

## Sura 1: AL-Fatiha (The Opening)

1. *In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*
2. *Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds,*
3. *The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy;*
4. *Master of the Day of Judgment.*
5. *You alone we do worship, and You alone we ask for help.*
6. *Guide us to the straight path,*
7. *The path of those on whom you have bestowed your blessings, not the path of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray.*

This short Sura, which has only seven verses, is recited by each and every Muslim at least seventeen times every day. The number of recitations can be doubled, if a Muslim chooses to pray the supererogatory prayers. The number would grow even larger if one chooses to pray more voluntary prayers. A prayer in which this Sura is not recited is deemed invalid. According to a tradition that was reported by the two authentic books (Al-Bukhari and Muslim), the Prophet (pbuh) has been quoted to have said, “*A prayer in which Al-Fatiha is not recited is invalid.*” This Sura outlines the basic principles of the Islamic doctrine as well as the fundamentals of the Islamic perspective. This may explain the rationale behind the requirement to recite it repeatedly by Muslims in their daily prayers.

Ibn Katheer mentioned that there is a difference in opinion regarding where it was revealed. According to Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) it was revealed in Mecca, while Abu Hururriah (RA) is of the opinion that it was revealed in Medina. Most probably it is a Meccan Sura, since prayer was prescribed in Mecca and it is known that prayer is rendered invalid if the Fatiha is not recited.

Al-Qurtobi mentions that this Sura has twelve names. However, the most common names for the Sura are the opening of the Book (al-Fatiha), the seven of the most-offt repeated verses, and the mother of the Qur’an. It is the very first Sura in the Qur’an, hence the name: the opening of the Book. It is called the seven of the oft repeated verses because it is repeated most-often in the prayer. It is also the mother of the Book because it is the foundation of the Qur’an.

Al-Razi says that the Qur’an establishes four fundamental concepts. These are the belief in the Oneness of God, the belief in the Day of Judgment, the belief in power of God and that each and everything happens by His leave, the belief in the fact that God sent messengers to guide people to the right path.

The verses, “*Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds; the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,*” is a statement of the belief in the Oneness of God; and that He has power over everything

The verse, “*Master of the Day of Judgment,*” is a statement of the inevitability of the resurrection.

The verse, *“You alone we do worship, and You alone we ask for help,”* is a statement of the ability of the human beings to make choices and that nothing can happen except by the leave of God.

The verses, *“Guide us to the straight path; the path of those on whom you have bestowed your blessings, not the path of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray;”* is a statement of the belief that God has sent messengers to guide people to the straight path.

Hawwa states that the Qur’an encompasses three areas of knowledge: The Doctrine, the acts of worship, and a way of life. The verses, *“Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy; Master of the Day of Judgment;”* are a statement of the doctrine. The verse, *“You alone we do worship, and You alone we ask for help,”* is a statement of the acts of worship. The way of life is stated in the verses, *“Guide us to the straight path; the path of those on whom you have bestowed your blessings, not the path of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray.”*

The Sura starts with the phrase, *“In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.”* The scholars have different views regarding the status of this verse. Some are of the opinion that this verse is a part of each Sura in the Quran, while some are of the opinion that it is a verse that should be recited at the beginning of each Sura but it is not part of the Sura. However, there is a consensus that it is one of the verses of Surat Al-Fatiha. This makes the number of verses of this Sura (Al-Fatiha) seven. There is an opinion that the verse, *“Indeed, We have bestowed on you (Prophet) seven of the oft repeated verses.”* (15:87) refers to Surat Al-Fatiha.

Starting the Sura in God’s name is consistent with the general rule that has been established in the first verse that was revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), *“Recite in the name of your Lord.”* (96:1). This also reflects the fundamental conception of God as the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. All praise is to God, He is the Truth, and from His existence emanates the existence of everything in the universe. Therefore, everything should start with His name.

The attributes, *“The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,”* encompass all aspects and dimensions of mercy. Only God has these two attributes combined together; and only He can be called the *“The Lord of Mercy.”* One can describe a human being as a giver of mercy, but one cannot describe a human being as *“The Lord of Mercy.”* The term *“The Lord of Mercy”* is an exclusive attribute of God.

Thus, two fundamental Islamic concepts are outlined in the first verse. The first concept is that it is the proper Islamic etiquette to start each action with the name of God. This reflects the belief in the Oneness of God. The second concept is that the attributes of God as the Lord of Mercy and the Giver of Mercy, encompass all aspects of mercy and it sets the tone for the relationship between the Creator and the creation. The praise of God and the acknowledgement that He is the absolute Lord of the universe follow. The praise of God is the feeling that floods the hearts of the believers when they remember God. Our mere existence is by the grace of God for which we should be eternally grateful. He should be praised in the beginning and at the end. Another fundamental Islamic concept is the belief in God’s infinite power. He is the Almighty, the Lord

of the worlds. The Lord owns, controls, and teaches. He cares about His creation and He looks after them. This concept establishes the foundation of the belief in the Oneness of God. The recognition of the absolute power of God as the Lord is the corner stone of monotheism. Islam emphasized this principle to purify the faith from any hint of polytheism.

*“Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.”* God is the only One who deserves our limitless praise. It is a praise that is not bounded by a time or a place. He is the Lord of the Worlds, His power is limitless and He controls everything. Nothing happens in the world without His leave. There is nothing like Him. He is the Creator who created the worlds, and He is the Lord of the Worlds. The word, “worlds,” is a plural and is undefined.

The two dimensions of the attribute of mercy are repeated again; *“The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,”* to emphasize one of the basic characteristics of the Lord and to once again establish the basis for the relationship between the Creator and the creation as one of mercy. The Lord is merciful, kind, and cares about the welfare of His creation. His mercy and kindness evoke feelings of gratitude and contentment in the hearts of His creatures. The gratitude is reflected in the praise of the Creator uttered by the creation.

The next verse, *“Master of the Day of Judgment,”* establishes an important Islamic principle that has a far reaching impact on the daily lives of people: the belief in the Hereafter. The Master owns, controls, and rewards on the Day of Judgment. The resurrection is inevitable and people will be held accountable for what they did in this life.

These two concepts complement each other. Some may believe in God as the Creator but they do not believe in the concept of the Day of Judgment. The Quran refers to them by saying, *“And if you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they will say, ‘God;’”* (31:25) another verse echoes the same reaction, *“They may deem it strange that a warner should have come to them from among themselves, and so those who deny the truth will say, ‘A strange thing is this. How could we be resurrected after we have become dust?’”* (50:2-3) this establishes the fundamental concept of life after death. When people fully recognize this fact, they will not be totally consumed by the struggle to get the rewards for their deeds in this life. They will understand that their reward will not be lost, rendering their struggles worthless. If they do not get compensation in this life, they will get it in the Hereafter. Acceptance of this fact will make people lead a life of security, contentment, tolerance, and certitude. This basic principle identifies the demarcation between the road to slavery imposed by the desires and whims and the road to freedom befitting humankind. Humankind will not be able to lead the excellent way of life that God wants for them if this concept is not inculcated in their psyche.

The next verse says, *“You alone we do worship, and You alone we ask for help.”* This is a logical consequence for the belief in the Oneness of God. No one is worthy of worship except God. No one can provide help and support to the believer except God. So, believers should neither worship any one else nor seek help from anyone else. Such a statement frees humankind from all sorts of servitude and it guides people to worship God alone. No system, organization, or human can control the destiny of people. We worship God alone and He is the only one who can help us.

The practical application of these fundamental concepts starts with praying to receive guidance from the Creator. Give us the knowledge that guides us to the straight path. Give us the courage to stay on the straight path after we have found it. The knowledge and the ability to stay on the path are the fruits of God's guidance and mercy. Asking God for guidance is the fruit of the belief that God is the only giver of guidance. The believer's first and foremost endeavor is to ask for the guidance of his Lord. Guidance to the straight path is the only guarantee for happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. It satisfies the quest of the natural innate disposition to find and recognize the Creator.

The Creator responds to the quest of His creation for guidance by sending messengers who bring guidance to humankind. This guidance defines the straight path which God has decreed for His servants. God blessed this path with His grace. This path is not followed by those who chose not to follow God's guidance. These are the ones who deviated from the truth after they had discovered it, and those who were not interested in finding the truth in the first place.

This is the Sura which has been chosen to be part of each and every prayer, without it the prayer is rendered invalid. It outlines the fundamental concepts of the doctrine and the practice of Islam. Imam Muslim narrates that the Prophet (pbuh) has been quoted to have said, *"God said, 'The prayer is a dialogue between Me and My servant. I will grant him whatever he asks for. When the servant says, 'All praise is to God, the Lord of the worlds,' I say, 'My servant praised me.' When he says, 'The Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,' I say, 'My servant has glorified Me.' When he says, 'You alone we do worship, and You alone we ask for help,' I say, 'This is between Me and My servant. I will grant him what he asked for.' When he says, 'Guide us to the straight path, the path of those on whom you have bestowed your blessings, not the path of those who earn your anger nor of those who go astray,' I say, 'I will grant My servant what he asked.'"*

## **Sura 2: AL-Baqarah (The Cow)**

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

This Sura of the Qur'an was one of the first Suras to be revealed after the migration to Medina took place. It is the longest Sura of the Qur'an. Most probably its verses were not revealed all at once. The verses of the Sura were revealed over a period of time interspersed with verses from other Suras. A review of the occasions for the revelation of some of its verses as well as the occasions for the revelation of some of the verses of the other long Suras – even though the description of these occasions may not have been absolutely unequivocal – indicates that the verses of each of the long Medinian Suras were not revealed all at once. Some verses of one Sura would be revealed followed by the revelation of few verses from another Sura and so on. The order of the revelation of the Suras was determined according to the order of the revelation of the opening verses of each Sura. The opening verses of this Sura were probably the first verses to be revealed after the Prophet's (PBUH) migration to Medina. Other verses in this Sura, such as the one dealing with usury, were revealed at a much later date.

The assignment of a specific verse to a specific Sura and the order of the verses within each Sura were decided according to God's revelation. It has been narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that Ibn 'Abbas (RA) said, *"The Prophet (PBUH) was the most generous person. He was even more generous during the month of Ramadan when he used to meet with the Archangel Gabriel. Gabriel (PBUH) used to meet with the Prophet (PBUH) every night during the month of Ramadan to recite the Qur'an."* Another version of this tradition states that Gabriel (PBUH) was teaching the Prophet (PBUH) the Qur'an during these meetings. It is confirmed that the Prophet (PBUH) has recited the complete Qur'an in the presence of Gabriel (PBUH) and that Gabriel (PBUH) has recited the complete Qur'an in the presence of the Prophet (PBUH). This indicates that these recitations were made for the Qur'an in its final form, with the proper arrangement of the verses in each Sura. Those who live in the shade of the Qur'an will feel that each Sura has its own specific features. One lives with these features in an atmosphere as if one is in the company of a living being. Each Sura has one or more basic themes all revolving around a fundamental concept. Each Sura has its own ambiance that connects all its different topics in harmony. This is a general feature that all the Suras of the Qur'an have in common.

There are many hadiths about the blessings that one gains when he/she recites Surat al-Baqarah. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Do not make your homes like graveyards. Satan does not enter the home in which Surat al-Baqarah is recited."*

Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of an introduction, three sections, and a conclusion. This suggestion is based on the similarity between the beginning and end of each section. The introduction is comprised of the first twenty verses. The introduction describes three groups of people: those who are God conscious, those who disbelieve (reject faith), and the hypocrites.

The first section of the Sura is comprised of the verses twenty-one to hundred and sixty-seven. This section starts with calling people to the worship of God. Then, it shows how the worship of God leads to God consciousness. God consciousness is then discussed using the stories of the Children of Israel and Prophet A

braham (PBUH).

The second section is comprised of the verses hundred and sixty-eight to two hundred and seven. This section discusses various pillars of Islam: prayers, fasting, alms, and pilgrimage. In addition to the discussion of the doctrine. All these topics are connected to the concepts of God consciousness and showing gratitude to God.

The third section is comprised of the verses two hundred and eight to two hundred and eighty-four. This section explores various major issues that concern the individual, the family, and the community.

This Sura deals with several topics woven around a central theme. The central theme has two dimensions. The first dimension deals with the response of the Children of Israel to the Islamic call in Medina and how they confronted the Muslims and the Messenger. This dimension also describes the alliances that the Jews of Medina formed with the hypocrites on one side and with the idolaters on the other side. The second dimension deals with the training process that the fledgling Muslim community went through in the early days of the message. This is the training that prepared the community to bear the responsibility of the call to Islam and to fulfill the conditions of being vicegerents on earth.

### **Verses: 1 to 29**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *This is the Book in which there is no doubt; in it there is guidance for those who are conscious of God;*
3. *Those who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them;*
4. *And those who believe in the revelation sent to you, and that which was revealed before you, and have certitude in the Hereafter.*
5. *These are on (true) guidance, from their Lord, and it is these who will succeed.*
6. *Surely, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe.*
7. *God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and a veil on their eyes; great torment is theirs.*
8. *Some people say, "We believe in God and the Last Day;" but they do not (truly) believe.*
9. *They desire to deceive God and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves and they realize it not.*
10. *There is a disease in their hearts; and God has increased their disease. Painful is the torment they incur, as a result of their persistent lying.*
11. *When it is said to them, "Do not make mischief on earth," they say, "Why, we are only mending things."*
12. *Indeed, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realize it not.*
13. *When it is said to them, "Believe as the others believe;" they say, "Shall we believe as the fools believe?" Indeed, they are the fools, but they do not know.*
14. *When they meet those who believe, they say, "We believe;" but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, "We are really with you. We were only mocking."*

15. *God will throw back their mockery on them, and give them rope in their trespasses; so they will wander like blind ones (to and fro).*
16. *These are they who bartered guidance for error. But their bargain is profitless, and they have lost true direction.*
17. *Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see.*
18. *Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return (to the path).*
19. *Or (another similitude) is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky. In it are zones of darkness, and thunder and lightning. They press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap, for fear of death. But God encompasses the disbelievers.*
20. *The lightning all but snatches away their sight; every time the light shines on them, they walk therein, and when the darkness grows on them, they stand still. And if God willed, He could take away their faculties of hearing and seeing; for God has power over all things.*
21. *People, worship your Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may be conscious of Him.*
22. *Who made the earth a resting place and the sky a canopy, for you; and sent down rain from the sky; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; and do not set up rivals to God when you know (the truth).*
23. *And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a single Sura like it; and call your witnesses (or helpers) besides God -if there are any - if you are truthful.*
24. *But if you cannot do it - and certainly you will not be able to do it - then guard yourselves against the fire whose fuel is people and stones, which is prepared for the disbelievers.*
25. *Prophet, give glad tidings to those who believe and do good deeds, that theirs are gardens, beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say, "this is what we were given before," for they are given things in similitude; and they will have pure mates; and they will abide therein (for ever).*
26. *God does not shy from putting forward a parable even with something as small as a gnat, or larger. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord; but the disbelievers say, "What does God mean by this parable?" By it, He causes many to go astray, and many He leads to the right path; but it is only the transgressors that He causes to go astray.*
27. *Those who break God's Covenant after it is ratified, and who sever the bonds which God has commanded to be joined, and do mischief on earth, these are the losers.*
28. *How can you disbelieve in God? seeing that you were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again to Him will you return.*
29. *It is He who created for you all things that are on earth; then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He knows all things. (2:1-29)*

The Sura starts with three letters of the Arabic Alphabet, "Alif. Lam. Mim." This is followed by the mention of the Book of God, "This is the Book in which there is no doubt; in it there is guidance for those who are conscious of God." Similarly, other Suras in the Qur'an begin with one or more letters of the Alphabet. Different views are available in the literature that attempt to

explain the rationale behind starting the Suras with these alphabetical letters. One of these appears most compelling, using these letters in the beginning of a Sura points to the fact that the Book is composed using the letters of the Alphabet of the language that the Arabs were familiar with at that time. The Qur'an challenged the Arabs repeatedly to use these same letters with which they were quite familiar to compose a book similar to the Qur'an, ten Suras similar to the Suras of the Qur'an, or even a single Sura like the ones in the Qur'an, but they were never able to meet the challenge.

*"There is no doubt in the Book."* How can there be any doubt when the proof of its authenticity is given in the beginning of the Sura. The Book is written in the Arabic language, yet the Arabs were unable to meet the challenge of composing a similar book. This is a book of true guidance, but who would benefit from this guidance? This Book offers guidance to those who are conscious of God. God consciousness opens the doors for the light of guidance to go through and shine on the heart. God consciousness prepares the heart to receive and engage guidance. Those who want to find guidance in the Qur'an must approach the Qur'an with a sound, sincere, sensitive, and pious hearts. They should approach the Qur'an with hearts that dread the temptation of going astray.

The Qur'an lists some of the attributes of those who are God conscious. The believers in Medina had these attributes, and all true believers must have these attributes. They *"believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; and who believe in the revelation sent to you, and that which was revealed before you, and have certitude in the Hereafter."* The first characteristic of those who are God conscious is that they have a holistic approach to faith. This holistic approach unites all the components of faith around one central belief: the belief in the Oneness of God. The components of the faith are the belief in the unseen, the performance of the rituals, the belief in all God's messengers, and the certitude of the inevitability of the Hereafter. This approach forms the basis for a believer's approach to life. It is an approach worthy of the final revelation to humankind, the revelation that best meets the needs of humanity.

The belief in the unseen breaks the physical barrier that prevents the soul from reaching out to the source from which it emanated. The belief in the unseen removes the roadblocks which stand between the soul and the metaphysical. The belief in the unseen elevates humankind above carnal desires and allows the human beings to explore the reality of their existence and to reflect on the reality of the universe and beyond. It allows the human being to go beyond the small world of the physical senses to the boundless universe of the spiritual. It allows the human being to appreciate the power that created this infinite universe, the power that cannot be fathomed using the limited human understanding. God cannot be seen by the human eye nor can His nature be understood by the human mind. This protects us from wasting our limited energy in thinking about what we are not created to think about. God gave the human beings an intellect which helps them in fulfilling their obligations as God's vicegerents on earth. A vicegerent is a person responsible for thinking, building, producing, and researching to promote better life on earth. These material duties should be supported by spirituality that connects the human being with the rest of the universe and the Creator of the universe. Without this spiritual support the responsibility of the vicegerent will not be fulfilled.



The believers establish prayer worshipping God alone. This frees them from other forms of worship. Their worship is solely dedicated to God. Prayers connect people to God. This connection provides security and support. It provides an incentive to do good deeds and to behave ethically.

The believers spend out of what God provided for them. They recognize that their wealth is not a natural product of their hard work but it is an endowment from God. This fills their hearts with gratitude to God for his grace; it is a gratitude that manifests itself in acts of kindness to the needy and the poor. They feel that they are part of the human family, so they have a responsibility toward their brothers and sisters in humanity. The recognition that their wealth is an endowment from God purifies them from stinginess and fills their hearts with goodness and generosity.

Spending includes the obligatory poor-dues and the voluntary charity. Charity includes all money spent in good causes. The principle of spending in the way of God was institutionalized in Islam before the rules regarding the obligatory poor-dues were revealed. Spending in the way of God is a general term that includes among other things the obligatory poor-dues. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“There are dues other than the poor-due.”* The verse points to the generalization of the principle of spending in the way of God.

They believe in what has been revealed to you and what has been revealed before you. This is fitting for a Muslim. Since, Muslims inherited all the previous divine messages. They believe in all messengers sent by God to guide humanity since the beginning of time. They were urged to be keepers of the legacy of all the previous messengers. This belief instills in the heart of the believer the concept of the oneness of humanity, the Oneness of the Creator, the oneness of the message, and the continuity of the messengers. This belief purifies the soul from religious intolerance and racism. It assures the believer that God has not forsaken His creatures and He continued to send messengers at different times to guide them to the right path.

They are certain of the inevitability of the Hereafter. It is a belief that joins the worldly life with the life in the Hereafter in a continuum, it indicates that people were not created in vain, and it highlights divine justice. This is the criterion which differentiates between those who believe only in materialistic things and those whose souls are free to wander beyond the material to the open space of the spiritual. Those are the truly guided and therefore, they will succeed.

These verses are followed by verses which paint an image of those who reject faith, those who disbelieved. The image portrays all the ingredients of faith rejection that can be found in all places and at all times.

*“Surely, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and a veil on their eyes; great torment is theirs.”* The images of the believers and the disbelievers are juxtaposed. The Book brings guidance to the believers, but the disbelievers are not affected whether they are warned or not. All the windows that are open for the believers’ souls to connect with the Creator are closed in front of the souls of the disbelievers. Their hearts and their hearings are sealed, so no guidance can reach them. The veil on their eyes blocks the light of the

truth from going through to their souls. They deserve what they get because they refused to heed the warning before. So, it does not matter whether they receive another warning or not. They will receive their due torment.

A third image is portrayed in the following verses. It is not a picture of purity and transparency as the one that portrays the believers' souls, nor it is a dark and gloomy image as the one painted for the souls of the disbelievers. This is the image of the hypocrites. It is an image of deceit and treachery. *"Some people say, 'We believe in God and the Last Day;' but they do not (truly) believe. They desire to deceive God and those who believe, and they deceive only themselves and they realize it not. There is a disease in their hearts; and God has increased their disease. Painful is the torment they incur, as a result of their persistent lying. When it is said to them, 'Do not make mischief on the earth,' they say, 'Why, we are only mending things.' Indeed, they are the ones who make mischief, but they realize it not. When it is said to them, 'Believe as the others believe;' they say, 'Shall we believe as the fools believe?' Indeed, they are the fools, but they do not know. When they meet those who believe, they say, 'We believe;' but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, 'We are really with you. We were only mocking.' God will throw back their mockery on them, and give them rope in their trespasses; so they will wander like blind ones (to and fro). These are they who bartered guidance for error. But their bargain is profitless, and they have lost true direction."* This image describes a group of people who lived in Medina at that time, but the image also describes the hypocrites at all times. They claim that they believe in God and the Last Day but they do not really believe. They are cowards; they are not able to declare their rejection of faith openly. They think they can outsmart God and the believers. The verse states one of the basic principles established by God's grace. This principle describes the relationship between God and the believers. God aligns Himself with the believers; He engulfs them in His care. They are His party. He defends and protects them against their enemy. Whoever tries to scheme against them is in actual fact scheming against God. By associating the believers with Himself, God is raising the status of the believers above all others. Faith fills the believers' hearts with security and peace because they know that God's protection is guaranteed.

The hypocrites were only deceiving themselves. They had sickness in their hearts. They swerved away from the straight path. Any deviation starts small but then grows larger quickly. They were arrogant to the extent that when they were asked to stop spreading mischief in the land they had the audacity to claim that they were implementing reform. However, they fooled no one, they were the mischief makers. Their arrogance made them think that they were above all others. They refused to be part of the community that submitted to God. They did not want to be associated with the poor people who were part of this community. They called the poor who believed in the Prophet (PBUH) fools, but they were themselves the fools.

The last attribute of the hypocrites is that they did not only deceive the believers but they also connived against them. *"When they meet those who believe, they say, 'We believe;' but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, 'We are really with you. We were only mocking.'* They thought that deception and connivance will make them powerful. But they forgot that a powerful person does not need deceit and connivance. They thought that they were mocking the believers but indeed it was God who was mocking them. *"These are they who bartered guidance for error. But their bargain is profitless, and they have lost true direction."*

We notice that the verses dedicated to the description of the hypocrites are much longer than those dedicated to the description of the other two categories: the believers and the disbelievers. It is a fairly straight forward task to describe a believer or a disbeliever. Both of them have clear and distinct features. The image of the first group is the image of pure souls pursuing a straight path. The image of the second group is the image of dark souls pursuing a crooked path. But the third image is much more complex. It is an image of sick, insecure and troubled souls. It requires a lengthy statement to define its dimensions.

The verses continue to elaborate on the image of the hypocrites. *“Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, God took away their light and left them in utter darkness. So they could not see. Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not return (to the path).”* The hypocrites did not reject faith initially as did the disbelievers. They turned away from the true path after they had embarked on it. Similar to those who kindle a fire seeking its light, but when they see the light, they do not benefit from it. When they turned away from the light of guidance, God took away the light and left them in total darkness. They blocked their ears against hearing the guidance and became deaf, they disabled their tongues so that they would not speak the truth and became dumb, and they closed their eyes so that they would not see the truth and became blind.

Another parable is struck to describe the perplexity and confusion of this group, *“Or (another similitude) is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky. In it are zones of darkness, and thunder and lightning. They press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap, for fear of death. But God encompasses the disbelievers. The lightning all but snatches away their sight; every time the light shines on them, they walk therein, and when the darkness grows on them, they stand still. And if God willed, He could take away their faculties of hearing and seeing; for God has power over all things.”* It is an awful description that paints a very dramatic and dreadful image of the fear and terror that people who are lost in a violent storm would experience. The image reflects the perplexity of the hypocrites as they deal alternately with the believers and the disbelievers; saying one thing to the believers and turning back to say another thing to the disbelievers. The image underlines the feelings of insecurity and confusion felt by the hypocrites as they waver between the light of faith and the darkness of disbelief.

*“People, worship your Lord, who created you and those who came before you, that you may be conscious of Him. Who has made the earth a resting place and the sky a canopy, for you; and sent down rain from the sky; and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance; and do not set up rivals to God when you know (the truth).”* This is a universal call to all people to worship their Lord who created them and those before them. The Lord is the sole Creator, so He deserves to be worshiped alone. Worship has one objective that people should strive to achieve: to become and remain conscious of God. He has made the earth a resting place for you, so it is easy for you to live, work, and enjoy life. The term canopy used to describe the sky points to the strength and the delicate organization of its structure. These characteristics are closely related to the ease of life on earth. The heat and light coming from the sky were essential to the beginning and continuation of life on earth. These are signs that remind people of the power of the Creator and His right to be worshiped. Verses talking about rain coming down from the sky to produce fruits have been mentioned in several places in the Qur’an. They act as a reminder of the power and blessings of God. This water is the main ingredient of all living beings.

These verses outline two fundamental Islamic concepts. The first is the concept of the Oneness of God, He alone created everything. The second is the harmony of the universe. God created the universe and maintained its delicately balanced harmony. This harmony allowed man to live comfortably on earth. The earth is extended and the heavens are raised to provide water needed for plants to grow and enable people to live comfortably on earth. You know that God alone created humans and the universe, so He deserves to be worshiped alone. So, do not associate partners with Him. Qur'an is very strict in denouncing associating partners with God. The belief in the Oneness of God should remain clear of the blemish of any shadow of idolatry. You know that He is the Creator who created you and those before you and you know that He is the One who made the earth a resting place and the sky a canopy for you. He is the One who brings down water from the sky. He did not have a helper to support Him, nor had He a rival to oppose Him. It is thus, inappropriate to associate partners with Him. The rivals that the verse refers to may not be only idols to be worshiped, but a rival may take other forms. Believing that someone or something other than God can harm or benefit people constitutes setting up rivals to God.

*“And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a single Sura like it; and call your witnesses (or helpers) besides God - if there are any - if you are truthful.”* This is a challenge that is posed to everyone who has the slightest doubt of the authenticity of the message which Prophet (PBUH) brought. The verse calls the Prophet (PBUH) God's servant. This is an honour bestowed on the Prophet (PBUH). God's servants are given the highest rank of honour among people. This honour is attainable for all who worship God alone. There is an implicit reprimand for those who refuse to attain the honour which was bestowed on the Prophet (PBUH) who was blessed by receiving God's revelation.

The challenge that is explicitly posed here has been implicitly alluded to in the beginning of the Sura. This is a book composed using the well-known letters of the Alphabet, if you doubt its authenticity then compose a Sura similar to the ones that are in the Book using these letters which are familiar to you and call your witnesses to judge. God has given His testimony that His servant is telling the truth.

This challenge was posed when the Prophet (PBUH) was still alive and it is still valid today. It is an insurmountable proof of the authenticity of the Qur'an. The Qur'an has certain characteristics which sets it apart from any of the literary works produced by humans. The verse states that no human can write a similar book, *“But if you cannot do it – and certainly you will not be able to do it- then guard yourselves against the Fire whose fuel is people and stones, which is prepared for the disbelievers.”* It is remarkable that the challenge was posed and the anticipated response was stated in unequivocal terms. Had the disbelievers at that time been able to refute the authenticity of the Book, they would not have hesitated for a moment. The Qur'anic statement that they will never be able to meet the challenge posed to them is a miracle because if they had been able to compose a single Sura similar to the Suras of the Qur'an, then the Qur'anic claim would have been refuted. However, the Arabs at that time were not able to face the challenge. Not only they were unable to compose a Sura similar to the Suras of the Qur'an but also no human being was ever able to do so.

One wonders why the verse associates people with stones in this fearful image describing Hell fire. In a previous verse, people who rejected faith had their hearts and hearings sealed and had

their sights veiled. They could not hear, see, nor think. The people to whom the challenge was posed were not able to act or respond similar to a stone which has no ability to act or respond, hence the similarity between those who reject faith and the stones.

This fearful image is juxtaposed against an image of comfort and happiness that awaits the believers. *“Prophet, give glad tidings to those who believe and do good deeds, that theirs are Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits there from, they say, ‘this is what we were given before,’ for they are given things in similitude; and they will have pure mates; and they will abide therein (for ever).”* One of the wonders of these gardens is that there will be fruits similar in shape to fruits that the believers had in their lifetime but will be different in taste. They will see the similarity in shape but will be pleasantly surprised by the difference in taste. The verse gives an image of comfort, happiness and pleasant surprises for the believers.

*“God does not shy from putting forward a parable even with something as small as a gnat, or larger. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord; but the disbelievers say, ‘What does God mean by this parable?’ By it, He causes many to go astray, and many He leads to the right path; but it is only the transgressors that He causes to go astray. Those who break God’s Covenant after it is ratified, and who sever the bonds which God ordered to be joined, and do mischief on earth, these are the losers.”*

These verses point to doubts that the hypocrites, and possibly others from among the Jews and the idolaters, may have casted on the use of parables in the Qur’an. They may have indicated that it does not behove God to use such parables which denigrate and mock them. They may have also questioned the propriety of using creatures like a fly and a spider in parables narrated in the Scripture. This was part of a campaign launched against Islam by the hypocrites and some Jews in Medina, and by the idolaters in Mecca. These verses came to refute such arguments and to state the rationale behind using parables in the Qur’an. The verses warn the disbelievers who spread such doubts and reassure the believers that this campaign is fruitless. God is the Lord of the little and the large. He is the Creator of the gnat and the elephant. The miracle of creating life in the form of a gnat is the same as the miracle of creating life in the form of an elephant. The miracle of life is beyond our comprehension, only God knows the secret of life. These parables were used as illustrative tools and as a test for the hearts and souls of people. The believers are those whose faith filled their hearts with light, opened their minds, and enhanced their spirituality to receive whatever comes to them from their Lord with appropriate reverence. But the disbelievers say, *“What does God mean by this parable?”* Only a person whose heart was neither touched by God’s light nor did it receive God’s wisdom may ask such a question. It is a heart that lost touch with God’s conventions. The question reflects ignorance and limited imagination and it shows disrespect to the Lord and what He is able to do. This is responded to by a dire warning, *“By it, He causes many to go astray, and many He leads to the right path; but it is only the transgressors that He causes to go astray.”* God allows His tests to take their natural course. People’s reaction to these tests will vary depending on their way of thinking and attitudes.

Tests may come in the form of adversity or may come in the form of affluence. Adversity causes the believers, who have put their trust in God, to seek God's help and support; while it causes the disbelievers and the hypocrites to stray away from God's path. Affluence fills the heart of the believer with gratitude, while it makes a transgressor ungrateful. Similarly, people react differently to God's parables some are guided by them, while others go astray. However, only the transgressors go astray. Those are the people whose hearts have swerved away from guidance and truth. They are rewarded with more of the same.

The verse continues to list the characters which identify transgression, "*Those who break God's Covenant after it is ratified.*" The covenant that has been ratified between God and people has various aspects. It is the covenant engrained in the initial natural disposition of all human beings to recognize the Creator and to worship Him alone. Human beings are created with an initial natural disposition which makes them yearn to the belief in God, but sometimes this initial natural disposition becomes corrupt and drives people to go astray. It is also the covenant that God ratified with Adam (PBUH) to make him a vicegerent on earth. These aspects of the covenant were outlined in the message brought by the various messengers that God sent to guide humankind. Those who break God's covenant after it has been ratified can easily break any other covenant.

"*Who sever the bonds which God has ordered to be joined,*" God commanded the joining of many bonds. These include the bond of kinship, the bond of brotherhood in humanity, and the bond of brotherhood in faith. Joining these bonds ensures the coherence of the society; and without it, corruption and chaos would prevail. "*And do mischief on earth, these are the losers.*" Mischief has different forms. The root of all forms of mischief is embedded in disobeying God, revoking the covenant between the person and God, and severing the bonds that God commanded to be joined.

"*How can you disbelieve in God? Seeing that you were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again to Him will you return. It is He who created for you all things that are on earth; then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He knows all things.*" Denying God after realizing all these proofs and signs is a baseless and hateful deed. The Qur'an confronts people with what they need to face, so that they recognize the truth and submit to its consequences. The Qur'an confronts people with the progression of their lives and the phases of their existence, they were dead and they were given life. There is no escape from facing the truth of life and its miraculous beginning. Who is the creator who gave them life after being dead? Life has been given by the Creator who created everything on earth from a lifeless substance.

"*How can you disbelieve in God? Seeing that you were without life, and He gave you life;*" You were dead and He gave you life. How can a creature reject faith in his/her Creator? Then He will put you to death. This is the ultimate truth; no one can argue about the inevitability of death. Then He will raise you again. They did contest this statement as do many people today. However, if they had reflected on how life started in the first instant, it is plausible that the one

who started life can restart it again. Then you will return to Him. You will return as He created you in the first instance. You will be gathered in front of Him to receive His judgment.

In one single short verse, the whole record of life of humankind is reviewed. A quick image of the phases that humankind will go through is projected: life is given, it is taken away, and it is given for the second time; then all will return to God as He created them in the first instance. It is an image of God's power that fills the sensitive soul with all types of emotions.

*"It is He who created for you all things that are on earth; then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He knows all things."* Long discourses were written by scholars attempting to interpret the verses on the creation of heaven and earth. They discussed the meanings of "before" and "after," as well as the terms "istiwaa" and "taswiyah" which have been translated here as "turned" and "fashioned." They forgot that "before" and "after" reflect human dimensions that cannot be extended to God. Similarly, they forgot that the terms "istiwaa" and "taswiyah," attempt to describe the metaphysical in terms that can be appreciated by the limited imagination of the human mind.

*"It is He who created for you all things that are on earth"* The word "for you" has a deep meaning. It is an unequivocal statement that God created humankind to perform a great undertaking. God created humankind to act as vicegerent on earth. Humankind was given the earth's wealth and they should play an effective role in its development. They are the heirs of this wide kingdom and they should play a major role in shaping its progress.

*"Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens."* It does not make sense to dwell on the meaning of the term "turned," here, except to say that it is a symbol of the controlling power of God and that creation was a deliberate plan of God. There is also no sense in trying to explain the meaning of the term "seven heavens." It is sufficient to understand the main significance of the verse. The verse emphasizes the power of God who created the heavens and the earth and made the earth habitable; and it denounces the rejection of faith on part of disbelievers who ignore the miracle of creation.

*"And He knows all things."* Since, He is the Creator of everything and He controls everything, then He knows everything. His knowledge is comprehensive as is His control. This is an incentive for people to believe in God alone, and worship Him alone. Worshiping the provider alone is an act of gratitude.

### **Verses: 30 to 39**

*30. And when your Lord said to the angels, "I will place a vicegerent on earth." They said, "Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?" He said, "I know what you know not."*

*31. And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, "Tell me the names of these if you are truthful."*

*32. They said, "Glory is to You. We have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. Verily, You are the Omniscient, the Wise."*

33. *He said, "Adam, tell them their names." When he had told them, God said, "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?"*
34. *When, We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam " and they prostrated, all save Iblis: he refused and was haughty. He was one of those who disbelieved.*
35. *We said, "Adam, dwell you and your spouse in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as you will; but approach not this tree lest you become wrongdoers."*
36. *But Satan made them slip from the (garden), and got them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said, "Get out, all of you, with enmity between yourselves. On earth you will have a dwelling-place and means of livelihood - for a time."*
37. *Then Adam received from his Lord's words and his Lord relented toward him; for He is Ever- Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*
38. *We said, "Get out all of you; but when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
39. *But those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, they shall be companions of the fire; they shall abide therein." (2:30-39)*

Stories are told at different places in the Qur'an to address certain events. The event dictates how the story develops, which part of the story is told, and how it is narrated to present the appropriate spiritual, intellectual, and artistic ambience for the event and to underscore the moral of the story. A superficial examination, may lead one to think that the Qur'anic stories are repetitive, because aspects of the same story are mentioned in different places of the Qur'an. However, a careful examination shows that not a single story was repeated in the same way or with the same level of details twice. Whenever a story was retold a new aspect of the event was explored. Stories form a major part of the Qur'an. Let us then consider the story of Adam in light of these comments.

The previous verses explored not only the progression of life on earth but also the development of the whole universe. Earth, one of the signs of God, has been created with all its contents for the benefit of humankind. The verses dealing with the story of making Adam a vicegerent on earth is a logical sequel. God created Adam and struck a covenant with him to undertake the responsibility of being a vicegerent on earth. God gave Adam the knowledge he needs to fulfill this responsibility. These verses also lead to the story of the Israelites, and the covenant that God struck with them appointing them a model for humankind on earth and the subsequent revocation of the covenant and replacing them with the Muslim nation who fulfilled God's covenant.

*"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'I will place a vicegerent on earth.' They said, 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?' He said, 'I know what you know not.'"*

It was then God's deliberate plan to make this new creature a vicegerent on earth. The plan gave humankind the freedom, the ability, and the creativity to manage the earth according to the will of God. Humankind was given the responsibility to discover, analyze, form, change, and develop the treasures of the earth. God gave humankind the mandate to use these treasures in fulfilling



the enormous undertaking that God entrusted them with; and He endowed them with the ability, the knowledge, and the aptitude needed to fulfill such an undertaking. These are some of the ideas which the hallowed statement "*I will place a vicegerent on earth,*" brings to our minds.

*"They said, 'Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?'"* This question intimates that the angels may have had a previous experience or some sort of insight that made them suspect that this creature will make mischief and shed blood. The angels with their innocent minds, which accept nothing but the absolute goodness and comprehensive peace, thought that celebrating God's praise and glorifying Him are the ultimate goals and the only purpose of the creation. Since, they are performing these functions then there is no need for another form of creation. They were not privy to the rationale behind the will of God to place a vicegerent on earth. God willed a civilization to be established and to develop on earth. It was God's will to entrust the responsibility for growing, developing, and improving this civilization to one of His creature. This creature, humankind, has been appointed by God as a vicegerent. This creature may make mischief and he/she may shed blood in the process of achieving a higher good, the good of continuous growth, development, and improvement. This good involves incessant trials and efforts that continuously push the envelope. The answer to their question was, "*I know what you know not.*"

*"And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, 'Tell me the names of these if you are truthful.' They said, 'Glory is to You. We have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. Verily, You are the Omniscient, the Wise.' He said, 'Adam, tell them their names.' When he had told them, God said, 'Did I not tell you that I know what is hidden in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?'"* Through glimpses of insight, we experience what the angels experienced in their high place. We see aspects of God's mystery being bestowed on humankind when he was asked to undertake the responsibility of being a vicegerent on earth, the mystery of the ability to use vocal symbols to identify physical things and beings.

*"When, We said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam' and they prostrated."* This is the highest honour that was given to a creature who makes mischief and sheds blood on earth but was given hidden aspects that elevated him in rank above the angels. Humankind was given the aptitude to gain knowledge and the free will which enables him to make choices. The rationale for getting this high honour lies in the duality of the nature of humankind. The duality that allows humankind to use his will to make the decisions needed for human life to continue on earth, and to act as a beacon which guides to God's path. The angels bowed in obedience, "*all save Iblis: he refused and was haughty. He was one of those who disbelieved.*" Plain evil is manifested in disobeying God's command, behaving arrogantly, and being stubborn and narrow minded. The way the story is told intimates that Iblis was not an angel, if he were an angel he would not have disobeyed God. Angel's first and basic attribute is, "*they do not disobey God in what He commands them, and they do as they are commanded.*" (66:6) He was simply present with the angels when the command was issued. The use of the exception style "*all save Iblis*" should not be taken as an evidence which supports the conclusion that Iblis was an angel because linguistically it is valid to use the exception style to single out an individual who is not part of a

group but happened to be present with the group when a command was issued to the group. Qur'an states unequivocally that Iblis belongs to a different kind of creation called jinn.

Thus, the field for the eternal battle has been established. It is the battle between Iblis, the embodiment of evil, and God's vicegerent on earth. This is the eternal battle for the human conscience. It is a battle in which the victory of goodness is contingent on observing the covenant of God. Disobedience to God and succumbing to the temptation of carnal desires will help evil to prevail.

*"We said, 'Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as you will; but approach not this tree lest you become wrongdoers.'" They were given the permission to eat of the fruits of all the trees in heaven except one tree. Only one single tree was prohibited for them. Perhaps, this was a symbol for all prohibited things which would have to exist on earth to give meaning to the concept of free will. There would be no meaning for the concept of free will if everything was allowable and nothing was prohibited. Without the temptation to commit the forbidden, what then would be the criterion that differentiates between a free-willed person and a forcibly-lead animal. A free-willed person has the choice either to honour the covenant of God by following His commands or to succumb to the temptation that satisfies his/her carnal desires.*

*"But Satan made them slip from the (garden), and got them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been." What an image that is formed by the use of the phrase "made them slip." One can almost see them fall as Satan was pushing them over the edge away from the garden. Now the trial was completed, Adam forgot his covenant with God and succumbed to the temptation. The verdict was issued, "We said, 'Get out, all of you, with enmity between yourselves. On earth you will have a dwelling-place and means of livelihood - for a time.'" The eternal battle between humankind and Satan has started. However, Adam's nature and God's mercy brought him up from his fall. God's mercy is there for whosoever seeks it. "Then Adam received from his Lord's words, and his Lord relented toward him; for He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy."*

The final word of God has been decreed. The permanent covenant with humankind has been declared explaining the conditions for success in life. *"We said, 'Get out all of you; but when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, they shall be companions of the fire; they shall abide therein.'" The eternal battle was now launched on its intended grounds. The battle will continue to rage till the end of time. Humankind can find their way to victory if they so will, but they can also end up losing the way if they so will.*

Let us go back to the story of the beginning of humanity. God said to the angels, *"I will place a vicegerent on earth."* So, Adam was created to live on earth. Why then was Adam created in heaven and why he was put to the test and why was that specific tree prohibited for him. One can almost feel that this was a training program to prepare this vicegerent for his intended role. It was a training program to sharpen his wits so that he can recognize his enemy and prepare him for resisting the temptation. It was the objective of this training period to show him the consequences of succumbing to the temptation and how to seek refuge with God when he fails.

The story of the forbidden tree, the temptation of Satan, forgetting the covenant and consequently disobeying God, the realization of the wrongdoing, the remorse, and seeking forgiveness reflect the ever repeating human experience. It is a mercy of God that humankind was trained for his intended role before placing him in the position of responsibility.

Let us outline briefly some of the thoughts that may be generated by this story. Several important messages may be gleaned from the story. Among these are the high stature that Islam confers on humankind, the importance of his role on earth, the relationship between humankind and the Creator, the responsibility of humankind in this universe, the standards that can be used to evaluate his success and failure, and the covenant between God and humankind. Not only did God declare Adam to be a vicegerent on earth but He also commanded the angels to bow to him. When Iblis refused in arrogance to bow, he was expelled from Heaven. This bestows on humankind the rank of the master of the earth. Humankind is valued highly above any other material value and he is the most honored creature on earth. This high view of humankind is inextricably linked to the high morals and supreme ethical values that should be upheld and promoted by humankind. Upholding these ethical values and promoting these morals constitute an integral part of the covenant with God. Although, the vicegerency is usually concerned with the achievement of materialistic and administrative goals, ethical values are more important than any administrative and materialistic matters. Administrative and materialistic objectives should always be guided by the high morals of the Islamic code.

Islam values highly the concept of human free will, because it is the focal point of the covenant with God and the system of reward and punishment. Humankind can elevate himself to a rank higher than that of the angels by honoring his covenant with God. Honoring the covenant requires self-discipline to abstain from indulging in carnal desires and to rise above the temptation. It also acts as a constant reminder of the point of demarcation between happiness and misery; between honour and shame; and between the ranks of the free-willed human and the forcibly-steered animal.

The story is also a constant reminder of the ever continuing battle between humankind and Satan. It is the battle between keeping God's covenant and succumbing to the temptation of Satan. It is the battle between faith and rejection, between right and wrong, and between guidance and loss. The battle field is the human psyche. The human being can either win or lose this battle. This is a constant reminder to humankind to be always on the alert like a soldier on a battle field.

Finally, the Islamic perspective regarding the concepts of sin and repentance is explored. Adam repented and asked for forgiveness and God forgave him before sending him to start his mission on earth. Islam refuses the concept of the original sin. An individual is not responsible for a sin committed before he or she is born. Each person is responsible for his/her own personal actions. No one will bear the responsibility of someone else. These are some of the thoughts that are inspired by the story of Adam.

## Verses: 40 to74

40. *Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill your covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you, and fear none but Me.*
41. *And believe in what I revealed, confirming the revelation which you possess already, and be not the first to reject it, nor sell My revelation for a small price; and be conscious of Me alone.*
42. *And do not cover the truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth.*
43. *And establish prayer; pay the poor-dues; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).*
44. *Do you enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practice it) yourselves, and yet you study the Scripture? Have you then no sense?*
45. *Seek (God's) help with perseverance and prayer; it is indeed hard, except for those who are humble.*
46. *Who know that they will certainly meet their Lord, and that they will return to Him.*
47. *Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and that I favoured you over all other people.*
48. *Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for it, nor shall compensation be taken from it, nor shall anyone be helped.*
49. *And remember, We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh, who subjected you to dreadful torment, slaughtered your sons, and let your women-folk live; that was a tremendous trial from your Lord.*
50. *And when We parted the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people before your eyes.*
51. *And We appointed forty nights for Moses, and in his absence, you chose the calf (for worship), and you were wrongdoers.*
52. *Even then, We did pardon you; in order that you may be grateful.*
53. *And when We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion (Between right and wrong): so that you may be guided.*
54. *And when Moses said to his people, "My people, you have indeed wronged yourselves by your worship of the calf. So turn (in repentance) to your Maker, and slay the wrongdoers from among yourselves; that will be better for you in the sight of your Maker." Then He turned toward you (in forgiveness); for He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*
55. *And remember when you said, "Moses, we shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly," so the thunderbolt overtook you while you looked on.*
56. *Then We raised you up after your death, that you may be grateful.*
57. *And We gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you Manna and quails, saying, "Eat of the good things We have provided for you."; they wronged Us not, but they did wrong themselves.*
58. *And when We said, "Enter this town, and eat freely therein as you wish in abundance; but enter the gate with humility, in posture and in words, and We will forgive you your sins and will increase (reward) for the good-doers.*
59. *But the wrongdoers changed the word from that which had been given them; so We sent on the wrongdoers a plague from heaven, because they infringed (Our command).*

60. *And remember Moses when he prayed for water for his people. We said, "Strike the rock with your staff," and then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do neither evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.*
61. *And when you said, "Moses, we cannot bear to eat only one kind of food (always), so call upon your Lord for us to produce for us of what the earth grows of herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions." He said, "Will you exchange the better for the worse? Go you down to any town (misr), and you shall find what you want." And humiliation and misery were stamped on them; they drew on themselves the wrath of God. This is because they continued to reject God's message and to slay His Messengers wrongfully. This was so because they rebelled and they were aggressors.*
62. *Those who believe (in that which is revealed to you Muhammad), and those who follow the Jewish (Scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians - any who believe in God and the Last Day, and do good deeds, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
63. *And remember when We took your covenant and We caused the mount to tower above you, (Saying), "Hold fast to what We have given you and remember that which is therein so that you become conscious of God."*
64. *But you turned away thereafter. Had it not been for the Grace and Mercy of God, you would have certainly been among the losers.*
65. *And you knew those among you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. We said to them, "Be you apes, despised and rejected."*
66. *So We made it an example to those who witnessed it and to the succeeding generations, and a lesson to those who are conscious of God.*
67. *And remember Moses when he said to his people, "God commands that you sacrifice a cow." They said, "Do you make us a laughing-stock?" He said, "God forbid that I should be among the foolish."*
68. *They said, "Call upon your Lord on our behalf to make plain to us what cow it is." He said, "He says, 'The cow should be neither too old nor too young, but of middle age.' Now do what you are commanded."*
69. *They said, "Call upon your Lord on our behalf to make plain to us her colour." He said, "He says, 'Verily, it is a bright yellow cow, pure and rich in tone and gives delight to the beholders.'"*
70. *They said, "Call upon you Lord on our behalf to make plain to us what she is, to us are all cows alike. We wish indeed for guidance, if God wills."*
71. *He said, "He says, 'A cow not trained to till the soil nor water the fields; sound and without blemish.'" They said, "Now you have brought the truth." Then they offered her in sacrifice, though they almost failed to do it.*
72. *And remember when you slew a man and fell into a dispute among yourselves as to the crime. But God brought forth what you did hide.*
73. *So We said, "Strike the (body) with a piece of the (cow)." Thus, God brings the dead to life and shows you His Signs, so you may understand.*
74. *Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became like a rock and even harder. For indeed there are rocks from which rivers gush forward; others send forth water when they are split asunder; and others sink for fear of God. And God is not unmindful of what you do. (2:40-74)*

God reminds the Children of Israel of the bounties that He blessed them with and of the covenant that He made with them, *“Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill your covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you,”* But which covenant does this verse refer to. Is it the covenant that God made with Adam, *“But when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve? But those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they shall be companions of the fire; they shall abide therein.”* (2:38-39) Or is it the initial universal covenant that God made with humankind not to worship anyone but Him. This is a covenant that has been deeply engrained in the initial natural disposition of humankind. It gives humankind the propensity to seek God. This natural propensity can be impaired as a result of external factors that misguide humankind away from the right path. Or is it the special covenant that God made with Prophet Abraham (PBUH), the account of which will be given later on, *“And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled. He said, ‘I will make you a leader for humankind.’ Abraham said, ‘And of my offspring (will they be leaders).’ He answered, ‘My promise does not include the wrongdoers.’”* (2:124) Or is it the covenant that God made with the Children of Israel when He raised the mountain over their heads and asked them to hold fast to what God has given them.

All these covenants are in essence one covenant. It is the covenant between the Creator and His servants to consecrate their hearts to God alone and to thoroughly submit themselves to Him. This is the essence of God’s single religion, the religion of submission which constituted the message brought by all the messengers of God. This was the banner carried high by the procession of faith over the history of humanity. So, God calls upon the Children of Israel to fulfill this covenant and to fear Him alone, *“And fear none but Me.”* He also reminds them that in order to fulfill the covenant they have to believe in what God revealed to His Prophet (PBUH) which confirms the revelation that they received before, and that they should not hasten to reject it, becoming the first disbelievers, *“And believe in what I reveal, confirming the revelation which you possess already, and be not the first to reject it,”* The religion of Islam which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought is the last version of the single eternal message. It is a continuation of the same message that came from God and the eternal covenant between God and all humankind. It includes all previous versions of the Message, and it consolidates the old and new testaments and adds what God wants to add for the benefit of humankind. It brings all humankind together in a single brotherhood. They gather around God’s religion and fulfill His covenant irrespective of their race, nationality, or political affiliation.

God admonishes the Children of Israel not to reject the new message seeking worldly gains or fearing loss of power and influence, *“Nor sell My revelation for a small price; and be conscious of Me alone.”* The verse continues to warn against hiding the truth, *“And do not cover the truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth,”* with the intention of spreading chaos and sedition in the Muslim community. The verse then exhorts them to join the procession of the faithful and practice the obligatory duties, *“And establish in prayer; pay the poor-dues; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship).”*

The verse then continues to rebuke the religious leaders who use double standards in their dealings, *“Do you enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practice it) yourselves, and you study the Scripture? Have you then no sense?”* Although this verse was revealed to address a specific incident, but it also addresses all professional religious leaders, irrespective of their persuasion, who use double standards in their dealings. There is always a fear that religious leaders abuse their power when religion ceases to be a way of life or a deep rooted conviction and it becomes a profession or a vocation. They may succumb to the temptation of money and power to twist the facts or produce decrees (fatwas), which may seem to agree with the apparent meaning of the verses but deviate greatly from the true spirit of the religion, to satisfy people in power. It is a grave blunder not to practice what one preaches. Not only people will be doubtful of their religious leaders but they will also be doubtful of the morals of the religion itself, because they listen to nice talk but they see ugly deeds. Hence the advice was not meant only for the Jews, who were addressed with these verses, but it was also addressed to religious leaders of all persuasions, *“Seek (God’s) help with perseverance and prayer;”* Jews were advised to follow what they knew to be the truth rather than worry about their special status in Medina. They should sacrifice whatever worldly gain they were getting and join the procession of faith, especially since they considered themselves a beacon of faith in the midst of the idolatry society of Medina. However, this required perseverance which comes through prayers. It is a difficult undertaking that can only be achieved by those who are humble, conscious of their Lord, and are certain about meeting Him on the Day of Judgment, *“It is indeed hard, except for those who are humble. Who know that they will certainly meet their Lord, and that they will return to Him.”* Seeking support and help through perseverance and prayers is mentioned repeatedly in the Qur’an. Perseverance and prayers provide the support necessary to overcome any adversity or hardship. It is indeed a hardship to relinquish the glamour, the power, and the wealth that usually come with leadership positions in favour of telling the truth.

What is the meaning of prayers? Prayers are an opportunity for the servant of God to meet and connect with his Lord. It is a conveyer that provides the heart with strength, and the soul with solace. This is a sustenance which is more valuable than any worldly material gain. Although the Prophet (PBUH) was always in close contact with his Lord, but he used to seek solace in prayers whenever he was faced with an adversity. Prayers continue to be a resource available for every believer who needs sustenance for the road, water to quench the thirst during the journey of life, and moral support when the support becomes scarce.

The certainty of meeting God is the focal point of perseverance and prayers, it is the focal point of God consciousness, and it is the focal point of the authentic standard of the true values. When one uses an authentic standard for the values, worldly gains appear trivial compared to the reward in the Hereafter. A wise person will find no difficulty in making the right choice.

The verses continue to address the Children of Israel and remind them with God’s favours which He bestowed on them, *“Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and that I favoured you over other people. Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for it, nor shall compensation be taken from it, nor shall anyone be helped.”* God’s favour which was bestowed on the Children of Israel

and made them the “chosen people” was contingent on the fulfillment of their covenant with God. The favour of being a chosen people ceased when they failed to fulfill the covenant, disobeyed their Prophets, became ungrateful, and abdicated their responsibility. When this happened, God’s curse and anger fell on them, and they were dispersed in the land. Reminding them of God’s favour which they enjoyed before was meant to motivate them to return back to God’s path and to join the procession of faith through the Islamic call. The motivation is followed by the warning of the Day of Judgment. Belief is a personal responsibility. Every soul is accountable for its deeds. On that day, no intercession will be accepted on behalf of those who did not believe and did not do good deeds nor will they be able to ransom themselves.

The verses continue to enumerate the blessings of God on the Children of Israel, “*And remember, We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh, who subjected you to dreadful torment, slaughtered your sons, and let your women-folk live; that was a tremendous trial from your Lord. And when We parted the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people before your eyes.*” An image of the strife of their ancestors in Egypt and how they were miraculously saved is painted. Details of the strife are mentioned: the killing of male babies and letting the females live. This was a trial from God. Then the miraculous escape of the Jews and the drowning of the Egyptians are mentioned. The description which is given for this experience here is brief and serves as a reminder of the trial and the deliverance of the Children of Israel. The verse paints a vivid image of the Jews reaching the shores of the Red sea under the leadership of Prophet Moses (PBUH) trying to flee the Egyptians who were earnestly pursuing them and suddenly the sea was parted so that they can cross it and escape. The experience has been detailed in other Suras of the Qur’an.

“*And We appointed forty nights for Moses, and in his absence you chose the calf (for worship), and you were wrongdoers. Even then, We did pardon you; in order that you may be grateful. And when We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion (Between right and wrong), so that you may be guided. And when Moses said to his people, ‘My people, you have indeed wronged yourselves by your worship of the calf. So turn (in repentance) to your Maker, and slay the wrongdoers from among yourselves; that will be better for you in the sight of your Maker.’ Then He turned toward you (in forgiveness); for He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*” This is only a brief reference to the story of the calf and how it was used for worship when Moses (PBUH) went to meet his Lord; more details are given in Surat TaHa (Chapter 20). This was a transgression on their part; however, God forgave them and gave Prophet Moses (PBUH) the Scripture (the Torah). The Scripture embodied the criteria that differentiate between right and wrong, so they would be guided.

After this transgression, there was a need for extreme purification, which can only be achieved when they “*slay the wrongdoers from among yourselves; that will be better for you in the sight of your Maker.*” This was a severe undertaking but it was the only way for penitence. Their repentance was accepted by God.

“*And remember when you said, ‘Moses, we shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly,’ so the thunderbolt overtook you while you looked on. Then We raised you up after your death that you may be grateful. And We gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you Manna and quails, saying, ‘Eat of the good things We have provided for you.’ They wronged Us*



*not, but they did wrong themselves.*” Were they only capable of gaining knowledge through physical senses, or were they being stubborn? The abundance of signs, blessings, and forgiveness from God were not able to change their materialistic hard nature. They continued to argue and wrangle until the wrath of God befell them. They said to Moses (PBUH), *“We shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly, so the thunderbolt overtook you while you looked on.”* But God’s mercy engulfed them and they got another chance, perchance they remember and be grateful to God. The verses reminded them of the incident when God raised them from the dead after the thunderbolt overtook them. They were also reminded of God’s blessings when they were in the barren desert, when God provided them with tasteful food at no effort on their part and He protected them from the extreme heat of the sun and the extreme cold of the desert, *“And We gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you Manna and quails, saying, ‘Eat of the good things We have provided for you,’”* Stories are narrated about how God provided them with Manna which they found on trees. It tasted like honey. He also provided them with a bird called *Salwa*, which they were able to capture easily. Thus, they were blessed with tasteful food and comfortable stay, but they were ungrateful.

*“And when We said, ‘Enter this town, and eat freely therein as you wish in abundance; but enter the gate with humility, in posture and in words, and We will forgive you your sins and will increase (reward) for the good-doers.’ But the wrongdoers changed the word from that which had been given them; so We sent on the wrongdoers a plague from heaven, because they infringed (Our command).”* Some narrations indicate that the town mentioned here was Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the homestead of the Giants. The Jews were commanded to conquer the city and expel the Giants, but they declined on the account that they cannot conquer the Giants. They said, *“Moses! A giant people (dwell) therein and we will not go in till they exit. When they go out, then we will enter.”* (5:22) Those who transgressed and disobeyed the command were punished. It should be noted that the verse singles out those who transgressed from among them.

The provision of water in the desert was another miracle that God bestowed on the Children of Israel, in addition to the provision of food and shade. The Qur’an reminds them with this miracle *“And remember when Moses prayed for water for his people;”* God responded favourably, *“Strike the rock with your staff. Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each group knew its own place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by God, and do neither evil nor mischief on the (face of the) earth.”* When Moses (PBUH) requested water for the Children of Israel, God responded favourably to his request. He asked him to strike a particular rock with his staff. Out of the rock gushed water from twelve springs, the same number as the number of the Israelite tribes. These tribes were the descendants of the twelve grandchildren of Prophet Jacob (Israel) (PBUH). Each tribe was given its own spring for its members to drink. The verse ends by a warning against doing evil or mischief.

*“And when you said, ‘Moses, we cannot endure one kind of food (always); so call upon your Lord for us to produce for us of what the earth grows of herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils, and onions.’ He said, ‘Will you exchange the better for the worse? Go you down to any town (misr), and you shall find what you want.’ And humiliation and misery were stamped on them; they drew on themselves the wrath of God. This is because they continued to reject God’s message and to slay His Messengers without just cause. This was so because they rebelled and they were*

*aggressors.*” Moses (PBUH) reprimanded them for this strange request. Do you want to exchange the tasteful food that God gave you with a food of a lesser quality? This is not a matter worthy of praying for, go down to any town and you will find what you are asking for. There are two possible interpretations for the Arabic word “Misr” used in this verse. In the Arabic language a town is called “misr”; also “Misr” is the name of the country Egypt. So, the verse may mean that the food they requested is a common food that can be found in any town; or it may mean do you want to go back to Egypt in which you suffered misery and humiliation where you can find the food you requested.

*“Those who believe (in that which is revealed to you Muhammad), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians,- any who believe in God and the Last Day, and do good deeds, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”*

Those who believe in that which is revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) are the Muslims, those who follow the Jewish Scripture are the Jews, and the Christians are the followers of Jesus (PBUH). Most likely, the Sabians were a group of the Arabs who rejected idol worship and were looking for a better faith. This group adopted the belief in the Oneness of God and followed Abraham’s (PBUH) faith. So, the idolaters called them “Sabians” meaning that they rejected the faith of their ancestors. The verse indicates that those who believe in God and the Day of Judgment and do good deeds from any of these groups will get their reward from God and they will have no fear nor will they be saddened.

*“And remember when We took your covenant and We caused the mount to tower above you (Saying), ‘Hold fast to what We have given you and remember that which is therein so that you become conscious of God.’ But you turned away thereafter. Had it not been for the Grace and Mercy of God, you would have most assuredly been among the losers.”* The content of the covenant is detailed in other Suras, and some of the details are mentioned later in this Sura. The verse paints a vigorous image: the mount is raised, the pledge is sought, and the command to hold fast to the covenant is issued. It is a clear command to stand firm in matters of faith. The covenant between God and the believers is an unequivocal pledge to strive in the way of God. It involves responsibilities and hardships but the believer should accept it whole heartedly and spare no effort in upholding the responsibilities and overcoming the hardships. This sentiment was voiced by the messenger when he was called upon to carry the responsibility of the message. He said to his wife, *“It is no longer sleep time.”* God told him, *“We will reveal to you a heavy message;”* (73:5) similarly, the Children of Israel were asked to hold fast to the covenant. To be able to hold fast to the covenant, it is imperative that they should remember its contents and understand its essence. The covenant of God details a way of life for the believers. The principles underlying this way of life should rest deep in the hearts of the believers, should be reflected on their behaviour, and should shape their lives as a whole. These principles should lead the believers to become highly and continuously conscious of God. But the Children of Israel turned away; however, once more they were saved by the mercy of God.

*“And you knew those among you who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. We said to them, ‘Be you apes, despised and rejected.’ So We made it an example to those who witnessed it and to the succeeding generations, and a lesson to those who are conscious of God.”* Breaking the law on the Sabbath was also mentioned in another Sura, *“and ask them about the village near the sea. The fish become abundant on the Sabbath but they disappear during normal days.”* (7:163) The Jews requested a day for rest, so God made the Sabbath a sacred resting day. They were then tested by God when they noticed that the fish appears in abundance on the Sabbath, but disappear on regular days. They wanted the fish, but were afraid to blatantly break the law. Can they persevere and lose a plentiful catch of fish? They succumbed to the temptation and broke the law of the Sabbath in a roundabout way. They installed barriers to trap the fish when it comes on the Sabbath. Then, they catch the fish the day after the Sabbath, *“We said to them, ‘Be you apes, despised and rejected.’”*

They deserved to be punished for reneging on their covenant with God. Those who succumb to their desires in face of temptation relinquish the status of the free-willed humans. They lose the highly valued free-willed status of humankind that they gained through their covenant with God. The verse does not mean that they were made apes in a physical sense, but it points to the similarity between the two conditions: losing the free-willed status of humans and being apes with no control over their desires. They became similar to the apes in their thoughts and feelings. This was a lesson for those who witnessed this event and an admonition for the believers in all ages, *“So We made it an example to those who witnessed it and to the succeeding generations, and a lesson to those who are conscious of God.”*

Then, we come to the story of the cow which is narrated in detail and is mentioned only in this Sura. *“And remember Moses when he said to his people, ‘God commands that you sacrifice a cow.’ They said, ‘do you make us a laughing-stock?’ He said, ‘God forbid that I should be among the foolish.’ They said, ‘Call upon your Lord on our behalf to make plain to us what cow it is.’ He said, ‘He says, “The cow should be neither too old nor too young, but of middle age.’ Now do what you are commanded.”* They said, *‘Call upon your Lord on our behalf to make plain to us its colour.’ He said, ‘He says, “Verily it is a bright yellow cow, pure and rich in tone and gives delight to the beholders.”* They said, *‘Call upon you Lord on our behalf to make plain to us what it is, to us are all cows alike. We wish indeed for guidance, if God wills.’ He said, ‘He say, “A cow not trained to till the soil nor water the fields; sound and without blemish.”* They said, *‘Now you have brought the truth.’ Then they offered it in sacrifice; though they almost failed to do it. Thus, God brings the dead to life and shows you His Signs, so you may understand.”*

This short story, as it is narrated in the Qur’an, deals with several aspects that warrant some reflection on the part of the reader. The story describes the argument that the Children of Israel had with Prophet Moses (PBUH) when he asked them to make a sacrifice by slaughtering a cow. The story also shines the light on two major issues: the certainty of resurrection after death, and the nature of life and death. One also should pay attention to the beauty and flow of the narrative.

The argumentative nature of the Children of Israel is apparent from the narrative. Their hearts lost contact with the pure spring of the belief in the unseen, the trust in God, and the ability to

believe in what comes to them through the messengers of God. The story tells of their procrastination in following the commands of God and making excuses to evade complying with the command. Their prophet said to them, "*God commands that you sacrifice a cow.*" This should have been enough for them to comply. Their prophet was their leader who saved them, with the grace of God, from the humiliating torture at the hands of the Egyptians. He made clear to them that this was not his own command but God's command. They responded rudely because they thought that their prophet was mocking them. This is highly inappropriate. Moses (PBUH) responded saying, "*God forbids.*" This was a gentle reminder of the proper etiquette to be followed when dealing with God Almighty and His messenger. It was also a reminder that it is not appropriate to think that God's messenger is mocking them. At this point, they could have easily complied with the command by sacrificing *any* cow. But they chose to ask, "*Call upon your Lord on our behalf to make plain to us what cow it is.*" The way they framed the question may suggest that they were still in doubt of the seriousness of the command. They asked Moses (PBUH) to ask *his* God - as if God was only the God of Moses and not their God as well- about the cow. Moses (PBUH) answered their question and continued to gently guide them to the right path and to teach them what they should do. He told them that God says, "*The cow should be neither too old nor too young, but of middle age,*" so, you should now follow the command. The dialogue should have stopped at this point. They could have easily found a cow that matches the general description that was given, but they continued with their questions. This time they asked about its color. The response was forthcoming that it was yellow in color. Each question they asked brought about more restrictions. The cow is now a middle aged cow, yellow in color, and pleasing to the eye. However, this was not specific enough for them. They continued to ask for more details. However, they followed their request with an apology for the many questions they asked. It became evident that the more they asked for more details the narrower the choices available to them became. It would have been much easier if they had complied with the command once it was issued by sacrificing any cow. The description became more specific, not only the cow should be middle-aged, yellow, and pleasant to the sight, but it had to be a cow that was not trained to till the land nor water the plants. Its color should be clear without a blemish. "*Now you have brought the truth, then they offered her in sacrifice, though they almost failed to do it,*" was their answer. God then revealed to them the rationale behind the command, "*And remember when you slew a man and fell into a dispute among yourselves as to the crime. But God brought forth what you did hide. So We said, 'Strike the (body) with a piece of the (cow).'*' Thus, God brings the dead to life and shows you His Signs, so you may understand." A person was murdered, there were no witnesses to identify the culprit, but many accusations were made. God wanted to bring the victim back to life, long enough, to identify his killer.

This brings us to the second aspect of the story, the aspect that deals with the power of the Creator, the certainty of the resurrection, and the nature of life and death. The style of the verses changes from a narrative style to confrontation and blame. A man was killed, no one witnessed the crime, and a dispute ensued about who killed him. God wanted the truth to be announced by the murdered person himself. The cow that was sacrificed was the tool used to accomplish this objective. God asked the disputing parties to strike the corps with a piece of the cow's flesh. When the murdered person's corps was struck with the flesh of the cow, he was raised from the dead to tell them who had murdered him. Thus, the culprit was named and the truth became known without any shadow of a doubt. But what is the rationale behind this long process.

Certainly, God has the power to raise the dead without going through this process. What is the relationship between the dead cow and the man who was raised from the dead?

It was the custom of the Children of Israel to offer cows as a sacrifice to God. A piece of the flesh of a dead cow was used to cause a dead person to be raised again. The flesh of the dead cow has no power to give life to a dead person. It is only a tool to show the power of God. No one knows the mechanism behind the power or how it works; one only sees its effects. The moral of the story is that God can raise the dead in front of your eyes using simple ways which cannot be fathomed by people. The leap from death to life is huge. It is a jump that baffles people. But it is a simple matter for the Divine. How? No one knows. It is beyond the comprehension of any human being. It is one of the secrets of the Divine power.

This evocative scene, which should have moved the hearts of the Children of Israel and filled them with the light of God consciousness, is followed by a very strong final statement. *“Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became like a rock and even harder. For indeed there are rocks from which rivers gush forward; others send forth water when they are split asunder; and others sink for fear of God. And God is not unmindful of what you do.”* Their hearts were likened to the rock in its hardness. They were familiar with the nature of rocks and they knew how hard they can be. They have seen the water gushing from the rock that Moses (PBUH) struck into twelve springs and they have seen how the mountain was destroyed when God manifested Himself to it. But their hearts remained rigid and inflexible. Hence the warning, *“God is not unmindful of what you do.”*

### **Verses: 75 to 103**

75. *Can you (believers) entertain the hope that they will be true to you? Seeing that a party of them heard the word of God and they distorted it knowingly after they understood it.*

76. *When they meet the believers, they say, "We believe." But when they meet each other in private, they say, "Shall you tell them what God has revealed to you, that they may engage you in argument about it before your Lord? Do you not understand?"*

77. *Do not they know that God knows what they conceal and what they reveal?*

78. *And among them there are illiterates. They only know the Scripture through hearsay. They do nothing but conjecture.*

79. *Therefore, woe to those who write the Scripture with their own hands, and then say, "This is from God," to make a small gain. Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they earn.*

80. *And they say, "The Fire shall not touch us except for a few numbered days." Say, "Have you taken a promise from God, for He never breaks His promise? Or is it that you say of God what you do not know?"*

81. *Certainly, those who earn evil and are surrounded by their sins, they are companions of the Fire. Therein shall they abide (for ever).*

82. *But those who believe and do good, they are companions of the Garden. Therein shall they abide (for ever).*

83. *And remember when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel. Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak to*

people kindly; establish prayer; and pay the poor-dues. Then did you turn back, except a few among you, and you were refusing.

84. And remember We took your covenant. Shed not the blood of your people, nor evict your own people from your homes. Then you ratified (Our covenant) and you were witnesses to that.

85. Yet here you are slaying each other and driving out a party of your people from their homes, supporting one another against them in sin and aggression? And if they came to you as captives you would ransom them, whereas their expulsion was itself unlawful for you. Do you believe in parts of the Scripture and reject others? And what is the reward of those who do so save ignominy in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous torment. For God is not unaware of what you do.

86. These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter. Their torment shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped.

87. And Indeed, We gave Moses the Scripture and followed him up with a succession of messengers; We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what you yourselves do not desire, you grow arrogant? Some you called impostors, and others you slew.

88. They say, "Our hearts are covered." Nay, God's curse is on them for their blasphemy. Little is that which they believe.

89. And when there comes to them a Book from God, confirming that which is in their possession, although before that they had prayed for victory against the disbelievers, when there comes to them that which they (should) have recognized, they refuse to believe in it. The curse of God is on the disbelievers.

90. Miserable is the price for which they have sold their souls, that they deny (the revelation) which God has sent down, grudging that God should reveal of His bounty on whom He pleases of His servants. Thus, they have incurred wrath upon wrath. And humiliating is the torment of those who disbelieve.

91. When it is said to them, "Believe in what God has revealed," they say, "We believe in what was revealed to us," and they reject what came after it, even if it is the truth confirming what they have. Say, "Why then have you slain the prophets of God in times gone by, if you are indeed believers?"

92. And Indeed, Moses came to you with clear signs, yet, while he was away, you chose the calf (for worship) and you were wrongdoers.

93. And remember when We made a covenant with you and caused the Mount to tower above you, (saying), "Hold fast to that which We have given you, and hear (Our Word)," they said, "We hear and we disobey." And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their hearts on account of their disbelief. Say (to them), "Evil is that which your belief enjoins upon you, if you are believers."

94. Say to them, "If the abode of the Hereafter in the providence of God is indeed for you alone and not for others of humankind (as you claim), then long for death if you are truthful."

95. But they will never long for it, because of that which their own hands have sent before them. God is aware of the wrongdoers.

96. And you will indeed find them, of all people, most greedy for life, even more than the idolaters. Each one of them wishes he could be given a life of a thousand years. But the grant of such life will not save him from torment. For God sees well all that they do.

97. Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel – no one else brought it down (the revelation) to your heart by God's leave, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe.

98. Whoever is the enemy of God and His angels and His messengers and Gabriel and Michael, so indeed God is the enemy of the disbelievers?

99. Verily, We have sent down to you clear signs; and none reject them but those who are the transgressors.

100. Is it not so that every time they make a covenant, a party of them cast it aside? The truth is, most of them do not believe.

101. And when there came to them a messenger from God, confirming that which they have, a party of the People of the Scripture threw away the Scripture of God behind their backs, as if (it had been something) they did not know.

102. And they followed that which the devils fabricated against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon was not a disbeliever. But the devils disbelieved, teaching humankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels in Babel, Harut and Marut. Nor did they (the two angels) teach it to anyone till they had said, "We are only a trial, therefore do not disbelieve." And from these two (angles) people learn that by which they cause division between man and his wife; but they harm thereby no-one save by God's leave. And they learn that which harms them and does not benefit them. And they certainly knew that whoever made a gain from this knowledge will have no share in the Hereafter; and indeed, evil is the price for which they sell their souls, if they but knew.

103. And if they had believed and remained conscious of God, recompense from God would be better, if they only knew. (2:75-103)

"Can you (believers) entertain the hope that they will be true to you? Seeing that a party of them heard the Word of God and they distorted it knowingly after they understood it." There is no hope that people of such a character would accept faith. People who accept faith have open minds and souls which are ready to receive the light of guidance. They are prepared to connect with the eternal pure spring of guidance. They are conscious of God. This consciousness prevents them from distorting the word of God after reading and comprehending it. The party that is referred to in these verses is a group of Jewish scholars who were knowledgeable of the truth revealed in the Torah. They distorted the truth given in the Torah, which was revealed to their Prophet Moses (PBUH), by providing round about interpretations of its verses to change their intended meaning, not because they did not understand the intended meaning but because they were motivated by their own desires to protect their interests and remain in a position of authority among their people. One cannot expect them to believe in the truth revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) after they had distorted the truth revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH).

"When they meet the believers, they say, 'We believe.' But when they meet each other in private, they say, 'Shall you tell them what God has revealed to you, that they may engage you in argument about it before your Lord?' Do you not understand?" This group of scholars had two traits, corruption and hypocrisy, what hope can you hold that they would be true to you? Some of them used to say to the believers, "We believe in what Muhammad brought," because the advent of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) corroborates the prophecies of the Torah. They were hoping that the new prophet becomes their saviour. However, when they congregated together they blamed

each other for revealing what in their Scripture to the believers. They thought that revealing this information to the believers will be taken as a proof against them in front of God. *“Do not they know that God knows what they conceal and what they reveal?”*

*“And among them there are illiterates. They only know the Scripture from hearsay. They do nothing but conjecture. Therefore, woe to those who write the Scripture with their own hands, and then say, ‘This is from God,’ to make a small gain. Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they earn.”* It is not expected of such people to accept the truth and become guided. These people have no scruple to change and distort verses in their revealed Scripture when these verses stand between them and their interests. They will be punished severely by God for the infractions they committed.

They had hoped that they will be spared the torment no matter what they do. This is merely wishful thinking that contravenes divine justice. They believed that they will only stay for a few days in Hell then they will be moved to the eternal bliss. These aspirations are not in alignment with God’s system of justice, nor are they aligned with the principle that the recompense should be commensurate with the deeds. *“And they say, ‘The Fire shall not touch us except for a few numbered days.’ Say, ‘Have you taken a promise from God, for He never breaks His promise? or is it that you say of God what you do not know?’”* This is the divine statement for the proof against them, *“Have you taken a promise from God”* where is then this promise? *“Or is it that you say of God what you do not know.”* This is a rhetorical question which conveys a rejection of their claim.

At this point, the unequivocal statement, which elucidates one of the fundamental principles of Islam and refutes their claim, is pronounced. This principle emanates from the comprehensive Islamic perspective on the universe, life, and humankind. Recompense is fitting and according to the deeds, *“Certainly, those who earn evil and are surrounded by their sins, they are companions of the Fire, Therein, shall they abide (for ever). But those who believe and do good, they are companions of the Garden. Therein shall they abide (for ever).”* We have to stop here and reflect on this profound artistic description of the state of mind of the sinner. The word “earn” is used to describe the act of committing a sin. This describes the state of mind of the person who commits a sin. A person commits a sin because he/she enjoys the act and thinks that he/she earned the pleasure that comes with it. Those people do not think that they are committing a hateful act. Had they thought of it as a loss rather than a gain, they would not have done it. Had they thought of it as a hateful deed and they somehow succumbed to the temptation and committed the sin, they would have hastened to seek God’s forgiveness. In this case, they would not have been surrounded by their sin. A person who enjoys being in sin and does not feel bad about doing it, is surrounded by this sin. The sin surrounds them all around and prevents them from seeing anything else other than instant gratification. Thus, they do not see a reason for remorse and seeking repentance or forgiveness. The term *“surrounded by their sins”* exemplifies this concept. This is one of the characteristics of the Qur’anic diction which gives it a profound power in painting dramatic images that flood the hearts with emotions. What image could be more compelling than the image of a person imprisoned by his sin? When the doors to repentance are shut on a person in the prison of sin, then there is no escape from the swift, just recompense, *“They are companions of the Fire.”* The recompense for the believers follows, *“They are*



*companions of the Garden.*” True faith rests deep in the heart of a believer and provides the source from which good deeds spring. It is crucial that those who call themselves Muslims understand and apply this principle. True faith should lead to good deeds. Those who call themselves Muslims and spread mischief in the land are not true believers. Faith is never complete if it is not reflected on the deeds of a person.

The verses continue to talk about the Children of Israel and describe the different covenants between them and God, “*And remember when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel. Worship none but God; treat with kindness your parents and kindred, and orphans and those in need; speak to people kindly; establish prayer; and pay the poor-dues. Then did you turn back, except a few among you, and you were refusing. And remember We took your covenant. Shed not the blood of your people, nor evict your own people from your homes. Then you ratified (Our covenant) and you were witnesses to that. Yet here you are slaying each other and driving out a party of your people from their homes, supporting one another against them by sin and transgression? and if they came to you as captives you would ransom them, whereas their expulsion was itself unlawful for you. Do you believe in parts of the Scripture and reject others? And what is the reward of those who do so save ignominy in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous torment. For God is not unaware of what you do. These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter. Their torment shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped.*” The first verse describes the details of the covenant between God and the Children of Israel. This is the covenant that was struck in the shade of the mount. This is the covenant that they were commanded to hold fast to and to remember its details. This is the covenant which comprised the fundamental principles of the religion of God, the same principles stated in Islam which they rejected.

The covenant dictated that they worship no one other than God. This is the first rule for the belief in the absolute Oneness of God. It dictated treating parents, the kin, the orphans, and the poor with kindness. It also ordained speaking nicely to people, enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, establishing prayer, and paying poor-dues. This covenant sums up the fundamental principles of Islam. These verses highlight two facts. The first fact is the Oneness of God’s religion, there is an agreement in principle between Islam (the last message) and the previous messages. The second fact is the obstinacy of those who rejected the message of Islam, despite the fact that it agrees in principle with the covenant that they had with God.

The verses then turn to address the Children of Israel, “*Then did you turn back.*” The verses then continue to list the infractions they committed against the covenant. “*And remember We took your covenant. Shed not the blood of your people, nor evict your own people from your homes. Then you ratified (Our covenant) and you were witnesses to that. Yet here you are slaying each other and driving out a party of your people from their homes, supporting one another against them by sin and transgression? and if they came to you as captives you would ransom them, whereas their expulsion was itself unlawful for you. Do you believe in parts of the Scripture and reject others?*” These verses describe a state of affairs which the Jews of Medina experienced before the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina. Although the two main Arab tribes of Medina, Al-Awas and Al-Khazraj, were both idolaters, but they were avowed enemies to each other. There were also three Jewish tribes, Bani Qaynuqa’, Bani Nadir, and Bani Qurayzah who

resided in Medina. The Jewish tribes were divided among themselves. Bani Qaynuqa' and Bani Nadir aligned themselves with Al-Khazraj, while Bani Qurayzah aligned themselves with the Al-Awas. Whenever war erupted between the two Arab tribes, each Jewish tribe fought alongside its ally. This led to situations where a Jew fought and even killed another Jew. The covenant with God forbade them to kill one another. The side which emerged victorious at the end of the war would expel their enemy from their homes, loot their property, and take their women captive. This was a transgression against the covenant. After the hostilities had subsided, each Jewish tribe would ransom its members who fell captive as a result of the war - according to the statement in the Torah which ordained that it is incumbent on a Jew to free enslaved Jews. These verses confronted them with this contradictory behaviour, *"Do you believe in parts of the Scripture and reject others?"* The verse promised that this breach of the covenant will bring them, *"Ignominy in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous torment."*

The true nature of those who behave in this fashion is declared to all people, Muslims and non-Muslims, *"These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter. Their torment shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped."*

*"And indeed, We gave Moses the Scripture and followed him up with a succession of messengers; We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear Signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what you yourselves do not desire, you grow arrogant? Some you called impostors, and others you slew."* This verse addresses the assertion which some of the Children of Israel made: they did not need a new religion because it was sufficient for them to follow the laws and teachings which their previous prophets brought. The verse reminded them of how they treated some of the prophets who were sent to them before. The verse pointed out the similarity between their attitudes toward earlier prophets and their attitude toward Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The verse elaborates on their interaction with Prophet Moses (PBUH), a topic which was touched upon in earlier verses. The verse also describes how they treated some of the prophets who were sent to them and cites, as an example, Jesus the son of Mary (PBUH) who was endowed with the ability to perform miracles and was supported by the Holy Spirit. Whenever a messenger came to them with that which they did not desire, they either rejected the messenger or slew him.

*"They say, 'Our hearts are covered.' Nay, God's curse is on them for their blasphemy. Little is that which they believe."* They said their hearts were sealed, they were no longer in the mood to receive a new message, nor could they listen to a new messenger. They said this to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to the Muslims to explain why they did not respond favourably to the call of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). God responded to their assertions, *"God's curse is on them for their blasphemy."* They rejected the guidance given to them, so God distanced them further from guidance as a punishment for their rejection. Therefore, only few of them will heed the guidance and become believers. The word "little" could also mean that their faith is "little" because they rejected guidance when it came to them.

Their rejection was unreasonable, because they were waiting in anticipation for a new prophet but when one came to them - with a message that confirmed the revelation that they had received before - they rejected him. *“And when there comes to them a Book from God, confirming that which is in their possession, although before that they had prayed for victory against the disbelievers, when there comes to them that which they (should) have recognized, they refuse to believe in it. The curse of God is on the disbelievers.”* This rejection is punished by a curse from God.

The following verse uncovers the true reasons behind their rejection, *“Miserable is the price for which they have sold their souls, that they deny (the revelation) which God has sent down, grudging that God should reveal of His bounty on whom He pleases of His servants. Thus, they have incurred wrath upon wrath. And humiliating is the torment of those who disbelieve.”* They sold their souls for a miserable price. The price they received for their souls is their rejection of the faith. This is truly a losing bargain.

*“When it is said to them, ‘Believe in what God has revealed,’ they say, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us’ and they reject what came after it, even if it is the truth confirming what they have. Say, ‘Why then have you slain the prophets of God in times gone by, if you are indeed believers?’”* This is what they used to say when they were called to Islam, *“We believe in what was revealed to us.”* They thought that this is enough. They rejected what Jesus and Muhammad (PBUH) brought. The verses express a sense of amazement. Why would they reject the newer revelation which was sent down, after they had received their first revelation, while they know that the newer revelation is the truth? They were not interested in the truth; they were interested only in maintaining authority and power. They decided to deny the new revelation because it came through someone outside their circle. They worshiped themselves, their desires, and their clannish loyalty. They even rejected what their previous prophets brought when it stood against their desires and interests. The verse asked them, *“If you truly believe in what you received before, why did you kill your prophets?”*

*“And indeed, Moses came to you with clear signs, yet, while he was away, you chose the calf (for worship) and you were wrongdoers.”* Was it part of your faith to worship the calf after Moses (PBUH) brought you guidance? This was not the only time you did this, *“And remember when We made a covenant with you and caused the Mount to tower above you, (saying), ‘Hold fast to that which We have given you, and hear (Our Word),’ they said, ‘We hear and we disobey.’ And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their hearts on account of their disbelief. Say (to them), ‘Evil is that which your belief enjoins upon you, if you are believers.’”* The style changes here from addressing the Children of Israel to a narrative addressed to the believers and the rest of the world. It also tells the Prophet (PBUH) how to respond to them, *“Evil is that which your belief enjoins on you, if you are believers.”*

Let us stop for a moment to reflect on the expression, *“We hear and we disobey. And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their hearts on account of their unbelief.”* They said, *“We hear,”* but, they would not have been able to voice their disobedience. Why then the verse states that they said, *“We disobey?”* The verse vocalises the silent reality. Their tongues said, *“We hear,”* while their deeds said, *“We disobey.”* Deeds send a much stronger message than

words. This is another Islamic fundamental principle: deeds, not words, what matter most. Deeds change an enunciated concept to a reality of life.

The verse paints a harsh image. Did they really imbibe the calf? How did they imbibe it in their hearts? The verse visualizes a calf being squeezed into their hearts. This image dramatically describes the strength of their love for the calf. The verse portrays a mental picture of how the love for the calf filled and flooded their hearts.

The Jews used to claim that they are God's chosen people. They claimed that only they are guided and only they will be successful in the Hereafter. No other nation will have a share in God's reward in the Hereafter. This claim implies that those who believe in Muhammad (PBUH) have no share in God's reward in the Hereafter. The claim was used to sow the seeds of doubt in the hearts of Muslims regarding the authenticity of the message of Islam and the truthfulness of the promises made by their Prophet (PBUH) and the Qur'an. They wanted to plant the seeds of mistrust between the believers and their Prophet (PBUH). So, God asked His Prophet (PBUH) to challenge them. The Prophet (PBUH) asked them to join him in calling upon God to destroy the erring party, *"Say to them, if the abode of the Hereafter in the providence of God is indeed for you alone and not for others of humankind (as you claim), then long for death if you are truthful."* The verse continued to tell the Prophet (PBUH) that they will not accept the challenge. They could not call upon God to destroy the erring party because they knew that this meant their own destruction, *"But they will never long for it, because of that which their own hands have sent before them. God is aware of the evildoers."*

*"And you will indeed find them, of all people, most greedy for life, even more than the idolaters. Each one of them wishes he could be given a life of a thousand years. But the grant of such life will not save him from torment. For God sees well all that they do."* They would love it if they can live for a thousand years, because they did not long to meeting God. They only loved this life and they had no aspirations for another life in the Hereafter. This worldly life would seem certainly very short if one feels that it does not lead to the Hereafter. The belief in the Hereafter is a blessing. It is a blessing that fills the heart of the believer. It is a blessing that God bestows on the mortals whose lives are short but their hopes are high. Only those who lost the sense of true life close the door that leads to the Hereafter. Not only is the belief in the Hereafter an indication of the belief in the ultimate justice of God, but it is also an indication of souls filled with refreshing vitality. It is an indicator of souls filled with eternal life that does not end at the boundaries of earth but goes beyond it to an open space that only God knows its extent. This is the open space that leads to the meeting with God.

The Qur'an commands Muhammad (PBUH) to pose to them another challenge, *"Say, 'Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel – no one else brought it down (revelation) to your heart by God's leave, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe.'"* The Jews were hoping that God would send one of them as a prophet. They were very angry that the message was given to Muhammad (PBUH). Their anger led them to claim that Gabriel is their enemy claiming that he is the angel of destruction, torture, and misery. They claimed that this animosity became the barrier between them and the belief in Muhammad (PBUH). They claimed

that had Michael been the one who brought the revelation to Muhammad (PBUH), they would have been able to believe in Muhammad (PBUH), because they claimed that Michael is the angel of opulence, rain, and fertility. This is truly ridiculous. How can Gabriel (PBUH) be their enemy? Gabriel (PBUH) was not a human working for them or against them. Gabriel (PBUH) was not doing things on his own; he was a servant of God. He does what God commands him to do, and never disobeyed what he has been told to do. The Qur'an in general confirms the previously revealed Scripture. The core of the message embodied in all revealed Scriptures and religions is the same. The message brings guidance and glad tidings to the believing hearts that are open to receive the message. This is a truth that needs to be emphasized. The verses of the Qur'an fill the believing hearts with concord and harmony; they open the doors of knowledge and understanding; and they create inspiration and feelings which can never be achieved without having faith. This leads to guidance and glad tidings. The Qur'an repeats this truth in several places in verses like, "*Guidance to those who are conscious of God,*" (2:2) "*It is certainly guidance and mercy to those who believe,*" (27:77) "*Guidance and mercy to those who have certitude,*" (45:20) and "*in it there is healing and mercy for the believers.*" (41:44) Guidance is the fruit of having faith, God consciousness, and certitude. Those who are the enemy of Gabriel (PBUH) are the enemy of God. Only those who reject faith differentiate between God, His angels, and His messengers, "*Whoever is the enemy of God and His angels and His messengers and Gabriel and Michael, so indeed God is the enemy of the disbelievers.*"

*"Verily, We have sent down to you clear signs; and none reject them but those who are transgressors. Is it not so that when they make a covenant a party of them cast it aside? The truth is, most of them do not believe. And when there came to them a messenger from God, confirming that which they have, a party of the People of the Scripture threw away the Scripture of God behind their backs, as if (it had been something) they did not know."*

These verses indicate that the reason behind the actions of the Jewish scholars in Medina was their transgression. Transgression engulfs the heart and sways the initial natural disposition of a human being away from the true faith. A non-corrupt initial natural disposition leads people to the true faith. Only those who have a corrupt initial natural disposition are able to rationalize their rejection of faith.

The Jews were not even a closely knit group. They were divided into factions, and each faction was motivated by its own interests. They breached the covenants and were never united. They breached the covenant of God and the covenants they had with their Prophets. They also breached the agreement they had with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when he first came to Medina. They supported the Prophet's enemy, insulted his faith, and attempted to plant the seeds of sedition among Muslims in clear contravention of the terms of the agreement they had with him. Compare this behaviour with what the Muslims were commanded to do. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded the Muslims to support each other and to honour the pledge given by the least in power among them. When a Muslim makes a pledge to someone, it is the responsibility of all Muslims to honour that pledge. An army commander, Abu 'Ubaida, wrote to the Caliph 'Umar telling him that a Muslim slave pledged protection for the people living in a small township in Iraq. The commander sought 'Umar's advice how to deal with this pledge. 'Umar

wrote back saying, “*God ranks fidelity very high among human traits, so be faithful, honour the pledge, and leave them alone.*” Fidelity is a trait for a nation united on the straight path.

“*And when there came to them a messenger from God, confirming that which they have, a party of the People of the Scripture threw away the Scripture of God behind their backs, as if (it had been something) they did not know.*” This is another way infidelity was manifested. Believing in the messengers of God was one of the terms of the covenant they made with God, but when a Book came to them confirming that which they already had, a group of them breached the covenant and rejected the new Book.

“*And they followed that which the devils fabricated against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon was not a disbeliever. But the devils disbelieved, teaching humankind magic and that which was revealed to the two angels in Babel, Harut and Marut. Nor did they (the two angels) teach it to anyone till they had said, ‘We are only a trial, therefore do not disbelieve’ And from these two (angels) people learn that by which they cause division between man and his wife; but they harm thereby no-one save by God’s leave. And they learn that which harms them and does not benefit them. And they certainly knew that whoever made a gain from this knowledge will have no share in the Hereafter; and indeed evil is the price for which they sell their souls, if they but knew.*”

They rejected God’s revelation which confirmed what had been already revealed to them and listened instead to the stories narrated by the devils about Prophet Solomon (PBUH). The stories were lies aimed at distorting the image of Prophet Solomon (PBUH). They claimed that his controlling power was an import of the magic he practised. The Qur’an implies that the use of magic is a form of disbelief, so it affirms that Prophet Solomon (PBUH) was a believer and that the devils were the ones who disbelieved. The Qur’an affirms also that the angels did not receive magic instructions from God and they were truly believers. It seems that there was a certain understanding that the two angels, Harut and Marut, did practice magic and they used to teach people how to practice magic, but the Qur’an rejects this claim. The Qur’an states that God sent these two angels as a trial for people for a certain reason, known only to God. They used to say to those who came to them asking for instructions in magic that they were sent as a test for people. They admonished people who sought this knowledge not to fail this test, because if they fail the test they will join the ranks of the disbelievers. Some people did not heed this warning and continued to seek this knowledge. They came to learn how to cause a split between a man and his wife, the evil act that the angels warned them against. The Qur’an then emphasizes one of the fundamental principles of Islam, “*but they harm thereby no-one save by God’s leave.*” Only by God’s leave can the means lead to the results. Every Muslim should understand and be certain of the truthfulness of this statement. The truth is that those who practice magic to harm people can only harm themselves. The practice of magic is a form of disbelief which is bad enough for those who practice it. They knew that when they make this choice they will lose all hope in the Hereafter. This is the worst bargain they can make. This ruling applies to those who did learn magic at the hands of the angels, those who believed the fabrications made about Prophet Solomon (PBUH), and those who rejected God’s Book.

## Verses: 104 to 123

104. *Believers do not say (to the Messenger), "Listen to us," but say, "have patience with us," and hearken (unto him). The disbelievers will have a painful torment.*
105. *Neither those who disbelieved among the people of the Scripture nor the idolaters desire that any good thing should be sent down to you from your Lord. But God chooses for His mercy whom He wills, and God is of Infinite Bounty.*
106. *Nothing of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (even a single verse), but We substitute it with another better or similar. Do you not know that God has power over all things?*
107. *Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? And besides Him you have neither guardian nor helper.*
108. *Or would you question your messenger as Moses was questioned before? But whoever replaces belief with disbelief has certainly gone astray from the right way.*
109. *Many of the people of the Scripture long to make you disbelieve after you have become believers, out of envy on their own account, after the truth has become manifest to them. Pardon and forbear until God gives command. God has power over all things.*
110. *And establish prayer and pay the poor-dues. Whatever good you send forth for your souls before you, you shall find it with God. God sees well all that you do.*
111. *And they say, "None shall enter paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian." That is their wishful thinking. Say, "Bring your proof if you are truthful."*
112. *Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to God while doing good, his reward is with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
113. *The Jews say, "The Christians have no grounds to stand upon;" and the Christians say, "The Jews have no grounds to stand upon." Yet they both read the same Scripture. And those who have no knowledge say the same. God will settle the dispute between them on the Day of Judgment.*
114. *And who is more unjust than he who forbids that God's name be celebrated in the places for God's worship, and who strives to ruin them? It was not fitting that such should themselves enter them except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the hereafter great torment.*
115. *To God belong the east and the west, wherever you turn, there is the presence of God. For God is All-Embracing, Omniscient.*
116. *They say, "God has begotten a son." Glory be to Him. Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. All are subservient to Him;*
117. *He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He says, "Be," and it is.*
118. *And those who have no knowledge say, "Why does not God speak to us, nor is a sign shown to us?" Those before them said the same thing. Their hearts are all alike. We have made clear the revelations for people who have certitude.*
119. *Verily, We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. But you will not be asked about the companions of the blazing fire.*
120. *Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion. Say, "The Guidance of God is the (only) Guidance." Were you to follow their whims after the knowledge which has reached you, then you would find neither a protecting guardian nor a helper against God.*

121. *Those to whom We have sent the Scripture recite (follow) it as it should be recited (followed). They are the ones who believe in it. Those who deny its truth are the losers.*
122. *Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all others.*
123. *Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from it, nor shall intercession profit it, nor shall anyone be helped. (2:104-123)*

*“Believers, do not say (to the Messenger), ‘Listen to us,’ but say, ‘have patience with us,’ and hearken (to him). The disbelievers will have a painful torment.”* The Arabic word which has been translated here as, “listen to us,” can be twisted into a form which means, “Foolish.” It is narrated that Muslims were admonished not to address the Prophet (PBUH) in this way because some silly Jews used to address the Prophet (PBUH) using the twisted form of this word. They wanted to deride the Prophet (PBUH) in a roundabout way without confronting him with their hostility. The Qur’an admonished the believers not to use this verb in addressing the Prophet (PBUH) so that others would not have an excuse for using it.

The Qur’an continues to explore the ill feelings that some Jews harboured against the believers because they begrudged the bounty that God bestowed upon the Muslims, *“Neither those who disbelieved among the people of the Scripture nor the idolaters love that there should be sent down to you any good thing from your Lord. But God chooses for His mercy whom He wills, and God is of Infinite Bounty.”* This was a reminder for the believers to be aware of their enemy and to be grateful to God for the bounty He bestowed upon them. The Qur’an groups those who rejected faith from among the people of the Scripture and the idolaters in one group because both of them rejected the last message. Both groups harboured feelings of hatred and jealousy against the Muslims mainly because they envied them for the bounty they received from God. They wished that they themselves would have been the recipients of such bounty. They loathed the fact that the Muslims would be blessed with this bounty. This is a blessing of God that He bestowed on the Muslims to carry the torch of the message to the whole world. God knows well who should deliver the message. He chose Muhammad (PBUH) because He knew that Muhammad (PBUH) was capable of delivering the message. God is of infinite bounty, nothing is greater than the bounty of being a messenger of God and nothing is greater than being a deliverer of the message.

*“Nothing of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (even a single verse), but We substitute it with another better or similar.”* Irrespective of the occasion on which this verse was revealed, the verse states unequivocally the ruling regarding abrogation of verses in the Qur’an. During the lifetime of the Prophet (PBUH), some Islamic laws revealed in the Qur’an were slightly modified to suit the changing conditions of the Muslim community. These slight modifications were meant to achieve a greater good for the whole humanity. God the Creator - who sent the messengers and gave them the Scripture - is the one who knows best how to conduct these changes. He is the one who decides which verse - whether it is a verse that embodies a certain ruling, a sign, or a miracle - to abrogate and to replace with a better verse. God is the owner of everything and He has the absolute command of heavens and earth, *“Do you*



*not know that God has power over all things? Do you not know that to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? And besides Him you have neither guardian nor helper.”* This was a warning and a reminder to the believers that only God can provide help and support. There is no helper or supporter beside Him. The warning was issued to Muslims who fell in the trap, became confused, and started asking the Prophet (PBUH) questions which showed weakness in faith. It was necessary to remind them, *“Or would you question your messenger as Moses was questioned before? but whoever replaces belief with disbelief has strayed without doubt from the right way.”* The verse denounced the behaviour of those Muslims who asked questions, similar to the questions that the Jews used to ask Prophet Moses (PBUH). They kept asking for proofs and miracles to confirm Moses’ (PBUH) commands. The reminder indicated that people who have this attitude usually end up deviating from the straight path, *“Many of the people of the Scripture long to make you disbelieve after you have become believers, out of envy on their own account, after the truth has become manifest to them.”* Jealousy drives people to adopt bad attitudes and to the desire to rob others of what they are blessed with.

But the Qur’an impresses on the believers the duty to be tolerant toward those who wanted to hurt them. The Qur’an wanted the believers to cleanse their hearts of ill feelings toward their enemy and to wait for God’s command. God has the will and power over everything, *“Forgive and forbear until God gives command. God has power over all things.”* And go forward on your way and worship your Lord, *“And establish prayer and pay poor-dues. Whatever good you send forth for your souls before you, you shall find it with God. God sees well all that you do.”*

The verses continue to respond to the claim that only Jews and Christians are rightly guided and only they will be admitted to paradise, *“And they say, ‘None shall enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.’ That is their own wishful thinking. Say, ‘Bring your proof if you are truthful.’ Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to God while doing good his reward is with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no grounds to stand upon;’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no grounds to stand upon.’ Yet they both read the same Scripture. And those who have no knowledge say the same. God will settle the dispute between them on the Day of Judgment.”* Although there was no Christian community in Medina, but the verses state a general principle regarding who will be admitted to paradise. God rewards people according to their deeds not according to who they are. The criteria for goodness are submission to God and doing good deeds. It is the same fundamental principle that was stated before: whoever earns a sin he will be encircled by his sin, and whoever submits to God and does good deeds will earn his reward from his Lord. Earning a sin is juxtaposed against submission to God. The expression “submitting one’s face to God,” conveys the meaning of complete and absolute submission to God. It is submission in belief and submission in actions. However, the value of the action is emphasized by, “while doing good.” Islamic faith stresses the inseparable bond between human feelings and behaviour, the inseparable bond between faith and deeds, and the inseparable bond between the belief in the heart and the doing of good. This turns faith into a way of life which unites all human activities into a single entity clear of any kind of duality or double standard. This makes people eligible for the greatest reward, *“his reward is with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”* This is a guaranteed reward that can never be lost, security that can never be tarnished by fear, and happiness that can never be touched by sadness. This is a fundamental principle that applies to all humanity.

Not only did the Christians and Jews dispute with each other, but also the idolaters Arabs were party to the dispute. The Arabs, who did not receive a Scripture similar to the Jews and Christians, were neither interested in Judaism nor Christianity. Those Arabs believed that their own religion is superior to Judaism and Christianity, so they also said to the Jews and Christians, “*you have no grounds to stand on.*” The Qur’an recorded these disputes, addressed the claims of each group, and stated that God has the final say in settling these disputes on the Day of Judgment, “*God will settle the dispute between them on the Day of Judgment.*” Everything will return to God and He will judge fairly among these disputing parties. This approach is the only effective way in dealing with a situation where the disputing parties could neither produce solid proofs to support their claims nor were they willing to listen to the voice of reason.

*“And who is more unjust than he who forbids that God’s name be celebrated in the places for God’s worship, and who strives to ruin them? It was not fitting that such should themselves enter them except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter great torment. To God belong the east and the west; wherever you turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-Embracing, Omniscient.”* The first thought that comes to mind is that these two verses were revealed in connection with the command to face toward the Ka’ba in Mecca during prayers. However, there are other narrations which suggest different reasons for the revelations of these two verses. At any rate, these two verses embody a general ruling that deals with those who forbid the name of God to be celebrated in God’s places of worship and those who try to destroy these places. These people deserve to be fought back and stripped of any peace or security unless they take refuge in one of God’s places of worship, similar to what happened on the day of the conquest of Mecca. On that day, the Messenger of God commanded one of his companions to announce that safety and security are guaranteed for whosoever sought refuge inside the Holy Mosque. Many of the leaders of Quraish, who previously denied the Messenger of God and the Muslims the right to visit the Holy Mosque, sought refuge in the Holy Mosque. Those who seek the destruction of the God’s places of worship are not only threatened with disgrace in this life but also with great torment in the Hereafter.

The claim made by some Jews that the prayers which were made by Muslims before the realignment of the direction of Qibla toward Mecca were null and void (since they were done facing the wrong Qibla direction) is addressed in the second verse, “*To God belong the east and the west, wherever you turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-Embracing, Omniscient.*” The verse indicates that wherever one faces there is a Qibla. God’s Qibla is not limited to a specific direction but it is wherever we face seeking to worship Him. However, it is an act of obedience to follow God’s command to face toward a specific direction.

*“They say, ‘God has begotten a son.’ Glory be to Him. Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. All are subservient to Him; the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He says, ‘Be,’ and it is. And those who have no knowledge say, ‘Why does not God speak to us, or a sign comes to us?’ Thus, those before them said the same thing. Their hearts are all alike. We have made clear the revelations for people who are sure.”* This false statement, “*God has begotten a son,*” was not only made by the Christians about Jesus, but was also made by the Jews about Ezra and by the idolaters about the angels. Islam embraces the concept of the absolute Oneness of God. God created the universe with His

absolute will, *“Be, and it is.”* God’s will to create a being with any image or form is sufficient for such being to materialize. God does not need help or support of any kind. To Him belongs all that in the heavens and the earth. It is thus unnecessary for Him to have a son. All His creations are equal. He is *“The Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He says, ‘Be,’ and it is.”* How God’s will operate is beyond the comprehension of the human mind. It is futile to spend effort trying to discover this process.

Having addressed the claim that God has a son, the Qur’an turns to an equally unreasonable request made by the idolaters, *“And those who have no knowledge say, ‘Why does not God speak to us, or a sign comes to us?’ Thus, those before them said the same thing. Their hearts are all alike. We have made clear the revelations for people who have certitude.”* Those who do not know are the idolaters who did not receive a Scripture. They often challenged the Prophet (PBUH) to make God talk to them or to bring about a miracle from God. These verses confirm the faith of those who have certitude in their hearts. The verses do not create certitude, rather those who have certitude in their hearts are able to understand the verses and find peace and security in their meanings.

*“Verily, We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. But you will not be asked about the companions of the Blazing Fire. Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you unless you follow their form of religion. Say, ‘The Guidance of God is the (only) Guidance.’ Were you to follow their whims after the knowledge which has reached you, then you would find neither a protecting guardian nor a helper against God. Those to whom We have sent the Scripture recite (follow) it as it should be recited (followed). They are the ones who believe in it. Those who deny its truth are the losers.”*

We have sent you with the truth. This is an unequivocal statement to support the Messenger (PBUH) against those who are spreading rumours and doubts about the authenticity of the message. The mandate of the Messenger (PBUH) is to deliver the message. He brings glad tidings to the obedient and warns the disobedient. He is not responsible for those who chose to enter Hellfire as a consequence of their disobedience. The Qur’an addressed the Messenger saying that the Jews and the Christians will never be satisfied with you unless you give up the message and abandon the truth that was revealed to you. The only way to please them is to abandon your faith and follow theirs. But the only true guidance is the guidance that you received from God. The Qur’an warns the Messenger, *“Were you to follow their whims after the knowledge which has reached you, then you would find neither a protecting guardian nor a helper against God.”* It is a stern warning to the Prophet (PBUH) not to follow their whims. He should follow the guidance that he received from God. Those among them who do not follow their whims recite their Scripture the way it should be recited and they follow it as it should be followed. They believe in the truth that was revealed to you. Those who reject this truth are the true losers.

This group of verses ends up with a final call to the Children of Israel, *“Children of Israel, remember My blessings which I bestowed upon you, and that I preferred you to all others. Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall compensation be accepted from her nor shall intercession profit her nor shall anyone be helped.”*

## Verses: 124 to 141

124. *And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled. He said, "I will make you a leader for humankind." Abraham said, "And of my offspring (will there be leaders)?" He answered, "My promise does not include the wrongdoers."*
125. *Remember when We made the House a place of resort for humankind and a place of safety; and take you the station of Abraham as a place of prayer. We commanded Abraham and Ishmael, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).*
126. *And remember when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a city of security, and provide its people with fruits, those who believe in God and the Last Day." He said, "As for them who disbelieve I will grant them their pleasure for a while, but will soon drive them to the torment of fire. It is an evil destination (indeed)."*
127. *And remember when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House, "Our Lord, accept (this service) from us. Indeed, You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
128. *Our Lord, make us submit to You, and of our progeny a people who submit to You; and show us our way of worship; and relent toward us. Verily, You are the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*
129. *Our Lord, and raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and purify them. Verily, You are the Eminent, the Wise."*
130. *And who forsakes the religion of Abraham but he who makes himself a fool, and most certainly We chose him in this world, and in the Hereafter he is most assuredly among the righteous.*
131. *His Lord said to him, "Submit" He said, "I submit to the Lord of the Universe."*
132. *And Abraham commanded his sons, and so did Jacob, "My sons, God has chosen the religion for you; then die not except in a state of submission to Him."*
133. *Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob? He said to his sons, "What will you worship after I am gone?" They said, "We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the one (True) God. To Him we have submitted."*
134. *Those are a people who have passed away; theirs is that which they earned and yours is that which you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do.*
135. *And they say, Be Jews or Christians, then you will be rightly guided. Say (Muhammad), "Nay, we follow the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters."*
136. *Say (you believers), "We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them. And we submit to God."*
137. *So if they believe as you believe, they are indeed on the right path; but if they turn back, it is they who are in schism. God will suffice you against them; and He is the All-Hearing the Omniscient.*

138. *(Our life takes) its hue from God, and who could give a better hue (to life) than God. We are His worshippers.*
139. *Say (to the People of the Scripture), "Do you dispute with us concerning God. He is our Lord and your Lord? Ours are our deeds and yours are your deeds. We are sincere to Him."*
140. *Or do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say, "Do you know better than God?" And who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from God? But God is not unaware of what you do.*
141. *Those are a people who have passed away; theirs is that which they earned and yours is that which you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do. (2:124-141)*

*"And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled. He said, 'I will make you a leader for humankind.' Abraham said, 'And of my offspring (will there be leaders).' He answered, 'My promise does not include the wrongdoers.'"* The Prophet (PBUH) was asked to remember how God tested Prophet Abraham (PBUH). God commanded him to do certain things which he completed perfectly. God commended Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in another verse in the Qur'an for being thorough in the execution of his tasks. For that he was labeled by God as, *"Abraham who fulfilled."* This earned Prophet Abraham (PBUH) a high stature befitting a person who earned the pleasure of his God. God rewarded him by appointing him a leader, to lead the people on God's way and to introduce them to goodness. The initial natural disposition of Abraham (PBUH) as a human being made him request that the honour bestowed on him by God be extended to his progeny. So, he asked God, *"And of my offspring."* But the answer came from God who chose Abraham (PBUH) and raised him in stature, *"My promise does not include the wrongdoers."* The answer states a fundamental principle: leadership is not a family inheritance but it is a trust to be earned by righteousness, faith, actions, and behaviour. The other fundamental rule that can be gleaned from this response is that wrongdoers are precluded from this trust. There are different kinds of wrongdoing: a person may wrong himself/herself by associating partners with God, or a person may wrong people by oppressing them. There are also different types of leaders. These include, among others: God's messengers who guide people to the right path, rulers who govern people, and those who lead people in prayers. The verse states that the wrongdoers are precluded from assuming any type of leadership. Fairness is a fundamental criterion for choosing leaders. Any person who commits any type of wrongdoing cannot be trusted with a leadership role.

*"Remember when We made the House a place of resort for humankind and a place of safety; and take you the station of Abraham as a place of prayer. We commanded Abraham and Ishmael, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer)."* God wanted this sacred house to be a place of peace and security for all people. Safety and security should be guaranteed for any who enters the House. The verse commands people to pray at *"the station of Abraham."* The term *"the station of Abraham"* should be taken to mean the whole house. The House has been designated as a Qibla for Muslims praying anywhere. It is the focal point toward which Muslims should face when they perform their prayers. It is natural and fitting to designate the House as Qibla for

Muslims since the House belongs only to God not to any human being. He entrusted two of His righteous servants to cleanse and prepare it for those who “*compass it round or use it as a retreat or bow or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).*” It is a place for prayers for those who come from far away to perform the rituals of pilgrimage as well as for those who live nearby. Prophets Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) did not own the House; they only built it, prepared it for prayers, and took care of its maintenance as a place of worship.

*“And remember when Abraham said, ‘My Lord, make this a city of security, and provide its people with fruits, those who believe in God and the Last Day.’ He said, ‘As for them who disbelieve, I will grant them their pleasure for a while, but will soon drive them to the torment of fire. It is an evil destination (indeed).’* Abraham (PBUH) called upon God to make the House a place of safety and security for people, and having understood the lesson that God’s promise “*does not include the wrongdoers,*” he called upon his Lord to bestow His bounty on those who “*believe in God and the Last Day.*” This is an invocation which reflects Abraham’s (PBUH) obedience, piety, and meekness. God responded to his invocation, “*As for them who disbelieve I will grant them their pleasure for a while, but will soon drive them to the torment of fire.*”

Prophets Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) started the undertaking commanded by God, “*And remember when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House.*” The image is so vivid, we feel as if we were there watching them building the House and hearing their voices calling upon God, “*Our Lord, accept (this service) from us. Indeed, You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient. Our Lord, make us submit to You, and of our progeny a people who submit to You; and show us our way of worship; and relent toward us. Verily, You are the Oft-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*” They called upon God to accept their efforts which were dedicated solely to Him. They asked God’s help to guide them to true submission, the submission that puts their hearts in God’s hand. They also asked God to guide their progeny to His way. Having tasted the sweetness of faith, they wanted their progeny to enjoy God’s bounty as well. “*Our Lord, and raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and purify them. Verily, You are the Eminent, the Wise.*” Centuries after this call has been made, God responded favourably to their invocation and sent His messenger Muhammad (PBUH) to recite the revelation of God and to teach the Book and the Wisdom. All sincere invocations are heard and accepted by God; however, it is He who decides when these invocations would be realized.

*“And who forsakes the religion of Abraham but he who makes himself a fool? Most certainly We chose him in this world, and in the Hereafter he is most assuredly among the righteous. His Lord said to him, ‘Submit’ He said, ‘I submit to the Lord of the universe.’* Abraham’s religion is true submission to God. Only wrongdoers and fools would turn away from such a religion. And Abraham (PBUH), “*Commanded his sons, and so did Jacob, ‘My sons, God has chosen the religion for you; then die not except in a state of submission to Him’”*

*“Or were you witnesses when death came to Jacob? he said to his sons, ‘What will you worship after I am gone?’ They said, ‘We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the one (True) God. To Him we have submitted.’”* This verse narrates a

dialogue between a father on the death bed and his sons. It is a very emotional scene, what would the father say to his sons in such a moment? What is the most important thought on his mind at these last moments of his life? What is the legacy that he wants to leave behind for his children? The legacy is the faith that he adopted. It became the most important treasure that he wanted to leave behind for his children. He wanted them to cherish it after his death as he did during his life. He wanted to make sure that they will worship the Lord that he worshiped. They did not fail him and responded that they have “*submitted.*”

*“And they say, Be Jews or Christians, then you will be rightly guided. Say (Muhammad), ‘Nay, we follow the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters.’ Say (you believers), ‘We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them. And we submit to God.’ So if they believe as you believe, they are indeed on the right path; but if they turn back, it is they who are in schism. God will suffice you against them, and He is the All-Hearing the Omniscient. (Our life takes) its hue from God, and who could give a better hue (to life) than God. We are His worshippers. Say (to the People of the Scripture), ‘Do you dispute with us concerning God. He is our Lord and your Lord? Ours are our deeds and yours are your deeds. We are sincere to Him.’ Or do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes were Jews or Christians? Say, ‘Do you know better than God?’ And who is more unjust than those who conceal the testimony they have from God? but God is not unaware of what you do.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to respond to the Jews and Christians, who claimed independently that the only way to guidance is to adopt their own faith, by saying, “*Nay, we follow the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters.*” We will go back to the original faith, the faith of Abraham (PBUH), our father and your father. This is the faith that is rooted in the complete submission to God. The Muslims are commanded to pronounce the principle of the Oneness of God, the religion brought by all the messengers starting by Abraham and ending by Muhammad (PBUT). This is the concept of the universal unity that brings all messages and all messengers together. This is the Islamic perspective of God’s religion, the perspective that makes the Muslim nation the rightful heir of a faith based on God’s true religion on earth. This is the true faith, whoever follows it has been guided but those who chose not to follow it will always be in conflict with the truth. Those who turned away from guidance have neither power nor authority over the believers. God will take care of the nonbelievers. The believers’ only task is to align themselves along the straight path. They should be proud of the truth that came to them directly from God. God gives them the hue of their lives. What better life can one aspire to? This is the hue of a life that has been not corrupted by hatred, racism, or bigotry.

Do you dispute with us regarding God? The Oneness of God is indisputable. He is our Lord and He is your Lord. All people will be held accountable for what they have done. We are sincere in our devotion to God. We neither associate partners with Him, nor do we ask anyone else for help.

The verses continue to address another issue that seems to have been disputed, “*Or do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?*” These Prophets existed before the advent of Judaism and Christianity. God stated that they adopted the religion of true submission to Him. Do you have knowledge that God does not have? This is a rhetorical question. The discourse then ends with the same statement mentioned earlier, “*Those are a people who have passed away; theirs is that which they earned and yours is that which you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do.*”

## **Verses: 142 to 152**

142. *The fools among the people will say, “What has turned them away from the Qibla to which they used to face?” Say, “To God belong both east and west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.”*
143. *Thus, have We made you a justly balanced nation that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger is a witness over yourselves. We appointed the Qibla, to which you were facing in prayer, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels. Indeed, it was a momentous change, except to those guided by God. But it was not God's purpose that your faith should be in vain. Indeed, God to all people, is All-Pitying Giver of Mercy.*
144. *We see the turning of your face to heavens (for guidance). Now, We shall make you turn (in prayer) toward a Qibla which pleases you. Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque. Wherever you may be, turn your faces (when you pray) in that direction. The People of the Scripture know well that this is the truth from their Lord. God is not unaware of what they do.*
145. *Even if you were to bring the People of the Scripture all the signs, they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you, after the knowledge has reached you, were to follow their whims, then you are indeed a wrongdoer.*
146. *The People of the Scripture know this revelation as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know.*
147. *The truth is from your Lord; so do not be one of those who doubt.*
148. *And each one has a goal toward which he turns; so strive together (as in a race) toward all that is good. Wherever you may be, God will bring you together. Certainly, God has power over all things.*
149. *And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque; and indeed it is the truth from your Lord, and God is not at all unaware of what you do.*
150. *So from whence ever you come forth, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your face toward it; so that there would be no ground for dispute against you among the people, except those of them who are wrongdoers; so fear them not, but fear Me; so that I may complete My blessings on you, and you may be guided.*
151. *A similar (favour you have already received) that We sent you a Messenger from among you, to recite to you Our revelation, and to purify you, and to teach you the Book and the Wisdom, and teaches you that which you did not know.*



152. *Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and do not reject faith. (2:142-152)*

These verses discuss the event of the realignment of the direction of the Qibla to face toward Mecca. There is no unequivocal account of the details of this incident and the Qur'an did not mention when this change took place. Most probably, the event took place sixteen or seventeen months after the migration to Medina. It may be deduced from the different accounts about this subject that Muslims in Mecca used to pray toward the Ka'ba, although there is no Qur'anic verse regarding this. After migration, Muslims were commanded to turn their faces toward Jerusalem in prayers. The command came in these verses to realign the direction of Qibla back to face toward the Sacred Mosque in Mecca. The realignment of the Qibla from the Ka'ba to Jerusalem may have given the People of the Scripture an excuse not to adopt Islam. They argued that the fact that Muslims are facing toward Jerusalem meant that their religion is the true religion and that Muslims should follow their religion.

It is narrated that Al-Baraa bin A'zeb (RA) said, *“When the Prophet (PBUH) came to Medina and settled near his uncles from among the Ansar, he continued to pray toward Jerusalem for about sixteen or seventeen months. All the time, he yearned to realign the direction of the Qibla toward the Ka'ba. The first prayer he performed toward the Ka'ba was the afternoon prayer (Asr). A man prayed (Asr) with the Prophet (PBUH), then on his way home, he saw a group of people praying facing toward Jerusalem, he said, ‘By God, I just prayed with the Prophet (PBUH) and we did face toward the Ka'ba.’ On hearing this, the group turned around to face toward the Ka'ba.”* The Jews of Medina were happy that the Muslims were facing toward Jerusalem in their prayers, so the command to realign the Qibla was disappointing news to them. This is the reason behind the verse, *“The fools among the people will say, ‘What has turned them from the Qibla to which they used to face?’ Say, ‘To God belong both east and west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path.’”* It seems that some Muslims were annoyed by the reaction of the Jews in Medina to the change in the Qibla. These verses were revealed to deal with this reaction and to explain the rationale behind the change. God is there whether one faces east or west. The important thing is seeking guidance. Whatever God chooses for His servants is best for them. He has chosen an important role for His servants, *“Thus, have We made you a justly balanced nation, that you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger is a witness over yourselves.”* It is a justly balanced nation that establishes fairness and justice on earth according to fair standards and measures. The Prophet (PBUH) was appointed as a witness to testify whether this nation had fulfilled its intended role.

The term *“justly balanced nation”* conveys very rich and powerful meaning. It encompasses the full range of the dimensions of the word “balanced.” The nation enjoys well balanced characteristics in all areas of human activities. It is balanced in its faith, its feelings, and its behaviour. It shuns all types of extremism. Its religion maintains a balance between spirituality and materialism. Its endeavours are balanced between the well-established traditions and the adventurous new. It maintains a balance between the freedom of the individual and the rights of the community. It has well-balanced economic and legal systems. It maintains a balance between human creativity and the preservation of traditions. It is well balanced both in time and space.

Then, the rationale behind the realignment of the Qibla to face toward the Sacred Mosque is given, *“We appointed the Qibla, to which you were facing in prayer, only to test those who followed the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels.”* It is an exercise to prepare the community for the new pure faith and rid them of all remnants of the old traditions of the pagan society that they were living in. The Arabs before Islam used to sanctify the Sacred Mosque but their practices were wrapped in the impurities of idolatry. God wanted to free the fledgling Muslim community from all traces of idolatry. He wanted the Muslims to break away from all traditions that were engulfed in racism, tribalism, and paganism. So, they were commanded to turn away from the place which became a symbol of all these infractions. God wanted the Muslim community to dedicate itself to the pure submission to God and to free that submission from all other forms of transgressions that surrounded it. Turning away from the Sacred Mosque was a symbol of the rejection of all expressions of loyalty to pagan traditions which engulfed the Mosque at that time. This was an expression for complete devotion to the concept of submission to God alone. The command to turn their focal point to Jerusalem was made to rid them of any feeling of loyalty to old traditions and to test their obedience and dedication to the Prophet (PBUH).

*“Indeed it was a momentous change, except to those guided by God.”* Although, this was a momentous change, but it was made easy by the grace of God for those who chose guidance. They accepted the change and got rid of all the old concepts and symbols. It was easy for them to dedicate themselves to God and to listen to and obey the commands.

The Qur’an continued to reassure Muslims that the rituals which they performed before the realignment of the Qibla were not in vain. God does not want people to suffer and He does not burden a soul beyond its ability, *“But it was not God's purpose that your faith should be in vain. Indeed God to all people, is All-Pitying Giver of Mercy.”*

The realignment of the Qibla was announced in response to the Prophet’s (PBUH) wish, *“We see the turning of your face to heavens (for guidance).”* This is an expression which reveals the Prophet’s (PBUH) strong wish for a command from God to realign the Qibla. The Prophet (PBUH) was too shy to express such a wish in words; he waited for the command to come from his Lord. His Lord responded to his wish and expressed this response in a way which intimates a loving relationship between God and His servant, *“Now, We shall make you turn (in prayer) toward a Qibla which pleases you.”* Then the Qibla is specified, *“Turn then your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque.”* This is a Qibla for Muhammad (PBUH) and his nation and it is going to stay their Qibla till the end of time, *“Wherever you may be, turn your faces (when you pray) in that direction.”* Wherever Muslims may be, they all face toward Mecca in prayer. It is a Qibla for all Muslims. Muslims living at different places on earth, speaking different languages, and having different ethnic origins, they all face toward one focal point in their prayers. This Qibla is a strong expression of the unity of Muslims. The unity that brings all Muslims together in one nation that believes in the same God, the same Messenger, and the same Message. This nation is united around a single faith and follows the same way of life even if they all have different cultures, speak different languages, have different colors, and come from different ethnic back grounds.

*“The People of the Scripture know well that this is the truth from their Lord. God is not unaware of what they do.”* They know that the Sacred Mosque is the first house built on earth for the worship of God. This is the house that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) raised. It is appropriate for the descendants of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to face toward the Sacred Mosque in their prayers. Although, the People of the Scripture know this historic fact, they did not accept this logic. There is nothing you can do, Muhammad (PBUH), to convince them that this is the appropriate thing to do. They are stubborn in their way and will not relent, no matter what you do, *“Even if you were to bring to the People of the Scripture all the signs, they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you, after the knowledge has reached you, were to follow their whims, then you are indeed a wrongdoer.”* They will not follow your Qibla, nor should you follow their Qibla, because if you do, then you will be one of the wrongdoers. This is a very strong language that God uses in addressing and warning His Prophet. The Qur'an warned the Prophet (PBUH) not to follow the desires of those who were not on the straight path. The verses juxtaposed the two alternatives: you either follow the unsubstantiated desires of people or follow the knowledge that comes from God. A Muslim should not entertain the thought of following other than the knowledge that comes from God.

*“The People of the Scripture know this revelation as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know.”* The expression *“Knowing one's son”* is a figure of speech which suggests very intimate knowledge. It is a figure of speech which the Arabs use to indicate certainty of knowledge. The Muslims should not be influenced by the desires and the arguments of the People of the Scripture, who knew the truth but chose not to follow it. The believers should follow the truth which came to them through the Messenger of God (PBUH).

Then, a warning is issued, *“The Truth is from your Lord; so do not be one of those who doubt.”* We know that the Prophet (PBUH) never doubted. When God addressed him in another verse, saying, *“if you are in doubt of what We revealed to you, then ask those who read the Scripture before you,”* (10: 94) the Prophet's (PBUH) response was, *“I have no doubt and I will not ask.”* So, this warning was actually directed to the Muslims through the Prophet (PBUH). Those Muslims who may come under the influence of such falsehood should heed this warning.

*“And each one has a goal toward which he turns; so strive together (as in a race) toward all that is good. Wherever you may be, God will bring you together. Indeed, God has power over all things.”* The believers should focus on the objectives they have at hand. They should strive to do good deeds and remember that they will be held accountable when they meet their Lord. God is all encompassing and He is aware of everything.

The command to follow the new Qibla is reiterated, once more, *“And from whatsoever place you come forth, turn your face toward the Sacred Mosque; and indeed it is the truth from your Lord, and God is not at all unaware of what you do.”*

The command is reiterated a third time, *“So from whence ever you come forth, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque; and wherever you may be, turn your face toward it; so that*

*there would be no ground for dispute against you among the people, except those of them who are wrongdoers; so fear them not, but fear Me; so that I may complete My blessings on you, and you may be guided.*” The believers were told to follow God’s command and never to worry about those who were plotting against them. God has bestowed His blessings on the believers and no one else has power over them.

The believers were reminded of the grace of God, when He sent one of them as a prophet to guide them in response to the prayer that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) made, *“A similar (favour you have already received) that We sent you a Messenger from among you, to recite to you Our revelation, and to purify you, and to teach you the Scripture and the Wisdom, and teaches you that which you did not know. Therefore, remember Me, I will remember you. Give thanks to Me, and do not reject faith.”* It should be noted that the verse reiterates the prayer that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) made while he was rebuilding the House, with his son Ishmael (PBUH). He prayed God to send one of his progeny as a prophet to recite God’s revelations and to teach the people the Book and the wisdom and to purify them. This is a reminder that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent as a response to Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) prayer. It emphasizes the concept of the oneness of the divine message and the continuation of the guidance that God promised His Prophet Abraham (PBUH). He sent His Messenger (PBUH) to purify the people from the impurities of paganism and associating partners with God. He sent His messenger to purify them from the myths that burdens human souls and from the carnal desires that contaminate human bodies. He sent His messenger to purify the society of usury, fraudulent transactions, injustices, and oppression. He sent His messenger to spread justice and peace. He sent His messenger to teach them the Book and the wisdom which encompassed all what have been revealed before it. The wisdom which is achieved from following the teachings of the Book, will train the believers to identify high goals, to choose the appropriate ways to reach these goals, and to use appropriate measures for evaluating successes and failures. This messenger was also sent to teach them that which they did not know. Before Islam, the Arabs lead a nomadic life which did not require much knowledge. After the advent of Islam, the Mosque became a school for training leaders and a source of knowledge in all areas of life. Many prominent leaders graduated from this school and went on to lead the world in a wise and enlightened way. The verse ends by a loving invitation from God to His servants, *“remember Me and I will remember you.”* It is a blessing from God to reward His servants when they remember Him by remembering them. They would remember God in their small world, but God will remember them in the huge universe. Those whom God remembers enjoy endless bounty and abundant blessings.

Several authentic traditions elaborate on this verse. It has been narrated that God said, *“Whoever remembers Me in private, I will remember him in private; and whoever remembers Me in front of an audience, I will remember him in front of a better audience.”* In another version, it has been narrated that God said, *“Whoever remembers Me in private, I will remember him in private; and whoever remembers Me in front of an audience, I will remember him in front of a better audience. If the son of Adam moved toward Me a distance equal to the width of his palm, I will move toward him a distance equal to the length of his arm; and if the son Adam approached Me walking, I will approach him hurriedly.”* Such generosity cannot be described in words, nor can it be repaid with gratitude, except the gratitude expressed by a prostrating heart.

Remembrance of God is not merely a lip service, but it is an experience for the heart which feels the existence and nearness of God. The least that this experience can lead to is the obedience to God. But it can also lead to a heart which is completely devoted to God, oblivious to everything except God, and a heart that yearns to be in the presence of God at all times.

*“Give thanks to Me, and do not reject faith.”* There are different ways one can give thanks to God. The least one can do is to acknowledge God’s bounty and to shy away from disobeying Him. A higher rank of giving thanks is to dedicate all human activities to God as an expression of gratitude. Every effort to be exerted, every word to be pronounced, every heartbeat, and every thought are dedicated to God as expressions of gratitude to Him. The command, *“do not reject faith,”* hints to the grievous end to which ingratitude may lead.

### **Verses: 153 to 157**

153. *Believers, seek help with perseverance and prayer. Indeed, God is with those who persevere.*
154. *And do not say of those who are slain in the way of God, "They are dead." Nay, they are alive, though you realize it not.*
155. *And certainly, We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the perseverant,*
156. *Those who say, when afflicted with calamity, "To God we belong, and to Him is our return."*
157. *They are those on whom (descend) blessings from God, and mercy, and they are the ones who are rightly guided. (2: 153-157)*

*“Believers, seek help with perseverance and prayer. Indeed, God is with those who persevere.”* The reference to perseverance is repeated often in the Qur’an. God Almighty knows that staying on the straight path requires an enormous effort on the part of the believer. Believers have to fend off temptations and vain desires which would make them swerve away from the right path. One has to be alert at all times. Perseverance is needed to fulfill the prescribed undertakings and it is needed to avoid committing that which is prohibited. The life of a believer is full of activities that cannot be done without perseverance. Going through life, everyone meets obstacles and adverse situations; perseverance helps to overcome these obstacles. Truth does not always prevail and righteousness does not always win. The Qur’an provides an endless fountain for perseverance: prayer. Prayer is a direct link between the mortal human being and the everlasting God; it is the time for the isolated droplet of water to connect with the infinite spring; and it is the key to the treasure of all riches. It is the launching pad for a vehicle that moves from a bounded place on earth to a limitless universe. It is the spirit, the drop of dew, and the shade for a traveler across an arid desert. It is the comforting touch for the tired heart. Whenever the Prophet (PBUH) met an adversity, he would call upon Belal (RA) - the Prophet’s (PBUH) Moazen- to call for prayer. He would say, *“Comfort us with prayer.”* In these situations, the Prophet (PBUH) would pray more than usual.

The Islamic way of life has its foundations in the acts of worship. The rituals in Islam embody hidden benefits. Rituals provide sustenance for the spirit and purity for the heart. Rituals provide

the support for carrying out the heavy undertakings. Rituals open the door for the believer's heart to find enjoyment in performing the difficult undertakings. When God chose Muhammad (PBUH) for the difficult role of a messenger, He said to him, "*You enwrapped in your cloak, stay up, in prayer at night, all but a small part of it, one-half thereof – or make it a little less than that, or add to it; and recite the Qur'an calmly and distinctly, with your mind attuned to its meaning. We shall bestow upon you a weighty message.*" (73:1-5). The Prophet (PBUH) was given a training program to prepare him for the weighty message. Spending the night in prayer and reciting the Qur'an were components of the training program to prepare the Prophet for the heavy task ahead. Rituals open the heart to receive the light of guidance and strengthen the link with God. They provide the support and comfort needed to face hardships. It is therefore appropriate that the believers are commanded to seek help in prayer and perseverance. Certainly, God is, "*with those who persevere.*" He provides the support, the strength, the comfort, and the company along the road. God will not abandon the believers and leave them to face adversity with their limited power and resources. The verse begins with an endearing call, "*Believers,*" and ends by stressing the fact that God is, "*with those who persevere,*" This alludes to the beauty of the link between God and those who persevere.

As the Muslim community was given the responsibility for the call to Islam, it was unavoidable that they will have to go through hard times. It was then appropriate to motivate them and prepare them for the hard times that lie ahead, "*And do not say of those who are slain in the way of God, 'They are dead.' Nay, they are alive, though you realize it not.*" There will be battles, and there will be lives lost. Those who fall in the battle against falsehood, giving up their lives in the way of God, have pure hearts and unselfish souls. They chose to sacrifice their lives for the sake of establishing the truth. They cannot be considered dead. Life and death cannot be judged using the superficial human standards. The effectiveness of the life of a human being is measured by the influence it had on the lives of others; effectiveness of life is also measured by the growth and enrichment it produces in the lives of others. Death, on the other hand, brings about a cessation of activities and the absence of any influence on the lives of others. Those who fight for the sake of God pay their lives to propagate the truth; their blood waters the idea they planted. Their death may still influence the lives of others. In that sense, their death is the reason for a better and more effective life for others. So they are considered alive because of the influence they produce on the living.

God considers them alive. We don't know the nature of their lives with God. It is beyond the capability of a human mind to grasp this concept. For these reasons, a special procedure is followed in dealing with their burial. Their bodies are neither washed nor wrapped in the traditional burial shrouds. The rationale for the ritual burial wash is to cleanse the dead body before burial. Since they are considered still alive they do not need this cleansing process and they are buried in the same clothes that they had on before they died.

Martyrs were promised a great reward from their Lord. It has been narrated by Muslim, that the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, "*The souls of martyrs are kept in the necks of green birds that fly wherever they wish all around paradise. They then land under lights hanging under God's throne. Their Lord looks at them and says, 'Make a wish.' They say, 'Our Lord, there is nothing we wish for, You have given us more than You have ever given anyone of your servants.' When God repeats the request, they say, 'We wish to return to life to fight and die in*

*Your way again.' They wish to enjoy the reward of martyrdom again. But God has decreed that they will not return."*

Anas (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH), said, *"No one from among those admitted to paradise wishes to go back to life except the martyr. The honour that a martyr receives in paradise makes him wish to return to life and die for the sake of God ten times over."*

But who are these martyrs? They are those who lose their lives for the sake of God alone. They are not interested in anything else except serving God's cause. Abu Musa (RA) narrated that, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *"Different motives may drive people to engage in fighting a battle. There are those who fight because they are courageous, those who fight because they want fervently to defend a worldly cause, and those who fight to gain fame and honour. None of them is considered to be fighting for the sake of God. Only those who fight so that the word of God prevails are fighting for the sake of God."*

Abu Hurariarah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *"A person who fights for the sake of God but in the meantime harbours a worldly objective will not be rewarded by God."* The martyrs are those who die fighting only for the sake of God and nothing else.

Those who choose to stay on the right path and serve God will face hard times and calamities will befall them. They need to be trained to face and overcome these difficulties. They need to be trained to perform their responsibilities even when they are facing adverse conditions. They will be put through tests and trials as part of this training, *"And certainly, We shall try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and lives and crops; but give glad tidings to the perseverant, Who say, when afflicted with calamity, 'To God we belong, and to Him is our return.'" Tests strengthen the believers and their perseverance will entice others to reflect on their cause. The verse gives a recipe for dealing with calamities and hard times: taking refuge in God and remembering that everything comes from God and everything is returning back to Him. This is an expression of absolute submission to God. Those who practice true perseverance will be rewarded with the blessings of God, "They are those on whom (descend) blessings from God and mercy; they are the ones who are rightly guided."*

We need to stop for a moment and reflect on the last verses of this passage. The verses talk about hard times; martyrdom; fear; and loss of life, wealth, and crops that the believers expect to face. The final verse promises a reward for those who will persevere in face of all these difficulties: blessings from God and mercy. There is no promise of victory, authority, or material gain. The promise is blessings from God. Worldly gain should not be the incentive for dedicating oneself to the service of God. The only reward that the believer should aspire to is to gain the pleasure of God and to enjoy His blessings.

## Verses: 158 to 177

158. *Indeed, the Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God. It is therefore no sin on those who visit the House to perform major or minor pilgrimage, to go around them. And if any one does good of his own accord, (for him) God is Appreciative, Omniscient.*
159. *Those who conceal the clear (signs) We have sent down, and the guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Scripture, on them shall be God's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse.*
160. *Except those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth). I will accept their repentance; for I am Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.*
161. *Those who disbelieve, and die while they are disbelievers, on them is God's curse, and the curse of the angels, and of all humankind;*
162. *They will abide therein. Their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved.*
163. *And your God is the One True God. There is no deity but He, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*
164. *Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the benefit of humankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, thereby reviving the earth after its death; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; and in the change of the winds, and the clouds made subservient between the sky and the earth are indeed signs for a people who understand.*
165. *Yet there are people who take (for worship) others besides God, as rivals to God. They love them as they should love God. But the believers are stronger in their love for God. If only the wrongdoers could see, as they will when they face the torment, that to God belongs all power, and that He is severe in torment.*
166. *When those, who were followed disown those who followed (them), would see the torment, and all relations between them would be cut off.*
167. *And those who followed would say, "If only We had one more chance, We would disown them, as they have disowned us." Thus, will God show them (the fruits of) their deeds as (nothing but) a source for regret. Nor will there be a way for them out of the Fire.*
168. *People, eat of what is lawful and wholesome on earth; and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan, for he is to you an avowed enemy.*
169. *He indeed, commands you what is evil and shameful, and that you should say about God that of which you have no knowledge.*
170. *When it is said to them, "Follow what God has revealed." They say, "Nay, we shall follow the ways of our fathers." Even though their fathers had no sense at all and had no guidance.*
171. *The parable of those who disbelieve is that of a beast which hears the shepherd's cry, and hears in it nothing but the sound of a voice and a cry. Deaf, dumb, blind, for they do not use their reason.*
172. *Believers, eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to God, if it is Him you worship.*
173. *He has only forbidden you carrion, blood, the flesh of a swine, and that on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God. But if one is forced by necessity,*



*without wilful disobedience nor transgressing due limits, then no sin shall be upon him. For God is All-Forgiving Giver of Mercy.*

174. *Indeed, those who conceal God's revelations in the Scripture, and barter them for a miserable profit, they only fill their bellies with fire. God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Painful will be their torment.*
175. *They are the ones who buy error in place of guidance and torment in place of forgiveness. How perseverant are they in their strife to reach the Fire.*
176. *That is because God has revealed the Scripture with the truth. Those who find (a cause of) disagreement in the Scripture are in deep discord.*
177. *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward east or west; but the truly righteous are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; those who give away some of their wealth - however much they may cherish it - to their kin, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask, and to ransom slaves; those who establish prayer and pay the poor-dues; who fulfill the contracts which they have made; and who are perseverant, in times of tribulation and adversity, and in time of peril. Such are the people of truth, the God conscious. (2:158-177)*

There are several narrations that explain the rationale behind the revelation of the verse, *“Indeed, the Safa and Marwa are among the rites of God. It is therefore no sin on those who visit the House to perform major or minor pilgrimage, to go around them. And if any one does good of his own accord, (for him) God is Appreciative, Omniscient.”* However, the following explanation seems to be the most plausible one. When Muslims went to perform Major (Hajj) and Minor (‘Umra) pilgrimages they were reluctant to walk between Safa and Marwa because this was part of the rituals they used to perform before the advent of Islam. The idols of Asaf and Naeila used to be placed on top of these two mountains. Al-Bukhari narrated on the authority of Muhammad bin Yousof that Anas (RA) said, *“We used to think that this was a pagan ritual, so when we became Muslims we stopped performing it, until this verse was revealed.”*

Alsha’bi said, *“The idols of Asaf and Naeila were placed on top of the mountains of Safa and Marwa, respectively. That is why Muslims did not like to perform the ritual of walking between Safa and Marwa, until the verse was revealed.”*

So, Safa and Marwa are parts of the rituals of worship of God. People who walk between Safa and Marwa are only performing God’s rites. They perform this ritual out of their devotion to God alone. Islam approved most of the rituals of pilgrimage that the Arabs used to perform before the advent of Islam. However, all rituals that were connected to idol worship were completely abandoned. Rituals of pilgrimage were again used to connect with the rituals that God taught Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The major difference between the rituals of ‘Umra (Minor pilgrimage) and Hajj (Major pilgrimage) is the ritual of spending sometime in the valley of ‘Arafat. This ritual is observed in Hajj but not in ‘Umra. ‘Umra can also be done at any time of the year, while Hajj can only be done at a certain prescribed time of the year. The verse ends by motivating people to do good, *“And if any one does good of his own accord, (for him) God is Appreciative, Omniscient.”* This indicates that walking between Safa and Marwa is indeed an

acceptable deed. This statement aimed at removing any doubt that Muslims may harbour about the validity of this ritual.

*“Those who conceal the clear (signs) We have sent down, and the guidance, after We have made it clear for the people in the Scripture, on them shall be God's curse, and the curse of those entitled to curse. Except those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth). I will accept their repentance; for I am Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy. Those who disbelieve, and die while they are disbelievers, on them is God's curse, and the curse of the angels, and of all humankind; They will abide therein. Their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved.”* The People of the Scripture should have known from their Scripture that the message brought by Muhammad (PBUH) is the truth. However, they chose to conceal this knowledge, for one reason or another. Many people, at different places and various times conceal the truth; they intentionally and knowingly hide verses that existed in the Scripture to serve their worldly purposes. These people are cursed by God. God's curse means that they have earned God's wrath and they were expelled from His mercy. However, they still have a window of opportunity to repent and make amends. This is the window of repentance. It is a window that brings a breath of fresh air and hope. This is the hope which brings light to the life of the repentant to lead their hearts back to the source of light. No one should despair of the mercy and forgiveness of God. Those who wish to return to the safe refuge of God still have a chance. The signs of true repentance are doing good deeds, acknowledging the truth, and behaving according to the truth. Those who chose to repent should put their trust in God who says, *“I am Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.”* But those who are stubborn and continue in their crooked ways until it is too late, they will meet the promised result, *“Those who disbelieve, and die while they are disbelievers, on them is God's curse, and the curse of the angels, and of all humankind; They will abide therein. Their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be reprieved.”* They brought it on themselves by ignoring the opportunity to acknowledge the truth.

*“And your God is the One True God. There is no deity but He, Lord of Mercy, Giver of Mercy.”* This is an unequivocal statement of the Oneness of God. He is the only One who is worthy of worship. He is the only One who sets the standards for ethical behaviour. He is the only One who issues rules and laws necessary for the organization of life on earth. He is the only One who defines the way of life to be adopted by His servants. This statement is enunciated in the context of preparing the Muslim nation to carry its responsibility on earth. This statement is repeated over and over again to inculcate this value in the hearts of the believers. This statement is the corner stone of the Islamic way of life. The verse ends with an emphasis that all God's decrees spring from His Grace and Mercy.

The whole universe is a testament of the Oneness and mercy of God, *“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of humankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, thereby reviving the earth after its death; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds made subservient between the sky and the earth; are indeed signs for a people who understand.”* The Qur'an invites humankind to travel through the universe, with open eyes, to discover the secrets of the creation. The verses allude to the vastness of heavens and earth and the huge constellations that form the universe. They all

move in harmony and delicate balance. The alternation of day and night, light and darkness, and sunrise and sunset are miracles that stir emotions in people and fill their hearts with awe and apprehension. However, very quickly the miraculous phenomena lose their lustre and become accepted as routine events except for the heart of a believer, which continues to feel the blessings of God and continues to be awed by the miracles of the creation.

Ships sail through water bringing goods to people. Reading this verse, the image of a vast dark ocean dotted with minute structures which move under the mercy of huge merciless waves comes to mind. Nothing protects the floating ships from being overtaken by the huge waves except the mercy of God. God's mercy has materialized in the laws of the universe that keep ships afloat allowing them to survive in harsh environments.

Contemplating the scenes of falling rain that creates life in the dead earth, the variety of animals that live on earth, the change of winds, and the motion of the clouds, one cannot but feel awed by the power of God and His mercy. Dry land looks dead; when water falls, life springs suddenly from the dead ground. Where did life come from? Was it lurking in the seed? But where did the seed come from? Questions that we cannot escape from and all lead to the Creator.

The change of winds and the clouds that move around are all controlled by God's law. Theories may explain these natural phenomena but they do not tell us about the origin of these phenomena. The verse is an invitation to humankind to reflect on the miracles of the creation and the amazing balance under which the universe is kept.

Many people do not reflect. They associate partners with God, *"Yet there are people who take (for worship) others besides God, as rivals to God. They love them as they should love God."* At the time of the revelation of these verses, the pagans of Mecca used to worship idols. Idols may take different forms and types but the essence of this practice continues at all times. But, *"the believers are stronger in their love for God."* The love of God in the heart of the believer is unconditional. It is a love that fills the heart of the believer and leaves no space for the love of anything else. It connects the believer with God through a link of love, kindness, and spiritual affection.

*"If only the wrongdoers could see, as they will when they face the torment, that to God belongs all power, and that He is severe in torment."* Those are the ones who associated partners with God. They committed injustice against themselves and against the truth. If only they had the foresight to think about the Day of Judgment, they would have realized that God has all power and He has no partners. On that Day, *"those, who were followed disown those who followed (them), would see the torment, and all relations between them would be cut off."* On that day, everyone will be busy with their own affairs. There will be no chiefs to be obeyed, nor leaders to be followed. The truth will become evident and no one will be able to protect anyone else. Anger will overtake those who were fooled by the illusion of power in life. They will wish if they could go back to take revenge against those who deluded them, *"And those who followed would say, 'If only We had one more chance, We would disown them, as they have disowned us.' Thus, will God show them (the fruits of) their deeds as (nothing but) a source for regret. Nor will there be a*

*way for them out of the fire.”*

*“People, eat of what is lawful and wholesome on earth; and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan, for he is to you an avowed enemy. He indeed, commands you to do what is evil and shameful, and that you should say about God that of which you have no knowledge. When it is said to them, ‘Follow what God has revealed.’ They say, ‘Nay, we shall follow the ways of our fathers.’ Even though their fathers had no sense at all and had no guidance? The parable of those who disbelieve is that of a beast which hears the shepherd’s cry, and hears in it nothing but the sound of a voice and a cry. Deaf, dumb, blind, for they do not use their reason.”* God makes it allowable for people to eat of that which He provided, lawful and wholesome. That which has been prohibited is explained in detail. Commands regarding the lawful and the forbidden should be taken from God alone. Satan’s should not be followed because he is the avowed enemy for humankind. Satan’s commands are never for the good of humankind, he only commands what is evil. He commands people to change God’s laws regarding what is allowed and what is forbidden.

This verse establishes a general rule that reflects the ease of the Islamic faith and shows that it is in concert with the creation of the universe and humankind. It is allowable for humankind to use for their benefit all what is on earth, except the few things which God has declared prohibited. It is a rule that responds to the initial natural disposition of the universe and people. God created everything on earth for the benefit of humankind, thus He decreed that the use of these things is allowable.

The practice of those who do not reflect on the revelation of God, but follow blindly in the footsteps of their forefathers in matters of faith is condemned. All matters of faith have to come from God. They are being ridiculed for following blindly the faith of their fathers, even though they may not be able to listen with their ears, talk with their tongues, or see with their eyes. They have no understanding.

*“Believers, eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to God, if it is Him you worship. He has only forbidden you carrion, blood, the flesh of a swine, and that on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God. But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience or transgressing due limits, then no sin shall be upon him. For God is All-Forgiving Giver of Mercy.”*

God is calling upon the believers to enjoy the good things that He made lawful to them. Whatever God allows is good and whatever He prohibited is bad. God alone is the provider and He has made the good things allowable to them and for that they should be grateful. A list of the things that He made unlawful is given. This is an exclusive list, only the things mentioned on the list are unlawful. In addition to the fact that modern medicine discovered the dangers around consuming carrion and blood, they are abominable. Swine meat has been prohibited in the Torah and in the Qur’an. It was later discovered that there are health issues regarding swine flesh; however, the claim is made that at this day and age these issues have been sorted out. But the

question is, are we sure that we have discovered all the bad consequences that may result from consuming such prohibited items. God's law deserves to be heeded.

God prohibited the consumption of meat from an animal, *“on which any other name has been invoked besides that of God.”* not because of health issues but because it has been dedicated to other than God. This violates the belief in the Oneness of God. It is a spiritual impurity that brings this item under the same umbrella that covers physical impurities. The verses indicate the close relationship between rules defining the lawful and the forbidden with the belief in the Oneness of God. Obeying God's commands which delineate the lawful and the forbidden is a practical application of the belief in the Oneness of God.

However, there are exceptional situations when the prohibition rules are overridden, *“But if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience or transgressing due limits, then no sin shall be upon him.”* This is a general rule: the rules which prohibit certain food should be suspended if the application of such rules may endanger human life. There is a difference in the views of the scholars regarding the type and extent of the necessity for which the rule can be suspended.

Some of the Jewish tribes in Medina argued extensively about the rules of the lawful and forbidden that were revealed in the Qur'an. One reason for this argument is that the Qur'an made lawful some of the things that the Jews considered unlawful. Verse 146 of Sura 6, recounts some of the things that were forbidden for Jews but were made allowable for Muslims, *“For those who followed the Jewish Law, We forbade every (animal) with undivided hoof, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep, except what adheres to their backs or their entrails, or is mixed up with a bone.”*

The Qur'an continued to condemn those who conceal God's revelation, *“Those who conceal God's revelations in the Scripture, and barter them for a miserable profit, they only fill their bellies with fire. God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Painful will be their torment. They are the ones who buy error in place of guidance and torment in place of forgiveness. How perseverant are they in their strife to reach the Fire? That is because God has revealed the Scripture with the truth. Those who find (a cause of) disagreement in the Scripture are in deep discord.”* Although the verse came to denounce the concealment of the revelation by the People of the Scripture, but it applies to any group of people who conceal the truth for personal gains. They bargain a losing deal. Whatever gain they make is trivial in comparison to the loss of God's blessing and the great reward in the Hereafter. The material gain they make in this life is like consuming fire in their bellies. This is a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment: they will be clothed in fire and they will be eating fire. In addition, they will be humiliated, *“God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Painful will be their torment.”* The verse continues to paint an emotive image of people who are negotiating a bargain: they buy error in place of guidance, and they sell forgiveness in place of torment. This is truly a losing bargain. But it was their decision to relinquish guidance and choose error, and to forfeit forgiveness and choose torment. They should then endure the consequences of their decision, because they will suffer long in Hell fire. This is the recompense for concealing the Scripture that has been revealed to guide people to the way of life that God has chosen for people on earth. This is truly the Book of truth, whoever chose to live according to it, has made the right choice. Those who chose not to follow it are in great schism with the law

of nature and they will always live in schism among themselves.

In a single verse, the true Islamic behaviour is defined and the characteristics of the true believers are delineated, *"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces toward east or west; but the truly righteous are those who believe in God and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; those who give away some of their wealth - however much they may cherish it - to their kin, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask, and to ransom slaves; those who establish prayer, and pay the poor-dues; who fulfill the contracts which they have made; and who are perseverant, in times of tribulation and adversity, and in time of peril. Such are the people of truth, the God conscious."* This verse may have been revealed in connection with the issue of the realignment of the direction of the Qibla, but the underlying issue here is much more fundamental. It is an unequivocal statement that defines the approach of Islam to life and defines the priorities of faith. Righteousness is not attained by performing superficial rituals. Facing east or west - toward Mecca or Jerusalem - is not the ultimate goal of the ritual. Righteousness is deeds and behaviours based on feelings and principles. The feelings and principles initiate changes in the psyche and the way of life of the individual and the community.

Righteousness is the whole sum of goodness. What is the relation between righteousness and the belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Messengers? The belief in God is a turning point in the lives of people. It frees people from slavery: whether it is slavery to other people, to a greater power, or to ideas and traditions. Being a servant of God frees the human being from the chains of all types of slavery. Belief in God puts all people on the same footing in front of God, all people are equal. Belief in God is a turning point from chaos to harmony, from confusion to clarity, from disunity to the oneness of objectives. Belief in the Last Day is a belief in the ultimate divine justice. It is the belief that life on earth is not in vain and that whatever good one does on this earth will never go unrewarded. The belief in the angels is a component of the belief in the unseen. This is one of the criteria that differentiate between human beings and beasts. Human beings are able to perceive the metaphysical while beasts only perceive the physical. The belief in the Book and the Messengers is the belief in all Messengers and the message they brought. It is a belief in the unity of humanity, the oneness of its God, and the oneness of its way of life.

To give out of one's wealth, which one loves, to *"their kin, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarer, to those who ask, and to ransom slaves;"* is to free oneself from enslavement to stinginess and selfishness. It frees oneself from the love of wealth which controls people and prevents them from being generous to those who are in need. It enriches the relationship between the members of the extended family. It provides support to the vulnerable orphans who lost their parents and protects them from straying away from the right path. Giving to the needy, who refrain from begging, makes them feel that they are part of the community, it is an expression of the collective responsibility of the members of the community. Helping the travelers who are on the road away from their homes emphasizes the unity of humanity. Those who have no recourse but to ask for help should be helped. Islamic traditions urge people to have good work ethics. Thus, those who are asking for help are doing this out of sheer necessity. It is a righteous deed indeed to help slaves to gain their freedom.

Establishing prayers goes beyond facing toward east or west, it is the absolute devotion of the whole of the human being to his/her Lord. The physical, the spiritual, the body, the mind, and the soul are all in devotion to God. Prayer does not consist only of motions to be performed mechanically, nor it is an exercise of spiritual devotion. Prayer sums up the essence of the Islamic perspective on human life. Islam acknowledges the various components of the human being: a body, a mind, and a spirit. The three components are all united in one being and they should be in harmony with each other. No component is favoured over the other two. The three components have equal roles in performing prayer, the major act of worship. Prayer consists of movements of the body, recitation and reflection of the mind, and submission of the spirit all working together to exemplify the Islamic conception of human life.

Paying the poor-dues (Zakat) is a fulfillment of the individual's social obligation to the community. God is the ultimate owner of wealth, He delegated people to use it and spend out of it in legitimate causes. One of these causes is the poor-dues. Poor-dues is mentioned in the verse in addition to other ways of spending which indicates that poor-dues is independent of the other ways of spending money. Poor-dues is an obligatory tax, while the other ways of spending money are voluntary. Righteousness is not achieved until one practices both obligatory and voluntary spending in the way of God. Obligatory spending and voluntary spending are two of the fundamental principles of Islam.

Fulfillment of pledges is a fundamental element of the Islamic ethical code. The command to fulfill pledges made is often repeated in the Qur'an. A common sequence of verses starts with the command to fulfill pledges, followed by verses about faith, humanity, and doing good deeds. Fulfillment of pledges is critical to the establishment of an environment of trust and security whether at the individual, community, or state levels. The absence of this ethic in a community creates an atmosphere of mistrust among people. The first pledge one makes, is the pledge one makes with God. Islam does not differentiate between pledges made to friends or foes, all pledges have to be honoured.

Perseverance, "*in times of tribulation and adversity, and in time of peril,*" is an important trait that is needed to help people go through life with all its tribulations and trials. Believers should trust that each time of adversity will be followed by a time of ease. Hope and trust in God are the ways to deal with adverse situations. The way this part of the verse is written alludes to the special status that is given to those who persevere.

The verse defines righteousness as an indivisible combination of the articles of faith and the individual responsibilities and traits. It ends by stating that whoever fulfills these characteristics are, "*the people of truth, the God conscious,*" Those who are truthful with their Lord, truthful in their faith, and truthful in translating their faith into a way of life.

This verse gives a very concise summary of the way of life that Islam calls for. One can see clearly, that the verse states the articles of faith of Islam; then it mentions the rituals and the acts of worship; and finally it states the main attributes of believers. The verse is composed in such a way that elements of these three topics are intermingled. Two points can be stated. First, righteousness is achieved when one adopts an Islamic way of life. Second, Islam is not a

compartmentalized religion. All three components: the doctrine, the rituals, and behavior are interconnected.

## Verses: 178 to 188

178. *Believers, just retribution is ordained for you in cases of murder; the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the woman for the woman. But for him who is pardoned by his (injured) brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and restitution should be made to him in kindness. This is alleviation and a mercy from your Lord. He who transgresses after this will have a painful torment.*
179. *And there is life for you in the law of just retribution, people of understanding, that you may remain conscious of God.*
180. *It is prescribed for you, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves behind any wealth that he should make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage. This is a duty incumbent on those who are conscious of God.*
181. *And whoso changes (the will) after he has heard it, the sin thereof is only upon those who change it. God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
182. *But if one has a reason to fear that a testator has committed a mistake or wrong, and brings about a settlement between the heirs, (it shall be) no sin for him. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
183. *Believers, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may remain God conscious.*
184. *Fast for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (Should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he who will give more, of his own free will, it is better for him. And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew.*
185. *Ramadan is the (month) during which the Qur'an was sent down, a guidance to humankind and clear (signs) for the guidance, and the Criterion (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during this month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. God wants ease for you. He does not want to put you to hardship. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and you may be grateful.*
186. *When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them). I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls on Me. So let them also listen to My call, and believe in Me, that they may be guided.*
187. *Permitted to you, on the night of the fast, to go unto your wives. They are your garments and you are their garments. God knows what you used to do secretly among yourselves; but He accepted your repentance and pardoned you; so now associate with them, and seek what God has ordained for you, and eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread. Then complete your fast until nightfall. Do not associate with your wives while you are in retreat in the mosques. Those are limits (set by) God, so do not go near them. Thus, does God make clear His Signs to people, that they may remain conscious of Him.*



188. *And do not eat up your property among yourselves wrongfully, nor use it to bribe judges, with intent that you may eat up sinfully and knowingly a portion of (other) people's property. (2:178-188)*

*“Believers, just retribution is ordained for you in cases of murder; the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the woman for the woman. But for him who is pardoned by his (injured) brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and restitution should be made to him in kindness. This is alleviation and a mercy from your Lord. He who transgresses after this will have a painful torment.”* The address is to the believers, who believe in God and therefore have to accept God’s commands and laws. This verse outlines God’s legislation regarding retribution. The law is enunciated and the rationale behind it is explained. The verse also exhorts them to remain conscious of God which guarantees the observance of the law. The law states that retribution has to be exacted when crimes of premeditated murder are committed, *“the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the woman for the woman.”* However, *“for him who is forgiven somewhat by his (injured) brother, this shall be adhered to fairly, and restitution should be made to him in kindness.”* Acceptance of restitution is a sign from the victim’s family that they are willing to forgive. It has to be requested and paid with kindness. The purpose of this process is to remove animosity between the murderer and the victim’s family. This is an alleviation and mercy from God. But, *“He who transgresses after this will have a painful torment.”* Transgressors are not only punished in the Hereafter, but also in this life. Those who transgress after restitution has been negotiated and agreed upon should be executed. Retribution is not allowed once restitution has been accepted.

The verse reflects the comprehensive nature of the law and illustrates how it takes into consideration human emotions. It is natural for a victim’s family to feel angry and to request retribution, so means for exacting justice is provided. However, forgiveness is encouraged and legislated. Forgiveness is made an option for those who are willing and able to exercise it.

It has been narrated that this verse has been abrogated by verse 45 in Sura 5, *“And We ordained for them therein a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds is legal retribution,”* which emphasized retribution as the only option. However, it is clear that these two verses address different circumstances. It seems that verse 45 in Sura 5, addresses situations of individual crimes, when a single person or persons commit premeditated murder. In this case, just retribution should be exacted. But, the present verse applies to situations where killing is the result of large scale hostility between two groups of people. In the first case the target is one or more specific individuals, while in the second case it is a war between two tribes or two families in which case, the killing and the acts of revenge are random. Therefore, the two options of retribution and restitution are open. This interpretation, if accepted, removes any contradiction between the two verses.

*“And there is life for you in the law of just retribution, people of understanding, that you may remain conscious of God.”* The purpose of the law for just retribution is not only to address the desire of the victim’s family to take revenge for their loved ones who were killed, but it is also a legislation to preserve life. It is a deterrent for anyone who attempts to commit a murder. When the culprits realize that they may lose their lives as a punishment for their crimes, they may stop, think, and change their minds. The rationale behind the law of just retribution may also be

understood if we consider the protection that the whole community will enjoy when the lives of the individuals are protected.

The verse ends with an admonition to the believers to remain God conscious. This is actually the main factor in deterring people from committing crimes, whether it is unprovoked aggression or an act of revenge. Although retribution laws are necessary for the establishment of justice in a community, this alone does not provide sufficient deterrent against crime. God consciousness provides a strong motivation to stop aggression. Laws alone are not sufficient tools to change people's behaviour; laws should be accompanied by internal motivation. Islam provides this internal motivation in the form of the concept of God consciousness. This explains the rarity of crimes committed during the time of the Prophet (PBUH). Even when a crime was committed the culprits, in most cases, made voluntary admission of their guilt. This behaviour was mainly motivated by feelings of God consciousness in the culprit's heart.

*“It is prescribed for you, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves behind any wealth, that he should make a bequest to parents and next of kin, according to reasonable usage. This is a duty incumbent on those who are conscious of God.”* This is a command for the believers who die and leave behind estates; they should write a will before they die. There is a difference in opinion among the scholars as to the size of the estate which makes this command obligatory. Most probably, the norms of the society would be the decisive factor in this case.

It should be mentioned that the requirement of making a bequest for the parents has been abrogated by the verses expounding the inheritance laws which were revealed at a later time. Inheritance laws specified the portions that each parent is entitled to receive from the estates of their children. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Those who were allotted portions of the estate by virtue of the inheritance laws have no right in an additional bequest from the same estate.”* As for the next of kin, if they are allotted portions by virtue of inheritance laws, then they have no additional rights as well. Those who are not allotted a portion according to the inheritance law are entitled to a portion through the will that the deceased makes. The rationale behind making a bequest for those who are not entitled to a portion of the estate according to the inheritance laws is to strengthen the ties of the extended family. It is an application of the collective responsibility of family members toward their kinfolks. All these laws and regulations should be executed with kindness and fairness. People should observe God consciousness when wills are made to make sure that no injustice is done to a family member. The Prophet's (PBUH) tradition limited the portion of the estate that the deceased is allowed to include in such a will to one third of the estate. This way, those who are entitled to inherit according to the inheritance laws will not suffer injustice.

*“And whoso changes (the will) after he has heard it, the sin thereof is only upon those who change it. God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* Those who change the will of a deceased person after he/she had died are sinners. God has knowledge of everything. However, there is one case in which the executor is allowed to change the will. This is the situation when the executor knows that the deceased intended to deprive someone, who is legally entitled to inherit, of their right, *“But if one has a reason to fear that a testator has committed a mistake or wrong, and brings about a settlement between the heirs, (it shall be) no sin for him. God is All-Forgiving,*

*Giver of Mercy.*”

“Believers, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may remain God conscious.” This shows that the main objective behind fasting is the attainment of God consciousness. God consciousness enhances the ability of the hearts to obey God’s commands, to do the things that please God, and to refrain from doing the things that displease Him. Fasting is a tool to promote God consciousness which helps the believers to overcome the temptation of sin. Believers know how important God consciousness is. Attaining God consciousness is one of the major objectives of the believer. This verse emphasizes that fasting is one of the ways that lead to the attainment of God consciousness.

“Fast for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the prescribed number (Should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship), is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he who will give more, of his own free will it is better for him. And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew.” Fasting is prescribed for few days only every year for those who are healthy and not traveling. Those who are sick or travelling are given an exemption until they recover or come back home from their travel, respectively. The way the verse is written gives the impression that there are no specific conditions attached to this exemption. This is the way these exemptions should be understood. The exemption is not attached to the severity of the illness or the level of hardship encountered in travel. The idea is to make these tasks easier for people and to remove any feeling of embarrassment that they are not complying with God’s commands. We are not privy to the reasons behind these exemptions, God knows best. So, we have to accept these rulings even if we don’t understand the rationale behind them. Some of the scholars are wary of this approach, because they fear that people may abuse this privilege. They may become reckless in the conduct of the rituals. This may lead to neglecting the ritual of fasting for the slightest hardship that they may suffer. This is not a justification for introducing conditions that were not prescribed in the first place.

There are traditions that may shed some light on the application of these exemptions. Anas (RA) said, “One day, we were travelling with the Prophet (PBUH), some of us were fasting and some were not. We camped in a very hot place. Those who were fasting were too tired so they lied down. Those who were not fasting set up camp, and tended the horses and camels. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘Today, those who are not fasting got all the reward from God.’”

Jaber (RA) said, “The Prophet (PBUH) was traveling and saw a group of people surrounding a man covering him from the sun, the Prophet (PBUH) asked, ‘What is wrong with him?’ they said, ‘He is fasting.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘It is not righteousness to fast while one is traveling.’”

‘Amr bin Umayyah Al-Damri (RA), said, “I came back from travel, and went to see the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) offered me food. I apologized saying, ‘Messenger of God, I am fasting.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘I tell you that God has decreed that the traveler is given an exemption from fasting and to pray only half the prayer.’”

‘Aiysha (RA) said, “*Hamza bin Amr Al-Aslami (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) about fasting while traveling- Hamza was a person who frequently fasted - the Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘It is up to you, whether you fast or not.’*”

The impression one gets from these different narrations and others, is that when one of the companions asked the Prophet (PBUH) a question, the Prophet (PBUH) used to take into consideration the different circumstances surrounding the question and the person who is asking. My final impression, about the exemption from fasting during travel, is that it is better not to fast during travel and that this exemption is not related to how difficult the travel conditions are. I could not find any tradition that deal with the exemption for being sick, except the opinions of the scholars. It seems that there are no conditions attached to this exemption as well. Those who are traveling or are sick are allowed not to fast. They have to make up the days which they missed when their conditions allow.

Fasting was prescribed in the second year after Hijra. In the beginning, it was a very difficult undertaking. So, another exemption was given to those who are barely able to fast, instead of fasting, one can feed a needy person. Muslims are urged anyway to feed the needy, whether it is a ransom for not fasting or not, “*But he who will give more, of his own free will it is better for him.*” Muslims were also encouraged to fast, even if they suffer some hardship in fasting, “*And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew.*” Fasting is a good training for self-discipline and increasing the stamina. In addition, this exemption was only a temporary measure until people got used to the practice of fasting. This exemption remained only in the case of the elderly who are unable to fast. Imam Malek said that it was the opinion of Anas bin Malek (RA) that feeding a needy person in lieu of fasting is acceptable for those who are unable to fast because of their old age.

“*Ramadan is the (month) during which the Qur’an was sent down, a guidance to humankind and clear (signs) for the guidance, and the Criterion (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period (should be made up) by days later. God wants ease for you. He does not want to put you to hardship. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and you may be grateful.*” This is the verse that was revealed to restrict the permission to feed a needy person in lieu of fasting to only those who are not able to fast because they are too old. So, those who are home during this month and are certain that the month has started should fast. However, those who are travelling or sick are allowed to delay the fasting until they return home, or they recover from sickness. A fundamental principle is reiterated: God wants ease for you and He does not want you to suffer unnecessarily. This is a fundamental principle that applies to all undertakings that a Muslim is required to perform as part of the rituals of Islam. It exhorts Muslims to become lenient in their dealings with others. It gives Muslims a sense of security and trust in God’s mercy. Allowing the sick and the traveler to perform fasting after they return to normal life again allows them to gain the reward for fasting. So, they do not lose that reward. The verse ends by explaining another reason for fasting, “*to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and you may be grateful.*” One of the objectives of fasting is for Muslims to appreciate the value of the guidance they received from God. During the month of fasting, Muslims become more sensitive to gaining the pleasure of God by abstaining from thinking and committing all sorts of sin. They become grateful to God

that He gave them the opportunity to become better human beings and helped them to become better equipped to perform the greater responsibility that they are expected to undertake.

Before continuing to talk about the details of fasting, the huge reward from God for those who fast is mentioned, *“When My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them). I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls on Me. So let them also listen to My call, and believe in Me, that they may be guided.”* What better reward than feeling the closeness of God. He listens to their requests and is ready to respond favourably to them. The verse’s language reflects the limitless kindness and grace of God. He honours those who believe in Him by calling them, *“My servants.”* Another form of grace and kindness is that He himself tells His servants that He is close to them. Instead of delegating the Prophet (PBUH) to answer their question, He Himself responds directly to the people and tells them that He is close. Then the verse is completed by an invitation to heed God’s call and to believe in Him so that they become guided. The fruit of believing in God is guidance. This is true guidance because it comes from God and is based on the belief in Him.

It has been narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“God will shy away from ignoring one of His servants who asks for something good.”* In another tradition, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God will respond to the call of whoever submits to Him on the surface of this earth. God may grant the wish of the person who is asking or may protect her/him from something bad as long as the request does not involve hurting a kin or a wish for something evil.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) has also been quoted to have said, *“God promised to respond favourably to all requests as long as it does not involve hurting a kin or a wish for an evil deed, or made hurriedly.”* The companions asked the Prophet (PBUH) what he meant by the word *“hurriedly.”* He said, *“Hurriedly means that a person asks for an immediate response from God”*

A fasting person is in a favourable position for making requests from God. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God responds favourably to the request of a fasting person at the time of breaking fast.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) has also been quoted to have said, *“God never turns down supplications made by three kinds of people: a just leader, a fasting person until he/she breaks their fast, and a person who suffered injustice. God raises these supplications above the clouds and opens the doors of heaven for them. God then says, ‘I will certainly respond favourably to these calls, though, this may not occur immediately.’”*

*“Permitted to you, on the night of the fast, to go unto your wives. They are your garments and you are their garments. God knows what you used to do secretly among yourselves; but He accepted your repentance and pardoned you; so now associate with them, and seek what God has ordained for you, and eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread. Then complete your fast until nightfall. Do not associate with your wives while you are in retreat in the mosques. Those are limits (set by) God, so do not go near them.*

*Thus, does God make clear His Signs to people, that they may remain conscious of Him.*” When fasting was first prescribed, a fasting person who sleeps after breaking fast at sunset would not be able to eat, to drink, or to have intimate relationship with his/her spouse when they wake up even if they wake up before dawn. So, if it so happened that a person was not able to breakfast at sunset and instead was overcome by sleep and woke up later, he /she would not be able to eat anything and would have to continue fasting for another day. This subjected Muslims to a great hardship. This verse was revealed to remove this restriction and to allow Muslims to practice their normal activities between sunset and dawn. The Qur’an uses a decent allegory to describe the intimate relationship between spouses, *“They are your garments and you are their garments.”* The allegory elevates this relationship from the realm of a mere physical interaction to the realm of a kind, sensitive, and tender relationship. It also alludes to the security and comfort that each spouse should find in the relationship with his/her spouse.

God forgave whatever trespasses happened before the revelation of this verse. So, seek fulfillment in whatever God has made lawful to you until the light of dawn appears on the horizon. Prayer schedules issued by religious authorities provide accurate times for starting the fast. No intimate relationship between spouses should be conducted during periods of retreat at mosques. These are the boundaries of allowable practices made clear by God, so do keep your distance from them. It is safer not to come close to the boundary for fear of an unintentional crossing of the boundary. The objective of the believer is to seek and remain conscious of God. God consciousness is a goal that the believers should hold dear to their hearts and keep it in front of their eyes, working hard to reach it.

*“And do not eat up your property among yourselves wrongfully, nor use it to bribe judges, with intent that you may eat up sinfully and knowingly a portion of (other) people's property.”* Ibn Katheer wrote regarding the interpretation of this verse on the authority of ‘Ali bin Abi Talha (RA), *“This verse deals with a situation that arises as a result of a person who borrowed money without making a written document attesting to the debt, refuses to repay the debt and asserts in a court of law that he never borrowed the money. His intention is to avoid paying back the debt knowing full well that he is committing a sin.”* Mejahed and others said *“Do not get into a litigation knowing that you are wrong.”* Um Salamah (RA) was quoted to have said, *“The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘I am a human being, when I judge between two litigators of you I may be persuaded by the person who is able to articulate his/her case more eloquently than the other. Whosoever claims something that is not his/her and gets it, it is like getting a piece of fire. He/she would either leave it or get burnt by it.’”*

## **Verses: 189 to 203**

189. *They ask you concerning the new moons. Say, “They are signs to mark fixed periods of time for people and for pilgrimage.” It is not righteousness that you enter your houses from the back. But, it is righteousness to be conscious of God. Enter houses through the proper doors and be conscious of God so you may attain success.*
190. *Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits. God does not love transgressors.*

191. *And slay them (in battle) wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaying; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there (first); but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of the disbelievers.*
192. *But if they cease, God is All- Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
193. *And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion should be only for God, but if they desist, then there should be no hostility except against the wrongdoers.*
194. *The sacred month is for the sacred month and violation of sanctity (calls for) fair retribution. And if one attacked you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. But remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.*
195. *Spend in the cause of God, and let not your hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good, for God loves those who do good.*
196. *And perform the pilgrimage, major and minor, for God. But if you are prevented (from performing it), send an offering for sacrifice that may be obtained with ease, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice. And if any of you is ill, or has an ailment in his scalp, (necessitating shaving), he should offer a ransom for it by either fasting, or feeding the poor, or offering another form of worship; and when you feel safe, if any one wishes to continue the minor pilgrimage to the major one, he must make an offering, such as he can afford, but if he cannot afford it, he should fast three days during the major pilgrimage and seven days on his return, making ten days in all. This is for those whose household is not in (the precincts of) the Sacred Mosque. And remain conscious of God, and know that God is severe in punishment.*
197. *The pilgrimage takes place in the months appointed for it, and whoever performs the pilgrimage during these months (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness, abuse, nor angry conversation during the pilgrimage. And whatsoever good you do God knows it. So make provision for yourselves; for the best provision is to be conscious of God. Therefore, remain conscious of Me, you who have understanding.*
198. *It is no sin for you that you seek the bounty of your Lord (by trading), but when you press on in the multitude from 'Arafat, remember God by the Sacred Monument. Remember Him as He has guided you, although before you were of those astray.*
199. *Then hasten from the place from which the people hasten, and ask for God's forgiveness. For God is All-forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
200. *And when you have completed your rites, celebrate the praise of God, as you used to celebrate the praise of your fathers, with far more heart and soul. There are men who say, "Our Lord, give us (your bounties) in this world." But they will have no share in the Hereafter.*
201. *And there are some among them who say, "Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the hereafter, and save us from the torment of the fire."*
202. *To these will be allotted what they have earned; and God is swift in reckoning.*
203. *Celebrate the praise of God during the appointed days. But if any one hastens to leave after two days, there is no blame on him, and if any one stays on, there is no blame on him, if his aim is to do right. Then be conscious of God, and know that you will surely be gathered to Him. (2:189-203)*

*“They ask you concerning the new moons. Say, ‘They are signs to mark fixed periods of time for people and for pilgrimage.’ It is not righteousness that you enter your houses from the back. But, it is righteousness to be conscious of God. Enter houses through the proper doors and be conscious of God so you may succeed.”* It is narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) was asked why the moon takes different shapes. The question may have been also, why the moon was created. So, the answer came that the moon is a sign to mark fixed periods of time. It is a tool that can be used by people to determine times for activities as well as for rituals. The verse continues to talk about a custom which the idolaters used to follow during pilgrimage. It was narrated that, it was the custom of the people of Medina to use the back doors to their houses when they return back after performing pilgrimage. They thought that this is a sign of righteousness. The verse came down to change this meaningless tradition which was rooted in pre Islamic myth. The verse states that righteousness is not achieved through superficial and meaningless traditions. Righteousness is achieved through God consciousness and the belief that God is ever watching over people, He knows what they do in secret and in the open. So, *“Enter houses through the proper doors and be conscious of God so you may succeed.”* The verse alerts the believer to seek righteousness through God consciousness because God consciousness is the door to success.

*“Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits. God does not love transgressors. And slay them (in battle) wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaying; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they fight you there (first); but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of the disbelievers. But if they cease, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion should be only for God, but if they desist, then there should be no hostility except against the wrongdoers. The sacred month is for the sacred month and violation of sanctity (calls for) fair retribution. And if one attacked you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. But remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him. Spend in the cause of God, and let not your hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good, for God loves those who do good.”* It was narrated that this was the first verse that commanded the believers to fight back those who fight them. A previous verse acknowledged the persecution of Muslims at the hands of the idolaters of Mecca but stopped short of giving the command to fight back, *“Permission is given to those against whom war is waged, because they have been wronged; and verily, God is able to give them victory. (They are) those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, (for no cause) except that they say, ‘Our Lord is God.’ Had not God checked one set of people by means of another, there would surely have been destroyed monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure. God will certainly aid those who aid his (cause); for verily God is full of Strength, Eminent.”* (22: 39-40).

The permission for the believers to fight back the idolaters has now been given. The permission was given to redress the injustice inflicted on the believers. They were given the permission to fight back. But why was the permission to fight back delayed until this time? There could have been a multitude of reasons for the timing of the permission to fight back. God knows best, but we can speculate on some of these reasons.



The first reason may have been that the believers needed a training period to be prepared for the responsibilities which they were about to undertake. The Arabs were hot tempered people, unable to control themselves in face of oppression, and they responded quickly and spontaneously to aggression. They needed a training program in self-discipline. They needed to be trained to follow orders. Through this training men like ‘Umar bin Al-Khatib (RA), known for his daring courage, and Hamza bin Abdel Muttaleb (RA), known for his physical strength, were made to exercise patience in face of the insults and persecution suffered by the believers at the hands of the idolaters; and to comply with the orders issued from the supreme commander to, “*Restrain your hands (from fighting) and establish prayer and give poor-dues.*” (4:77) Men like them were known to quickly jump to combat at the slightest hint of aggression. Muslims needed the training for self-control and self-discipline to behave like an organized army.

Another reason may have been that the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to appeal to the sense of gallantry of the non-Muslim Arabs when they watch their fellow Muslim Arabs being tortured and tormented. He was hoping that this may induce the Arabs who were not party to the dispute between the Muslims and Quraish to sympathize with the Muslims. History bears witness to the success of the Prophet’s (PBUH) strategy in restraining the Muslims against fighting back during the time of persecution in Mecca. An example of this success is the failure of the coalition that Quraish formed to boycott the tribe of Bani Hashem to force them to disown the Prophet (PBUH). Bani Hashem refused to abandon their tribal duty and continued to offer the Prophet (PBUH) tribal protection. When other tribes saw the extent of the harm inflicted on Bani Hashem, they rose up against the coalition and tore the agreement between Quraish and the other tribes who participated in the coalition.

A third reason for not allowing Muslims to fight back may have been because Muslims were still living with their families some of whom were non-Muslims; fighting back under such conditions would have resulted in bloody wars inside each house in Mecca.

These could have been some of the reasons why fighting back was not allowed during the first years following the advent of Islam. In addition to this, the Muslim community was still a fledgling community unable to support such fights. The verse outlines one of the fundamental Islamic principles regarding fighting back. These rules met the needs of the Muslim community at that time. The fighting rules evolved to suit the changing requirements of the Muslim community as time progressed. The present verses enunciate some of the fundamental rules of war in Islam which remained valid until they were amended in Sura 9.

It may be a good idea to talk a little about Jihad in Islam at this point. This provides a general background for the verses dealing with Jihad.

Islam, the final form of the creed of submission, came to set up standards and a general way of life for humankind on earth. The Muslim nation was given the undertaking of leading humankind to a way of life based on the divine project. This way of life is rooted in the correct understanding of the purpose for which the universe and humankind were created. This blessed way of life leads to a life of goodness, without which humanity would be lost.

It is, thus, the right of all human beings to be able to examine this creed. No one should be deprived of the right to examine this creed for themselves without any harassment, oppression, or transgression. Once they have examined it, they have the right to adopt it or reject it freely, without any oppression or compulsion. Those who chose to adopt the creed should be able to practice this way of life freely. Those who reject the creed should not stand in the way of letting other people examine this creed or force them not to adopt it if they so wish. These are basic rights for all human beings. It is the responsibility of the Muslim nation to defend these basic rights.

The Muslim nation should prevent any power to stand in the way of presenting this creed to all people or attempts to harass or persecute the believers. The Muslim nation may have to resort to armed struggle to stop the aggression against the believers or those who wish to adopt this faith. This does not mean that the Muslim nation has the right to compel people to adopt Islam. But it means that Muslims should be able to practice their faith freely without any fear.

These are the basic principles underlying the concept of Jihad. Jihad is only decreed to provide a tool for the protection of the creed and the right of the people to choose freely the religion they would like to practice. Jihad is also a means for protecting Muslims against any aggression which aims at destroying their way of life. Jihad is not meant to be a tool for forcing people to become Muslims.

These verses were revealed to outline the rules of Jihad to the Muslims at a time when they were subjected to persecution by the idolaters of Mecca. However, these are also fundamental rules for Jihad in Islam. The verses start by a command to fight back those who are fighting the Muslims and to continue to fight back as long as the others continue to fight them. However, they are commanded not to transgress the limits, *“Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress the limits. God does not love transgressors.”* The objective of Jihad is stated in unequivocal terms, *“Fight in the cause of God those who fight you.”* The fight should be in the cause of God. A Muslim should not fight for any of the causes which have been adopted by people during the long history of humanity as excuses for waging wars. A Muslim should not fight for worldly gains whether it be wealth, honour, enslavement of others, control of resources, or opening markets for products. Not only the cause has been stated but also the extent of the war has been specified, *“but do not transgress the limits. God does not love transgressors.”*

The narrative continues to emphasize the right to fight those who fought the Muslims, persecuted them, and evicted them out of their homes, *“And slay them (in battle) wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaying; but fight them not at the Sacred Mosque, unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of the disbelievers. But if they cease, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Persecuting people because of their faith represents an assault on people’s most sacred right. It is therefore, more horrendous than killing. Fighting back should continue until they desist. If they fight you at the Sacred Mosque, then fight them back. If they fight you during the sacred months, then they do not deserve to enjoy the protection and security that are guaranteed during the sacred months, *“The sacred month is for the sacred month and violation of sanctity (calls for) fair retribution. And if one attacked you, attack him in like manner as he attacked you. But remain conscious of God, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.”* God has decreed that the safety and security should be guaranteed for all people in the precinct of the Sacred Mosque at all times. Safety and security are guaranteed for all people in

any area outside the precinct of the Sacred House during the scared months. However, those who violate the sanctity of the place or the time designated by God should be punished. But this punishment should be within reasonable limits, *“do not transgress the limits.”*

An army requires men as well as equipment. The Muslim fighters were volunteers; they were not professional soldiers who were paid to fight. Each one brought his own fighting equipment including a horse or a camel for transportation. They volunteered themselves and their wealth which they used to buy fighting equipment. There were others who wanted to volunteer as fighters but they could not afford the price of a mount to use to travel to the battle ground. They would come to the Prophet (PBUH) asking for means of transportation. When they were told that no means of transportation were available, *“They turn back with eyes overflowing with tear of grief that they have nothing to spend in God’s cause.”* (9:92). The verse urges Muslims to spend in the cause of God, *“Spend in the cause of God, and let not your hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for God loves those who do good.”* Stinginess is bad for the individual as well as for the community especially for a society in which volunteerism plays a major role in the maintenance of its welfare. The Arabic word translated as, *“Doing good”* designates those who have the highest rank among the believers in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) explained the meaning of *“doing good,”* by saying that, *“To serve God as if you see Him, because if you are unable to see God, God certainly sees you.”*

*“And perform the pilgrimage, major and minor, for God. But if you are prevented (from performing it), send an offering for sacrifice that may be obtained with ease, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice. And if any of you is ill, or has an ailment in his scalp, (necessitating shaving), he should offer a ransom for it by either fasting, or feeding the poor, or offering another form of worship; and when you feel safe, if any one wishes to continue the minor pilgrimage to the major one, he must make an offering, such as he can afford, but if he cannot afford it, he should fast three days during the major pilgrimage and seven days on his return, making ten days in all. This is for those whose household is not in (the precincts of) the Sacred Mosque. And remain conscious of God, and know that God is severe in punishment.”* The first thing we notice about this verse is the way the rules for performing pilgrimage are explained. The verse includes a number of rules which were given one after the other but with the proper punctuation to make the rules distinct from one another. A comment about each rule is mentioned before moving on to the subsequent one. All these rules are connected with the fundamental concept of God consciousness. The verse starts with the command to complete the rituals of pilgrimage, major and minor. Some scholars are of the opinion that this verse is a command to establish the rituals of pilgrimage. Others understood it to mean that once a person makes the intention that he/she wants to perform pilgrimage, they should go through with the rituals until they have been completed. The latter opinion seems to be more appropriate, because the verse talks about pilgrimage major and minor and it is known that minor pilgrimage is not considered an obligatory ritual in Islam. It is thus apparent that the command indicates that once one started the rituals of pilgrimage, one should continue until the rituals have been completed. This rule applies to both major and minor pilgrimage. An exception is made in case one is faced with an obstacle that does not allow him/her to go through with the rituals as planned, such as in the case of falling ill. In this case the person who wanted to perform pilgrimage should offer a prescribed sacrifice at the place which he/she was able to reach. They

can then break the state of Ihram even if they are unable to perform any of the rituals except entering the state of Ihram at the designated place. The state of Ihram describes the condition of a person who is performing minor and major pilgrimage. At a certain distance from Mecca, people who intend to perform pilgrimage go through a list of spiritual and physical acts to declare their intention to perform pilgrimage and to announce the beginning of the rituals. This is what happened at Hudaibiyah when Muslims were denied entrance to Mecca thus, preventing them from reaching the Sacred Mosque to perform minor pilgrimage in the Sixth year after Hijra. (6H). The Hudaibiyah's agreement was ratified. The agreement stipulated that Muslims would be allowed to perform minor pilgrimage the following year. The verse was revealed to command the believers to offer their sacrifice at Hudaibiyah and to break the state of Ihram. Muslims were somewhat reluctant to offer their sacrifice before they reach the Sacred Mosque. However, when they saw that the Prophet (PBUH) complied with the command, they followed suit.

Part of the rituals of pilgrimage is to offer, "*A sacrifice that may be obtained with ease.*" The animals to be sacrificed include camels, cows, sheep and goats. It is allowable that seven people share in offering one cow or one camel as a sacrifice; alternatively, individuals can each offer a goat or a sheep.

In a normal situation, breaking the state of Ihram occurs when the person offers the sacrifice upon having finished the rituals of the day of 'Arafat. Offering the sacrifice usually occurs on the tenth day of the month of Zi Al-Hijja, in Mena.

Another exception is made for those who cannot stay long without having a hair-cut because of sickness. They can cut their hair before offering their sacrifice and before the rituals of pilgrimage have been completed provided they offer a ransom. This ransom can be either a three days fast, feeding six needy people, or offering another sacrifice. The details of this ruling came in a tradition that has been narrated in Al-Bukhari. Ka'b bin 'Aqrah (RA) said, "*I was carried to the Prophet (PBUH) with lice jumping all over my face, the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'I did not realize how bad your condition was, can you offer an ewe in sacrifice?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'then you can either fast three days; or feed six needy people, each one should get half a Sa' (the Sa' is a standard for volumetric measurement equal to 2512 milliliter); and you can cut your hair.'*"

*"And when you feel safe, if any one wishes to continue the minor pilgrimage to the major one, he must make an offering, such as he can afford,"* Those who may have arrived in Mecca long before the appropriate time for Hajj, performed the minor pilgrimage, and are waiting for the designated time to start the rituals for major pilgrimage, can break the state Ihram during this waiting period provided they offer a sacrifice. However, if they cannot afford to offer a sacrifice, they can fast ten days: three before the day of 'Arafat, and seven after they had returned home. Fasting may have been prescribed as an alternative to strengthen the relationship with God during these days when the state of Ihram has been broken. However, those whose household is in the Sacred Precinct are exempt since they are not required to perform minor pilgrimage.

*“And remain conscious of God, and know that God is severe in punishment.”* God consciousness is the only guarantee that people will heed these rules and perform the rituals as required, hence the reminder to remain God conscious.

The narrative continues to outline the timing and etiquette of pilgrimage and ends also by a reminder to remain conscious of God, *“Pilgrimage takes place in the months appointed for it, and whoever performs pilgrimage during these months (let him remember that) there is (to be) no lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation during pilgrimage. And whatsoever good you do God knows it. So make provision for yourselves; for the best provision is to be conscious of God. Therefore, remain conscious of Me, you who have understanding.”* It is obvious that there is a specific time for pilgrimage. Embarking on a state of Ihram for those who intend to perform the rituals of pilgrimage should be done during the months of Shawal, Zul Qi’da, and the first ten days of Zul Hijja. However, according to some scholars, one may embark on the state of Ihram any time during the year. El-Shafe’i supports the former opinion, while Malek, Abu Haneefa, and Ahmed bin Hanbal support the latter. The former opinion has also been narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas, Jaber, A’taa, Tawoos, and Mejahed. The former opinion is stronger than the latter. However, there is an agreement that the rituals of pilgrimage should be performed during the time frame outlined above.

Once a person embarks on the state of Ihram, one should abstain from, *“Lewdness nor abuse nor angry conversation during the pilgrimage.”* Lewdness refers to intimate relationship with women, while abuse refers to sins in general. The idea behind these injunctions is to devote oneself completely to God. It is a time for enhancing our spirituality and taking advantage of being in the precinct of the Sacred House of God to feel the closeness to Him. Having been told of what not to do, the narrative continues to urge the believers to do good deeds, reminding them that God knows whatever they do. Pilgrimage is a time to get the spiritual provision for life, *“And whatsoever good you do God knows it. So make provision for yourselves; for the best provision is to be conscious of God.”* God consciousness is the provision which sustains the hearts and the souls of the believers. It is the provision that enhances their spirituality, helps them to overcome difficulties of life, and enables them to reach their objective. Only those who have understanding appreciate the value of God consciousness.

The narrative goes on to discuss what is allowable and what is forbidden during pilgrimage, whether it is allowable to engage in business transactions or work for a salary and when to leave the mount of ‘Arafat and what to say in way of remembrance of God, *“It is no sin for you that you seek the bounty of your Lord (by trading), but when you press on in the multitude from ‘Arafat, remember God by the sacred monument. Remember Him as He has guided you, although before you were of those astray. Then hasten from the place from which the people hasten, and ask for God’s forgiveness. For God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* It was narrated by Abu Daoud on the authority of Ibn Abbas (RA) that, *“Muslims abstained from engaging in business activities during the time of pilgrimage and dedicated themselves fully to the remembrance of*

*God until the verse, 'It is no sin for you that you seek the bounty of your Lord (by trading),' was revealed."* The verse calls the business activities a bounty from God. Thus, those who work to earn a living are in reality seeking the bounty of God. It is thus appropriate to find a verse talking about earning a living among the verses describing the rituals of pilgrimage.

*"But when you press on in the multitude from 'Arafat, remember God by the Sacred Monument. Remember Him as He has guided you, although before you were of those astray."* Standing on the mount of 'Arafat is the corner stone of the rituals of pilgrimage. It has been narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Pilgrimage is primarily standing on the mount of 'Arafat. Whoever reaches the mount of 'Arafat before the dawn of the Tenth day of Zi Al-Hijja has performed pilgrimage. People should stay in Mena for three days but it is no problem if someone has to leave after two days only or someone wanted to stay longer."*

The time for standing on the mount of 'Arafat starts at noon on the Ninth day of Zi Al-Hijja and continues till the dawn of the tenth of Zi Al-Hijja. It was narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) stayed on 'Arafat until after the sunset of the ninth day of Zi Al-Hijja. Then he went from 'Arafat to Muzdalifah where he prayed Maghreb and Isha together. He lied down until the break of dawn on the tenth day of Zi Al-Hijja at which time he prayed Fajr.

The verse commands the believers to remember God after they have come out from 'Arafat. This is another blessing from God to be guided by Him. The early Muslims understood the meaning of this statement, since they were idolaters just few years back. They knew what it means to be misguided and confused by the mythology of idolatry.

The Arabs used to come to the markets of 'Uokaz, Mejna, and Zi Majaz for trade and to participate in poetry competitions. These competitions were the battle fields for their poets to brag about their forefathers' achievements and to boast the ethnic origins of their tribes. Islam considered these practices a waste of time and energy. Muslims now have a more important calling. The Qur'an guides them to a more worthwhile practice, *"And when you have completed your rites, celebrate the praise of God, as you used to celebrate the praise of your fathers, with far more heart and soul."* The verse derided the tribal practices of boasting and bragging. Those who come to perform the rituals of pilgrimage should be fully devoted to God. They made sacrifices in terms of money and effort to complete the rituals. One of the expressions of their devotion is to shed off their regular garments and to dress in the shrouds of Ihram. It is thus unfitting for them to be engaged in the tribal practice of boasting and bragging about their forefathers in such a setting. They should busy themselves with the praise of God. Real honour is not achieved through ancestry, but it is achieved by the remembrance of God. The new standard in life is the standard of God consciousness. This standard is further elaborated upon, *"There are men who say, 'Our Lord, give us (your bounties) in this world.' but they will have no share in the Hereafter. And there are some among them who say, 'Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire.' To these will be allotted*

*what they have earned; and God is swift in reckoning.*” During pilgrimage, there are those who are only interested in what God provides for them in the following year. They wanted more rain so that they can plant crops and raise cattle. Others had a more comprehensive approach to life; they were interested in success in this life as well as in the salvation in the Hereafter. They do not ask God for specific material gains but rather they ask God to decide what is best for them. They are content with whatever God bestows on them. Their share is guaranteed by God because He is quick in reckoning. This is a fundamental Islamic concept: those who submit their will to God and put their trust in Him will get the best reward both in this life and in the Hereafter.

Finally, the rituals of pilgrimage come to an end. This has to be celebrated by singing the praise of God, *“Celebrate the praise of God during the appointed days. But if any one hastens to leave after two days, there is no blame on him, and if any one stays on, there is no blame on him, if his aim is to do right. Then be conscious of God, and know that you will surely be gathered to Him.”* It was narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) that *“The appointed days are the days after the day of ‘Arafat, when people celebrate the praise of God.”* Abdel El-Rahman bin Mo’amer Al-Dailami said, *“The days of Mena are three, if any one hastens to leave after two days, there is no blame on him, and if any one stays on, there is no blame on him.”* The days of ‘Arafat, and the next three days are good opportunity for celebrating God’s praise. God consciousness is the criterion for the acceptance of deeds. So, remain God conscious because you will be gathered to meet Him on the day judgment.

## **Verses: 204 to 214**

204. *There is the type of people whose speech about this world's life may dazzle you, and he calls God to witness about what is in his heart; yet he is the most contentious of enemies.*
205. *When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the land and destroy crops and cattle. But God does not love mischief.*
206. *When it is said to him, "Be conscious of God", he is led by arrogance to (more) crime. Hell will settle his account, an evil resting place.*
207. *And there is the type of people who gives his life to earn the pleasure of God. And God is All-Pitying to (His) devotees.*
208. *Believers, enter whole heartedly into submission to God and follow not in the footsteps of Satan; for he is to you an avowed enemy.*
209. *If you backslide after the clear signs have come to you, then know that God is Eminent, Wise.*
210. *Are they waiting for God to come to them in canopies of clouds, with the angels? Then the matter would have been already settled. All matters go back to God.*
211. *Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs We have sent them and whoever changes the blessings of God after it has come to him, then surely God is severe in punishment.*
212. *The life of this world is made alluring to the disbelievers, and they scoff at those who believe. But those who are conscious of God will be above them on the Day of Resurrection; for God provides without measure to whom He pleases.*

213. *Humankind was one single nation, and God sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Scripture in truth, to judge between people in matters in which they disagreed. And only those to whom the Scripture was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come to them, out of mutual jealousy. And God by His will guided the believers to the truth of that concerning which they differed. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.*
214. *Or do you think that you shall enter paradise without such trials as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered tribulation and adversity, and were so shaken that even the Messenger and the believers with him cried, "When will the help of God come?" Verily, the help of God is always near." (2:204-214)*

This is a very expressive image that depicts the true nature of some people, a nature which cannot be perceived and described except by the Creator. The image of a person who appears on the surface to be kind and loving, while his inner self is bent on animosity and hatred, *"There is the type of people whose speech about this world's life may dazzle you, and he calls God to witness about what is in his heart; yet is he the most contentious of enemies."* This is the image of an extremely eloquent person who uses his eloquence to portray himself as a godly person. On the face of it, he is perceived as a loving, caring, and kind person but his heart overflows with animosity and hatred. Every one admires him and his qualities, but God knows what is in his heart. His heart is full of deceit and void of all feelings of love or empathy. A double-faced person who knows how to lie and deceive but when the time for action comes his true nature emerges and all what he does is evil, *"When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the land and destroy crops and cattle. But God does not love mischief."* His actions are all evil and he is bent on destruction and wickedness. Whenever, someone reminds him that he should be conscious of God he becomes haughty and arrogant, *"When it is said to him, 'be conscious of God', he is led by arrogance to (more) crime. Hell will settle his account, an evil resting place."*

The narrative continues to describe another kind of person at the other end of the spectrum of human nature, *"And there is the type of people who gives his life to earn the pleasure of God. And God is All-Pitying to (His) devotees."* This is a person who is completely devoted to God and dedicates all of his/her being to Him. They do not expect any worldly gain from this bargain except the pleasure of God. Ibn Katheer narrated in his interpretation of the Qur'an that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *"This verse was revealed to laud the behaviour of Suhaib bin Sanan Al-Roomi (RA), who adopted Islam and when he wanted to migrate to Medina the idolaters of Mecca refused to let him take his possessions with him. He gladly gave up all his possessions and left Mecca to Medina. On the way to Medina he met with 'Umar bin Al-Khattab and a group of Muslims. They said to him, 'God has made your bargain a profitable one,' He said, 'I pray the same for you, but what are you talking about?' They told him about the revelation of this verse and that it pertains to his situation."* It was narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) told Suhaib (RA) also that God has made his bargain with the idolaters of Mecca a profitable one. Although the verse may have been revealed to describe a particular incident but it goes beyond this to describe a model that should be followed at all times.



*“Believers, enter whole heartedly into submission to God and follow not in the footsteps of Satan; for he is to you an avowed enemy. If you backslide after the clear signs have come to you, then know that God is Eminent, Wise.”* This is a call to the believers to submit completely to God. The first basic principle of Islam is to submit fully to God. It is an absolute submission in all matters. It is a voluntary submission without coercion or compulsion. It is the submission of a person who is contented with whatever the results of this submission may be. It is a submission of a person who finds security in submitting willingly to the hand that leads to guidance and goodness. It is the submission of those who are sure of the path and destination both in this life and in the Hereafter.

Addressing the believers with such a call intimates that there were still some people who were reluctant to submit fully. It is natural that such type of people existed in the Muslim community at that time. So, the call was issued to urge these people to purify their thoughts and rid themselves of any doubt or reluctance. They should align themselves with the rest of the community and follow their prophet in secure steps.

When a Muslim accepts this call he/she is admitted to a peaceful universe. This is a universe of security and stability. It is a universe free of confusion and anxiety. Those who accept this call enjoy comprehensive peace: peace within themselves; peace with the people and the living beings around them; peace on earth and in heaven; peace with the whole universe.

The first sign of this peace is a feeling that fills the heart with a simple, clear and unequivocal fact: the Oneness of God. It is the Powerful and Almighty God toward Whom one should face and only Him one should ask. Submission to God, the only true power in this universe, frees the human beings from all kinds of fear. He is the Just and Wise God. He protects us from injustice, vain desires, and the suffering of loss. He is the Loving and Caring God who bestows His blessings on His servants. He is the Forgiving and Relenting God who forgives the sins of His servants and accepts the calls of those who are in need.

Submission to God who has these attributes creates the feeling that the believer is living under the care of God. The believer lives according to God’s law, obedient to His decrees, and moving forward to achieve God’s will. It also places the believer in a harmonious environment with the other creations of God. All follow God’s laws in harmony and collaboration. All are guided by God’s light.

Finally, they are reminded that God is Eminent and Wise. He has the power to discipline them when they err. He is Wise, so He knows what is best for them.

*“Are they waiting for God to come to them in canopies of clouds, with the angels? Then the matter would have been already settled. All matters go back to God.”* The verse questions the attitude of those who are reluctant to submit. What kind of proof are they waiting for? Are they going to wait until the horrible day comes? Are they waiting for the day when God will come in canopies of clouds and the angels will stand in line? On that day no one will dare speak unless he/she is given permission and will only say the truth. But then, the case would have been

settled: time has gone by, the opportunity has been lost, and no salvation can be achieved. It is a dramatic way to end the verse.

The narrative goes on to address the Prophet (PBUH), *“Ask the Children of Israel how many clear signs We have sent them and whoever changes the blessings of God after it has come to him, then surely God is severe in punishment.”* Ask them how many clear signs came to them and they were reluctant to submit. It is appropriate to remind the believers of the stance that the Children of Israel adopted before and warn the believers not to follow in their footsteps. It is a reminder that submission and faith are a blessing of God; one should not lose this blessing once it has been bestowed. Those who forfeit this blessing live forever in a life of insecurity, instability, and doubt.

Subsequently, a comparison between the conditions of the believers and disbelievers is made, *“The life of this world is made alluring to the disbelievers, and they scoff at those who believe. But those who are conscious of God will be above them on the Day of Resurrection; for God provides without measure to whom He pleases.”* Trivial interests and cheap gains of this life lure the disbelievers. They do not go beyond the immediate gratification they get from these pleasures. The believers look with contempt upon these worldly gains, not because they do not want to enjoy life, but because they believe that life is more than a place for instant gratification and worldly pleasures. The believers while they enjoy material pleasures of this life, they also aspire to the fulfillment of the supreme undertakings which were entrusted to humankind. The believers espouse a comprehensive outlook toward life and they believe that such an outlook is the basis for a plan that leads humankind to supreme levels of felicity. The disbelievers do not comprehend the believers’ attitude. The believers manoeuvre away from instant gratification and are not interested in immediate personal gains. They are more interested in issues that concern all humankind. They choose difficult routes and they suffer hardships because they believe in certain principles. These are actions that earn ridicule from the disbelievers. However, the measure of honour and success has been set by God. The criterion of honour and success is God consciousness. The believers should understand this, so that they could continue on their way to achieve their goals ignoring the ridicule they receive from the disbelievers. God bestows His blessings and bounties on whomsoever He wishes. He chooses those who should receive His bounty, no one controls the treasures of His bounty. He may grant the disbelievers of His bounty on earth during their lifetime for a wisdom that only He knows.

*“Humankind was one single nation, and God sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Scripture in truth, to judge between people in matters in which they disagreed. And only those to whom the Scripture was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come to them, out of mutual jealousy. And God by His will guided the believers to the truth of that concerning which they differed. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.”* This is a fundamental truth, in the beginning all people formed a single nation; they had the same way of life and the same perspective. This may be a reference to the small community which consisted of Adam, his wife and their children in the early days of humanity; when they all had the same understanding of life. Qur’an states that all people are the descendants of Adam and Eve. God willed the human race to be brought forth from a single family. It may have been a way to emphasize the importance of the role of the family in the human society. The family is the building block of the society. Humankind started with the same perspective but humanity

grew into a multitude of people who spread and developed and followed different directions and adopted different life styles depending on their abilities and aptitudes. God sent prophets with the Scripture in truth to guide and warn people. It is natural that the original group of people developed into a number of different communities, because it was the will of God that life on earth becomes diversified. Diversity is needed for humankind to fulfill their undertaking on earth, being the vicegerents of God. Diversity is needed for the successful completion of this task because this task requires the collaboration of people with different talents and aptitudes, *“And if your Lord had pleased, He would certainly have made people a single nation, and they shall continue to differ. Except those on whom your Lord has bestowed His Mercy.”* (11:118-119). Diversity in talents, aptitudes, and attitudes brings about differences in perspectives, interests, and methodologies. But God wants these differences to remain within a broad framework that guarantees the collective success of humanity. This framework is the framework of the correct faith. This is a wide and open minded framework that accepts the differences and allows creativity and talent to grow and flourish. The framework is not meant to kill or imprison diversity but aims at providing a platform to organize the collaborative efforts of the different communities effectively and successfully.

The framework should be built on a single standard to be used as a reference for settling disputes, *“And God sent messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Scripture in truth, to judge between people in matters in which they disagreed.”* The word “in truth” is the unequivocal statement that the Scripture came with the truth that should be used in settling the disputes between people. This is the only standard that should be used to settle these differences; anything else is based on people’s whims and interests. Without this standard, life on earth will be chaotic, no dispute will be settled fairly, and no peace will prevail on earth.

This concept is important in understanding that there is only one single source for the laws that can be used to settle all disputes among people. This is the source that brought down the Scripture in truth. It is the same Scripture which was revealed to different messengers. It came with the same message, to provide a single perspective of a single Lord and Creator. The details of the various revelations are different because they came to address the needs of different people at different times and different places. Islam embodied the final form of this single message.

People followed their whims and were lured by worldly interest so they strayed away from the Scripture, *“And only those to whom the Scripture was given differed concerning it, after clear proofs had come to them, out of mutual jealousy.”* Jealousy led people along different paths. But those who believed were guided because they had pure spirits and their souls aspired to the truth. *“And God by His will guided the believers to the truth of that concerning which they differed. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.”* This is the straight path that the Scripture brought, it is a program that is based on the truth and promotes the truth. God knows who among His servants are ready and able to submit themselves to Him. Those are the successful ones

*“Or do you think that you shall enter paradise without such trials as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered tribulation and adversity, and were so shaken that even the*

*Messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will the help of God come?' Verily, the help of God is always near.*" This is how God addressed the early Muslim community to bring to their attention the experiences of previous believing communities. The verse also draws the attention of the Muslim community to God's plan to prepare and train His chosen servants. These are God's servants who were designated to carry God's banner and to act as God's vicegerents on earth. The verse paints a dramatic picture of the suffering of the Muslim community which is reflected in the believers' cry, "*When will the help of God come?*" This must have been a tremendous suffering. The response was forthcoming, "*Verily, the help of God is near.*" God's help is saved for those who deserve it, those who persevere and are steadfast in face of difficulty and adversity. When a calamity strikes, the believers long to God's support; they do not seek a solution or help from any other source. They strive, persevere and dedicate themselves to God. This is the way to paradise, which they enter after passing the test.

### **Verses: 215 to 220**

215. *They ask you what they should spend in charity. Say, "Whatever you spend of wealth is for the parents and the kindred and the orphans and the needy and for the wayfarers. And whatever you do that is good, God knows it well."*
216. *Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful to you. But it is possible that you hate a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But God knows, and you do not know.*
217. *They ask you concerning warfare in the sacred month. Say, "Warfare during the sacred month is a grave offence; but it is graver, in the sight of God, to prevent access to the path of God, to disbelieve in Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and to drive out its members." Persecution is worse than killing. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can. And if any of you turn back from their faith and die as a disbeliever, their deeds will bear no fruits in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein.*
218. *Those who believed and those who fled their homes and strove hard in the path of God, they hope for the Mercy of God. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
219. *They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, "In them there is great sin, and some profit, for people; but the sin is greater than the profit." They ask you how much they should spend; Say, "What you can spare." Thus, does God make clear to you His signs, in order that you may reflect*
220. *On this life and the Hereafter. They ask you concerning the orphans. Say, "The best thing to do is what is for their good; if you mix their affairs with yours, they are your brethren; but God knows the one who means mischief from the one who means good. And if God had wished, He could have put you into difficulties. He is indeed Eminent, Wise." (2:215-220)*

*"They ask you what they should spend in charity. Say, 'whatever you spend of wealth is for the parents and the kindred and the orphans and the needy and for the wayfarers. And whatever you do that is good, God knows it well.'"* Many verses discussed charitable spending before this question was posed. Spending in the way of God was a necessity at the time of the advent of

Islam. It was necessary to help establish a Muslim community which was facing difficulties as a result of being surrounded by hostile communities. It was a tool to fulfill the collective social commitment of the community. It was also necessary to address the needs of the individuals, so that they feel that they are an integral part of the community and that they are being looked after by other members of the community. The question was then posed by a group of Muslims, “*What should we spend?*” It is a question about the kind of charity they should give. The answer came not only to explain what to spend but also to whom should the charity be given. The verse in Arabic could be understood in two different ways. The first is that charitable spending is good. It is good for the person who gives, for the person who receives, and for the whole community. The second meaning is that it is recommended that the person who is giving would give out of the best he/she has. Giving purifies the heart and enhances the spirituality of the person who is giving; in addition, it should be useful to the person who is receiving. That is why it is recommended that one should give out of the best things one owns. However, this is only a recommendation. It is obligatory that whatever is given should be in a decent condition for use.

The verse then continues to list those who are worthiest of receiving charity, “*The parents and the kindred and the orphans and the needy and for the wayfarers.*” The parents are members of the nucleus family; the relatives are members of the extended family; the orphans, the needy, and the wayfarers are members of the human family at large. Looking after these people is part of the collective social duty of the members of the community. The order given in this verse sheds light on the approach that Islam adopts in training people to become better human beings taking into consideration the essential characteristics of the human psyche. The training program takes the human being gradually, one step at a time until he/she reaches the intended target. Islam recognizes human interest in the welfare of oneself. So, the first step is to satisfy the needs of the individual, allowing the human being to enjoy a moderately comfortable life with no excesses. The Prophet (PBUH) explained that, “*The best charity is that which is given after the person him/herself becomes self-sufficient. The upper hand is better than the lower hand, and one should start with the immediate family.*” A person came to the Prophet (PBUH) with a piece of gold. He said, “*Prophet of God, this is all I have and I am giving it as a charity.*” The Prophet (PBUH) did not respond and simply turned away. The man repeated what he said a second time and the Prophet (PBUH) continued to ignore him. When the man repeated his request for the third time, the Prophet (PBUH) took the piece of gold and threw it aside. He then said to the man, “*If this is all you have then it is better for you to keep it and spend it on your family, rather than to give it away in charity and then ask people for help. The best charity is that which is given by a person who is self-sufficient.*”

The second step after becoming self-sufficient is to look after the members of one’s immediate family, to satisfy the natural instinct which God created in the human beings. The third step involves looking after members of the extended family. The fourth step is to look after the orphans, the needy, and the travelers who are members of the human family at large. The verse ends by emphasizing God’s knowledge of all forms of charity to entice the believer to dedicate his/her charity to God.

“*Warfare is ordained for you, though it is hateful to you. But it is possible that you hate a thing which is good for you, and that you love a thing which is bad for you. But God knows, and you do not know.*” Fighting in God’s cause is a difficult task, but it is a duty that has to be fulfilled. It

is necessary because it is a way to better the conditions of the Muslim individual, the Muslim community, and the whole humanity. It is a tool to establish the truth, guidance and goodness. Islam does not ignore the initial natural disposition of the human beings nor does it try to suppress the natural feelings of people. Islam does not belittle the hardships associated with fighting and recognizes that the human race in general has a natural disposition against violence. However, Islam realizes that there are other realities that need to be considered. Fighting may be hateful and difficult but there may be a greater good that materializes as a result of fighting. God knows best.

*“They ask you concerning warfare in the sacred month. Say, ‘Warfare during the sacred month is a grave offence; but it is graver, in the sight of God, to prevent access to the path of God, to disbelieve in Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and to drive out its members.’ Persecution is worse than killing. Nor will they cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith if they can. And if any of you turn back from their faith and die as a disbeliever, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein.”* The verse states clearly the sanctity of the sacred month. The Muslims did not transgress by starting a fight during the sacred month, but it was the idolaters who prevented access to the Sacred House. The idolaters committed capital sins against God and violated the sanctity of the sacred month and defiled the Sacred House. They oppressed and tortured the Muslims and forced them out of their homes. This is greater in the sight of God than fighting during the sacred month.

The idolaters raised the issue of fighting in the Sacred Month as an excuse to portray the Muslims as transgressors, while they themselves were the ones who violated the sanctity of the Sacred Month and the Sacred House in the first place. The idolaters will continue to fight the Muslims until they turn them away from their faith, if they could. The enemies of Islam will take recourse to all kinds of tricks and acts of deception to turn Muslims away from their faith; Muslims should be on the alert not to let this happen. A warning is issued for those who capitulate to these efforts. Those who surrender and turn away from their faith and die as disbelievers will lose all the fruits of their deeds in this life and in the Hereafter. Those who strive constantly in the way of God seeking and never despairing of God’s mercy will not be disappointed, *“Those who believed and those who fled their homes and strove hard in the path of God, they hope for the Mercy of God. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

*“They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say, ‘In them there is great sin, and some profit, for people; but the sin is greater than the profit.’”* Up until this time, the revelation was silent regarding the status of drinking and gambling. Earlier, the Quran hinted that there is a difference between alcohol and good provision *“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get wine and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who reason.”* (16:67). This was an indirect way to state that there is a difference between wine and wholesome provision. However, no specific strategy was suggested for the prohibition. This verse was the first step in Islam’s strategy to prohibit drinking and gambling. The verse points to the criterion that can be used to render something lawful or unlawful. Many things may have mixed shares of good and evil. However, if the evil that will accrue as a result of the usage of something is more than the

good that may accrue, then this thing should be made unlawful. The verse points to the criterion but stops short of declaring these items unlawful. We can detect from this verse and others, the Islamic approach in dealing with social issues. The fundamentals of faith were stated clearly, unequivocally, and decisively from the start. On the other hand, Islam adopts a gradual strategy in dealing with issues that are related to old established habits and entrenched traditions. The strategy is based on developing an environment conducive to the changes that Islam wishes to implement.

Since its inception, Islam dealt decisively and unequivocally with the question of the belief in the Oneness of God. The concept of associating partners with God was rejected outright from the beginning. No compromise was accepted. The fundamentals of faith were declared from the outset.

However, Islam recognizes that changing social habits and old traditions cannot happen overnight. Outlawing drinking and gambling needed a gradual program. The first step was to highlight the difference between intoxicants and wholesome provision, *“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get wine and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who reason.”* (16:67). This was an indirect way to state that there is a difference between wine and wholesome provision. The second step was taken to alert people to the evil that accrues from drinking and gambling, and to motivate them to think about this evil. The third step came in verse 43 of Sura 4, *“Believers, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say.”* (4:43) This did not leave much time for drinking, since Muslims had to perform five prayers every day. The prayer times are distributed over the hours of the day in close intervals. This minimized the time available for drinking. It broke the cycle for the alcoholics who were habituated to drinking at specific times. The fourth step declared the prohibition in no uncertain terms, *“Believers, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and divination by arrows, are an abomination of Satan's handwork eschew such (abomination), that you may succeed.”* (5:90)

The narrative continued to establish Islamic principles in the form of answers to questions which were posed to the Prophet (PBUH) by his companions, *“They ask you how much they are to spend; Say, ‘What you can spare.’ Thus, does God make clear to you His signs, in order that you may reflect.”* The question was asked before and the answer came to specify the kind of items that can be given in the form of charity and who is worthiest to receive this charity. This time the response dealt with other aspects of charitable spending: the amount. One can spend whatever one can spare after the personal needs have been reasonably addressed. This kind of charitable spending is different from the obligatory poor-dues (Zakat); it is over and above the prescribed poor-dues. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“There is spending obligation beyond the prescribed poor-dues (Zakat).”* One should seek God’s pleasure by fulfilling this obligation. The Muslims were then commanded to reflect on matters related to this life and the Hereafter. This reflection enhances the spirituality, and minimizes the selfish attitudes of human beings. It opens up windows for people to understand the benefits of charitable spending both at the personal level and at the societal level. The individual gains purity of the heart which more than make up for the money spent in charity. The society gains when the needs of the destitute are addressed and feelings of need are replaced by contentment and security. Reflecting on the Hereafter puts these benefits in perspective.

*“They ask you concerning the orphans. Say, ‘The best thing to do is what is for their good; if you mix their affairs with yours, they are your brethren;’ but God knows the one who means mischief from the one who means good. And if God had wished, He could have put you into difficulties. He is indeed Eminent, Wise.”* Collective social responsibility is a basic principle in the establishment of the Islamic society. The Muslim community as a whole has a duty to protect the welfare of the vulnerable in the society. The orphans are among the most vulnerable in the society. It is the duty of the society to look after their welfare. Legal guardians used to invest the wealth of the orphans under their care in joint business activities. Sometimes it was difficult to distribute the revenues fairly among the different partners and the orphans may not get their fair share. When the Qur’an warned against this practice, some legal guardians became overzealous in protecting the interest of the orphans under their care. In some cases, this resulted in a hardship to the guardian and lost opportunities to the orphans. This verse came down to rectify this situation. Joint business activities are allowed as long as the intention is to promote the interests of the orphan. Deeds are not judged according to superficial technicalities but by the substance and the results they achieve. God does not want people to suffer unnecessarily, and He knows their intentions.

## **Verses: 221 to 242**

221. *Do not marry idolatresses, until they believe. A believing slave woman is better than an idolatress woman, even though she pleases you. Nor marry your girls to idolaters until they believe. A believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he pleases you. These beckon to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to paradise and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to humankind, that they may remember.*
222. *They ask you (Prophet) about menstruation. Say, “It is a painful condition, so let women alone at such times and do not approach them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as God has enjoined upon you. Truly, God loves those who turn to Him often, and loves those who purify themselves.*
223. *Your wives are your tilth so approach your tilth as you may desire; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and be conscious of God. And know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give good tidings to the believers.*
224. *And do not let your oaths in the name of God to become a hindrance to your being righteous and conscious of Him and making peace among people. God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
225. *God will not take you to task for your unintentional oaths. But He will take you to task for the intention in your hearts; and He is All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing.*
226. *Those who take an oath for abstention from their wives must wait for four months. If then they change their minds, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
227. *And if they decide upon divorce, then indeed God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
228. *Divorced women shall wait, before remarrying, for three monthly periods. It is unlawful for them to hide what God has created in their wombs, if they have faith in God and the Last Day. And their husbands would be better to take them back during this period, if they wish for reconciliation. The wives are owed obligations the like of those*



*they owe, in an honorable way. But men have a degree (of precedence) over them. And God is Eminent, Wise.*

229. *A divorce is only permissible twice. After that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness. It is not lawful for you, (Men), to take back any of your gifts (from your wives), except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by God. If you (judges) do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by God, there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom. These are the limits ordained by God; so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by God, such persons are wrongdoers.*
230. *So if a husband divorces his wife irrevocably, he cannot, after that, re-marry her until after she has married another husband and that husband has divorced her. In that case, there is no blame on either of them if they remarry; provided they feel that they can keep the limits ordained by God. Such are the limits ordained by God, which He makes plain to those who know.*
231. *When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to harm them, or to take undue advantage; if any one does that; He wrongs his own soul. Do not treat God's verses as a jest, but remember God's blessings on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And be conscious of God, and know that God is well acquainted with all things.*
232. *When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms. This is an admonition for him among you who believe in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous for you and purer. God knows and you know not.*
233. *Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years for those who wish to complete the suckling. The duty of feeding and clothing nursing mothers in a seemly manner is upon the father of the child. No one should be charged beyond his capacity. A mother should not be made to suffer because of her child, nor should he to whom the child is born be made to suffer because of his child. And it is incumbent on the father's heir the like of that which was incumbent on the father. If they desire to wean the child by mutual consent and after consultation, it is no sin for them. And if you wish to give your children out to nurse, it is no sin for you, provided that you pay what is due from you in kindness. Remain conscious of God, and know that God sees all what you do.*
234. *If any of you die and leave widows behind, they shall wait for four months and ten days before they remarry. When they have fulfilled their term, there is no blame on you if they dispose of themselves in a just and reasonable manner. And God is well acquainted with what you do.*
235. *There is no blame on you if you make an offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts. God knows that you cherish them in your hearts. But do not make a secret contract with them except in honourable terms, nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the prescribed term is fulfilled. And know that God knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that God is All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing.*
236. *There is no blame on you if you divorce women before consummation of marriage or the fixation of their dower; but make fair provision for them; the rich according to his*

- means, and the poor according to his means. A provision of a reasonable amount is due from those who wish to do the right thing.*
237. *And if you divorce them before consummation of marriage, but after the fixation of a dower for them, then give them half the dower, unless they waive their right or the person in whose hands is the marriage tie waives the right. To waive the right is nearest to God consciousness. And do not forget kindness between yourselves. For God sees well all that you do.*
238. *Maintain with care the obligatory prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand up before God in complete devotion.*
239. *If you are in danger, pray on foot, or riding, but when you are in security, remember God in the manner He has taught you, which you knew not before.*
240. *Those of you who die and leave widows should bequest for their widows a year's maintenance and residence. But if they leave (the residence), there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves, provided it is reasonable. And God is Eminent, Wise.*
241. *For divorced women a fair maintenance should be provided. This is a duty for all who are conscious of God*
242. *Thus, God makes clear His revelations to you, in order that you may understand. (2:221-242)*

*“Do not marry idolatresses, until they believe. A believing slave woman is better than an idolatress woman, even though she pleases you. Nor marry your girls to idolaters until they believe. A believing slave is better than an idolater, even though he pleases you. These beckon you to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to paradise and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to humankind, that they may remember.”* Marriage is the most intimate, the strongest, and the most exclusive relationship between two members of the human race. For the relationship to continue it must be based on two strongly bonded loving hearts. A strong bond between two hearts has to be based on an agreement of the fundamental principles on which their way of life will be built. The most important factor that shapes a way of life is the faith of the person. This verse came to determine some of the basic characteristics of marriage in Islam. These rules applied only to new marriages which were consummated after these verses had been revealed. Old marriages which were in existence at that time were exempted from these rules until year 6 (H), when a verse in Sura 60 was revealed to disallow such marriages, *“Believers, when there come to you believing women as refugees, examine them, God knows best as to their faith; if you ascertain that they are believers, then do not send them back to the disbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the disbelievers, nor are the (disbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. But pay the disbelievers what they have spent (on their dower), and there will be no blame on you if you marry them on payment of their dower to them. But hold not to the guardianship of disbelieving women;”* (60:10).

The verse prohibits marriage between Muslim men and idolatresses, and between Muslim women and idolaters. It is felt that a bond between two people who do not share the same faith is a shaky bond. A meeting of the hearts around the love of God produces a strong bond between them and protects the bond from being easily dissolvable. A marriage relationship should not be based only on physical infatuation but also on a spiritual bond between the spouses. This spiritual bond connects the two hearts with God, hence the unequivocal statement, *“Do not*

*marry idolatresses, until they believe.*” The obstacle in the way of such marriage is cleared once they become believers. Physical infatuation alone is not a good basis to build a successful marriage relationship on. Therefore, *“A believing slave woman is better than an idolatress woman, even though she pleases you.”* The same principle applies to marriages between idolaters and believing women for the same reasons. The reason is emphasized, *“These beckon to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to paradise and forgiveness.”* The idolaters and the believers lead different ways of life based on different sets of beliefs. Such differences cannot be reconciled and usually result in the eventual failure of the marriage. But, do the idolaters actually beckon their spouses to Hell fire? Who would want to beckon himself/herself or others to Hell fire? The verse states the end result of a way of life which is based on idolatry. Idolatry promotes practices which lead to Hell fire. Joining an idolater in matrimony is like being beckoned to Hell fire.

It should be pointed out that God did not prohibit marriage between a Muslim man and a woman from the People of the Scripture, even though each one of them would profess a different religion. Judaism, Christianity and Islam may differ in the details and the laws of each but they all share the essence of the belief in God.

Some scholars raised the question about whether the belief in the Trinity renders a Christian woman an idolatress. There is a consensus among the scholars that the verse in Sura 5, *“Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who disbelieve will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers,”* (5:5) applies to Christian and Jewish women even if some of them may believe in the Trinity. However, some scholars disagree with this opinion. Al-Bukhari narrated that ‘Umar bin Al-Khattab (RA) has this opinion, he said, *“I don’t know a stronger statement that indicates associating partners with God than saying Jesus is the son of God.”*

A Muslim woman, on the other hand, is not allowed to marry a Christian man or a Jew. When a Muslim woman is married to a non-Muslim, she follows her husband and joins his family. This deprive the children of having the opportunity to grow in an Islamic environment. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the husband may not recognize the right of his wife to practice her faith. Islam grants Christian and Jewish women who marry Muslim men the right to practice their religion. A Christian or a Jewish man has no such obligation. He may allow or does not allow his wife to practice her religion depending on his own attitude.

*“They ask you (Prophet) about menstruation. Say, ‘It is a painful condition, so let women alone at such times and do not approach them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as God has enjoined upon you. Truly God loves those who turn to Him, and loves those who purify themselves.’ Your wives are your tilth so approach your tilth as you may desire; but do some good act for your souls beforehand; and be conscious of God. And know that you are to meet Him (in the Hereafter), and give good tidings to the believers.”* This is a fine gesture that raises the objectives of the relationship between husband and wife to higher levels even when discussing physical intimacy between the two spouses. Sexual

intercourse is not an end in itself but it is a means to a higher goal, the goal of the continuation of life on earth. Sexual intercourse during menstruation, in addition to the inauspicious health consequences for both the man and the woman, does not contribute to the achievement of this higher goal. The physical uncleanness associated with this condition is not conducive to the expected physical enjoyment. The verse disallows sexual intercourse during menstruation, but once women are cleansed then it is allowable to, *“go in unto them as God has enjoined upon you,”* which indicates that sexual intercourse should be only through the female reproductive organs. Sexual pleasure is not the only objective but the goal is the continuation of life and seeking and enjoying what God has made lawful. A Muslim should seek and enjoy what has been made lawful, because God allows that which purifies His servants; the servants who repent when they err and return to God seeking His forgiveness, *“Truly God loves those who turn to Him, and loves those who purify themselves.”*

The narrative continued to discuss another aspect of the intimate relationship between husband and wife, *“Your wives are your tilth, so approach your tilth as you may desire;”* This precise expression points to the nature and objective of this relationship. However, it does not give a comprehensive treatment of the topic. Other dimensions of the relationship between a husband and his wife have been addressed in verses in Sura 2 and Sura 30, *“They are your garments and you are their garments.”* (2:187) and, *“And among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in with them in tranquility, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts).”* (30:21) These verses address different dimensions of the relationship between husbands and wives. However, the focus of the present verses is on procreation, hence the use of the word “tilth.” The word “tilth” brings the connotation of tillage, fertility, and growth to the picture, which is most fitting to the subject of procreation. Sexual intercourse is allowed any way the couple desire, as long as it is done through the female reproduction organs. In the meantime, one should keep in mind the fact that sexual intercourse is only one aspect of the husband-wife relationship. One should also keep in mind that all human activities are acts of worship provided that the intention is to seek the pleasure of God. This is achieved through God consciousness. God gives His glad tidings to those who follow His commands.

*“And do not let your oaths in the name of God to become a hindrance to your being righteous and conscious of Him and making peace among humankind. God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) said, *“Do not take an oath that prevents you from doing something good. If you do, you should absolve yourself of this oath by offering a ransom.”* Doing good for the benefit of people and society takes precedence over keeping an oath. A practical example for this was given by Abu Bakr (RA); he used to give charity to one of his relatives by the name of Mostah. When he came to know that Mostah was slandering his daughter, ‘Aiysha (the mother of the believers - RA), he vowed to stop giving Mostah the charity he used to give. When the verse, *“And let not those who possess dignity and abundance of wealth among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and those who migrated for the cause of God. Let them pardon and forbear. Do not you love that God may forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy,”* (24:22) was revealed Abu Bakr (RA) broke his oath and paid the ransom. God is merciful to people, so He decreed that ransom should be paid only in case of breaking a premeditated oath. Breaking an unintentional oath is forgiven and does not warrant a ransom, *“God will not take you to task for your unintentional oaths. But He will take you to task for the intention in your hearts;*

*and He is All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing.*” Abu Dawoud narrated on the authority of ‘Aiysha (RA), that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Unintentional oaths are the oaths that one makes as part of normal speech and come out spontaneously, like saying, ‘by God no.’”* It was also narrated that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“Unintentional oaths are the oaths that one makes in anger.”* He also said, *“Unintentional oaths are oaths which may attempt to render unlawful that what God made lawful.”*

It may be concluded from these traditions that breaking unintentional oaths which come out inadvertently during one’s usual speech without a well thought out intention behind them are forgiven without a ransom. Breaking a premeditated oath which is made by a person who has the full intention to follow on with his/her oath is a sin and a ransom has to be paid to atone for the sin. A premeditated oath that will result in good to cease or evil to befall should be broken. The person who made the oath should pay the ransom in this case. The verse commanding the believers to break an oath if it is going to hinder doing good ends by stating that God is, *“All-Hearing, Omniscient,”* to remind the believers that God hears everything and knows what is best for them. The verse talking about the unintentional oaths ends by stating that God is, *“All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing,”* to emphasize the kindness and mercy of God in dealing with the shortcomings of the believers.

*“Those who take an oath for abstention from their wives must wait for four months. If then they change their minds, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. And if they decide upon divorce, then God is surely All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* Some husbands, for one reason or another, may take an oath not to have sexual relationship with their wives. This may be caused by tensions between a husband and his wife. This practice is hurtful and degrading to the wife. It usually results in the creation of an inimical environment at home which leads to family life disruption and eventually to the breaking up of the marriage. This practice was prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. Islam did not disallow this practice in the beginning because it may have been a solution to some marital problems. However, Islam established certain rules that govern the procedure with the purpose of curbing the power of the husband and to protect the rights of the wives. Thus, the verse came with a ruling to limit the duration of the abstention to a maximum of four months.

*“Divorced women shall wait before remarrying for three monthly periods. It is unlawful for them to hide what God has created in their wombs, if they have faith in God and the Last Day. And their husbands would be better to take them back during this period, if they wish for reconciliation. The wives are owed obligations the like of those they owe, in an honorable way. But men have a degree (of precedence) over them. And God is Eminent, Wise.”*

The expression *“three monthly periods”* was interpreted to mean three menstruation periods or three menstruation-free periods depending on the school of thought. The word used for *“waiting”* in the verse has a far deeper meaning than just waiting. Reflecting on this word in Arabic leads one to conclude that it has the connotation of *“waiting with anticipation.”* Linguistically it means waiting without marriage until the specified period has passed, but the word used in the Qur’an describes a mental state where the divorcee is looking forward eagerly for the waiting period to end so that she can remarry. This is a natural feeling since someone in that situation would be eager to prove that the breakup of the marriage was not her fault and that she is still capable of

entering into a new successful marriage relationship. The man may not have the same predicament since he is the one who initiated the divorce.

The reason a divorcee has to wait for a period of three months before remarrying is to make sure that she is not pregnant. The verse refers to pregnancy as God's creation to evoke feelings of God consciousness in the heart of the would-be mother so she does not conceal the fact that she is pregnant. Concealment of pregnancy goes against the fact that she believes in God and the Last Day.

Another reason for the waiting period is to use it as a cooling off period. Reconciliation may still be possible if the husband and wife get the opportunity to think it over, after the initial state of anger that may have precipitated the divorce has subsided.

Divorce is allowed; but it is the most hated thing in the sight of God. It is a terminal solution that must not be sought until all other possible means to mend the differences between the husband and wife have been tried and failed. Other verses in the Qur'an describe the process that a couple should follow when they have differences that may lead to a divorce. Divorce can only be effected during a period of ritual cleanliness for the wife after she had finished a menstruation period. This shorter waiting period may also be used to help mend the relationship between the husband and wife. The first revocable divorce is followed by a waiting period which serves as a time for the couple to discover their true feelings about living together. If they discover that they are able to sort out their differences and resume their married life again, then they are allowed to resume their marital life, *"And their husbands would be better to take them back during this period, if they wish for reconciliation."* This is provided that they truly wish for reconciliation. *"The wives are owed obligations the like of those they owe, in an honorable way. But men have a degree (of precedence) over them. And God is Eminent, Wise."* I think that the degree of precedence mentioned here is specific to this situation and it is not a universal right for men. It may mean that if the man is the one who initiated the divorce, then he has the right to annul the divorce allowing marital life to resume again. God is Eminent and Wise. He knows what is best for people, so they should follow these rules carefully. It must be emphasized that the verse only allows this degree of precedence in the present context. It is not a universal right for men as may be understood by some.

The next verse deals with the details of the process of divorce before it becomes final, *"A divorce is only permissible twice. After that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness. It is not lawful for you, (Men), to take back any of your gifts (from your wives), except when both parties fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by God. If you (judges) do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep the limits ordained by God, there is no blame on either of them if she gives something for her freedom. These are the limits ordained by God; so do not transgress them. If any do transgress the limits ordained by God, such persons are wrongdoers."* A couple is allowed two revocable divorces before a divorce becomes final. After each of the revocable divorces, the couple may resume their married life again if they so wish. A third divorce is final. Once the divorce became final, it is illegal for them to resume their married life again. If the wife gets married to someone else and gets another final divorce, then she can remarry the first husband if they so wished.

This rule was revealed to rectify a bad practice that was prevalent among the Arabs before Islam. Some men who wanted to torment their wives took recourse to a bad practice. A husband would divorce his wife, then reconcile with her and they would return back to their married life; then he would divorce her again, and they resume their married life, only to repeat the whole process again. Life thus, is spent in a vicious circle. The situation becomes so overwhelming and the woman would be immersed in a dilemma to the extent that she would not know the current state of her marriage. In the mean time she cannot get a final divorce to enable her to marry someone else. So, the Islamic rule limited the number of revocable divorces to two after which the divorce becomes final.

*“So if a husband divorces his wife irrevocably, he cannot, after that, remarry her until after she has married another husband and that husband has divorced her. In that case, there is no blame on either of them if they remarry; provided they feel that they can keep the limits ordained by God. Such are the limits ordained by God, which He makes plain to those who know.”* There is no hope that couples who reach the stage of final divorce can lead a normal married life together. In this case, it is best that each one of them gets the chance to try another partner. This process is a deterrent for those men who do not take these issues seriously. However, if the woman married someone else and was later divorced from her second husband and wanted to remarry the first one, then they are allowed to remarry, provided that they thought about it deeply and accepted the limits ordained by God. These limits have been made very clear.

*“When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to harm them, or to take undue advantage; if any one does that, He wrongs his own soul. Do not treat God's verses as a jest, but remember God's blessings on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And be conscious of God, and know that God is well acquainted with all things. When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms. This is an admonition for him among you who believes in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous for you and purer. God knows, and you know not.”* Married life should be based on kindness, equity, and love. These values should continue to be observed by the husband and the wife, even when the marriage breaks up. Men should not harbour the intention to hurt their wives or subject them to duress. Only a true belief in God will induce men to observe these values and to behave accordingly. Believers should remember the blessings that God bestowed on them. They should express their gratitude by following His rules. They should be conscientious in dealing with their wives whether they are happily married or they are contemplating a divorce.

Women were badly treated before Islam. A woman was oppressed as a baby. She was either put to death as a victim of infanticide or let to live a humiliating life. A woman was oppressed as wife by being treated as chattel. A woman was oppressed as a divorcee. She did not have the right to remarry unless she was granted permission by her previous husband and her family. Islam came to change all this. Islam declared that men and women share the same origin of life. Men were commanded to treat their wives kindly, because treating one's wife kindly is an act of worship. God blessed the humanity with these rights without anyone asking for them.

Before the end of the waiting period referred to previously, they have to make up their minds: either mend things up and pick up their lives from where they left it before the occurrence of the revocable divorce, or finalize the divorce. This is what meant by, *“either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to harm them, or to take undue advantage.”* Men were commanded not to harm their wives. An example of the bad practices against women at that time is exemplified in a man’s saying to his wife, “I will neither take you back as a wife, nor will I divorce you.” This is the kind of treatment that was abolished by Islam. Islam accomplished this by establishing the principle that whoever treats his wife badly has transgressed against himself. A wife is a sister in Islam, he who wrongs his sister in Islam wronged himself. In addition, these verses expound the rules that govern the relationship between a husband and his wife, he who does not take these rules seriously has wronged himself because he took God’s Book in jest. Then men are reminded of the power of God and their duty toward Him, *“And be conscious of God, and know that God is well acquainted with all things.”*

The rules also indicated the right of a divorced woman to remarry her previous husband after the waiting period has elapsed, *“When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms.”*

Termidhi narrated on the authority of Mo’qal bin Yassar (RA), he said, *“My sister was married to a man, during the time of the Prophet (PBUH). They stayed together for some time, and then they were divorced. After the waiting period had elapsed her previous husband proposed to her again but I refused to let my sister accept her previous husband’s proposal. When the verse, ‘When you divorce women, and they have fulfilled the appointed waiting period, do not prevent them from marrying their (former) husbands, if they mutually agree on equitable terms,’ was revealed, I had no choice but to obey the command and bless my sister’s marriage to her previous husband.”*

These rules aimed at addressing the needs of people and simplifying their lives. The rules exemplify the grace of God on His servants, *“This is an admonition for him among you who believes in God and the Last Day. That is more virtuous for you and purer. God knows and you know not.”* This verse aims at touching the hearts of people to listen and obey. Reminding them that following the rules is more virtuous and purer for them is an incentive for them to follow the rules. This is an admonition from God to those who believe in God and the Last Day. The belief in God and the Last Day opens the hearts to receive God’s admonitions. The heart of a believer yearns to a way to please God and enjoy the security and purity that this belief brings. The connection between laws that govern the issues of daily life and the worship of God is emphasized, which highlights the Islamic holistic approach to life.

*“Mothers shall suckle their children for two whole years for those who wish to complete the suckling. The duty of feeding and clothing nursing mothers in a seemly manner is upon the father of the child. No one should be charged beyond his capacity. A mother should not be made to suffer because of her child, nor should he to whom the child is born be made to suffer because of his child. And it is incumbent on the father's heir the like of that which was incumbent on the father. If they desire to wean the child by mutual consent and after consultation, it is no sin for them. And if you wish to give your children out to nurse, it is no sin for you, provided that you*



*pay what is due from you in kindness. Remain conscious of God, and know that God sees all what you do.*” The initial natural disposition of a mother would normally prevent her from relinquishing her responsibility to suckle her newborn. But the Qur’an does not leave such a serious responsibility for the disposition of the mother because the dispute between the husband and the wife which precipitated a divorce may affect that disposition. To protect the right of the vulnerable newborn, the Qur’an commands divorced mothers to suckle their newborn babies for a period of two years. This seems to be an ideal suckling period which provides sufficient physical and mental nourishment for the newborn. In return, the husband has the responsibility to provide decent levels of feeding and clothing for the nursing mother. Thus, the baby continues to enjoy the collaborative efforts of his parents even after they were divorced. This collaboration has to be done kindly and decently, neither the mother nor the father should take this as an excuse to make the other suffer. God is Merciful and Kind and He does not burden any soul beyond its capacity. If the father dies, his heir should carry out that undertaking on his behalf. The heir should ensure that the rights of the nursing mother and her baby are fulfilled.

The parents can, after a mutual agreement has been reached, wean the baby before the end of the two-year term mentioned earlier, if it is in the best interest of the baby. In addition, the father can hire someone to nurse the baby if it is the wish of the parents and it is deemed to be in the best interest of the baby to do so. All of these rules are rooted in the concept of God consciousness.

*“If any of you die and leave widows behind, they shall wait for four months and ten days before they remarry. When they have fulfilled their term, there is no blame on you if they dispose of themselves in a just and reasonable manner. And God is well acquainted with what you do. There is no blame on you if you make an indirect offer of betrothal or hold it in your hearts. God knows that you cherish them in your hearts. But do not make a secret contract with them except in honourable terms, nor resolve on the tie of marriage till the prescribed term is fulfilled. And know that God knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him; and know that God is All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing.”* Widows used to be subjected to a great deal of suffering in the pre-Islamic Arabian society. The mourning period for a widow in pre-Islamic Arabian society was a full year, during such time the widow would stay in seclusion, badly dressed, and she would not be allowed to touch perfume. At the end of the year the widow would perform a number of silly and absurd rituals. Islam abolished these practices and limited the mourning period to four months and ten days. Once the mourning period is completed, a widow is free to entertain a marriage proposal if someone showed interest and if she so wished.

Men are also taught the etiquette of dealing with widows during their mourning period. A man is not allowed to propose to a widow during her mourning period. A mourning period is a period of anguish, sadness, and uncertainty. Open marriage proposals during this period may subject a widow to further stress and uncertainty. It is therefore only permissible to intimate an interest in marriage during this period. However, it is allowable for a man to entertain the desire to marry a woman while she is still in the mourning period. Marriage desires are natural feelings and Islam does not suppress natural feelings but only refines them. But, it is not allowed to propose secretly before the end of the mourning period nor should a man even have the resolve to tie the marriage knot. The verse ends with a warning, *“God knows what is in your hearts, and take heed of Him,”*

This is a link between legal matters and inner feelings. Believers are exhorted to refine their inner feelings to go along with the rules which govern the lawful and unlawful. But God is, “*All-Forgiving, Most Forbearing,*” the opportunity to repent is always there.

*“There is no blame on you if you divorce women before consummation of marriage or the fixation of their dower; but make fair provision for them; the rich according to his means, and the poor according to his means. A provision of a reasonable amount is due from those who wish to do the right thing. And if you divorce them before consummation of marriage, but after the fixation of a dower for them, then give them half the dower, unless they waive their right or the person in whose hands is the marriage tie waives the right. To waive the right is nearest to God consciousness. And do not forget kindness between yourselves, for God sees well all that you do.”* These verses explain the rules which govern the cases of women who were divorced before their marriages had been consummated. There are two cases.

The first case is the case of a woman who was divorced before the consummation of the marriage and a dower was not yet specified. Since, it is a legal duty for a man to give his bride a dower; he has to give his divorcee a gift according to his means. In a way, it is a gift that may make up partly for the bad experience that the divorced woman went through. Giving a gift at such time may ameliorate the bad feelings that accompany a broken marriage. The amount of the gift should be according to the means of the man, “*the rich according to his means, and the poor according to his means,*” no one should carry a burden beyond his capability. However, men should remember that this is the right thing to do.

The second case is the case of a woman who was divorced before the consummation of the marriage but the dower had been specified. In this case the man has to pay half the specified dower. But the divorced woman, or the person that the woman delegated to conduct the marriage procedure on her behalf (in case of a young woman), may agree to waive her legal right to the dower. Waiving the legal right out of her own free will creates an atmosphere of generosity and amity. This reflects the true essence of Islam which makes kindness and generosity in treating people an act of worship.

A reminder of the obligatory prayer is squeezed in the middle of verses dealing with divorce rules. “*Maintain with care the obligatory prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand up before God in complete devotion. If you are in danger, pray on foot, or riding, but when you are in security, remember God in the manner He has taught you, which you knew not before.*” This is a command to perform prayers at the set times and in the best form. There is a difference in opinion about what was meant by the middle prayer. However, there is a strong indication that it refers to afternoon (‘Asr) prayer. This is based on a tradition that the Prophet (PBUH) during the battle of the Trench said, “*They distracted us to pray the middle prayer, the ‘Asr prayer, and may God fill their hearts and their homes with fire.*” At that time, Muslims used sometimes to speak to each other while they were performing prayer. The command to stand in complete devotion to God during prayers indicates that during prayer people should not busy themselves with anything except the prayer. When this verse was revealed, the rule that talking while prayer is not permitted was established.

Prayer should be performed at all times as prescribed, even when the believers are in a state of fear of an impending attack from the enemy. However, at times of fear, a different format for prayer is used to suit the situation. In this case, Muslims are allowed to pray while on their mounts and not necessarily facing toward the Qibla. Kneeling and prostrating are replaced with light gestures by the head. This format differs from the one described in Sura 4. The format mentioned in Sura 4, indicates that Muslims would be divided into two groups, one group would perform the prayer and the second would stand guard behind them. Then the two groups exchange places. The present verse gives the format when fighting is going on and there is no chance to form lines. This underscores the importance which Islam attaches to prayers. Prayer plays a cardinal role in Islam. It is the support that the Muslim relies on in times of adversity or fear. The sword in the hand and the prayer in the heart are the weapons that the believers use to defend themselves against the enemy. *“But when you are in security, remember God in the manner He has taught you, which you knew not before,”* and if it were not for the knowledge bestowed by God, how can humans know?

After this brief interjection, which emphasized a fundamental principle in Islam: obeying God’s law in all aspects of life is an act of worship, the narrative returns to the discussion of marriage and divorce rules. *“Those of you who die and leave widows should bequest for their widows a year’s maintenance and residence. But if they leave (the residence), there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves, provided it is reasonable. And God is Eminent Wise.”* The verse determines the right of a widow to be supported by her deceased husband for a period of one year. The mourning period, as has been mentioned before, is only four months and ten days after which the woman can enjoy her normal life but she still maintains her right for the support for a period of one year. Some scholars are of the opinion that the previous verse abrogates this one, but there is no need to conclude that there is a contradiction between the two verses which requires that one of them abrogates the other. The rationale for our argument is that the first verse states a duty that the woman should fulfill while the present verse states a right the woman should enjoy. So there is no contradiction between the two verses.

*“For divorced women a fair maintenance should be provided. This is a duty for all who are conscious of God.”* This is a fair recompense for any divorced woman to mend the wounds that have been caused by the process of divorce. The rules have been detailed in a clear exposition for the believers to reflect on the rationale behind them, the mercy that engulfs them, and the blessings which they represent, *“Thus, God makes clear His revelations to you, in order that you may understand.”*

### **Verses: 243 to 252**

243. *Have you not considered those who went forth from their homes, for fear of death, and they were thousands, then God said to them, “Die!” And then He brought them to life again. Most surely God is gracious to people, but most people are not grateful.*

244. *Fight in the cause of God, and know that God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*

245. *Who is he that will lend God a beautiful loan, which God will multiply to him manifold? It is God who withholds and who gives abundantly, and to Him shall be your return.*

246. *Have you not considered the chiefs of the Children of Israel after Moses, when they said to a prophet of theirs, “Raise up for us a king that we may fight in the way of God?” He said,*

*“May it not be that you would not fight if fighting is ordained for you?” They said, “And what reason have we that we should not fight in the way of God, when we and our children have indeed been driven out of our homes?” But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned back, except a few of them, and God knows the wrongdoers.*

247. *Their Prophet said to them, “God has appointed Saul as king over you.” They said, “How can he have dominion over us when we are more deserving of the dominion than him, and he is not even gifted with wealth in abundance?” He said, “God has chosen him above you, and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess. God grants His authority to whom He pleases. God is Vast, Omniscient.”*

248. *And their Prophet said to them, “A Sign of his dominion is that there shall come to you the Ark of the covenant. In it peace from your Lord, and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron, carried by the angels. In this is a sign for you if you are indeed believers.”*

249. *When Saul set out with the armies, he said, “God will test you with a stream, whoever drinks of its water will not belong with me. Only those who do not taste it will belong with me. A mere sip out of the hand is excused.” But they all drank of it, except a few. When they crossed the river, he and the faithful ones with him, they said, “This day we cannot cope with Goliath and his forces.” But those who were certain that they will meet God, said, “How often, by God's will, has a small force overcome a mighty one? God is with those who persevere.”*

250. *When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed, “Our Lord, bestow perseverance on us and make our foothold firm. Help us against the disbelievers.”*

251. *So they defeated them by God's leave and David slew Goliath; and God gave him the dominion and the wisdom, and taught him of that which He wills. And if God had not repelled some people by others the earth would have been corrupted. But God is Gracious to all the worlds.*

252. *These are the revelations of God. We recite them to you in truth. Verily you are one of the messengers. (2:243-252)*

*“Have you not considered those who went forth from their homes, for fear of death, and they were thousands, then God said to them, ‘Die!’ And then He brought them to life again. Most surely God is gracious to people, but most people are not grateful.”* The verse does not specify who the people who went out of their homes were, where they lived, nor when this incident took place. We don't want to speculate on answers to these questions because if God wanted us to know the specific answers to these questions He would have mentioned these details. The narrative's objective is to reflect on the meaning of life and death. The moral of the story is that life and death are controlled by the will of God. No one can avoid death and no amount of care can delay its occurrence. God gives life and only He controls its end. There is a great divine wisdom behind the cycle of life and death. Life and death are blessings from God, and His divine power guarantees the benefit of humankind in either case. This large group of people went out from their homes in a panic, fleeing death. It is not known exactly what type of death causing danger they were fleeing. They may have been fleeing death at the hands of an enemy or because of an epidemic. However, they did not succeed in their attempt because God wanted them dead. He said, “Die!” and they died. How God said this, and how they died, no one knows, and it is not relevant here to know the answers to these questions. What is important is that they thought they were fleeing death but they were actually going forward to meet their death. Then God brought them back to life. They returned back to life by the will of God without any effort on their part.

This introduction sets the stage for the following command, *“Then fight in the cause of God, and know that God All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* Do not let the fear of death or the love of life prevent you from complying when the call to fight in the cause of God is made. Life and death are controlled by God and He hears and knows what we say. No good deed will be lost. Fighting in the cause of God is usually mentioned in association with spending in the cause of God in the Qur’an. Both involve a great sacrifice. In addition, the army in the early days of Islam was an army of volunteers who depended solely on donations to prepare for war. The believers were urged not only to enrol in the army but also to make donations in support of the army, *“Who is he that will lend God a beautiful loan, which God will multiply to him manifold. It is God who withholds and who gives abundantly, and to Him shall be your return.”* If life and death are controlled by God so is the wealth. Avoiding war does not mean that one may live longer; similarly avoiding spending in the cause of God does not guarantee the maintenance of wealth. On the contrary, a donation in the cause of God is a guaranteed loan to God. He will pay it back in multitude. The payback will be blessings in this life and a great reward in the Hereafter.

*“Have you not considered the chiefs of the Children of Israel after Moses, when they said to a prophet of theirs, ‘Raise up for us a king that we may fight in the way of God.’ He said, ‘May it not be that you would not fight if fighting is ordained for you?’ They said, ‘And what reason have we that we should not fight in the way of God? We have indeed been compelled to abandon our homes and our children.’ But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned back, except a few of them, and God knows the wrongdoers.”* The verse paints a lively image as if one is watching the events unfold. It describes a discussion between a group of the chiefs of the Children of Israel and one of their prophets who wanted to test their resolve to fight if they received a command to fight in the cause of God. They responded enthusiastically that they are ready to fight once the command is given, however, when the command was given only few obliged.

*“Their Prophet said to them, ‘God has appointed Saul as king over you.’ They said, ‘How can he have dominion over us when we are more deserving of the dominion than him, and he is not even gifted with wealth in abundance?’ He said, ‘God has chosen him above you, and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess. God grants His authority to whom He pleases. God is Vast, Omniscient.’”* They asked God for a king to lead them, but when a king was appointed they started casting doubts about his right and ability to lead. Their prophet explained the rationale behind this appointment and outlined the deserving qualities that the king enjoys. God has chosen him and bestowed upon him gifts of knowledge and strength. In the final analysis, it is God’s privilege to appoint whomsoever He wishes. Their prophet gave them signs to identify the king, *“And their Prophet said to them, ‘A Sign of his dominion is that there shall come to you the Ark of the covenant. In it peace from your Lord, and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron, carried by angels. In this is a sign for you if you are indeed believers.’”* The Ark of the Covenant was stolen from them when they were forced out of the Holy Land. God brought the stolen Ark as a miracle to identify the king appointed by Him.

*“When Saul set out with the armies, he said, ‘God will test you with a stream; whoever drinks of its water will not belong with me. Only those who do not taste it will belong with me. A mere sip out of the hand is excused.’ But they all drank of it, except a few.”* Discipline for the soldiers is

an essential trait for an army to secure victory, especially when the enemy has superior power. This test was a training exercise to prepare the army for the coming battle but many failed the test. Only those who were steadfast remained with the army. However, those who remained were few in number, when they saw how large the army of the enemy was, doubts started to rise in their minds, *“When they crossed the river, he and the faithful ones with him, they said, ‘This day we cannot cope with Goliath and his forces.’* But the true believers never doubted, *“But those who were certain that they will meet God, said, ‘How often, by God's will, has a small force overcome a mighty one? God is with those who persevere.’”* Perseverance and the belief that meeting God is inevitable more than balance the disparity in power on the battle ground. These feelings provide strength and resolve and bring about victory. In the final analysis, victory is a gift from God which He will bestow on those who persevere.

*“When they advanced to meet Goliath and his forces, they prayed, ‘Our Lord, bestow perseverance on us and make our foothold firm. Help us against the disbelievers.’”* The believers offered a beautiful prayer. They asked God to inundate them with patience and endurance, strengthen their foothold, and bestow His victory on them. God accepted their prayer, *“So they defeated them by God's leave and David slew Goliath; and God gave him the dominion and the wisdom, and taught him of that which He wills. And if God had not repelled some men by others the earth would have been corrupted. But God is gracious to the worlds.”* The verse emphasized the fact that victory was granted by God’s leave, so that there would be no doubt in the minds of the believers about the realities of life. It is a fact that fills the hearts of the believers with peace, security, and certitude. God’s volition will prevail. Truth will prevail over falsehood and goodness will prevail over evil only by God’s will. The believers are chosen by God to implement His plan.

*“These are the revelations of God. We recite them to you in truth. Verily you are one of the messengers.”* These are God’s revelations recited by the One who has the right to recite them. They embody the truth that should govern the lives of God’s servants.

## **Verses: 253 to 257**

253. *Those messengers We endowed with gifts, some above others. To some, God spoke; others He raised to degrees of honour. We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear revelations, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. If God had so willed, succeeding generations would not have fought among each other, after clear revelations had come to them, but they chose to wrangle, some believing and others disbelieving. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other; but God does what He wills.*

254. *Believers, spend out of the bounties We have provided for you, before the Day comes when there will be no bargaining, friendship, nor intercession. The disbelievers are the wrongdoers.*

255. *God, there is no deity but Him, the Living, the Self-Subsisting. Neither slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His*

*presence except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. Nor shall they encompass aught of His knowledge except as He wills. His throne does extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Tremendous.*

256. *Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*

257. *God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers. He leads them from the depths of darkness into light. As for the disbelievers, their patrons are false deities. They lead them from light into darkness. They will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein forever. (2:253-257)*

*“Those messengers We endowed with gifts, some above others.”* The endowment may have been related to the scope of the responsibility of the messenger. A messenger may be sent to a tribe, to a nation, to a generation, or to the whole humanity. The endowment may also be related to the attributes of the messenger or to the nature of the message itself. The verse refers to Prophet Moses (PBUH) and other messengers, but cites Jesus (PBUH) by name, *“To some God spoke; others He raised to degrees of honour. We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear revelations, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.”* When we read about those to whom God spoke, Prophet Moses (PBUH) comes automatically to mind. The Qur’an usually calls Prophet Jesus (PBUH), *“Jesus the son of Mary”* to emphasize the human nature of Jesus (PBUH). The Holy Spirit refers to the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH) who had the responsibility of transmitting the revelation to the messengers. Gabriel (PBUH) provided the support to the messengers during their arduous missions; he helped them along the hard way to deliver the message; and he filled their hearts with peace and security. The clear revelations that were given to Jesus (PBUH) included the Bible and the miracles that he was able to perform as a proof of his prophet-hood. There was no need to mention Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in this verse because the narrative is addressed to him. Muhammad (PBUH) was the Messenger that was sent to the whole humanity. The Message he brought was not supported by physical miracles but was supported by intellectual articulation signalling the era of the maturity of the human race. His message embodied the details of a way of life for the humanity that is in accordance with the divine plan. He was therefore, the seal of the prophets and his message was the last link in a series of messages. No revelation appeared after his death.

Fighting erupted among the followers of these messengers. The oneness of the Message did not prevent them from fighting, *“If God had so willed, succeeding generations would not have fought among each other, after clear revelations had come to them, but they chose to wrangle, some believing and others disbelieving. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other; but God does what He wills.”* This fight did not occur against God’s will, nothing happens in this universe except by God’s leave, but God willed that humankind should have free will to be able to choose between right and wrong.

Diversity is a part of the deliberate divine plan. Diversity is God’s tool for humankind to be able to fulfill the various tasks necessary for human life to continue on earth. The variety of the tasks that are needed to keep the wheel of life running requires diversity in the creation. Only through collaboration can humankind survive on earth. Humankind was given the free will to decide

between right and wrong. God created humankind with an initial natural disposition which allows them to differentiate between truth and falsehood; He filled the universe with signs that lead to Him; and He sent the messengers with guidance. However, people differed “*Some believing and others disbelieving.*” When people differ along the lines of belief and disbelief, then fighting is inevitable. This verse describes to some extent the situation in Medina at that time. The idolaters of Mecca claimed that they were following the faith of Prophet Abraham (PBUH); the Jews in Medina claimed that they are the followers of the religion of Moses (PBUH); the Christians claimed that they are the followers of Jesus (PBUH). The Muslims were already fighting the idolaters and the fight against the People of the Scripture was eminent. “*If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other; but God does what He wills,*” But fighting was necessary to repel the rejection of faith and to state the essence of the true Message which was given to all messengers of God and was later corrupted. God knew that falsehood will not stand by watching while guidance is spreading among people. He knew that falsehood is aggressive and it will do its best to sway people away from the straight path. It is therefore, imperative that falsehood should be fought and stopped.

God’s will is absolute and His power is overwhelming. It was His will to establish a diverse creation on earth. It was His will to give humankind free will to choose between right and wrong. It was His will to let those who fail in their choice become misguided. It was His will that evil-doers become transgressors and that fight erupts between the guided and the misguided. It was His will that the believers fight to establish the truth.

*“Believers, spend out of the bounties We have provided for you, before the Day comes when there will be no bargaining, friendship, nor intercession. The disbelievers are the wrongdoers.”* The believers are addressed with the endearing adjective that they like to be called with, the adjective that connects them to the One they believe in, to spend out of that which He has provided them with. It is a timed invitation and limited opportunity. They should take advantage of it before it is too late. The verse points to the rationale behind the invitation, it is to repel the injustice of the disbelievers, those who committed injustice against God by rejecting the truth, committed injustice against people by blocking their way to guidance, and committed injustice against themselves when they chose to follow the crooked way.

The discussion of faith and rejection of faith is followed by a central verse which lays down the fundamentals of the Islamic perspective of faith and outlines some of the attributes of God which are central to the concept of the Oneness of God. The first of these is “*God, there is no deity but Him.*” This is an unequivocal statement of the oneness and uniqueness of God. This concept lays the foundation for the principle of God as the absolute and only ruler. He is the only source of all laws that govern life on earth. God determines the values that shape the way of life of people on earth.

He is “*The Living, the Self-Subsisting.*” God’s life is unique, independent and eternal. God’s life is not like the life we know. It is eternal with no beginning and no end. God is Self-Subsisting. He is in control of all existing things and nothing can exist except by His will and under His control.



*“Neither slumber can seize Him nor sleep.”* This emphasizes His Self-Subsistence and His continuous control of everything.

*“His are all things in the heavens and on earth.”* His dominion is absolute, comprehensive, and unconditional. No one shares His dominion. He is the absolute owner of everything. Once we understand that everything on earth and in heaven belong to God, we realize that no one can claim ownership of anything. We have been delegated to run things without real ownership. The conditions governing this delegation have been explained in God’s law. This statement is not only a statement of faith but it lays down the fundamental rule which govern human life on earth.

*“Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permits?”* “This is another attribute of God. It juxtaposes the different roles of the Creator and the created. The created are the servants of God. When they are in His presence, they stand in awe unable to speak unless they are given permission.

*“He knows what is before them and what is behind them. Nor shall they encompass aught of His knowledge except as He wills.”* God’s knowledge is infinite and comprehensive. He knows what is happening, what will happen and what already had happened. He knows what people know and what they don’t know. This has two implications. The first is that God knows our intentions, our thoughts, and our feelings. We cannot hide or escape from God. This knowledge leads to our complete submission to God. The second implication is that people know only what God wants them to know. He reveals His knowledge to people according to His will. People get impressed with new discoveries and forget that it is God who reveals this knowledge to people so that they can discover the nature of the universe they live in. God created Adam and He taught him. He gave him the ability to learn because knowledge is needed for the humankind to fulfill their role as vicegerents of God on earth. God also promised that He will reveal His signs to them, so that they can learn about themselves and about the universe they live in. God fulfilled His promise. Each day we discover something new about ourselves and about the universe. There are still secrets that God did not open up for us to discover yet, some of them we may never discover.

*“His throne does extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Tremendous.”* The verse uses a metaphorical image that can be felt by the heart of the believer. God’s throne extends over the heavens and earth. This is the dominion of God. Furthermore, He is able to control His dominion without the slightest sign of fatigue or tiredness. He is the Most High and Tremendous.

Having explained the fundamentals of the Islamic perspective of God, it is important that the role of Muslims in connection to the call to Islam is explained, *“Let there be no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clear from error. Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things. God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers. He leads them from the depths of darkness into light. As for the disbelievers, their patrons are false deities. They lead them from light into darkness. They will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein forever.”* Islam does not subscribe to compulsion regarding matters of faith. The belief in God should be based on thinking, reasoning, and understanding. A person who adopts Islam should do it freely and on the

basis of persuasion not compulsion. Islam appeals to rational reasoning as well as to the initial natural disposition of the human being. Islam appeals to the spirit that feels as well as to the mind that thinks. Islam does not rely on miracles as a tool for persuasion. Thus, its banner declares that there should be no compulsion in matters of faith. This clearly reflects the honour that God bestowed on humankind. God decreed that humankind's feelings, thoughts, and will are respected. Humankind has the free will to choose between right and wrong. Each freedom comes with a responsibility.

Islam places the freedom of faith at the top of the list of human rights. Those who deprive people of their freedom of faith deprive them of their humanity. The right of free speech goes hand in hand with the freedom of faith. The freedom for free speech implies that each one is able to advocate freely for one's cause.

*"Truth stands out clear from error,"* Faith is the truth revealed from God and error is the rejection of this truth. This is further elaborated upon, *"Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that never breaks."* Evil should be rejected because evil is a form of oppression. Evil oppresses the ability of a person to think and to see the truth. This is a transgression against God. Those who reject evil are saved. They are secure as if they are holding tightly to a ring; nothing can push them away. *"And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."* He hears and knows everything.

*"God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers. He leads them from the depths of darkness into light. As for the disbelievers, their patrons are false deities. They lead them from light into darkness."* Faith is light, and rejection of faith is darkness. The verse used the word light in the singular form while it used the word darkness in the plural form. This implies that there is only one truth, while there are different types of falsehoods but they are all the same at the end and all of them lead to darkness. Those who rejected the light will be the, *"companions of the fire, to dwell therein forever."*

### **Verses: 258 to 260**

258. *Have you not considered him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had granted him power? Abraham said, "My Lord is He who gives life and death." He said, "I give life and death." Said Abraham, "But it is God that causes the sun to rise from the east. Can you cause it to rise from the west?" Thus, the disbeliever was dumbfounded. God does not guide the wrongdoers.*

259. *Or take the example of one who passed by a town, all in ruins to its roofs. He said, "How shall God bring this ever to life, after its death?" but God caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up again. He said, "How long did you stay like that?" he (the man) said, "Perhaps a day or part of a day." He (God) said, "No, you stayed like that for a hundred years, look at your food and your drink, they show no signs of age; and look at your donkey. We will make you a sign for the people. Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and cloth them with flesh." When this was shown clearly to him, he said, "I know that God has power over all things."*

260. *When Abraham said, "Show me, Lord, how You will raise the dead," He (God) replied, "Have you no faith?" He said, "Yes, but just to reassure my heart." He (God) said, "Take four*

*birds, draw them to you, and cut their bodies into pieces. Scatter them over the mountain-tops, and then call them back. They will come swiftly to you. Know that God is Eminent, Wise.” (2:258-260).*

A verse which quotes an argument between Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and one of the kings of his time is given next. The Qur’an does not specify the name of the king, because it is irrelevant to the moral of the story, *“Have you not considered him who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because God had granted him power? Abraham said, ‘My Lord is He who gives life and death.’ He said, ‘I give life and death.’ Said Abraham, ‘But it is God that causes the sun to rise from the east. Can you cause it to rise from the west?’ Thus, the disbeliever was dumbfounded. God does not guide the wrongdoers.”* The tone of the story reflects the amazement at the audacity of the king to maximize the dramatic effect of the narrative. The king was not an atheist. He simply thought that the power he has which allows him to control the destiny of people raises him to the rank of a god. He forgot that the power he has is a gift from God, he should have been grateful to God for this gift. When the king asked Prophet Abraham (PBUH) who is your Lord? Prophet Abraham (PBUH) answered, *“My Lord is He who gives life and death.”* This is a unique divine attribute. God is the One who gives life and He is the One who puts people to death. No human being controls life and death. However, the king, in his arrogance, thought he also can control life and death, he said, *“I give life and death.”* Prophet Abraham (PBUH) realized that the king does not understand the subtlety of the argument, but did not want to waste time arguing this point further. Instead, he put forward a physical fact that cannot be disputed. He said, *“He causes the sun to rise from the east. Can you cause it to rise from the west?”* He wanted to tell the king that with all the power he has, he can only control a minute part of the universe. The true God has control over everything. That challenge ended the argument, *“Thus, the disbeliever was dumbfounded.”*

*“Or take the example of one who passed by a town, all in ruins to its roofs. He said, ‘How shall God bring it ever to life, after its death?’ but God caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up again. He said, ‘How long did you stay like that?’ he (the man) said, ‘Perhaps a day or part of a day.’ He (God) said, ‘No, you stayed like that for a hundred years, look at your food and your drink, they show no signs of age; and look at your donkey. We will make you a sign for the people. Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and cloth them with flesh.’ When this was shown clearly to him, he said, ‘I know that God has power over all things.’”* Again, the Qur’an did not reveal the identity of the person mentioned in these verses, nor did the verses mention the name of the town. The Qur’an mentioned only the relevant details. The verses describe an emotive picture of the scene of this town which has been completely destroyed and deserted. One can imagine how the shadow of death was cast on this town. One can sense the absolute feeling of despair that filled the heart of the man as he looked at it. He must have wondered, is there any remote possibility that life would come back to this town? He knew that God existed, but he could not imagine the possibility of the revival of this town after the death and destruction it suffered. God wanted him to see for himself how this can happen. God did not answer him in words but he put him through an experience of life and death. He was put to death and after a period of a hundred years had elapsed, he was resurrected to life again. He was asked, *“How long did you stay like that?”* His answer was, a day or may be a part of a day. God told him that he had been dead for a hundred years. There must have been changes around the man that told him how long he had stayed in the state of death. However, his food was kept fresh, but the effect of the passing years was shown on the man’s donkey. The donkey

perished and only his bones were there. God put back the bones of the donkey together and covered them with flesh and brought the donkey back to life in front of his eyes.

This is another lesson for the believers to learn. God does not only control life and death, but He also has the absolute power over all things. God does what He wills, whenever He wills, and whatever way He wills.

*“When Abraham said, ‘Show me, Lord, how You will raise the dead,’ He replied, ‘Have you no faith?’ He said, ‘Yes, but just to reassure my heart.’ He (God) said, ‘Take four birds, draw them to you, and cut their bodies to pieces. Scatter them over the mountain-tops, and then call them back. They will come swiftly to you. Know that God is Eminent, Wise.’”* The verse described the state of mind of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) who wanted to know the secrets of the resurrection. When someone like Prophet Abraham (PBUH), who is a believer, a friend of God, and a person who has submitted to God, entertains such thoughts, we know that it is normal for other people to entertain such thoughts as well. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) wanted to feel the reassurance in his heart seeing the power of God at work. He wanted to understand the secrets of life and death. God knew that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was a true believer. Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) request was not the request of a person who was in doubt of the power of God, but it was the request of a curious person. God satisfied his curiosity, *“Take four birds, draw them to you, and cut their bodies to pieces. Scatter them over the mountain-tops, and then call them back. They will come swiftly to you. Know that God is Eminent, Wise.”* God asked Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to pick up four birds, inspect them closely to be able to recognize them later, slaughter them and cut them into pieces, scatter the pieces over different mountain-tops, and call for them to come to him. He was told that, when he calls them back, they will be resurrected to life again and they will hasten toward him. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) saw the secret of the process of resurrection unfold in front of his eyes.

### **Verses: 261 to 274**

261. *The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain of corn. It grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.*
262. *Those who spend their wealth in the cause of God, and follow not up their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury, for them their reward is with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
263. *A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury. God is Self-Sufficient, and He is Most-Forbearing.*
264. *Believers, do not render your charity in vain by reproach or by injury like him who spends his wealth to be seen by people, but he neither believes in God nor the Last Day. His example is like a hard barren rock on which is a little soil, heavy rain falls on it and leaves it just a bare stone. They will not be able to do anything with what they have earned. And God does not guide those who disbelieve.*
265. *And the example of those who spend their wealth, seeking to please God and to strengthen their souls, is like a garden, high and fertile. When heavy rain falls on it, it yields double its normal harvest, and if it does not receive heavy rain, light moisture will be sufficient. God sees well whatever you do.*

266. *Would any of you wish that he should have a garden with date-palms and vines and streams flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruit, and then he is stricken with old age, and his children are not strong (enough to look after themselves) that it should be caught in a fiery whirlwind and then consumed by fire? Thus, does God make clear to you His revelations that you may reflect.*

267. *You who believe, give of the good things which you have earned, and of the fruits of the earth which We have produced for you, and do not seek the bad with the intent that you spend from it in charity, when you yourselves would not accept it except with closed eyes. And know that God is Self-Sufficient, and Praiseworthy.*

268. *The devil threatens you with poverty and commands you to act immorally. God promises you His forgiveness and bounties. God is indeed Vast, Omniscient.*

269. *He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed abundant good; but none will grasp this but men of understanding.*

270. *Whatever you spend in charity or devotion, rest assured that God knows it all. But the wrongdoers have no helpers.*

271. *If you give charity openly, it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you. This will atone for some of your evil deeds, and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*

272. *It is not required of you (Messenger), to guide them, but God guides whom He pleases. Whatever good you give will benefit your own souls, and you shall only do so seeking to please God. Whatever good you give, shall be rendered back to you, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.*

273. *Give to those in need, who, are preoccupied in God's cause and are restricted from travel, and cannot move about in the land, seeking trade or work. The ignorant person thinks, because of their modesty, that they are not needy. You shall know them by their unfailing mark: they beg not importunately. And whatever of good you give, be assured God knows it well.*

274. *Those who spend of their wealth in charity by night and by day, in secret and in public, have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:261-274)*

*“The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain of corn. It grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.”* The mathematics is intriguing, how can a single grain become seven hundred? But the more important message is the one given by the image of a grain put in the ground, producing a plant that comes out carrying a multitude of grains. This is an image of the growth of life which inculcates the ideal of giving in the consciousness of people. Giving is actually taking and wealth does not decrease by giving but it actually increases. Wealth grows by giving because God rewards in multitude, because God is “*Vast, Omniscient.*” He has limitless resources and He knows what is in people’s hearts. What kind of spending is meant here? It is the spending in the way of God that is not tarnished by hurting the feelings of people on the receiving end. Reminding people that they are on the receiving end is a mean act. It is only done by those who want to show off or want to humiliate others. This charity is not intended to please God. This behaviour is unacceptable since it is God’s wealth, not ours that we give away. Those who do not commit this mean act should not suffer any feeling of fear of deprivation or injustice. They should not be saddened that they gave away their money in this life nor by the spectre of a bad ending in the Hereafter. The same message is reemphasized, “*A kind word with forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury. God is Self-Sufficient, and*

*He is Most-Forbearing.*” Charity that is followed by hurting the feelings of those who are on the receiving end is useless. Charity should be followed by a kind word and a good feeling. Charity should be followed by a kind word that heals the wounds of the hearts of the deprived and cleanse their souls. One of the objectives of charity is to bring comfort to the deprived and to make them enjoy a sense of brotherhood and friendship. This objective can only be achieved through a kind word and forgiveness. Charity is not in reality a favour that the wealthy bestows on the poor, but it is an obligation for seeking the pleasure of God. If it is not done right, then it will not be accepted by God. God is Most-Forbearing toward His servants. Their ingratitude after He had bestowed His bounty on them does not anger Him. So, people should learn how to treat others nicely when they seem slightly ungrateful.

*“Believers, do not render your charity in vain by reproach or by injury like him who spends his wealth to be seen by people, but neither believes in God nor the Last Day. His example is like a hard barren rock on which is a little soil, heavy rain falls on it and leaves it just a bare stone. They will not be able to do anything with what they have earned. And God does not guide those who disbelieve.”* This verse describes metaphorically the situation of a person with a hard heart. It is so hard that it does not feel the beauty of faith. This hard heart is enshrouded in a thin veil of hypocrisy. The verse likens the hard heart to a hard rock. The hard rock is covered with a thin layer of soil that cannot support any plant life. The scene of the thin layer of soil that hides the hardness of the rock is juxtaposed against the scene of the thin layer of hypocrisy that hides the hardness of the heart. When the rain water comes down on the rock, the thin layer of soil quickly vanishes leaving behind a bare rock very much similar to the heart of a person who spent his money to show off. It was not much of use to people nor did it help grow life.

Juxtapose this scene with the scene of a person who has a heart full of faith and who spends money generously seeking the pleasure of God. His spending is motivated by his faith and the impetus to do good. The parable of this heart is the parable of a paradise with thick and fertile soil that produces a multitude of plant life even if it only receives a few drops of rain.

The narrative creates a scene that depicts the evil end of those who hurt people after giving them charity. In that scene, one sees a person who used to hurt the feelings of people who receive charity at a time when he/she grows old and becomes helpless and suddenly he/she loses everything he/she owns, *“Would any of you wish that he should have a garden with date-palms and vines and streams flowing underneath, and all kinds of fruit, and then he is stricken with old age, and his children are not strong (enough to look after themselves) that it should be caught in a fiery whirlwind and then consumed by fire? Thus, does God make clear to you His revelations that you may reflect.”* Giving charity is similar to planting a garden. The garden gives shade and fruits so does charity. Charity has positive effects for both the person who gives and the person who receives. Who would like to have a garden like this, and then want to see it destroyed, at a time when he/she is least able to save it and in most need for its shade and fruits?

*“Believers, give of the good things which you have earned, and of the fruits of the earth which We have produced for you, and do not seek the bad with the intent that you spend from it in*

*charity, when you yourselves would not accept it except with closed eyes. And know that God is Self-sufficient, and Praiseworthy.*” This is a fundamental principle in Islam, one should give in charity out of the best that one has. One should not give away something in charity that he/she would not accept. God does not accept worthless charity. This is a general principle that should be heeded by all believers, at all times.

*“The devil threatens you with poverty and commands you to act immorally. God promises you His forgiveness and bounties. God is indeed Vast, Omniscient. He grants wisdom to whom He pleases; and he to whom wisdom is granted receives indeed abundant good; but none will grasp this but men of understanding.”* The devil instils in your hearts the fear of becoming poor if you spend in charity. This makes you stingy. The devil also seduces you to commit sins. Infanticide was one of the wicked habits that the Arabs adopted before Islam because of the fear of becoming poor. This was a sin motivated by the fear of becoming poor which the devil instilled in the disbelievers. On the other hand, God promises you forgiveness and bounty. One notices that forgiveness was promised before bounty, because bounty goes beyond forgiveness. In addition to forgiveness, bounty includes all types of provision that God bestows on His servants as a reward for their charity. God has limitless bounty and He knows everything. God further blesses His servants with wisdom. Those who have wisdom have insight into life, they understand the rationale behind things and events, and they deal moderately and justly with people. Only those who were given the talent of understanding are able to remind themselves continuously so they do not go astray. God bestows wisdom on whosoever He wishes. This brings us again to the principle that God’s will is absolute.

*“Whatever you spend in charity or devotion, rest assured that God knows it all. But the wrongdoers have no helpers. If you give charity openly, it is well, and if you hide it and give it to the poor, it is better for you. This will atone for some of your evil deeds, and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* Spending in the way of God includes all types of obligatory and voluntary charity, and what one spends in devotion. Spending in devotion is to dedicate a specific charity to God. It is an obligation that the person puts on himself/herself voluntarily seeking the pleasure of God. Knowing that God knows all what the believer does is an incentive to be conscious of God in all our deeds. Those who are not grateful to God for His blessings are truly wrongdoers. They will have no support. Giving charity in secret is better because it eliminates, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the sin of showing off. However, one may give the obligatory charity openly because it is an expression of obedience to God. The verse also allows the believer to give openly or secretly depending on which is more fitting to the situation at hand.

Islam recognized two main impediments in the way of inculcating the trait of being charitable in the believers. The first impediment is the inherent human weakness toward hoarding money and the reluctance to give it away in charity. Islam’s strategy consisted of a continuous reminder and a repeated inducement to inspire the believers to spend in the way of God and to rid themselves of the hateful trait of stinginess. The second impediment is one of the main characteristics of Arabs. Arabs were known for their generosity; however, this generosity was motivated by the desire to be known for their generosity. They wanted people to write poetry praising them for being generous. Islam aimed at changing this behaviour. Islam established the principle that

charity should be done for the sole purpose of pleasing God. It took a long training program to establish this principle.

*“It is not required of you (Messenger), to guide them, but God guides whom He pleases. Whatever good you give will benefit your own souls, and you shall only do so seeking to please God. Whatever good you give, shall be rendered back to you, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.”* Ibn Abi Hatem narrated on the authority of Ibn Abbas (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) used to tell the believers to give charity only to Muslims until this verse was revealed. When this verse was revealed the Prophet (PBUH) commanded the believers to give charity to any one in need irrespective of her/his faith. Only God is privy to the secrets of people’s hearts and only He controls guidance. Not even the Prophet (PBUH) has the authority or the responsibility to guide people. The Prophet’s (PBUH) only responsibility is to deliver the message, and it is up to people to heed it or ignore it. It is incumbent on the Prophet (PBUH), and all Muslims, to open their hearts to people, to treat them kindly, and to offer help to those who need help, irrespective of their religious affiliation and with no expectation of any worldly reward. God rewards good deeds. Islam does not only sanctify the freedom of religion, but it goes beyond this by commanding Muslims to treat adherents of other faiths kindly. The believers are once more reminded that their main objective in giving charity is to seek the pleasure of God.

The following verse specified a group of people who were worthy of charity, *“Give to those in need, who, are preoccupied in God's cause and are restricted from travel, and cannot move about in the land, seeking trade or work. The ignorant man thinks, because of their modesty, that they are not needy. You shall know them by their unfailing mark: they beg not importunately. And whatever of good you give, be assured God knows it well.”* The verse describes a group of people who migrated from Mecca to Medina, leaving their families and wealth behind. In Medina they devoted themselves to guarding the Prophet (PBUH) and striving in the way of God. These duties occupied their time and did not allow them to seek any paid employment to support themselves. However, they were too proud to ask any one for help. Those who did not know them well thought that they were self-sufficient. The verse advised the believers to help these people. However, the advice given in this verse is a general advice that applies to any similar group of people.

The verses on charity end by a general statement, *“Those who spend of their wealth in charity by night and by day, in secret and in public, have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”* The verse promised those who spend in any way and at all times that they will not only get their reward, but they will never experience any fear nor sadness.

## **Verses: 275 to 281**

275. *Those who devour usury will not stand except as a person who was touched by the devil and driven to madness. That is because they say, “Trade is like usury,” but God has permitted trade and forbidden usury. Those who desist, after receiving admonition from their Lord, shall*



*be pardoned for the past; their case is for God to judge. But those who repeat the offence are companions of the fire. They will abide therein forever.*

276. *God will deprive usury of all blessing, whereas He will bless deeds of charity with manifold increase. God does not love the ungrateful, the sinner.*

277. *Those who believe, and do good deeds, and establish regular prayers and pay poor-dues, will have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*

278. *Believers, be conscious of God and give up all outstanding gains from usury, if you are indeed believers.*

279. *If you do not, then be warned of war from God and His Messenger. But if you repent you shall have your capital sums. Deal not unjustly, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly.*

280. *If the debtor is in a difficulty, grant him time till it is easy for him to repay. But if you forgive the debt by way of charity, that is best for you if you only knew.*

281. *And fear the Day when you shall be brought back to God. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly. (2:275-281)*

*“Those who devour usury will not stand except as a person who was touched by the devil and driven to madness. That is because they say, ‘Trade is like usury,’ but God has permitted trade and forbidden usury. Those who after receiving admonition from their Lord, desist, shall be pardoned for the past; their case is for God to judge. But those who repeat the offence are companions of the fire. They will abide therein forever.”* This verse paints a very ugly picture for those who deal in usury. There were two types of usury dealings known to the Arabs before Islam: Naseeah, and Faddal.

There are several traditions that define the Naseeah. Katada said, “In the pre-Islamic era, a buyer requests a delay in paying the price of a commodity he/she bought, when the payment became due the buyer would ask for another delay in paying the seller in exchange for an increase in the price”. Abu Bakr Al-Gassass said, “It is known that Naseeah consisted of a debt that should be paid back with an additional amount of money to be agreed upon by the lender and debtor.” Imam Razi mentioned in his interpretation of the Qur’an, “Naseeah consisted of a debt with a monthly interest, in addition to the capital that would be paid back in full at the end of the lending period.”

Faddal consists of trading a specific amount of a certain commodity for a smaller amount of the same commodity but of a higher quality. This practice was called usury because it shares some of the characteristics of usury. It involves a trade-off of two different amounts of the same commodity. The difference in the amounts may be due to a difference in the quality of the commodity being exchanged. This may result in a perception of injustice or abuse.

Islam not only abolished both types of usury, but also aimed at changing the mentality of the business people. Business people claimed that the act of lending money at an exorbitant interest rate is a legitimate way of conducting business. They said, “*Trade is like usury*” Their reasoning is that both practices aim at investing money. But these are two different models. In a regular trading model, the rate of return is not guaranteed, there is always a possibility for gain or loss. In the usury model the rate of return is guaranteed. Trade has been made lawful because the whole society stands to benefit from its activities.

The verse indicated that the command should be implemented and all usury practices should cease immediately. Previous deals were forgiven and people should trust their affairs to God. This stresses the fact that salvation is contingent on God's will and mercy. Those who do not heed this admonition and repeat the offence are threatened with a long lasting torment in the Hereafter. Another reminder is given for those who procrastinate, thinking that there is still time for repentance, *"God will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity. God does not love the ungrateful, the sinner."* This will not only happen in this life but also in the Hereafter. Those who are determined to practice what God has made unlawful, claiming that it is lawful are deprived of God's love. Islam is not a lip service but it is a way of life.

In contrast to the scene describing the sinful practices of those who adopt a system of usury and the promise that they will be scourged by the wrath of God, we see another scene describing those who believe and do good deeds. These are the attributes of the believers whose way of life embodies a system of obligatory charity, *"Those who believe, and do good deeds, and establish regular prayers and pay the poor-dues, will have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."* The requirement to pay poor-dues is a salient feature of the Islamic system. Poor-dues are an obligatory charity, which form the foundation of the collective social responsibility of the community. Those who are constant in paying the poor-dues will have their reward with their Lord, in addition to a promise that they will never suffer fear or sadness.

*"Believers, be conscious of God and give up all outstanding gains from usury, if you are indeed believers"*. There was no retroactive punishment and previous offences involving the practice of usury were forgiven. This is one of the policies of Islamic legislation, the enactment of the law starts when the law is legislated. The law cannot be applied retroactively. This policy protected the economy of the Muslim community at that time from collapsing. For a law to be successful, it has to be both respected and enforceable. Connecting the concept of God consciousness to the obedience of the law highlights the concept of respecting the law. This provides an inner incentive to follow the law. The external incentive is provided by the enforcement, *"If you do not, then be warned of war from God and His Messenger. But if you repent you shall have your capital sums. Deal not unjustly, and you shall not be dealt with unjustly."* A tremendous punishment was promised. Those who disobey the law will face a war against God and His Messenger.

When this verse was revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) commanded the governor of Mecca to fight the family of Al-Mughira if they do not cease practicing usury. In his sermon upon securing Mecca, the Prophet (PBUH) announced that all previous interest charges have been forgiven. All debtors were asked to pay back only the original capital which they had borrowed.

Those debtors who were facing a hard time paying back their debt needed a break. The lenders were commanded to allow those debtors more time to pay back their debts. It was indicated that it is even better if they were able to forgive the debt, *"If the debtor is in a difficulty, grant him time till it is easy for him to repay. But if you forgive the debt by way of charity, that is best for*

*you if you only knew”*. The lenders are reminded of the Day of Reckoning as an incentive for treating the debtors nicely, *“And fear the Day when you shall be brought back to God. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly.”*

## **Verses: 282 to 284**

282. *Believers, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing. Have a scribe write down justly the terms between the parties. No scribe should refuse to write, as God has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him be conscious of his Lord God, and not diminish anything of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable himself to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly. Call two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her. The witnesses should not refuse when they are called upon. Do not disdain to put it in writing for a future period, whether it is small or big. It is more equitable in the sight of God, more suitable as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves; but if it be a transaction which you carry out on the spot among yourselves, there is no blame on you if you do not put it in writing. Have witnesses present whenever you make a commercial contract; and let no harm to be suffered by neither a scribe nor a witness. If you do such harm, it will be sinful conduct on your part. So be conscious of God. God teaches you. And God is well acquainted with all things.*
283. *If you are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe, a security deposit may serve the purpose. And if one of you deposits a thing on trust with another, Let the trustee faithfully discharge his trust, and let him be conscious of God his Lord. Conceal not evidence; for whoever conceals it, his heart is tainted with sin. And God knows all that you do.*
284. *To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. Whether you show what is in your minds or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it. He forgives whom He pleases, and torments whom He pleases, for God has power over all things. (2:282-284)*

*“Believers, when you contract a debt for a stated term, put it down in writing.”* Documenting transactions which involve lending and borrowing is a general principle in Islam. All debts have to be documented. An independent person (a scribe) should prepare the document and should observe total fairness to both parties involved in the transaction, *“Have a scribe write down justly the terms between the parties.”* God commands that, *“No scribe should refuse to write, as God has taught him, so let him write.”* The verse also details how the document is prepared, *“Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him be conscious of his Lord God, and not diminish anything of what he owes. If the party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable himself to dictate, then let his guardian dictate justly.”* The debtor, who incurs the liability, should dictate to the scribe all information regarding the amount of the debt and when it should be paid back. This way the rights of the debtor are protected.

*“Call two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as you choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.”* Two witnesses are required. The witnesses should be known for their integrity, and they should be acceptable to both parties involved in the transaction. The verse offers an alternative to having two men as witnesses. If securing two male witnesses proved to be difficult, then one man and two women can become the witnesses. The reason for accepting the testimony of two females in lieu of a single male is mentioned, *“so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her.”* The error referred to here may result from the lack of business experience. Having another woman allows the two women to remind each other of the conditions of the transaction.

Giving testimony is an obligation, *“The witnesses should not refuse when they are called upon,”* because it is a necessary tool for establishing justice and protecting the rights of people engaged in business transactions. It is God’s command to accept the duty of a witness and one should do it willingly. Witnesses should not entertain the notion that they are doing those who are involved in the transaction a favour.

*“Do not disdain to put it in writing for a future period, whether it is small or big. It is more equitable in the sight of God, more suitable as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves.”* The verse warns against the feeling that one may sometime experience when one thinks that it is not worth it to spend all this effort and time to document a small debt. A written document which outlines the details and conditions of the debt eliminates all sources of doubts or dispute. Unless it is, *“a transaction which you carry out on the spot among yourselves, there is no blame on you if you do not put in writing.”* In this case, the requirement of a written document is dropped but the requirement of witnesses still stands. Some narrations indicate that in this situation having witnesses is recommended but not obligatory. However, it is most probable that having witnesses is still a requirement in this case.

Having prescribed the responsibilities of the scribes and witnesses earlier, it is now the time for prescribing their rights. Scribes and witnesses should be protected so that they can fulfill their responsibility, *“and let neither a scribe nor a witness suffer harm. If you do such harm, it will be sinful conduct on your part. So be conscious of God. God teaches you. And God is well acquainted with all things.”*

Another alternative for a written document is suggested when the parties are travelling and they cannot find a scribe, *“If you are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe, a security deposit may serve the purpose. And if one of you deposits a thing on trust with another, Let the trustee faithfully discharge his trust, and let him be conscious of God his Lord. Conceal not evidence; for whoever conceals it, his heart is tainted with sin. And God knows all that you do.”* The written document is replaced by an oral agreement supported by a collateral that the debtor has to give the creditor. The concept of God consciousness is mentioned to remind the believers that it is their duty to discharge their trusts. The debt is a trust that the debtor has to pay back and the collateral is a trust that the creditor has to give back when the debt is paid.

Giving testimony in a court of law is another important duty for the believers. Those who conceal evidence will have sinful hearts. God knows what is in your hearts. The following verse refers to the power of God as an incentive to the believers to have clean hearts. God is the owner

of heavens and earth, He knows what is in the hearts of the believers, He controls the destiny of His servants, and His power is limitless. *“To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. Whether you show what is in your minds or conceal it, God will bring you to account for it. He forgives whom He pleases, and torments whom He pleases, for God has power over all things.”* This verse comes at the end of verses which addressed rules used in the management of civil affairs of the society to emphasize the relationship between the Creator and the rules which govern the civil affairs of the society. It points to the link which connects the created with the Creator, a link that consists of a mix of fear and hope. It prepares the hearts of the believers to accept Islamic legislation and comply with it. This creates an inner incentive for people to live according to the way of life that God has decreed.

### **Verses: 285 to 286**

285. *The Messenger believed in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as did the believers. Each one of them believes in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers, (saying) “We make no distinction between one and another of His messengers.” And they say, “We hear, and we obey, we seek Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the end of all journeys.”*
286. *On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns. “Our Lord, condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord, lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us; Our Lord, lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Protecting Guardian; Help us against the disbelievers.” (2:285-286)*

*“The Messenger believed in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, as did the believers. Each one of them believes in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers, (saying) ‘We make no distinction between one and another of His messengers.’ And they say, ‘We hear, and we obey, we seek Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the end of all journeys.’”* This is the image of true believers, those who understand the true meaning of the belief in God. They are honoured when God addresses them together with the Messenger in the same verse. The Messenger’s belief in God was the result of a direct revelation that filled his heart with faith. This revelation connected the pure heart of the Prophet (PBUH) with the truth through a direct link. It is a rank of faith that cannot be described. Yet, God includes the believers in this rank to honour them. The articles of faith are spelled out, they include the belief in: *God, His angels, His books, and His messengers*. It is a comprehensive set of articles of faith which form the basis of this religion, a religion worthy of the human race which extends from the beginning of history to the end of time. The belief in God implies the belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God the Lord of everything. Only He is worthy of our worship. He has control over all aspects of life. The belief in the angels is an aspect of the belief in the unseen. It takes the human being out of the realm of the physical to the realm of the spiritual thus allowing the human being to access dimensions of knowledge which would be otherwise inaccessible. The belief in angels who also believe in God, who ask God to forgive the believers, and who provide support to the believers when support is needed, warms the hearts of the believers and fills them with security and tranquility.

It is natural for the believers to believe in all of God's books and messengers. This implies the belief in the oneness of the message and the continuity of the messengers. God sent messengers with the same message to guide humankind to the straight path. The fundamentals of the message that each messenger brought were the same but the details were different to suit the place and time of the specific messenger. This continued until God sent Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the final form of the message for the whole of humankind. Thus, the message of Islam is the comprehensive message which embodies all previous messages.

Those who believe in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers submit to the will of their Lord, express obedience to His commands, and are cognizant of the fact that they will return to Him, *"And they say, 'We hear, and we obey, we seek Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the end of all journeys'"*. The impact of the belief in God, His angels, His books, and His messengers is clearly portrayed in the submission and obedience expressed by the believers. They listen to His words and obey His commands. Submission is not perfect until obedience is exercised. Faith is not complete without following the commands of God. Faith is what rests deep in one's heart and is reflected on one's deeds. The believers always feel that they have not perfected their tasks, so they ask for forgiveness for what has been inadvertently missed, *"we seek Your forgiveness, our Lord and to You is the end of all journeys"*. The admission of the fact that all will return to God is an expression of the belief in the Day of Judgment. This is an essential component of the articles of faith. God created humankind to act as vicegerents of God on earth. The terms of the vicegerency were spelled out in the covenant between God and humankind. The covenant with God delineated the details of the way of life that humankind should lead. Life is a testing ground for the compliance with the covenant and on the Day of Judgment the results of the test will be announced. Those who did well will be rewarded, and those who failed will be punished. Thus, the belief in the Day of Judgment is a fundamental underpinning of the life of the believer on earth. It is the incentive for the believers to work hard, to follow God's commands, and to promote goodness irrespective of the enormity of the required sacrifice. The believer knows that he/she should fulfill their duties without any expectation of a reward in this life. The great reward will be awarded at the end of the journey on the Day of Judgment.

The articles of faith constitute a comprehensive set of compatible beliefs that reflect the continuity of the message that God sent, through a succession of messengers, to guide humankind from the beginning of life on earth to the last day to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. This is a set of beliefs that recognizes human nature with its strengths and weaknesses. It recognizes the duality of the body and the soul of the human being and addresses the needs of both with equal care. A set of beliefs that does not burden people beyond their abilities, it allows the human beings to have the freedom of choice between right and wrong, and expects them to accept the consequences of their choices.

*"On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns."* This outlines God's fair plan and His mercy in dealing with His servants. No servant is burdened beyond his ability whether the burden is a command to comply with or a trial that one is subjected to; and at the end, a just reward awaits the servant. God's mercy and justice provide the support necessary for the believers to accomplish their

mission on earth without complaints or hesitation. Islam is a personal responsibility; each one is rewarded according to his/her deeds.

*“Our Lord, condemn us not if we forget or fall into error; our Lord, lay not on us a burden like that which You did lay on those before us; Our Lord, lay not on us a burden greater than we have strength to bear. Pardon us, and grant us forgiveness. Have mercy on us. You are our Protecting Guide; Help us against the disbelievers.”* This is a supplication that the believers address to their Lord that depicts their mindset. The believers are cognizant of the fact that they are weak and helpless, they are in need for God’s mercy, forgiveness, help, and support. They are cognizant of the fact that they are prone to sin and forgetfulness and they can only achieve salvation through God’s mercy and forgiveness. They admit any misdeed they commit and ask for forgiveness rather than be stubborn. They ask God to relieve them from burdens that they are not able to carry and to help them fulfill their mission. The quest for God’s mercy and forgiveness is reiterated again. This is the only guarantee for salvation. The verse ends with a declaration of their hope that God would bring them closer to Him, He is their Lord, and they raise His banner, establish His way of life, strive in His way, and seek His support.

These last verses summarize the Sura, the articles of faith, and the relationship between the believers and their Lord at all times.

## **Sūra 3: Al- Imran (The House of ‘Imran)**

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

The Qur’an is the book, the soul, the source, the spine, the guide, the constitution and the proclamation of this faith. In the ultimate analysis, it is the reference which delineates the strategies and tactics to be used in the call to Islam.

There will always be a gap that separates us from the Qur’an if we do not realize that the Qur’an was revealed to address a real people living in a real world, to help them manage major events in their lives, and to reshape their character. A thick wall will always separate us from the Qur’an if we only treat its verses as a ritualistic tool to be recited or listened to without having any effect on the daily life of the creature we call the human being and the nation we call the Muslim nation.

The Qur’an was revealed to address a specific people living in a specific environment at a specific time. However, the real miracle of the Qur’an lies in the fact that its revelation did not only bring dramatic changes to the lives of the people who received it, but it remained also, over the years, in an interactive relationship with the Muslim nation, almost as if the process of revelation never ceased. In order that we gain the greatest benefit from the Qur’an, appreciate its vitality, and tap into its never ending resource to help us lead a better life; we have to envision the life of the early Muslim community. We have to envision how the early Muslims interacted with the rapidly changing events they met, how they interacted with their foes and friends, and how they dealt with their human desires and whims. We have to relive in our minds the experience of the first Muslim community.

This Sura presents a dramatic segment of the life of the Muslim community in Medina. This segment of life spans the period between the time of the battle of Badr, which took place in the second year after Hijra (2 H), and the battle of Uhud which took place in the third year after Hijra (3 H). During this period, the Muslim community started to settle down somewhat in Medina. The results of the miraculous victory of Muslims in the battle of Badr were starting to unfold. One of these results, was Abd-Allah bin Saloul’s acceptance of Islam. Abd-Allah was one of the major chiefs of the tribe of Al-Khazraj. He hated Islam and hated the Prophet (PBUH) but realized that it would be prudent on his part to adopt Islam even though he did not like it.

Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of five well-defined sections. The first section is comprised of the first thirty-two verses. The second section is comprised of the following thirty-one verses. The third section is comprised of the verses sixty-four to ninety-three. The fourth section is comprised of the verses one hundred to one hundred and eighty-four. The fifth section is comprised of the last fifty-two verses.

### **Verses: 1 to 32**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *God, there is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting.*



3. *It is He Who sent down to you the Book (step by step), setting forth the truth, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel*
4. *Before this, as a guide to people, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Those who rejected the revelations of God will suffer grievous torment. God is Eminent<sup>1</sup>, Avenger of evil.*
5. *Nothing on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from God.*
6. *It is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Eminent, the Wise.*
7. *It is He Who has sent down to you the Book. In it are unequivocal verses, they are the foundation of the Book. Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, "We believe in it (the Book); the whole of it is from our Lord", and only those who have understanding really heed.*
8. *Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Own Presence; for You are the Grantor of bounties.*
9. *Our Lord, You will gather humankind together on a day about which there is no doubt; for God never fails in His promise.*
10. *On that Day neither the riches nor the progeny of those who disbelieved will avail them in the least against God. They will be fuel for fire.*
11. *Like Pharaoh's folk and those who were before them, they denied Our revelations and so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment.*
12. *Say (Muhammad) to the disbelievers, "You shall be overcome and gathered in Hell, an evil resting-place."*
13. *There has already been for you a sign in the two armies that met (in combat). One was fighting for God's cause, and the other made up of disbelievers, whom they saw with their own eyes as twice their number. But God does support with His aid whom He pleases. In this is a lesson for those who have eyes to see.*
14. *Made alluring to humankind is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this worldly life; but with God is the best abode to return to.*
15. *Say, "Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God." God is All-Seeing of (His) servants-*
16. *Those who say, "Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the torment of the Fire;"*
17. *The perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn.*
18. *God bears witness that there is no deity but He, and (so do) the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge; maintaining His creation with justice; there is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Arabic word "al-'Aziz," which has been translated here as the Eminent has a much wider meaning. There is no single English which can capture its full meaning.

19. *True religion in the sight of God is the submission to His Will. Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge had come to them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning.*
20. *And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, "I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me." And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, "Have you submitted?" If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of the servants.*
21. *Those who reject the revelations of God, and slay the prophets wrongfully, and slay people who enjoin equity promise them a painful torment.*
22. *The deeds of such people will neither bear fruit in this world nor in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.*
23. *Have you not considered those who have been given a portion of the Scripture? They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their disputes, but a party of them turns away and declines (the arbitration).*
24. *This is because they say, "The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days". The forgeries they made caused them to betray their own faith.*
25. *How will they fare when we gather them together on a Day about which there is no doubt, and each soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they will not be wronged?*
26. *Say, "God, Owner of Sovereignty, You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please. You endue with honour whom You please, and You abase whom You please. In Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power.*
27. *You cause the night to merge into the day, and You cause the day to merge into the night; You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure."*
28. *Let not the believers make the disbelievers their protecting guardians in preference to the believers. Whosoever does that shall cut himself from God, unless you are guarding yourselves against them. But God cautions you to beware of Him; for the final return is to God.*
29. *Say, "Whether you hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God knows it all. He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And God has power over all things."*
30. *On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done and all the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you to beware of Him. And God is All-Pitying towards all those who serve Him.*
31. *Say, "If you do love God, follow me, God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
32. *Say, "Obey God and His Messenger." But if they turn back, God does not love the disbelievers. (3:1-32)*

*"Alif Lam Mim."* It was mentioned in the beginning of the previous Sura that we believe that these letters were probably used to remind us of the fact that the Book is composed using the letters of the alphabet of the language that the Arabs were familiar with at that time. The Qur'an challenged the Arabs repeatedly to use these same letters which they were familiar with to compose a book similar to the Qur'an. We choose this interpretation as a probable but not a certain explanation for the use of the letters in the beginning of some Qur'anic Suras. This

interpretation seems logical since it is directly related to the theme that appears in the subsequent verses. In Sura 2, "The Cow," a challenge was posed to the disbelievers to compose a Sura similar to the Suras of the Qur'an. In the present Sura, it is stressed that the Qur'an is God's revelation similar to the previous revelations which have already been accepted by the People of the Scripture.

*"God! There is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting."* This is a statement of the pure belief in the Oneness of God, it is the corner stone of the Islamic creed. God has no partners, He is the Ever-Living, and He is unique in His attributes. God is the source of existence of everything. The belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God is the criterion which sets the Muslim faith apart from all other faiths. It also forms the foundation on which the Muslims' way of life is based.

*"It is He Who sent down to you the Book (step by step), setting forth the truth, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel before this, as a guide to people, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Those who rejected the revelations of God, will suffer grievous torment. God is Eminent, avenger of evil."* The first part of the verse establishes certain facts that set the perspective of the faith. It also responds to those who denied Muhammad's (PBUH) message. The verse states that all revelations come only from God. He is the one who revealed this Qur'an as well as the Torah and Gospel. The verse also emphasizes the oneness of the Message which was brought by all these Books. All the revealed Books embody a single truth which brings guidance to people. This new Book sets the truth embodied in the revealed Scripture apart from the falsehood that people fabricated motivated by their political attitudes, whims, and desires.

*"Nothing on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from God."* God has complete knowledge of everything. This statement is congruent with the previous statements emphasizing the Oneness of God. It supports God's power of retribution mentioned in the previous verse by stressing the fact that nothing can escape God's knowledge. It is not possible to hide one's intentions or thoughts from God. The comprehensive knowledge is like a great tree that extends the comfort of its shade to one of the most intimate aspects of human life: the origin of human life. *"It is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise."* God gives you the shape and the form, with all the attributes, that He has decreed for you. It is God and only He who is able to shape and form people as He pleases.

*"It is He Who has sent down to you the Book. In it are unequivocal verses, they are the foundation of the Book. Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord', and only those who have understanding really heed. 'Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Own Presence; for You are the Grantor of bounties. Our Lord, You will gather humankind together on a Day about which there is no doubt; for God never fails in His promise.'"*

This verse was revealed to refute the argument made by the Christians of Najran when they asked the Prophet (PBUH), “*Don’t you say that Jesus is God’s word and spirit?*” They wanted to use this description to prove that Jesus is not a human being and he is the spirit of God. So, the verse came to establish unequivocally the doctrine of the Oneness of God.

This verse establishes a basic principle. The verse states that the Qur’an includes unambiguous verses which are unequivocal in establishing the fundamentals of the faith and the law. There are also verses which deal with the unseen, like the verses dealing with the birth of Jesus for example which are allegorical in nature. Believers should believe the truthfulness of these verses and take them at their face value without delving into questioning how and why. The answers to these questions are not within the realm of knowledge of human beings. The belief in the truthfulness of these verses is a matter of faith because it is beyond the ability of human mind to comprehend the how and why of these matters.

The reactions of people when they listen to these verses divide them into two groups. The people whose hearts are perverted will ignore the clear unambiguous fundamentals of faith and will engage into vain discussions of the allegorical verses. But those who are grounded in knowledge and who appreciate the limitations of human mind will say with confidence, “*We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.*” Their confidence is grounded in the belief that this is a revelation from God and it must be true. God’s words are the truth, a truth that does not need a proof. They realize that the human mind is incapable of finding a proof even if it tried very hard to find one.

Only those who have understanding will heed the meaning of these verses. They have a sound initial natural disposition which only needs a slight reminder to get them to see the truth. Their sound initial natural disposition is filled with the truth which connects them to their Creator. It makes their tongues and hearts join in asking God in humility to set them on the straight path, to prevent their hearts from deviating from the truth, and to endow them with His mercy and blessings. They remember the Day which will certainly come. The Day on which all humankind will be gathered together, no one will miss it. This is how those who are grounded in knowledge will react to God’s words. It is a reaction motivated by a strong faith that emanates from their confidence in the truthfulness of God’s word, the hope in His mercy, and the fear of His wrath. It is a strong faith that implants in the believer a continuous feeling of the consciousness of God. The believer’s heart recognizes the value of guidance after being lost, the value of clear vision after having a cloudy vision, the value of the straight path after being lost in crooked ways, and the value of freedom after suffering from servitude. This is the freedom that one gains when one serves God alone rather than serving a multitude of human masters.

The supplication to God of those with understanding reflects their realization that nothing can be attained except by the will of God. It has been narrated by ‘Ayesha (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) used to pray God saying, “*You are the God in whose hands are the conditions of people’s hearts, establish my heart firmly on Your path.*” When ‘Ayesha (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) why he says this supplication often, he said, “*No human heart but rests in the hand of God. If God wills, He can set the heart on the straight path, and if He wills, He can make it deviate from the straight path.*”

*“On that Day neither the riches nor the progeny of those who disbelieved will avail them in the least against God. They will be fuel for fire. Like Pharaoh's folk and those who were before them, they denied Our revelations and so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment. Say (Muhammad) to the disbelievers, ‘You shall be overcome and gathered in Hell, an evil resting-place.’ There has already been for you a sign in the two armies that met (in combat). One was fighting for God’s cause, and the other made up of disbelievers, whom they saw with their own eyes as twice their number. But God does support with His aid whom He pleases. In this is a lesson for those who have eyes to see.”*

Those who disbelieved think that their wealth and progeny can provide protection for them, but on the Day of Judgment all of this will be useless. On that Day, God’s promise will be fulfilled and they will become fuel for the fire. This image takes away all human attributes from them and reduces them to a solid fuel for the fire. Even in their lifetime, wealth, progeny, and power can still be of no use to them as in the case of Pharaoh. History has often repeated the story of Pharaoh and the Qur’an narrates it in great details. It exemplifies one of the principles decreed by God as part of the set of rules that govern life on this earth. Those who disbelieved and denied the revelations of God will meet a fate similar to Pharaoh’s fate in this life as well as in the Hereafter. The verse asked the Prophet (PBUH) to warn and remind the idolaters of Mecca with what happened in the battle of Badr. The story of Pharaoh may have been long forgotten but the battle of Badr was still fresh in their minds. There are two probable interpretations for the expression, *“they saw with their own eyes as twice their number.”* One interpretation could be that the disbelievers saw the Muslim army as if it were twice as big as it actually was. They were scared to battle such a large army. Another interpretation could be that the Muslims thought that the idolater’s army is twice as big as their own army, while in reality the idolater’s army was threefold the Muslim army. Either way, the Muslims persevered and won. The victory was only possible by the grace of God. This principle will always be valid. The believers have to understand this truth. They should trust in God’s promise, do their best to prepare for the battle, and persevere when the time comes. They should not despair if victory is delayed. God only knows what is best for them.

*“Made alluring to humankind is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this worldly life; but with God is the best abode to return to. Say, ‘Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? In store for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God.’ God is All-Seeing (His) servants- those who say, ‘Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;’ the perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn.”*

The passive tense used in the sentence suggests that covetousness is embedded in humankind’s initial natural disposition. This is a natural attribute of the human psyche; there is no need to deny or suppress it. These natural feelings are essential in the development of human mental welfare. However, this natural instinct is balanced by another instinct which is embedded in the initial natural disposition of the human being. It is a disposition which provides the human being with the ability to control his/her desires. It is a disposition towards the spiritual that connects the

human being with God and makes him/her aspire to the Hereafter and God's reward. These two initial natural dispositions should always be kept in balance to keep the human being on safe grounds. The balance of these two dispositions protects the human being from being overwhelmed by the material aspects of life, allows him/her to entertain lofty aspirations towards God, and enhances the feeling of God consciousness in his/her heart.

Coveting women and sons has been always a strong human desire; add to this the love of hoarding money. Human beings are not only interested in money which satisfies their needs but they are fond of owning heaps of wealth. Hoarding is in itself one of the weaknesses of human beings. Horses are beautiful animals, people love to own, ride, or even just watch them. Animals and fertile farmland are examples of the love of ownership.

These are examples of the worldly desires of human beings, but what is their real worth? They are the, "*possessions of this worldly life,*" they will not last forever. Those who aspire to the everlasting reward, an aspiration that elevates the human being from the level of material desires to the level of heavenly spirituality, should seek it with God, "*Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? In store for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God.*" This everlasting reward which the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to promise the believers was in fact a material reward. However, there is a basic difference between the material things in this worldly life and the material things in the Hereafter. In addition, there is the invaluable reward, "*the good pleasure of God.*" This is a pleasure that outweigh all the pleasures of this life and the Hereafter combined. "*God is All-Seeing of (His) servants,*" God sees and knows what is in the hearts of His servants. He knows their feelings, their thoughts, and their desires and He knows what is best for them.

The characters of those servants are then outlined, "*those who say, 'Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;'* the perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn." Their supplication reflects the depth of their consciousness of God. It is a proclamation of faith in God. They use it to seek God's forgiveness and salvation. These characters delineate the high moral ground that should be assumed by all Muslims.

They are perseverant. They do not cower when inflicted by pain. They persevere in performing their difficult undertakings. They submit to God's will and they are content with God's decrees.

They are truthful. They take pride in upholding what is right. They refrain from lying, because lying is a symptom of a deficient character motivated by the fear of loss or the extreme desire of gain.

They worship devoutly. They fulfill their duty to God. They dignify their souls by being devout to God alone.

They spend. They free themselves from the shackles of stinginess. They raise the value of human brotherhood above the personal desire of hoarding. They fulfill their share in the social collective duty towards the human community to make it a community befitting humans.

They pray for forgiveness before dawn. This is an image of highly spiritual beings in a highly spiritual environment. Before dawn, life is calm, the spirit is alert, and the thoughts are heavenly. The spirit of the human joins the spirit of the universe in a prayer to God, the Creator of both the human and the universe.

*“God bears witness that there is no deity but He, and (so do) the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge; maintaining His creation with justice; there is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.”* The belief in the Oneness of God is the corner stone of faith from an Islamic perspective. He is the only God and it is He who maintains His creation with justice. The verse states unequivocally this truth in the form of a testimony from God which is sufficient for any believer. However, it may be said that only those who believe in God would be happy to accept such a testimony as a proof of the Oneness of God. But the fact is that the People of the Scripture believed in God, however, they claimed that He has a son. The idolaters did believe in God, but they associated partners with Him.

The narrative indicates that the statement of the Oneness of God has far reaching consequences and deeper dimensions of understanding. God accepts nothing of His servants except absolute submission. Not only they have to believe and feel that there is only one God, but they also have to act accordingly. They have to follow the divine plan which is detailed in the rules and laws given in His Book. Those who claim that they believe in God but accept rules and laws which contravene the divine plan are, in actuality, associating partners with God.

The testimony of the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge is exemplified in their complete compliance with God’s commands and their absolute submission to His will. The statement reflects their belief in the truth of the Oneness of God, their obedience, and their submission to God alone.

The testimony that God is One leads to the testimony that He maintains His creation with justice. This is a reference to the second verse in the Sura, *“There is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting.”* Maintaining His creation with justice is a component of His Self-Subsistence. Justice in life will not be achieved until the way of life that God has chosen for people is established. This way of life has been delineated in His Book.

*“There is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.”* Power and wisdom are necessary attributes for maintaining the creation and the establishment of justice. These are attributes of positive effectiveness. They motivate the believer to put his trust in God and accept His will. They transform faith from being an abstract concept into a dynamic propelling force.

*“True religion in the sight of God is the submission to His Will. Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge came to them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning. And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, ‘I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me.’ And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, ‘Have you submitted?’ If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of the servants.”*

It is One God and one faith that bring people together under the banner of submission to God. But submission to God is not a slogan to be raised nor is it words to be uttered. It is not an abstract concept that resides in the heart, nor mere rituals to be performed. Submission is complete obedience to God. It is the use of God's revelation as the source for rules that govern the lives of people.

*“Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge came to them, through transgression among themselves.”* Their dispute was not caused by ignorance, because the proof for the Oneness of God was given clearly in the revelations they received. Their difference in opinion was caused by their transgression. Disputing the Oneness of God is a rejection of the belief in God. Those who commit this transgression are warned, *“Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning.”*

God then told His Prophet (PBUH) how to settle this argument, *“And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, ‘I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me.’ And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, ‘Have you submitted?’ If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of the servants.”*

This is the challenge that God asked His Prophet (PBUH) to pose to those who argue about the concept of the Oneness of God: call people to submit to God alone. The meaning of submission was given above. If they submit, then they are guided. But if they do not accept the challenge then it is your duty only to deliver the message.

*“Those who reject the revelations of God, and slay the prophets wrongfully, and slay those of humankind who enjoin equity promise them a painful torment. The deeds of such people will neither bear fruit in this world nor in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.”*

This is the fate of those who reject the revelations of God. Their deeds will be frustrated in this life and in the Hereafter. They did not only reject the revelations of God but they also murdered the prophets and those who tried to establish justice.

*“Have you not considered those who have been given a portion of the Scripture? They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their dispute, but a party of them turns away and declines (The arbitration).”* It is amazing how some of the People of Scripture (not all of them) turn away from referring to the rules in God's Book regarding matters of belief and daily life. This is similar to the situation of Muslims who say that they are Muslims but refrain from applying God's law in their lives.

*“This is because they say, ‘The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days’. The forgeries they made caused them to betray their own faith.”* This is the reason behind their refusal to apply the rule of God's Book. They do not truly believe in a Day of Judgment nor do they truly believe in the divine justice. The fear of God and shying away from displeasing Him cannot settle in one heart side by side to the refusal to apply God's law; the law that has been delineated in His Book. Unfortunately, there are those who claim that they are Muslims but refuse to apply the rules of God's Book in their lives. They claim that there is no place for these



rules in the daily lives of people. They claim that religion should not interfere with the social and economic practices of people.

*“How will they fare when we gather them together on a Day about which there is no doubt, and each soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they will not be wronged?”* This is a real warning posed in the form of a question left unanswered so that people would reflect on it.

*“Say, ‘God, Owner of Sovereignty, You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please. You endue with honour whom You please, and You abase whom You please. In Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power. You cause the night to merge into the day, and You cause the day to merge into the night; You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure.’”* This is a humble invocation which reiterates a fundamental fact, God is One. He is the sole owner of everything, He has no partner. He bestows on whomsoever He pleases whatever He pleases. Wealth bestowed on people does not become their own. It is a trust that has been entrusted to them so that they manage it according to the rules that pleases God. God can take it back whenever He pleases. He endows with honour whomsoever He pleases and He abases whosoever He pleases. No one has the power to dispute God’s decrees. He maintains everything in the universe with justice and in His hand is all the good.

The image of merging the day into the night and the night into the day is a moving image. The verse could be understood to refer to the change in the lengths of the day and the night from one season to another. It could also be a reference to the gradual change from the light of day to the darkness of night which takes place every day. Either way, the image alerts the heart of the believer to God’s management of the universe. This is a gentle touch which returns the human heart to the great truth, the truth of the Oneness of God, the truth of the Oneness of the maintainer of the universe, the truth of the Oneness of the doer, and the truth of the Oneness of the planner. He is the sole owner and He is the sole giver. He is God the Self-Subsisting, the Sovereign, the One who bestows honor, the One who humbles, the Supreme Life-Giver, the Supreme Death-Bringer, the Grantor, and the Preventer. He manages all the affairs of the universe and people with justice and goodness.

*“Let not the believers make the disbelievers their protecting guardians in preference to the believers. Whosoever does that shall cut himself from God, unless you are guarding yourselves against them. But God cautions you to beware of Him; for the final return is to God. Say, ‘Whether you hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God knows it all. He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And God has power over all things.’ On the day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done and all the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you to beware of Him. And God is All-Pitying towards all those who serve Him. Say, ‘If you do love God, follow me, God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’ Say, ‘Obey God and His Messenger’. But if they turn back, God does not love the disbelievers.”*

Islam does not command nor allow Muslims to treat others who do not fight Muslims unkindly. An alliance is a different form of relationship. The word alliance in the verse refers to a bond based on love and loyalty. Members of an alliance subscribe to the same values and principles. It

is difficult that such a bond would exist between Muslims and others who do not subscribe to Islamic values.

To love God means to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH) and to lead a life according to his example. The belief in God is not words to be enunciated, feelings that fill the heart, nor rituals to be performed. The belief in God is obedience to God and His messenger, an obedience that is reflected on the deeds of the believer.

Ibn Katheer says, "This verse establishes a criterion which tests the truthfulness of those who claim that they love God. If they truly love God then they have to follow Muhammad's (PBUH) way in words and deeds." The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, "*Whoever does something that contravenes our principles, he is not one of us.*"

Ibn Katheer also said, "These verses suggest that disobeying God and the Messenger is synonymous to the disbelief in God; God does not love the disbelievers even though they may claim that they love God,"

### **Verses: 33 to 64**

33. *God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all people,*
34. *Offspring, one of the other. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
35. *When the wife of 'Imran said, "My Lord, I do dedicate what is in my womb entirely for Your special service. So accept this of me. You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."*
36. *When she was delivered, she said, "My Lord, I am delivered of a female child" - and God knew best what she brought forth - "And the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from Satan, the rejected."*
37. *Her Lord graciously accepted her. He made her grow in purity and beauty under the care of Zachary. Whenever Zachary went into the sanctuary where she was, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, "Mary, whence comes this to you?" She said, "From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."*
38. *Then did Zachary pray to his Lord, saying, "My Lord, grant me from Your grace a progeny that is pure. You are Hearer of prayer."*
39. *The angels called to him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary, "God gives you the glad tidings of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble, chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous."*
40. *He said, "My Lord, how shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me, and my wife is barren?" He (the angel) said, "So it will be. God does whatever He wills."*
41. *He said, "My Lord, give me a sign." He (the angel) said, "Your sign is that you shall not speak to anyone for three days except with signals. Then remember your Lord often, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning."*
42. *And when the angels said, "Mary, God has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the world."*
43. *Mary, worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down in prayer."*

44. *This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not with them when they cast lots with their pens, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed (the point).*
45. *The angels said, "Mary, God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him. His name will be the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God.*
46. *He shall speak to the people in his cradle and in maturity. And he shall be of the righteous."*
47. *She said, "My Lord, how shall I give birth to a child when no man has touched me?" He said, "So it will be, God creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He only says, 'Be' and it is.*
48. *And God will teach him the Book and the Wisdom; the Torah, and the Gospel.*
49. *And will make him a messenger to the Children of Israel, (who will say), 'I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God's leave; and I tell you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you are believers.*
50. *And I have come to confirm that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So be conscious of God, and obey me.*
51. *It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is the straight path."*
52. *But when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he said, "Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?" The disciples said, "We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him.*
53. *Our Lord, we believe in that which You have revealed and we follow the messenger. Enrol us among those who bear witness (to the truth)."*
54. *And (the disbelievers) schemed, and God too schemed, and God is the Best of the Schemers.*
55. *When God said, "Jesus, I will cause you to die and I will raise you to Me, and I am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and I am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me you will (all) return, and I shall judge among you as to that wherein you used to differ.*
56. *As for those who rejected faith, I will torment them with terrible torment in this world and in the Hereafter, and they will not have anyone to help them.*
57. *But as for those who believe and do good deeds, God will pay them (in full) their reward; but God does not love the wrongdoers."*
58. *This is what We recite to you of the revelations and the Message of Wisdom.*
59. *The similitude of Jesus in the sight of God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was.*
60. *This is the truth coming from your Lord, so be not of those who doubt.*
61. *If any one disputes in this matter with you after (full) knowledge has come to you, say, "Come, let us gather together - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves - then let us humbly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie."*
62. *This is verily the true account. There is no deity except God; and God is indeed the Eminent, the Wise.*

63. *But if they turn away, God has full knowledge of those who are mischief-makers.*
64. *Say, "People of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you. That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God." If then they turn away, say you, "Bear witness that we are the ones who submitted to God. (3: 33-64)*

This group of verses starts with a mention of those whom God has chosen from among His servants to carry the responsibility of bringing His guidance to people. This is a continuous chain of messengers that were chosen to deliver God's message. It is the single message that was revealed to humankind over the years since the beginning of time, *"God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all people, offspring, one of the other. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."* The word "offspring" does not necessarily mean that there is a blood relationship between the messengers however, they all are the offspring of Adam and Noah (PBUT). The verse mentions two people, Adam and Noah (PBUT) and two families, the families of Abraham and 'Imran. This indicates that Adam and Noah were chosen by God as individuals, while in the case of Abraham and 'Imran (PBUT), not only they were chosen as individuals, but their offspring were also chosen as well. The meaning of "offspring" has been explained in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2), to indicate that prophet-hood is not bestowed according to rules of hereditary succession on the basis of blood relationships but it is bestowed on the basis of the legacy of faith.

The verses then continue to narrate the story of the birth of Mary, *"When the wife of 'Imran said, 'My Lord, I do dedicate what is in my womb entirely for Your special service. So accept this of me. You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.'"* But the baby came out to be a female, *"When she was delivered, she said, 'My Lord, I am delivered of a female child'- and God knew best what she brought forth – 'And the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from Satan, the rejected.'"*

The story of the vow that the wife of 'Imran, the mother of Mary, made reveals a heart full of faith. She vowed to commit the most precious thing she had, her child yet still in her womb, to the service of God. The voluntary dedication of her child to the service of God is an act laden with emotion. It suggests that absolute freedom can only be attained by those who dedicate themselves fully to God. This is the essence of the belief in the Oneness of God. The belief in the Oneness of God and the application of His law frees human beings from any kind of slavery to others. The humble invocation made by the wife of 'Imran reflected her absolute submission to God. However, she was hoping for a son because the tradition at that time was that only males are accepted to serve in the temple. The verses express Mary's mother's apology and her appeal to God to accept her offering asking Him in simple and humble words, the words of a person who feels the closeness to God, to protect her gift and her progeny from the cursed one. God responded to her sincerity and accepted her gift, *"Her Lord graciously accepted her. He made her grow in purity and beauty under the care of Zachary. Whenever Zachary went into the sanctuary where she was, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, 'Mary, whence comes this to you?' She said, 'From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.'"*

This was God's reward for the sincerity that filled the heart of the mother. God entrusted Mary to the care of Zachary (PBUH), a descendent of the Prophet Aaron (PBUH) and the chief of the temple. She grew up in a pure environment and was supplied by provisions from God. There is no need to discuss the details of the provisions; we will simply say that she was given provisions that made Zachary (PBUH) wonder. He asked her about this, her response was the response of a humble believer who does not boast or brag about the blessings bestowed on her. She simply said it is, *"From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."* This was a harbinger for the miracles of the births of John and Jesus (PBUT).

Zachary (PBUH) did not have progeny but he was yearning for a child of his own. Seeing what was happening to Mary, the hope in the mercy of God grew in his heart, *"Then did Zachary pray to his Lord, saying, 'My Lord, grant me from Your grace a progeny that is pure. You are Hearer of prayer.'"* Zachary's (PBUH) humble invocation was accepted by God. Zachary (PBUH), the old man, and his barren wife were promised a child. The prayer that emanated from a pure heart and was directed to God who is able to grant what He pleases whenever He pleases has been accepted. The glad tidings of a son who was named before he was even born were carried by the angels, *"The angels called to him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary, 'God gives you the glad tidings of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble, chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous.' He said, 'My Lord, how shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me, and my wife is barren?' He (the angel) said, 'So it will be, God does whatever He wills.'"*

Zachary (PBUH) was taken by surprise, to have a son born to an old man and a barren woman is a miracle. But God does what He wills. Zachary (PBUH) wanted a sign to reassure his heart, *"He said, 'My Lord, give me a sign', He (the angel) said 'Your sign is that you shall not speak to anyone for three days except with signals. Then remember your Lord often, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning.'"* God gave him a sign which illustrated how miracles take place. He was told that he will not be able to speak to people for a period of three days, but at the same time, he will be able to use his tongue to celebrate the praise of God.

*"And when the angels said, 'Mary, God has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the world. Mary, worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down in prayer.'"* God chose her to receive this direct blessing from Him, exactly as the father of humanity was chosen to receive God's blessing. It is a great blessing. But, she did not realize the real impact of this news. The verses point to the purity of Mary. This has great significance in view of the doubts that were cast about the birth of Jesus. This also illustrates the beauty of this religion and reveals its source. At the time, Muhammad (PBUH) was facing great difficulties in dealing with the People of the Scripture, but in spite of that, here he is talking about the purity of Mary and her unique status among the women of the world. This is the same Mary that the Christians believe in and use as an excuse for not believing in Muhammad (PBUH). It is the truth that Muhammad (PBUH) received from his Lord. Had this religion not come from God, Muhammad (PBUH) would not have said it.

*"This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not with them when they cast lots with their pens, as to which of them should be charged with the*

*care of Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed (the point).*” The verse points to what happened when Mary’s mother brought her to the temple in fulfillment of her vow to God. The rabbis were competing with each other to get the honour of taking care of Mary. This story was neither narrated in the old nor in the new testaments, but it must have been known to the rabbis at that time. The Qur’an does not give many details about this incident, but we know that the care of Mary was entrusted to Zachary (PBUH). This story was not known to the Prophet (PBUH) either. It may have been one of the secrets of the temple and it was used by the Qur’an to challenge the People of the Scripture. The story in the Qur’an was never challenged by the People of the Scripture which attests to its veracity.

Now we come to the account of the birth of Jesus (PBUH), a miracle for human beings but a normal thing for the Divine will. The angels brought the glad tidings to Mary of a word from God; his name is Jesus the son of Mary. The verse refers to him as Jesus, the son of Mary. Thus, not only his name was given but also his lineage. *“The angels said, ‘Mary, God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him. His name will be the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God. He shall speak to the people in his cradle and in maturity. And he shall be of the righteous.’”* The verses also described his relationship to God. He will be, *“held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God.”* The verses refer to another miracle that he was endowed with: he will be able to speak to people as a young baby in the cradle, and in maturity. He will be one of the righteous.

Mary the virgin, was puzzled as anyone in her place would be, she called upon her Lord, *“My Lord, how shall I give birth to a child when no man has touched me?”* The answer came to remind her of the simple fact that human beings often forget, *“So it will be; God creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He only says, ‘Be’ and it is.”* This reminder is enough to resolve the puzzle, clear the confusion, and secure the heart. One would ask after that; how could I miss this simple fact? The verses continue to talk about Jesus (PBUH), *“And God will teach him the Scripture and the Wisdom; the Torah, and the Gospel.”* The Scripture could be construed as writings, or as the actual books, the Torah and the Gospel. Wisdom is a state of mind which grants people insight and allows them to make the right decisions. It is a great blessing. The Torah was Jesus’ (PBUH) Scripture as well as the Gospel. It was the foundation of the religion that Jesus (PBUH) believed in.

*“And will make him a messenger to the Children of Israel, (saying) ‘I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God’s leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God’s leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you are believers.’”* The verse shows that Jesus’ (PBUH) message was directed to the Children of Israel. He was one of their prophets. The verse also refers to the miracles that Jesus (PBUH) performed in front of the Children of Israel, *“I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God’s leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God’s leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses.”* Jesus (PBUH) insisted, each time he performed these miracles, that he is able to perform these miracles only by the leave

of God. These powers that were given to Prophet Jesus (PBUH) complement the miracle of his birth and show that God is able to make anyone of His servants perform such miracles.

*“And I have come to confirm that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So be conscious of God, and obey me. It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is the straight path.”* These verses which summarize Jesus’ (PBUH) call to the Children of Israel reveal the original features of Christianity. Jesus’ (PBUH) message came to confirm the law revealed in the Torah with some modification. The modifications included the removal of some restrictions given in the Torah, thus rendering lawful some of the things that were originally prohibited. He also clarified the fundamental truth on which the religion of God was established: all the miracles which he performed were made possible by the grace of God. Jesus (PBUH) is a human being; he has no supernatural power which enables him to perform miracles out of his own accord. His message to them is to be conscious of God and obey Him and His Messenger. God is the only deity to be worshiped. To be on the straight path is to believe in the Oneness of God, to worship Him, to obey His Messenger, and to follow the Message which the Messenger brought.

*“But when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he cried, ‘Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?’ The disciples said, ‘We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him. Our Lord, we believe in that which You have revealed and we follow the messenger. Enrol us among those who bear witness (to the truth).’”*

We can see the sudden change in the narrative. The details of the birth of Jesus and the description of the encounter between Mary and her people after Jesus was delivered are omitted. These details are mentioned in another Sura, Surat Mary (Chapter 19). The narrative moves to speak about the discussion between Jesus (PBUH) and his disciples when he realized the lack of support for his mission from the Children of Israel. He called upon those who believed in him to join him, *“Who will be my helpers?”* Each messenger or leader should have supporters to support his cause. Jesus’ (PBUH) disciples responded saying, *“We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him.”* They asked Jesus (PBUH) to bear witness that they have submitted to God and they will help establish God’s way on earth. They also made a pledge to God. This pledge embodies their consent on a covenant between them and God. The task of the messenger is to deliver the message. Once the believer received the message and believed in it then he/she has to pledge allegiance to God. This is a pledge to follow the way of life that came in the message.

*“And (the disbelievers) schemed, and God too schemed, and God is the Best of the Schemers. When God said, ‘Jesus, I will cause you to die and I will raise you to Me, and I am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and I am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me you will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein you used to differ. As for those who disbelieve, I will torment them with terrible torment in this world and in the Hereafter, and they will not have anyone to help them. But as for those who believe and do good deeds, God will pay them (in full) their reward; but God does not love the wrongdoers.’”* Those who did not believe in Jesus (PBUH) schemed. They accused his

mother of adultery and accused him of lying and sorcery. They complained to the Roman ruler accusing Jesus (PBUH) of being an agitator. The Roman ruler delivered Jesus (PBUH) to them to try him and punish him according to their law. They wanted Jesus (PBUH) to be crucified, but God wanted to take him back to Him, raise him, and honour him. How did God take him back and how did God raise him? These are matters of the unseen; we better not delve into them.

*“This is what We recite to you of the revelations and the Message of Wisdom.”* These stories and the lessons that one can learn from them are a revelation from God. The tone of the verse is endearing to the Prophet (PBUH). When God narrates stories to His Prophet (PBUH) it indicates certain closeness between the two. Then the miraculous birth of Jesus (PBUH) is explained, *“The similitude of Jesus in the sight of God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, and then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.”* How can the creation of Jesus be more difficult than the creation of Adam?

*“This is the truth coming from your Lord, so be not of those who doubt.”* The Prophet (PBUH) never doubted the words of God, but the statement is meant to strengthen the Prophet’s (PBUH) argument when he deals with the doubters. If they continue in their arguments, then call them to a challenge, *“If any one disputes in this matter with you, now after (full) knowledge has come to you, say, ‘Come, let us gather together - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves - then let us humbly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) posed that challenge to those who were arguing about the truth of the Qur’an, but they declined.

*“This is verily the true account. There is no deity except God; and God is indeed the Eminent, the Wise.”* When they declined the challenge they admitted the truth of the Qur’an. The Qur’an describes those who turned away as, *“mischief-makers.”* Those who do not believe in the Oneness of God are committing great mischief. The belief in the Oneness of God frees human beings from all sorts of slavery. It establishes a way of life that is based on God’s law. The values and morals of this way of life are dictated by God’s message.

*“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you. That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that none of us shall take others for lords beside God.’ If then they turn away, say you, ‘Bear witness that we are the ones who submitted to God.’”* This is a fair invitation. It aims at putting all people on an equal footing in front of God. No people are better than other people and no human being is obliged to worship another. All people have one God. But if they turn away, then say to them, *“we are the ones who submitted to God.”*



## Verses: 65 to 92

65. *People of the Scripture, why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Do you have no sense?*
66. *Here you are arguing about matters of which you had some knowledge, but why do you argue about matters of which you have no knowledge? It is God Who knows, and you do not know.*
67. *Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; but he was an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater.*
68. *Indeed, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and the believers; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.*
69. *A party of the People of the Scripture long to make you go astray; and they make none to go astray except themselves, but they realize it not.*
70. *People of the Scripture, why do you reject God's revelations, when you (yourselves) bear witness (to their truth)?*
71. *People of the Scripture, why do you mask the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth?*
72. *A party of the People of the Scripture say, "Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe at the opening of the day, and then reject it at the end of the day, in order that they may return.*
73. *And believe no one unless he follows your religion. Say, 'True guidance is the Guidance of God.' Lest anyone is given the like of that which was given to you or that they may argue with you in the presence of your Lord". Say (Muhammad), "The bounty is in God's hand. He bestows it on whom He wills". God is Vast, Omniscient.*
74. *He chooses for His mercy whom He wills. God's Bounty is Great.*
75. *Among the People of the Scripture there is he who, if you trust him with a treasure, will return it to you. And among them there is he who, if you trust him with a piece of gold, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over him. That is because they say, "We are under no obligation towards the gentiles." They tell a lie against God knowingly.*
76. *Nay, whoever fulfills his promise and is conscious of God, then surely God loves those who are conscious of Him.*
77. *Those who purchase a small gain at the cost of God's covenant and their oaths, they have no share in the Hereafter. God will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Theirs will be a painful torment.*
78. *There is among them a party, who distorts the Scripture with their tongues, so that you may think it is a part of the Scripture, but it is not part of the Scripture; and they say, "It is from God," but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.*
79. *It is not possible that any human being, to whom God has given the Scripture and the Wisdom and the prophet-hood, would say to people, "Worship me rather than worship God." On the contrary he would say, "Be faithful servants of God, for you have taught the Scripture and you have studied it earnestly."*
80. *Nor would he instruct you to take the angels and the prophets for lords. Would he command you to disbelieve after you have submitted to God?*
81. *God took the covenant of the prophets, saying, "I give you the Scripture and the Wisdom; then when a messenger comes to you, confirming that which you have; you shall believe in him and you shall help him." God said, "Do you agree, and take my Covenant as*

*binding on you?" They said, "We agree." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."*

82. *Then whosoever turns away after this, these are the transgressors.*
83. *Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned.*
84. *Say, "We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and we have submitted to God."*
85. *And whoso seeks as religion other than the complete submission to God, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.*
86. *How shall God guide a people who rejected faith after they have accepted it and bore witness that the Messenger was true and that clear signs had come to them? God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
87. *The recompense for such people is a curse from God, from the angels, and from all people.*
88. *They will abide therein. The torment which they will be subjected to will not be lightened; neither will they be reprieved;*
89. *Except for those who repent afterward and make amends; for verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
90. *But those who rejected faith after they have accepted it, and then increased in their rejection of faith, their repentance will never be accepted. And such are those who have gone astray.*
91. *As to those who reject faith, and die while rejecting faith, never would be accepted from any such as much gold as the earth contains, if it were offered as a ransom; for such is a grievous torment and they will find no helpers.*
92. *By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever you spend God knows it well. (3:65-92)*

*"People of the Scripture, why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Do you have no sense? Here you are arguing about matters of which you had some knowledge, but why do you argue about matters of which you have no knowledge? It is God Who knows, and you do not know. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; but he was an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater. Those of humankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers."*

It is narrated that these verses were revealed to address a situation that arose during a discussion between the Christians of Najran and some Jewish scholars who were at a meeting with the Prophet (PBUH). The two groups argued together: The Jewish scholars said Abraham (PBUH) was a Jew, and the Christians said Abraham (PBUH) was a Christian. Whether this is true or not, it seems that the verses came to address claims made by the Christians and Jews about Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Each group claimed that they are the only carrier of Abraham's (PBUH) legacy. These verses refuted these claims. How can Abraham (PBUH) be a Jew or a Christian when the Torah and the Gospel were revealed long after he passed away? The verses state

unequivocally that Abraham (PBUH) was, “*an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater.*” This statement puts forward three points. First, the distortions that crept into Judaism and Christianity brought them into the circle of associating partners with God. This is something that Abraham (PBUH) would not have accepted. Second, Islam (absolute submission to God) and associating partners with God can never be congruent, since they contradict each other. Third, the idolaters of Mecca cannot claim that they are followers of Abraham (PBUH), as they used to claim, because Abraham (PBUH) was never an idolater.

*“Those of humankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and the believers; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.”* Only those who accepted Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) call when he was alive, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) - who followed in the footsteps of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in submitting himself to God – and those who submitted themselves to God with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can claim that they carry the legacy of Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

The verses then warn the believers of the trickery of a party of the People of the Scripture, “*A party of the People of the Scripture long to make you go astray; and they make none to go astray except themselves, but they realize it not.*” This trickery is motivated by a desire in their hearts that makes them long to leading you astray, but they only lead themselves astray without even being aware of it.

The warning to the believers is followed by a rebuke to the group of the People of the Scripture who were involved in this deception, “*People of the Scripture, why do you reject God’s revelations, when you (yourselves) bear witness (to their truth)? People of the Scripture, why do you mask the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth?*” The verses address the group of the People of the Scripture who were involved in these acts of deception in spite of the fact that they recognized the truth in Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) call. There were signs and harbingers in their Scripture which paved the way to the appearance of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, they chose not to believe in him, not because of lack of evidence supporting his prophet-hood but because of their stubbornness. However, the Qur’an continued to address them as People of the Scripture even after they had transgressed and distorted the Scripture.

*“A party of the People of the Scripture say, ‘Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe at the opening of the day, and then reject it at the end of the day, in order that they may return.’”* This was a clever way to create confusion in the hearts of those Muslims who were not sure of their faith. This trick aimed at planting the seeds of doubt in the hearts of some Muslims who would think that those who left Islam did so because they discovered its fallacy. For this plan to succeed, it had to be kept in confidence, so they commanded complete secrecy, “*And believe no one unless he follows your religion.*”

God’s response to this trickery was to command His Prophet (PBUH) to say, “*True guidance is the Guidance of God*” There is no other way except God’s way to receive guidance.

The verses continue to elaborate on the efforts of some of the People of Scripture to lead the Muslims astray and the motivations behind these efforts. They were motivated by envy and fear

that the Muslims would take away from them their place with God as if God does not know who deserves to be recognized by Him, *“Lest anyone is given the like of that which was given to you or that they may argue with you in the presence of your Lord”.* So, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to set the record straight, *“Say (Muhammad), ‘The bounty is in God's hand. He bestows it on whom He wills.’ God is Vast, Omniscient. He chooses for His mercy whom He wills. God’s Bounty is Great.”*

The Qur’an was fair to the People of the Scripture even if they were unfair to Muslims. It recognized that some were honest in their dealings and some were not. Hence, it praised those who were honest, *“Among the People of the Scripture there is he who, if you trust him with a treasure, will return it to you.”* But it deprecated those who were dishonest in their dealings, *“And among them there is he who, if you trust him with a piece of gold, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over him. That is because they say, ‘We are under no obligation towards the gentiles.’ They tell a lie against God knowingly.”*

Not only they were dishonest, but they also made the claim that it is their religion that commanded them to behave in such a despicable way. They were telling a lie, because God did not command them to use a double standard in dealing with people. The Qur’an states the golden standard with which all dealings are measured, *“Nay, whoever fulfills his promise and is conscious of God, then surely God loves those who are conscious of Him. Those who purchase a small gain at the cost of God's covenant and their oaths, they have no share in the Hereafter. God will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Theirs will be a painful torment.”* It is a single standard that should be followed. The Qur’an promised those who apply this standard, out of being conscious of God and seeking to please Him, to be loved and honoured by God. Those who chose not to use this standard, and bartered the covenant of God for a miserable price – it is a miserable price even if they gained the whole world - they have no share in the Hereafter, God will not look at them nor will He purify them. They will suffer a painful doom. One notices here that the principle of the fulfillment of promises is closely related to the concept of God consciousness. Therefore, one cannot use a double standard in dealing with people because ultimately the dealing is with God whether the person on the other side of the deal is a friend or foe.

*“There is among them a party who distorts the Scripture with their tongues, so that you may think it is a part of the Scripture, but it is not part of the Scripture; and they say, ‘It is from God’, but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.”* This is the problem when clergy or religious scholars become corrupt. We know how they twist the verses to provide statements which may contradict the essence of the religion. We can see this happening from people who belong to various faiths. They speak in the name of religion while they are acting against the religion. They twist the verses and extrapolate it wrongly to please their masters or to attain a worldly gain. They claim that, *“It is from God, but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.”* This problem is not unique to the People of the Scripture but it applies to corrupt scholars and clergy in any religion. It is mentioned here to warn Muslims of the dangers of corrupt religious leaders.

*“It is not possible that any human being, to whom God has given the Scripture and the Wisdom and the prophet-hood, would say to people, ‘Be my servants rather than God’s’. On the contrary he would say, ‘Be faithful servants of God, for you have taught the Scripture and you have studied it earnestly.’ Nor would he instruct you to take the angels and the prophets for lords. Would he command you to disbelief after you have submitted to God?”* Any prophet knows that he is a servant of God. God alone is the Lord who deserves to be worshiped. It is impossible for any prophet to claim that he is a god. A prophet would only say to the people that they should submit only to God; they should worship Him alone; and they should follow His commands. This is what they have been told in God’s Scripture which they are familiar with. Similarly, a prophet will never ask people to take the angels or the prophets for lords, because this means he would be commanding them to reject faith in God. A prophet’s task is to guide people to God’s path not to lead them astray. The verses at hand describe also the transgressions committed by some present day self-proclaimed Muslim scholars. They conveniently select verses from the Qur’an and twist them to serve the purpose of their human gods.

*“God took the covenant of the prophets, saying, ‘I give you the Scripture and the Wisdom; then when a messenger comes to you, confirming that which you have; you shall believe in him and you shall help him.’ God said, ‘Do you agree, and take my Covenant as binding on you?’ They said, ‘We agree.’ He said, ‘Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.’ Then whosoever turns away after this, these are the transgressors. Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned.”* God has taken a sacred covenant from all messengers, He gathered all messengers to witness the ratification of the covenant, and He, Himself was a witness. The covenant commanded each messenger to follow what the subsequent messengers will bring, even though each one of them was given a Scripture and Wisdom from God. Each messenger should support subsequent messengers. The verse wraps up time and brings all messengers together in one scene to ratify the covenant. They were asked by God if they agree to take God’s Covenant as binding to all of them. They all agreed. The verse paints a majestic scene, a procession of honoured messengers submitting to the divine guidance and announcing the unity of the message and the brotherhood of the messengers. The messengers are a group of chosen people. Each messenger came to complete the work that has been done by his predecessor. They neither had ego nor personal ambitions to hinder the completion of the mission. The religion of God is free of any shadow of chauvinism caused by ethnicity or nationalism. In the light of this, one may conclude that the People of the Scripture broke the covenant of God when they refused to believe in the revelations that Muhammad (PBUH) brought.

Those who do not follow the Prophet (PBUH) are transgressors. God revealed one message that was delivered through a succession of messengers. All of them delivered the same single message. The message commanded complete submission to God. Submission is achieved through following God’s law and the way of life that He has decreed for His servants.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to proclaim to the whole world that the Muslim nation recognizes God’s covenant which has been ratified by all the prophets. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to say, *“We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was*

*revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and we have submitted to God.”*

It should be noted that the list of the beliefs mentioned in the verse is crowned by the statement of submission. Submission to God means absolute obedience to God’s commands, law, and rules. It is clear from the previous verse, *“Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned,”* that submission of the celestial creatures means that they follow God’s law. The Qur’an reiterates the meaning of the word Islam (submission) over and over again to emphasize that it is not only a word to be uttered nor a belief to settle in the heart, but it is also a practical application of God’s law in our daily life.

Finally, the ultimate conclusion is made, *“And whoso seeks as religion other than the complete submission to God, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.”* After this detailed discourse, there is no chance whatsoever for any doubt regarding the meaning of the word *“Islam,”* (submission). It is not sufficient to proclaim that *“there is no deity except God,”* but we have to follow that with applying the true meaning of the statement of the Oneness of God, the maintainer of the universe. It is not sufficient to proclaim that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of God, but we have to follow that by following the way of life and the law that Muhammad (PBUH) brought to us. Islam is not only a belief that rests deep in our hearts, but also deeds and actions that reflect this belief. Rituals are not an end in themselves but they are a vehicle which keeps us close to God.

*“How shall God guide a people who rejected faith after they have accepted it and bore witness that the Messenger was true and that clear signs had come to them? God does not guide the wrongdoers. The recompense for such people is a curse from God, from the angels, and from all people. They will abide therein. The torment which they will be subjected to will not be lightened; neither will they be reprieved.”* This is a frightening warning that fills any believing heart with anxiety. The warning highlights the seriousness of the matter. However, the chance for forgiveness is still available, all it takes is a knock on the door for repentance, *“Except for those who repent afterward and make amends; for verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

*“By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever you spend God knows it well.”* The early Muslims realized the implication of this verse and they sought righteousness by spending out of that which was dearest to them.

It has been narrated by Imam Ahmed, on the authority of Abi Ishaq bin Abdullah bin Abi Talha who heard Anas bin Malek (RA) says, *“Abu Talha was one of the richest people in Medina. He had a well facing the Messenger’s Mosque. Abu Talha was fond of the well because it had fresh water and the water tasted good. The Prophet (PBUH) used to drink out of this well. When this verse was revealed, Abu Talha came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, ‘God says you will not*

*attain righteousness unless you spend out of that which you love and I am fond of this well, so I would like to donate it to the Muslims. I will put it under your control and you do whatever God commands you to do.' The Prophet (PBUH) admired this deed and said to him, 'This is a profitable bargain. I see that you should give it to your kinsfolk.' Abu Talha said, 'I will do that.' And he gave the ownership of the well to his cousins."*

## **Verses: 93 to 120**

93. *All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except that which Israel made unlawful for himself, before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful."*
94. *Then whosoever shall invent a lie and attributes it to God, these are indeed the wrongdoers.*
95. *Say, "God speaks the truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. He was not of the idolaters."*
96. *The first House (of worship) appointed for humankind was that at Bakka, a blessed place, and (source of) guidance for all humankind.*
97. *In it are clear signs, the place where Abraham once stood; whoever enters it attains security. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for those who can afford it. But if any disbelieves, God does not stand in need of any of His creatures.*
98. *Say, "People of the Scripture, why do you reject the revelations of God, when God is Himself a witness to all what you do?"*
99. *Say, "People of the Scripture, why you obstruct those who believe, from the path of God, seeking to make it crooked, while you were yourselves witnesses (to God's Covenant)? But God is not unaware of what you do."*
100. *You who believe, if you obey a party of the people who were given the Scripture, they would (indeed) turn you back as disbelievers after you have believed.*
101. *And how would you disbelieve while God's revelations are being recited to you and His messenger is in your midst? Whoever holds firmly to God will be guided to a straight path.*
102. *You who believe, be conscious of God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not die except in a state of submission to God.*
103. *And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's Blessings on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Blessing, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, does God make His revelations clear to you, so you may be guided.*
104. *And from among you there should be a party who invite to what is good, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and these are the successful.*
105. *Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear revelations. For such is a dreadful torment.*
106. *On the Day when some faces will be brightened, and some faces will be darkened, it will be said to those whose faces are darkened, "Did you reject faith after accepting it? Then taste the torment for rejecting faith."*
107. *But those whose faces will be brightened, they will be in God's mercy, therein to dwell (for ever).*

108. *These are God's revelations. We recite them to you with the truth. And God wills no injustice to any of His creatures.*
109. *To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. To Him all things will return.*
110. *You are the best community that has been raised up for humankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been best for them. Among them are some who believe, but most of them are transgressors.*
111. *They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance. If they come out to fight you, they will turn their backs to you and flee, and no help shall they get.*
112. *Overshadowed by ignominy wherever they are found save if they clutch a rope from God and a rope from people. They have incurred anger from God, and wretchedness is laid upon them. That is because they used to reject the revelations of God, and slew the prophets wrongfully. That is because they were rebellious and used to transgress.*
113. *Not all of them are alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a party that stands upright. They recite the revelations of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.*
114. *They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they vie one another in doing good deeds. These are in the ranks of the righteous.*
115. *And whatever good they do, it will not be rejected. God is aware of those who are conscious of Him.*
116. *Those who disbelieve, neither their possessions nor their progeny will help them against God. They will be the companions of the fire, dwelling therein (for ever).*
117. *The likeness of that which they spend in this worldly life is as a biting, icy wind which smites the harvest of a people who have wronged themselves and destroys it. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.*
118. *You who believe, do not take as your intimate friends people who are not your kind. They will spare no pains to ruin you and they love to see you in distress. Hatred has already appeared in the utterance from their mouths, and what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made plain to you the revelations, if you will understand.*
119. *Here you are, you love them but they do not love you, though you believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, "We believe." But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in their rage. Say, "Perish in your rage; God knows well all the secrets of the hearts."*
120. *If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if some misfortune overtakes you, they rejoice at it. But if you persevere and do right, their cunning will not do you the least harm. God encompasses all what they do. (3:93-120)*

*"All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except that which Israel made unlawful for himself, before the Torah was revealed. Say, 'Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful.'" Some Jews criticized the Qur'an because it made lawful some food which they were forbidden to eat, in spite of the fact that the Qur'an states that it came to confirm the Torah. It was narrated that the food they referred to was camel meat and milk. The verse came to remind*



them of a historical fact: it is Prophet Jacob (PBUH) who made this food unlawful before the Torah was revealed. Prophet Jacob (PBUH) was also called Israel. It is narrated that he suffered a severe illness. His favourite food was camel's meat and milk; he vowed to give up his favourite food voluntarily upon his recovery. God accepted his vow and healed him. The Children of Israel followed their father in keeping this vow, hence the prohibition. God made unlawful other types of food to the Children of Israel as punishment for their transgression. These foods are mentioned in Surat Al-Ana'am (Chapter 6). The present verse stated the basic Qur'anic rule regarding prohibited food. Food, in general, is made lawful by God except that which has been explicitly declared prohibited for a specific reason. The reasons behind the earlier prohibitions did not apply to Muslims. Thus, these types of food were made lawful to Muslims. The challenge was made, *"Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful."* Those who invent lies about God are not only lying, but they are also committing an injustice against themselves and the people. The punishment for those who commit injustice is known, so it is sufficient to identify the crime and the culprit for the people to recognize the kind of punishment which they should expect.

*"Say, 'God speaks the truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. He was not of the idolaters.' The first House (of worship) appointed for humankind was that at Bakka, a blessed place, and (source of) guidance for all humankind. In it are clear signs, the place where Abraham once stood; whoever enters it attains security. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for those who can afford it. But if any disbelieves, God does not stand in need of any of His creatures."* The statement, *"God speaks the truth"* may refer to the previous discussion made in regard to the realignment of Qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca. The Sacred Mosque in Mecca was built by Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) to be a Qibla for people and a place of safety and security. It is a Qibla for the believers, hence the command to follow Abraham's (PBUH) religion. It is a religion free of idolatry. This House was dedicated to those who prostrate themselves in worship to God. The sign indicating the place where Abraham (PBUH) once stood may be a reference to an old stone that was found attached to the K'aba. It is thought that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) used to stand upon this stone while building the K'aba. It was separated from the K'aba at the time of 'Umar (RA) to clear the path for people to circle around the K'aba.

God decreed that this House is a place of safety and security for whomsoever enters it. This decree was respected even at the time when the Arabs abandoned Abraham's (PBUH) religion and became idolaters. It is narrated that very often a murderer would seek asylum in the House. He would stay safe from any retribution as long as he remains inside the House, even if the murdered person's family knows his whereabouts. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said on the day of Mecca's conquest, *"This city has been made sacred on the day God created the heavens and earth. It is going to be sacred till the Day of Resurrection. Fighting has been made unlawful until today, when I was allowed to fight but only for an hour. Fighting, hunting, and destruction of plants are prohibited in this city till the Day of Resurrection."*

The verses state that Pilgrimage has been prescribed as a ritual for those who can afford it. God is not in need of those who turn away from guidance. It is interesting to note that the command to perform Pilgrimage has been addressed to *"the people."* The command was not issued to the Muslims alone, it is, thus, a command to all people.

Pilgrimage is a duty to be performed once in a lifetime, for those who can afford it. Affordability means financial ability and health capability, in addition to the safety of the road. Several scholars argued about the date on which Pilgrimage was made obligatory. Some say it was made obligatory during the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra based on the fact the Prophet (PBUH) performed Pilgrimage on the 10<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra. Another view holds that Pilgrimage was made obligatory after the battle of Uhud, but the Prophet (PBUH) was not able to perform it right away for one reason or another. Either way, this verse is quite clear in making Pilgrimage an obligatory religious duty for those who can afford it.

*“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, why do you reject the revelations of God, when God is Himself witness to all you do?’”* This verse denounces the People of the Scripture who rejected the Qur’an. The verse describes those who reject the Qur’an as disbelievers. This denouncement is followed with a harsh warning, *“God is Himself witness to all you do.”* An even harsher rebuke is expressed in the subsequent verse, *“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, why do you obstruct those who believe, from the path of God, seeking to make it crooked, while you were yourselves witnesses (to God’s Covenant)? But God is not unaware of what you do.’”* The straight path leads to God; all other paths are crooked because they do not lead to God. Corruption prevails when the way to God is obstructed and people are prevented from pursuing this path.

*“You who believe, if you listen to a party of the people who were given the Scripture, they would (indeed) turn you back as disbelievers after you have believed. And how would you disbelieve while God’s revelations are being recited to you and His messenger is in your midst? Whoever holds firmly to God will be guided to a straight path.”* The Muslim nation was not only commanded to lead a way of life based on God’s commands, but also to illustrate the viability of such a way of life for the whole humanity. The Muslim nation was commanded to be the model that shows all human beings that it is possible to lead a way of life which translates the revelation into practical actions, feelings, morals, and dealings. The Muslim nation would not be able to fulfill its undertaking unless it follows God’s commands.

The verse stated that it is certainly a capital sin for a believer to reject faith during these favourable conditions. This statement is valid today as it was valid then, because even if the Prophet (PBUH) is no longer alive; we still have the Qur’an which addresses us today as it used to address the Muslims at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The salvation lies in holding tight to God’s path.

The Prophet (PBUH) used to be very strict with his companions when it came to matters of faith. However, he used to be flexible with his companions in matters of daily life. He used to listen to their opinions, heed their advice, and benefit from their experience.

The Qur’an then addressed the believers stating two fundamental principles that the Muslim nation should adhere to if it desires to fulfill its responsibility. The first is to remain always conscious of God and the second is to maintain a strong sense of brotherhood among the believers. The role of the Muslims nation as a nation which commands what is good and forbids what is evil will not be fulfilled without a strong faith in God which makes it remain always conscious of Him at all times and a strong feeling of brotherhood among the believers which strengthens the structure of the society.

Let us elaborate on these two fundamental principles. The first principle is to remain, “*conscious of God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not die except in a state of submission to God.*” God consciousness keeps the heart of the believer on the alert at all times. The pursuit of God consciousness is an endless endeavour for the heart of the believer. No one is certain when he/she will die. Death can overtake the human being at any time. It is part of the unseen no one knows when its time will come. If someone wants to die in a state of submission, then one has always to remain conscious of God.

The second principle is the principle of the brotherhood in faith, “*And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's Blessings on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Blessing, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does God make His revelations clear to you, so you may be guided.*” It is a brotherhood that is rooted in Islam and God consciousness. The way to establish this brotherhood, is to hold fast to the rope of God. Its philosophy is to fulfill the covenant of God and to follow His commands. It is a favour that God bestows on whom He loves from among His servants. The Muslims are reminded that before God bestowed His favour on them, they were fighting each other in Medina. Only through Islam, the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj were able to forget their enmity and become brethren under the banner of Islam. The verse used the expression, “*joined your hearts,*” rather than saying “*joined you,*” because the hearts are the home for feelings such as love and hate. The verse paints a picture of a group of hearts gathered closely together around God’s covenant. They were about to fall in the pit of fire and suddenly the hearts remembered God’s covenant and held tight to God’s rope which saved them from falling into the abyss.

Having mentioned the two basic principles which shape the community of the believers, the verses continued to state the role that the Muslim nation was entrusted with, “*And from among you there should be a party who invite to what is good, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong, and these are the successful.*” It is absolutely necessary to have a group of people who invite people to what is good, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is evil. It may be possible for anyone to play the role of inviting to what is good, but it is the responsibility of the government to command what is right and forbid what is wrong.

The narrative continued to warn the Muslim community of falling into the pitfall of disputes that divide the community as has happened to communities before them, “*Be not like those who became divided amongst themselves and fell into disputations after receiving clear revelations. For such is a dreadful torment. On the Day when some faces will be brightened, and some faces will be darkened, it will be said to those whose faces are darkened, 'Did you reject faith after accepting it? Then taste the torment for rejecting faith.'* But those whose faces will be brightened, they will be in God's mercy, therein to dwell (for ever).” This is a lively image that describes different kinds of human beings, some with bright faces and some with darkened faces. Those with darkened faces are rebuked for choosing to reject faith after they had recognized the truth. These verses visualize the consequences of disputations and divisions among the members of the community, and alert the Muslim community to the perils of disputes that lead to divisions. The narrative is ended by a statement supporting the truth of the message, highlighting the seriousness of the reckoning on the Day of Judgment, stressing the absolute fairness with

which people will be judged, and emphasizing the sovereignty of the Creator, *“These are God’s revelations. We recite them to you with the truth. And God wills no injustice to any of His creatures. To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. To Him all things will return.”*

*“You are the best community that has been raised up for humankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God.”* The passive tense used here points to the subtle power of God that fashioned this nation and pushed it forward to assume its responsibility. The words underscore the specific role that the nation was entrusted with. This is what the Muslim nation should realize: this nation has been created to lead humanity on the way of goodness. It is incumbent on this nation, in order to fulfill its role, to be always a source of inspiration. The nation should be a role model for humanity. The tools for achieving such a status include true beliefs, sound perspective, excellent organization, good characters, and knowledge. The role of leadership cannot be assumed by force; it has to be earned by hard work. The Muslim nation has to earn its status as a leader on the basis of its qualifications and characteristics. It is a great responsibility and major undertaking. The first prerequisite for leadership is to have the strength to be able to promote goodness and protect against evil in the world. Strong and true faith is necessary for the nation to fulfill its role. Through true faith the correct moral standards can be established on the basis of the correct understanding of the relationship between God and the human being, and the correct understanding of the role of the human being on earth.

Strong faith is required to provide the necessary support for those who promote goodness and enable them to overcome the difficulties that will face them. Strong faith is the only source for genuine support; it will be still there when all other forms of support are exhausted.

Previous verses called upon the Muslim community to delegate a group from among themselves to carry the responsibility of promoting goodness, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is evil. The present verse describes the nation as a whole as a nation which promotes goodness, enjoins what is right, and forbids what is evil. These are the necessary conditions for the existence of a Muslim nation. There are many places in the Qur’an where this fact is stated. There are also Prophetic traditions which emphasize this.

On the authority of Ibn Sa’eed Al-Khodry (RA), he said, *“I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say, ‘Whoever saw an evil being committed, he should raise his hand against it, if he could not stop it by hand, he should speak against, and if he is unable to speak against it, he should at least condemn it in his heart.’”* On the authority of Jaber bin ‘Abdullah (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The greatest Jihad is to speak the truth in the court of a tyrant.”*

*“If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been best for them. Among them are some who believe, but most of them are transgressors.”* This is a verse which encourages the People of the Scripture to accept the faith of Islam. Their belief will benefit them both in this life and in the Hereafter. Belief will unite them in a single nation in this life and will guarantee their salvation in the Hereafter. The verse provides a fair description: some are believers but many are transgressors. Examples of People of the Scripture who accepted Islam include: ‘Abdullah bin Sallam (RA), Asad bin ‘Obaid (RA), Tha’labah bin Sho’bah (RA), and K’ab bin Malek (RA).

*“They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance. If they come out to fight you, they will turn their backs to you and flee, and no help shall they get.”* The verse indicates that no serious harm will be inflicted on the Muslims by their enemy, whatever harm that they will suffer will not affect their existence as a community nor it will ever amount to displacing them from their land. Muslims were promised victory over their enemy if the enemy chooses to engage them in a fight. The disbelievers will not only lose the battle but they will also be humiliated. They will only be saved by the protection offered to them by the believers and God, if they choose to take advantage of this protection, *“Overshadowed by ignominy wherever they are found save if they clutch a rope from God and a rope from people. They have incurred anger from God, and wretchedness is laid upon them.”* History tells that the events foretold by these verses materialized at later times. The Muslims were able to gain victory over those who waged wars against them from the People of the Scripture. Those who fought Muslims incurred the anger of God because they *“used to reject the revelations of God, and slew the prophets wrongfully. That is because they were rebellious and used to transgress.”*

But this does not apply to all of the People of the Scripture, *“Not all of them are alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a party that stands upright. They recite the revelations of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.”* There are among them believers who are true to God, *“They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they vie one another in doing good deeds. They are in the ranks of the righteous.”* The verse depicts a bright picture for the believers among the People of the Scripture. Their faith is true, complete, and comprehensive. They joined their Muslim brethren and carried out their responsibility the best they can. They became part of the best nation raised for people and they enjoined what is good and forbade what is evil. They competed with one another in doing good deeds. They deserved a divine testimony that they were righteous and they were promised a great reward, *“And whatever good they do, it will not be rejected. God is Aware of those who are conscious of Him.”* God is fully aware of those who remain conscious of Him. This is a bright image that is held in front of those who look forward to earn a similar testimony, to show them the way for such an achievement.

But there is also the other side of the coin, *“Those who disbelieve, neither their possessions nor their progeny will help them against God. They will be the companions of the fire, dwelling therein (for ever).”* This is the image of those who reject faith. Nothing they earned in this life will be of benefit to them. Neither their wealth, nor their offspring will be of any help to them on the Day of Judgment. Not even the money they spent in good causes will be of benefit, because they lacked the intention of spending it in the way of God, *“The likeness of that which they spend in this worldly life is as a biting, icy wind which smites the harvest of a people who have wronged themselves and destroys it. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.”* Here we are in front of an image of a field ripe with plants that are waiting to be harvested and suddenly the field is hit by a storm of icy wind destroying all the plants. In one moment, in a sudden move, the harvest that they were looking for is lost. Similarly, those who reject faith will find out that they lost the work of a lifetime in one moment. God did not wrong them. It was their fault that they followed a crooked path that deviated from the straight path.

*“You who believe, take not as your intimate friends people who are not your kind. They will spare no pains to ruin you and they love to see you in distress. Hatred has already appeared in*

*the utterance from their mouths, and what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made plain to you the revelations, if you will understand.”* This is a fully expressive image that describes the intense hatred that filled the hearts of the enemy and exposed their feelings towards the Muslims. This is a classical image of the hypocrites, whose outward expressions show love and affection while their hearts are bent on hatred and malice. They returned the love and affection of the Muslims with malice and plots to plant discord among the ranks of the Muslims, *“Here you are, you love them, but they love you not, though you believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, ‘We believe.’ But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in their rage. Say, ‘Perish in your rage; God knows well all the secrets of the heart.’ If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if some misfortune overtakes you, they rejoice at it.”* The antidote of their venom is given by the Qur’an, *“But if you persevere and do right, not the least harm will their cunning do to you. God encompasses all what they do.”*

These verses describe a group of people in Medina who were bent on hating and hurting the Muslims. The verses warn the believers of the danger of trusting this group. The Muslims should then be careful in choosing their intimate friends. Those who harbour bad feelings towards the believers are not their kind and should not be entrusted with their friendship. However, it is important to emphasize Islam’s tolerance in dealing with the other, even when the other is a foe. Muslims are commanded not to reciprocate the feelings of hatred. Muslims are commanded to treat all people nicely and kindly. Muslims’ behaviour should reflect Islam’s policy of promoting good will towards all people. That does not mean that Muslims should not be prudent in dealing with their enemy. They should protect their community and their faith against the danger of those who hate them, even if this means that Muslims should bear arms against the aggressors.

## **Verses: 121 to 179**

121. *Remember that morning, when you left your household to post the faithful at their stations for battle. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
122. *Remember when two of your parties almost lost courage, and God was their Protecting Friend. In God let the believers put their trust.*
123. *God had helped you at Badr when you were a contemptible little force. Be conscious of God in order that you may show your gratitude.*
124. *Remember when you said to the believers, “Is it not enough for you that God should support you with three thousand angels sent down?”*
125. *Well, if you persevere and remain conscious of God, even if the enemy should attack you suddenly, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels having marks (of distinction).*
126. *God made it a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts. Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*
127. *That He might cut off a group of the disbelievers or expose them to infamy, and they should then be turned back, frustrated of their purpose.*
128. *It is no concern of you (Muhammad) whether He relents toward them or torments them; for they are wrongdoers.*
129. *To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgives whom He wills and torments whom He wills; indeed, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

130. *You who believe, do not devour usury, doubled and multiplied; but remain conscious of God; that you may be successful.*
131. *And guard yourselves against the fire which has been prepared for the disbelievers.*
132. *And obey God and the Messenger; so that you may obtain mercy.*
133. *And vie one with another for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who are conscious of God.*
134. *Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity, who restrain their anger and pardon people. God loves those who do good deeds.*
135. *And those who, having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done.*
136. *The reward of such will be forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, an excellent reward for the workers (of righteousness).*
137. *Many ways of life have passed away before you. Travel in the land, and see what the end of those who rejected the truth was.*
138. *This is a declaration for humankind, guidance, and an admonition to those who are conscious of God.*
139. *So do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers.*
140. *If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers.*
141. *God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to destroy the disbelievers.*
142. *Did you think that you would enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (In His cause) and those who remained perseverant?*
143. *You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it with your own eyes.*
144. *Muhammad is no more than a messenger, many messengers (like him) passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will you then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God; but God will reward those who are grateful.*
145. *No soul can ever die except by God's leave at an appointed term. Whosoever desires a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and whosoever desires a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And We shall reward those who are grateful.*
146. *How many of the prophets fought (in God's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart when they met with a disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are perseverant.*
147. *All that they said was, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses which we have committed in our affairs, establish our feet firmly, and help us against the disbelievers."*
148. *So God gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter, for God loves those who do good deeds.*

149. *You who believe, if you obey those who disbelieve, they will make you turn back on your heels, and you will become losers.*
150. *But God is your Protecting Guide, and He is the Best of Helpers.*
151. *Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, because they associated partners with God, for which He had not send authority. Their refuge will be the fire, and evil is the abode of the wrongdoers.*
152. *God did indeed fulfill His promise to you when you, with His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy, until you faltered, disputed the command, and disobeyed after He had shown you what you covet. Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who desire the Hereafter. Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you but He pardoned you. God is Gracious to the believers.*
153. *When you climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight). Therefore, He rewarded you grief for grief to teach you not to grieve for that which you missed or for that which befell you. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
154. *Then, after grief, He sent down a sense of security on a band of you – who were overcome with slumber - while another band was anxious about themselves. They thought wrongly about God, the thought of ignorance. They say, “Do we have a say in this?” Say to them, “Indeed, everything to do with this affair is in God’s hand”. They hide in their hearts what they dare not reveal to you. They say (to themselves), “If we had any say about this affair, we would not have been killed here.” Say, “Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom death was decreed would certainly have gone forth to the place of their death.” All this has been in order that God might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts. God knows well the secrets of your hearts.*
155. *Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, it is Satan who caused them to fail, because of some of that which they have earned. Now God has pardoned them. God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing.*
156. *You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said to their brothers, when they traveled in the land or were engaged in fighting, “if they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain.” God will make these thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. God gives life and causes death; and God sees all what you do.*
157. *And if you are slain, or die, in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than all they could amass.*
158. *And if you die, or are slain, it is to God that you are brought together.*
159. *It was by an act of mercy from God that you were gentle in dealing with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, ask for God’s forgiveness for them, and consult them in the conduct of the affairs. Then, when you have made a decision put your trust in God. God loves those who put their trust (in Him).*
160. *If God helps you, none can overcome you. If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, who can help you? In God, let the believers put their trust.*
161. *It is inconceivable that a prophet could (ever) embezzle. Whosoever embezzles will bring what he embezzled with him on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul will be paid in full what it had earned; and they will not be wronged.*



162. *Is the one who follows the good pleasure of God like the one who has earned condemnation from God and whose refuge is the fire – an evil destination?*
163. *They have different ranks in the sight of God, and God is All-Seeing of what they do.*
164. *God did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent to them a messenger from among themselves, who recites to them God's revelations, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error.*
165. *And do you, when a calamity has befallen you after you have inflicted twice as much on your foes, say, "How did this happen?" Say (Muhammad), "You brought it upon yourselves. God is Able to do all things."*
166. *That which befell you, on the day when the two armies met, was by God's leave; so that He might know the true believers.*
167. *And that He might know the hypocrites, to whom it was said, "Come, fight in the way of God or defend yourselves." They answered, "If we knew that there will be fighting we would have followed you." On that day, they were nearer to disbelief than belief. They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts. God knows best what they conceal.*
168. *Those who, while they sat at home, said about their brothers (who were fighting for the cause of God), "Had they obeyed us they would not have been slain." Say to them (Muhammad), "Then avert death from yourselves if you are truthful."*
169. *Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.*
170. *They rejoice in the bounty bestowed upon them by God. They rejoice for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind, that there shall be no fear to come upon them neither shall they grieve.*
171. *They rejoice in God's blessing and favour and that God does not let the reward of the believers be lost.*
172. *Those who answered the call of God and the Messenger, even after being wounded -those from among them- who do right and are conscious of God will have a great reward.*
173. *Those to whom people said, "The people have amassed a great army against you, therefore fear them." But this only strengthened their faith and they said, "God is Sufficient for us, He is our best Guardian."*
174. *So they returned with blessings and favour from God, and no harm ever touched them. They followed the good pleasure of God. God's favour is great.*
175. *It is only Satan who instils fear in his votaries. Do not fear them but fear Me, if you are true believers.*
176. *Do not let the conduct of those who rush headlong into disbelief grieve you. Not the least harm will they do to God. God will give them no share in the Hereafter and they will have immense torment.*
177. *Those who purchase disbelief at the price of faith will not harm God in the least. They will have a painful torment.*
178. *Let not those who disbelieve think that our respite to them is good for themselves. We grant them respite so that they become more sinful. They will have a shameful torment.*

179. *God will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good, nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the unseen. But He chooses from His Messengers whom He wills. So believe in God, and His messengers. And if you believe and remain conscious of God, you will have a great reward. (3:121-179)*

These verses deal with the events that transpired during the battle of Uhud. The idolaters of Mecca, having lost the battle of Badr to the Muslims, vowed to take revenge. So, they amassed a large army to attack Medina. The Prophet (PBUH) consulted with his companions about the strategy of the looming battle. The Muslims were divided into two groups: one was of the opinion that the Muslims should stay within the borders of Medina and fortify the city to be able to repel the enemy, while the second group thought it is best to meet the attacking army outside of the borders of Medina. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that the Muslim army should go out to meet the attacking army outside the borders of Medina, *“Remember that morning when you left your household to post the faithful at their stations for battle. And God hears and knows all things.”* After the decision was made, the Prophet (PBUH) put on his shield and went out early in the day to arrange the army positions and to give his last commands to the believers. The strategy was for the army to camp in front of a mountain called Uhud. The Prophet (PBUH) assigned a group of archers to camp on top of the mountain so that they could protect the army against any attack that may be launched from the back. One setback that faced the Muslim army occurred when Abdullah bin Saloul and his group broke up from the Muslim army and returned back to Medina. The verse ends with a subtle touch on the major issues of the event. God sees and knows everything. He knows what the people say, what is hidden in their conscious, and what motivates their deeds and actions.

The setback caused by the breakup of Abd-Allah bin Saloul and his group from the army created confusion in the ranks of the Muslims. Two other groups were about to follow suit, *“Remember when two of your parties almost lost courage and God was their Protecting Friend. In God let the believers put their trust.”* These two groups were Banu Harithah and Banu Salamah, they were about to be swayed by Ibn Saloul’s move. However, God’s protection saved them. Jaber bin Abd-Allah (RA) said, *“We were the two groups mentioned in this verse, Banu Harithah and Banu Salamah. The only reason for being happy about the revelation of this verse was that it mentioned that God is our Protecting Friend.”*

Thus, God knew what was hidden in the hearts of the members of these two groups as they were contemplating to follow the example of Ibn Saloul and break up from the Muslim army. But God protected them against this fall and gave them the courage and strength to continue their mission with the rest of the Muslims. The verse is meant to emphasize God’s knowledge of everything and to show the believers the way out from such falls. Salvation is attained only by the grace of God, therefore, *“In God let the believers put their trust.”*

The two morals that come out of this narrative are the realization that God’s knowledge is unlimited and that the road to salvation is through seeking God’s support: God sees and hears

everything, so let the believers put their trust in God.

The victory in Badr was a miracle. All the material elements required to achieve victory were missing. The Muslim army consisted of three hundred ill equipped men, while the idolaters' army consisted of one thousand of well equipped men. The objective of the Muslim army was to capture the idolaters' caravan, while the idolaters' army came from Mecca to fight the Muslims. The Muslims had not fully recovered from their experience as new migrants. They barely had enough time to fully settle in Medina. In addition, they were surrounded by a hostile environment. They were reminded by all of this on their way to Uhud, "*God had helped you at Badr, when you were a contemptible little force. Be conscious of God in order that you may show your gratitude.*" They won their victory in Badr by the grace of God for no victory can be achieved without God's grace. They should then fear God and remain conscious of Him because all power and sovereignty belong to God alone. God consciousness may lead them to show gratitude befitting the grace of God that He bestowed upon them. Details of the battle of Badr are reiterated, "*Remember when you said to the believers, 'Is it not enough for you that God should support you with three thousand angels sent down?' Well, if you persevere and remain conscious of God, even if the enemy should attack you suddenly, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels having marks (of distinction).*" These were the words that the Prophet (PBUH) used to provide comfort and support to the believers, who went out with him to capture the idolaters' caravan, when they realized that the caravan had escaped and that it is the idolaters' army that they were going to fight. The Prophet's words echoed God's promise of help. As humans they needed the material support, even though they should know that, in the final analysis, it is God's will that decides the result. They were also told that there are conditions for getting God's help. These conditions are perseverance and God consciousness. The angels were a tool to comfort and reassure the believers that they are being helped, "*God made it a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts. Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*"

This principle has been reiterated over and over again so that it became inculcated in the believers' psyche, "*Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*" Muslims are commanded to do their best in material preparation for the war, but the ultimate result is in God's hand. Victory and loss occur according to a divine plan. The Prophet (PBUH) and those who fought with him had no say in achieving victory, nor should they have a personal stake in it. They were only a tool that was used to execute the divine plan. The Prophet (PBUH) and the believers were neither the makers nor the owners of victory.

*"That He might cut off a group of the disbelievers or expose them to infamy, and they should then be turned back, frustrated of their purpose. It is no concern at all of you (Muhammad) whether He relents toward them or torments them; for they are wrongdoers."* Cutting off the disbelievers may occur as a result of killing some of them in battle, making them lose their land to the believers, reducing their power by occupation, making them lose their wealth to the believers, or forcing them to capitulate. God may force them to retreat in infamy or He may forgive them. Their fight with the believers may open the doors of guidance for them and they may repent, or God may torment them for their transgression. Either way, it is God's decision and no one can interfere with His decision.

*“To God belong all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgives whom He wills and torments whom He wills; but God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* God has the absolute will, the absolute sovereignty, and the absolute power. God does not wrong any of His servants, nor does He favour any of His servants. His decrees are based on justice, wisdom, mercy, and forgiveness.

Before resuming the discussion of the battle of Uhud we find a group of verses which discuss several other topics: the institution of usury, the attributes of those who remain conscious of God, and the spending in the way of God. It may seem strange to have such a mix of topics, but there is a logical rationale behind this. The discussion of this variety of topics together demonstrates the comprehensiveness of this religion. These topics deal with a variety of human activities. The religion of Islam as a whole revolves around one theme: worshiping God alone. Worshiping God encompasses the whole array of human activities. This is a comprehensive religion which is based on the belief in the Oneness of God. The practical product of this belief is a way of life that reflects the impact of this belief on every aspect of human life.

*“You who believe, do not devour usury, doubled and multiplied; but remain conscious of God; that you may be successful. And guard yourselves against the fire which has been prepared for those who disbelieved.”* The institution of usury has been previously discussed, but we would like to stop at the expression used here to describe the return of debt, *“doubled and multiplied.”* At the present time, there is an argument which is being put forward by some advocating a twisted explanation for this term. It claims that the forbidden usury is the kind of usury which requires an exorbitant return on the debt but if the interest rate was reasonable (say 4% or even 9% for example) then this form of lending becomes permissible. It should be pointed out that the reference to a rate of return is simply a statement of details of transactions that were common practice at the time the Qur’an was revealed. It should not be used as a criterion for defining usury. The verse in Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2) is an unequivocal statement which prohibits usury.

*“And obey God and the Messenger; so that you may obtain mercy.”* This is a general command to obey God and His messenger so that one can enjoy God’s mercy. However, the fact that it came after the discussion of usury points to the fact that obedience of God and His messenger cannot be achieved in a society whose financial transactions are all based on usury.

*“And vie one with another for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who are conscious of God.”* Hasten, the paradise is waiting for those who are conscious of God. What are the salient attributes of those who are conscious of God? *“Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity,”* They are constant in their spending whether they are in a state of affluence or a state of need. Affluence does not spoil them and adversity does not frustrate them. They are aware of their duties and they are keen to free themselves from the shackles of stinginess. The verses regarding spending may have been included here to motivate the believers to support the army in its upcoming battle.

*“Who restrain their anger and pardon people. God loves those who do good.”* Anger is a human emotion which cannot be eliminated but should be controlled and managed; God

consciousness is one of the best tools to manage one's anger. However, one should not stop at anger management. Anger restraint should be combined by pardoning people. This eliminates the chance of channelling anger into destructive feelings of hate and frustration. The combination of anger restraint and pardoning people provide a mix which cleanses the heart of any destructive emotions. Those who are able to spend money in prosperity and adversity, to restrain their anger, and pardon people are good doers. God loves those who do good deeds. The term "God's love" is used to express God's affection for His servants. It induces the believer to do good deeds. These individuals form a community that God loves; a community that is established on the feelings of mutual interdependence, brotherhood, and forgiveness. These characters were needed for a community that will soon engage the enemy.

*"And those who, having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done."* Look at the levels of tolerance in this religion. Before asking people to be tolerant, God shows people how tolerant He is. Those who are conscious of God rank high in status among the believers. God's leniency towards His servants opens the doors of hope to those who, *"having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins."* The mercy of God engulfs those who commit sins and allows them to join the ranks of those who are conscious of Him, provided they recognize their error, are willing to seek God's forgiveness, and do not persist in their sin.

What is the reward for those who are conscious of God? *"The reward of such will be forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, an excellent reward for the workers (of righteousness)."* Those who are God conscious are not indifferent. They are hard working. They are fully engaged in the daily life while practicing the pursuit of forgiveness, managing their anger, pardoning people, and spending in the way of God.

The verses imply a relationship between the characters of the individuals forming an army and the ability of this army to win against its enemy. Individuals who are able to overcome their stinginess, control their anger, overpower their desire to sin, and seek God's forgiveness are well prepared to win victory in the battle field. The decisions that such individuals make are dictated by rational thinking not by whims and desires. They lead a well disciplined life according to God's law. These are necessary qualifications for the army to win its battle.

*"Many ways of life have passed away before you. Travel in the land, and see what the end of those who rejected the truth was. This is a declaration for humankind, guidance, and an admonition to those who are conscious of God. So do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers. If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers. God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to deprive of His blessing those who disbelieved. Did you think that you would enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (in His Cause) and those who remained perseverant? You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it*

*with your own eyes,*” The Muslims were hurt badly in this battle, they were defeated and some were killed. The hurt was both physical and psychological. Seventy people were killed and the Prophet (PBUH) was wounded. Muslims were shocked for the change in their fortune especially after they had won a miraculous victory in the battle of Badr. They were wondering what happened? What has changed? The Qur’an reminded them of God’s natural law, the law that govern life on earth. In order for people to succeed in their endeavours, they have to study and understand this law. They need to prepare the tools necessary for success. Muslims were reminded with lessons from history and they were asked to study and learn from them. These lessons include the inevitable end for those who reject faith, the fluctuations in life conditions and circumstances, and the perseverance that people should exercise in face of the tests that they are destined to meet during life. There is a law that govern how life progresses on earth and there is a rationale behind that law. This law will continue in effect till the Day of Judgment. This assured the believers that they will win the war at the end but they need to persevere in face of the current adversity. The Qur’an interjected these lessons with messages of hope and encouragement: others have also been wounded like you, and you have a high calling that needs sacrifice.

This is a general proclamation to all people to heed the guidance, but only a few will make use of it. Only those who are God conscious will benefit from this proclamation. Only hearts seeking guidance can receive guidance. The problem is not in being able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong - many people can differentiate between right and wrong - but only few people are willing to abide by what is right. Few people are willing to do what is right because of the sacrifices that they may have to make. Only those people whose hearts are always conscious of God are able to overcome these difficulties. The desire to accept the truth and to do what is right is initiated by a heart full of faith and is supported by a heart which is always conscious of God. That is why the Qur’an often reiterates the statement that only those who believe and are God conscious will benefit from the truth revealed in this Book, the guidance that it embodies, and the lessons that are detailed in it. Faith and God consciousness open up the hearts to receive guidance and encourage the mind to choose the path of light, and support the human being to persevere in face of the adversity that will be encountered on the path to the truth. This is the crux of the matter, being able to differentiate between right and wrong is not sufficient for salvation but the ability to choose the right path and endure the difficulties along this path is what really matters.

The proclamation is followed by a message of encouragement, *“do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers.”* Your faith elevates you above the enemy. You submit to God alone, while they submit to false deities. You follow God’s way of life and they lead a life that is fashioned by creatures like them. If you are true believers, then you will have the upper hand over them.

*“If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers.”* This may be a reference to the defeat that the idolaters suffered in the battle of Badr at the hands of the Muslims. Or it may be a reference to the battle of Uhud. In the battle of Uhud the Muslims won at first, then they were overcome by their enemy when the Muslim

archers left their positions on the mountain top and the back of the Muslim army was open to a counter attack by the idolaters' army. This is an example of how God's natural law works. The Muslim army was overtaken by the idolaters because the Muslim archers, motivated by greed and the desire to put their hands on the spoils of war, disobeyed their leader and left their assigned positions undefended. God has decreed that in battles of Jihad, those who fight only for His sake deserve to win. Another rule of God's natural law is the fluctuations of good and bad times. These are tools to differentiate between who is a true believer and who is a hypocrite. True believers persevere during times of prosperity and times of adversity, while hypocrites suffer anxiety and panic when faced by adversity. God knows who is a true believer and who is a hypocrite, and He knows the secrets of the hearts, but He will not hold people accountable on the basis of His knowledge. Reckoning is based on deeds. The fluctuations in life conditions are meant to bring what is hidden in the hearts to the realm of the deeds. The belief and the hypocrisy in the hearts of the believers and the hypocrites will be reflected on their reactions to the fluctuations in life conditions, respectively. Their reward and punishment will be based on their deeds.

God will choose those who will die as martyrs. Therefore, dying for God's cause is not a loss but is an honour. It is an honour that God bestows on select people. They are also witnesses chosen by God. They will bear witness that the message they fought and died for is the truth. Their fight and death in the way of God is an expression of their testament.

Not everyone who pronounces the testament that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His messenger is called a witness. Only those who act upon this testament can claim that they bore witness to the truth of the testament. Acting upon it means the belief in the Oneness of God. One of the consequences of the testament is to accept God as the only law maker, no one else has the right to legislate for people. God legislates and servants accept. The other consequence is that the only way to receive the message is through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He is the conduit through which God transmitted His message, His guidance, and the way of life that He has decreed for people on earth. A person who dies in the cause of establishing this testament is a martyr.

God does not love the wrongdoers. The Qur'an often refers to associating partners with God as injustice or wrongdoing, "*Associating partners with God is a great injustice.*" On the authority of Ibn Mass'oud (RA), he said, '*I asked the Messenger of God, which kind of injustice is worst?*' He said, '*To associate partners with Him who created you.*'"

*"God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to deprive of His blessing those who disbelieved."* Purging is a step higher than sifting through. Purging is a process that runs through the inner self of a human being to assess her/his personality and to purify it. Purging rids the human being of bad attributes and inculcates good ones. Very often we are unaware of our strengths and weaknesses. The objective of fluctuating life conditions between prosperity and adversity is for the human being to discover points of strengths and weaknesses in his/her personality.

*"Did you think that you would enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (in His Cause) and those who remained perseverant?"* The Qur'an uses a disapprobation

style to correct the understanding of the meaning of submission to God. It is not enough to make an oral statement, what really matter is the behaviour of the person. Those who submit are willing to strive in the way of God and persevere in the face of adversity. Fighting may be the least arduous duty that faces a believer. Daily challenges which are faced by the believer may be more demanding. There is the endless daily suffering caused by being constant on the path of God, the suffering felt in resisting temptations, and the suffering of observing the requirements of faith in face of inappropriate situations. The path to paradise is full of challenges which attempt to sway the believer away from the straight path. Paradise is not achieved by wishful thinking and rhetoric, but it is achieved by perseverance in face of the daily challenges that meet the believer.

*“You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it with your own eyes,”* The believers were looking to engage the enemy on the battle ground. The dreams of martyrdom filled their minds and the desire to die as martyrs was uttered. Now they have seen death with their own eyes. The verse poses the question to them so that they can feel the difference between the dream and the reality. It is a lesson for the future, to weigh every word uttered before committing oneself to a task. One should appreciate the gravity of real life actions, the responsibility attached to promises, and the consequences of oral statements. Actions speak louder than words.

God could have given victory to His Prophet (PBUH). He could have commanded the angels to fight with the believers and conquer the idolaters. But the point is not to gain victory in a battle. The point is to train the believers and prepare them for the undertaking of propagating the message of God. They have to assume a leadership role in providing guidance to humanity. Such an endeavour requires a solid character, perseverance in upholding the truth, patience in face of adversity, and an understanding of the human failings and strengths.

*“Muhammad is no more than a messenger, many messengers (like him) passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will you then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God; but God will reward those who are grateful.”* The first part of this verse refers to a specific incident that occurred during the battle of Uhud, when the archers left their positions on the mountain top and allowed the idolaters to occupy it and attack the Muslim army from behind. When chaos spread in the Muslims’ ranks someone screamed that Muhammad (PBUH) was dead. Upon hearing this many Muslims, overwhelmed with the feeling of despair, decided to abandon the battle ground and go back to Medina, but the Prophet (PBUH) was still alive. He stood there wounded but persevered and rallied the troops around him. Muslims came back and resumed the fight. This incident took the Muslims by surprise and it was used by the Qur’an to teach the Muslims a lesson. Muhammad (PBUH) is only a messenger, there were many messengers before him, they all died and so will he. Muhammad (PBUH) came to deliver God’s message, God is eternal, He will never die neither will His message. The believers should not turn their backs if Muhammad (PBUH) dies or is killed. This is the simple truth that they should not forget. Humans will all perish, but the faith will last forever. It should be understood that there is a difference between God’s message and God’s messengers.

The expression used in the verse, *“turn back on your heels,”* does not only mean the physical movement of going back but its meaning extends to the spiritual turning away from the religion.



The term addresses the thought that filled the minds of the believers, after they heard the cry that Muhammad (PBUH) had died; they thought that the religion will die with the death of Muhammad (PBUH). This is exactly what the companion of the Prophet Al-Nader bin Ias (RA) said when he saw the Muslims throwing their arms. He said, *“If Muhammad (PBUH) is dead, for what are you going to live? Let us fight to die and join our Prophet (PBUH).”* Those who turn away from Islam will not inflict any harm on God; it is they who will be the losers. God does not need any one, but people are the ones who need God to help them live a happy life on this earth and in the Hereafter. God will reward those who are grateful. Gratitude can be shown by adopting the way of life which God has decreed. God will reward those who show gratitude because they appreciate the blessings that God bestowed on His servants.

The objective behind this incident may have been to wean the believers off the tremendous love they had for Muhammad (PBUH) and to direct them to the source of guidance that Muhammad (PBUH) brought. It is as if God wanted to take their hands to show them the way to hold tight to the strong link that connects them to Him. As if God wanted them to feel the direct link between them and Islam and to get them to recognize that their covenant is with God directly without any intercessors. It may have also meant to be a training session for the Muslims to be prepared when the time comes for the death of the Prophet (PBUH).

*“No soul can ever die except by God's leave at an appointed term. Whosoever desires a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and whosoever desires a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And We shall reward those who are grateful.”* Every soul has a specific set day on which it will die. No soul will die before this set day. Therefore, fear of death and cowardice will not elongate one's life, and courage and gallantry will not result in a premature death. This statement inculcates the concept of the inevitability of death in the hearts of the believer. We should not busy ourselves thinking about when we will die and how we are going to die. These thoughts should not also hinder our progress and should not dictate what to do and what not to do, especially when it comes to performing duties and responsibilities. We should lead a secure and confident life and put our trust in God who controls life and death. It is therefore, important to think about what do we want to achieve in life and how can we make this achievement. Do we want to live for this worldly life alone, or are we aiming at a higher goal? These are two different routes, those who chose to live for this worldly life alone will lead a lowly life, while those who are aiming at the Hereafter will lead an honoured and dignified life, however, both groups will die at their appointed times.

*“How many of the prophets fought (in God's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? but they never lost heart if they met with a disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are perseverant.”* The believers who fought with many previous prophets fought with courage and determination, they never lost heart or wavered no matter how hard the difficulties they faced were. God loves those who persevere and are steadfast. The expression *“God loves”* intimates the power of this love in healing the wounds, removing the suffering, and compensating the hard work.

*“All that they said was, ‘Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses which we have committed in our affairs, establish our feet firmly, and help us against those who disbelieve.’”*

They did not ask for wealth or material compensation; they did not even ask for a reward in this life or the Hereafter, but they asked God to strengthen them and to affirm their steps in face of the enemy. They did not ask for personal victory, but they asked for a victory over disbelief. However, God gave them everything without asking. He gave them, *“A reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter, for God loves those who do good deeds.”* God described them as doers of good deeds, because they did well on the battle ground and they did well when they prayed for God’s favor.

The following verses talk about the battle of Uhud, but before doing this, a warning was issued to the believers. Islam and Muslims were still new to Medina. Muslims in Medina gained a great deal of respect after the victory in the battle of Badr, but the setback in the battle of Uhud was an opportunity for the disbelievers and the hypocrites to plant the seeds of doubt and sedition in the hearts of weak willed Muslims especially those who were directly affected by the defeat. Hence a warning was issued to the Muslims not to fall in the traps that are laid by the disbelievers and the hypocrites, *“You who believe, if you obey those who disbelieved, they will make you turn back on your heels, and you will lose.”* Remember that, *“God is your Protecting Guardian, and He is the Best of Helpers.”* So, ask God for help. Who can provide better support than God? Who can secure better victory than God? The support of God is coming, *“Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, because they associated partners with God, for which He had not send authority. Their refuge will be the fire, and evil is the abode of the wrongdoers.”* This is a promise from God whenever belief and disbelief are confronting each other. Whenever there is a battle between the believers and those who disbelieved, God will cast fear in the hearts of the disbelievers. However, the believers have to have true faith. They should have the firm conviction that only God can provide support and protection. Their faith should be devoted to God alone, a faith that is not blemished by any residue of doubt in God’s power. The disbelievers will not only suffer fear in this world, but will also abide in Hell fire in the Hereafter.

The believers were reminded by the fulfillment of God’s promise in the early stages of the battle, *“God did indeed fulfill His promise to you when you, with His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy”* This was in the beginning when the Muslims were obedient and before they became bedazzled by the spoils of war, *“Until you faltered, disputed the command, and disobeyed after He had shown you what you covet. Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who desire the Hereafter.”* This is what happened when the archers left their positions which they were commanded to hold. They disputed among themselves, a group was tempted by the spoils and another wanted to stay put in their positions until the battle was completely finished. The first group was interested in the quick reward of this life, while the second group was more interested in the permanent reward of the Hereafter. The army became divided and the unity around the objective was lost. They lost the most important ingredient of victory, they lost the pure intention that this battle is for God’s sake. God does not provide His help and support unless the effort is purely dedicated to Him.

The verse also uncovers the secrets of the hearts. Ibn Mass’oud (RA) said, *“I never thought that any of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) would be interested in the gains of this worldly life, until the verse, ‘Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who*

*desire the Hereafter. ' was revealed."* The verse thus, uncovers the desires for worldly gains that some of the believers harboured and led them to disobedience thus causing the defeat. This was also a test for the believers, *"Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you but He pardoned you. God is Gracious to the believers."* But God has forgiven you. God forgave your wavering, your disobedience, your disputation, and your fleeing the battle ground. These sins were committed because of human weaknesses which were forgiven by the grace of God.

*"When you climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight)."* This is a dramatization of the scene of the battle; this was intended to shame those who fled because of their weakness, their dispute, and their disobedience. The verse draws an image of a group of people climbing the mountain, fleeing the battle ground in confusion and fear. Nobody is paying attention to anyone else. The Prophet (PBUH) is calling to reassure them that he is still alive. They were rewarded for the misery that they inflicted on the Prophet (PBUH) a similar misery, *"Therefore, He rewarded you grief for grief to teach you not to grieve for that which you missed or for that which befell you. God is Totally-Aware of what you do."* Misery filled their hearts when they realized that they left the Prophet (PBUH) alone and fled the battle ground. This sadness in their hearts was greater than the sadness they may have felt for any other loss. God was fully aware of what they did. A strange calm descended on them after the confusion and the overwhelming fear that followed the defeat. They remembered their Lord and remembered their Prophet (PBUH) and they were cloaked with a mysterious slumber, *"Then, after grief, He sent down calm on a band of you overcome with slumber,"* This was a strange phenomenon that reflected the mercy of God when it descends over His believing servants. Slumber even for a few minutes reenergizes the fighters and fills their hearts with confidence and security. But there was another group who only cared about themselves, *"While another band was anxious about itself. They thought wrongly about God, the thought of ignorance. They say, 'Do we have a say in this?' Say to them, 'Indeed, everything to do with this affair is in God's hand.'"* They criticized the policy and strategy that were used to conduct the battle. This may be a reference to the group of people who were of the opinion that Muslims should have stayed in Medina and fought to defend the city. They lamented the fact that their view was overruled by those who wanted to meet the idolaters' army outside Medina. They were angry that their opinion was not adopted. The response came to tell them that *"This affair is in God's hand."* All affairs are in God's hand. In a previous verse, the Prophet (PBUH) was told, *"You have no say in the affairs."* All matters of faith, fighting for God's cause, and guiding hearts are all in God's hand. Human beings have no say in these matters. But this group had ill feelings in their hearts. *"They hide in their hearts what they dare not reveal to you. They say (to themselves), 'If we had any say about this affair, we would not have been in the slaughter here.'"* Their hearts were filled with misgivings. This points to a weakness of faith that became apparent when they were put to the test of defeat. The understanding is corrected, *"Say, 'Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom death was decreed would certainly have gone forth to the place of their death.' All this has been in order that God might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts. God knows well the secrets of your hearts."* Death will be met by those whose time has come, even if they had chosen to stay home and not to go out with the army. Death is inevitable, no one can escape death. This whole episode was a means to test what is in your breasts, to make you aware of your faults, and to purify your hearts. God is fully aware with what in people's hearts. He knew the inner thoughts of those who fled the battle

ground. He knew their weakness which opened the door for Satan to control them, *“Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, it is Satan who caused them to fail, because of some of that which they have earned. Now God has pardoned them. God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing.”* This may have been a reference to the archers who were lured away from their positions by the desire to collect the spoils of war. They ended up losing their share in the spoils of war by the Prophet’s (PBUH) decree. But it is a general rule that applies in many situations. Usually committing sins weakens the connection between the human being and God and opens the door for Satan who fills the heart with misgivings and bad thoughts. Satan then finds its way to seduce the person to more sinful acts. This is why it is advisable to seek forgiveness from God whenever one has committed a sinful act. Seeking forgiveness from God strengthens the relationship with God, closes the doors in face of Satan, clears the hearts of the bad thoughts, and puts the person back on the straight path away from the influence of Satan.

*“You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said to their brothers, when they travel in the land or engage in fighting, ‘if they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain.’ God will make these thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. God gives life and causes death; and God is All-Seeing of what you do.”* It seems that this is what the hypocrites and the idolaters of Medina, whose family members became Muslims, said to the believers upon their return defeated from the battle ground. They took advantage of the defeat that the Muslims suffered at the hands of the idolaters of Mecca to spread the seeds of sedition among the ranks of the Muslims by arousing in their hearts the feelings of loss of their loved ones in the battle. The verse came to put things in the right perspective. The saying, *“If they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain,”* illustrates the basic difference between those who have strong faith and those who are lacking in faith. Those who believe recognize God’s laws which control life on earth. They are confident of God’s fairness. They know that nothing will befall them except that which God has decreed. They neither panic when a calamity befalls them, nor do they boast when a gain accrues to them. They accept God’s decrees with secure and contented hearts. They are happy to accept God’s decrees in any form or shape. However, they recognize that they have to consult, plan, and do their best to achieve their goals, but the end result is in God’s hands. Once, they have discharged their responsibility they do not worry about the results because they cannot control the results, only God is in control of the end results. They maintain a delicate balance between actions and submission; and between taking the initiative and putting their trust in God. Those who have been deprived of faith live with an inner struggle that never ends. They are always thinking of “what if”, and “I wish.” The verse warns the believers not to be like those who are saddened by the loss of a relative if he died while traveling to earn a living or to strive in the way of God. Those who think that traveling is the cause of death simply do not understand God’s law. They should realize that death is inevitable and the length of life is predestined. God has power over life and death.

However, death is not the ultimate end, *“And if you are slain, or die, in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than all they could amass. And if you die, or are slain, it is to God that you are brought together.”* Death in the way of God is better than this worldly life because God’s mercy and forgiveness are better than what people amass in this life. The believers should not be interested in personal fame and glory but they should be more interested in what God has for them: His mercy and forgiveness. All people, those who die in their beds or on battle grounds, will return to God at the end. The end is same for all but the

reward will be different.

*“It was by an act of mercy from God that you were gentle in dealing with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you.”* God bestowed His mercy on the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers, a mercy that made the Prophet (PBUH) gentle with the believers. Had he treated them harshly their hearts would not have flocked around him. People need to be treated kindly. They need a leader who cares for them, helps them with their problems, and appreciates their shortcomings. They need a leader who opens his heart to them, and who is willing to help whenever help is needed. This was how the Prophet (PBUH) treated people and that is why he was loved by everyone who dealt with him.

*“So pardon them, ask for God’s forgiveness for them, and consult them in the conduct of the affairs.”* This unequivocal statement establishes a fundamental principle of governing in Islam: the principle of consultation. Every Muslim ruler has to abide with this principle, even if he were a prophet. An Islamic government should be built on this fundamental principle. However, the details of the process are left for people to decide. This verse was revealed at a point in time when the consequences of consultation seemed to lead to undesirable results. On the face of it, consultation resulted in a difference of opinion which led to disunity among Muslims: a group of Muslims wanted to stay in Medina waiting for the enemy to come, while the second group wanted to fight the enemy outside the boundaries of the city. As a result of this difference in opinion, one third of the army lead by Abdullah bin Saloul abandoned the Muslims ranks and went back to Medina. The plan that was decided upon as a result of the consultation process may have not been the best military strategy to be adopted. Muslims did learn this lesson, so when they were attacked in a later battle, the battle of the Trench, they stayed in Medina and waited for the enemy to attack the city which was protected by a trench.

The Prophet (PBUH) was cognizant of these consequences, he himself was in favour of fortifying the city and letting the enemy come to them; he had been alarmed by a dream which he saw earlier which described what may happen if they take the fight outside of Medina. He also had the right as a supreme leader to veto the decision that was reached by the majority, but he chose to go ahead with the majority’s decision to establish the principle of consultation. He saw that establishing the principle and giving the example is worth the sacrifices that were made.

The Prophet (PBUH) could have taken the failure in the plan that was reached by consultation as an excuse for abandoning the institution of consultation, but he did not, because this was part of the training program for the Muslim nation. This was a training program for the nation and for the leaders who will assume the responsibility after the Prophet (PBUH) has gone. These training programs were essential for the nation to mature and to be able to lead a stable life. Maturity cannot be achieved without sacrifices, but it is worth it at the end.

One of the attributes of a successful leader is resolve, *“Then, when you have made a decision put your trust in God. God loves those who put their trust (in Him).”* Consultation involves brain storming to explore all possible available alternatives and to choose the best alternative. Once a decision has been made, the implementation phase starts. The leader should be resolute in implementing the decision, putting his trust in God. God loves those who put their trust in Him.

The narrative continues to explain the true meaning of putting one's trust in God, *"If God helps you, none can overcome you. If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, that can help you? In God let the believers put their trust."* One of the characteristics of the Islamic perspective is the ability to maintain a delicate balance between recognizing the ability of God to do what He wills and the human effort which is dedicated to achieve this will. God decreed that results are to be achieved through means, but the means do not guarantee the results. The human being has to work hard, do his/her best, and make use of all available tools to achieve the set objective. Once this has been completed, the human being should put his/her trust in God and accept whatever result God wills. In the case of a battle the two expected outcomes are victory and defeat. Believers should put their trust in God, if God willed that they secure victory so it will be, and if God willed that they would be defeated no one else could provide them a road to victory. Recognizing the fact that God's power does effectuate His will is not an excuse for Muslims not to seek the means: results are to be sought through appropriate means.

*"It is inconceivable that a prophet could (ever) embezzle. Whosoever embezzles will bring what he embezzled with him on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul will be paid in full what it has earned; and they will not be wronged."* One of the reasons that the archers abandoned their designated positions during the battle was that they were worried that they would not get their share of the spoils of war. In addition, some of the hypocrites spread a rumour about the disappearance of some of the spoils of war that were obtained from the battle of Badr and they did not shy away from suggesting that the Prophet (PBUH) had a hand in their disappearance. The verse came to state, beyond a shadow of a doubt, not only that it does not befit prophets to commit such acts, but also to emphasize that prophets by their nature cannot assume such characters.

Another recitation implies that the verse commands the believers not to betray the Prophet (PBUH). The verse continues to threaten those who embezzle the Muslims money with appropriate punishment on the Day of the Resurrection.

It has been narrated by Abu Hameed Al-Sa'di (RA) on the authority of Imam Ahmed, that the Prophet (PBUH) appointed a person by the name of Ibn Al-Lateebah, from the tribe of Azad, to collect Zakat proceeds. Ibn Al-Lateebah brought the Zakat he collected to the Prophet (PBUH), but he kept some articles for himself, when the Prophet (PBUH) asked about the articles that Ibn Al-Lateebah kept for himself, Ibn Al-Lateebah answered that these were given to him as a gift. The Prophet (PBUH) went to the podium and said, *"Why do people we employ come back with articles that they claim it was given to them as gifts? Why do not they stay home and see if anybody would care to give them gifts?"* This verse and the Prophetic traditions played a major role in educating and training Muslims not to betray the trust. Stories about how the fighters were meticulous in bringing the spoils of war back to the leader of the army are abundant. When the battle of Qadisiyah was won, the soldiers brought to the Caliph Umar (RA) the treasures of the king of Persia intact. Umar (RA) was impressed by their honesty.

*"Is the one who follows the good pleasure of God like the one who has earned condemnation from God and whose refuge is the fire – an evil destination?"* These are the standards and these are the choices. One either aims at winning the pleasure of God or aims at losing it. God will

assign different ranks to the different categories, *“They have different ranks in the sight of God, and God is All-Seeing what they do.”*

*“God did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent to them a messenger from among themselves,”* It is out of God’s grace that He bestowed this blessing on His servants. It is a blessing that has been bestowed without being requested. The expression used is also indicative of God’s mercy. The verse says, *“A messenger from among themselves,”* and did not say, *“One of you.”* The expression used intimated the existence of a personal relationship between the Prophet (PBUH) and each and every one of his followers. God has blessed them twice: first, by guiding them to the faith and the second blessing by connecting them to the messenger. The messenger, *“Who recites to them God’s revelations, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error.”* It is a great blessing that God addresses them with His words, these words which describe God and His attributes. These words address human feelings and the issues that are important to people. These words chart a way for salvation and purification of the souls. God wants to purify humankind and elevate them above old traditions which denigrate their humanity. Ja’fer bin Abi Taleb (RA) addressed the King of Abyssinia saying, *“King, before Islam, we were living in ignorance. We worshipped idols, ate dead animals, committed sins, cut our kinfolks, abused our neighbours, and the rich oppressed the poor. God sent a messenger from among ourselves, whom we know and trust. He called us to believe in the Oneness of God, to worship God alone, to be truthful, to be honest, to join our kinfolks, to be good to our neighbours, to abstain from sin, to abstain from giving false testimony, and to abstain from devouring orphans’ money.”*

*“And teaches them the Book and the Wisdom.”* The Arabs to whom this verse was addressed, were illiterates. They had no civilization. They were transformed by this message into people who carried the flame of knowledge and wisdom to the whole world. The message changed the environment in which they were living and that spilled over to countries all over the world. They were at a loss both in faith and in life and were completely changed by this message.

*“And do you, when a calamity has befallen you after you have inflicted twice as much on your foes, say, ‘How did this happen?’ Say (Muhammad), ‘You brought it upon yourselves. God is able to do all things.’* The verse refers to the final defeat in Uhud. Before that they had two victories: one at Badr and the second in the early stages of the battle of Uhud when they inflicted a great loss on the idolaters before the balance of the battle was turned around when the archers left their assigned positions on the mountain top. The verse addressed the astonishment of the Muslims when they said, *“Why is this happening?”* The answer to this question was given clearly, *“You brought it upon yourselves,”* when you wavered and disputed among yourselves. You brought defeat upon yourselves when you broke the covenant with God and His messenger. You brought defeat upon yourselves when you allowed your selfish greed to control your actions and to lead you to disobedience. *“God is able to do all things,”* God is able to maintain His rule over the world. He has decreed certain laws to govern the universe. God is able to maintain these laws.

There is always a rationale behind God’s decrees, *“That which befell you, on the day when the two armies met, was by God’s leave; so that He might know the true believers.”* What happened

in the battle was not a coincidence, it was God's Will. God willed that this would happen for a certain reason and to teach the believers a lesson. *"And that He might know the hypocrites, to whom it was said, 'Come, fight in the way of God or defend yourselves.' They answered, 'If we knew that there will be fighting we would have followed you.' On that day they were nearer to disbelief than belief. They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts. God knows best what they conceal."* This is a reference to the actions taken by Ibn Saloul and his group. The verse called them, *"the hypocrites"*. They *"were nearer to disbelief than belief."* They claimed that they returned to Medina because they were not aware that there would be a fight. This was not the truth, *"They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts."* Their hearts were replete with hypocrisy which left no place for faith, and their actions were controlled by their egotistical nature. Ibn Saloul felt bad that the Prophet (PBUH) did not follow his advice when the consultation process about how to conduct of the battle of Uhud was held. Before the arrival of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina, Ibn Saloul had big plans to assume the leadership of Medina. He was in the process of being appointed by the people as their chief. The arrival of the Prophet (PBUH) rescinded all these plans. Ibn Saloul harboured a grudge against the Prophet (PBUH), thinking that the Prophet (PBUH) usurped his right for leadership. But God knows what is in their hearts.

They did not only abandon the Muslim army but they also tried to dissuade others from fighting, *"Those who, while they sat at home, said about their brothers (who were fighting for the cause of God), 'Had they obeyed us they would not have been slain.' Say to them (Muhammad), 'Then avert death from yourselves if you are truthful.'"* They tried to spread fear among Muslims by saying that those who were going to fight would be killed. The verse answered their claim with a statement of the inevitable truth: can you avert death from yourselves? Death is inevitable, it will befall everyone. No one can escape death no matter how careful he/she is. This answer refuted the claim and reassured the Muslims.

It is interesting that the Qur'an mentions the incident of Ibn Saloul's desertion after the account of the battle of Uhud has been dealt with, in spite of the fact that this incident occurred before the battle started. We may think of two reasons behind this organization of the text. The Qur'an wanted to outline the basic principles of consultation, life and death, unity and obedience of the Prophet (PBUH) from an Islamic perspective before dealing with this incident. The Qur'an wanted to define the characteristics of the believers before talking about the characteristics of the hypocrites, so that the difference is clearly seen and the people are able to judge fairly on the basis of clear criteria. The other reason may have been that the Qur'an did not want to attach an undue importance to the hypocrites. Thus, it was appropriate to delay this account after major issues related to the battle of Uhud have been dealt with. The Qur'an did not even mention Ibn Saloul by name as a sign of disrespect for him and his actions. The Qur'an alluded to him as part of the hypocrites.

Having dealt with the issue of death, the Qur'an wanted to reassure the Muslims of the destiny of the martyrs who were killed in the way of God. These martyrs are alive and they are enjoying all the characteristics of life: they get provisions from their Lord, they are pleased with the blessings that God bestowed on them, and they are looking forward for the others to join them. If this is their situation, why would the living feel sad about their martyrdom? *"Think not of those who are*



*slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord."*

Although we, who live in this world, have no firsthand information about the nature of the life that the martyrs lead after death, but we have authentic prophetic traditions and we have the present verse which tells us that things are not as they seem to be. Many things are different in their reality than what they seem to be if we take them at their face value. These people who were killed in the way of God look dead to us, they seem to have lost all signs of life as we know it, but they are living with their Lord. They, *"rejoice in the bounty bestowed upon them by God."* They also remember their brothers who are still fighting in the way of God and, *"they rejoice for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind, that there shall be no fear to come upon them neither shall they grieve. They rejoice in God's blessing and favour and that God does not let the reward of the believers be lost."*

This is a new formulation of the concept of dying in the way of God which changes the attitude of the believers who are fighting in the way of God and their loved ones whom they leave behind. Life extends beyond this world. The Hereafter holds great pleasures for those who seek martyrdom. This new understanding inculcated in the believers an ardent zeal for seeking martyrdom.

The narrative went on to describe the believers who continued to fight even after they had been wounded, *"Those who answered the call of God and the Messenger, even after being wounded, those who do right and are conscious of God have a great reward."* These are the believers whom the Prophet (PBUH) asked to join him in pursuit of the idolaters' army. This occurred the following day after the battle of Uhud took place. They barely escaped death on the battle field, and their wounds were still fresh and painful. But the Prophet (PBUH) called upon them, and did not call upon any other, to join him in his mission. He did not allow any one of those who did not participate in the first battle to join them. They responded favourably to the Prophet's call. It was not only the Prophet's call but it was God's call as well.

What was the rationale behind this move on the part of the Prophet (PBUH)? The group of Muslims that he asked to join him in pursuit of the idolaters were fewer in number than the army that fought the idolaters on the previous day. The memory of defeat was still fresh in their minds, the sadness of losing the battle and losing their comrades filled their hearts. The Prophet (PBUH) objective may have been to efface these feelings off their minds. He did not want the Muslims to return home with a memory of defeat. He may have wanted to convince his companions that what happened in the previous day was only a setback, and that the Muslims are still strong and are capable of fighting their enemy. He may have also wanted to send a message to Quraish. He did not want Quraish to go home with the prize of victory. He did not want Quraish to go home thinking that they have defeated the Muslims once and for all. The Prophet (PBUH) may have wanted to send a message to all the Arabs that the Muslims have a strong faith, and they are willing to embark on any endeavour for the sake of defending this faith. This was a new phenomenon. The phenomenon was dramatically illustrated in the move that the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions took in pursuit of their enemy. The move also illustrated their trust in God, and their confidence in their faith, *"Those to whom people said, 'The people have*

*amassed a great army against you, therefore fear them.’ But this only strengthened their faith and they said, ‘God is Sufficient for us, He is our Best Guardian.’”*

There are many traditions which describe the difficulties that faced the believers and how they dealt with them to join the Prophet (PBUH) in his pursuit of the idolaters. It is on the authority of Muhammad bin Ishaq that one of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) who participated in the battle of Uhud said, *“My brother and I fought in the battle of Uhud with the Messenger of God (PBUH) and came back wounded. When the call came to join the Messenger of God (PBUH) the following day, my brother said, ‘Are we going to miss a battle with the Messenger of God (PBUH)?’ We did not have a ride, and we were heavily wounded. However, we joined the Messenger of God (PBUH); my wounds were less severe than my brother’s, so whenever he got tired I would carry him.”*

These images combine to illustrate the birth of this new phenomenon in the souls of people who did not recognize other than God as their Protecting Guardian. They were happy with having God as their Protector, a happiness that increased as difficulties grew. They responded to those who were trying to scare them, *“God is Sufficient for us, He is our Best Guardian.”*

The consequences were just as they expected from their Lord, *“So they returned with blessing and favour from God, and no harm ever touched them. They followed the good pleasure of God. God’s favour is great.”* By the grace of God, they were not hurt in the least.

This group of verses ends with an explanation of the source of fear that human beings may experience in situations like this, *“It is only Satan that instils fear in his votaries. Do not fear them but fear Me, if you are true believers.”* Satan tries to aggrandize the image of his agents and to magnify their power and abilities to plant fear in the hearts of the believers. The believers should be aware of Satan’s tricks.

*“Do not let the conduct of those who rush headlong into disbelief grieve you. Not the least harm will they do to God. God will give them no share in the Hereafter. They will have a severe torment.”* This verse provided solace to the Prophet (PBUH) who was saddened by those who hastened to reject faith. They were not able to inflict any harm on God. God is giving them respite because they will have no share in the Hereafter and they will suffer severe torment.

They meet that dreadful doom in the Hereafter because they *“purchase disbelief at the price of faith.”* They were offered the truth. The signs which support the truth are all around them. They could find the proof in the signs of the harmony of the universe and in their initial natural disposition which can open their eyes to the beauty and miracles of the creation. But they chose to reject the truth.

People may be fooled by the power, wealth, and success which the disbelievers amass. But let them not be fooled by this, *“Let not those who disbelieve think that our respite to them is good for themselves. We grant them respite so that they become more sinful. They will have a shameful*

*torment.*” Although adversity is a trial; but it is also a blessing from God. It touches only those whom God loves.

God used the battle of Uhud to test people. The test was used to differentiate between the true believers and the hypocrites who joined the ranks of the believers for different reasons, *“God will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good, nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the unseen. But He chooses of His messengers whom He wills. So believe in God, and His messengers. And if you believe and remain conscious of God, you will have a vast reward.”* The verse indicates that it is one of God’s norms to subject the believers to tests so that the hypocrites would be exposed. It is also not the norm that God would reveal the secrets of the unseen to human beings. They are not prepared to cope with such experience and they do not need such knowledge, but God chooses messengers to transmit His message. Thus, we are commanded to believe in God and His messengers.

Let us now review some of the lessons that can be gleaned from the verses describing the battle of Uhud.

1. Some people expect miracles from this religion, ignoring the nature of human beings, their capabilities, their intellectual disposition, and their material abilities. These people become disappointed when these miracles fail to occur. The change that people should go through so that they can lead the way of life that God has chosen for them has to be achieved using normal human efforts. The religion adopts a methodology which helps people to change gradually from the state that they are in to the state that they should be in. It is a methodology that recognizes the reality of human nature and the initial natural disposition of people. It achieves its goals relying on normal human means and without taking recourse to miracles or supernatural means.

Naturally, God has the power to change people, with or without the help of this religion. God could have, if He willed, created humankind with a different initial natural disposition. But it was the will of God to create humans as they are, having a free will to decide and choose. It was the will of God that humankind be able to receive guidance. It was the will of God that people would have initial natural dispositions that guide them to make the right decisions.

2. Human beings are not perfect but they can work hard to improve and to rise to supreme levels. Those who failed the test in the battle of Uhud were believers, but they were at the beginning of the road. When, they failed the test they were neither excommunicated nor humiliated but they were taken into the fold and were taught how to deal with their weaknesses. God left them to experience the consequence of disobedience so that they learn the lesson, but He accepted their weakness and forgave them. They were trained and helped to reach the top.
3. A third principle that can be gleaned from this account is the close association between faith, behaviour and attitudes, whether the behaviour and attitudes are in the social,

political, economical, or ethical realm. This association was emphasized by highlighting the importance of the concept of God consciousness.

4. Islam uses the analysis of real life occurrences and events to educate and train people. The Qur'an provided a deep and rational analysis of the battle of Uhud reflecting on human nature and its failings, the reasons behind victory and defeat, and the factors that influenced the progress of events. This is done in a dramatic and emotive way to have the strongest effect on people.
5. Islam does not offer abstract teachings that have no bearing on Muslims' daily life. It presents its teachings through real life experiences.
6. Islam does not condone any wrongdoing by anyone no matter how high the rank of this person in society is. Those who make mistakes are held accountable. People are all equal in front of God and in front of the law. No mistakes are swept under the rug because the perpetrator is one of the dignitaries. Mistakes committed by Muslims are their responsibility not the fault of Islam.

### **Verses: 180 to 189**

180. *Let not those who covetously withhold the bounty, which God has bestowed on them of His Grace, think that it is good for them. It is bad for them. The things which they covetously withheld will be tied to their necks like a twisted collar on the Day of Judgment. To God belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
181. *God has heard the words of those who say, "Truly, God is indigent and we are rich." We shall certainly record their words - as well the slaying of the prophets in defiance of all that is right - and We shall say to them, "Taste the torment of the scorching fire.*
182. *This is on account of that which your own hands have sent before (you to the judgment)." God is never unjust to His servants.*
183. *Those who said, "God took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He brings us an offering which will be consumed by fire." Say, "There came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you asked for. Why then did you slay them, if you speak the truth?"*
184. *And if they reject you, so other messengers were rejected before you, who came with clear signs, Books, and the Book of enlightenment.*
185. *Every soul shall have a taste of death. And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is pulled away from the fire and admitted to paradise will attain a supreme achievement. The life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.*
186. *You shall certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Scripture before you and from the idolaters. But if you persevere, and remain conscious of God, then that will be the best course.*
187. *And remember when God took a covenant from the People of the Scripture, to make it known and clear to humankind, and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and bartered it for a small price. And vile was the bargain they made.*

188. *Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done, will escape the torment. A painful torment is theirs.*
189. *To God belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and God has power over all things. (3:180-189)*

*“Let not those who covetously withhold the bounty, which God has bestowed on them of His Grace, think that it is good for them. It is bad for them. The things which they covetously withheld will be tied to their necks like a twisted collar on the Day of Judgment. To God belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is Totally-Aware of all that you do.”* There is no authentic source which indicates which group of people this verse was referring to. However, this is a general statement that applies to all those who are stingy and do not want to share what God has provided them. They think that their wealth will be preserved if they do not spend it in the way of God. The Qur’an rebuts this claim and warns them that they will be tormented on the Day of Judgment with what they kept for themselves. It is a dire warning especially when they are reminded that their wealth has been provided by the grace God. They came to this world with nothing and only by the grace of God they were able to amass wealth, and now they refuse to give back some of what they received. Those who said, *“Truly, God is indigent and we are rich.”* God will certainly record, *“their words - as well the slaying of the prophets in defiance of all that is right”* God will say to them, *“Taste the torment of the scorching fire.”* Describing God as an indigent does not only reflect a crooked understanding of the nature of God, but it is also distasteful. How can the creature address His Creator in such a manner? Everything they say will be recorded and they will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. They will also be held accountable for killing the messengers of God who were sent to them. This seems to be a reference to some Jews who committed these sins. The punishment that they will receive on the Day of Judgment is on account of that, *“Which your own hands have sent before. God is never unjust to His servants.”*

*“Those who said, ‘God took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He showed us a sacrifice consumed by fire.’ Say, ‘There came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you asked for. Why then did you slay them, if you speak the truth?’”* They did not believe in Muhammad’s (PBUH) message because he did not perform the miracle of a fire descending from heaven to burn his offering. This seems to be a miracle that was given to some of the prophets who were sent earlier to the Jews. The Qur’an confronts them with the historical account of what happened when the earlier prophets performed the miracle they requested. Then the Qur’an offers a consolation to the Prophet (PBUH), *“And if they reject you, so other messengers were rejected before you, who came with clear signs, Scriptures, and the Book of enlightenment.”* He was not the first prophet to be denied by his people. Many a prophet came before him, they were supported with miracles and a Scripture from God, but they were also rejected by their people.

The Qur’an then addresses the believers and outlines certain values that they should cherish and persevere in protecting them, *“Every soul shall have a taste of death. And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is pulled away from the fire and admitted to paradise will attain a supreme achievement. The life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.”* This is a truth that should rest deep in everyone’s consciousness: our stay on this

earth is only temporary. Death is the inevitable truth. All humans will meet the same destiny, but what differentiates people from one another is the reward on the Day of the Resurrection. The expression “*pulled away*” intimates an image of Hell fire that has a gravity which pulls people towards it. One needs help to be pulled away from Hell fire. Those who were able to get the necessary help are the successful. It is a dramatic image which involves pulling and pushing. It alludes to the pulling force of sin. The desire to sin pulls people towards Hellfire; they need a strong force to counteract this pull. No matter how vigilant human beings are in resisting the pull of sin they would not be saved except by the grace of God. Worldly life has many pleasures but they are all transient pleasures, nothing will remain forever. The true everlasting pleasure is obtained when one is admitted to paradise after one was pulled away from Hellfire. Realizing this fact, one is ready to sacrifice and persevere in the face of adversity, “*You shall certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Scripture before you and from the idolaters. But if you persevere, and remain conscious of God, then that will be the best course.*” This is the standard route through which all who subscribe to a specific ideology will pass. Those who subscribe to a certain ideology are usually tested. In trying to be faithful to their ideology, they are usually faced with adverse conditions. There are many obstacles that one should cross on the road to paradise, but the fulfillment of carnal desires paves the road to Hellfire. Perseverance is the only way to remain on the road to paradise.

*“And remember when God took a pledge from the People of the Scripture to make it known and clear to people and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and bartered it for a small price. And vile was the bargain they made.”* God has taken a pledge from the People of Scripture that they should transmit the knowledge that God gave them in the Scripture to humankind, but some of them chose to breach this covenant and hide the Scripture behind their backs for a miserable price.

*“Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done, will escape the torment. A painful torment is theirs.”* It has been narrated on the authority of Al-Bukhari that this verse is referring to some of the hypocrites who did not want to join the Prophet (PBUH) whenever he went on a military expedition. They were happy that they were able to provide excuses to the Prophet (PBUH) after the battle and they would love being praised for their valor. However, this is a general statement that applies to all those who claim a credit for something that they did not do. They will not escape the punishment for their false claim. For God has, “*The dominion of the heavens and the earth; and God has power over all things.*”

## **Verses: 190 to 200**

190. *In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding.*
191. *Those who celebrate the praise of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth, and*

*say, "Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain. Glory be to You. Protect us from the torment of the Fire.*

192. *Our Lord, You have indeed disgraced whomsoever You do admit to the Fire. The wrongdoers will never find any helpers.*
193. *Our Lord, we have heard someone calling to Faith, 'Believe you in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins, absolve us of our evil deeds, and make us die the death of the righteous.*
194. *Our Lord, grant us what You did promise us through Your messengers, and save us from the disgrace on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise."*
195. *And their Lord has heard them, and answered them, "Never will I let the work of any of you be lost, be he a male or a female, each like the other in reward. Those who emigrated, were driven out from their homes, suffered harm in My cause, fought, and were slain, verily, I will absolve them of their evil deeds, and admit them into gardens underneath which rivers flow. This is a reward from God, and God has the best of rewards."*
196. *Let not the vicissitude (of the success) of the disbelievers through the land deceives you.*
197. *It is but a brief enjoyment. Their ultimate refuge is hell - an evil resting place.*
198. *But those who remain conscious of God, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will be safe for ever as a reward from God. That which God has in store is better for the righteous.*
199. *And there are, certainly, among the People of the Scripture those who believe in God, in what has been revealed to you, and in what has been revealed to them. They bow in humility to God. They will not barter the revelations of God for a small price. For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in reckoning.*
200. *You who believe persevere, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed. (3:190-200)*

This is the last lesson in this Sura. The Sura dealt with a large number of issues which form a comprehensive Islamic perspective. The Sura offered clarifications of certain misunderstandings and rebuttals of myths in its dialogue with the People of Scripture, the idolaters, and the hypocrites. It also detailed a plan for the daily life to be followed by members of the Muslim community. The plan dealt with issues of spending in the way of God, fulfillment of responsibility, coping with adversity, and the willingness to sacrifice in the way of God.

This last part continues to deal with issues that are related to the main themes of Sura. The verses discuss the universe as a sign of the existence of God. The universe is an open book full of signs and truths that only those who reflect are able to read and understand. The verses also point to the close connection between the nature of the universe and the initial natural disposition of the human being, a connection which should shape the relationship between humankind and the universe.

*“In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Those who celebrate the praise of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth”* What are the signs that those who reflect and celebrate the praise of God realize when they see the alternation of day and night? And how can they reach the conclusion, *“Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain.’ Glory be to You. Protect us from the torment of the Fire.”* This is a conclusion that a person who has a sound understanding and who receives the correct signals from the universe is able to reach. The Qur’an urges humankind to continuously reflect on the creation of the universe. The Qur’an urges us to open our minds and our hearts to different cosmic phenomena and try to reach to the secrets of this universe which God created.

If we open our hearts and minds and reflect on the scenes of heaven and earth, of the alternating day and night, we would reach the conclusion that there is a single power behind the planning, the organization, and the harmony of the universe. There is no randomness in the creation of the universe. Every part of the universe moves according to a plan. The verses connect between celebrating the praise of God and the contemplation of the heavens and earth. It implies that this contemplation is a part of the rituals of worship of God. This establishes two basic Islamic principles. The first one is that thinking and reflecting on the God’s creation is an essential component of the worship of God. The sciences which aim at the discovery of the secrets of the creation and the laws that govern the universe are part and parcel of the worship of God when this study is done with the intention of the remembrance of God and celebrating His praise. The second principle is that the truth of the cosmic phenomena can only be understood and appreciated fully by hearts which are intensely involved in the remembrance and praise of God.

*“Our Lord, You have indeed shamed whomsoever You do admit to the Fire. The wrongdoers will never find any helpers.”* This supplication points to the fact that their fear of Hellfire is actually a fear of being shamed. The believers find the pain of experiencing the humiliation which the companions of the Hellfire will suffer to be more painful than the fire itself. They fear displeasing God more than they fear the pain that they would experience by the fire. They believe that only God can help them, and the wrongdoers will have no helper.

*“Our Lord, We have heard someone calling to faith, ‘Believe you in your Lord,’ and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins, absolve us of our evil deeds, and make us die the death of the righteous.”* They have open and sensitive hearts, open to accept what they receive and they are cautious to commit anything that is tainted by the shadow of a sin. They hasten to seek God’s forgiveness for their sins and they long to die as righteous people.

This supplication is compatible with one of the main themes of the Sura which revolves around the desirability of seeking God’s forgiveness often. Seeking God’s forgiveness often provides support in the never ending battle against the temptation to indulge in carnal desires. The results of this basic battle determine the outcome of all battles that the believers will be engaged in during their life on earth.

The supplication ends on a note of appeal, hope, trust in God, and certitude in His fulfillment of the promise, *“Our Lord, grant us what You did promise us through Your messengers, and save us from shame on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise.”*



What is the relationship between the reflection on heavens and earth, the alternation of day and night and this passionate supplication? Those who are able to reflect will reach the conclusion that the process which runs the lives of people living in this universe is a process which has been carefully planned. It is a rationale process that has goals and objectives, and it aims at establishing the truth with justice. People living according to such a plan must be held accountable for what they do. There must then, be another life in which people will reap the reward for what they have done in the previous life.

*“And their Lord has heard them, and answered them, ‘Never will I let the work of any of you be lost, be he a male or a female, each like the other in reward. Those who emigrated, were driven out from their homes, suffered harm in My Cause, fought, and were slain, verily, I will absolve them of their evil deeds, and admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow. This is a reward from God, and God has the best of rewards.’”* God’s response to the supplication was given in detail. First, it starts with an assurance that the supplication will be accepted, then, the characteristics of those whose supplication will be accepted are given. The supplication is not a lip service but it is a mandate to “act.” Action is the practical application of the principles of reflection, planning, celebrating the praise of God, and seeking His forgiveness. God does not promise those who remain conscious of Him worldly benefits, but He promises them a reward from Him and He has the best of rewards.

*“Let not the vicissitude (of the success) of the disbelievers through the land deceives you. It is but a brief enjoyment. Their ultimate refuge is Hell - an evil resting place. But those who remain conscious of God, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will be safe for ever as a reward from God. That which God has in store is better for the righteous.”* The vicissitude of the success of the disbelievers is a sign of the enjoyment of life and a sign of power and influence. This may overwhelm the hearts of the believers with feelings of envy, for they work hard and sometimes they get nothing in return. The message to the believers is that do not let this deceive you. This is only a transient enjoyment, it will not last long, and it is going to lead to a bad abode. On the other hand, there are gardens underneath which rivers flow waiting for the believers who are conscious of God. The choice should be clear for all.

*“And there are, certainly, among the People of the Scripture those who believe in God, in what has been revealed to you, and in what has been revealed to them, bowing in humility to God. They will not barter the revelations of God for a small price. For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in reckoning.”* Having mentioned the scenes of the believers supplicating to God and God responding favourably to them, the People of the Scripture are not forgotten. Those of them who believed in God, believed in what was revealed to them, and in what has been revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) their reward awaits them with their Lord.

The very last verse embodied a command to the believers, *“You who believe persevere, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed.”* The command is to persevere and remain conscious of God. Perseverance and God consciousness are mentioned often in this Sura. Sometimes they are mentioned together and

sometimes they are mentioned separately. These are two important attributes that the believers need in their fight against their enemy. Perseverance is the sustenance for the believers which support them along the path of God. It is a long path full of difficulties and obstacles. Perseverance is needed to ward off temptations of carnal desires, to provide support in face of adversity, and to provide strength in face of human weakness. God consciousness goes hand in hand with perseverance; it is the attentive guard that evokes feelings of God observance in the conscious of the believer. This command sums up the Sura in a beautiful finale.

## **Sura 4: Al-Nisaa (The Women)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Medina. It is the second longest Sura in the Quran. It was revealed after Surat Al-Mumtahina (Chapter 60). It has been narrated that some verses from Al-Mumtahina were revealed during the battle of Al-Hudaiybiah in the sixth year (H), while others were revealed after the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year (H). However, as we have noted before, the narrations which provide a chronological order for the revelation of the different Suras of the Quran may not be accurate. In addition, no Sura was revealed in its entirety all at once. Whenever a group of verses was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH), he used to instruct his scribes where exactly they should place these verses. Thus, the contents of many of the Suras were not finalized until the revelation of the whole Quran had been completed. It seems that the revelation of this Sura started shortly after the Prophet (PBUH) had migrated to Medina. Verses in this Sura continued to be revealed over the subsequent eight years.

This Sura reflects the efforts that were spent to establish and protect the Muslim nation; and to build and nurture the Muslim society. It presents an example of the impact of the Quran on this fledgling society, a society whose values were deeply rooted in the verses of the Quran. This is a society which was fashioned according to a divinely inspired project. The verses of the Sura portray the efforts that were involved in implementing the divine project to move humankind from the lowermost level of vain desires to the uppermost level of pure faith along a path full of the obstacles of temptation and desires. The verses of the previous Sura dealt with a similar theme but each Sura of the Quran has its own way of addressing the issues. Each Sura has its own characteristics which sets it apart from other Suras.

The verses of this Sura express the serious effort that the Quran devoted to erase the characteristics of the pre-Islamic society from which the new Muslim society emerged. The verses provided a program to cleanse the Muslim society of all the impurities of the Pre-Islamic society and shape the new society according to the divinely inspired way of life. This is done by stating clearly the characteristics which set the new society apart from the old one and by exposing the attempts of the enemies of Islam which aimed at swaying the Muslims away from the straight path which they have chosen.

The verses also record the struggle between the remnants of the old society and the principles which are shaping the new society. The term "age of ignorance" does not only apply to the pre-Islamic society but it applies also to any society which allows human beings to enslave their fellow human beings. This phenomenon exists to a varying degrees in all societies controlled by man-made laws. Islam provides the only way of life which frees all people from the servitude imposed on them by their fellow human beings. In this divinely inspired way of life, human beings serve God alone, worship God alone, lower their head to God alone, and follow laws decreed by God alone. Their servitude to God frees them from any other kind of servitude. This is the criterion which differentiates an Islamic society from a society which lives in the age of

ignorance. The verses in this Sura depict very clearly the demarcation line between the two societies.

It is understood that the Quranic commands addressed situations which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. The commands were meant to establish new rules or to rescind existing ones. However, the rules that the Quran decreed were meant to apply to Muslims societies in general. It is a fundamental principle that Quranic commands provide general rulings even though they may have been revealed to address specific situations. Quranic commands were meant to apply at all times and for all places.

This may explain the choice of Arabia to be the birth place of this message. The genius of the message can only be realized by observing how the message was able to transform the primitive idolater society into a highly civilized one. The idolater society in Arabia was a backward society in all aspects of life: religious, moral, social, or political. The message was successful in transforming the society of the idolater savages to a highly refined and civilized society. This transformation took place as a result of a divine project that addressed the needs and aspirations of human nature. This transformational program can be applied by any society, anywhere and at any time.

When we read this Sura, we can understand some of the oppressing practices that existed in the pre-Islamic society. The verses describe how the rights of the orphans, especially female orphans, were usurped by their guardians. These guardians, motivated by greed, were anxious to arrogate the orphans' wealth before they grow up and become able to claim their rights. Greedy guardians married female orphans under their care to seize their property. The rights of the most vulnerable - children and women - were trampled upon by powerful men who deprived them of their rightful share in inheritance. In addition, women were ill- treated and abused.

Al-Maraghi summarizes the topics which the Sura dealt with. These are

- Commanding God consciousness.
- Stating that the whole human race was created from one soul.
- Defining permissible relations between family members.
- Stating the rules of inheritance.
- Stating the rules of war.
- Rebuttal of claims made by the People of the Scripture.
- Narrating stories about the hypocrites.

## **Verses: 1 to14**

1. *People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and from it created its mate and spread from these two, many men and women; and be conscious of God, in Whose name you demand your mutual rights, Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly God is ever watching over you.*

2. *And give to the orphans their property, and do not substitute worthless (things) for (their) good (ones), and do not devour their property (by mixing it up) with your own; this is certainly a major sin.*
3. *And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women who seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.*
4. *And give women their bridal gift upon marriage, but if they of themselves be pleased to give up a portion of it and give it to you, then take it with enjoyment.*
5. *And do not give away your property which God has made for you a means of support to the weak of understanding, and maintain them out of its profit, and clothe them and speak kindly to them.*
6. *And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, release their property to them, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily, lest they should grow up; and whoever is rich, let him abstain altogether (from taking of the property), and whoever is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable; then when you release their property to them, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence; and God is enough as a Reckoner.*
7. *From what is left by parents and near relatives, there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is small or large, a legal share.*
8. *But if at the time of the division of the legacy other relatives, or orphans or poor, are present, give them a portion of the (property), and speak kindly to them.*
9. *And let those who, should they leave behind them helpless offspring would fear for their future, be conscious of God, and let them speak justly.*
10. *Certainly, those who devour the property of the orphans unjustly, they only devour fire into their bellies and they will soon endure blazing fire.*
11. *God commands you regarding your children: the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have one-half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherited him, then his mother shall have one-third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have one-sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt he may have incurred; your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is more beneficial to you; this is an injunction from God, certainly God is Omniscient, Wise.*
12. *And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child, but if they have a child, then you shall have one-fourth of what they leave after (payment of) any bequest they may have bequeathed or a debt they may have incurred; and they shall have one-fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave after (payment of) a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt you may have incurred; and if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of the inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed*

*or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others; this is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*

*13. These are the limits set by God, and whoever obeys God and His Messenger will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow, in which he will dwell forever; and this is the supreme achievement.*

*14. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger and transgresses the limits set by God, will be admitted fire to abide therein, and he shall have a humiliating torment. (4:1-14)*

*“People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and from it created its mate and spread from these two, many men and women. Be conscious of God, in whose name you demand your mutual rights. Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly God is ever watching over you.”* This is an address to the whole humanity to remind them of the concept of the oneness of the Creator and the common root of their race. People need to reflect on these statements. How did humankind come to this world? Who brought them? Before being created they were nothing, they came to life by God’s will. They were given unique characteristics and talents to cope with life on earth. The power that brought them to existence knows everything about them. This power has the right to organize their lives and to determine the norms and principles which should govern their societies.

Human life started with a single decision from God and the whole humanity sprung from one common root. This makes the whole humanity a single family, and all people are related to each other. Understanding this fact should help diminish the differences that divide people and break up the ties between them. The evils of race discrimination and genocide would have been avoided had the human race recognized and understood this fact. All traditions that discriminate between people on the basis of skin color, gender, or class have no real justification. The long history of discrimination practices on the basis of gender should have been avoided. Souls of males and females are the same. Males and females share the same nature and the same human characteristics. They were created to complement each other. Each has a mission to fulfill and each has been created with the appropriate aptitude to fulfill this mission.

The verse also underscores the importance of the family as the building block of the human society. Humanity started with a single soul and it was complemented with its mate, both formed a single family from which sprang the whole human race. Had God willed He would have created many men and women in the first instance. The idea of starting the creation with a single family highlights the important role that the family plays in enhancing the human ties between the members of the human society. The social system in Islam paid great attention to developing and strengthening the means which support and protect the family structure. This is one of the major themes dealt with in this Sura as well as in many others. The family starts with two partners. A strong family structure cannot be established while one of the partners is being ill-treated, abused or wronged in any way. Islam paid great attention to establishing women’s rights as human beings and giving them their due respect.

When we reflect further on this verse, we cannot but wonder of how many different men and women sprang from one single family. People born over the centuries, since the beginning of the creation, are all different. They are different in form and shape. They are different in their

aptitudes and abilities. They are different in their dispositions and feelings. Who else is able to do this except God, the Creator?

The verse urges people to remain conscious of their Lord in whose name they conduct their transactions and request their rights from each other. It urges them to remain conscious of God when they deal with each other. The meaning of the expression “God consciousness” is understood and it is oft repeated in the Quran. However, the expression “conscious of the wombs” is a different one, it is an amazing expression and difficult to explain. It enlivens the feelings of the human being. The expression exhorts the believer to be sensitive to the needs and rights of family relationships. It exhorts the believers to avoid hurting, or committing injustice against those with whom we share a relationship through the wombs. Remember that God is ever watching over us. He is the Creator who knows His creation. There is nothing we can hide from Him. He is fully aware of our deeds and our thoughts.

*“And give to the orphans their property, and do not substitute worthless (things) for (their) good (ones), and do not devour their property (by mixing it up) with your own; this is certainly a major sin.”* The strong beginning of the Sura lays the foundation for the social system in Islam. This is a system which is determined to protect the vulnerable, secure women’s rights and dignity, establish means for the protection of society’s wealth, and establish a fair system for inheritance.

It starts by commanding the guardians of orphans to return the wealth to its rightful owners when they reach the age of maturity. The wealth should be protected and guardians should not usurp any of it or replace a property with another of lesser quality. Guardians are warned that it is a major sin not to heed these commands. Such warnings are needed to complement the legislated laws. People may break the law if they feel that they are able to get away with it, but realizing that God is ever watching provides a strong incentive not to break the law, even if they are able to escape the consequences in this life.

*“And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women who seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.”* ‘Urwah bin Al-Zubair (RA) asked ‘Aisha (RA) about this verse. She said, *“Son of my sister, this is regarding wealthy female orphans whose guardians marry them for the sake of their wealth and beauty but they don’t give them their bridal gifts as they would have given other women.”* The verse came to abolish this unfair practice. If the guardians are not able to treat their charges fairly, they should seek matrimony with other women. This removes any chance of abuse of the vulnerable charges. This tradition shows that Muslims continued to practice some pre-Islamic unfair traditions until the Quran commanded the believers to relinquish these practices and to be careful in their treatment of orphans. The verse exhorts guardians to exercise justice. Justice is a moral value in Islam that needs to be heeded in all its forms and in any circumstance.

The verse provides a license for polygamy with a certain caveat: fairness has to be observed in treating the wives. When a man fears that he will be unable to treat all his wives with absolute fairness, he should not marry more than one wife. This license is a source of debate between

those who are against and those who are pro the practice of polygamy. It has also been used as a spring board to launch attacks against Islam. We need to consider this carefully to show the rationale behind this license and the historical background for the practice.

Before the advent of Islam, the practice of polygamy was prevalent in Arabia. There was no limit on how many wives a man can have. Authentic traditions talk about men who had ten or more wives and were asked to keep only four and divorce the rest when they wanted to embrace Islam. The verse was revealed not to establish a new norm but to modify an existing norm. Men are not allowed to marry more than four wives with the caveat that they should treat them all fairly. Equal and fair treatment is a condition that needs to be fulfilled, otherwise polygamy is not permissible.

However, one can also ask, why did Islam allow the practice of polygamy to continue? Islam is a system which caters to realistic, legitimate, and necessary human needs. Islam provides a system in harmony with the initial natural disposition of humankind. It provides a system which endeavors to refine human behavior, neither ignoring the initial natural disposition nor allowing the indulgence in worldly desires without limits.

A system of polygamy which is based on the establishment of justice and the approval of all parties concerned provides practical solution to social problems that existed in human societies since the dawn of history and will continue to exist till the end of time. These include the disparity between the number of marriageable men and women, the difference between the sexual norms of men and women, and the various situations in which polygamy represents a better alternative to divorce. Such is the choice of Islam. A system of legal and restricted polygamy that ensures the rights and preserves the dignity of all parties involved.

Those who understand the spirit of Islam recognize that Islam does not condone polygamy for its own sake nor as a mechanism to abuse women for the sake of satisfying uncontrolled and unwarranted sexual desires. Islam recognizes polygamy as a necessary solution to certain social problems. It is the exception rather than the norm. It is not left without constraints or controls. It should only be exercised in special circumstances and not as a requirement that has to be fulfilled by every man. The permission to take recourse to this solution is controlled by the requirement of the fair treatment of all wives. The husband has to treat all wives equally in all aspects of life. Islam recognizes that humans have no control over their inner feelings. So, it is not logical to create laws controlling human emotions. Thus, the scope of the treatment that requires fairness does not include inner feelings or emotions. This exemption has been mentioned in the verse: *“and you will not be able to treat women with absolute fairness, even if you tried keenly”* (4:129). Some tried to argue that this verse is a proof that polygamy is not allowed in Islam. This is not so. We cannot imagine that the Quran allows a practice in one verse and prohibits it in another. The scope of fairness in treatment mentioned in the first verse encompasses material and physical aspects of life e.g. maintenance, daily interactions, and intimate relationships. Fairness has to be observed in satisfying the material and physical needs of the different wives. The second verse points to the inability of human beings to control their inner feelings. Matters of the heart lie in God’s domain of control.



To reiterate, polygamy existed before the advent of Islam. Islam introduced controls and constraints to the practice of polygamy. Islam does not consider polygamy to be the norm but it is an exception that can be used in special circumstances. The fact that some Muslims abuse this license does not warrant its abolishment. The right to marry more than one wife is conditional on the ability of the man to be fair in treating his wives. Fairness in treating all wives is a condition for the license to practice polygamy. Fairness should be observed by the husband in providing for his wives, and allotting equal shares of his time and attention. This condition does not apply to feelings and emotions, since these are beyond the control of human beings.

Marrying a slave girl was one of the devices that Islam introduced to end slavery. Marrying a slave girl removes the stigma cast upon slaves. Very often a slave girl is freed upon marrying a free man. Even if she was not freed at the time of marriage, she would be freed once she gives birth or when her husband dies. Her children are born free. At the time of the advent of Islam, slavery was a well-established practice in the world. Islam instituted several ways to eradicate slavery; however, it could not abolish the practice completely. Islam does not condone buying and selling of human beings as slaves, and it does not condone using slave girls as a tool for sexual pleasures.

The verse ends by explaining the rationale behind all these rules, *“that you may not deviate from the right course.”* The right course is the just course. Justice is an objective of all Islamic laws and social justice is a requirement for a sound and healthy society.

*“And give women their bridal gift upon marriage, but if they of themselves be pleased to give up a portion of it and give it to you, then take it with enjoyment. And do not give away your property which God has made for you a means of support to the weak of understanding, but maintain them out of its profit, and clothe them and speak kindly to them.”* This verse establishes the right of the bride to receive a wedding gift as her own property. She has the right to receive it and dispose of it as she wishes. The verse abolished practices that were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society which robbed women of their rights in receiving and disposing of their wedding gifts as they wish. A girl’s guardian had a free hand in deciding whom she should marry; he had the right to receive the wedding gift on her behalf and to dispose of it according to his own will. Many of these marriages were conducted as business deals to benefit the guardians. This verse came to abolish these bad practices and give a girl the right to decide for herself. She can choose freely and under no compulsion to share her wedding gift with her husband.

The wealth that God endowed individual orphans with is also intended for the benefit of the community. It can be looked at as a community property entrusted to individuals to invest and enjoy the accruing benefits. Wealth has to be protected, so it should be entrusted to those who are capable of managing it. Guardians should be appointed to manage the property of orphans who are weak minded or unable to manage their property appropriately. The needs of the orphans should be satisfied using the accrued benefit. This provides protection of the orphans’ wealth.

*“And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, release their property to them, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily, lest*

*they should grow up; and whoever is rich, let him abstain altogether (from taking of the property), and whoever is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable; then when you release their property to them, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence; and God is enough as a Reckoner.*” When orphans reach the age of maturity, they should be tested to determine whether or not they are able to manage their property. If it is determined that they are able to manage their property, the property has to be delivered to them in perfect condition. The guardians are admonished not to squander the property before the orphan reaches the age of maturity. The guardians should protect the wealth placed in their trust and do their best to grow it. If the guardian is a needy person then he should be recompensed reasonably for his efforts, but if the guardian is wealthy then he should not seek any compensation for his efforts. Witnesses should be present at the time of the transfer of the property. Guardians should remember that God is the best of those who reckon.

These verses show the enormous care that the divine project took to eradicate the corrupt practices which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. These practices which allowed guardians to squander the wealth under their trust were abolished by Islam and rules were established to protect the vulnerable orphans.

*“From what is left by parents and near relatives, there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is small or large, a legal share. But if at the time of the division of the legacy other relatives, or orphans or poor, are present, give them a portion of the (property), and speak kindly to them. And let those who, should they leave behind them helpless offspring would fear for their future, be conscious of God, and let them speak justly. Certainly, those who devour the property of the orphans unjustly, they only devour fire into their bellies and they will soon endure blazing fire.”* This is the fundamental principle that Islam introduced fourteen hundred years ago to establish women’s right to inheritance. In the pre-Islamic society people were given rights which were commensurate with their ability to contribute to society’s production or defense requirements. Islam established the principle of basic human rights. All human beings have equal worth irrespective of their material contribution to society. Having fulfilled the basic common human rights, the special needs of people can then be addressed according to their varying societal and family responsibilities.

Rules and traditions in the pre-Islamic society allowed only a small portion of the estate of a deceased person to be given to females and children heirs because females and children did not contribute to the fighting power of the tribe. Islamic law came to give all heirs fair shares. This is consistent with the Islamic premise of protecting the family structure. Depriving some members of a fair share in the inheritance creates animosity between the members of the family. Islamic inheritance law gives a fair share to each member of the family of the deceased taking into consideration their responsibilities in supporting other family members. Protecting the family structure is one of the objectives of the social system in Islam. Islam recognizes that a strong and healthy society can only be established if its building block, the family, is strong and healthy. Islamic laws are designed to strengthen the solidarity between family members.

The Quran addresses the hearts of the believers urging them to think of the orphan child under their guardianship as their own. It takes more than a law to protect the rights of the orphans. The

Quran combines the strength of the law with the fear of God to ensure that the rights of the orphans are protected.

*“God commands you regarding your children: the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have one half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have the sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherit him, then his mother shall have the third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have the sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt he may have incurred; your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is more beneficial to you; this is an injunction from God, certainly God is Omniscient, Wise. And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child, but if they have a child, then you shall have one-fourth of what they leave after (payment of) any bequest they may have bequeathed or a debt they may have incurred; and they shall have one-fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave after (payment of) a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt you may have incurred; and if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others; this is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.”* These two verses, in addition to a third one at the end of the Sura, establish the basis for the methodology of distributing an estate among the heirs of a deceased person. Further details of these rules were provided by the Prophet (PBUH) in some cases, and by the work of the scholars in other cases. We will reflect briefly on the interpretation of these verses. More details can be found in books on Islamic jurisprudence. The verses start by stating that these are God’s commands. He knows what is best for the believers. He is the Provider, and it is He who divides the shares among people. The male has twice the share of the female. When these verses were revealed, many of the Arabs who embraced Islam expressed their dissatisfaction with the new rules. They were used to the practice of giving most of the estate to those who can fight and provide protection for the tribe and they wanted this practice to continue. These objections were not appropriate nor were they warranted. God knows best what is beneficial for His servants. Thus, Islam came to change all of this; the female shall have the right to inherit. However, the female share is half that of the male. This division is not rooted in a feeling of patriarchal supremacy. It is congruent with the obligations that males are expected to undertake. It is the husband’s responsibility to provide for his wife and their children. The wife has no obligation to provide for her family. It is only fair that the male’s share of the inheritance to be twice the share of a female in the same category.

If the heirs were all females, then they inherit two thirds of the estate. If the deceased left behind only one daughter, then she would inherit half the estate; and the remainder goes to the nearest blood-relation of the deceased.

The verses continue to prescribe the shares of the parents of the deceased through different scenarios. Debts should be settled first before the shares are distributed among the heirs. If the deceased bequeathed a part of his/her estate, then the will has to be fulfilled before the shares are

determined. Bequests are limited to one third of the estate. They are meant to address situations where the deceased would like to compensate a person who has no legal right to inherit according to the law. These bequests should not be used to deprive the rightful heirs of their rights.

People are reminded that there is a rationale behind the legislation of these laws. Heirs whether parents or children should be treated fairly and objectively. God knows better who of them is more deserving than the other. These are God's commands and they should be obeyed. God is Omniscient, Wise.

The share of the husband in his wife's estate and the wife in her husband's estate are described depending on whether they have children or not. The last rule is regarding a person who does not leave behind children or parents.

The verses end by reminding people not to use the right to bequest a portion of the estate to inflict any harm on any of the rightful heirs. Debts should be settled before the rules are applied. These are the commands of God the Omniscient, the Forbearing.

*“These are the limits set by God, and whoever obeys God and His Messenger will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow, in which he will dwell forever; and this is the supreme achievement. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger and transgresses the limits set by God, will be admitted fire to abide therein, and he shall have a humiliating torment.”* The two verses emphasize the importance of being obedient to God. Disobedience may be interpreted as rejecting faith or apostasy. The verses identify the commands that are given regarding the distribution of the estate as limits set by God. Those who obey God and His Prophet (PBUH) are rewarded with an eternal abode in paradise. This is certainly a great achievement. Those who disobey will be destined to Hellfire and a humiliating torment. These are grave consequences. The consequences may seem to be disproportionate to such infractions of the details of the law. But is it? The answer to this question is dealt with in different places of this Sura. We will deal with it in the appropriate places. However, we will address this very briefly here in connection with the above two verses. The fundamental question, in this religion as well as in all divinely revealed religions sent to guide humankind since the time of Adam (PBUH), is who has the right to control people's lives? And who has the right to legislate the laws that organize people's lives? A believer's answer to both questions is God, the Lord has the right to legislate laws that organize people's lives and the right to set the limits that should not be transgressed; trespassing these limits for any reason represents a breach of the belief in the Oneness of God and His right to be in control. So the verses refer to grave transgressions of the law not mere infractions of the details.

The inheritance system in Islam is based on a fair methodology for the distribution of shares among the rightful heirs. The methodology is congruent with the initial natural disposition of the human being, the realities of family life, and the responsibilities of the different members of the family. It aims at the preservation of family unity. The system does not exclude any family member from having a share. This includes females as well as young children. The difference in the shares allotted to males and females is justified on the basis of the requirement that males are

required to provide for their families while women are exempt from such obligation. The system takes into consideration the initial natural human disposition and its innate bias towards its progeny. The children of the deceased are given priority over other relatives. The system also considers the interest of the community at large. Its methodology aims at the redistribution of wealth from one generation to the next. This prevents the concentration of wealth in few hands. The system provides a solution to economic and social problems without the interference of the state. Redistribution of wealth may not be acceptable if it is mandated by the government, but it may be easily accepted if it is God's command.

### **Verses:15 to 23**

- 15. If any of your women are guilty of immoral conduct, call to witness four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness to the truth of the allegation, confine them to the houses until death claims them or God ordains some other way for them.*
- 16. If two men are guilty of lewdness, punish them both; then if they repent and amend, leave them alone; certainly God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy.*
- 17. God only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them God will turn mercifully, and God is ever Omniscient, Wise.*
- 18. Repentance is not accepted from those who go on doing evil deeds until death faces one of them, then he says, "Now, I repent;" nor (for) those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful torment.*
- 19. You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor should you treat your wives harshly in order that you may take back part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest immoral conduct; and treat them kindly, for if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it.*
- 20. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then do not take anything from it; would you take it by slandering (her) and (doing her) manifest wrong?*
- 21. And how can you take it when you have become so intimate with each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?*
- 22. And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already been done in the past; this was certainly an immoral act, hateful act, and an evil way.*
- 23. You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers and your daughters and your sisters and your paternal aunts and your maternal aunts and your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters and your mothers that have suckled you and your sisters by suckling and the mothers of your wives and the stepdaughters who are under your guardianship - born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage, then there is no blame on you - and the wives of your sons who are of your own loins and that you should marry two sisters at the same time, except what has already been done in the past; certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. (4:15-23)*

This group of verses deals with two topics. The first topic is the abolishment of indecent practices which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. The second topic is the prohibition of certain types of consanguineous marriages.

*“If any of your women are guilty of immoral conduct, call to witnesses four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness to the truth of the allegation, confine them to the houses until death claims them or God ordains some other way for them. If two men are guilty of lewdness, punish them both; then if they repent and amend, leave them alone; certainly God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse outlines the ways which Islam has devised to cleanse and purify the society of various indecencies. Initially, Islam opted to isolate women who are guilty of lewdness from society and to punish men who commit homosexual acts; however, the punishment was not stated at first. The punishment for adultery for both men and women was later detailed in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24) and the in Prophetic tradition as flogging and stoning. The objective of the punishment is to maintain the purity of the society and to protect it against the practice of lewd and indecent acts.

Islam ensures that only the guilty is punished. The legal process is designed with great care and encompasses provisions which guarantee error-free convictions. The verses carefully identify who are the women to which this ruling applies and the procedure that should be followed to deal with an accusation. The ruling applies only to Muslim women. Four eye witnesses are required to prove the guilt. Four Muslim men should testify that they have personally witnessed the act while it was being performed. These Muslim men are members of the Muslim society, they know its rules, obey its laws, and care for its welfare. If they testify, then the guilty woman is confined to her house. She is not allowed to mingle in society, get married, nor seek employment until death claims her or God ordains a way for her. The reference to a decree from God indicates that house confinement was not meant to be the final punishment for this crime. This was a transitional sentence that was replaced by the permanent punishment which was expounded in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24). Only the punishment was changed but the guarantees to ensure an error-free conviction remained.

The second verse deals with male homosexuality. The Quran discourages the practice and admonishes men not to practice it. Methods suggested for dealing with those who engage in such practice include chiding or even beating. However, if they desist and repent then the punishment should be stopped and they should be accepted in society.

There are two lessons to be gleaned from ending the verse by, *“certainly God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy.”* God is the One who legislated the punishment and He is the one who determines its extent. People should not take matters into their own hands; they should only apply God’s law. God accepts repentance and He is Merciful. The second lesson is exhorting people to build their characters around the beautiful attributes of God. One of these attributes is mercy, so people should be merciful to each other. The society should forgive and forget once a person repents and makes amends. Repentant sinners should be helped to integrate into the society once they acknowledge their mistakes and take steps towards correcting them. The punishment for homosexuality was later modified. It has been narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) that the Messenger of God (PBUH) told his companions that men who practice homosexuality

should be punished by death (The chain of the narrators of this tradition was not connected directly to Ibn ‘Abbas (RA)).

These verses and others show that the Islamic project intention from the start was to cleanse the society of any indecent practices. These verses were revealed in Mecca before the establishment of a Muslim state. Muslims had no government to legislate laws preventing such practices. So these verses came to set the stage for abolishing indecent practices by raising awareness of the devastating consequences of such behavior on the society. However, such goal cannot be achieved by admonition alone but laws had to be legislated and enacted for abolishing such practices.

*“God will only accept the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them God will turn mercifully, and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* Islam does not close the door in the face of sinners nor excommunicate them if they wanted to repent. On the contrary, sinners were encouraged to repent. The verse gives a promise to accept the repentance of those who are sincere in their repentance.

Repentance was discussed before in Surat Al-‘Imran (Chapter 3), however the present verse addresses another aspect of repentance. The verse addresses the kind of repentance that God has promised to forgive. It is a repentance that is rooted in the regret that fills the heart of the sinner once he/she realizes the consequence of what they have committed. This is a repentance which changes the whole life of the sinner and pushes him/her to purify themselves and to seek God’s forgiveness.

Most scholars agree that the word “ignorance” used in the verse applies to those who commit a sin while they are misguided. It does not matter how long the state of misguidance continued as long as it ended before the final signs of death approaches the person. Those who “*repent soon afterwards*” are those who repent well before they realize that they are on the verge of death. In this case, it is a repentance that is motivated by remorse and a desire to make amends. It is a rebirth for the person. God promised to forgive them and give them a second chance to return to a life of piety.

*“Repentance is not accepted from those who go on doing evil deeds, until death faces one of them and he says, “Now, I repent;” nor (for) those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful torment.”* Repentance is accepted because it is a way to change the life of sinners and rehabilitate them into society. Repentance is of no use for those who seek it when they realize that they are on the verge of death. They repent because they are no longer able to commit sins. Repentance in this case is not motivated by remorse nor will it result in a change of the life style for the sinner. Those who die while rejecting faith severed all ties between them and repentance and they missed all chances of being forgiven. For them, a painful torment has been prepared.

*“You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor should you treat your wives harshly in order that you may take back part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest immoral conduct; and treat them kindly, for if you hate them, it*

*may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then do not take anything back from it; would you take it by slandering (her) and (doing her) manifest wrong?*

*And how can you take it when you have become so intimate with each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant? And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already been done in the past; this was certainly a lewd, hateful act, and an evil way.”*

Women were treated badly in the pre-Islamic Arabia. Some women were treated like chattel. A woman was considered part of the estate of her deceased husband to be inherited by his family. If one of the heirs wished, he could marry her. Alternatively, they could give her in marriage to someone else and take her wedding gift, or they may confine her to the house until she ransoms herself with a certain amount of money. In another practice, a man would divorce his wife and forces her to marry someone he chooses. She can avoid this by paying her ex-husband a ransom. There were other similar bad practices, all of which point to the degraded status of women and the abuse they used to suffer at the hands of men.

This was changed by Islam when it decreed that men and women are created from the same soul and that the relationship between the two should be based on mutual love and respect. These verses came to abolish several evil practices that were prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia and to establish family life on the basis of love and kindness. Islam banned the practice which allowed a woman to be inherited as a part of the estate of her deceased husband. Islam banned the practice which allowed the husband to abandon his wife and in the meantime prevent her from marrying someone else of her choice.

The verse addresses the situation when the relationship between a husband and his wife becomes precarious. Men are reminded that there is a connection between the marriage relationship and the relationship between them and their Lord. Islam considers the family home a refuge where husband and wife find peace and security. The house should provide an environment full of love, kindness, and friendship. The intimate relationship between husband and wife should be rooted in understanding, compassion, and love. Therefore, marriage should be based on the free will of both husband and wife. No one should be forced into a marriage relationship against their will. God also reminds men that, *“if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it.”* Men should be patient and do their best to keep the family intact. ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) has been quoted to have said to a man who wanted to divorce his wife because he did not love her anymore, *“Is love the only reason for a family life? What happened to the duty to care?”*

But if family life is impossible to continue, then parting ways should be done in a way that does not inflict harm on the wife. The verse reminds man of the intimate relationship that once existed between him and his wife. The intimacy that was not only physical but was also emotional should be treasured. The verse inspires the imagination of the husband to remember the good times he spent with his wife. It also reminds men of the sanctity of the marriage contract. Usurping the rights of the wife is a clear violation of the marriage contract that was struck between the two at the time when the wedding took place. A marriage contract is a sacred contract that should be respected.



The final command in these verses addresses another evil practice that was prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia: a son was allowed to marry his widowed stepmother. The verses decree that this is a lewd and hateful act. This is a hateful act for various reasons. A stepmother plays the role of a mother to her stepchildren. A son is prohibited to marry his mother. The Quran described this marriage as, *“an immoral act, hateful act, and an evil way.”* Marriages of this kind which have been consummated before the advent of Islam were forgiven.

The following group of verses deals with certain types of consanguineous marriages which Islam prohibited. *“You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers and your daughters and your sisters and your paternal aunts and your maternal aunts and your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters and your mothers that have suckled you and your sisters by suckling and the mothers of your wives and the stepdaughters who are under your guardianship - born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage, then there is no blame on you - and the wives of your sons who are of your own loins and that you should marry two sisters at the same time, except what has already been done in the past; certainly God is Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Various cultures shunned certain types of marriages for different reasons. This verse, in addition to the one before and the one after, lists the consanguineous marriages that Islam prohibited. The reasons for the prohibitions vary. They include marriages prohibited because there is a certain blood relationship between the man and the woman, because there is a marriage relationship between the families of the man and the woman, or because the man and the woman were breastfed by the same woman (The man and woman in this case become siblings by virtue of being breastfed by the same woman.) On the other hand, Islam does not espouse the view that race, culture, language or the color of skin are acceptable reasons for preventing a man and a woman to be united in matrimony.

One can categorize the prohibited marriages which are based on blood relationship in four classes

- Marriage between a man and his mother, or grandmothers (paternal or maternal).
- Marriage between a man and his daughters or granddaughters.
- Marriage between a man and his sisters or nieces.
- Marriage between a man and his aunts (paternal and maternal), and the aunts of his uncles or his aunts.

Marriages prohibited on the basis of an existing marriage relationship between the families of the man and the woman include five cases

- Marriage between a man and his wife's mother or grandmothers. This prohibition comes into play once the original marriage contract has been signed whether the marriage has been consummated or not.
- Marriage between a man and his wife's daughters or granddaughters. This prohibition applies only after the original marriage has been consummated.
- Marriage between a man and the wives of his father or grandfathers.
- Marriage between a man and the wives of his sons or grandsons. This does not apply to the wife of an adopted son.
- A man is not allowed to marry two sisters at the same time.

Marriages prohibited on the basis of a breastfeeding relationship include

- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who breastfed him, her mother, or grandmother.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breastfed by the man's wife, or her daughters.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breastfed by a woman who breastfed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry the sister or the sister in law of a woman who breastfed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who breastfed his wife.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breast fed by his wife (before she married him).
- A man is not allowed to marry the second wife of a man whose first wife breast fed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry the wife of a man who was breast fed by his wife.
- A man is not allowed to marry two women who were breast fed by the same woman at the same time.

The first and second groups of prohibited marriage relationships listed above have been prohibited by Quranic verses. The third group of marriage relationships was made unlawful by a prophetic tradition. It has been reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said that relationships resulting from breastfeeding are similar to blood relationships regarding the allowable and prohibited marriages.

These were the marriage relationships which were rendered unlawful by Islam. The Quran does not provide the rationale behind these prohibitions. Many scholars attempted to infer the rationale behind these prohibitions. However, these attempts remain in the realm of personal opinions. These laws have to be accepted by Muslims irrespective of whether we understand the rationale behind them or not.

All these relationships were traditionally prohibited in the pre-Islamic society except for two: a man was allowed to marry the widow of his father and to marry two sisters at the same time. These two forms of marriage were allowed by the pre-Islamic traditions however; they were not widely accepted. However, in deciding what is lawful and what is prohibited in the area of marriage relationships, as in all other areas of human interactions, Islam provides its own rules regardless of what existed before its advent. It is God's authority to determine what is lawful and what is prohibited for people. Deciding the lawful and forbidden is not a formality, but it is one of the basic foundations of religion. Only God has the authority to decide what is allowable and what is forbidden. No one other than God can claim such authority, claiming such authority is synonymous to claiming being god.

## **Verses: 24 to 35**

*24. Women who are already married are also prohibited, except those whom your right hand possesses. This is what God has decreed for you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided that you seek them with gifts from your property in honest wedlock, not*

- debauchery. Those whom you wish to enjoy through marriage, you are obligated to give them their bridal gift. But if after you have fulfilled the obligation, you mutually agree to do otherwise, you will not be blamed; certainly God is Omniscient, Wise.*
25. *And whoever among you does not have the means to marry free believing women, let him marry from the believing maids whom your right hands possess; and God knows best your faith, you are (sprung) one from another; so marry them with the permission of their folk, and give them their bridal gifts kindly, they being chaste not fornicating, nor receiving paramours; and when they are honorably married, then if they are guilty of an immoral conduct, they shall suffer half the punishment which is prescribed upon free women. This permission is for those among you who are afraid to sin. But it is better for you to persevere and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
26. *God wishes to make His laws clear to you, and to guide you into the ways of those before you, and to turn to you in mercy, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
27. *And God wishes to turn to you in mercy, and those who follow their lusts wish that you go tremendously astray.*
28. *God wishes to lighten your burden, for the human being was created weak.*
29. *You who believe, do not devour your property among yourselves falsely, but trade by your mutual consent; and do not kill one another; certainly God is Merciful to you.*
30. *And whoever does this through aggression and injustice, We will soon cast him into fire; and this is easy for God.*
31. *If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden to do, We will absolve you of your minor sins and cause you to enter at a noble gate.*
32. *And do not covet that which God has favored some of you over the others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace; certainly God knows all things.*
33. *And to everyone We have appointed heirs of what parents and near relatives leave; and as to those with whom your right hands have ratified agreements, give them their due portion; certainly God is a witness over all things.*
34. *Men should take full care of their wives by virtue of the bounties God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their property; and the righteous women are the truly devout ones, guarding in secret that which God has guarded; and as for whom you fear rebellion, admonish them first, refuse to share their beds, and beat them lightly; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; certainly God is Most Exalted, Great.*

35. *And if you fear a breach between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people; if they both desire amendment, God will bring about reconciliation between them, certainly God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware. (4:24-35)*

*“Women who are already married are also prohibited, except those whom your right hand possesses. This is what God has decreed for you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided that you seek them with gifts from your property in honest wedlock, not debauchery. Those whom you wish to enjoy through marriage, you are obligated to give them their bridal gift. But if after you have fulfilled the obligation, you mutually agree to do otherwise, you will not be blamed; certainly God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The verse continues to list the prohibited marriage relationships. A man cannot marry a woman who is already married. This ruling strengthens the role of the family in Islam as the building block of society. This building block has to be protected and the transparency of the lineage has to be maintained. The family in Islam is based on a man and a woman joined in wedlock. Family provides a protection against adultery and is the logical answer to the needs of the initial natural human disposition.

It is observed that the human baby needs a longer period to grow up and become independent than the period required by a baby from any other species. Education of human children takes even a longer period of time. The objective of sexual relationship between couples in the animal species is the preservation of the species. The objective of the relationship in humans goes far beyond procreation and sexual pleasure. The relationship between human couples is a long term relationship to provide care and education for the children and prepare them to become active participants in the human society. The life between human couples does not revolve around sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure has been ingrained in the initial natural human disposition to facilitate bringing couples together in the first instance to start a long term relationship. Thus, for humans the relationship between a man and woman is not controlled by the “desire” but it is controlled by the “duty to care,” the duty to care for the vulnerable progeny. These considerations support the notion of building the relationship between couples on the foundation of the concept of family. The sanctity of the institution of family should be protected. Practice of polyandry threatens this concept and confuses the transparency of lineage; therefore, it is not acceptable in Islam.

An exception is made in the case of married women who were captured in wars between the believers and non-believers and were made slaves according to the norms of the human society at that time. These women lost all relationship with their first husbands when they were captured and became legally unmarried. They have to wait until they have one menstruation to make sure that they are not pregnant before they can engage in a sexual relationship. These women could gain their freedom upon accepting Islam and becoming legally married, otherwise they would continue to be captives and they were allowed to engage in sexual relationship with their masters according to the norms of the society at that time.

The issue of slavery has been addressed in different places in the Quran. It has to be noted that rules regarding enslavement of captured enemy were well established before the advent of Islam. Islam made giant steps towards abolishing slavery as has been pointed out in other places in the

Quran. In the interim, Muslims had to abide by the same rules that their enemy followed. However, Islam revolutionized the way the captured slaves were treated.

The rules which determine the lawful and the forbidden were decreed by God and they should be followed. The marriage relationship is based on honest and decent wedlock between the partners, neither prostitution nor debauchery are allowed. The woman gets her bridal gift as a part of the marriage contract. This is her right. However, once the condition has been fulfilled and she received her gift, she can do whatever she wants with it including giving part of the gift back to her husband

If a man is unable to marry a free woman, then an alternative is given, *“And whoever among you does not have the means to marry free believing women, let him marry from the believing maids whom your right hand possesses; and God knows best your faith: you are (sprung) one from another; so marry them with the permission of their folk, and give them their bridal gifts kindly, they being chaste, not fornicating, nor receiving paramours; and when they are honorably married, then if they are guilty of immoral conduct, they shall suffer half the punishment which is prescribed upon free women. This permission is for those among you who are afraid to sin. But it is better for you to persevere, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse organizes marriage relationships that involve slave girls. The verse implies that it is preferable for a man to seek marriage from a free woman. However, if it was not feasible for a man to marry a free woman and he is unable to wait for a change in circumstances, then he is allowed to marry a believing (slave) girl on the condition that she receives her wedding gift. The relationship is a marriage relationship with all its characteristics and conditions. It is important to point out how the Quran dealt with the relationship between free people and slaves in the Islamic society at that time. First, the Quran calls the slave girls “believing girls” and calls their masters, their “family”, which shows how Islam was preparing people for the eradication of slavery. The verse points to the fact that Islam does not categorize masters and slaves as two different races but it reminds them that they all belong to the same human race. It reminds them that they are connected together through humanity and faith, *“God knows best your faith: you are (sprung) one from another.”* Second, all marriage rules that apply to a free woman apply also to a slave woman. The wedding gift is given to her personally and she cannot be forced to engage in extra marital sexual relationships. But if the married slave girl was tempted somehow and succumbed to the temptation to commit adultery, then she only gets half the punishment that a free woman would suffer for the same crime. The ruling recognizes the vulnerability of slave girls, even after they get married and this consideration is reflected on the reduction the punishment. The verse ends by iterating the preference of marrying a free girl, but allows an exception for those who are unable to exercise self-restraint although exercising self-restraint is better.

*“God wishes to make His laws clear to you, and to guide you into the ways of those before you, and to turn to you in mercy and God is Omniscient, Wise. And God wishes to turn to you in mercy, and those who follow their lusts wish that you go tremendously astray. God wishes to lighten your burden, for man was created weak.”* God wishes to make His rules clear to His believing servants and He wants to explain the rationale behind these rules. These rules are not an expression of senseless desire for control. The rules aim at elevating the status of humankind. They are part of a divine project that has been decreed for all believers since the beginning of

time. God wants to guide the believers, turn to them in mercy, and forgive their sins. These rules are meant to guide people to the straight path, the path of mercy and forgiveness, while those who follow their lust wish to sway people away from the path of God. God wishes to lighten the burden of humankind by making rules that take into consideration human weaknesses.

Many people think that following these rules, especially the ones that deal with the organization of sexual relationships, place a burden on them and limits their freedom to satisfy their needs. They want to remove all restrictions on these relationships. They are seeking a hedonistic lifestyle. These people are in fact pursuing a mirage. The type of freedom they are seeking is not in the best interest of the human society and will result in catastrophic consequences for the society.

*“You who believe, do not wrongfully devour each other property, but trade by mutual consent; and do not kill one another; certainly God is Merciful to you. And whoever does this through aggression and injustice, We will soon cast him into fire; and this is easy to God. If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden to do, We will absolve you of your smaller sins and cause you to enter at a noble gate.”* The verses present another lesson in the series of lessons for educating people as well as for introducing legislations. Education and legislation complement each other. Legislation takes into account real life conditions and the best way to implement laws. This is achieved through education and training people to be conscious of God. Education connects the heart of the believer to God, the source of laws; and instills in it the will to obey these laws.

These verses establish three principles which govern financial transactions. The verses provide a mixture of Islamic education and laws. This methodology has been used extensively by Islam because education and law go hand in hand. Education prepares people to accept the law and to believe that it is in their best interest to follow the law. However, there will always be a person who will not obey the law voluntarily. Hence, law enforcement is needed.

The first principle establishes the basis of Islamic financial dealings to guarantee the purity of transactions. It establishes the principle that profit should always be sought through lawful means. The verse addressed the believers and pointed to a methodology to eradicate the remnants of the pre-Islamic bad practices and to emphasize the relationship between faith and practice. The principle outlawed all bad financial practices including cheating, fraud, gambling, and usury, etc. The verse is specific in excluding fair business practices based on mutual agreement of all parties involved. These fair practices are allowed. It is not clear whether usury was prohibited before this verse was revealed or not, but either way, the Quran is clear on usury dealings. Usury is the worst form of financial dealings. The verse alluded to a link between the disastrous impact that bad financial practices can have on society and committing suicide. Bad financial practices cause the death of the society exactly as committing suicide puts an end to human life. God is merciful; He wishes to save the human society of the devastating consequences of bad financial dealings. Those who do not heed this principle are deemed transgressors and will be punished in Hellfire. On the other hand, those who avoid capital sins are promised a forgiveness for all other sins which they may have committed and will be admitted through a noble gate. This is a fair faith with an easy program for a better life. This is a program that attempts to purify the human

soul and to establish a sound society. It provides a balance between the undertaking and the capacity, between what is desired and what is necessary, between the incentive and the drive, between what to do and what not to do, and between threats of punishment and promises of life in paradise. It offers a clear promise from God to forgive all sins, if one avoids the capital sins. The criterion is to try sincerely to avoid these capital sins. If a person tried sincerely to avoid these sins but succumbed to the temptation and committed one of the major sins, he/she can still repent and ask for forgiveness. There are a number of Prophetic traditions which list some of the major sins. It should not be difficult for Muslims to recognize which sins are major and which are not. The important thing is to be sincere in the intent to obey God's commandments and to try hard to follow these commands. God knows that we will commit mistakes and He promised to forgive these mistakes.

*“And do not covet that with which God has favored some of you over the others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace; certainly God knows all things. And to everyone We have appointed heirs of what parents and near relatives leave; and as to those with whom your right hands have ratified agreements, give them their due portion; certainly God is a witness over all things.”* This is a general statement which forbids coveting the bounty of God that has been bestowed on others. Instead of coveting a position, a status, a talent, or wealth which God bestowed on others; one should ask God for a similar favor. Coveting will only result in creating bad feelings, envy, jealousy, and hatred. Asking God from His bounty, on the other hand, generates feelings of security and hope; and will induce the believers to seek the lawful means to achieve what they aspire to. This is a statement that applies in general, but its mention at this point gives it also a special significance. It deals with the apparent variance in the portions allotted to men and women in accordance with inheritance laws. The verse aims at reconciling the relationship between the two partners in the human society. The Islamic methodology for building a human society is based on the recognition that males and females are partners in the society, and they are created to play different but complimentary roles. Their relationship should not be based on competition but it should be based on collaboration. The methodology does not favor one gender over the other but it aims at realizing the interest of the society as whole.

The early Quranic commentaries mentioned that the verse was revealed in response to a question posed by Um Salmah (RA), to the Prophet (PBUH), she said, *“Messenger of God, we don't participate in Jihad and therefore we are deprived of the opportunity of martyrdom.”* God did neither prescribe Jihad for women nor prohibit them from participating in Jihad. Some women participated in battles against the enemy of Islam. Some participated by carrying food and water or as nurses and supporters. But there were also women who participated as fighters. Women's role as fighters was the exception rather than the rule as dictated by situation.

The other source for coveting between men and women is the variance in inheritance rules. This may seem unfair on the surface but if we consider the matter more carefully, we find that this variance reflects the requirements for an integrated scheme for building an Islamic society. The male has double the share of a female. This addresses the obligations that are placed on males in the society. A man is obliged to give his bride a wedding gift. A man is obliged to support his nuclear family and the needy members of his extended family. A man is obliged to support his

divorcee. Women are exempt from all these obligations, even if they are wealthy and even if they can afford to participate in these financial obligations.

The verses continued to establish women's financial rights. Women have the right to engage in financial transactions and to own property the same way men do. This was a change in the status quo. The pre-Islamic society did not recognize women's right to own property. Great injustice was inflicted on wealthy women to deprive them of their wealth through crooked means. Islam came to rectify this. This verse established the equal rights of men and women to own property.

Finally, a reference is made to a number of contracts which were recognized in the pre-Islamic society and which were phased out by Islam. These contracts were known as "loyalty contracts." They included four types

- Loyalty contracts for a freed slave: this was a contract between a slave and his master that resulted in the slave being freed and adopted into the family of the master. The adopted member of the family enjoyed all the rights of the original members including inheritance rights.
- Loyalty contracts between an Arab and a non-Arab: this contract involved the adoption of a non-Arab into the family of an Arab. Consequently, the new member of the family enjoyed all the rights that the other family members enjoyed including the right of inheritance.
- Brotherhood pacts: these were pacts that the Prophet (PBUH) formed between the migrants (Muhajereen) and the supporters (Ansar) just after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) from Mecca to Medina. According to this pact a man from Medina adopted a man from Mecca as his brother. This brotherhood was treated as a blood relationship and allowed the two brothers to inherit one another.
- Pre-Islamic adoption contract: this was a contract between two men to inherit one another.

Islam respected the contracts which were solemnized before the inheritance rules were revealed. However, it gradually phased out all these types of contracts and restricted the right of inheritance to members of the family who share blood or marriage relationships.

*"Men should take full care of their wives with the bounties God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their property; and the righteous women are the truly devout ones, guarding in secret that which God has guarded; and as for whom you fear rebellion, admonish them first, refuse to share their beds, and beat them lightly; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; certainly God is Exalted, Great. And if you fear a breach between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people; if they both desire amendment, God will bring about reconciliation between them, certainly God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware."* Before we deal with these verses, let us consider Islam's philosophy regarding the family as an institution and the measures it took to protect it and preserve its integrity.



God created the whole universe on the concept of duality “*and from each thing We created a pair, if you remember,*” (51:49). As a part of the universe, the human race is created on the basis of the concept of duality as well. So, living in pairs satisfies the initial natural human disposition. God created this pair from a single soul. God made each member of this pair to be a cause of tranquility, security, comfort, and protection to one another. He made their union a source for sustaining life on earth. Because they were created from the same soul, they stand equal in the sight of God. They are treated equally by God in matters of reward and punishment. They are equal in a court of law, when they are involved in a civil dispute. They have equal rights in owning property.

Men and women have equal worth as human beings but they were created to fulfill different roles. God created each with the appropriate physical and psychological form suitable for the achievement of their respective roles. Along with the appropriate capabilities came a fair distribution of responsibilities. It is the woman’s responsibility to bear children and it is the man’s responsibility to support his family. The verse alluded to the physical and psychological preparation of men and women to be able to carry out their respective tasks and also referred to the man’s responsibility in providing the financial support to his family.

This verse organized family life and allocated responsibilities to each of the two human beings who are necessary for the establishment of a family in the first place. Allocation of responsibilities removes potential friction and competition between the partners and establishes the basic rule that any dispute should be settled by referring to God’s rules. The verse established the principle that males are responsible for taking full care of their wives. Males have been given this leadership role because of their intrinsic characteristics and because they are responsible for maintaining the family. The verse also prescribed a procedure for dealing with family disputes. These organizational rules were necessary to maintain the integrity of family life.

The division of responsibilities between the male and the female in a family setting is imperative if fairness is to prevail. Each has a role to play and each has been prepared for that role. Females are given the responsibility of child birth and child care. These are major responsibilities, but females have been created with biological and psychological characteristics which enable them to undertake such responsibilities. It is only fair that the other partner in the family organization be given the responsibility of providing the financial necessities needed to maintain the family. Males are given biological and psychological characteristics which prepare them to fulfill their prescribed roles as well.

The rationale for asking men to be in charge and to take full care of their wives rests on two fundamental elements: the characteristics that they were given and the requirement of providing for the family.

The verse continued to describe the characteristics of believing women. The righteous woman is truly devout as well. A devout person is one who obey God willingly and voluntarily. The verse did not use the term obedient because obedience may be imposed by external forces. The word devout indicates obedience based on belief and choice. A devout woman obeys God because she is convinced that this is the right thing to do. Another character of righteous believing women is

their ability to guard the sanctity of marriage as has been dictated by God. It is interesting to note that the verse was not worded in the form of a command to women, but it was phrased to indicate that devotion is not to be imposed but it comes natural with righteousness. The verse continued to outline the procedure for dealing with a rebellious woman, a shrew. The Arabic word used to describe this situation refers to mutinous behavior which challenges the natural order. Islam uses a proactive approach to deal with family problems. This proactive approach consists of three steps or phases. The intent of this approach is to deal with the early signs before they develop into a situation that cannot be remedied. This is a gradual approach which does not aim at humiliating or punishing wives. It aims at protecting the integrity of the family and bringing back stability and order to family life. Before talking about the procedure recommended for dealing with rebellious wives, we need to remember that God bestowed honor on the two partners in the human race. Women have God given rights that should be respected. Entrusting man with a leadership role in the family does not take away from a woman her right to choose her partner and to manage her personal and financial affairs independently. The verse laid the foundation to understand the rationale behind this procedure. It also provided an understanding of the way it should be implemented.

The steps are first to admonish, then refuse to share their beds, and finally to beat them lightly. These are measures to be followed when means for a discussion or a civil discourse have been exhausted. Several prophetic traditions commanded men to deal kindly with their wives. One of the prophet's (PBUH) companions asked him about the rights that a wife has. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"You feed her as you feed yourself, you dress her as you dress yourself, do not hit her on the face, do not call her names, and if you have to abandon her bed, do not leave the house."* He also has been quoted to have said, *"Do not hit God's women servants."* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"The best among you is the one who treats his wife the best way, and I treat my wives the best way."*

The verse continued to admonish men not to oppress their wives when they seek reconciliation. The reconciliation sought by a rebellious wife should be based on understanding and not on oppression. The verse reminded men that God is Exalted and Great. This should eliminate any feelings of pride or any desire for oppression.

When the means to mend the relationship between the husband and wife have been exhausted then, two arbiters, one from the husband's family and the other from the wife's family, are convened to mediate between the two. If the couple is interested in mending things, then God will guide their steps towards reconciliation.

### **Verses: 36 to 43**

36. *And worship God and do not associate anything with Him and be good to parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of your kin and the neighbor who is not kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and those whom your right hand possesses; certainly God does not love him who is arrogant and boastful;*
37. *Those who are niggardly and command people to be niggardly and hide what God has bestowed upon them; and We have prepared for the disbelievers a disgraceful torment.*

38. *And those who spend of their wealth to be seen and praised by people and do not believe in God nor in the last day; and whoso takes Satan for a comrade, what a dreadful comrade he is.*
39. *And what harm would it have done them if they had believed in God and the Last Day and spent benevolently of what God had bestowed upon them? And God has full knowledge of them.*
40. *Certainly God does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of an atom, and if there is a good deed He multiplies it and gives the doer from His own presence an immense reward.*
41. *What will they do, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness against these?*
42. *On that Day, those who disbelieve and disobey the Messenger will wish that they were level with the ground, and they shall not hide any word from God.*
43. *You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say, nor when you are in a state of ritual impurity - unless you are passing through on the road- until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then take for yourselves clean earth, and wipe your faces and your hands; certainly God is Pardoning, All-Forgiving. (4:36-43)*

All Islamic laws are rooted in the belief in the Oneness of God, “*And worship God and do not associate anything with Him and be good to parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of your kin and the neighbor who is not kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and those whom your right hand possesses; certainly God does not love him who is arrogant and boastful;*” These verses outline commands and directives to Muslims. All commands and directives in Islam are rooted in the belief in the Oneness of God. This basic principle provides the framework that brings all commands and guidelines into one cohesive structure. These verses list a number of commands and it is logical that the first command is to worship God. The second command prohibits associating partners with God. It is a very strong command not to associate anything with God. This is followed by a command to be kind to one’s parents in particular and to all kin in general. It is interesting to note that commands to be kind to parents are more prevalent in the Quran than commands to be kind to the progeny. Parents by nature are kind to their children, while children may not always be kind to their parents, hence, came the emphasis in the Quran on being kind to parents. This is a directive from the Giver of Mercy, the Compassionate who does not forget anybody. He takes care of all His creation.

Another point to note is that in this verse and in many similar verses in the Quran, the command starts with those who are nearest of kin then branches out to include people who have varying degrees of closeness to the person. This is congruent with the initial natural human disposition. People tend to care more about those who are closest to them, then the next of kin, then their friends and so forth. So, the verse lists people to whom one should be kind according to their priority. It starts first with the parents, then members of the family, followed by the needy and poor, then the neighbor who is kin, then the neighbor who is not kin, then the fellow traveler, then the traveling person who is away from his land and family, and finally the slaves. This is a reminder that slaves are our brothers in humanity whose misfortune deprived them from their

freedom and made them slaves. The verse closes by disparaging boasting and arrogance. These are traits which tend to prevent people from being kind.

Those *“who are niggardly and command people to be niggardly and hide what God has bestowed upon them; and We have prepared for the disbelievers a disgraceful torment. And those who spend of their wealth to be seen and praised by people and do not believe in God nor in the Last Day; and whoso takes Satan for a comrade, what a dreadful comrade he is.”* Once again the relationship between the belief in the Oneness of God and human behavior is reiterated. Believing in God promotes kindness and generosity for the sake of receiving the pleasure of God alone. Knowing that whatever we spend is from the bounty of God and it is spent for the sake of God, eliminates the hateful traits of being boastful and arrogant. The verse puts human behavior in perspective. The belief in God and the sincere desire to seek His pleasure are strong incentives to behave nicely. Deeds are dedicated solely to God with no expectations for a reward from other human beings. These values are based on the belief in God and the Hereafter. These are standard values that are unchangeable. Values determined by human beings are “relative” values that change from one place to another and from one generation to the other. The verse says, *“God does not love”* God’s love is not like the love that human beings experience. The expression is used to denote the consequences of *“God does not love.”* The consequences of boasting and arrogance are punishment and disgrace. What is more disgraceful than being associated with Satan?

*“And what harm would it have done them if they had believed in God and the Last Day and spent benevolently of what God had bestowed upon them? And God has full knowledge of them. Certainly God does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of an atom, and if there is a good deed He multiplies it and gives the doer from His own presence an immense reward. What will they do?”* And why don’t they believe in God and the Last Day? And why don’t they spend of that which was bestowed on them by God? Don’t they know that God knows all what they do and what motivates their deeds? Because of this knowledge, God does not wrong any one. On the contrary, if they do any good deed, they will be rewarded several fold and they will be recompensed nicely by God. The choice to believe brings security and gain, both in this life and in the Hereafter.

*“When We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness against these? On that Day, those who disbelieve and disobey the Messenger will wish that they were level with the ground, but they shall not hide any word from God.”* This verse laid the ground rules for how people will be treated on the Day of Judgment: God does not inflict even the magnitude of a small atom of injustice on people; His is absolute justice. He will multiply the reward for good deeds and will give more from His bounty. He will exercise His mercy and His blessing for those who believed, looked forward, and worked hard for this day. As for those who rejected faith and did not work for this day, how will they feel when they face the messenger of God who came to them, because God will bring all messengers as witnesses and He will bring Muhammad (PBUH) as a witness over them. Some scholars indicated that the word “these” refers to the pagans of Quraish. The verse paints a vivid image of the Day of Judgment. People from each nation will be crowded in a huge space. Each nation is faced with the messenger of God who was sent to them. Each messenger is a witness. All those who were arrogant and belied their

messenger will be there. All their deeds will be declared. Their hypocrisy, their niggardliness, and their selfishness will become apparent. They will stand in front of God with all their sins feeling guilty and humiliated.

This group of verses started with the command to worship God. Prayer is one of the most important rituals in Islam and it is a fundamental part of worship. Hence, the verses continued with a description of some of the rules regarding the preparation for and the conduct of prayers. *“You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say, nor when you are in a state of ritual impurity - unless you are travelling on the road- until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you come from the privy or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then take for yourselves clean earth, and wipe your faces and your hands; certainly God is Effacer of sins, All-Forgiving.”* This was a step in the spiritual education for Muslims to prepare them for the impending change of rules regarding drinking Alcohol. Drinking Alcohol was one of the oldest and deeply rooted traditions of the Arabic society before Islam. Drinking was a hallmark of the Arabic society before Islam as it was the hallmark of other societies: The Roman, the Persian, as well as western societies of the present day. Islam introduced a progressive program to abolish this bad habit. The program consisted of several stages that were revealed in various verses of the Quran over a period of time. This was Islam’s approach to eradicate the drinking habit which was so entrenched in the pre-Islamic society. The implementation of the plan went smoothly without waging wars or requiring major sacrifices. When the verse which brought the final decree prohibiting drinking alcohol was revealed, Muslims spilled the alcohol they had and they even spat out what was in their mouths. In the beginning, the Quran hinted that there is a difference between alcohol and good provision *“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get wine and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who reason.”* (16:67). This was an indirect way to state that there is a difference between wine and wholesome provision. This was a slight nudge to the fledgling Islamic consciousness to raise its awareness. Drinking was not only a strong tradition in the pre-Islamic society, but it was also a flourishing industry. More than just a nudge was needed to convince people of its bad impact on society. The second step came in Medina at a time when Muslims were in authority but the prohibition needed more than enacting and enforcing a law. It needed a psychological preparation. So, the Quran provided a lesson to be heeded by Muslims in the form of a question-answer style, *“They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say to them, ‘In them is great sin, and some profit, for people; but the sin is greater than the profit.’”* [2:219]. This was a direct and loud call alerting people to the dangers of drinking and its adverse effects on society. The third stage aimed at limiting the amount of alcohol that a Muslim could consume. This was a transient stage to move from the stage that *“there are good as well as bad things associated with alcohol”* to the stage which completely banned the use of alcohol because it is unclean, *“You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say,”* [4:43]. The implementation of this verse limited the use of alcohol greatly, because keeping regular prayers requires one to pray five times every day. It became a challenge for those who want to keep up the regular prayers to find the time for drinking. Finally, and when people were ready to accept the change, the final verse came to completely prohibit drinking, *“You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handwork; eschew such (abomination), that you may prosper.”* [5:90]. This verse brought an end

to the tradition of drinking alcohol in Arabia. The Quranic plan succeeded without a civil authority to enact the law. This is a miracle which was only possible because the plan understood the human psyche and addressed its needs. The plan depended on instilling the love of God and the knowledge that He is ever watching in the hearts of people. It depended on filling the vacuum in people's lives with serious thoughts and interests and filling their hearts with a faith that freed them from the servitude of their worldly pleasures and desires.

After this slight digression we come back to the verse at hand, "*You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say.*" There is some difference in opinion about what is meant by the two terms, "*passing through*" and "*approach prayers.*" One opinion states that those who are ritually unclean are not allowed to enter or stay in a mosque until they perform the ritual wash. However, they would be allowed to pass through a mosque. This brought relief to some of the Prophet's companions who had houses which opened into the mosque and they had to pass through the mosque to get in or out of their houses. Another opinion states that a person who is ritually unclean is not allowed to pray, unless he was travelling and in this case he can head to the mosque, perform "Tayamum" and perform his prayer. It seems that the first interpretation makes more sense, since the state of travel was mentioned in the verse under the category of "*on a journey.*" This implies unnecessary repetition of the same verdict.

Thus, those who are travelling, sick or have just satisfied a call of nature should not pray until they perform a ritual wash. If they are unable to perform a ritual wash, for the lack of water or because of fear of harm (for example, if the water was very cold) then they could perform Tayamum.

There is also a difference of opinion on the meaning of the term "*touched women.*" Some say that this is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, which would require a ritual wash before one can perform prayers. Another opinion takes the word to mean literally touching women. This means that one has to perform ritual wash after touching any part of a woman's body.

We summarize the opinions of the different schools as follows:

- Touching a woman's body requires performance of ritual wash (ablution).
- Ablution is required if a man who can be easily aroused by touching a woman touches a woman who is sexually desirable.
- Ablution is required if the man felt that he was aroused as a result of the touch.
- Neither touching a woman nor hugging nor kissing one's wife require ablution.

These are opinions of the different schools of jurisprudence. Each school has its evidence and interpretation of the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). However, we are of the opinion that "*touching*" here refers to the act of sexual intercourse which requires a major ritual wash (Ghusl).

The verse also introduces the concept of Tayamum as an alternative for minor ritual wash (Ablution) or major ritual wash (Ghusl) when water is not available or when the use of water may cause harm to the person. This involves tapping the clean dust (or any object that may be

covered with enough dust such that the dust will blow away when the object is touched), rubbing the palms together to get rid of the dust, and then using the palms to wipe the face. The whole process is repeated again but this time the palms are used to wipe the hands. This is a convenient alternative when the use of water is not possible. The ending of the verse conveys the message that God wants to make things easy for people. He forgives our shortcomings.

We need to reflect on the rationale behind the concept of ritual wash and the concept of Tayamum. One may suggest that the objective behind requiring ritual wash is maintaining physical cleanliness. This may be true but it does not explain the use of Tayamum as an alternative. I am not absolutely certain of the rationale behind replacing the ritual wash by Tayamum. However, it seems to me that these rituals provide two functions. The first is preparing the person psychologically to engage in the prayers. Prayers are a meeting with God that requires such a preparation. The rituals provide a transition for the state of mind from a state completely absorbed in the regular daily activities to a state wholly devoted to a meeting with God. The other function may be that it allows the Muslim to establish prayers under any condition and in all circumstances. So that the communications between the person and His Lord continues whether he is sick or traveling and whether water is available or scarce.

## **Verses: 44 to 57**

44. *Do you not see those who were given a portion of the Scripture? They purchase error and desire that you should go astray from the right way.*
45. *And God knows best your enemies; and God suffices as a Protecting Guardian, and God suffices as a Helper.*
46. *Of those who are Jews, there are those, who distort the meanings of words and say, "We have heard and we disobey and hear, may you not be made to hear, and, 'Ra'ina,'" distorting the word with their tongues and slandering the faith; and if they had said (instead), "We have heard and we obey, and do hear, and do look at us," it would have been better for them and more upright; but God has cursed them on account of their disbelief, so but few of them will believe.*
47. *You who have been given the Scripture, believe in that which We have revealed, verifying what you have, before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and the command of God shall be executed.*
48. *Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed invented a great sin.*
49. *Have you not considered those who attribute purity to themselves? Nay, God will purify whom He pleases; and they shall not be wronged even, as much as the thread upon a date- stone.*
50. *See how they forge a lie against God? That of itself is a flagrant sin.*
51. *Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Scripture has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve, "These are better guided than the believers."*
52. *Those are they whom God has cursed, and whomever God curses you shall not find any helper for him.*

53. *Or have they a share in the dominion? But then they would not give people even what fills the groove on a date-stone.*
54. *Or do they envy people for what God has given them out of His grace? But indeed We have given the House of Abraham the Scripture and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom.*
55. *Some of them believed, and some turned away from it. And nothing can burn like Hell fire.*
56. *Those who reject Our revelations, We shall soon cast them into fire; so often as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment; certainly God is Eminent, Wise.*
57. *But those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, this will be their eternal home. They shall have therein pure mates, and We shall admit them to cool refreshing shade.” (4:44-57)*

“Do you not see those who were given a portion of the Scripture? They purchase error and desire that you should go astray from the right way. And God knows best your enemies; and God suffices as a Protecting Guide, and God suffices as a Helper.” Those who were given the Scripture had every reason to be guided by it, but when they were called to guidance they chose misguidance. They would rather pay for misguidance than follow the free guidance given to them. Buying misguidance implies a predetermination on their part. This is a state of affairs that is both surprising and deplorable. They even go further by asking those who are guided to abandon guidance. They try to confuse people so that they do not follow guidance. It is therefore, important that Muslims know their enemies so that they would not be deceived by these attempts which aim at making them swerve away from the straight path. The verse alludes to the conflict that was going on between the Muslims and some of the Jews in Medina and alerted the Muslims to the danger of the attempts of their enemy, “God knows best your enemies.” God further assures the believers of His support and help, “God suffices as a Protecting Guardian, and God suffices as a Helper.”

The verses continue to name those enemies and to describe how this misbehaved in dealing with the Prophet (PBUH). “Of those who are Jews, there are those, who distort the meanings of words and say, ‘We have heard and we disobey and hear, may you not be made to hear. And, Ra’ina,’ distorting the word with their tongues and slandering the faith; and if they had said (instead), ‘We have heard and we obey, and do hear, and do look at us,’ it would have been better for them and more upright; but God has cursed them on account of their disbelief, so but few of them will believe.” Some of the Jews of Medina distorted the meaning of the word of God in the Torah which predicted the coming of a new revelation. They said to the Prophet (PBUH), “We listened to what you said, but we will disobey, and we will not believe or follow you.” They play on the words they say, saying words with double meaning. On the face of it, they speak to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a polite way saying, “Hear, but you are not obliged to hear.” However, what they really mean is “Hear, may you not be able to hear.” They also use the word “Ra’ina” which may be understood as if they are asking for a special consideration because they are People of the Scripture, while what they really mean is to describe the Prophet (PBUH) to be stupid. So on the face of it, the dialogue sounds polite while in fact it embodied insults. The



verse then stated that it would be better to use straight talk rather than words which have double meaning.

*“You who have been given the Scripture, believe that which We have revealed, verifying what you have, before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and the command of God shall be executed.”* This is an invitation and a warning from God to those who were given the Scripture before, to believe in the new Book which came to support the Scripture which they already have. This is a reasonable request since they were given a similar revelation. Refusing to comply called for a strong threat: to obliterate their faces and turn them on their backs. There are different opinions about whether the warning should be considered physical or metaphorical. God’s command will certainly be executed.

*“Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases”* Al-Bukhari and Muslim both mentioned a prophetic tradition narrated by Abu Dharr (RA). Abu Dharr (RA) narrated that he was walking one night and saw the Prophet (PBUH) walking alone. Abu Dharr (RA) thought that the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to walk alone, so he followed him but did not approach him. However, the Prophet (PBUH) felt that there was someone following him so he called and Abu Dharr (RA) came to him. They walked together for a while then the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Those who have much will get little on the Day of Judgment, except those who spend freely out of that which God gave them.”* Then he sat Abu Dharr (RA) in a place and went to a spot out of sight. When the Prophet (PBUH) came back after a while, Abu Dharr (RA) heard him saying, *“And even if he stole and committed adultery.”* Abu Dharr (RA) asked him, *“Prophet of God what were you saying?”* the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“On my way back, the Archangel Gabriel came to me and said, ‘Muhammad, bring glad tidings to your people, whosoever dies without associating partners with God will be admitted to heaven.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) asked Gabriel, *“Even if the person committed the crimes of theft or adultery,”* Gabriel said, *“Even if he stole, committed adultery, or drank alcohol.”*

Ibn Abi Hatem documented a tradition narrated by Jaber ibn ‘Abd-Allah (RA), quoting the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, *“Any soul dies not associating anything with God has earned God’s forgiveness. It will be punished or forgiven according to God’s will. God forgives everything except associating partners with Him.”*

On the authority of Al-Tabarani, Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) quoted the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, *“God said, ‘Whosoever recognized that I have the power to forgive sins will be forgiven unless he associates partners with Me.’”* This last tradition evinces the power of the deep inner feelings in the heart of a believing person. A person who recognizes the extent of the power of God will enjoy a mixture of feelings that include security, hope, fear, and love. These are feelings which promote God consciousness and open the door for forgiveness.

*“Have you not considered those who attribute purity to themselves? Nay, God will purify whom He pleases; and they shall not be wronged even as much as the thread upon a date- stone. See how they forge a lie against Go? That of itself is a flagrant sin.”*

The Jews claimed that they were the chosen people. This is true, they were chosen by God to carry the trust and to deliver God's message to people. God favored them over all people. God destroyed Pharaoh and his chiefs and saved them. God gave the Jews the holy land but they deviated away from the divine project and they became tyrants, committing sins, and spreading mischief in the land.

One wonders of the audacity of such people to claim purity for themselves. Similarly, one wonders at the situation of Muslims. Those who have Muslim names and live on Muslim land however, they abandon the way of life dictated by Islamic principles. How can such Muslims call to Islam while Islam is absent from their lives? They only distort the image of Islam. I think this verse applies to Muslims today who claim that they believe in God and His messenger while Islam and the divine project are strangers in our land. These Muslims, *"forge a lie against God, and that of itself is a flagrant sin."* Islam is a way of life; we can obey God only if we adopt this way of life. Obedience to God brings us closer to Him. Let us look at our situation, where do we stand with respect to the standard enunciated by this verse.

*"Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Scripture has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve, 'These are better guided than the believers.' Those are they whom God has cursed, and whomever God curses you shall not find any helper for him. Or have they a share in the dominion? But then they would not give people even what fills the groove on a date-stone. Or do they envy people for what God has given them out of His grace? But indeed We have given the House of Abraham the Scripture and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom. Some of them believed, and some turned away from it. And nothing can burn like Hell fire."* Don't you wonder at those who claim that they are purified while they believe in falsehood? They follow rules that contravene God's laws and they consider those who associate partners with God better guided than those who believe in the Oneness of God. Those who were given previous Scripture should have recognized the truth. They should have recognized the falsehood of associating partners with God. They should have followed God's law rather than man-made unjust laws. This refers to some of the Jewish tribes in Medina which sided with Quraish when they attacked Medina in the battle of the Ahzab.

They envy people for the blessings that God bestowed on them but when they have a share of the blessings, they behave niggardly. They don't give out even something as small as that which fills the groove on the back of a date-stone.

*"Those who reject Our revelations, We shall soon cast them into fire; so often as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment; certainly God is Eminent, Wise. But those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, this will be their eternal home. They shall have therein pure mates, and We shall admit them to cool refreshing shade."* What a horrifying image for those who will end up in Hellfire. As the skin burns, it will be replaced by new skin so they can taste the torment. In contrast to this, those who believed and did good deeds will abide in gardens under which rivers flow forever. They will enjoy purified spouses and will be covered with refreshing shades.

## Verses: 58 to 70

58. *Certainly, God commands you to render back the trusts to their owners and when you judge between people you judge with justice; certainly God admonishes you with what is excellent; certainly God is All-Seeing, All-Hearing.*
59. *You who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you; then if you have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; this is better and more seemly in the end.*
60. *Have you not seen those who claim that they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, how they would go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray.*
61. *And when it is said to them, "Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger," you will see the hypocrites turning away from you with utter aversion.*
62. *But how will it be when misfortune befalls them as a result of what their hands have committed before. Then they will come to you swearing by God, "We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation."*
63. *God knows what is in their hearts; therefore, ignore them and admonish them, and speak to them about themselves in an effectual way.*
64. *And We did not send a messenger but to be obeyed in accordance with God's will; and had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and asked for God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
65. *But no, by your Lord, they will not be true believers until they make you a judge in all disputes between them, and then they find no resistance in their hearts to what you have decided, and submit entirely.*
66. *If We had ordered them, "Lay down your lives or forsake your homes," they would not have done it except a few of them; if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and more affirming for their faith.*
67. *Then We would certainly have given them from Ourselves a great reward;*
68. *We would certainly have guided them to a straight path.*
69. *All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom God has bestowed His blessings; of those are the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous. The best company they are.*
70. *This is a bounty from God, and God suffices as the Omniscient." (4:58-70)*

*"Certainly, God commands you to render back the trusts to their owners and when you judge between people you judge with justice; certainly, God admonishes you with what is excellent; certainly, God is All-Seeing, All-Hearing."* These are commands for a Muslim nation. These commands form a framework for ethical behavior, a trust must be returned back to its rightful owner and people should be judged fairly according to the divine project.

The first most important trust is the trust that God has entrusted humankind with. This is the trust that heavens, earth and mountains refused to undertake but humankind accepted. It is the trust of

guidance, knowledge and belief in God willingly and purposely. This is the trust that God inculcated in the initial natural human disposition. Only humankind was given the choice to believe or not to believe. Humankind was given initial natural disposition, intellect, knowledge, and free will to help him in pursuit of the truth. He was asked to strive to reach God with the help of God, *“But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause.”* (29:69)

This is the basic trust that humankind must fulfill. It is the foundation of all other trusts that humankind was asked to undertake. One of these trusts is the trust to be a witness for the faith of Islam, by striving against one’s own desires and leading an Islamic way of life. The Muslim should be a living example of the ethical behavior that Islam promotes, for all people to see. The second level of being a witness for the faith of Islam is to convey its message to people. A third level of being a witness for this faith is to promote the Islamic way of life for the whole humanity.

The trust of dealing honestly with people is another trust. One should be honest in dealing with people in all aspects of human activities whether financial or social. Other trusts include raising children and protecting people’s lives and property. Muslims are commanded to be fair in their judgments. This is a comprehensive justice; it applies to all people whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Enjoying justice is a human right. All human beings have the right to be treated justly irrespective of their faith, ethnic origin, language, or color. The Muslim nation must uphold justice whenever possible. The verse ends by a reminder that God’s command are the best commands and that He is ever watching. It is interesting to note the correspondence between the command and the attributes of God used at the end of the verse. God listens and sees. To be just, one must listen and use one’s insight to arrive at a just rule.

*“You who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you; then if you have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; this is better and more seemly in the end.”* What are the standards of honesty and justice? And how can they be determined and implemented? Do we leave the definitions of honesty and justice to be determined according to human whim, human intellect, and societal norms? It is true that human intellect is a valuable tool for gaining and articulating knowledge which can help humankind in its quest for guidance. But human intellect is a product of the environment in which it lives and the collective experience of the individuals living in this environment. The values that such human intellect produces are not absolute; they will vary from one place to another and from one society to another. But the values should be absolute. The verse outlines the source of all values and rules that should govern human life. God is the one who sets the standards and the values for the human society.

Obedience to God and His Messenger is a fundamental feature of the Muslim society. It is the criterion which defines the belief in God. The verse established the fundamental principle that God is the only source for legislation. God alone has the right to legislate for people and the Quran embodies God’s law. God sent a messenger to illustrate how this law can be applied. The Messenger (PBUH) behaved according to the revelation. So, the Messenger’s tradition is a component of God’s law. Obeying the Messenger (PBUH) is an integral part of obeying God.

The verse indicates that obedience to those who are in authority is conditional on their obedience to God and His Messenger. It also indicates that those who are in authority should be believers. Obedience to those who are in authority is not mandated when they transgress and make evil commands. Authentic traditions expand on this point by stating that obedience is only mandated when those in authority make commands which are in compliance with the fundamentals of Islamic practices. No obedience is mandated when a command to commit a sin is given. This leaves individuals with a responsibility to examine commands issued to them by those in authority. Islam does not mandate blind obedience. Those who perform a command have a responsibility to ensure that these commands are not meant to inflict harm.

A standard protocol to arrive at a verdict is stated. Obedience is mandated when there is a clear and unequivocal verdict given in the Quran or an authentic tradition. Difference in opinion regarding issues which emerge as a result of the changing needs of the society and local culture should be settled through referring it to “*God and the Messenger.*” Reference should be made to the verses that may apply to this issue. However, if there are no verses dealing with the issue at hand then a verdict may be sought which abides with the general principles of Islamic law. This methodology should be followed by those who believe in God and the Hereafter, this is better for them in this life and in the Hereafter.

This methodology is beneficial for humankind because it is devised by the Creator of humankind. The Creator is Totally Aware of His creation. This methodology is free of the ills that can accrue through humankind weaknesses, desires, whims, and ignorance. It is a fair methodology that does not favor an individual, a class, a people, a race, or a generation.

*“Have you not seen those who claim that they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, how they would go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray. And when it is said to them, ‘Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger,’ you will see the hypocrites turning away from you with utter aversion. But how will it be when misfortune befalls them as a result of what their hands have committed before. Then they will come to you swearing by God, ‘We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation.’ God knows what is in their hearts; therefore, ignore them and admonish them, and speak to them about themselves in an effectual way.”* It seems that these verses were revealed to address the situation of the hypocrites in Medina during the first few years after Hijra. The verses also outline a fundamental criterion for a person to be deemed a believer. Those who want to “*go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them*” are not considered believers. They will not be true believers until they ask the Prophet (PBUH) to be the judge in all their disputes and they would accept his judgment willingly. They voluntarily accept the judgment of the Prophet (PBUH) feeling comfortable with whatever judgment decreed by the Prophet (PBUH).

The hypocrites claimed they believed in what was revealed to the messengers who came before the Prophet (PBUH) as well as in what has been revealed to the Prophet (PBUH), but at the same time they contravened this claim by seeking unjust tyrants as judges. The judgments of these false deities were based on their whims and desires not on the revelations of God. Moreover, the

hypocrites were admonished not to use unjust tyrants as judges, but they chose deliberately to ignore this command and they succumbed to the deception of Satan who wanted to lead them far astray. They refused to let the Prophet (PBUH) judge according to God's revelations among them in their disputes, what a contradiction.

Symptoms of hypocrisy became apparent when an adversity befell the hypocrites. They came hurrying to the Prophet (PBUH), "*swearing by God, 'We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation.'*" It was a humiliating situation. They were unable to declare their true intentions, so they lied to the Prophet (PBUH). This is an image of what will happen to all who choose not to refer to the laws of God to settle their affairs. These people hid their intentions, but God knew what was in their hearts. He told His Prophet (PBUH) that He knew what was in their hearts, however the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to treat them kindly and to advise them to abandon their crooked behavior. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to treat them kindly and to educate them perhaps they might relinquish their crooked ways and join the ranks of the believers.

*"And We did not send a messenger but to be obeyed in accordance with God's will; and had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and asked for God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* This is an important rule. The mandate of God's messengers was not merely to give sermons and leave not knowing whether the message has been heeded or not, as some may argue. Religion is a way of life. It encompasses institutions, values, behavior, and rituals. For this way of life to be established, it must be supported by power. God sent His messengers to be obeyed, by His leave and within the constraints that He delineated. God ordained that His messengers should be obeyed so that the way of life that God has ordained can be established.

God is All-Forgiving; He accepts the repentance of those who seek God's forgiveness. He is Merciful for those who return to Him. When this verse was revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) was accessible for those who were mentioned earlier in the previous verses, they could have availed themselves of the opportunity of asking the Prophet (PBUH) to seek God's forgiveness for them. This opportunity is no longer available, since the Prophet (PBUH) is no longer available to help, but the door to God remains open and it will never be closed in the face of those who seek His forgiveness. The promise for forgiveness is still available to anyone who seeks God's forgiveness.

*"But no, by your Lord, they will not be true believers until they make you a judge in all disputes between them, and then they find no resistance in their hearts to what you have decided, and submit entirely"*

This is the criterion that needs to be met by true believers. It is stated with an oath from God. The true believers are those who accept the Prophet (PBUH) as their judge and they accept his ruling with hearts full of content. Some may argue that this criterion was meant only for the time during which it was revealed or that it was meant only for people living at the time of this revelation. This is an argument of someone who does not know much about Islam and has little understanding of the language of the Quran. The criterion was stated in unequivocal terms in the

form of an oath by God. It means that Islamic jurisprudence should be used to settle the disputes between people. It does not mean that the Prophet (PBUH) personally should act as a judge. A similar argument was made by the apostates after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). They used this argument to challenge the right of the state to collect the Poor-Dues (Zakat). The first Caliph, Abu Bakr (RA) had to fight them over this.

Public acceptance of Islamic law and the Prophet's (PBUH) traditions as the standard in settling disputes may be sufficient for a person to be considered a Muslim, but to be a believer this acceptance has to come from a heart secure in its contentment and satisfaction with whatever judgment is made.

*“And if We had ordered them, ‘Lay down your lives or forsake your homes,’ they would not have done it except a few of them; and if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and more affirming for their faith; then We would certainly have given them from Ourselves a great reward. We would certainly have guided them to a straight path.”* After posing the criterion that needs to be satisfied by people to be true believers, a reassurance is given that the way of life that they are asked to follow is actually a simple, easy, and merciful way of life. No one is burdened beyond his/her ability, and no one is asked to offer a dear sacrifice. God knows the ability of each person and He is Merciful. God also knows that if people were asked to perform difficult tasks, only few would be able to comply. He, therefore, does not burden people with tasks beyond their ability. God does not want people to lead a tough life, nor does He want to charge them with arduous duties. Had people met the reasonable obligations they were asked to do, they would have received God's great help. Asking people to lay down their lives or forsake their homes are examples of arduous tasks that many people would not have been able to comply with had they been mandated. But God mandates only tasks which are within the reach of everyone. In addition, God promised to extend His help and support to those who make the first step on the straight path. However, the ease built in this way of life does not mean that one should follow the path of least resistance. The Islamic way of life allows for exemptions that can be applied when extenuating circumstances do occur. One should try to perform the duties the best way one can and take recourse to the exemptions when it is absolutely necessary to do so.

*“All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom God has bestowed His blessings; of those are the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous. The best company they are. This is a bounty from God, and God suffices as the Omniscient;”* This is a gesture that arouses a feeling of anticipation in the hearts of all whose hearts are yearning to be in the company of those who were honored by God. This status can only be achieved by the blessings of God. It is appropriate to live a few moments with the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) who entertained these feelings. Said Ibn Jubair (RA) narrated that, *“A man from Al-Ansar (people of the Medina), came to the Prophet (PBUH) and he looked sad. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him, ‘Why do I see you sad?’ The man said, ‘Prophet of God, something crossed my mind made me feel sad.’ The Prophet (PBUH) asked, ‘What is it that made you sad?’ The man said, ‘We are used to having you among us, we look at your face and we sit with you but tomorrow you will die and leave us.’ The Prophet (PBUH) did not answer the man. Then Gabriel came down with this verse, ‘All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on*

*whom God has bestowed His Blessing;’ The Prophet (PBUH) sent for the man who came to him earlier and gave him the glad tiding of being in his company.”*

*Another tradition that was narrated by Abu Bakr ibn Mardaweeh (RA), he said, “A man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, ‘Messenger of God, I love you more than I love myself, my family, and my child. Sometimes, when I am home I remember you, so I could not wait until I come to see you. I worry that after death you will be with the other prophets and I may not be able to see you again.’ The Prophet did not answer him until the above mentioned verses were revealed.”*

*A tradition given in Sahih Muslim states that Rabeah ibn Kaab Al-Aslam (RA) said, “I used to stay overnight at the house of the Messenger of God (PBUH) to serve him. The Messenger of God (PBUH) asked me to name a reward. So, I said that I would like to accompany him in heaven. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘Would you ask something else?’ I said no, this is what I want. The Prophet (PBUH) then said, ‘Prostrate yourself often (meaning pray often).’” A well authenticated (Mutawater) tradition narrated by a group of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and cited by Al-Bukhari stated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “After death, a person will be with those whom he loves.” Muslims were extremely happy to hear this.*

## **Verses: 71 to 86**

- 71. You who believe, be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together.*
- 72. Certainly, among you is he who would certainly tarry behind. If then a misfortune befalls you he says, “Certainly, God did bless me that I was not present with them.”*
- 73. And if God bestows a bounty on you, he would certainly say, as if there had not been any affection between you and him, “Had I been with them, then I would have attained a mighty achievement.”*
- 74. Therefore, let those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter, fight in the way of God. Whoever fights in the way of God, then whether he is slain or victorious, We shall grant him a great reward.*
- 75. And why should you not fight in the way of God and for the sake of the oppressed among the men and the women and the children, who say, “Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Your grace a protecting guardian and a helper.”*
- 76. Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who rejected faith fight in the way of Satan. Fight therefore the allies of Satan; certainly Satan’s scheme is ever weak.*
- 77. Do you not see those to whom it was said, “Restrain your hands from fighting, and establish regular prayers and pay the poor-dues;” but when fighting was prescribed for them, a party of them feared people as – or even more than - they should have feared*



*God. They said, "Our Lord, why did You ordain fighting for us? If only You give us a respite for a while." Say to them, "The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the thread on the back of a date-stone."*

- 78. Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you may be in lofty towers. If a benefit comes to them, they say, "This is from God;" and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, "This is from you." Say to them, "All is from God," but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?*
- 79. Whatever benefit comes to you (humankind), it is from God, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself, and We have sent you (Prophet), to humankind as a messenger; and God is sufficient as a witness.*
- 80. Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys God, but whoever turns away, We have not sent you as a keeper over them.*
- 81. And they say, "We obey you," but as soon as they leave you, a party of them spend the night plotting to do other than what you say; and God writes down what they plot by night. Therefore, ignore them and put your trust in God; God is sufficient as a Guardian.*
- 82. Do they not then reflect on the Quran? If it were from any other than God, would not they have found in it many a discrepancy.*
- 83. And when there comes to them news of some matter touching upon public security or fear, they spread it around. If they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those among them who are able to reach a correct conclusion, would have resolved it. Were it not for the grace of God upon you and His mercy, you would have certainly followed Satan save a few.*
- 84. Fight then in God's way; this is only imposed on you, and urge the believers maybe God will restrain the might of those who disbelieve; God is strongest in might and in punishment.*
- 85. Whoever recommends and helps in a good cause shall have a share of it, and whoever recommends and helps in an evil cause shall have a share of its consequences; God is the Controller of all things.*
- 86. And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it; certainly God is a Reckoner of all things." (4:71- 86)*

It is likely that these verses were revealed during the period between of the two battles of Uhud and the Trench. The verses deal with the unity of Muslims. They allude to the existence of various groups among the Muslim community. Some of these groups may not have had a full understanding of the true meaning of Islam, or they may not have been truly believed but

pretended to be among the believers. The verse touches upon the great effort that was needed to bring all these groups together as a united community in face of the challenges that the community was encountering. These were challenges related to the true understanding of the faith and the need to defend the fledgling community in the face of threats posed by its enemies. This may describe the condition of the community as a whole, however, it does not preclude the presence of Muslims who were shining examples and who strived hard and reached the top.

*“You who believe, be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together. And certainly among you is he who would certainly tarry behind. If then a misfortune befalls you he says, ‘Certainly, God did bless me that I was not present with them.’ And if God bestows a bounty on you, he would certainly say, as if there had not been any affection between you and him, ‘Had I been with them, then I would have attained a mighty achievement.’* This was an advice to the believers, an advice from the high command which plans the strategy and explains the tactics. One cannot but feel amazed at the Quran’s holistic approach to life. In one verse the general strategy for combating the enemy is explained, *“You who believe, fight the disbelievers near you and let them find you standing firm; be aware that God is with those who are conscious of Him.”* (9:123) In the verse at hand, the tactics of dealing with enemy are outlined, *“Be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together.”* In a third verse yet a new tactic is explained, *“If you gain the upper hand over them in war, use them to disperse those who follow them, that they may remember.”* (8:57) This shows that Quranic verses were not limited in scope to teaching Muslims how to worship God, how to perform rituals, or how to behave but its scope encompassed all aspects of life. Islam looks at life as a whole and requests the believers to adopt a way of life that is consistent with the divine project. The Quran provides a code of conduct for the individuals which explains the rituals, the acts of worship, and the ethical expectations. In addition, the Quran formulates the basic fundamentals upon which the social, economic, and political systems, to be adopted by the Muslim community, should be established. Details of the systems may differ depending on the time and place but they have always to emanate from the same basic fundamentals.

The verse explains that when Muslims go to war they should go out in small or large groups depending on the situation but not as individuals. It is easy to eliminate individuals, especially when there are hypocrites around. They should always be on the alert, not only watching the enemy’s activities but also watching the actions of the defeatists among their ranks. The verse stressed the danger of the defeatists who were trying to hold the progress of the army. Those defeatists were hypocrites who wanted to maximize their profits. They did not participate in the campaign fearing death on the battle ground. They did not hide their happiness when a disaster befell the fighting believers. But, when the believers won then they were full of regret having lost their share in the spoils of war. Their sole concern was how much material gains they can accumulate. True believers loved to win and also to be safe; they prayed God to make them safe and winners. However, when they were requested to fight in the way of God, they answered the call without hesitation. They knew that they will win one of the two best rewards: martyrdom or victory.

The verse painted a despicable image for the defeatists to warn the rest of the Muslim community against falling in this category. The verse alerted the Muslim community to be aware

of both the dangers that may come from within and the dangers that may come from outside the community. This is a typical situation that can be seen repeatedly over time. The strategy in dealing with inside dangers is to try to rehabilitate the defeatists to overcome their weakness and to find a way to integrate them into the community.

*“Therefore let those fight in the way of God, who sell the life of this world for the hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of God, then whether he is slain or victorious, We shall grant him a great reward.”* Do fight in the way of God. Islam does not recognize any other motive for fighting other than fighting in the way of God. Fighting to gain spoils of war, fighting to control land or people, or fighting to build personal or national glory are illegitimate motives for fighting. The only legitimate motive for fighting in Islam is to fight to proclaim the word of God and to give people the freedom to adopt a way of life of their choice. It is divine justice that dictates that people should have the chance to examine the word of God and to have the free will to adopt a way of life which they believe in. When a Muslim is killed in the course of fighting in the way of God, he/she becomes a martyr. But if he/she is killed fighting for any other reason he/she would not be considered a martyr.

*“And why should you not fight in the way of God and for the sake of the oppressed among the men and the women and the children, who say, ‘Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Your grace a protecting guardian and a helper.’”* How can you not fight in the way of God to save those who are being persecuted from among the men, women and children? A question which paints an emotive image for the persecuted who need help, in an attempt to arouse feelings of chivalry in the hearts of the believers. It urged them to defend those who were persecuted by the Meccan Arabs because they chose to adopt Islam and to help them to escape the persecution at the hands of the unjust.

*“Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who disbelieve fight in the way of the Satan. Fight therefore the allies of Satan; certainly Satan’s scheme is ever weak.”* The verse paints an image of two different groups of people, fighting under two different banners. Those who fight in the way of God, fight to proclaim the sovereignty of God’s law and to establish justice among people under the banner of God. They proclaim God as the only deity to be worshiped and, therefore, He is the Ruler. Those who fight in the way of Satan are trying to establish a way of life that is based on values which are deemed improper by God. Those who fight in the way of God get His support and protection. Those who fight in the way of Satan seek Satan’s protection. Believers are commanded to fight the allies of Satan and never fear them because Satan’s scheme is ever weak.

Thus, Muslims stand on firm grounds in their battle against those who are protected by Satan. They have a strong support from God because they have the strong belief that they are fighting in His way. They are not fighting for personal, tribal or national gains. It is a battle between the truth and falsehood. The truth is exemplified in the values and discipline deemed good by God, while falsehood is brought about by various programs and methodologies that is based on the whims and desires of human beings. Establishing the truth provides an environment in which justice is established. Muslims should not fear Satan because Satan strategy is weak.

*“Do you not see those to whom it was said, ‘Restrain your hands from fighting, and establish regular prayers and pay the poor-dues;’ but when fighting is prescribed for them, a party of them fear people as – or even more than - they should have feared God. They said, ‘Our Lord, why did You ordain fighting for us? If only You give us a respite for a while.’ Say to them, ‘The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the hair on the back of a date-stone.’ Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you may be in lofty towers. If a benefit comes to them, they say, ‘This is from God;’ and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, ‘This is from you.’ Say to them, ‘All is from God,’ but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?”*

God wonders at the behavior of a group of people, who were anxious to fight in the beginning, before Muslims were allowed to fight back those who were persecuting them, but when the time came and Muslims were allowed to fight back those who were persecuting them, they became overwhelmed with fear. They feared people more than they feared God. They asked in humiliation why they were commanded to fight. They even asked for a respite to prepare themselves for carrying out the command.

The verse indicates that initially, Muslims were not allowed to fight back those who were persecuting them in Mecca, then the strategy changed and a command allowing the Muslims to fight back was issued. In the early days after the advent of Islam, Muslims were asked to persevere, establish prayers, and pay the poor dues. What was the wisdom behind the change in strategy? There is no certain and specific knowledge of the reasons behind the change in strategy, one can only speculate. Speculations may be right, may be wrong, or may provide only a partial explanation. The true reasons are only known to God and we have no way to be certain of the real reasons behind the change in the strategy. Our speculations are as follows:

- The Meccan period may have been considered a period for education and preparation for the Muslims for the task of establishing a Muslim community.
- The unarmed struggle may have been more effective in this period. The Arabs of Quraish were obstinate by nature. Armed struggle may have motivated even the moderates among them to become staunch enemies of Islam and would have closed the door in front of anyone who wanted to become a Muslim.
- Armed struggle may not have been practical, since there was no single identified army to fight against. Persecution was practiced by individuals and armed struggle may have turned many houses in Mecca into battle grounds. Armed struggle that takes place in individual households may have caused a great deal of destruction and chaos and would have reinforced the claim of the Arabs of Mecca that Muhammad’s message commands the father to kill his son and the son to kill his father.
- There may have been hopes that those who persecuted the Muslims in the beginning may turn around and adopt Islam and become its sincerest supporters. An example of this group was ‘Umar (RA), the second caliph.
- The strategy of the unarmed struggle did arouse the feelings of chivalry in the hearts of the non-Muslims and motivated them to save Muslims from persecution and torture. Some examples support this opinion. When Ibn Al-Daghna came to know that Abu Bakr (RA) was going to migrate from Mecca to flee the persecution, he felt ashamed. It was

shameful, in his view, that someone like Abu Bakr (RA) was forced to leave his home in face of persecution and offered Abu Bakr (RA) his protection. Another example was shown when the gallantry of some non-Muslim men drove them to lift the boycott which was imposed on the Prophet's (PBUH) tribe when they realized how much devastation the boycott had caused.

- The Muslims were a minority in Mecca. All the tribes outside Mecca considered what is happening between the Muslims and non-Muslims in Mecca as an internal conflict. An armed struggle between the Muslims and non-Muslims may have ended in wiping out the Muslim minority.
- The priority at that time may have been for the call to Islam to continue. This was being achieved in spite of the price that was being paid.

These considerations may have helped in shaping the strategy of the unarmed struggle. Muslims were commanded to persevere, establish prayers, and pay the poor dues.

Then the command was given and those who were most anxious to participate in the armed struggle started to have second thoughts, fear of facing people on the battle ground filled their hearts. The presence of such a group could break up the unity of the community. The whole community should be ready to take up their responsibility and undertake the command to participate in the armed struggle with fearless hearts full of confidence and security. The Quran addressed this situation by educating this group, *“The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the thread on the back of a date-stone. Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you are in lofty towers.”* They feared death and wanted to live. They wished that they had more time to enjoy life before they face death on the battle ground. The Quran told them that the enjoyment of this life is little. So, how long do they hope to live: days, weeks, months, or years? Life will end some day and the enjoyment of the whole worldly life is little. This worldly life is only one of the stages of the life of a human being. Death is not the end of the journey. Death is a bridge to the second stage, the everlasting life. The enjoyment in the Hereafter is not only everlasting but it is also better for those who remain conscious of God. God consciousness involves fearing God. It is appropriate to mention the fear of God here because it is God that one should fear not people. Those who are God conscious have nothing to fear. God will not treat them unjustly. If one misses the worldly enjoyment, then there is the fullest reward in the Hereafter. No one will be wronged.

Death overtakes everyone at the appointed time, no one can escape. Death is certain whether one engages in war or lives in peace; it is certain whether one is protected within the confines of a secure place or lives in the open. Delaying the undertaking of armed struggle will not then change the time of the death.

*“If a benefit comes to them, they say, ‘This is from God;’ and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, ‘This is from you.’ Say to them, ‘All is from God,’ but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?”* They may have said this for one or more of the following three reasons:

- They may have considered the Prophet (PBUH) to be a bad omen. If the land did not yield the crops they expected, the cattle did not multiply as they had hoped, or if they were touched by an adversity, then it must have been the Prophet's (PBUH) fault. But if everything is fine then, it is God who bestows the bounty.
- Or they may have wanted to berate the Prophet (PBUH) so that they would have the excuse to relieve themselves from the responsibilities which he commanded them to undertake, especially if the responsibility included taking up arms. This may have been their way of deflecting the blame from themselves to the Prophet (PBUH). Instead of blaming themselves for being weak and fearful, they blamed the Prophet (PBUH) for the evil he commanded them to do.
- Or they may not have understood the reality of life and the role of God's will in what happens to them and to the others. They may have not understood the role of the Prophet (PBUH) and the nature of the relationship between God and His Messenger.

These verses deal with one of the aspects of the concept of free will and predestination. The Quran has a simple approach in dealing with this concept. God is the only doer for what happens in the universe and what befalls people. A person can attempt to do something but it will only happen if God willed it to happen. The Prophet (PBUH) is a creature of God; he has no power to make things happen. The fact that they blame him for their good fortune or misfortune shows how little their understanding is. The point is people can try, using all the tools that God made available to them, to accomplish a certain task whether good or bad, but ultimately it is the will of God that determines whether or not the task will be achieved. It is the will of God which controls all things happening in this universe.

Then we come to the subsequent verse, *“Whatever benefit comes to you (humankind), it is from God, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself, and We have sent you (Prophet), to humankind as a messenger; and God is sufficient as a witness.”* There is no contradiction between this verse and the previous one. God has established a clear way to be followed and He pointed out the way to goodness and warned people not to follow the way that leads to evil. God's way guides people to what is good and keeps them away from what is evil. Those who chose to follow God's way will be helped further by God, *“But We shall certainly guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause.”* (29:69). When one follows this way, he/she will get the benefit. It may not look like a benefit in the eyes of many. But the true benefit is that which will be beneficial in God's balance because it is He who has drawn the way and it is He who set the standard for good and evil. Those who choose not to follow the way of God, refrain from doing good, and indulge in committing evil will gain the recompense for their evil deeds in this life, in the Hereafter, or in both. This is what they have gained as a consequence of their own deeds. There is no contradiction between the two statements. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) was sent as a messenger to deliver God's message and not to control goodness or evil.

*“Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys God, and whoever turns away, We have not sent you as a keeper over them.”* Whoever obeys the Prophet (PBUH) he/she indeed obeys God, because the Prophet (PBUH) is simply delivering God's message. The Prophet (PBUH) was not sent to force people to believe or to compel them to be guided. Forcing people to believe was neither the Prophet's (PBUH) mandate, nor was he prepared for doing it. Those who turn away should be left to God. God will deal with them as He chooses.

*“And they say, ‘We obey you,’ but as soon as they leave you, a party of them spend the night plotting to do other than what you say; and God writes down what they plot by night, therefore ignore them and trust in God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian.”* There are two possible interpretations for this verse. The first, the verse refers to a group of Muslims who expressed their unconditional acceptance of whatever the Prophet (PBUH) commanded them to do, as long as they were in his company. Once they parted company with the Prophet (PBUH) they started plotting to obviate the prophet’s (PBUH) commands.

An alternative interpretation is also plausible. When the Muslims were with the Prophet (PBUH) they expressed their obedience but once they parted company, a smaller group (the hypocrites) of them started plotting for disobedience. These plots jeopardized the unity of the Muslim community. Such threats could have been catastrophic since the danger of an outside enemy was eminent. God, however, assured the Prophet (PBUH) and the sincere Muslims that He is ever aware of those who plot and scheme against them. He also sent a warning to the hypocrites that they will not be successful in their plots.

The strategy that the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to adopt in dealing with the hypocrites was to take what they say at its face value and not to try to dig deeper for their real intentions. This plan worked in the end and left them disgraced and weak. So, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to leave them alone and to put his trust in God. God is sufficient for those who put their trust in Him. They will be saved from those who plot evil against them.

*“Do they not then reflect on the Quran? And if it were from any other than God, would not they have found in it many a discrepancy.”* This is a criterion that they could have used to find out for themselves whether the Quran is God’s word: a criterion that respects humankind and honors his ability to think and understand. The criterion is to find for themselves whether there is any inconsistency in the Quran. Those who read and reflect on the Quran will discover that the Quran is a consistent book. There are different levels for this characteristic which are suitable for all generations and all different levels of intellectual attainment. Each generation is requested to reflect on the Quran and discover for themselves the consistent nature of the Quran.

*“And when there comes to them news of some matter touching upon public security or fear, they spread it around; and if they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those among them who are able to reach a correct conclusion would have resolved it. Were it not for the grace of God upon you and His mercy, you would have certainly followed Satan save a few.”* The verse depicts a scene of a group of people within the Muslim community who were lacking in self-discipline. They did not appreciate the danger of spreading rumors among a community getting ready for a battle. It may have been that they really did not care about the impact of their actions on the welfare of the community. Spreading rumors may have had serious repercussions on the preparations for war. Rumors spread very quickly from one person to another and may have had a devastating effect on the morale of the army and its readiness for combat. This is a typical example of an army which is either lacking in discipline, in loyalty to its command, or in both. It seems that the verse is describing a real situation which the army was experiencing, at that time. The verse directed the Muslims to the correct approach

in dealing with such situations. Rather than spreading rumors, they should have gone back to the Prophet (PBUH) or to their commanders. Those who were in command should have been able to help in sorting out the situation. God's blessings are great and it is the only protection against Satan's temptation.

*“Fight then in God's way; this is only imposed on you, and urge the believers maybe God will restrain the might of those who disbelieve and God is strongest in might and in punishment.”*

Reading this verse and remembering the previous ones, lead us to make the following comments:

- The verse alludes to the shaky condition of the Muslim community. Rumors frustrated the unity of the Muslim ranks. God commanded His Prophet (PBUH) to fight, even if he had to fight alone. In the meantime, he should urge the believers to join him. In addition, the verse reiterates a fundamental principle that obeying God's command is a personal responsibility.
- The verse emphasizes how difficult it was for the Muslim community to take up arms against the polytheists. The verse indicates that that the ultimate hope of the Muslims was that God would support them against the polytheists. The verse brings a sense of security to the Muslims by reminding them of the superiority of God's power.
- The verses also outline the natural reluctance of people to undertake difficult tasks. Seeking the support of God and putting their trust in Him are the only tools to ease the burden of these difficult tasks and responsibilities.

*“Whoever recommends and helps a good cause shall have a share of it, and whoever recommends and helps in an evil cause shall have his share of its consequences, and God is the Controller all things.”* Those who encourage and urge people to fulfill their responsibilities will have a share in the reward, and those who hesitate in carrying out their responsibilities and dampen the drive of others will be recompensed for the consequences of their actions. This is a general rule that applies to all situations. The specific circumstances which constituted the subject of these verses were used to produce this general rule. This is one of the general features of Quran. The verse ends by stating that God is ever watching over everything; all power and provision is His.

*“And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it; certainly God is Reckoner of all things.”* Answering the greetings offered by people is a social etiquette that helps in improving the relationships between people in the society. Islam has its own unique greeting. The greeting can be any one of the three forms: peace be with you; peace and mercy of God be with you; or peace, mercy, and blessings of God be with you. The second form is used to respond to the first form and the third form is used to respond to the second and the third forms. This way the response is either better or equal to the original greeting.

## **Verses: 87 to 94**

*87. There is no god but Him- He will most certainly gather you together on the Day of Resurrection, there is no doubt about that; who is truer in His speech than God?*

*88. Why should you be divided into two parties regarding the hypocrites? When God Himself rejected them because of what they have earned? Do you wish to guide those whom God*



- has left to go astray? And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for them.*
89. *They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be (all) alike. Therefore, take no protecting guardians from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way. If they turn their back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them.*
  90. *Except those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a treaty, or who come to you, their hearts restraining them from fighting you or fighting their own people; and if God had pleased, He would have given them power over you, so that they should have certainly fought you; therefore, if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God has not given you a way against them.*
  91. *You will find others who wish to obtain security from you, as well as from their people, but every time they are back in a situation where they are tempted (to fight you), they succumb to it; therefore, if they do not withdraw from you, and offer you peace and restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; and against these We have given you a clear authority.*
  92. *It is not for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to the victim's people unless they remit it as a charity, but if he be from a tribe hostile to you and he is a believer, then set free a believing slave, and if he is from a tribe with whom you have a treaty, the blood-money should be paid to the victim's people along with the freeing of a believing slave; but he who does not have the means should fast for two months successively: a penance from God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
  93. *And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is Hell; he shall abide in it, and God will send His wrath and curse on him and prepare for him a dreadful torment.*
  94. *You who believe, when you go to war in God's way, be careful to discern; and do not say to someone who offers you peace, "You are not a believer." Do you seek the chance profit of this life? God has abundant gains; you too were such before, then God conferred His favor on you; therefore, take care to discern; certainly God is Totally -Aware of what you do. (4:87-94)*

*"There is no god but Him - He will most certainly gather you together on the Day of Resurrection, there is no doubt about that. Who is truer in His speech than God?"* The belief in the Oneness of God is the foundation of the divine project to educate individuals and to establish a Muslim society. It is also the basis of the Muslim society's laws and institutions. These laws and institutions organize life within the society as well the relationships between the Muslim society and other societies and organizations. It is appropriate to use this verse as an introduction to the subsequent verses which delineate basic rules that govern the relationships within the Muslim society as well as the relationships between the Muslim society and other societies.

*"Why should you be divided into two parties regarding the hypocrites when God Himself rejected them because of what they have earned? Do you wish to guide those whom God has left to go astray? And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for them. They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be*

*(all) alike. Therefore, take no ally from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way; but if they turn their back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them.*” The verse deplored the difference in opinion that existed between two groups of Muslims regarding how to deal with the hypocrites. It placed the issue in perspective setting up the grounds for dealing with the hypocrites. To build a unified front regarding the hypocrites, the Quran explained that the bad situation in which the hypocrites found themselves in was brought upon themselves as a result of their own deeds. A rhetorical question is posed to the Muslims who wanted to adopt a lenient position towards the hypocrites thinking that this might rectify the situation, *“Do you wish to guide him whom God has left to go astray?”* The answer is, *“And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for him.”* God leaves those who deliberately choose to be led astray to continue on the path of misguidance. They lose any hope in coming back to the straight path. Not only did they lose the way but they also wish that the believers be led astray as well, *“They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be (all) alike.”* They recanted after they had adopted Islam. Their tongues proclaimed the testament of faith but their deeds confirmed their disbelief. Not only they supported the enemy of Islam, but they also worked very hard to sway the Muslims from the straight path, so that they would be all alike. The verse removed all doubts about who can be called a true Muslim. The deeds of a true Muslim should be a true reflection of his/her words. The verse excited the feelings of the believers, who recently tasted the sweetness of faith and appreciated the change in their life style which was brought about by the new faith and urged them to abhor what the hypocrites did.

Then the command was issued, *“Therefore take no protecting guardians from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way; but if they turn back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them.”* We sense from this command that at the time these verses were revealed, there were still close family and tribal ties as well as economic and business transactions between the Muslims and the idolaters of Mecca. The command alluded to the type of bonds that should be observed by the members of the Muslim community. It explained that the Muslim community should not be built on tribal, family, or other interests. The common bond that should hold the Muslims together in a single entity is the belief in the Oneness of God. This means that no friendship can exist between the two warring parties: Muslims in Medina and the idolaters in Mecca. Those who adopted the faith of Islam but still lived in Mecca should migrate to Medina and become an integral part of the new Muslim community. Their migration should be in the way of God. Their sole purpose would be to flee with their faith and to contribute to the establishment of a community whose members lead an Islamic way of life. The verse stated clearly, that if they migrate then they can be considered members of the Muslim community, but if they do not migrate and remain in Mecca then their Islam is only a lip service. In this case, *“Seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them.”* We believe, on the basis of this statement, that this verdict did not apply to the hypocrites in Medina.

Islam is tolerant towards people of different faiths. It is not Islam’s way to force people to abandon their faiths and convert to Islam. Non-Muslims living in a Muslim state have the right to practice their faith as long as they do not attack Islam or try to convert Muslims to their religion. They are treated as full citizens of the society enjoying the same rights that Muslims enjoy. They

are allowed to use laws based on their faith to settle their own disputes in matters that are not part of national interest.

But, those who said that they were Muslims and testified that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger, then refused to migrate with the Muslims to Medina and they supported the enemies of Islam, do not deserve any leniency. Their actions showed that they were enemies of the Muslims. However, an exception is made *“Except those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a treaty, or who come to you, their hearts restraining them from fighting you or fighting their own people; and if God had pleased, He would have given them power over you, so that they should have certainly fought you; therefore, if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God has not given you a way against them.”* The enemies of Islam who joined a group or a party who had a peace treaty with the Muslims were given the same privileges which the original subscribers to the treaty enjoyed. Muslims were not allowed to fight them. This command shows Islam’s inclination towards peace. Islam opts for peace whenever there is a way to settle disputes in a peaceful way, as long as the security and the freedom of speech of Muslims are not compromised.

Another exception is made for those who wanted to stay neutral and did not want to side with any of the warring factions. These were people who were living in Mecca and were members of the tribes that were at war with the Muslims but they chose to take a neutral position regarding the war. Islam respected their choice. The verse explained the logic behind the Quran’s stance towards these people. They could have sided with their people against the Muslims. So, their choice to take a neutral stand deserved to be respected by the Muslims. It is God’s will nevertheless. This is a reminder for the Muslims to incline to peace whenever it is possible as long as fundamental principles are not compromised.

*“You will find others who wish to obtain security from you, as well as, from their people, but every time they are back in a situation where they are tempted (to fight you), they succumb to it; therefore, if they do not withdraw from you, and offer you peace and restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; and against these We have given you a clear authority.”* This was a group similar to the first one in its evil intentions towards the Muslims. They were not party to any peace treaty and they did not want to remain neutral. So, they were considered at war with the Muslims. Ibn Jareer quoted Mejahed who said that this verse tells the story of a group from the hypocrite Meccan Arabs. They used to come to the Prophet (PBUH) expressing their allegiance but they revert back to idolatry practices upon their return to their tribes. They wanted to hold the stick from the middle. The verse requested that these people should clarify their stand. If they did not restrain their hands and offer peace, then they should be considered at war with the Muslims.

These verses outline two basic principles for Muslims: be firm at war, but do opt for peace whenever there is a chance for peace. Being firm in dealing with serious situations does not contradict being tolerant when tolerance is required. Establishing these two principles side by side is a clear instruction for Muslims to practice moderation in their dealings. They indicate that extremism is not supported by Islam.

*“It is not for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to the victim’s people unless they remit it as a charity, but if he be from a tribe hostile to you and he is a believer, then set free a believing slave, and if he is from a tribe with whom you have a treaty, the blood-money should be paid to the victim’s people along with the freeing of a believing slave; but he who does not have the means should fast for two months successively: a penance from God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The previous verses dealt with the relationship between the Muslim community and other communities at times of war. In this verse, the discourse turns to the relationships among Muslims. The rule that Muslims should not fight each other irrespective of differences in background and nationality has been stated. There is no good enough reason to justify killing a Muslim at the hands of his fellow Muslims, with two exceptions: killing by mistake or on account of retribution as dictated by the rule of law. The verse explains three different ways for dealing with situations when a person is killed by mistake.

The first scenario is when the victim and his family are residents of a Muslim state. In this case, a believing slave should be freed and a ransom should be paid to the victim’s family. Freeing a slave is a symbolic gesture to redress the loss that the Muslim community suffered. It is like giving life to a person in lieu of the life that was taken by death. The ransom is a means to compensate the victim’s family for their loss. The verse states that the victim’s family has the right to forgo the ransom if they so choose.

The second scenario deals with a situation where the victim is a Muslim but his family is not. The family of the deceased lives in a non-Muslim state. In this case, a Muslim slave has to be freed as a compensation for the loss of the Muslim community. No ransom should be paid to the non-Muslim family, since this money may be used to support the war against Muslims.

The third scenario involves a victim whose family is not Muslim but they reside in a state which has concluded a peace treaty with the Muslim state. In this case a ransom should be paid to his family and a slave should be freed. It is interesting to note that the verse does not mention explicitly in this last scenario whether the victim is a believer or not as it was explicitly stated in the previous two scenarios. This motivated some of the scholars to conclude that this is a general verdict that applies to murder victims whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims as long as the victim is a resident of a state that has a peace treaty with the Muslim state. However, it appears to me that these three scenarios only address the cases when a Muslim is killed by mistake as was stated in the beginning of the verse and the three scenarios provide details of the different situations that may be encountered.

It has been reported that the Prophet (PBUH) did pay a ransom for non-Muslims who were killed by mistake, but he did not free any slaves in these cases. Thus, the conclusion of the Muslim scholars mentioned above is supported by the Prophet’s (PBUH) actions not by the verses under discussion.

*“And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is Hell; he shall abide in it, and God will send His wrath and curse on him and prepare for him a dreadful torment.”* Premeditated killing of a fellow Muslim is a heinous crime. It is a crime that deliberately destroys human life,

as well as severing the strong relationship created by the brotherhood of faith. This is a relationship which provides the bond that holds the community together. This crime has been grouped in one category with associating partners with God in many places in the Quran. Some scholars concluded- among them Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) - that the perpetrator, in this case, has no chance to repent. However, others cited the verse, *“Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases,”* (4:48) indicating that a repentant murderer may still be forgiven.

Early Muslims used to suffer a great deal of bitterness and sadness when they encounter fellow Muslims who murdered - before they embraced Islam - their parents, brothers or children, but they never thought of avenging their loss or treating them badly.

This leads to the following verse which clearly instructs Muslims to be careful when they fight not to kill anyone until they have verified that this person is fighting against Islam. The word of any person that declares himself a Muslim should be taken at its face value.

*“You who believe, when you go to war in God's way, be careful to discern; and do not say to someone who offers you peace, ‘You are not a believer.’ Do you seek the chance profit of this life? God has abundant gains; you too were such before, then God conferred His favor on you; therefore, take care to discern; certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”*

The verse reminded Muslims of their recent past before they adopted Islam. This was a time when a fight would start for the most trivial reason, very often motivated by greed. It also reminded them of the security that they have gained after they reverted to Islam. This is a bounty from God.

## **Verses: 95 to 104**

95. *The believers who sit back, except those who are suffering an injury, are not equal to those who strive and fight in the cause of God with their wealth and their persons. God has made those who strive with their wealth and their persons a rank higher than those who sit back and to each class God has promised a good reward. God has distinguished those who strive above those who sit back and will grant them a great reward.*
96. *High ranks are especially bestowed by Him and forgiveness and mercy, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
97. *When the angels take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they shall say, “In what state were you?” They shall say, “We were weak and oppressed in the land.” The angels will say, “Was not God's earth spacious, so that you could have migrated therein?” Such people will find their refuge in Hell. What an evil destination.*
98. *Except those who are really weak and oppressed – men, women, and children - who have no means in their power and cannot find a way (to escape);*
99. *For these, there is hope that God will pardon them, God is Pardoning, All-Forgiving.*
100. *Whoever migrates in God's way, he will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoever forsakes his home, seeking refuge with God and His Messenger, and*

*then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with God, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

101. *And when you travel in the land, there is no blame on you if you shorten the prayer, if you fear that the disbelievers may attack you, certainly the disbelievers are your avowed enemy.*
102. *And when you are among them and standing to lead them in prayer, let a party of them stand up with you, and let them take their arms; then when they have prostrated themselves let them go to the rear, and let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, taking all precaution and bearing arms; the disbelievers wish that you may be careless of your arms and your luggage, so that they may then assault you with a sudden united attack, and there is no blame on you, if you are inconvenienced with rain or if you are sick, that you lay down your arms, and take every precaution; certainly, God has prepared a disgraceful torment for the disbelievers.*
103. *When you have finished the prayer, remember God standing, sitting down, and reclining; but when you are safe from danger establish regular prayers; certainly, prayers are prescribed for the believers at stated times.*
104. *And be not weak hearted in pursuit of the enemy; if you suffer pain, they too suffer pain as you suffer pain, and you hope from God that which they do not hope; and God is Omniscient, Wise.” (4:95-104)*

*“The believers who sit back, except those who are suffering an injury, are not equal to those who strive and fight in the cause of God with their wealth and their persons. God has made those who strive with their wealth and their persons a rank higher than those who sit back and to each class God has promised a good reward. God has distinguished those who strive above those who sit back and will grant them a great reward. High ranks are specially bestowed by Him and forgiveness and mercy, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This verse came down to deal with a special circumstance that the Muslim community was facing. Some Muslims were lacking in the drive to fight in the way of God. Both financial support and physical participation were needed. The verse came to urge this group to actively participate in the fight in the way of God. Although the verse came to address a special circumstance, but the rule stated is a general rule that can be applied to similar situations at any time as well. Muslims, who actively participate in Jihad, whether physically or through providing financial support, will have a better reward than Muslims who are able but for one reason or another choose not to participate. Those who are unable to participate because of health issues or are too poor to contribute financially are exempted from this rule.

The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God prepared a hundred ranks in paradise for those who strive in His way. The distance between each two consecutive ranks is like the distance between heavens and earth.”* However, all Muslims were promised a good reward. The rule was repeated twice in the verse to emphasize the benefit of active participation.

Two facts can be deduced from this verse. The first is that the verse came to deal with the reluctance of some Muslims to participate in fighting against the enemy of Islam. The second is the importance of active participation in fighting against the enemy of Islam, whether physically or through financial support. The need for defending Muslims against their enemy is not only

limited to a certain phase in the history of Islam but the need will continue as long as life on earth continues.

*“When the angels take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they shall say, ‘In what state were you?’ They shall say, ‘We were weak and oppressed in the land.’ The angels will say, ‘Was not God’s earth spacious, so that you could have migrated therein?’ Such people will find their refuge in Hell. What an evil destination. Except those who are really weak and oppressed – men, women, and children - who have no means in their power, and cannot find a way (to escape); For these, there is hope that God will pardon them, God is Pardoning, All-Forgiving.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina and established the new Muslim state there. However, some Muslims remained in their home town in Mecca and other places in the Arabian Peninsula. Migration meant that people leave their homes and property behind. Some Muslims did not want to undertake this sacrifice, some were apprehensive of the experience of moving to a new place, and some were too weak to endure the hardships of moving to Medina. Many Muslims who remained behind suffered different sorts of persecution and torture at the hands of the idolaters, especially after the battle of Badr in which the idolaters suffered defeat at the hands of the Muslims. The torture and persecution forced some Muslims to revert back to idolatry to save their lives. These verses came down to deal with this situation. Those who did not migrate and chose to stay behind for one reason or another were told that they will die in sin. They have deprived themselves a decent life in the newly established Muslim state. They preferred a life of persecution in their old homes to a life of freedom in a new home.

The verse aimed at reclaiming these souls who wronged themselves by staying behind. The verse painted a horrifying image for a dying person being questioned by the angels. Their behavior is questioned and their answers are rebutted. Why did they not flee the persecution? Why did they stay behind and accepted to be humiliated and tortured? The verse ended up by reminding them of the fearful result of their deeds. However, those who were truly weak and could not migrate were exempted. They will be forgiven because they had no choice.

*“And whoever migrates in God’s way, he will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoever forsakes his home, seeking refuge with God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with God, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This verse exemplifies the Quranic approach to relieve human anxiety for those facing the prospect of migration. The approach is honest in recognizing the natural human fear of the unknown. It provided the assurance of safety and security. Those who migrate in the way of God are promised safe refuge and abundance of provision. The verse opened up horizons for safe and prosperous life. Earnings are not restricted to one place or one opportunity. God will provide for those who migrate in his way. Death can come at any time and it will happen at a specific time for each one irrespective of his/her place and condition. If it came on the road to Medina, then the reward is guaranteed and God’s forgiveness is abundant.

*“And when you travel in the land, there is no blame on you if you shorten the prayer, if you fear that the disbeliever may attack you, certainly the disbelievers are your avowed enemy.”* A traveler needs to be in constant contact with his Lord. This contact provides support to the traveler to overcome the obstacles on the road and to achieve the objective of the journey.

Prayers are the best method of contact with God. Prayers provide the support Muslims need at difficult times, *“Seek help with perseverance and prayers.”* (2:45) So, it is appropriate to remind those who were migrating of the benefit of prayers and provide them with a license to perform a shortened form of the prayer to maintain the connection with their Lord and in the meantime to avoid putting them in harm’s way. Regular prayers involve certain movements; a person performing regular prayers may attract the attention of the enemy. The enemy may find an opportunity to attack or capture Muslims while performing regular prayers. The verse allows Muslims to perform a shortened prayer in lieu of the regular prayer when they are travelling if they fear the enemy.

We should differentiate between the shortened prayers mentioned here and the shortened prayers that a traveler is allowed to perform. The shortened prayers in this verse are specific for those who are afraid to be attacked by the enemy. A normal traveler is allowed to perform a prayer similar in form to the regular prayer but shorter in length. For a person who is traveling and is also afraid to be attacked by an enemy, not only the length of the prayer is shortened but also the form is different. In this case, a person may perform the prayer standing up, and forgo kneeling and prostrating oneself which are integral components of the regular prayer. One can also perform prayers while walking or riding in this case. Gesturing with one’s head would replace kneeling and prostrating.

*“And when you are among them and standing to lead them in prayer, let a party of them stand up with you, and let them take their arms; then when they have prostrated themselves let them go to your rear, and let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, taking all precaution and bearing arms; the disbelievers wish that you may be careless of your arms and your luggage, so that they may then assault you with a sudden united attack, and there is no blame on you, if you are inconvenienced with rain or if you are sick, that you lay down your arms, and take every precaution; certainly, God has prepared a disgraceful torment for the disbelievers. When you have finished the prayer, remember God standing, sitting down, and reclining; but when you are safe from danger establish regular prayers; certainly prayers are prescribed for the believers at sated times.”* When one reflects on the deep meanings underlying these verses, which illustrate the Quranic approach to deal with human psyche, one can see the subtle touches that reach the human soul. These touches were part of the training program for Muslims. The verses did not only address the mechanics of performing prayers on the battle ground, but they also emphasized the importance of prayers for a Muslim even when one is in the midst of a battle. Prayers were called the weapon of the Muslim. Early Muslims were able to prevail over their enemy because they understood the meaning and impact of this weapon and they used it effectively. They prevailed because their belief in the Oneness of God made them superior over their enemy. They prevailed because they understood the context of life and the objective of their existence. Prayers were the symbol of their faith and a guide to the route of achieving their goal.

The other interesting point that one can glean from these verses is their role in preparing the Muslims psychologically to meet their enemy on the battle ground. The verses warned the Muslims against being careless or negligent in keeping their arms. They were asked to take every



precaution, however it assured them of the demise of their enemy. A balanced combination of warning and reassurance provided the recipe for victory.

There is some difference of opinion regarding the mechanics of the “Fear prayers.” It suffices to highlight the general characteristics of this prayer, without delving into the details of the different opinions. The army should be divided into two groups. While one group prays with the Prophet (PBUH) the other will keep watch in the rear, then they switch places. The first group will pray first one rakk’a with the Prophet while the second group is keeping watch, then they will switch places. When the Prophet (PBUH) has finished his prayers of two rakk’as, each group would have prayed a single rakk’a with the Prophet (PBUH). Each group should then proceed to complete the second rakk’a, separately. This way, both groups would have performed a part of their prayer with the Prophet (PBUH) and in the meantime, there was always a group watching and protecting the rest of the army. However, whenever you feel secure then establish prayers at the appointed times.

*“And be not weak hearted in pursuit of the enemy; if you suffer pain, they too suffer pain as you suffer pain, and you hope from God that which they do not hope; and God is Omniscient, Wise.”*  
Few words touch upon the crux of the matter and outline the demarcation between the different situations of the believers and the non-believers. Pain will be endured by both factions, but the believers look forward to a reward from God while the disbelievers are lost.

### **Verses: 105 to 113**

105. *Certainly We have revealed to you the Book with the truth that you may judge between people according to what God has taught you; and be not an advocate on behalf of the treacherous.*
106. *And ask forgiveness of God; certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
107. *Do not plead on behalf of those who betray themselves; certainly, God does not love him who is treacherous, sinful;*
108. *They seek to hide from people but they cannot hide from God, and He is with them when they plot by night in words which do not please Him, and God is Totally-Aware of what they do.*
109. *There you are pleading for them in this world's life, but who will plead for them with God on the Day of Resurrection, or who shall be their guardian?*
110. *Whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul and then seeks God's forgiveness, he shall find God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
111. *Whoever commits a sin, he is only committing it against his own soul; and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
112. *Whoever commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame on to an innocent person, he indeed takes upon himself the burden of a calumny and a manifest sin.*
113. *Had it not been for God's grace upon you and His mercy, a party of them would have certainly resolved to lead you astray, but they only mislead themselves; they can do you no harm at all. God has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom. He taught you what you did not know; certainly, God's grace on you is great.” (4:105-113)*

It was narrated that these verses were revealed advising the Prophet (PBUH) about a certain incident that occurred in Medina. The armor of a man from the Ansar (his name was Rifa'a) was stolen while he was on an expedition with the Prophet (PBUH). Another person (by the name of Basheer ibn Obairiq) from a different clan from the Ansar was accused of the theft. When Basheer realized that he became under suspicion he threw the armor inside the house of a Jew (by the name of Zaid). The thief asked a member of his family to go and tell the Prophet (PBUH) that Zaid is the one who stole the armor. When the armor was found in Zaid's house, the Prophet (PBUH) announced the innocence of Basheer and apologized to him in public. At this moment the above verses were revealed and the truth became known. Basheer fled Medina to avoid being prosecuted for the theft.

Although declaring the innocence of a person who was falsely accused is a noble feat, the verses were meant to address a much graver issue. The verses established the principle of maintaining the balance of justice for all people. This is a balance that is not swayed by whims, interest, or status. The verses came down to cleanse the society of the remnants of the pre-Islamic norms and values.

The Quran could have ignored this incident. Ignoring this incident could be justified, if we were to use present day political values. The victim was a Jew. Many Jews at that time were creating a great deal of difficulty for the Muslims. The culprit was one of the Ansar who provided home and protection for the Muslims migrating from Mecca. But the Quran chose not to ignore the incident in spite of all these considerations. The issue was that the Muslim society should be built on justice for any and everyone who lives within the boundaries of this society. The only way that Muslims can promote the goodness of Islam is by maintaining a standard of absolute justice in their dealings. Everyone should be treated according to the same standard of justice.

These verses embody three general principles that outline the framework for the relationship between the individual and God. The first principle is stated as, *“And whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul, then seeks God’s forgiveness, he shall find God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This verse opens the door for God’s forgiveness to everyone. God is the All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. He is there for anyone who seeks His forgiveness and knocks on the door of His mercy. The second principle is stated in the following verse, *“And whoever commits a sin, he is only committing it against his own soul; and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* Sin is an individual responsibility. Islam does not accept the concept of the original sin and that man is born sinner. Everyone earns his sin or reward according to his own deeds. This is a manifestation of the absolute justice of God. The third principle is stated in the verse, *“And whoever commits a fault or a sin, then throws the blame on to an innocent person, he indeed takes upon himself the burden of a calumny and a manifest sin.”* It deals with framing others with a sin that they have not committed. If a person commits a sin and then attempts to frame another, then he/she will bear the burden of his/her deed. The culprit will be punished for his/her sin as well as for the calumny he/she committed. These three principles are an integral part of the framework of justice in Islam. They also provide a gateway for hope in the mercy of God for those who want to repent and seek God’s forgiveness.

*“Had it not been for God's grace upon you and His mercy, a party of them would have certainly resolved to lead you astray, but they only mislead themselves; they can do you no harm at all. And God has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom, and He taught you what you did not know, and certainly God's grace on you is great.”* The verse refers to the story told earlier about the theft of the armor and the attempt to frame a Jew to take the punishment. This is one of the many attempts that the enemies of the Prophet (PBUH) tried to mislead the Prophet (PBUH) and to get him to make wrong or unjust decisions. But God protected him from falling into the trap that his enemies laid for him. He was saved by the grace of God who bestowed many favors on His Prophet (PBUH). God also assured the Prophet (PBUH) of His continuous protection. The greatest favor that was bestowed on the Prophet (PBUH) was the favor of entrusting the Prophet (PBUH) with the responsibility to deliver God's message. It is a favor bestowed on all members of the human race. This is a favor that gave them a new birth and gave them the opportunity to taste the sweetness of guidance after they had been immersed in the ignorance of misguidance. The Prophet (PBUH) was favored by being the first to taste and appreciate the sweetness of guidance. He was taught by his Lord that which he did not know before.

## **Verses: 114 to 126**

114. *There is no good in most of their secret counsels save him who enjoins charitable act, goodness, or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this seeking God's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward.*
115. *And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We shall leave him in the way he has chosen, and admit him to Hell; what an evil destination?*
116. *Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives other sins to whom He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed strayed far away.*
117. *In His place, the idolaters invoke only female idols and a rebellious Satan;*
118. *God has cursed him- but he (Satan) said, “Most certainly I will take a stated portion of your servants.*
119. *And most certainly I will lead them astray and I will arouse in them vain desires, and command them so that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most certainly I will command them so that they shall alter God's creation;” and whoever takes Satan for a protecting guardian rather than God he indeed shall suffer a manifest loss.*
120. *He (Satan) promises them and stirs up vain desires in them; but Satan's promises are only a delusion.*
121. *These are they whose refuge is Hell, and they shall not find any escape from it.*
122. *And those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; God's promise is the truth, and whose word can be truer than God?*
123. *It shall not be in accordance with your desires nor in accordance with the desires of the followers of the Scripture; whoever does evil, he shall be requited for it, and standing before God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper.*

124. *And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them, not even as much as the speck on the date-stone.*
125. *And who can be better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God, does good, and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and God took Abraham for a friend.*
126. *And to God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and God encompasses all things.” (4:114-126)*

“There is no good in most of their secret counsels save him who enjoins charitable act, goodness, or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this seeking God's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward.” The Quran has repeatedly admonished against secret counsel. Secret counsel is when few Muslims meet in secret to plot and make plans. The proper practice for dealing with problems, personal or otherwise, was to consult the Prophet (PBUH). This provided a legitimate avenue for resolving conflicts, establishing precedents, and shaping public policy. It also aimed at eliminating the potential for the formation of interest groups or pockets within the Muslim community. Interest groups usually aspire at shaping public policy to favor their own interests which may be against the interest of the whole community. The verse reminded Muslims who were involved in such clandestine practices that they might be successful in conducting such clandestine counsel sessions but they would not be able to escape the scrutiny of God. He is well aware of what they do.

The verse indicated that there are exceptions. Secret consultation to help those who are in need or to establish peace between two Muslims fighting together is not considered “secret counsel,” and is allowable provided that it is done with the objective of seeking the pleasure of God.

“And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We shall leave him in the way he has chosen, and admit him to hell; what an evil refuge? Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives other sins to whom He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed strayed far away.” It was mentioned that these verses were revealed to deal with the situation of Basheer ibn Obairiq, who became an apostate and reverted back to idolatry. However, the verses provided a general rule that can be applied in all similar situations. The word “opposes” implies following a way different from the way which has been chosen by the Messenger (PBUH). It is by the grace of God that people are held accountable only after they had received a message which clearly outlines the route to guidance. A person is held accountable only after he receives guidance, recognizes that it is the truth and then deliberately chooses not to follow it. Those who choose not to follow the guidance after it has been recognized, they will be left to go astray and they will be part of the group of disbelievers whom he chose to join. They will then be punished accordingly. This bad ending was earned by deliberately rejecting the truth and opting for associating partners with God. God forgives all sins except the sin of associating partners with Him. Those who die while they are still in the state of associating partners with God have no hope in God’s forgiveness. Any other sin may be forgiven by the will of God.

Associating partners with God has many forms. One form is to actually worship others besides God. Another form is to bestow some of God's characteristics on leaders, religious or otherwise, and follow them blindly. Associating partners with God is an unforgivable sin for those who insist on it because it is against the initial natural human disposition.

Those who associate partners with God have gone far astray. However, the door for forgiveness is always open. God will forgive them if they repent, even if they were on the death bed. But those who do not repent are doomed.

*“In His place, the idolaters invoke only female idols and a rebellious Satan - God has cursed him- but he (Satan) said, ‘Most certainly I will take a stated portion of your servants. And most certainly I will lead them astray and I will arouse in them vain desires, and command them so that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most certainly I will command them so that they shall alter God's creation;’ and whoever takes Satan for a protecting guardian rather than God he indeed shall suffer a manifest loss. He (Satan) promises them and stirs up vain desires in them; but Satan's promises are only a delusion. These are they whose abode is Hell, and they shall not find any refuge from it. And those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; God's promise is the truth, and whose word can be truer than God?”* The verse refers to some of the mythical traditions that the idolaters used to practice. The idolater Arabs were polytheists. They claimed that the angels are God's daughters. They worshiped statues of the angels. They called the statues names like Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza, and Manat. In the beginning they believed that the idols could intercede with God on their behalf. Over time, they gradually started worshipping the idols themselves as gods. Some idolaters practiced devil worship. Although the reference to devil worship can be taken literal but the verse can also be understood to mean a wider scope of devil worship. Practicing polytheism is a kind of support for Satan, the enemy of humankind who was cursed for disobeying God. Satan vowed to tempt humans to join him in the act of disobedience. Satan promises those who follow him happiness, fulfillment of desires, and salvation to tempt them away from the straight path. He rationalized for them some of the silly rituals like slitting the ears of the cattle to declare its sanctity. Satan convinced the idolater Arabs that God has forbidden the use of cattle with slit ears for riding or for food. Satan seduced them into changing the creation of God by mutilating human and animal bodies.

Salvation can only be achieved by taking God as the Patron and the Protecting Guardian. Doomed are those who take Satan as their patron and protecting guardian. Satan makes hollow promises that satisfy their vain desires and sways them away from the initial natural human disposition. Humankind was created with an initial natural disposition which can help human beings find the right way in life. Thus enables them to find their way to monotheism and to protect them from falling into the sin of polytheism. The initial natural human disposition acts like a compass to guide people to the right path. Satan tempts people by portraying evil deeds as acts of goodness. He tempts people by mapping a route for happiness that goes through a field of sin. Those who fall for the temptation of Satan will land in Hellfire. The eternal abode for those who resist the temptation of Satan is paradise. This is God's promise, and whose promise is more truthful than God? The verse juxtaposed the absolute truth of God against the treacherous lies of Satan.

*“It shall not be in accordance with your desires nor in accordance with the desires of the followers of the Scripture; whoever does evil, he shall be requited for it, and besides God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper. And whoever does good deeds whether, male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them, not even as much as the speck on the date-stone. And who can be better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God, does good, and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one? God took Abraham for a friend.”* This verse came down to refute unsubstantiated claims by people from different faiths who misunderstood certain verses in the Torah, Bible, and Quran. Some Jews and Christians used to say, “We are the children of God and He likes us, and even if we were to be punished, it will only last for a few days.” Jews say that they are the chosen people of God. Some Muslims say that they are *“The best nation created by God,”* and God will forgive them simply because they are Muslims.

The verse came down to establish the criterion for goodness. People will be judged according to their deeds. The standard is to submit one’s self to God’s will and to combine that with excellence in deeds. The best faith is attained by fully submitting to God, this is the faith of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The best deeds are the deeds that are completely dedicated purely to God. Thus, submission and excellence are the criteria for success. Submission means submitting oneself totally to the will of God and excellence means that one worships God as if one can see God, because while we cannot see God, God certainly, sees us. God requested excellence in performing all deeds. Even when one slaughters an animal for food, one should let the animal lie in such a way that it does not see the cutting knife. One should use a sharp knife so that one stroke of the knife is enough to kill the animal. The idea is to make the slaughtering process as humane as possible.

The verse also emphasized the equality between males and females in responsibilities and recompense. It also emphasized that belief is a prerequisite for acceptance of good deeds. The statement, *“and whoever does good deeds whether, male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them,”* clearly indicates the use of the same standard for judging males and females. It is also an unequivocal statement indicating that belief in the Oneness of God is a prerequisite for the acceptance of deeds. Belief in the Oneness of God guarantees consistency in doing good deeds and ensures that it is dedicated to God alone.

When the Muslims heard the verse, *“Whoever does evil, he shall be requited for it, and standing before God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper,”* they felt very bad because they knew that as human beings they were bound to commit some bad deeds. Imam Ahmed narrated on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn Numair that Abu Bakr (RA) went to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him about this verse. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“May God forgive you Abu Bakr, don’t you get sick? Don’t you get tired? Don’t you get sad? Don’t you get afflictions?”* Abu Bakr (RA) answered affirmatively, the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“This is the recompense for the bad deeds.”*

*“And to God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and God encompasses all things.”* The discourse dealing with deeds, rewards, belief, and disbelief was

concluded by a reminder that all what is in the heavens and earth belong to God. God is well aware of everything. The Quran usually mentions the attributes of power, dominion in connection with the use of the word God. It reflects the concept of the belief in the Oneness and uniqueness of God not only as a God to be worshiped but also as the God who controls, shapes, and maintains the universe. This belief provides an incentive for the believers to seek the pleasure of God through following His guidance and obeying His commands.

Some philosophical schools concede the Oneness and uniqueness of God but refuse to attach the attributes of will, knowledge, or dominion to Him. God becomes a mere symbol that has no role to play in people's lives. This is not the concept of God that Muslims believe in. God owns whatever in the heavens and earth. He encompasses everything and He has the dominion over everything.

### **Verses: 127 to 134**

127. *And they ask you for a ruling about women. Say to them, "God gives you ruling concerning them, and the Book that is recited to you regarding female orphans whom you do not give what is ordained for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among children, and that you should deal towards orphans with equity; and whatever good you do, God certainly knows it."*
128. *And if a woman fears cruelty or desertion on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them, if they arrange a reconciliation between them, and reconciliation is better, and avarice has been made to be present in people's minds; and if you do good and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
129. *And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, leaving her in suspense; and if you arrange reconciliation and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
130. *And if they separate, God will render them both free from want out of His abundant bounty, and God is All-Embracing, Wise.*
131. *And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God and certainly, We enjoined those who were given the Scripture before you and (We enjoin) you too that you should be conscious of God; and if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is God's and God is Rich, Praised.*
132. *And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian.*
133. *If He pleases, He could destroy you, people, and bring others in your place; and God has the power to do this.*
134. *Whoever desires the reward of this world, then with God is the reward of this world and the hereafter; and God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (4:126-134)*

*"And they ask you for a ruling about women. Say to them, 'God gives you ruling concerning them, and the Scripture that is recited to you regarding female orphans whom you do not give what is ordained for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among*

*children, and that you should deal towards orphans with equity; and whatever good you do, God certainly knows it.’*” New Muslims were eager to learn the code that will shape their new way of life. This was a way of life that differed in many ways from what they used to practice before Islam. Old traditions and practices were abolished and new ones were instated. They were reborn anew with the adoption of Islam. Their eagerness was rewarded with a grace from God. He answered all their questions. This verse came to answer a question about orphan girls and to rectify a bad practice that was prevalent before Islam.

‘Ali ibn Abi Talha (RA) narrated that he heard Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) explaining this verse, he said, *“Before Islam the guardian of an orphan girl had the right to throw his garment over the girl, once he had done that, she was not allowed to marry anyone else. Her guardian can marry her if he so wished. However, if he did not marry her she became a spinster. He would have control over her wealth while she was alive and he would inherit her when she dies.”* This verse came to abolish this practice.

This tradition gives an idea of how orphan girls were treated by their guardians before Islam. Guardians were greedy. They were more interested in the wealth of the child under their care than in the child’s welfare. Similarly, they deprived young children and women of their inheritance rights. The logic was that young children and women do not contribute to the fighting power of the tribe, so they do not deserve to have a share in the estate left by a deceased relative. The vulnerable had no power and they could not defend themselves against such injustices of the idolatry society. Islam came to change all these bad and unjust practices. These practices were abolished and replaced by humane and just ones. This was not merely a sudden change in human behavior but it was a complete rebirth of a nation.

It is important to note that the rebirth that occurred was not preceded by introductory steps that made the change logical, nor was it the result of a revolutionary change in the life of the nation. The social change in the status of women and children and the new rights that they gained did not result because there was a change in society’s need for warriors nor was there a change in the status of warriors. The need for warriors did not change and their status did not change. Warriors were needed to protect the nascent Muslim society. The move from a system that awards rights on the basis of the status of a person to a system that awards rights on the basis of the human value of the members of the society was brought about by the advent of Islam. Islam established the principle of the equal worth of all members of the human race. The change occurred without a revolution but was brought about by a verse in a book. The Book gave birth to a new society. The new values were espoused by the same people who lived on the same land and under the same economic conditions. The verse reminds Muslims again with the relationship between the new values and the Originator of these values. Every good deed is recorded and no reward will be lost.

*“And if a woman fears cruelty or desertion on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them, if they arrange a reconciliation between them, and reconciliation is better, and avarice has been made to be present in people’s minds; and if you do good and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* The Quran dealt in a previous verse with the situation when the wife is the cause of a family conflict. In this verse the Quran deals with



the problem when the husband is the one to be blamed for the conflict. Family conflicts affect the security of the wife and children. Islam provides a realistic methodology to deal with the different aspects of life recognizing the changes that occur to people and their feelings towards each other as time passes.

The verse established a methodology for dealing with conflicts arising as a result of a husband deserting his wife. A wife fearing the consequences of such a desertion, which may or may not lead to a divorce, can negotiate with her husband the terms of an agreement to resolve the conflict. This agreement is an alternative to divorce. If a woman does not want a divorce and wants to resume family life with her husband, then she can make some concessions to reach such an agreement. These concessions may include giving up some of her financial or physical rights. These concessions should be made out of her own free will and with no coercion from anyone.

Acrimonious family conflicts can be avoided through a negotiated agreement between the husband and wife. This is a methodology that recognizes human limitations and the realities of life. One of these realities is the ever presence of avarice in the human heart. This can only be combated by the reminder that excellence and God consciousness are better. The reward for these is guaranteed and will not be lost because God is Totally-Aware of what you do.

*“And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, leaving her in suspense; and if you arrange a reconciliation and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. And if they separate, God will render them both free from want out of His abundant bounty, and God is All-embracing, Wise.”* God who created the human soul knows the nature of this soul. It is in the initial natural human disposition to aspire to that which one does not have. Therefore, God provided the human beings with a harness to control these desires. The harness is meant to refine not to kill these desires.

A man, who is married to more than one wife, may prefer one over the other. This is a human emotion that he may not be able to erase or kill. Islam certainly does not hold people accountable for things that they have no control over. So, this is a human failing which is made clear. A man married to more than one wife will not be able to treat them fairly, even if he tried hard, because he may not be able to feel for all of them equally. Feelings are beyond human control. Men are commanded to be fair in treating their wives, in spending equal times with them, and in providing equally for them. A man has to treat all his wives fairly in all aspects of life that are under his control. Men are admonished not to deprive any wife of her stated rights. Men are again reminded of doing the right thing and to be conscious of God in their treatment of women. This is how Islam deals realistically with the complexities of the human psyche. Islam tries to maintain a balance between the needs of a body that is created from dust and a soul that have wings wishing to fly in the sky.

The Prophet (PBUH) who is the perfect example of the human creation tried hard to be fair in treating all his wives. However, he did not deny that he felt more towards one than the others. He used to pray saying, *“God, I tried to be fair in what I have control over so don’t blame me for*

*that which You, not me, have control over.”* He meant that man has no control over the feelings of the heart.

If all measures to save the marriage fail and the marriage is dissolved, then God will provide for each one of them.

*“And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God; and certainly We enjoined those who were given the Scripture before you and (We enjoin) you too that you should be conscious of God; and if you disbelieve, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is God's and God is Rich, Praised. And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian. If He pleases, He could destroy you, people, and bring others in your place. God has the power to do this. Whoever desires the reward of this world, then with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter; and God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”* It is common in the Quran that a verse which deals with a command or a prohibition ends by a reminder that God has the dominion over everything and that He is the owner of whatever in the heavens and on the earth. It is a reminder that the owner of the universe has the right and the power to legislate for His creation. God has the absolute power over His creation. God consciousness is the way to salvation. The power of God is emphasized by reminding people that God does not need them and if they become ungrateful, then it is easy for God to replace them with a new generation. People are advised to remain conscious of God for their own sake. God's dominion will not be affected whether people believe or disbelieve. Islam provides a way of life that guarantees the achievement of happiness both in this life and in the Hereafter. It is rather stupid that humankind would be given this opportunity but prefers the quick but a fleeting gain of this world.

### **Verses: 135 to 147**

135. *You who believe, stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor, God can best protect both; therefore, do not follow your whims, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
136. *You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Scripture which He revealed before; and whoever denies God and His angels and His Scripture and His Messengers and the Last Day, he indeed has gone far astray.*
137. *Certainly, those who believe, then reject faith, then believe (again) and (again) reject faith, and go on increasing in disbelief, God will not forgive them nor guide them on the way.*
138. *Bring glad tidings to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful torment,*
139. *Those who take the disbelievers as protecting guardians instead of the believers; do they seek power at their hands? Certainly, all power is with God.*
140. *And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear people reject and ridicule God's revelations, do not sit with them until they turn to a different discourse; or else you would be like them; certainly, God will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers all in Hell.*

141. *Those who wait for a misfortune to befall you, but if you gain a victory from God they say, "Were we not with you?" But if the disbelievers gain a success, they say, "Did we not gain an advantage over you and defend you from the believers?" So God shall judge between you on the Day of Resurrection, and God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers.*
142. *Certainly, the hypocrites strive to deceive God, and He shall requite their deceit to them, and when they stand up to perform prayer they perform it languidly; they do it only to be seen by people and do not remember God save a little.*
143. *Wavering between this and that; they do not belong neither to these nor to those; and whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall not find a way for him.*
144. *You who believe, do not take the disbelievers as protecting guardians in place of the believers; do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you?*
145. *Certainly, the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire and you shall not find a helper for them.*
146. *Except those who repent, amend, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God, these are with the believers; and God will grant the believers an immense reward.*
147. *Why should God torment you if you are grateful and you believe? And God is ever Thankful, Omniscient. (4:135-147)*

*"You who believe, stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor, God can best protect both; therefore, do not follow your whims, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do."* This is an address to the believers. They are being addressed with a newly acquired attribute. This is the unique attribute that they gained when they were born again as Muslims. When they were reborn again, they were given new spirits, new values, new principles, new responsibilities, and new trust. These were the values and principles which should enable them to undertake their new responsibility as leaders whose objective is to establish justice on earth. They were commanded to stand firm for justice: absolute and comprehensive justice. They were commanded to eradicate injustice and guarantee fair treatment for all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The right to be treated fairly is a human right. Every human being whether a believer or a non-believer, a friend or foe, poor or rich should enjoy the right to be treated fairly in a court of law. Muslims are accountable to God, and to God alone, in fulfilling this trust. The believers are commanded to be completely objective when they act as witnesses. No desire, whim or nepotism should affect their testimony because the testimony is given in front of God. Even when the testimony is given on behalf of themselves, their families, or their parents, they should be objective in their testimony. This is a difficult task which requires a rigorous training program for people to overcome the natural human weakness and bias towards their own families. It is also a difficult task to be objective when the culprit is poor. A poor person is usually vulnerable, and people may tend to change their testimony in favor of a poor person as an act of kindness. But the warning is given, *"Do not follow your whims."* The verse mentioned some specific examples for motives which may compel a person to follow one's own whims and to abandon objectivity. Of these: favoring oneself, one's family, or one's friends. Absolute objectivity is commanded even when one's enemy is involved. Similarly, difference in religion, nationality or ethnicity should not be

justification for bias. The verse ends by reminding the believers that God is aware of what they do. This is an incentive to fulfill the command.

*“You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Scripture which He revealed before; and whoever denies God and His angels and His Scriptures and His Messengers and the Last Day, he indeed has gone far astray.”*

This is a list of the articles of faith which a believer should believe in. It includes the belief in God and His Messenger, a belief that connects the believers with their Lord who created them and who sent His Messenger to guide them to the way to connect with Him. It includes the belief in the Messenger and his message and all that he brought to them from their Lord. It includes the belief in the Book which was revealed to the Messenger, the Book that guides them to the way of life that God has chosen for them. It is a belief in the Book as a whole, not to pick and choose from it. It includes the belief in the previous Scriptures, all the Books that were revealed by God. All these Books brought a single message for humankind: to submit one’s face to God alone and not to associate anything with Him.

The command to believe is followed by a warning for the disbelievers. The elements of faith are listed again in detail as a reminder that rejecting any of them constitutes an act of rejecting faith as a whole. One notes that the belief in the angels was added to this second list. In the first list the belief in the angels was not mentioned explicitly. Since, the angels are mentioned in the Book, a belief in the Book implies that we believe in the angels. However, when a warning is issued against rejecting faith, the list had to be exhaustive and the angels had to be mentioned explicitly.

*“Certainly, those who believe, then reject faith, then believe (again) and (again) reject faith, and go on increasing in unbelief, God will not forgive them nor guide them on the way.”*

In Islam, the rule is that all sins that a person committed before becoming a believer are forgiven. Faith is a light that erases the darkness of disbelief. Once the darkness is removed a person connects with the Creator and the soul tastes the sweetness of faith. Those who oscillate between faith and disbelief stray away from the initial natural disposition of humankind. They deliberately chose to be led astray.

*“Bring glad tidings to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful torment, those who take the disbelievers as protecting guardians instead of the believers, do they seek power at their hands? Certainly all power is with God.”* The use of the word “bring glad tidings” instead of “warn” reflects obvious sarcasm. The reason for such sarcasm is then explained, “Do they think that the disbelievers have more power than God.” All power belongs to God alone. Those who seek power with someone else other than God are deluding themselves. God is the only one who can provide support to people. Seeking help and support from God frees the human being from all kinds of servitude.

*“And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear people reject and ridicule God’s revelations, do not sit with them until they turn to a different discourse; or else you would be like them; certainly, God will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers all in Hell.”*

Some Muslims used to frequent the gatherings of powerful hypocrites looking for support or worldly gains. Sometimes disparaging remarks were uttered against the word of God in these gatherings. The verse reminded Muslims that this is wrong. It was premature to command Muslims to boycott these gatherings altogether, so the command was given to abandon the gathering whenever they hear any disparaging remarks being uttered against the word of God. This verse reminded Muslims of a similar verse that was revealed before in Surat Al-An'aam (Chapter 6), "*Whenever you witness people abusing Our verses, then turn away from them until they embark on a different discourse.*" (6:68) Muslims were warned that complacency puts them in the same category as the hypocrites. This will warrant a great punishment on the Day of Judgment. God will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers together in Hell.

*"Those who wait for a misfortune to befall you, then if you gain a victory from God they say, 'Were we not with you?' But if the disbelievers gain a success, they say, 'Did we not gain an advantage over you and defend you from the believers?' God shall judge between you on the Day of Resurrection and God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers."* The verse painted a repulsive image of the hypocrites. It described the evil feelings that the hypocrites had for the believers and how they quickly changed their colors depending on the situation. When they found the Muslims winning, they would disguise their ill feelings towards the Muslims by feigning love and affection. On the other hand, when the disbelievers gain the upper hand over the believers, the hypocrites would declare their support for the disbelievers. However, the Islamic strategy at that time was to avoid opening a battle front against the hypocrites. The command was to turn away from them and treat them cautiously. They will be judged by God on the Day of Judgment.

There are different interpretations for the last part of the verse, "*And God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers.*" Some scholars are of the opinion that this promise will be fulfilled on the Day of Judgment. Others are of the opinion that the promise will be fulfilled in this life, in the sense that Muslims may lose some battles but God will not allow the Muslims to be decimated by the disbelievers in this world. However, it makes sense that the promise would be fulfilled both in this life and in the Hereafter. It is easy to imagine that it will be fulfilled in the Hereafter, but there may be doubts about the promise being fulfilled in this life. I strongly believe that this promise is meant to be fulfilled in this life. Historical accounts show that Muslims were only defeated when their faith was weak or when their actions did not reflect the strength of their faith. Elements of faith include the meticulous preparation of all material resources required for the battle as well as being dedicated to the cause of God.

In the battle of Uhud, Muslims lost because some of them, motivated by their greedy interest in the booty, disobeyed the commands of the Prophet (PBUH). In the battle of Hunain, Muslims lost because of their arrogance in thinking that material power alone is enough to secure victory. Losing a battle is a trial, and trials happen for a reason. Trials help people discover their shortcomings so that they can deal with them. Defeat has a far wider dimension than losing a battle. Defeat means the conquest of the spirit and the loss of fervor and enthusiasm. Losing a battle is not considered a defeat if it does not devastate the spirit and if it acts as a catalyst for building the morale for a continued struggle. This is what the verse refers to. The verse urges Muslims to work on filling their hearts with true faith and to translate their faith into action.

When Muslims perfect their faith and lead a true Islamic way of life then they should be sure of God's support. This is the promise that is given in this verse. True faith is accomplished when it rests deeply in the hearts of Muslims and is reflected on their deeds.

*“Certainly the hypocrites strive to deceive God, and He shall requite their deceit to them, and when they stand up to perform prayer they perform it languidly; they do it only to be seen by people and do not remember God save a little. Wavering between this and that, they do belong neither to these nor to those; and whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall not find a way for him.”* This verse painted a despicable image for the hypocrites. Believers knew that God would not be deceived. He knows all what is hidden and He is aware of all what is done in secret. Those who think they can deceive God are either fools or have no appreciation of the power of God. God will not make them face trials to alert them to the gravity of their actions. Trials that people face in life may have a silver lining because they serve as wake up calls alerting people to the consequences of their actions and allowing them to reflect and go back to the straight path. The hypocrites have gone too far astray that these trials will not be of any benefit to them.

Prayers for them are no longer a way to communicate with God. They are lazy when the prayer is called, as if they were asked to perform a difficult task. They pray only to be seen by people. Appeasing people is more important to them than the remembrance of God. They are insecure, they cannot take a firm stand, and they are unable to decide whether to side with the believers or the disbelievers. They deserved the wrath of God so they will not find anyone to help them.

*“You who believe, do not take the disbelievers as protecting guardians in place of the believers; do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you? Certainly, the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire and you shall not find a helper for them, except those who repent and amend and hold fast to God and devote their religion entirely to God: these are with the believers and God will grant the believers an immense reward.”* The verse warns the believers not to follow in the footsteps of the hypocrites by seeking support from the disbelievers. There was a real need for this reminder at the time it was issued, because there were strong interactions between the Muslim community and the Jews in Medina on one hand and between the Muslim community and the idolaters of Mecca on the other hand. Strong personal relationships, business dealings, and family ties still existed between some Muslims and non-Muslims. These Muslims needed to be alerted to the fact that their dependence on their friends and relatives from among the disbelievers may cause them to slip to the path of the hypocrites. The verse ended by a strong warning in the form of a rhetoric question. Such question is enough to remind the believers of the dire consequences of this practice, *“do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you?”*

The hypocrites will end up in the lowest level of hell fire. Their interest in the material things will pull them down to the ground. They chose the disbelievers as allies and pretended to be with the believers, but on the Day of Judgment they will not find anyone to help or support them. However, the verse indicated that the door was not completely closed. There was a chance to repent and to seek forgiveness. Those who repent and amend and hold fast to God and devote their religion entirely to God will be forgiven. In many verses reference is made to those who *“repent and amend”* but here the verse goes on to stress, *“Repent, amend, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God.”* This is relevant because the verse addressed a situation

that involved reluctance and hesitation on the part of the hypocrites, it was imperative then to emphasize the requirements of perseverance, steadfastness, sincerity, and devotion.

*“Why should God chastise you if you are grateful and you believe? And God is ever Thankful, Omniscient.”* Salvation lies in expressing gratitude to God and believing in Him because God is not interested in punishing and tormenting people. However, the expression that God is also thankful points to the reward that awaits the believers from God. If God the Creator, the Independent responds to His believing creatures, should not the creatures express their gratitude to God for all the blessings that He showered them with.

### **Verses: 148 to 170**

148. *God does not love the public utterance of evil speech unless it is by one who has been wronged; and God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
149. *If you do a good deed openly or do it in secret or pardon an evil act then certainly, God is Effacer of sins, Powerful.*
150. *In the case of those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and seek to separate God from His messengers, saying “We believe in some and disbelieve in others,” seeking to choose a way in between,*
151. *These are truly disbeliever. For the disbelievers We have prepared a humiliating torment.*
152. *And those who believe in God and His messengers and do not make a distinction between any of the messengers, God will grant them their rewards, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
153. *The people of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from heaven; so indeed they demanded of Moses a greater thing than that, for they said, “Show us God plainly;” so a thunderbolt overtook them on account of their injustice. Then they took the calf (for a god), after clear signs had come to them, but We pardoned this; and We gave Moses a manifest authority.*
154. *And We raised the Mount to tower above them at the taking of their covenant; and We said, “Enter the gate in prostration,” and We commanded them: transgress not in the matter of the Sabbath. And We took from them a firm covenant.*
155. *Then, because they broke their covenant and they rejected God’s revelations and they killed the prophets wrongfully and they said, “Our hearts are covered.” No, God set a seal upon them owing to their disbelief, so they shall not believe except a few.*
156. *And because they rejected faith and because what they uttered against Mary which was a grievous calumny;*
157. *And that they said, “We killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of God;” but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are in doubt, with no certain knowledge, but they only follow a conjecture, for certainly they did not kill him.*
158. *No, God raised him up to Himself; and God is Eminent, Wise.*
159. *And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them.*

160. *Because of the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow them the good things which had been made lawful for them and because they hindered many from God's way.*
161. *And their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and their devouring the property of people falsely, and We have prepared for the disbelievers from among them a painful torment.*
162. *But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers, believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you; and those who establish prayers and give the poor-dues and who believe in God and the Last Day, We will give them an immense reward.*
163. *Certainly, We have sent you revelations as We have sent to Noah, and the prophets after him, and We sent revelations to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We gave David the Psalms.*
164. *And We sent messengers whom We have already mentioned to you and messengers whom we have not mentioned; and God spoke directly to Moses.*
165. *We sent messengers who gave good news as well as to warn, so that people should have no argument against God after the coming of messengers, God is Eminent, Wise.*
166. *But God bears witness by what He has revealed to you - He has revealed it to you with His full knowledge - and the angels too bear witness; and God is sufficient as a witness.*
167. *Those who rejected faith and hindered others from God's way, they indeed have strayed far away from the path.*
168. *Certainly, those who rejected faith and acted unjustly, God will not forgive them nor guide them to a path.*
169. *Except the path of Hell, to abide in it for ever and this is easy for God.*
170. *People, the Messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord, therefore believe - this is best for you - but if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and the earth is God's, God is Omniscient, Wise.”(4:148-170)*

*“God does not love the public utterance of evil speech unless it is by one who has been wronged; and God is All-Hearing, Omniscient. If you do a good deed openly or do it in secret or pardon an evil act then certainly God is Pardoning, Powerful.”* The Quran tried to inculcate new values in the hearts of the believers to build a new Muslim society. One of these values is to avoid slandering people or spreading rumors about the misconduct of people. These bad practices were depicted as evil speech. Utterance of evil speech in public may have dire consequences on the society. It may sensitize people to evil practices and provide people who have certain bad tendencies with the motivation to commit evil acts. It may also involve slandering innocent people. Thus, utterance of evil speech is a sin except when it is used in self-defense by a person who was wronged. A person who suffers injustice is allowed to defend himself/herself and stand up against those who are persecuting him/her. In this case, there is no ambiguity. In this case, the person is only making a statement of the facts and the statement addresses those who are responsible for inflecting the injustice. Islam protects people against slander as long as they have not committed an act of transgression. Anyone who commits an act of transgression does not



deserve protection. This rule provides a balance between the need for protecting morals in a society and the obligation of protecting individuals against injustice. The statement ended by reminding people that God knows their intentions and what is hidden in their hearts.

*“Certainly those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and seek to separate God from His messengers and say, ‘We believe in some and disbelieve in others,’ seeking to choose a way in between, these are truly disbelievers; and We have prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers. And those who believe in God and His messengers and do not make a distinction between any of the messengers, God will grant them their rewards, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The Jews believed in the prophets that were sent to them but they did not believe in Jesus (PBUH) as a prophet of God, and the Christians believed in the previous prophets and in Jesus (PBUH) but they did not believe in Muhammad (PBUH) as a prophet of God. The Quran introduced the concept of the comprehensive religion. This is the religion which is based on the belief in God and all His messengers. This is a belief in the Oneness of God and the oneness of His Message. This is the true religion. Those who believe in this true religion will be granted God’s reward. Islam emphasized the concept of the belief in the Oneness and uniqueness of God because it is the fundamental basis for the true religion.

*“The people of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from heaven; so indeed they demanded of Moses a greater thing than that, for they said, ‘Show us God plainly;’ so a thunderbolt overtook them on account of their injustice. Then they took the calf (for a god), after clear signs had come to them, but We pardoned this; and We gave to Moses a manifest authority. And We raised the Mount to tower above them at the taking of their covenant; and We said, ‘Enter the gate in prostration,’ and We commanded them: Transgress not in the matter of the Sabbath, and We took from them a firm covenant. Then, because they broke their covenant and they rejected God’s revelations and they killed the prophets wrongfully and they said, ‘Our hearts are covered.’ No, God set a seal upon them owing to their disbelief, so they shall not believe except a few. And because they rejected faith and because what they uttered against Mary which was a grievous calumny; and that they said, ‘We killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of God;’ but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are in doubt, with no certain knowledge, but they only follow a conjecture, for certainly, they did not kill him. No, God raised him up to Himself: God is Eminent, Wise. And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them. Because of the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow them the good things which had been made lawful for them and because they hindered many from God’s way. And their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and their devouring the property of people falsely, and We have prepared for the disbelievers from among them a painful torment.”* The bigots asked the Prophet (PBUH) to bring down a book from heaven, a book that they can touch with their own hands. However, the answer to this request came from God in the form of a narrative describing how some of the Jews dealt with their Prophet Moses (PBUH). They asked a greater feat of Moses (PBUH). They asked him to make them see God with their own eyes. God gave Moses (PBUH) several clear signs proving his prophet-hood. However, these signs were not sufficient to arouse the spirit of faith in them and to bring peace and security to their hearts. As a result, they were destroyed, but God forgave them and accepted the prayers offered by Moses (PBUH)

and saved them. Then, they took the calf for a god. The Samaritan used the jewels, which they took from the Egyptians, to make a golden calf. They worshipped the calf while Moses (PBUH) was away receiving the Tablets from his Lord. However, God still forgave them and He gave Moses (PBUH) the Tablets which embodied the law. God gave Moses (PBUH) the authority to implement the law.

The bigots used to say to the Prophet (PBUH), “Our hearts are covered,” as an excuse for not believing in the message that the Prophet (PBUH) brought. The Quran reminded them that hearts are not created with covers which prevent the truth from reaching them. Their hearts were covered as a result of the evil deeds which they committed. On the other hand, there were Jews like ‘Abd- Allah Ibn Sallam (RA), Tha’alaba ibn Sa’aiya (RA), Asad ibn Sa’ayia (RA), and Asad ibn ‘Obayed-Allah (RA) and others who opened their hearts to the truth and accepted it. These were guided by God.

The verses list a number of reasons behind God’s decision to deprive the bigots of His blessings in this life and to send them to Hell fire in the Hereafter. These include fabricating a lie about Mary and claiming that they killed Jesus (PBUH). Certainly, they did not kill Jesus (PBUH), nor did they crucify him but God raised him to heaven. The Quran does not give any details about how Jesus (PBUH) was raised to heaven. There is no need to speculate then on how this happened.

There are different interpretations for the statement that, *“And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them.”* Some scholars are of the opinion that everyone from the people of the Scripture will believe in Jesus (PBUH) when he is brought back to this world before the Day of Judgment. Another group is of the opinion that the statement means that everyone from the people of the Scripture will recognize the truth of what Jesus (PBUH) brought before they die.

*“But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers, believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and those who establish prayers and give the poor-dues and who believe in God and the Last Day, We will give them an immense reward.”* The verse emphasized that firm knowledge and pure faith lead to the belief in the Oneness of God and the oneness of the Message. It was mentioned in the traditional interpretations of the Quran that this verse alludes to those Jews, who are among others, believed in the message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought. But this is a general statement that applies to all those who have firm knowledge and strong faith among the people of the Scripture. They are included in the list of those who believe, establish prayers, pay the poor dues, and believe in God and the Last Day. One notes that the short vowels used in the statement, *“those who establish prayers”* in this verse are different from those used in the same statement in other verses of the Quran. This may have been done to underscore the importance of establishing prayers.

*“Certainly, We have sent you revelations as We have sent to Noah, and the prophets after him, and We sent revelations to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We gave David the Psalms. And We sent messengers whom We have already mentioned to you and messengers whom we have not*

*mentioned; and God spoke directly to Moses. We sent messengers who gave good news as well as to warn, so that people should have no argument against God after the coming of messengers, God is Eminent, Wise.”* It is then a single message brought by a number of messengers sent to humankind, one after the other, over the span of human history. A single message revealed to guide humankind to the right path using an approach which combines the bringing of glad tidings and the issuing of warning. This group of chosen messengers included Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, David, Moses, and others whose names were mentioned and others whose names were not mentioned. They lived in different places, came from different ethnic origins, sent to different people at different times over the path of the history of humankind but they all belonged to the same group of God’s chosen people. They were all sent by God, they all carried the light to guide humankind to the straight path. Finally, Muhammad (PBUH) was sent to all people. He is the last of the messengers and the seal of the prophets.

All the messengers received revelations from God. God spoke to Moses (PBUH). This was a revelation. However, we don’t know how this happened. The Quran, our only source whose authenticity cannot be disputed, did not elaborate on this. All that we know is that God spoke to Moses (PBUH). There are many questions which we cannot answer. What was the nature of the speech? How did it occur? How did Moses (PBUH) receive this speech? All these questions are part of the hidden knowledge that the Quran did not explain and we have no way of knowing the answers to them.

God in His wisdom and fairness sent these messengers to guide people. The messengers brought glad tidings of what God has prepared for those who believe, and a warning of the bad consequences for rejecting faith. This way people should have no excuse.

God gave people the intellect and the ability to think about the creation and the signs of God. The mercy of God brought about messengers to remind people knowing that humankind’s desires may overcome the wisdom that God gave them to think and to reflect. God is certainly Eminent and Wise.

*“But God bears witness by what He has revealed to you - He has revealed it to you with His full knowledge - and the angels too bear witness; and God is sufficient as a witness.”* The verse provided moral support to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his struggle against those who rejected him and did not believe in the truth which he brought. Although God’s testimony is sufficient, but the angels also testified that the message that the Prophet (PBUH) brought is a revelation from God.

*“Those who rejected faith and hindered others from God's way, they indeed have strayed far away from the path. Certainly, those who rejected faith and acted unjustly, God will not forgive them nor guide them to a path. Except the path of Hell, to abide in it for ever and this is easy to God.”* These verses carried a dire warning to the bigots who rejected the message and hindered the efforts of the Prophet (PBUH). The bigots did not only reject faith but they also committed injustice. Rejecting faith in itself is an injustice. Denial of the truth is an injustice. Denial of the right to the freedom of faith is an injustice. The Quran described rejecting faith as an injustice in the verses, *“Most certainly associating partners with God is a grievous iniquity.”* (31:13). These

bigots did not only deny the truth but they also prevented other people from accessing the truth. They went too far astray, they have no hope in forgiveness and they are destined to Hellfire. This is easy for God to do.

*“People, the Messenger has, certainly come to you with the truth from your Lord, therefore believe - this is best for you - but if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and the earth is God's. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* This is a proclamation to all people that the Messenger of God (PBUH) has brought them the truth from their Lord. Those who believe will get their good reward. Although, God has full control over people but He does not need people to believe in Him. He has the dominion of the heavens and earth.

### **Verses: 171 to 176**

171. *People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak lies against God, but speak the truth; the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is only a messenger of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in God and His messengers, and do not say, “Trinity”. Desist, it is better for you; God is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and God is sufficient for a Guardian.*
172. *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and those who disdain His service and are arrogant, He will assemble them all before Himself.*
173. *Then, as for those who believe and do good deeds, He will reward them fully and will give them more out of His grace; and as for those who disdain and are arrogant, He will punish them with a painful torment. And they shall not find any besides God to protect or help them.*
174. *People, certainly, there has come to you clear proof from your Lord and We have sent you a clear light.*
175. *God will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him into His mercy and grace and will guide them to Himself on a straight path.*
176. *They ask you for a legal decision. Say to them, “God gives you a decision concerning the person who has neither parents nor offspring; if a man dies (and) he has no son and he has a sister, she shall have half the inheritance, If (such a deceased was) a woman, who left no child, Her brother inherits her; but if there are two (sisters), they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves; and if there are siblings, men and women, then the male shall have twice the share of a female;” Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you err; and God knows all things. (4:171-176)*

*“People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak lies against God, but speak the truth; the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is only a messenger of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in God and His messengers, and do not say, ‘Trinity’. Desist, it is better for you; God is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and God is sufficient for a Guardian.”* It is a transgression and exceeding the limit

to claim that God has a son and that He, the One, is three. God is glorified beyond being a member of a partnership. He is unique and He is the Creator. The miraculous birth of Jesus (PBUH), having been born without a father, was something out of the ordinary for people. However, there are many things beyond what people consider ordinary that happen in the universe. The Messiah was one of the messengers of God. These messengers included Noah, Abraham, Moses, Muhammad, and the rest of the messengers chosen by God to deliver His Message to humankind. The interpretation of “*His Word*” may mean that the birth of Jesus (PBUH) occurred as a result of the direct command of God, “*Be and he was.*” God bestowed His Word on Mary, and Jesus (PBUH) was created in her womb without the need for a father’s sperm as is required in normal conception. The word of God which created everything from nothing can easily create Jesus (PBUH) in his mother’s womb. The spirit that was used in the creation of Jesus (PBUH) was used to create Adam (PBUH) from mud before. God who created Adam (PBUH) without a father or a mother is certainly able to create Jesus (PBUH) without a father. People then should believe in God and His messengers, including Jesus (PBUH) as a messenger of God, and Muhammad (PBUH) as the seal of the prophets, and they should stop making these mythical claims. God is One and He is unique. God does not need to have a son because God is Eternal and He is Infinite. He has the dominion of heavens and earth. The relationship between the human being and God is a relationship between the created and the Creator. God is sufficient for His creatures; He cares for them and looks after their needs and their interests.

*“The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and those who disdain His service and are arrogant, He will assemble them all before Himself. Then, as for those who believe and do good deeds, He will reward them fully and will give them more out of His grace; and as for those who disdain and are arrogant, He will punish them with a painful torment. And they shall not find any besides God to protect or help them.”* One of the fundamental concepts that Islam has emphasized is the concept of the Oneness of God. The fact that God is One and is unique is the corner stone of the Islamic faith. The relationship between God and humankind is a relationship between the Creator and His creatures. This fact has been stated throughout the Quran in a way that leaves no doubt about its importance and its centrality to the message of Islam. Islam also stressed the fact that this is the message that all messengers brought to humankind. The fact of the Oneness and uniqueness of God has been emphasized in the message that each messenger of God brought before, from Noah (PBUH) to Muhammad (PBUH). Each messenger told his people, “*My people, worship God, you have no deity save Him.*” (7:59) The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary (PBUH) knew that he is a messenger and a servant of God and he would never have entertained the notion of being himself a god or a son of god. He would have been proud of being a servant of God. This is a status that all the messengers of God were proud to attain. This is a status that God bestowed on the messengers and the angels who are close to Him. The arrogance of those who disdain to be servants of God will not protect them from the wrath of God. Everyone will be gathered on the Day of Judgment to be recompensed according to their deeds.

God does not need people to worship Him. Serving God alone is for the benefit of humankind. Knowing one’s Creator and serving Him provide the basis for a healthy and happy life. Serving God alone frees humankind of all kinds of servitude whether it is servitude to another human

being or to a weakness in one's life. When all people recognize God as the Creator and that they are all equal in front of Him, no tyranny will prevail and the dignity of humankind will be preserved. Those, whose arrogance prevents them from assuming the status of being servants to God, become the captives of other forms of servitude.

*“People, certainly, there has come to you clear proof from your Lord and We have sent you a clear light. God will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him into His mercy and grace and will guide them to Himself on a straight path.”* The verse provided a proof from God. The language and construction of the Quran show that it could not have been composed by a human being. Those who understand the language are able to feel the beauty of the language of the Quran. The stories about the Arabs in the early days of Islam who adopted Islam after listening to the Quran are many. The Quran is a light that enables humankind to differentiate between truth and falsehood. Reading the Quran and living its spiritual environment promotes a feeling of ease, security and clarity. It removes all the impurities that are heaped on the spirit to bring it back to its initial natural disposition. Holding fast to God is the fruit of a strong faith. Through a strong faith one recognizes God and recognizes that all people are servants of God. This leads to holding fast to God as the only power in life. A strong faith provides safety and security for human beings and also serves as a healthy foundation on which to build a society. A strong faith and holding fast to God is rewarded with guidance to the straight path.

*“They ask you for a legal decision. Say to them, ‘God gives you a decision concerning the person who has neither parents nor offspring; if a man dies (and) he has no son and he has a sister, she shall have half the inheritance; if (such a deceased was) a woman, who left no child, her brother inherits her; but if there are two (sisters), they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves; and if there are siblings, men and women, then the male shall have twice the share of a female.’ Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows all things.”* The last verse in this Sura deals with a question on one of the articles of the law of inheritance. This Sura started on a theme related to family affairs, then dealt with a number of family laws, and it ends citing the answer to a closely related question: how to distribute the estate of a deceased person in a certain situation. The verse explains the regulations regarding the term “*Kalalah*.” This ruling was dealt with in an earlier verse, *“And if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others.”* (4:12) The present verse provides an answer to a question that was raised regarding this article. When a deceased person has neither children nor a father but has a sister, whether they have common parents or they only share a common father, then she inherits half his estate. If she dies first, then he inherits all her estate – after other legal heirs had their shares - if she did not have a child or a parent. If the deceased had two sisters, then each one of them inherits one third of the estate. And if the deceased had a number of siblings, then the male gets twice the share of the female. Siblings having only a common father would not inherit if the deceased had siblings who were born to the same parents as the deceased.

The Sura ended on a comprehensive note, *“Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows all things.”* It clearly indicated that matters of rights and duties emanate from

God's law. All rules organizing inheritance, family affairs, and community affairs have been delineated in God's law. Guidance and security are achieved by following God's law, while falsehood and error are the lot of those who choose not to follow God's law.

## **Sura 5: Al-Maidah (The Table Spread)**

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

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) to build a nation, to establish a state, and to organize a society. It laid down the rules that organize the relationships between the different members of the community, between the individual and the state, and between the Muslim state and the rest of the world. This Sura addresses, as do the previous three long Suras, a number of different topics. The underlying theme that binds all these Suras is the original goal that the Quran is trying to accomplish: building a nation, establishing a state and organizing a community on the basis of a special faith, a faith in which only God, the Lord, has the dominion and is the source of all the laws and rules which regulate life.

#### **Verses: 1 to 11**

- 1. You who believe, fulfill the obligations. Four-footed animals are made lawful to you (for food), except that which is recited to you (herein), game are unlawful while you are performing Pilgrimage; surely God decrees what He desires.*
- 2. So, you who believe do not violate the sanctity of God's rites, the Sacred Month, the animals brought for sacrifice, the garlands which are used to mark out such animals, nor the people going to the Sacred House to seek the bounty and pleasure of their Lord—but when you have completed the rites of Pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression; help one another to do what is right and good and do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be conscious of God, for His punishment is severe.*
- 3. You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is an abomination. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to transgression, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy.*
- 4. They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, "All good things are lawful for you." (This includes) what you have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by God, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God's name over it. Be conscious of God, He is swift in reckoning.*
- 5. Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.*
- 6. You who believe, when you get ready for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if you are in a state of*



*major ritual impurity wash your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and finds no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you, He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.*

7. *Remember God's blessing on you and the covenant which He ratified with you, when you said, "We hear and we obey." Be conscious of God, God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart.*
8. *You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
9. *God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those who believe and do good deeds.*
10. *Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations will be companions of Hell.*
11. *You who believe, remember God's blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against you and He restrained them. Be conscious of God, and let the believers put their trust in Him. (5:1-11)*

*"You who believe, fulfill the obligations. Four-footed animals are made lawful to you (for food), except that which is recited to you (herein), game are unlawful while you are performing Pilgrimage; certainly God decrees what He desires."* For life to continue and prosper on earth, man has to endure certain controls. These controls are necessary to organize the relationship between individuals, between the individual and people whether of kin or foreign, between the individual and living things, and between the individual and God. Islam delineates these controls clearly and traces them back to God's ordinance so that they would be respected and obeyed. These controls are not left to the whims and desires of human beings or fashioned to serve certain interests. These controls are meant to serve the interest of people everywhere and at all times. The Quran calls these controls "obligations," and it commands those who believe to fulfill these obligations.

This opening implies that the word "obligations" has a wider scope than what may appear at first glance. It indicates that the word "obligations" describes all constraints that need to be observed in the course of human life. The first obligation is to believe in the Oneness and uniqueness of God. It involves understanding and accepting the implications of having one and only One God. All other obligations spring out from this fundamental obligation.

The obligation to believe in God was originally administered to Adam (PBUH) by God. The obligation is stated in the following verse, *"We said, 'Get you down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.'" (2:38)* This was the condition stated for Adam (PBUH) and his descendants to become the vicegerents of God on earth. The condition for being vicegerents is to follow God's guidance and to fulfill the first obligation that Adam (PBUH) was commanded to fulfill. The command to fulfill this obligation was renewed to all of Adam's (PBUH) descendants in the verse, *"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' (7:172).* This is a covenant which God has taken from each and every one of the children of Adam (PBUH). This covenant was declared when the children of Adam (PBUH) were in their father's loins. We may not understand how this happened, but we have no right to ask how, God knows best His creation.

The verses continue to list the rest of the obligations which believers are commanded to fulfill. *"So, you who believe do not violate the sanctity of God's rites, the Sacred Month, the animals brought for sacrifice, the garlands which are used to mark out such animals, nor the people going to the Sacred House to seek the bounty and pleasure of their Lord - but when you have completed the rites of Pilgrimage you may hunt. Do not let your hatred for the people who barred you from the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression: help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility. Be conscious of God, for His punishment is severe. You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is an abomination. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them: fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessing upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to transgression, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy."* The obligations also include following the commands which outline what has been prohibited, what has been made lawful, and when and where to do certain tasks. These obligations have been decreed by God alone, and as such they have to be obeyed. All four-footed animals are lawful except that which is listed in these verses. Prohibitions include three categories: some things are prohibited at all times, others are only prohibited at specific times, and a third category includes certain things which are prohibited in specific places.

During Pilgrimage hunting is prohibited. Pilgrimage is a journey to God, during which one abandons the routine that one follows in regular daily life. The Sacred Mosque is a place of security and safety not only for people but also for all living beings. The time of Pilgrimage is a period of spiritual training in which the human being comes to understand and appreciate his/her relationship with other living things. Believers should take this opportunity to shed the material links to the world which they have been used to in their normal lives. Believers are asked to observe the rituals of Pilgrimage and to respect the sanctity of the Sacred Months. The Sacred Months include the months of Rajab, Zi Al-Qi'da, Zi Al-Hijja, and Muharram. God commanded that fighting is prohibited during these months. Animals brought by people performing Pilgrimage to be offered as sacrifice should only be used for that purpose. When one has completed the rituals, then one can hunt. Observing these obligations ensures a safe and secure environment for all living beings. The verses urge the believers to purify their hearts of hatred even towards those who barred them from visiting the Sacred House before. Safety and security should be extended to the hearts of the believers to replace hatred and transgression. Fulfilling this obligation requires an enormous amount of self-discipline.

The list of the prohibitions continues, *"You are forbidden to eat carrion; blood; pig's meat; any animal over which any name other than God's has been invoked; any animal which has been*

*killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows, this is an abomination. Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessings upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion; but if any of you is forced by hunger to eat forbidden food, with no inclination to transgression, then God is All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy.*” Carrion, blood and pig’s meat have been prohibited. This was discussed before and whether we understand the rationale behind the prohibition of these items or not, we have to respect the command. The prohibition has been made by God and God prohibits only bad things. The list includes “*any animal over which any name other than God’s has been invoked.*” The reason behind this is that this practice contravenes the belief in the Oneness of God.

The list of prohibitions continues, “*Any animal which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow or a fall, or gored or savaged by a beast of prey, unless you are still able to slaughter it (in the correct manner); or that which has been sacrificed on idolatrous altars. You are also forbidden to allot shares (of meat) by drawing marked arrows.*” The practice of using marked arrows to make certain decisions is a kind of gambling, thus it is prohibited.

Exception is made when one is forced to eat any of these unlawful things for fear of losing one’s life. Scholars differed on how much to eat in such situations. The discussion of this issue can be found in books on Islamic jurisprudence. It is quite sufficient to state the fact that this religion provides easy tools to implement practical solutions which address everyday life problems.

Let us contemplate the verse, “*Today the disbelievers have lost all hope that you will give up your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My blessings upon you, and have chosen Islam as your religion;*” This verse was the last verse to be revealed to the Prophet (PBUH). It came to announce that God’s message has been revealed in its complete and final form. When ‘Umar (RA) heard this verse he was saddened because he understood the implications of the proclamation that the message has been completed. He knew that this meant that the Prophet (PBUH) has fulfilled the trust and delivered the message, so he would be departing soon. The insertion of this verse in the middle of a list that outlines the things that have been rendered unlawful shows that these prohibitions are actually a blessing from God. It also indicates that all aspects of human life including rituals, all types of dealings, prohibitions, or commands are all components of the message. The message is indivisible and it is a depiction of the divine project. This divine project details the way of life that God has chosen for His servants. Believers should voluntarily accept the divine project in its totality and refuse all other manmade programs. Those who advocate abandoning God’s divine project in favor of manmade systems are actually transgressing their limits.

With the completion of the Message, the disbelievers have lost any hope in being able to distort the message or stop people from joining the ranks of the believers. God has guaranteed the integrity of the Message. Muslims may be defeated in a battle or they may suffer a period of decline but Islam will always be the final Message for humanity. The believers should not fear anyone except God Himself. This is an address to all believers at all times and places, those who

adopt that which God has chosen for them. This address shows the believers that the way to security and safety is to adopt a way of life that is congruent with the divine project.

*“They ask you, Prophet, what is lawful for them. Say, “All good things are lawful for you.” (This includes) what you have taught your trained hunting animals (to catch) in the manner directed to you by God, so eat what they catch for you, but first pronounce God’s name over it. Be conscious of God, He is swift in reckoning. Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the people of the Scripture is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them. So are chaste believing women as well as chaste women of the people who were given the Scripture before you, as long as you have given them their bridal-gifts and married them, not taking them as lovers or secret mistresses. The deeds of anyone who rejects faith will come to nothing, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.”* These verses came to provide an answer to a question that was posed by some believers who wanted to know what edible things were lawful and what things were forbidden. The question indicates the mindset of a people who are happy of the fact that they are being addressed by God for the first time. They appreciated the great blessing that has been bestowed on them. So, they wanted to be extremely careful not to displease God by committing any unlawful act. They wanted to make sure that they did only what is rendered lawful by God. This shows the impact that Islam had on the psyche of new Muslims. They felt that they were given a new life, a life free from the bad practices which were prevalent before Islam. So, they asked the question: what edible things are lawful? The answer came to state that all good things are lawful. Thus, Islam came only to forbid eating things that are bad to humans. These are things which a decent human being would normally refrain from eating. Then an allowance was given: the animals hunted by trained animals or birds like hawks and hunting dogs are allowable. The main condition is that these trained hunting animals do not eat the prey they hunt. They only catch them and deliver them intact to their masters. If they eat, even a small piece of the prey, then it becomes forbidden. The verses reminded them that training animals to hunt is a God given skill, as all other types of knowledge. The believers were told to invoke the name of God when they release the hunting animal. This is a substitute for invoking the name of God when the prey is slaughtered. Then they are also reminded to be always conscious of God. The link between observing the laws of the lawful and forbidden and God consciousness was thus stated.

The verses continued to list the lawful things, stressing the fact that what is lawful is good for humans. The following item on the list of lawful things deals with taking Christian and Jewish (people of the Scripture) women, who were living in the Muslim community and had a protection contract between them and the Muslim state, as wives. Islam did not only allow them to practice their religion freely but also permitted cross marriages between Muslim men and Christian and Jewish women. This shows Islam’s attitude towards these religious minorities. It encouraged them to be part of the community and treated them with love and kindness. Islam also made the food of the people of the Scripture lawful for Muslims, so all can participate in community social functions. The marriage contract between a Muslim man and a woman from the people of the Scripture is governed by the same rules that govern the marriage of a Muslim man to a Muslim woman. The man gives the woman her bridal gift with the intention of entering into a marriage contract not as a gift to a lover or a mistress. All these rules and obligations are accepted as part of faith and fulfillment of these obligations is a sign of true faith. The deeds of those who chose to reject these obligations will be in vain.

*“You who believe, when you get ready for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, wash your feet up to the ankles and, if you are in a state of ritual impurity wash your whole body. If any of you is sick or on a journey, or has just relieved himself, or had intimate contact with a woman, and finds no water, then take some clean sand and wipe your face and hands with it. God does not wish to place any burden on you, He only wishes to cleanse you and perfect His blessing on you, so that you may be thankful.”* It is not a coincidence that verses talking about rituals of prayers and purification were mentioned in connection with rules dealing with the lawful and the unlawful. This integration of topics points to the fact that rituals of prayers and purification are among the “good things” that God made lawful for Muslims. Prayers should be as enjoyable as other good things in life because when Muslims pray, they should enjoy the pleasure of communicating with God in a state of purity, cleanliness, and devotion. The second message that one gets from this discourse is that Islam deals with human life as a whole. All human activities are done to serve God. One should not treat the acts of worship any different than other activities of life. Life should be treated as a whole with no artificial segregation between acts of worship and other human activities. The scholars of Jurisprudence artificially categorized obligations into “rituals of worship” and “dealings.” This division does not reflect the essence of the divinely inspired Islamic law. All obligations whether those which deal with rituals or those which deal with daily life activities should be treated on equal footings. Obligations describing what is lawful in everyday dealings between people are as sacred as obligations regarding rituals of worship.

Prayers are a means of communication with God. A Muslim has to be prepared both physically and spiritually for this meeting. The physical preparation is described in this verse and involves a ritual wash. There are two types of ritual cleansing acts: Wudu and Ghusl. Wudu involves washing the face, the hands to the elbows, and wiping the heads and washing the feet to the ankles. Ghusl involves washing the whole body. Performing Wudu or Ghusl depends on the condition of the person. Instructions when a Muslim has to perform Wudu or Ghusl are explained. A Muslim, whether a male or a female, has to perform only Wudu after experiencing what is referred to as the “smaller event.” This is alluded to in the verse using the term “relieved himself.” In this case only Wudu is required as an act of cleansing. A Muslim has to perform the ritual wash of Ghusl when he or she experienced the condition which is referred to as the “bigger event.” This is alluded to in the verse using the term “touched women” which is a delicate way of describing intimate sexual contact between a man and a woman. In this case, Ghusl is required.

The verse continued to describe an alternative purification ritual called “Tayamum.” Muslims can take recourse to this alternative in the following special cases:

- When water is unavailable.
- When a person is sick in such a way that using water will cause bodily harm.
- When a person is travelling on the road.

Tayamum is performed by letting the palms touch a clean part of the earth usually sand or dust, removing the dust or sand from the palms and wiping the face and hands using the palms, one or two times depending on which school of Jurisprudence one wants to follow.

Questions arose regarding the meaning of the term “touched women” and whether it means simply touching women or does it mean having sexual intercourse. Whether the man or the woman experienced sexual pleasure from the touch or not? Different scholars have different views regarding the interpretation of this term. Different views also exist regarding the cases where sickness is the reason for replacing Wudu or Ghusl by Tayamum. Is Tayamum allowed only in cases when using water is deemed harmful to the body, or is it permissible in case of any sickness? Is it permissible to take recourse to Tayamum even in cases where there is doubt that water may cause harm? Probably yes.

The verse ends with a statement that these rules were mandated not to cause the believers any inconvenience but to purify them and to prepare them for the communication with God. It is clear that Wudu and Ghusl prepare the Muslim both physically and spiritually for the prayers. However, Tayamum only prepares the Muslim spiritually. The special circumstances in which Wudu or Ghusl can be replaced by Tayamum are described above. Although Islam emphasizes the importance of physical as well as spiritual hygiene; accepting Tayamum as an alternative, shows that Islam emphasizes the importance of spiritual hygiene when physical hygiene is difficult to attain. While there are situations when physical hygiene is not possible to achieve, means for spiritual hygiene are always available. It is also important to note that while there are exemptions for performing the ritual wash needed for the prayer, Islam is keen on providing every tool which enables Muslims to perform prayers.

*“Remember God’s blessing on you and the covenant which He ratified with you, when you said, ‘We hear and we obey.’ Be conscious of God, God has full knowledge of the secrets of the heart.”* Muslims who heard the Quran addressing them, valued the blessings of God. They witnessed the changes that were happening to their lives and their communities because of these blessings. One of these blessings was the fact that they were made a party in a covenant with God. What an honor? However, one should always remember that God knows all what goes on inside our breasts. This is an allusion to the secrets of the heart that one may harbor.

*“You who believe, be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially. Do not let the hatred of others make you swerve away from justice, act justly, for that is closer to piety. Be conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.”* In a previous verse, the believers were admonished not to let the hatred of some people make them transgress against their enemy. In this verse, the tolerant attitude of Islam is extended. It admonished the believers not to let the hatred of others make them swerve away from justice. It may be easy not to transgress physically against one’s enemy but it is much harder to treat one’s enemy fairly. Yet the believers were commanded to establish justice even when they were in dispute with the people they hate. A support was promised to strengthen the believers in this endeavor. They should strive to become conscious of God. It is the duty of this nation to be steadfast in its devotion to God for the benefit of humankind. Muslims were able to play that role when Islam was their way of life. Muslims faltered in their responsibility when Islamic values became mere slogans.

*“God has promised forgiveness and a great reward to those who believe and do good deeds. Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations will be companions of Hell. You who believe, remember God’s blessing on you when a certain people were about to raise their hands against you and He restrained them. Be conscious of God, and let the believers put their trust in Him.”*

This is the reward that awaits those who chose to carry out their responsibility. This reward is a manifestation of divine justice. Those who believed and did good deeds will be rewarded differently from those who chose to disbelieve and do wicked deeds. The verse brings assurance to the believers of God's support.

## Verses: 12 to 26

12. *God took a covenant from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them, and God said, "I am with you: if you establish prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will absolve you of your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this (covenant) will go astray from the right path."*
13. *But they broke their pledge, so We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of (revealed) words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember. You (Prophet) will continue to find them- barring a few - ever bent on deceit. Pardon them and forbear, God loves those who do good.*
14. *We also took a covenant from those who say, "We are Christians," but they too forgot a part of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done.*
15. *People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has come to reveal to you much of what you concealed of the Scripture, and to pardon much (of what you have done). A light has now come to you from God, and a Book making things clear.*
16. *With which God guides to the ways of peace those who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path.*
17. *Those who say, "God is the Messiah, the son of Mary," are defying the truth. Say, "If it had been God's will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, the son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth?" Control of the heavens and earth and all that is in between them belongs to God; He creates whatever He wills. God has power over everything.*
18. *The Jews and the Christians say, "We are the children of God and His beloved ones." Say, "Then why does He torment you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His creation. He forgives whoever He pleases and torments whoever He pleases. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: to Him is the final destination."*
19. *People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has now come to you, after an interval of cessation of the messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, "No one has come to give us good news or to warn us." So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you; God has the power to do all things.*
20. *And when Moses said to his people, "My people, remember God's blessings on you, how He raised prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given any other people.*
21. *My people, enter the holy land which God assigned for you, and do not turn your back for then you will be losers."*

22. *They said, "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."*
23. *Two men whom God has blessed among those who were afraid (to disobey) 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."*
24. *They said, "Moses, we shall never enter it so long as they are in it; go therefore you and your Lord, and fight, we will stay here."*
25. *He said, "My Lord, I have no authority (upon any) but my own self and my brother; therefore, judge between us and the transgressors."*
26. *God said, "Therefore will the land be forbidden to them for forty years (during which) they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over the transgressors." (5:12-26)*

*"God took a covenant from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them, and God said, 'I am with you, if you establish prayer, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will absolve you of your sins and admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams. Any of you who now ignore this (covenant) will go astray from the right path.' But they broke their pledge, so We cursed them and hardened their hearts. They distort the meaning of (revealed) words and have forgotten some of what they were told to remember. You (Prophet) will continue to find them - barring a few - ever bent on deceit. Pardon them and forbear, God loves those who do good. We also took a covenant from those who say, 'We are Christians,' but they too forgot a part of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done."* God took a covenant from the Jews. This covenant had two components: a condition to be fulfilled and a reward to be awarded. The verse gives the details of the covenant and the way it was made. God appointed twelve leaders from among the Israelites to represent the twelve tribes who constituted the offspring of Jacob (PBUH). The leaders of the tribes took the covenant on behalf of the twelve tribes. In the covenant, God promised the Israelites that He is with them. This was a great promise. Those who have God on their side will never be conquered; they will never lose their way; and they will never be unhappy. In short, those who have God on their side have got everything. However, this is conditional on the performance of specific duties. The first duty is to establish prayers. The word "establish" go beyond "perform." Establishing prayers means that prayers should be performed in the best way possible, it should become a tool to prevent the person from committing sins and wicked deeds. The second duty is to pay the prescribed Alms. This is an expression of gratitude to God for His blessings in increasing the provision and wealth. It is also a tool to establish social justice and ensure that the needs of the poor are satisfied. The third duty is to believe in all God's messengers. All messengers came with the same message from God. If we deny one messenger, then it is as if we deny all of them and we deny God. This belief should be reflected on the deeds of the individual. Actively supporting the messengers is definitely among these deeds. Belief is not a lip service to be paid to a set of articles of faith or empty rituals to be performed but it is a complete way of life. Those who believe in God's message should actively support this way of life.

The verse also describes a type of spending in the way of God that goes beyond the prescribed Alms. This extra spending is considered by God as a loan given to Him by His servants even though the wealth came originally from God. These were the terms of the covenant. Once the terms are fulfilled, then the reward will be given. First, all sins will be wiped out. Wiping out all



sins is a great reward because humankind sins often. Wiping the sins is a great blessing and mercy from God. When all sins are wiped out, admission to gardens under which rivers flow follows. This is another blessing from God. But those who do not fulfill their commitment according to the covenant will go astray.

However, the Children of Israel reneged on their covenant, and they distorted the Scripture given to them and forgot the law. So, they were no longer capable of availing themselves of God's guidance and their hearts became hard. The Jews of Medina refused to accept the Prophet's (PBUH) guidance, they reneged on the treaty that they had with him, and they continued to break their agreements with him. However, the verse commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to pardon them and to deal with them in the best way possible.

Those who said they were Christians, but only paid lip service to the true meaning of the word, forgot the covenant they had with God. This is the covenant which proclaimed the Oneness of God. So, they became divided and enmity and hatred were stirred among them.

*“People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has come to reveal to you much of what you concealed of the Scripture, and to pardon much (of what you have done). A light has now come to you from God, and a Book making things clear. With which God guides to the ways of peace those who follow what pleases Him, bringing them from darkness out into light, by His will, and guiding them to a straight path.”* These verses addressed the people of the Scripture, stating that God has sent Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a messenger to them. His role was to explain and clarify parts of the message that was revealed before but were ignored or have been forgotten; he was instructed to pardon these transgressions. The Prophet (PBUH) came to re-establish God's original message and declare it a universal message to all people in every place and at all times. This Prophet (PBUH) and the Book he brought are a light to guide all people to the straight path. Those who receive this guidance are led to the way of peace. Islam fills life with peace, a comprehensive peace. It is a peace for the individual, peace for the family, peace for the community, peace for the nation, peace for the world, peace for the human race, and peace for the whole universe.

This Book will bring people out of darkness into light. There are different types of darkness: darkness generated by superstition; darkness generated by old myth and legends; darkness generated by bad traditions; darkness generated by whims and desires of humankind; darkness generated by missing guidance and going astray; and darkness generated by adopting wrong values and principles. The Book will guide people to the straight path. This is a path aligned with the initial natural human disposition; it is aligned with the laws that govern the universe; and it guides straight to God. God who created humankind and the universe gave humankind a way to guidance through the straight path.

*“Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,’ are defying the truth. Say, ‘If it had been God's will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, the son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth?’ Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to God; He creates whatever He wills. God has power over everything. The Jews and the Christians say, ‘We are the children of God and His beloved ones.’ Say, ‘Then why does He punish you for your sins? You are merely human beings, part of His*

*creation. He forgives whoever He pleases and punishes whoever He pleases. Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to Him: to Him is the final destination.”* Jesus (PBUH) came with the same message which was brought by all other messengers. This message commands the worship of one unique God. However, Christianity, as we know it today, distorted the original message and adopted the concept of trinity instead. The Quran came to re-establish the original message: worshipping the One and only God. The verse argued with those who say that Jesus is God, and posed the question: who can save Jesus, his mother, and indeed the whole human race if God wanted to destroy them? It stated the difference between the power of the Creator and the power of the created. There is no limit to what the Creator can do, while the created has limited power.

The Quran challenged the claim made by the Jews and Christians who said that they are the children of God which implies that God can be used as a father figure, spiritual if not physical. This claim casts doubts on the concept of the Oneness of God and distorts the relationship between the human being and God. Human beings are servants of God. The Oneness of the Creator means that all rules and laws that organize life on earth emanate from God who decrees the laws and the rules that are compatible and suitable for humankind, thus, bringing security and order to human life.

The verse addressed the claim that God promised not to punish the Jews and the Christians. Discrimination in treating human beings is against divine justice. Nobody should be given the right to break God’s law without suffering His punishment. All human beings are equal in front of God. He is capable of punishing whomsoever He wishes and forgiving whomsoever He wishes. To Him belongs the dominion of heavens and earth.

*“People of the Scripture, Our Messenger has now come to you, after an interval of cessation of the messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, ‘No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.’ So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you; God has the power to do all things.”* The verse made a clear statement to the people of the Scripture that a messenger has been sent to them, so they had no excuse. The verse challenged them to claim that they had not received a message to straighten out their distorted beliefs. They were also reminded that God has the power to send whosoever He wills as a messenger.

*“And when Moses said to his people, ‘My people, remember God’s blessings on you, how He raised prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given any other people. My people, enter the holy land which God assigned for you, and do not turn your back for then you will be losers.’ They said, ‘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.’”* One senses the trepidation that Moses (PBUH) felt when he was faced with the hesitant attitude of his people. The memory of his experience during the long journey from Egypt was still vivid in his mind. He tried to rally them around the cause that they came to achieve: to enter the Holy Land. He reminded them of the blessings of God and God’s promise to appoint from among them prophets and kings. This was a promise that was not given any other nation in the world. God promised them the Holy Land and God always fulfills His promise. Thus, turning back on their heels at this point would be a total loss. However, they forgot God’s promise in face of the danger they

sensed. They did not want to fight for the Holy Land even though they knew that God's promise will be fulfilled.

*“Two men of whom God has blessed among those who were afraid (to disobey) 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.’”* The verse gave a true depiction of the qualities of people having genuine faith. The fear of God filled the hearts of these two men. This fear gave them the strength and the courage to face the giants controlling the Holy Land. The fear of God and the fear of fellow human beings do not coexist in the heart of a believer. They told their people: enter the gate, for when you have entered you shall surely be victorious. This is the rule: advance and conquer and put your trust in God. Only believers put their trust in God. But their response was, *“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.”* This was a cowardly and rude response. Cowardice and rudeness usually go hand in hand. The response implied rejecting God as their Lord since believing in Him would force them to fight. Moses (PBUH) felt the pain of helplessness. He called upon his Lord, *“My Lord, I have no control (upon any) but my own self and my brother; therefore, judge between us and the transgressors.”*

God responded favorably to His Messenger's request and they were punished justly, *“God said, ‘Therefore will the land be forbidden to them for forty years (during which) they will wander the earth aimlessly. Do not grieve over the transgressors.’”* The Promised Land was declared forbidden to them, and they had to wander in the Diaspora for forty years. Most probably, this was a ruling that applied only to that generation in the hope that a new generation will arise to fulfill the terms of the covenant. A new generation raised in the desert will be free from the heritage of slavery and humiliation which the previous generation was subjected to in Egypt. A new generation will be better prepared to carry its responsibility courageously.

### **Verses: 27 to 40**

27. *(Prophet), tell them the truth about the story of the two sons of Adam: each of them offered a sacrifice (to God). It was accepted from one, but not from the other. The latter said, “I will, certainly slay you.” The former said, “God accepts only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him.*
28. *If you raise your hand to slay me, I will not raise my hand against you to slay you; for I do fear God, the Lord of the worlds.*
29. *And I would rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the fire, that is the reward of the wrongdoers.”*
30. *But his soul prompted him to murder his brother; he murdered him, and became one of the losers.*
31. *Then God sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide his brother's corpse. He said, “Woe is me, was I not even able to be as this raven, and cover my brother's body?” then he became remorseful.*
32. *On account of (this deed), We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all humankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind. Our messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.*

33. *The recompense for those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive hard to spread mischief in the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a great torment is theirs in the Hereafter;*
34. *Unless they repent before you overpower them; in that case, know that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
35. *You who believe, be conscious of God, seek the means to come closer to Him, and strive with might in his cause; so that you may succeed.*
36. *Certainly, those who disbelieved, even if they had what is in the earth, all of it, and the like of it with it, that they might ransom themselves with it from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall not be accepted from them, and they shall have a painful torment.*
37. *They will wish to get out of the Fire, but they will never get out therefrom; their torment will be one that endures.*
38. *Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are male or female as a punishment for what they have done – a deterrent from God, God is Eminent, Wise.*
39. *But whoso repents after his wrongdoing and amends, God will certainly, relent toward him, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
40. *Do you not know that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to God; He torments whom He pleases; and forgives whom He pleases and God has power over everything. (5:27-40)*

*“(Prophet), tell them the truth about the story of the two sons of Adam: each of them offered a sacrifice (to God). It was accepted from one, but not from the other. The latter said, ‘I will, certainly slay you.’ The former said, ‘God accepts only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him.’”* Tell them about these two models of humankind, and you are only telling them the truth. It is a true story that reveals certain dimensions of human nature. These two sons of Adam (PBUH) were trying to seek the pleasure of God by making offerings to Him. A person seeking the pleasure of God would not contemplate assaulting an innocent person. Committing such a crime defeats the purpose of making the offering. They made their offerings. The offering of one was accepted but the offering of the other was not. The verse is written in the passive voice which indicates that decisions whether to accept the offering or not and how it would be accepted were made by an unseen power. Two points need to be emphasized here. One, we should not dwell on the reasons behind the decision that one offering was accepted and the other was not. The second is the culpability of the person whose offering was accepted regarding the decision to reject the offering of his brother. The decision to reject the offering was made by an unseen power and no human deserves to be punished for it. However, the one whose offering was not accepted blamed the other for the rejection of his offering, he said, *“I will kill you.”* This statement indicates a premeditated intention to harm an innocent person. Such a horrible act could not be justified. It was incited by blind jealousy that filled the heart of the man whose offering was not accepted. The response of his brother only magnifies the gravity of the crime. In spite of the threat of impending harm, the brother simply responded by saying, *“God accepts only the sacrifice of those who are conscious of Him.”* In this brief statement, he tried to clarify the situation. He showed his brother the need to accept God’s decision, and directed his brother gently to the way that leads to God’s acceptance. The brother who is faithful, righteous, and peaceful, continued to explain to his vengeful brother, *“If you raise your hand to slay me, I will not raise my hand against you to slay you for I do fear God, the Lord of the worlds; and I would*

*rather you were burdened with my sins as well as yours and became an inhabitant of the Fire, that is the reward of the wrongdoers.*” In spite of the eminent danger, the response of the innocent brother portrayed a soul which reveled in peace and security. He would not raise a hand against his aggressive brother, even if the other tried to kill him. He could not entertain such desire, not because he was unable to, but because he was conscious of his Lord. He would rather have his brother be burdened with the sins of both of them. The culprit’s sins were the reason that his offering was not accepted in the first place. This was also an attempt to swerve his brother away from his bad intention by expressing how much he abhorred harming his brother. He also pointed out to him that the way to get his sins forgiven is to be conscious of God.

*“But his soul prompted him to the murder of his brother; he murdered him, and became one of the losers.”* In spite of all the pleading by the peaceful brother, evil prevailed and the soul of the wicked brother made it easy for him to commit the crime. He killed his brother and he became a loser. He lost his soul and got himself in trouble. He lost his brother who was his friend and companion. He lost comfort in this life and he lost the reward in the Hereafter. He realized the gravity of his crime when he saw the body of his brother lying on the ground and he did not know what to do with it. God in His wisdom wanted him to realize how helpless he was.

*“Then God sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide his brother’s corpse. He said, ‘Woe is me, was I not even able to be as this raven, and cover my brother’s body?’ Then he became remorseful.”* It is obvious that this was the first time for the killer to see a dead body being buried. It may be the case that this was the first time one of Adam’s (PBUH) offspring had died or that the killer may have been too young to have seen a dead person being buried before. It is also obvious that his regret was not for the bad deed that he committed, in such case he would have been forgiven by God, but the regret was for the realization that killing his brother did not solve his problem but added to it. The story emphasized the gravity of the crime and provided a foundation for the legislation dealing with the crime of murder, a legislation which should be a deterrent before the crime is committed and a tool for retribution after the crime has been committed.

*“On account of (this deed), We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone kills a person - unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land - it would be as if he killed all humankind; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all humankind. Our Messengers came to them with clear signs, but many of them continued to commit excesses in the land.”* On account of this incident, knowing that such aggressive human model exists and that such model may not heed advice or admonition, and for the protection of peaceful and righteous people who do not assault or commit evil against any one; God ordained for the children of Israel that killing one soul is equivalent to killing the whole human race and saving a single soul is equivalent to saving the whole human race.

*“The recompense for those who wage war against God and His Messenger, and strive hard to spread mischief in the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a great torment is theirs in the Hereafter; unless they repent before you overpower them; in that case, know that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse described the punishment for crimes that may be committed by gangs of outlaws against citizens of a Muslim state, a state governed by a

Muslim ruler who governs according to God's law. These gangs terrorize and assault people; and steal their money. These gangs are not only fighting the government or the citizens of the state but they are also fighting God and His Messenger because they are fighting God's law. They are spreading corruption and terrorism in the land. This is a horrendous crime. People who are proven guilty of committing such crime will be punished in this life as well as in the Hereafter. However, if they abandoned violence and repented before they were seized, then they should be granted amnesty. The rationale behind granting them amnesty, if they repent while they are still free and able to commit more atrocities, has two components. First, abandoning their wicked ways while they are still in a position of power and are able to inflict more harm on the society is an expression of remorse and their serious intention to go back to the right way. Second, amnesty provides an incentive for such gangs to seek forgiveness and saves the society the burden of fighting them.

*“You who believe, be conscious of God, seek the means to come closer to Him, and strive with might in his cause; so that you may succeed.”* The divine project takes into account human nature. It recognizes its weaknesses and its strengths. It aims at promoting goodness in the human soul and encouraging people to follow the law. This cannot be achieved by punishment alone. Fear of the worldly consequences of breaking the law is not sufficient to create a healthy society. Punishment may deter people from committing crimes, however it does not change the criminal mindset. Quran encourages people to seek the pleasure of God by adopting means to bring them nearer to God. This is the honourable way for human beings to follow. So, be conscious of your Lord and seek the means to come near to Him. Seeking help from God empowers them and puts them on the road to success.

*“Certainly, those who disbelieved, even if they had what is in the earth, all of it, and the like of it with it, that they might ransom themselves with it from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall not be accepted from them, and they shall have a painful torment. They will wish to get out of the Fire, but they will never get out therefrom; their torment will be one that endures.”* The verse paints an image for the disbelievers on the Day of Judgment. One can imagine that they have all what is on the earth and the like of it, trying to ransom themselves from the punishment by giving away that wealth and yet they are incapable of ransoming themselves.

*“Cut off the hands of thieves, whether they are male or female as a punishment for what they have done – a deterrent from God, God is Eminent, Wise. But whoso repents after his wrongdoing and amends, surely, God will relent toward him, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Do you not know that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to God; He torments whom He pleases; and forgives whom He pleases and God has power over everything.”* The government in an Islamic society should guarantee a decent living, appropriate education, and social justice for all its citizens; Muslims and non-Muslims alike. No citizen should be faced with the temptation to steal to support him/herself. Islam requires a decent life for all citizens. It ensures that each citizen has an ample access to education and health services. It decrees social justice for all. The right to have personal property gained through legal means is sacred. Personal property is a way to enrich the society and to benefit its citizens. It should be protected. It is then logical to specify a severe punishment for the crime of theft. However, for the punishment to be enacted, the alleged perpetrator has to be proven guilty without a shadow of a doubt.

Islam provides an integrated system which organizes the life of people in a Muslim state. For the Islamic system to be successful, it has to be applied in its entirety. Partial application of the system is counterproductive. The rationale behind enacting a law to address a specific crime may not be clear unless we examine the system as a whole. Let us examine the laws regarding the punishment for the crime of theft. All citizens of a Muslim state have the right to live a decent life. They have the right to have all their basic needs satisfied. These needs include food, clothing, and a comfortable home. The state has to provide education and appropriate work opportunities for its citizens so that they become gainfully employed and are able to afford a decent life. The state has to provide the necessary support for those who are unable to work, those whose income is not sufficient, and those who lost their jobs either temporarily or permanently. Islam prescribes three different measures that can be used to address the needs of the poor or needy. First, affluent family members are obligated to support their kin who are needy. If the family members are all poor, then the responsibility falls on the rich people of the town or the village. If this kind of help is not available, then Zakat money is used to address the need. An Islamic government should provide a reasonably decent life for its citizens.

Islam is very particular about the ways which are used to acquire wealth. All properties should be acquired through legal means. Since, wealth can only be acquired through hard work and legal means, then there is no reason for anyone to begrudge the wealthy. Islam trains its adherents to adopt highly ethical values and to behave accordingly. It motivates them to work hard and seek legal means for earning their living. If for some reason they are unable to work or it so happened that their income is not sufficient to ensure a decent life, then the government is obligated to cover that shortage.

In such a society stealing can only be motivated by greed and the desire for easy and quick gain. This is not acceptable in an Islamic setting. Such acts terrorize the society, threaten people's security, and infringe the right for legal ownership that people deserve. It is the right of all members of the society, who work hard and earn their living through legal means and pay their dues, to ensure that their property is protected. This system ensures that the basic needs for people are satisfied. Therefore, there is no excuse for those who choose to steal other people's property. This is a punishable crime.

However, punishments can only be executed if the crime has been proven without a shadow of a doubt. Any doubt renders the punishment inapplicable. 'Umar (RA) did not apply the punishment for theft during the year of draught (when there was a famine). Another example which illustrates this point is the story of the two servants of Ibn Hatab ibn abi Balta'h (RA) who stole a she camel from a man from a tribe called Mazeenah. Originally, 'Umar (RA) decided to punish the servants when they were proven guilty. However, when 'Umar (RA) came to know that the servants were often left without food and that their master did not satisfy their basic needs, 'Umar (RA) decided to pardon the servants. He punished their master by commanding him to repay the owner of the she camel twice its price.

Now, let us discuss the punishment for the crime of theft. A crime of theft is defined as stealing money or property that has a monetary value of more than about one dollar. The money or the property must be locked up in a secure place which is not accessible to people. Exceptions are made in certain situations. Examples of these are a person stealing money that was left with him/

her as a trust, a servant stealing items that left unlocked in the house, a person refusing to repay his/her debt, or a person stealing fruits from a tree in an open field. The punishment for theft is not applicable in these situations. However, in such situations, the judge can impose different punishments depending on the gravity of the crime.

The punishment for the crime of theft is the cutting of the right hand to the wrist. A second offense is punished by cutting the left foot to the ankle. The scholars differed as to the punishments for repeating offenders who commit the crime of theft for more than two times. This punishment may seem to be a harsh and inhumane, but it is meant to be a deterrent. It also meant to send a message that the tool which is used to make illegal gains can be easily lost. This deterrent worked well, one can cite very few cases during the early years of Islam when it was necessary to enact the punishment.

In any case, the door for repentance is always open for those who seek it. Wrongdoing has grave consequences. Thus, for repentance to be accepted the wrongdoing has to be redressed. It is not only sufficient for a Muslim to abstain from committing injustice but it is also important that we make positive contribution to the society. Urging people to make positive contributions provides them with incentive to abstain from committing injustices.

The topics mentioned in these verses flow nicely from Islam's strategy to train people to practice an Islamic way of life. First, the crime is outlined followed by citing the punishment, then comes the way out and finally a reminder of the power of God. God created humankind and He knows what is good and what is bad for people. God has the ultimate authority over everything.

## **Verses: 41 to 50**

- 41. Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race each other into rejecting faith: (whether it be) among those who say "We believe" with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews, who will listen eagerly to lies, and to those who have not even met you. They distort the meaning of the revealed words. They say (to each other), "If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware." If God intends to put any one to trial you will be powerless against God on their behalf, for those are the ones whose hearts God does not want to purify. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a grievous torment.*
- 42. They are fond of listening to falsehood, and they devour what is unlawful. If they do come to you for judgment, either judge between them, or decline. If you decline, they cannot hurt you in the least. If you judge between them, judge justly. God loves those who judge justly.*
- 43. But why do they come to you for judgment, when they have the Torah with God's judgment and even then, they still turn away. They are not really believers.*
- 44. We revealed the Torah, wherein there are guidance and light. By which the prophets who submitted to God, judged the Jews; so did the rabbis and the scholars, for to them was entrusted the protection of God's book, and they were witnesses thereto. Therefore, fear*



- not people, but fear Me, and sell not my verses for a small price. Whosoever fails to judge by (the light of) what God has revealed, such are the disbelievers.*
45. *We prescribed for them in the Torah: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. But whoso forgoes the just retribution by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself. And whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the wrongdoers.*
46. *And We sent Jesus the son of Mary in their footsteps, confirming the Torah that had come before him. We gave him the Gospel; therein was guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who are God conscious.*
47. *So, let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed therein. Whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the transgressors.*
48. *To you (Muhammad), We sent the Book with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so judge between them by what God has revealed; and follow not their vain desires which diverge from the truth that has come to you. To each among you We have prescribed a law and a path. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you in what He has given you; so vie one with another in doing good deeds. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters which you differed about.*
49. *So (Prophet) judge between them according to what God has revealed, and follow not their whims, and beware of them lest they beguile you from any of what God has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that God intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed. And truly most people are transgressors.*
50. *Is it a judgment of the time of (idolatry) ignorance that they are seeking? Who is better than God as a judge for a people who have certitude? (5:41-50)*

*“Messenger, do not be grieved by those who race each other into rejecting faith: (whether it be) among those who say, ‘We believe’ with their lips but whose hearts have no faith; or it be among the Jews, who will listen eagerly to lies, and to those who have not even met you. They distort the meaning of the revealed words. They say (to each other), ‘If you are given this ruling, accept it, but if you are not, then beware.’ If God intends to put any one to trial, you will be powerless against God on their behalf. For those are the ones whose hearts God does not want to purify. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a grievous torment. They are fond of listening to falsehood, and they devour what is unlawful. If they do come to you for judgment, either judge between them, or decline. If you decline, they cannot hurt you in the least. If you judge between them, judge justly. God loves those who judge justly. But why do they come to you for judgment, when they have the Torah with God’s judgment and even then, they still turn away. They are not really believers.”* It seems that these verses were revealed during the first years after the migration to Medina. During these years some of the Jewish tribes living in Medina were plotting against the Muslims. The hypocrites allied themselves with these tribes. This used to sadden the Prophet (PBUH). The verses came to offer support and consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). The verses also instructed the Prophet (PBUH) in ways to deal with those who plot against him and the believers. These verses describe a situation where members of a Jewish tribe committed certain offenses for which there were specific prescribed punishments in the Torah.

The original prescribed punishments were harsh. However, gradually, the punishments were relaxed and were replaced with lighter punishments. They asked the Prophet (PBUH) what punishment he would suggest for these offenses. They had hoped that he would suggest the lighter punishments. However, they were determined to ignore the Prophet's (PBUH) suggestion if they did not like it. This opportunistic approach reflects the insincerity of these people. God is telling His Messenger that this was a test for these people, a test that they failed. The Prophet (PBUH) is asked not to grieve over this. The hearts of these people were corrupt; and they were fond of listening to falsehood. They were no longer in pursuit of the truth. This is what happens to people who stray away from their Book. Their societies become decadent. These are people who have long lost the true meaning of their faith and they only follow the technicalities. They try to find a trick or a crooked decree to avoid what they consider difficult tasks. We can see this today among the Muslims who said, "*We believe with their lips but whose hearts have no faith.*" The verses came to console the Prophet (PBUH). These were people who were tried by God and because their corrupt hearts they failed the test. The Prophet (PBUH) could not save anyone from God's trial.

They had no scruples about the sources of their wealth. They earned their living through illegal means. The Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice either to respond to their request or to abstain from suggesting any punishment. However, if the Prophet (PBUH) chose to judge among them, he should do that with absolute justice. God loves those who are just. The Muslim leader and the Muslim judge should seek the pleasure of God when they pass their judgments. They should know that it is God's justice they apply not their own; this is the guarantee for establishing justice in an Islamic society.

The fact that the Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice to judge or not to judge implies that these verses must have been revealed in the early days of the life of Muslims in Medina. Once the Muslim state has been established, Islamic law has to be applied and it becomes incumbent on the ruler to rule according to Islamic law. Islamic law allows the people of the Scripture living in an Islamic society to follow their own law regarding the lawful and the forbidden. For example, Christians living in an Islamic state are allowed to eat pork and drink wine.

But why did they ask the prophet while they knew the punishment that Torah had prescribed? But they turned away from it. They were not true believers because believers obey God's law. Believers uphold God's law. Those who reject God's law are no longer considered believers. This verse is similar to verse 65 Sura 4, "*But no, by your Lord, they will not truly believe until they make you (Muhammad) judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit willingly full submission.*" (4: 65) The two verses deal with those who are being judged, not with judges; and both verses emphasize that it is the essence of faith to accept God's judgement.

The previous verses dealt with the people being judged and the following verses deal with the judges, "*We revealed the Torah, wherein there are guidance and light. By which the prophets who submitted to God, judged the Jews; so did the rabbis and the scholars, for to them was entrusted the protection of God's book, and they were witnesses thereto. Therefore, fear not people, but fear Me, and sell not my verses for a small price. Whosoever fails to judge by (the light of) what God has revealed, such are disbelievers. We prescribed for them in the Torah: a*

*life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. But whoso forgoes the just retribution by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself. Whosoever fails to judge according to what God has revealed, such are the wrongdoers.*” This verse addressed the case of rulers who do not rule according to God’s law. Religion is not only a set of beliefs that are meant to settle in people’s hearts, nor a set of rituals to be practiced in a temple but religion is a way of life. It provides laws which organize life on earth. These laws have to be followed in our daily life. God is the only authority to issue such laws. He controls everything in this life and to Him we will be accountable in the Hereafter.

God revealed the Torah to guide the children of Israel to the path of God. It has the light to guide them in their daily life. It brought them the doctrine of the Oneness of God as well as the law. The Prophets (PBUH) were commanded to rule according to the law and to keep their practices pure for the sake of God. This is the meaning of submission (Islam). The rabbis and scholars were asked to be witnesses for God by living according to God’s law. God knows that, in every place and at all times, there will be some who will resist the rule of God’s law. These are the people who will feel threaten because God’s law will outstrip them of the power which they use to rule people, guided only by their whims and desires. People who grow their wealth using shady financial practices will never accept the rule of God’s law. They know that the rule of God’s law will not permit them to continue their unfair practices. This group also includes those who are immersed into cheap material enjoyment and hedonistic practices. They know that these practices are unlawful under the rule of God’s law. Others who simply hate to see peace, tranquility and goodness spread all over the earth will also oppose the rule of God’s law. God knows this. This is why He commanded those who are entrusted with the establishment of the law not to fear people but to fear Him instead. The establishment of God’s law should not be hindered by the fear that it will displease those who oppose God’s law. God is the only one who deserves to be feared.

God also knows that those who are entrusted with establishing the rule of God’s law may succumb to the temptation of the material pleasures of life. So, they are commanded not to sell God’s law for few pennies. They may be tempted by the corrupt to turn a blind eye, distort the law, or issue corrupt verdicts in return for cheap worldly pleasures. Any price they get for distorting the law is small no matter how big it was. No crime is more grievous for a man in a position of responsibility than betraying the trust. Finally, the verse ends with a strong statement: those who do not uphold the rule of God’s law are disbelievers. The rationale behind this statement is that those who do not uphold the rule of God’s law essentially refuse the right of God to rule. They thus reject one of the main attributes of God.

The verse gave an example of the laws revealed in the Torah, *“We prescribed for them in the Torah: a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound.”* These laws were adopted into the Islamic law. This is the law that should apply till the end of time. These laws apply only within the borders of a Muslim state because a Muslim state has no jurisdiction beyond its borders. This law was complemented in the Islamic law by the addition of a new article. This is the article that allows a person to forgo the retribution as an act of charity, *“But whoso forgoes the retaliation by way of charity, it will be an act of atonement for himself.”*

It may be appropriate to comment on the concept of retribution in Islam. Equality is a fundamental principle underlying the retribution laws. All people are equal irrespective of their ethnicity, social status, or rank. A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and a wound for an equal wound. People are equal in front of God's law. This fundamental principle which was proclaimed by God's law is the true announcement of the new birth of the human race. All human beings are equal.

Retribution is intended to be a deterrent. When a person knows that he /she will suffer harm similar to that which they inflicted on others, criminals may think twice before inflicting harm on others. Imprisonment is not effective as a deterrent. However, Islam adds a new dimension: the dimension of forgiveness. God promised those who forgive the people who harmed them a great reward. The verse ends by a new attribute for those who do not uphold God's law. They are wrongdoers. They are wrongdoers because they do not use God's law to judge among people. Thus, they use the wrong law in their judgments.

*“And We sent Jesus the son of Mary in their footsteps, confirming the Torah that had come before him. We gave him the Gospel; therein was guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him: guidance and admonition to those who are God conscious. So, let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed therein. If any do fail to judge according to what God has revealed such are the transgressors.”* God revealed the Gospel to Prophet Jesus the son of Mary (PBUH). The Gospel came to establish a way of life. It came to confirm the law that was revealed in the Torah. The Gospel brought guidance, light, and admonition to those who are conscious of God. Those who are God conscious are the ones who seek guidance and their hearts are touched with the light of the Gospel. Those who are hard hearted do not benefit from this guidance, are unable to see the light, nor are they able to heed the admonition. The Gospel and the Torah came to guide specific communities. Each community is commanded to apply the laws that were revealed to them in their Scripture. These Scriptures were not meant to be the universal message to all people. A third attribute is then used to describe those who do not apply God's law: they are transgressors. Three attributes describe those who do not uphold God's law. They are disbelievers, wrongdoers, and transgressors.

*“To you (Muhammad), We sent the Book with the truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so judge between them by what God has revealed; and follow not their vain desires which diverge from the truth that has come to you. To each among you We have prescribed a law and a path. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you in what He has given you; so vie one with another in doing good deeds. You will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters which you differed about. So (Prophet) judge between them according to what God has revealed, and follow not their whims, and beware of them lest they beguile you from any of what God has sent down to you. And if they turn away, be assured that God intends to punish them for some of the sins they have committed. And truly most people are transgressors. Is it a judgment of the time of (idolatry) ignorance that they are seeking? Who is better than God as a judge for a people who have certitude?”* Finally, the last message is addressed. It is the message of Islam in its final form. It is the universal message which addresses all people. It confirms and supersedes all the forms that came before it. It establishes the way of life that God wants for His servants. It came not only to be studied as an intellectual exercise, but to be applied as a way of life. It addresses

all the details of the daily lives of people. Reading this unequivocal command to apply God's law, one wonders, how can Muslims abandon the rule of God? The Book came with the truth. It is the truth because it is a revelation from God. God is the only authority to dictate the law and to formulate the rules. It is the truth because its contents embody the truth. This is the last Scripture to be revealed from God. It is the final reference which outlines the characteristics of the way of life that God has decreed. It embodies the final form of the message of submission (Islam.) Therefore, it is the standard that should be used to settle all arguments related to matters of faith and lives of the believers. The verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to apply God's law. However, this specific command is generalized to include all Muslims. All Muslims should apply God's law in its entirety as long as they live.

This religion was revealed in its entirety, it is a blessing that God has bestowed on His servants, and it is a way of life that God wants His servants to adopt. No one has the authority to change its contents. Muslims cannot abandon its rules, nor replace them with manmade ones. God knows that the rules revealed in the Quran accommodate the needs of all people. These rules ensure goodness for those who follow them. These rules are adaptable to the changing needs of people with time until the Day of Judgment. This is a fact that each and every Muslim should know.

The verses carried a warning for the Prophet (PBUH) not to abandon God's law in favour of the whims of others. The warning was emphasized twice. God knew that there will be people who will make excuses to seek an exemption from following the command to apply God's rules. One excuse may be motivated by their desire to bring people of different faiths, different, political views, or different persuasions living in one country under a banner that they would all subscribe to. This may result in attempts to side step some rules which may not seem important in order to satisfy other groups. God's law should not be compromised in any way. God has decreed different rules for different people. Had God wanted all people to follow the same rule, He would have done that. It is therefore, critical not to compromise God's law in any way.

God consoled His Prophet (PBUH) by telling him not to be grieved by those who will turn away and refuse to apply God's law. The Prophet (PBUH) should persevere in applying God's law. He should not be tempted by the thought that he can pacify these people by side stepping God's law. They will be punished by God for turning away and no harm will befall the Prophet (PBUH) or the believers as a result of this. This closes all doors in the way of Satan who will always try to tempt people to abandon God's law. The warning is clear and the question is posed: do the believers want to follow God's law or do they want to follow the idolaters' law (law of ignorance)? There is no middle way, it is one or the other. This verse defines the meaning of the term "ignorance." The law of ignorance is the law that allows the rulers to judge people according to their whims and desires. It is a kind of slavery, because it places people under the mercy of their rulers. It denies God's right to be the only master and gives that privilege to a mere mortal. Ignorance is not a period of time in history but it is a state of human life. This state can exist at any time and in any place. People who choose to follow God's law are the believers. Those who abandon God's law in favor of a manmade law are living in a state of ignorance. The verse concludes by stating the best choice a person firm in faith can make in choosing a judge: God is the best of the law makers. The best law maker is the Creator who created people and knows them best. He knows best what is good for them. He is the most Merciful to His people.

He knows best what will happen in the future, and makes the law adaptable to the future needs of people. This is a central issue that needs to be understood by each and every Muslim. Applying God's law is what makes them Muslims. Abandoning God's law in favor of a manmade law places them in a state of ignorance.

## **Verses: 51 to 66**

51. *You who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as protecting guardians. They are protecting guardians only to each other. And he among you who takes them as protecting guardians becomes one of them. Verily God does not guide those who are wrongdoers.*
52. *But you will see those in whose hearts is a disease rushing to them for protection, saying, "We fear that a calamity should befall us;" but God may well bring about victory or a command from Himself, then they will regret the thoughts which they secretly harbored in their hearts.*
53. *And those who believe will say, "Are these those who swore their strongest oaths by God that they were with you?" All that they do will be in vain and they will become losers.*
54. *You who believe, if any of you turn back from his faith, soon will God replace you with people whom He loves and who love Him. They are people who are humble towards the believers, mighty against the disbelievers, fighting in the way of God, and never afraid of the reproach of anyone. That is the grace of God, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.*
55. *Your true protecting guardians are God, His Messenger, and the believers- those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms, and they bow down humbly (in worship).*
56. *Those who turn to God, His Messenger, and the believers for protection (are God's party); God's party will certainly triumph.*
57. *You who believe, do not take as protecting guardians those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it, whether from among those who received the Scripture before you, or among the disbelievers; but be conscious of God if you are true believers.*
58. *When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make a mockery out of it; that is because they are a people who do not understand.*
59. *Say, "People of the Scripture, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, we believe in which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed before us, while most of you are transgressors.*
60. *Say, "Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than (the punishment you wish upon) us: those whom God has cursed, those on whom God's wrath has fallen, those whom God condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the straight path.*
61. *When they come to you, they say, "We believe." But in fact they come with a disbelieving mindset, and they leave with the same, but God knows fully all that they hide.*
62. *And you see many of them vying one another into sin and transgression, and eating what is unlawfully acquired; how evil is that which they do?*
63. *Why do not their godly people and rabbis forbid them from uttering sinful words and eating forbidden things? How evil is that which they do?*

64. *And the Jews said, "God's hand is tied up." Their hands shall be shackled and they shall be cursed for what they say. Truly, God's hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases; and what has been revealed to you from your Lord will certainly make many of them more insolent and defiant; and We have placed enmity and hatred among them till the day of resurrection; whenever they kindle a fire for war God puts it out, and they strive to make mischief in the land; and God does not love the mischief-makers.*
65. *If only the people of the Scripture had believed and been righteous, We would indeed have absolved them of their evil deeds and admitted them to gardens of bliss.*
66. *If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have been given abundance from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct. (5:51-66)*

*"You who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as protecting guardians. They are protecting guardians only to each other. And he among you who takes them as protecting guardians becomes one of them. Verily God does not guide those who are wrongdoers. But you will see those in whose hearts is a disease rushing to them for protection, saying, 'We fear that a calamity should befall us;' but God may well bring about victory or a command from Himself, then they will regret the thoughts which they secretly harbored in their hearts. And those who believe will say, 'Are these those who swore their strongest oaths by God that they were with you?' All that they do will be in vain and they will become losers."* We need first to explain what is meant by the term "Protecting guardians" mentioned in the verse. The term "Protecting guardians" here refers to alliances between Muslims and Jews or Christians which involved pledges of protection and support. The verse is referring to a state of affair that was prevalent during the early days of Muslims in Medina. Some Muslims thought that such alliances are allowed. Muslims thought that it is possible to have such alliances especially since they had a great deal of business dealings with the Jews of Medina. The verse commanded the Muslims to abandon these alliances, since it became clear that such alliances are not plausible. Muslims are commanded to treat the Christians and the Jews kindly and fairly. Christians and Jews living in a Muslim state have all the rights and privileges that all citizens enjoy. However, the way the Christian and Jewish groups viewed Muslims and Islam at that time made all attempts to seek political alliances between the different groups unsuccessful.

The verse warned Muslims, who were still seeking to get protection for their interests from the Jews, that they were doing themselves, Islam, and the Muslims great injustice. God will deprive them His guidance and will make them outcasts because God does not guide those who commit wrongdoing. This was a very strong warning for Muslims in Medina. The warning reflects the gravity of the situation in Medina at that time. A person who is seeking to ally himself with the enemy of Islam and the Muslims betrays Islam, himself, and his fellow Muslims.

An example of the situations which explain the rationale behind these verses is narrated by Mohamed Ibn Ishaq. He said, *"I was told on the authority of Abi Ishaq ibn Yasar, that both Abd-Allah ibn Obai (RA) and Obada ibn Al-Samet (RA) were allies to the Jewish tribe of Banu Qinuqa' when war erupted between them and the Muslims. Obada (RA) went to the prophet (PBUH) and denounced his alliance with Banu Qinuqa' while Abd-Allah kept his alliance."*

This story gives a glimpse of the conditions of the Muslim community in Medina at that time and how it was affected by the relationships that existed between the different tribes before Islam. Rules which organize the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims were not finalized yet. Although the interactions which prompted the revelation of this verse were mainly between Muslims and Jews, but the verse included the Christians as well. The verse established a principle regarding political alliances between Muslims and other non-Muslim groups. Muslims should only seek alliances with other Muslims. These alliances should only be in the sake of God, and for the benefit of the Muslim community. This does not violate the fundamental principle that Muslims must treat non-Muslims kindly. A Muslim is commanded to treat the people of the Scripture kindly (as long as they do not wage war against Muslims or persecute them). Muslims are allowed to marry Christian and Jewish women but that does not mean that Muslims are required to support Christianity or Judaism over Islam. Muslims are asked to call all non-Muslims to Islam but they cannot compel anyone to accept Islam. Faith is a matter of the heart and no one has control over people's hearts. Compulsion in religion is not only forbidden in Islam but it is counterproductive.

When victory comes, those who have sickness in their hearts will regret their decision to hasten in supporting the Jews and Christians against the Muslims. Their hypocrisy will be revealed. The believers will recognize the hypocrites and they will look upon them with disdain.

*“You who believe, if any of you turn back from his faith, soon will God replace you with people whom He loves and who love Him. They are people who are humble towards the believers, mighty against the disbelievers, fighting in the way of God, and never afraid of the reproach of anyone. That is the grace of God, which He will bestow on whom He pleases. And God is Vast, Omniscient.”* Certainly, it is a great blessing to be chosen by God to fight in His sake, to bring the truth to people, and to establish God's rule on earth. People are free to accept or reject this blessing. God will choose those who can carry out the mission. They will be blessed by the grace of God. This group will have specific characteristics. They love God and God loves them. Only those who are able to recognize their Lord can appreciate His love. They recognize God through the attributes which He described Himself with. They feel these attributes deep in their hearts and throughout their whole beings. Only those who are able to recognize the Giver are able to appreciate the gift.

It is even a greater blessing for the servant to be able to love His Lord. Only those who experienced that love are able to appreciate its sweetness. This is a unique feeling that no words can express. Rabi'ah El-'Adawiyah tried to describe her love of God when she said, *“I don't mind how bitter life is, if I can experience the sweetness of Your nearness. I don't mind how angry everyone is at me, if You are pleased with me. I don't mind if everyone else abandoned me, if I can still maintain my contact with You. I don't need anyone else, if I am able to experience Your love. Everything above the dust is dust.”*

Another attribute that this group has is treating the believers with humility. This is an attribute that emanates from their obedience to God. The believers listen to each other, they obey each other, and they love each other. The word humility here does not mean subservience but it implies brotherhood and love. On the other hand, they deal with the disbelievers with dignity. They know that they are on the right path and they are proud of their faith. They are sure that the



truth will prevail. They fight in the sake of God fearing no blame from the others. This fight is not for personal, national, or ethnic gain. It is a fight in the sake of God, to establish the divine project and to support goodness over evil. They have no reason to fear people since they have the assurance of the love of the Lord of the people. This is a blessing from God. He bestows His blessings abundantly on whomsoever He chooses.

*“Your true protecting guardians are God, His Messenger, and the believers- those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms, and they bow down humbly (in worship).”* The verse defined clearly the true protecting guardians of Muslims. It also reiterated the criteria which distinguish the believers. The believers are those who establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed poor dues. Establishing prayers implies more than just “performing” prayers. It means striving to perfection so that the expected fruits of the prayer are achieved as has been stated in the verse *“Certainly, prayer forbids evil and sin.”* (29:45) So, those whose prayers do not forbid them to commit evil have not “established” prayers. They also pay the prescribed alms. The objective behind prescribing alms is more than providing financial help to the poor. Paying the prescribed alms is an act of obedience to God. Muslims should pay the alms willingly and with the sole purpose of pleasing God. The word Zakat in Arabic implies purification and growth. It is purification of the souls of those who pay it. Those who pay Zakat will not only be rewarded in the Hereafter, but will also experience growth in their wealth in this life. Paying Zakat enriches the economic system and strengthens the social fabric of the society. Poor people who receive Zakat know that they are only receiving what is their right, a right that has been given to them by God. They will not begrudge the rich for their wealth which they have accumulated legally. The rich know that they will be rewarded by God for fulfilling this obligation. They will only be grateful to God that they are able to fulfill their obligations and they will look for God’s blessings. Thus, the Alms will help create an environment full of empathy, love and brotherhood.

*“Those who turn to God, His Messenger, and the believers for protection (are God’s party); God’s party will certainly triumph.”* This is God’s promise to the believers; those who trust in God and seek His support alone will be granted victory against their enemy. The promise is given after the criterion for trusting in God has been explained. Allegiance and loyalty are pledged only to God, His Prophet and the believers. A warning against political alliances with the Jews and the Christians against Muslims has been delivered.

*“You who believe, do not take as protecting guardians those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it, whether from among those who received the Scripture before you, or among those who reject faith; but be conscious of God if you are true believers. When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make a mockery out of it; that is because they are a people who do not understand.”* This is a challenge for those who accept that their faith, their rituals, and their prayers be ridiculed. How can they pledge political allegiance to those who commit such acts against the believers? Those who ridicule the Muslims and their faith have no understanding. The disbelievers and the Jews used to ridicule the believers. There is no account that the Christians were guilty of such acts. However, the criterion which identifies those who are worthy of the allegiance of the believers has been formulated and will remain valid forever. There came times in history when Christians practiced the same behavior against Muslims. The Christian West sent crusaders, occupying armies, and missionaries to conquer Muslim lands and to convert

Muslims to Christianity. Prohibiting political alliances with the Christians under this principle seems logical.

It must be emphasized that Islam commands Muslims to be tolerant and to treat the people of the Scripture, especially the Christians, kindly. However, political alliances and kind treatment are two different issues. Tolerance and kind treatment are matters of behaviour but a political alliance is a matter of faith and strategy. A political alliance requires those who subscribe to the alliance to support each other against a common enemy. Muslims should not be party to an alliance which targets other Muslims.

*“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, we believe in which was revealed to us, and that which was revealed before us, while most of you are transgressors.’ Say, ‘Shall I tell you who deserves a worse punishment from God than (the punishment you wish upon) us: those whom God has cursed, those on whom God’s wrath has fallen, those whom God condemned as apes and pigs, and those who worship idols. Such are in worse plight and further astray from the straight path.”* The verse stated a rhetorical question that God instructed His Messenger to pose to the people of the Scripture. The objective was to underscore the actual behavior of the people of Scripture and to reveal the real motivation behind their animosity towards the Muslims. The question condemned the attitude of the people of the Scripture and alerted Muslims to the grave consequences that may occur as a result of the position which the people of the Scripture assumed.

The verse explains that the people of Scripture resented the fact that the Muslims were given a Book from God and that they follow that Book. The verse explains that those who harboured this resentment are transgressors. Transgressors do not tolerate seeing others following the straight path. If they admit that Muslims are on the straight path, then they are accepting the fact that they are following a crooked path. To avoid this self incrimination, they convinced themselves that Muslims were wrong.

Idol worshippers are cursed. What is the meaning of idol worshipping that the verse alluded to? Idol worship mentioned here alludes to following any power that does not emanate from God, any rule that is not derived from God’s law, and any transgression from the truth. The people of the Scripture did not worship their scholars and priests but they followed their commands and abandoned God’s commands. They are then idolaters because they followed manmade laws instead of God’s law. Idolatry in this verse does not mean worshipping idols, but it means putting manmade laws above God’s law.

*“When they come to you, they say, ‘We believe.’ But in fact they come with a disbelieving mindset, and they leave with the same but God knows fully all that they hide. And you see many of them vying one another into sin and transgression, and eating what is unlawfully acquired; how evil is that which they do? Why do not their rabbis and scholars forbid them from uttering sinful words and eating forbidden things? How evil is that which they do? And the Jews said, ‘God’s hand is tied up.’ Their hands shall be shackled and they shall be cursed for what they say. Truly, God’s hands are spread out, He expends as He pleases; and what has been revealed to you from your Lord will certainly make many of them more insolent and defiant; and We have*

*placed enmity and hatred among them till the day of resurrection; whenever they kindle a fire for war God puts it out, and they strive to make mischief in the land; and God does not love the mischief-makers.*” The verses transform centuries old events into dynamic images and live scenes, following the unique Quranic style, to make the readers feel as if they were present when these events took place. The verses talk about those who used to approach Muslims pretending to be believers, while their hearts were full of disbelief. However, God knew what they concealed in their hearts. This statement was made to reassure the believers and to warn their enemy that they cannot hide anything from God. They hastened, as if they were in a race, to commit sins and to eat that which they gained unlawfully. The verse then alludes to one of the characteristics of corrupt societies. The fact that the scholars who derive and explain the laws of jurisprudence and matters of faith were silent in the face of the corruption they witness. The verse alerts those who are in authority in any community to their duty to command what is good and forbid what is evil. These duties cannot be fulfilled without authority.

Some Jews said that God’s hands are tied up and in another verse of the Quran they said God is poor and we are rich, implying that God does not give people much. This is just an excuse to justify the fact that they do not want to spend in the sake of God. They deserve to be cursed for these evil words which they uttered against God. The verse addressed these evil claims by stating that God’s hands are wide open. He spends as He wills. His bounty is limitless. His gifts that He bestows on His servants are abundant. God tells His messenger about what will befall these people. They will become more insolent and defiant because they refused the gift of true belief. God will allow enmity and hatred to burgeon between them; and their schemes against the Muslims will be in vain. However, God will quell the fire of war that they will kindle. God will send others to stop the corruption that the transgressors are spreading in the land, because God does not like corruption.

*“If only the People of the Scripture had believed and been righteous, We should indeed have absolved them of their evil deeds and admitted them to gardens of bliss. If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and that which was revealed to them from their Lord, they would certainly have been given abundance from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them there are people who are moderate, but many of them are of evil conduct.”* These two verses established a fundamental principle in Islam. It is very important to explain and emphasize this principle. God is telling the people of the Scripture that if they believe and remain conscious of God, He will expiate their sins and will admit them to gardens of bliss. This is their reward in the Hereafter. Furthermore, if they follow God’s path, as explained in the Torah and the Gospel and what God had revealed to them without any deviation, they will have a better life on this earth and they will enjoy an abundance of provision. But many of them deviated and did not follow the path of God. The principle is clear: those who follow God’s path and remain conscious of Him will not only get their reward in the Hereafter, but will also enjoy success in this life. There is a single route that leads to the success in both this life and the Hereafter. This route is guaranteed for those who believe and remain continuously conscious of God. Following God’s path does not only mean trying to attain superior spirituality, but it also means leading a way of life that emanates from the divine project. This way of life is based on two pillars: true belief and God consciousness. This path does not request humankind to sacrifice this life in favour of the Hereafter, nor to sacrifice the Hereafter for the sake of this life. According to the divine project, humankind is the vicegerent of God on earth with His permission and according to the constraints that He places

on His servants. To fulfill the obligations of being a vicegerent of God on earth, human beings should work hard utilizing all the resources that were made available by God to develop a rich and prosperous life on earth. This task is an act of obedience to God. Humankind will be rewarded for it in the Hereafter, while reaping the benefit of the progress made in this life. Those who will not fulfill this obligation are considered sinners. Under this principle the duality of humankind's life is removed. There is no contradiction between working for this life and working for the Hereafter. It is one route that leads to success in both worlds.

### **Verses: 67 to 81**

67. *Messenger, proclaim the (message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you will not have conveyed His message. And God will defend you from people, for God does not guide those who disbelieve.*
68. *Say, "People of the Scripture, you have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." What has been revealed to you (Muhammad) from your Lord will increase in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But do not worry about those who do not believe.*
69. *Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (Scripture), the Sabians, and the Christians - any who believe in God and the Last Day - and do righteous deeds, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
70. *We took the covenant of the children of Israel and sent them messengers. Whenever, a messenger brought them something that they do not like, they called some impostors, and some they slew.*
71. *They thought there would be no trial (or punishment); so they became blind and deaf; yet God (in mercy) turned to them; yet again many of them became blind and deaf. But God sees well all what they do.*
72. *They are verily disbelievers who say, "God is the Messiah, son of Mary." The Messiah (himself) said, "Children of Israel, serve God: my Lord and your Lord." Whosoever associates partners with God, God will then forbid him to enter paradise. Hell will be his refuge. No one will help such wrongdoers.*
73. *They are verily disbelievers who say, "God is the third of three," for there is no deity except One God. If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the blasphemers among them.*
74. *Why do not they turn to God and seek His forgiveness? For God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
75. *The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger; other messengers had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat food (like other mortals). See how We make the revelations clear for them, and see how deluded they are.*
76. *Say, "How can you worship, besides God, something which has no power either to harm or benefit you?" But God alone is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
77. *Say, "People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the whims of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.*
78. *Those of the children of Israel who went astray were cursed by the tongue of David, and of Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and used to transgress.*

79. *They did not forbid one another to commit iniquities; evil indeed were the deeds which they did.*
80. *You (Prophet) see many of them allying themselves with those who disbelieve. Evil indeed are (the deeds) which their souls have sent forward before them. God's wrath is on them, and in torment will they abide.*
81. *If only they had believed in God, in the Prophet, and in what was revealed to him, they would have never taken them as protecting guardians, but most of them are transgressors. (5:67 - 81)*

*“Messenger, proclaim the (message) which has been sent to you from your Lord. If you do not, then you will not have conveyed His message. And God will defend you from people, for God does not guide those who reject faith. Say, ‘People of the Scripture, you have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.’ What has been revealed to you (Muhammad) from your Lord will increase in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But do not worry about those who do not believe. Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (Scripture), the Sabians, and the Christians - any who believe in God and the Last Day - and do righteous deeds, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”* This is a clear and strict command from God to his Messenger: convey the message in its entirety. The Message should not be compromised in any way or for any reason. God promised to protect him from any harm that he may be subjected to. A clear and unequivocal message reaches the hearts of people. The Messenger should not worry about those whose hearts are comfortable with compromises and hypocrisy. This does not mean that the Messenger should deliver the message in a harsh or a crude way. On the contrary, the Messenger was commanded to use a wise and decent approach in conveying the message to people. One has to differentiate between the content of the message and the way to deliver the message. While there should be no compromises regarding the content of the message, the message should be delivered in the most appropriate way.

It seems that the intent of the verse was to confront the people of the Scripture in Medina, who did not take their religion seriously and were only paying lip service to the injunctions of their books, while the reality of their practices contradicted what they were commanded to do. They only paid a lip service to the revelation that came to them. They did not uphold the injunctions of the Gospel or the Torah. Thus, they could not claim that they were really “People of the Scripture.” One may argue that they have already received the Scripture and they were reciting it, but reciting the Scripture and abiding by its injunctions are two different things. The Messenger was told to confront them with this dichotomy. They could not be considered “People of the Scripture” unless they uphold the way of life that the Scripture instructed them to follow. Establishing the Torah and the Gospel meant also that they should believe in all messengers sent by God. Among these messengers is Muhammad (PBUH). The Messenger was commanded to confront them with this reality. God tells His Messenger that although this confrontation may cause them to become more obstinate, but it was necessary. The true message has to be proclaimed and those who do not accept it should be prepared for the consequences of their rejection.

Those who believe (Muslims), the Jews, the Sabians [most probably this term refers to people who rejected polytheism before the advent of Muhammad (PBUH)], and the Christians are saved as long as they believe in God and the Day of Judgment and they do good deeds.

It is implied that this applies only to those who believed in the last messenger. This opinion is considered part of the essential knowledge that each Muslim should have. It is clear that Muhammad (PBUH) was the last messenger of God. God sent him to all people. Those who reject the messenger and his Message are not included among those *“on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”*

*“We took the covenant of the children of Israel and sent them messengers. Whenever, a messenger brought them something that they do not like, they called some impostors, and some they slew. They thought there would be no trial (or punishment); so they became blind and deaf; yet God (in mercy) turned to them; yet again many of them became blind and deaf. But God sees well all what they do.”* The Children of Israel have a long history of arguing with their prophets and disobeying their commands. This may be the reason that the most often narrated stories in the Quran are about the Children of Israel. The Muslim nation is warned not to follow in their footsteps. When the Children of Israel disobeyed their prophets, they thought that they would not be punished by God and when they were forgiven by God, many of them went back and committed the same sin again. God is Totally-Aware of what they do.

*“They are verily disbelievers who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary.’ The Messiah (himself) said, ‘Children of Israel, serve God: my Lord and your Lord.’ Whosoever associates partners with God, God will then forbid him to enter paradise. Hell will be his refuge. No one will help such wrongdoers. They are verily disbelievers who say, ‘God is the third of three,’ for there is no deity except One God. If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the blasphemers among them. Why do not they turn to God and seek His forgiveness? For God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger, other messengers had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat food (like other mortals). See how We make the revelations clear for them, and see how deluded they are. Say, ‘How can you worship, besides God, something which has no power either to harm or benefit you?’ But God alone is the All-Hearing and All-Knowing. Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.”* We have explained briefly before, how these corrupt claims crept into the Christian belief. Jesus (PBUH) as all other God’s messengers were sent with a single message based on the pure concept of the Oneness of God. A message that is free from any traces of associating partners with God. These verses reiterate this concept and emphasize that claiming that Jesus (PBUH) is the son of God violates this principle. Jesus (PBUH) warned his followers not to associate partners with God but they forgot his command, *“Children of Israel, serve God: my Lord and your Lord.”* The command implied that he and they are servants of God. They worship one God. The Quran continues to emphasize the principle of the belief in the Oneness of God and warns against violating this principle, *“If they do not desist from what they say, verily a painful torment will befall the blasphemers among them.”* Those who do not desist are truly disbelievers. The Quran leaves the door for repentance open by emphasizing that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The verses continue to present a rational

argument about the nature of Jesus (PBUH). He and his mother used to eat food just like any other mortal. Eating food is a human trait: it satisfies a material need. God does not need food to survive. This should provide a proof for the human nature of Jesus (PBUH).

The verses continue this logical argument by posing a rhetorical question, *“Will you worship, besides God, that which has no power either to harm or benefit you?”* The choice of the word “which” instead of “who” is deliberate; because it includes all things that people associate with God. God hears and knows. He is the One who provides benefit and causes harm. He is the one who hears His servants when they call upon Him. He knows what is in their hearts. No one else is able to listen, know or respond to these calls. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to warn the people of the Scripture not to exceed the limits of the truth by claiming that Jesus (PBUH) is divine, *“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits of truth in your religion, nor follow the whims of people who went wrong before you - they misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the straight path.’”* This was the last call for those who claimed the divinity of Jesus (PBUH) to abandon this false claim and to follow the straight path.

These verses point to three facts. The first fact is the great emphasis that Islam has placed on establishing the concept of the Oneness of God. The creed of Islam is rooted in the pure and absolute belief in the Oneness of God. The second fact is that the Quran clearly indicates that claiming the divinity of Jesus (PBUH) or believing in the trinity is equivalent to rejecting faith in God. The third fact is that it is impossible that a political allegiance can be established between Muslims who believe in the Oneness of God and people of the Scripture.

*“Those of the Children of Israel who went astray were cursed by the tongue of David, and of Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and used to transgress. They did not forbid one another to commit iniquities; evil indeed were the deeds which they did. You (Prophet) see many of them allying themselves with those who disbelieve. Evil indeed are (the deeds) which their souls have sent forward before them. God's wrath is on them, and in torment will they abide. If only they had believed in God, in the Prophet, and in what has been revealed to him, they would have never taken them as protecting guardians, but most of them are transgressors.”* Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Israel were cursed by their prophets because they distorted the Scripture which was revealed to them, they did not uphold God’s law that was given to them, and they infringed God’s covenant. They disobeyed and transgressed. Each community has transgressors. But the rest of the community should be able to curb the infractions committed by the transgressors. When nobody raises a finger to stop those who transgress and commit indecent acts, God will punish the whole community. This is the basis of the concept of the collective duty of commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Whoever sees a sinful act from among you, he should physically stop it. If he is unable to physically stop it, he should voice his objection to it, and if he is unable, then he should at least reject it in his heart.”* In another tradition, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God will not punish a whole community on account of the transgression of a small minority, unless the community turns a blind eye to the infractions and no attempts were made to stop these infractions.”* A third tradition quotes the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, *“The best of Jihad is voicing the truth in the court of a tyrant ruler.”* These traditions and the above verses define the collective responsibility of the community to stop evil acts, which may be committed by a small minority, so that they would not become pervasive in

the community. The Muslim community has a collective responsibility to protect itself from falling prey to cynicism. This requires a clear understanding of the meaning of the belief in God. To believe in God one must conduct a way of life that is shaped by God's law. All verses and traditions that addressed the concept of "*commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil*" addressed a Muslim community that recognized the dominion of God and used God's law to organize its life no matter how tyrant its ruler was. Those who disbelieved from among the Children of Israel allied themselves with the polytheists against the believers. They did not believe in the Prophet (PBUH) and the message that was revealed to him.

## **Verses: 82 to 86**

82. *You (Prophet) will find the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and the most affectionate to the believers are those who say, "We are Christians"; because among these are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant.*
83. *And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize the truth. They pray, "Our Lord, we believe; write us down among the witnesses.*
84. *And why should we not believe in God and the truth which has come to us, when we hope that our Lord includes us in the company of the righteous?"*
85. *God rewarded them for their saying - Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the reward for the doers of good.*
86. *Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they are inhabitants of Hell. (5:82-86)*

These verses describe how the Jews of Medina treated the Muslims. They state that the Jews were very hostile to the Muslims and that they aligned themselves with the polytheists in attacking the Muslims. But the situation was different for those who said, "*We are Christians.*" The verses describe these people as people who understood and followed true Christianity. Among them were scholars and priests who humbled themselves to God's truth. The verses describe their reaction when they heard the Quranic verses being recited. Their hearts became soft and tears welled up in their eyes. They said, "*Our Lord, we believe; write us down among the witnesses. Why should we not believe in God and the truth that has come down to us when we long that our Lord admit us into the company of the righteous?*" They proclaimed their belief in the truth and they asked God to include them in the company of the righteous. They were open to the truth, so they wondered why it should be a surprise that they would listen to the truth when it came to them. They recognized that the new faith is the truth and they were willing to sacrifice everything in order to be part of this new religion. So "*God rewarded them on account of what they said, with gardens under which rivers flow, wherein they will abide for ever; and this is the reward of the doers of good.*" God knew that they recognized the truth and they were determined to follow it. As a result, they were rewarded and they were given the rank of "*the doers of good*" and this is the highest rank of the believers.

There are different narratives which identify the Christian group that these verses refer to. El-Qortby stated in his interpretation of the Quran, "*These verses refer to the Negus (the king of Ethiopia) and his followers. According to Ibn Ishaq, Muslims migrated to Ethiopia fleeing the persecution of the polytheist of Mecca. Some of them remained there until after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina. After the battle of Badr, the idolaters of Mecca tried to*



*repatriate the Muslims living in Ethiopia to kill them as an act of revenge for the idolaters killed at the hands of Muslims in the battle of Badr. The idolaters sent 'Amr ibn El-'Ass and 'Abd-Allah ibn abi Rabie'a to make their case in the Negus' court. The Prophet (PBUH) sent a letter with a messenger to the Negus, who called the Muslims living in Ethiopia to his court. The Negus requested Ja'far ibn abi Taleb (RA) to recite excerpts from the Quran. Ja'far recited Surat Mary (Mariam). The priests and the monks attending the court were moved and felt their eyes welling with tears. This was the group referred to by the verse, "the most affectionate to the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians.'"*

Al-Baihaqi narrated, on the authority of Ibn Ishaq, that the Prophet (PBUH) received a group of about twenty Christians who had business to conduct in Mecca. After they had attended to their business, the Prophet (PBUH) talked to them about Islam and recited verses from the Quran to them. When they listened to the Quran, their eyes welled up with tears and they accepted Islam.

### **Verses: 87 to 108**

87. *You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you, and do not exceed the limits, for God does not love those who exceed the limits.*
88. *Eat of the things which God has provided for you, lawful and good; but be conscious of God, in Whom you believe.*
89. *God will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but He will take you to task for your deliberate oaths. The expiation for such oaths is to feed ten of the needy with food that you normally feed your own families, or to cloth them, or to free a slave, and for him who does not find the means, he should fast three days. This is the expiation of your oaths when you have sworn; and keep your oaths. Thus, God makes clear His revelations in order that you may be thankful.*
90. *You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and divination by arrows, are an abomination - of Satan's handwork- eschew such (abomination), that you may succeed.*
91. *Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist?*
92. *Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard: if you do turn away, know you that the sole duty of Our Messenger is to proclaim (the message) in the clearest manner.*
93. *There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds; for God loves those who do good deeds.*
94. *You who believe, God will certainly try you in a little matter of game well within reach of your hands and your lances, that He may test who fears Him even though they do not see him: any who transgresses thereafter, will have a painful torment.*
95. *You who believe, do not kill game while you are dressed for Pilgrimage. If any of you does that intentionally, he shall offer a domestic animal the equivalent to that which he has killed, brought to the Ka'ba, as adjudged by two just men among you; alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy; or its equivalent in fast; that he may taste the penalty*

- of his deed. God pardoned whatever happened in the past; but he who reoffends God will exact revenge on him. God is Eminent, an avenger of evil.*
96. *It is lawful to you to catch and eat seafood - for the benefit of yourselves and the travellers- but to hunt on land is forbidden you so long as you are dressed for Pilgrimage. Be conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.*
97. *God made the Ka'ba, the Sacred House, a means of support for people, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them; so that you know that God has knowledge of what is in the heavens and on earth and that God is well acquainted with all things.*
98. *Know too that God is severe in punishment and that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
99. *The Messenger's duty is only to convey (the message). But God knows what you reveal and what you conceal.*
100. *Say, "The evil and the good are not equal even though the abundance of evil may attract you. So be conscious of God, people of understanding that you may succeed."*
101. *You who believe, ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. But if you ask about things when the Qur'an is being revealed, they will be made plain to you - for God has kept silent about them - God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing.*
102. *Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith.*
103. *It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work. It is blasphemers who invent a lie against God; but most of them do not use reason.*
104. *When it is said to them "Come to what God has revealed; and come to the Messenger." They say, "Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following." What? Even though their fathers had no knowledge and no guidance?*
105. *You who believe, you have charge of your own souls; if you follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who go astray. To God you shall return; and it is He who will show you the truth of all that you did.*
106. *You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the making of bequests, or two men from other people if you are journeying through the land and the chance of death befalls you. If you doubt (their truth), detain them both after prayer, and let them both swear by God saying, "We wish not in this for any worldly gain, even though the (beneficiary) be our near relation. We shall hide not the evidence before God. If we do, indeed we will be sinful."*
107. *But if it gets known that these two were guilty of the sin (of perjury), let two others stand forth in their places - nearest in kin from among those who claim a lawful right - and let them swear by God saying, "We affirm that our witness is truer than that of those two, and that we have not trespassed (beyond the truth), if we did, then indeed we are wrongdoers."*
108. *That is most suitable so that they may give the evidence in its true nature and shape, or else they would fear that other oaths would be taken after their oaths. But be conscious of God, and listen (to His counsel), for God does not guide transgressing*

people. (5: 87-108)

*“You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you, and do not exceed the limits, for God does not love those who exceed the limits. Eat of the things which God has provided for you, lawful and good; but be conscious of God, in Whom you believe.”*

These two verses establish the right of God to decree laws which organize people’s life on earth. God has created humankind, He is the one Who provides for them, thus, He alone has the right to dictate what is lawful and what is forbidden. This is a logical argument that people readily accept. The Owner of the dominion has the right to set the limits for what is permissible and what is not permissible. Anyone who does not accept this simple fact is a transgressor. Believers, by their nature, are not transgressors. Faith and transgression are mutually exclusive. These two verses and the subsequent verse were revealed to deal with attitudes adopted by some Muslims. However, although these verses were revealed to deal with a specific situation, the principle they establish is a general principle that should shape the attitudes of all Muslims, at all times.

It was narrated by Anas (RA) that three Muslim men came to the house of the Prophet (PBUH) to ask about his practice regarding the acts of worship. Some of the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) described his practice which seemed little in the eyes of these three men. They said, *“We need to do more worship because we are not like the Prophet (PBUH), whose sins have been forgiven.”* One said, *“I spend the whole night in prayers;”* the second said, *“I fast every day;”* and the third said, *“I will remain celibate as long as I live.”* The Prophet (PBUH) overheard them and came to talk to them. He said, *“By God, I am more conscious of God than you, but I pray part of the night and I sleep the rest; I fast few days and I break my fast other days; and I did not vow celibacy. This is my practice. Whosoever does not follow my practice does not belong to me.”*

*“God will not take you to task for that which is unintentional in your oaths, but He will take you to task for your deliberate oaths. The expiation for such oaths is to feed ten of the needy with food that you normally feed your own families, or to cloth them, or to free a slave, and for him who does not find the means, he should fast three days. This is the expiation of your oaths when you have sworn; and keep your oaths. Thus, God makes clear His revelations in order that you may be thankful”* It seems that this verse, which deals with taking oaths, was revealed to deal with situations when Muslims took oaths which prevented them from enjoying lawful things. This would be synonymous to taking the law in their hands and decreeing what is lawful and what is forbidden. The Quran told them that it is not their prerogative to make unlawful that which God has decreed lawful. The verse also deals with situations when a person takes an oath to commit a sin or to abstain from doing something good. If a person takes an oath then realizes that it is better to go back on his oath then, he can do this provided that he atones for breaking his oath using the prescribed expiation scheme mentioned in these verses.

Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) said that this verse was revealed to address the question posed by people who forbade themselves to enjoy good things which God deemed lawful. They took an oath not to avail themselves of these lawful things which included certain food or wedding women through legal marriage. When the verse saying, *“You who believe, do not make unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you,”* was revealed, people who took such oaths asked how can they relieve themselves of the oaths they took. So, this verse came down to explain the difference

between intentional and unintentional oaths. Unintentional oaths are forgiven but breaking an intentional oath requires expiation. The verse also urged Muslims to watch out for taking oaths unnecessarily. Oaths are made to be respected. The verse explained how one can expiate for an intentional oath. The expiation consists of feeding ten needy people, clothing them, or freeing a slave. Those who do not have the means for any of these should fast for three days.

*“You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and divination by arrows, are an abomination - of Satan's handwork- eschew such (abomination), that you may succeed. Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist? Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and be on your guard; if you do turn away, know you that the sole duty of Our Messenger is to proclaim (the message) in the clearest manner. There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds, for God loves those who do good deeds.”* Drinking, gambling, idolatry practices and lottery (using arrows to determine winners in a competition) were practices ingrained in the pre-Islamic society. These practices were interwoven together in the fabric of the society. People used to drink excessively, boasting about their drinking habits and writing poetry to praise good wine. Drinking needed food, so they slaughtered animals for the idols and used their meat for their drinking parties. They devised a form of lottery; using arrows to determine how to distribute shares of meat among themselves. Islam recognized that these are only symptoms of the malaise. Islam chose to address the fundamental problem behind these corrupt practices. Islam recognized that the source of the problem lies in the concept of idol worship. Thus, the starting point was to guide people to the belief in the One true God. Islamic methodology focused on establishing the concept of “there is no deity but God” first. It recognized that once the belief in the One True God has been established, it would be easy to eradicate the pre-Islamic corrupt practices. The Prophet (PBUH) spent 13 years to establish the concept of “*there is no deity but God.*” During this period the main objective of the Prophet (PBUH) was to inculcate this concept in the hearts of the believers. Accepting and obeying the commands of God came naturally after the concept of “no deity but God” became ingrained in the psyche of the believers. In other words, obedience came after submission.

The process of prohibiting intoxicants in Islam did not occur overnight. The strategy to impose the prohibition used a gradual approach to allow the required drastic change in the social life to take place. The stage was set for the prohibition by verse 67 in Chapter 16, “*And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out sweet drink and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who are wise,*” which juxtaposed a sweet drink (wine) against wholesome food, implying that the two are not alike. The second stage started when verse 219 in Chapter 2 was revealed, “*They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say, ‘In them is great sin, and some benefit, for people; but the sin is greater than the benefit.’ They ask you how much they are to spend; Say, ‘What is beyond your needs.’ Thus, does God make clear to you His Signs; in order that you may consider.*” (2:219) The verse suggested that although there are benefits that may accrue from wine, but the evil that will result outweighs the benefits that may accrue. Thus, it is better to abandon drinking. The third stage came with the revelation of verse 43 in Chapter 4, “*You who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying.*” (4:43) In the pre-Islamic society, people used to drink early in the morning, early

afternoon, and after sunset. These new restrictions resulted in reducing the opportunity for drinking at these times because these times overlapped with prayer times. Muslims have to pray five times a day and the times for prayers are usually closely spaced during the day which further diminishes the opportunity for drinking at other times. These stages paved the road for the final ruling which came to categorically prohibit drinking. These stages prepared the Muslims mentally and psychologically to accept the prohibition.

Before the prohibition was made, ‘Umar ibn El-Khatib (RA) used to pray, *“Our Lord clarify for us the ruling regarding intoxicants.”* Then the verse, *“They ask you concerning wine and gambling...”* was revealed. ‘Umar (RA) continued to pray for a clear position regarding intoxicants until the verse, *“You who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying.”* He continued to pray for a clear decision until the verse, *“Satan seeks to incite among you, enmity and hatred with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then desist?”* was revealed. ‘Umar (RA) said, *“We desist, we desist.”*

When the command to prohibit the use of intoxicants was finally revealed, three years after the battle of Uhud, all that was needed is for a person to go through the streets of Medina making the announcement. The response was instantaneous; people broke their glasses and spilled whatever intoxicants they had at the time. The verse which stated the prohibition, starts with the call to the believers, *“You who believe,”* to remind people that they are believers and that obedience goes hand in hand with this title. Then a clear statement was made regarding intoxicants, gambling, idolatry practices, and divination with the arrows. These are abomination and they are Satan’s handiwork. Satan is the eternal enemy of humankind, thus anything that is related to Satan is bad for the believer. The command to avoid such abomination came hand in hand with a promise of success for those who follow the command. The believer was reminded that Satan’s objective is to incite animosity among the believers through these sinful practices. Believers were asked to desist, their response was instantaneous, *“We desist.”* Believers should obey God, and should obey God’s Messenger. This is a fundamental rule in Islam, it is the essence of submission, and without which there would be no “submission.”

It may be a good idea to explain what is meant by “intoxicants” in these verses. Abu Daoud explained on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), *“Everything that was left to ferment is an intoxicant and every intoxicant is forbidden.”* ‘Umar (RA) stood on the podium of the Prophet (PBUH) and addressed the people; among the people were other companions of the Prophet (PBUH). He said, *“Intoxicants have been prohibited. Intoxicants can be obtained from five sources: grapes, dates, honey, wheat, and barley. Intoxicants are any substance that fogs the mind.”* This shows that the definition of intoxicants extends to cover any substance that affects the intellect of the human being. Islam requires Muslims to be alert at all times. This is not possible if the person is under the influence of an intoxicant that fogs the mind. Muslims should be alert so that they remain conscious of their Lord all the time. This will enable them to fulfill their duties to God, to themselves, to their families, and to their community.

The scholars are divided on the nature of intoxicants and whether they should be considered physically unclean. Most of the scholars opt for that opinion. Another group is of the opinion that it is only prohibited as a drink.

Some Muslims were concerned about the situation of their fellow Muslims who died before the prohibition command came down. That question was addressed by the revelation of, *“There is no blame on those who believe and do righteous deeds for what they ate (in the past), if they are conscious of God, believe, and do righteous deeds; then they are conscious of God and believe; then again, they are conscious of God and do good deeds, for God loves those who do good deeds.”* The verse established the rule that prohibitions can only be made on the basis of a decree and that they are not retroactive. Thus, those who used to drink and died before the prohibition came into effect are not going to be punished for drinking. I did not find in the literature on the interpretation of Quran a convincing argument about the repeated use of the sentence *“were conscious of God,”* in relation to believing, being righteous, and doing good deeds. The best I could come up with was given by the scholar Ibn Jareer Al-Tabari who said, *“The first mention of being conscious of God refers to the acceptance of God’s commands and working according to it; the second time it was mentioned, it refers to being steadfast in performing these commands; the third time it was mentioned it refers to improving the deeds by going beyond the obligatory tasks and performing voluntary tasks.”*

*“You who believe, God will certainly try you in a little matter of game well within reach of your hands and your lances, that He may test who fears Him even though they do not see him: any who transgresses thereafter, will have a grievous penalty.”* This was the test: an easy prey which was driven near them by God. It was within their reach and they could have easily struck it with their lances. The temptation was great, but they were on Pilgrimage. For them hunting was not allowed. This was to test the believers and to find out if they truly fear God even though He is unseen to them. Fear of God, even if God is unseen, is the solid foundation for the true belief. God knows who fears Him, but God does not punish people on the basis of His knowledge, God punishes people on the basis of their actual transgressions.

*“You who believe, do not kill game while you are on Pilgrimage. If any of you does that intentionally, he shall offer a domestic animal the equivalent of that which he has killed, brought to the Ka’ba, as adjudged by two just men among you; alternatively, he may atone by feeding the needy; or its equivalent in fast: that he may taste the penalty of his deed. God pardoned whatever happened in the past: but he who reoffends God will exact revenge on him. God is Eminent, an avenger of evil.”* Pre-meditated killing of animals by those who are performing the rituals of Pilgrimage is prohibited, but it is not sinful to kill an animal by mistake. The expiation for pre-meditated killing of animals is to offer a domestic animal equivalent to the animal that was killed as in sacrifice. Two fair-minded judges should be chosen to decide the equivalency issue. When they have chosen an animal for sacrifice, the animal would be taken to the Ka’ba, sacrificed and used to feed poor people. If an animal is not available, the judges would determine the number of poor people to be fed by the culprit as expiation. The cost of this would be equal to the price of the killed animal (there is different opinions regarding this). Otherwise, the culprit has to fast a number of days. This way a person tastes the consequences of his deeds. Atonement for a sin is a kind of punishment. However, God pardoned those who transgressed before this command has been issued. A dire warning is issued to those who re-offend. They are reminded that if they preach the security that God awarded these animals in this secure place, God is Eminent and He is Able to bring them to task. This is the verdict regarding hunting, but fishing is allowed whether a person is in a state of Pilgrimage or not. The verse reiterated that prohibition of

hunting after it allowed fishing. All scholars are agreed that hunting is prohibited while a person is in the state of Pilgrimage, but they differ about the animals that come under this ruling. They also differ regarding the permissibility of eating an animal that has been hunted by another person who is not on Pilgrimage. The verse ends by reminding the believers with the importance of being conscious of God.

*“God made the Ka’ba, the Sacred House, a means of support for people, as also the Sacred Months, the animals for offerings, and the garlands that mark them. So that you know that God has knowledge of what is in the heavens and on earth and that God is well acquainted with all things. Know too that God is severe in punishment and that God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. The Messenger’s duty is only to convey (the message). But God knows what you reveal and what you conceal.”* God has sanctified a place and a time for people so that they can find security and peace. The place is the Ka’ba and the time is the Sacred Months. During the Sacred Months people should stop fighting. They can take refuge in the sacred place at any time, to find security and peace. Security and safety are not guaranteed only for people in the sanctified place but the guarantee of safety extends to cover birds, animals, and other living things. Even before Islam, the Arabs observed the sanctity of the Sacred Months. During the four months of Zul Qi’da, Zul Hija, Rajab, and Muharram the Arabs abstained from fighting and revenge. It is being said that during these months, a person seeking to avenge the killing of his father would not harm those who were responsible even if he had the opportunity to do so. The security and safety were also extended to cover the animals which were destined to the Ka’ba for sacrifice. They were safe while on their way to the Ka’ba. Ka’ba had been sanctified since Prophets Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) rebuilt it.

God has knowledge of all what is in the heavens and what is on earth. God decreed these laws to suit the nature and needs of the creation and to meet with their expectations and ambitions. When the hearts of the believers sense the mercy of God reflected on His laws, they will realize and appreciate God’s knowledge of His creation. At the end of the verses which explain the lawful and the prohibited, comes the warning and the hope that God is severe in punishment but He is also All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Obedience is a personal responsibility. The Messenger’s duty is only to deliver the message and God knows what every person reveals and what he/she conceals. This verse points to the individual responsibility of people.

*“Say, ‘The evil and the good are not equal even though the abundance of the evil may attract you. So be conscious of God, people of understanding that you may succeed.’”* This verse established a moral value. The abundance of evil does not make it good. This comes in the context of speaking of the lawful and forbidden. The lawful may be little but it is good. The lawful is good because it provides enjoyment without bad consequences. No pain, sickness, or sense of loss is left behind after consuming what is lawful. Lawful food provides joy in this life and in the Hereafter. God consciousness is the only guarantee for protection against temptation and for achieving success in this life and in the hereafter.

*“You who believe, ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. But if you ask about things when the Qur’an is being revealed, they will be made plain to you – for God has kept silent about them - God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing. Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith.”* These verses start a new theme,

a theme of teaching Muslims the etiquette of asking questions and what questions are appropriate to ask God and His Messenger. Some Muslims used to ask repeatedly about things that have not been dealt with by the revelation. Some were anxious to know more details about certain issues which have been mentioned in the Quran without details. Reference to issues in general affords Muslims more flexibility in the interpretations. It has been narrated that when the verse prescribing Pilgrimage was revealed, someone asked the Prophet (PBUH) whether it is required to perform Pilgrimage every year. The Prophet (PBUH) was displeased by this question because the verse indicated that only those who can perform Pilgrimage should do it. Had it been mentioned that Pilgrimage should be performed every year, it would have been difficult to comply with the command.

Quran was not revealed to deal only with issues of faith and law, but also to provide a training program for the nation, to establish a society, and to prepare individuals having the right attitudes. These verses deal with the attitude towards seeking knowledge about details of the law that were not readily mentioned. God is the one who decrees the commands. He is the one who passes the law. It is appropriate to trust His wisdom about the level of details that He wants to reveal. God knows His creation. He knows their abilities, and their limitations. The law was revealed at the level of details that He deemed appropriate for them. There is no need to try to make things difficult for ourselves by trying to find out unnecessary details. The attitude of seeking more details would have been more dangerous at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). At that time the process of the revelation of the Quran had not been completed yet. Had the questions been answered and details were decreed, Muslims would have had to comply. That is why the verse commanded believers not to ask about things that may make life difficult for them. God will reveal details as He sees fit.

The verses gave the example of nations that received revealed Books before and had the same attitude. When they requested unnecessarily detailed instructions of what is permissible and what is not, it became very difficult for them to comply with the level of details that they received and consequently they lost their faith. An example of this is the story of the Cow which was mentioned in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2). The children of Israel were asked to slaughter a cow. There were no conditions attached to the command. It would have been easier for them to comply with the command and slaughter any cow. But they kept asking about its details and how it looks like until it became extremely difficult to find a cow that fits all these details.

A saying of the Prophet (PBUH) that captures the essence of these verses has been narrated by Muslim. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God Almighty has decreed certain duties, perform them; He specified certain limits, do not exceed them; He prohibited certain things, do not violate them; and He did not mention certain things, not that He forgot these things but as a token of His mercy, so do not ask about them.”*

*“It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work. It is blasphemers who invent a lie against God; but most of them do not use reason.”* This classification of cattle was invented by the Arabs before Islam. It was a heritage of the Pre-Islamic era. There are many definitions for these animals. We will mention some of them.



Al-Zuhary narrated on the authority of Sa'eed Ibn Al-Mussaib (RA) that he said, "*A slit-ear she camel (Bahira) is a camel whose milk is dedicated to the idols. The let loose camel (Sa'iba) was a camel that was let loose for the sake of the idols. The twin-birth camel (Wassila) is a camel that gives birth to two females one after the other. This she camel would be sacrificed for the idols. The stallion-camel (Ham) is a male camel that becomes protected against slaughtering after impregnating a certain number of she camels.*"

Linguistically, a *Bahira* is a she camel whose ears have been slit. The word "Bahira" is derived from "Bahr" which means sea. In the pre-Islamic tradition, a she camel, which gives birth five times ending with a male baby camel, would have its ears slit and it becomes dedicated to the idols. No one would ride it. It would be left to roam wherever it wishes. A person who needs the idols to help him achieve a wish promises to dedicate a she camel to the idols if his wish is fulfilled. This is called "Sa'iba." It becomes like a Bahira. The "Wassila" is an ewe that is born as a twin to a ram.

The idol worshippers among the Arabs in the pre-Islamic era used to practice these traditions. They also thought that they were the followers of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). They believed in God but they invented these rituals which were not decreed by God. This is a lie that they fabricated. So, they deserved to be labeled as disbelievers because they do not follow the law decreed by God.

*"When it is said to them, 'Come to what God has revealed; and come to the Messenger.' They say, 'Enough for us are the ways we found our fathers following.' What? Even though their fathers had no knowledge and no guidance?"* God's commands have been articulated in the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). The criterion of belief is to comply with these commands. Those who abandon God's commands in favor of the traditions that they inherited from their forefathers do not qualify to be believers. The irony is that their forefathers followed these traditions without knowledge and they were not guided.

*"You who believe, you have charge of your own souls; if you follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who go astray. To God you shall return; and it is He who will show you the truth of all that you did."* The believers are but one nation. No harm shall befall them if others went astray as long as they remain on the straight path. This does not mean that the Muslim nation would abandon its duty in calling others to guidance. The duty of the Muslim nation is to establish an Islamic way of life according to the commands of God. It should become a beacon of justice for the rest of the world. This verse does not relieve the individuals and the nation from their duty in supporting truth and condemning evil.

*"You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let two just men from among you act as witnesses to the making of bequests, or two men from other people if you are journeying through the land and the chance of death befalls you. If you doubt (their truth), detain them both after prayer, and let them both swear by God saying, 'We wish not in this for any worldly gain, even though the (beneficiary) be our near relation. We shall hide not the evidence before God. If we do, indeed we will be sinful.' But if it gets known that these two were guilty of the sin (of perjury), let two others stand forth in their places - nearest in kin from among those who claim a lawful right - and let them swear by God saying, 'We affirm that our witness is truer than that of*

*those two, and that we have not trespassed (beyond the truth), if we did, then indeed we are transgressors.’ That is most suitable so that they may give the evidence in its true nature and shape, or else they would fear that other oaths would be taken after their oaths. But be conscious of God, and listen (to His counsel), for God does not guide a rebellious people.”* These verses explain the process of making wills. Two witnesses are needed to validate and execute a will. If the person is travelling and did not find two Muslims to testify, he can ask two non-Muslims to execute his will. If doubts arise as to the truthfulness of the witnesses, then an oath should be administered after performing their prayers. If, however, it was proven later that they perjured themselves, then two men from the deceased family should come forward and take an oath that they will be telling the truth. This would invalidate the original testimony. This procedure provides guarantees that the witnesses should tell the truth so that they would not be labeled as liars. But the ultimate incentive to tell the truth is the fear of displeasing God.

### **Verses: 109 to 120**

109. *On the day when God gathers the messengers together, and asks, “What was the response you received (from people to your teaching)?” They will say, “We have no knowledge. It is You Who know in full all that is hidden.”*
110. *Then God will say, “Jesus, son of Mary, recount My blessing on you and on your mother. How I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you did speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. How I taught you the Scripture and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; and how, by My leave you fashioned the shape of a bird, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; and how, by My leave, you healed the blind person, and the leper; and how, by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how I did restrain the Children of Israel from (harming) you when you did show them the clear Signs, and the disbelievers among them said, ‘This is nothing but evident magic.’*
111. *And how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My Messenger- they said, ‘We believe, and we bear witness that we submit ourselves to God.’”*
112. *When the disciples, said, “Jesus son of Mary, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?” Said Jesus, “Be conscious of God, if you are true believers.”*
113. *They said, “We only wish to eat from it and to reassure our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth; and that we ourselves may be witnesses to the miracle.”*
114. *Said Jesus the son of Mary, “God our Lord, send us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us - for the first and the last of us - and a sign from You; and provide for us, for You are the best of Providers.”*
115. *God said, “I will send it down to you. But if any of you after that disbelieves, I will punish him with a torment such as I have not inflicted on any one among all the peoples.”*
116. *And when God says, “Jesus the son of Mary, did you say to people, worship me and my mother as gods alongside God?” He will say, “Glory to You, never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, but I know not what is in Yours. Indeed, You know in full all that is hidden.*

117. *I Never said to them except that which You commanded me to say, 'Worship God, my Lord and your Lord;' and I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them; when You did take me up You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things.*
118. *If You do torment them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the Eminent, Wise."*
119. *God will say, "This is a day when the truthful will profit from their truth; theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, they will abide in it for ever; God is well pleased with them, and they with God. That is the great triumph."*
120. *To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, and it is He Who has power over all things. (5:109-120)*

*"On the day when God gathers the messengers together, and asks, 'What was the response you received (from men to your teaching)?' They will say, 'We have no knowledge. It is You Who knows in full all that is hidden.'" God will gather all the messengers whom He sent to the people. He will ask them about the people's response to their call. The messengers were human beings. Each one of them was sent to guide his people to the truth. However, they had no true knowledge of who was a believer and who turned away. Only God can judge. He knows the unseen.*

*"Then God will say, 'Jesus, son of Mary, recount My blessing to you and to your mother. How I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you did speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. How I taught you the Scripture and the Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; and how, by My leave you fashioned the shape of a bird, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; and how, by My leave, you healed the blind person, and the leper; and how, by My leave, you brought the dead back to life; how I did restrain the Children of Israel from (harming) you when you did show them the clear Signs, and the disbelievers among them said, "This is nothing but evident magic." And how I inspired the disciples to believe in Me and My Messenger- they said, "We believe, and we bear witness that we submit ourselves to God."'" Then God will turn to Jesus. God will remind him with the blessings that He bestowed on him and on his mother. God supported him with the Holy Spirit and blessed him with the ability to talk when he was a baby in the cradle to clear his mother's name. God taught him the Torah and the Gospel. God blessed him with the ability to perform miracles no human could perform. He was able to breathe life into a piece of mud shaped in the form of a bird and it became a bird; he was able to heal the blind and the leper; and he was able to bring the dead back to life. All these miracles were blessings from the Creator Who is able to change the natural law, because He is the One Who created it. God will remind Jesus (PBUH) of His blessings when He protected him from the Children of Israel who belied him and accused him of sorcery. The Children of Israel were arrogant; they saw the miracles but instead of believing in Jesus (PBUH) they accused him of practicing sorcery. God saved him from crucifixion and raised him to heaven.*

*"When the disciples, said, 'Jesus the son of Mary, can your Lord send down to us a table spread with food from heaven?' Said Jesus, 'Be conscious of God, if you are true believers.' They said, 'We only wish to eat from it and to reassure our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth; and that we ourselves may be witnesses to the miracle.' Said Jesus the son of Mary, 'God our Lord, send us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us - for*

*the first and the last of us - and a sign from You; and provide for us, for You are the best of Providers.’ God said, ‘I will send it down to you. But if any of you after that disbelieves, I will punish him with a torment such as I have not inflicted on any one among all the peoples.’”* The story about the table mentioned here is different from the account given in the Bible of the meal which Jesus (PBUH) prepared for his disciples. The verse narrates the request that the disciples asked of Jesus (PBUH). They asked him if God can bring down a table spread with food from heaven. Jesus (PBUH) warned them to be conscious of their Lord. They said we would like to eat food from heaven to reassure our hearts and to witness the miracle. When they persisted, Jesus (PBUH) prayed his Lord to bring down a table spread with food from heaven so they can eat and celebrate. God responded positively to the prayer from Jesus (PBUH) so that there would be no excuse for anyone to disbelieve in the message that Jesus (PBUH) brought from God.

*“And when God says, ‘Jesus the son of Mary, did you say to people, worship me and my mother as gods alongside God?’ He will say, ‘Glory to You, never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, but I know not what is in Yours. Indeed, You know in full all that is hidden. I Never said to them except that which You commanded me to say, “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord”; and I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them; when You did take me up You were the Watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things. If You do torment them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are the Eminent, the Wise.’ God will say, ‘This is a day when the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, they will abide in it for ever; God is well pleased with them, and they with God. That is the great triumph.’ To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, and it is He Who has power over all things.”* This is a rhetorical question because God knows what Jesus (PBUH) did say to people. However, it is reiterated so that the weight of the sin of associating partners with God is understood. Jesus’ (PBUH) response started with glorifying his Lord and stating that God is High above all of this. Then, the statement of facts followed: God knows everything that Jesus (PBUH) would have said; God knows the unseen; and Jesus (PBUH) said only that which he was commanded to say. He did witness what they were doing when he was dwelling among them. When God raised him, he had no way of knowing what they did. This Sura ends by the statement: to God belongs the dominion of heaven and earth, to remove any shadow of a doubt about the Oneness of God. He alone is the Lord and He alone is the God.

## **Sura 6: Al-An'am (The Cattle)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It thus, belongs to the part of Quran normally called the Meccan Quran. The revelations during the Meccan period, which lasted for thirteen years, revolved around a single theme and addressed a single concept. The content was the same but the presentations were different. The objective of the Meccan Quran was to inculcate the belief in the Oneness of God in the hearts of the believers. Only when this principle was understood and became entrenched in the Muslims' psyche that Quran started talking about systems that organize people's daily lives. The belief in the Oneness of God is the foundation that supports all Islamic systems and rules. Rules that regulate the way of life people lead on earth should spring from this foundation and abide by its principles. There is no room for manmade laws which do not respect this basic principle in an Islamic way of life. This belief frees people from the tyranny of the rulers who think that they have ultimate authority.

This was how the call to Islam started and this is the way it should continue. A call to Islam should start by inculcating the belief in the Oneness of God. Some may argue that it may be easier, when calling people to Islam, to expose people to Islamic systems and way of life first. This is not the way it was meant for this religion to be established. The belief in the Oneness of God is the foundation that needs to be established first then the applications can follow.

Quran used a unique methodology in the presentation of the doctrine of Islam. There was no theoretical formulation, nor philosophical or theological arguments. Quran appealed to the initial natural human disposition. It endeavored to purify the spiritual receptors within the human being and open up the channels to receive the divine inspiration. It prepared the believers for the fierce fight against the ignorant state of the society around them. The preparation was done in a practical way that matched the dynamics of life. The doctrine should not be studied in isolation of the daily lives of people. Islam offers a dynamic way of life. It should be developed in an interactive way responding to the ever changing needs of people and society. Islam's objective was not only to change what people believed in but it also endeavored to change their way of thinking and their approach to life.

This Sura is the sixth Sura in the Quran, it is a true example of the Meccan Quran. It presents clearly the Meccan Quran characteristics and salient features. However, the Sura has its own characteristics which set it apart from other Suras. Each Sura in the Quran has its own salient features which appear in its organization, its presentation of the topic, and the imagery that accompany the presentation.

This Sura is unique in the way it handles its basic topics: the meaning of divinity and the relationship between the Creator and the creation. God is the Creator, the Provider, the Almighty. He sets the rules that govern His creation. The theme runs through the whole

Sura and culminates in dealing with specific cases of lawful and prohibited practices. The Sura illustrates how some of the prevalent practices contravened the right of God to set the ultimate rule that govern the life of His creation. This specific example is an illustration of the main objective of the Sura: only God has the right to determine what is lawful and what is prohibited.

It has been narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), and others that the whole Sura was revealed in one session in Mecca. The narrations did not specify an exact date for the revelation of the Sura, nor does the text point to an exact date for the revelation. According to the most probable known order for the revelation of the Suras in the Quran, its order is the fifty-fifth following Surat Al-Hijr (Chapter 15). This does not help in fixing an exact time for the revelation of this Sura. However, we are of the opinion that, most probably, it was revealed during the fifth or sixth year after the advent of the message. This opinion is based on the suggested order for the Sura and the extent and depth of the topics that it dealt with. This indicates that it was revealed at a time when extensive discussions with the idolaters of Mecca were conducted. The Sura included verses which aimed at providing support, solace, and comfort to the Prophet (PBUH) in face of the strong rejection by the idolaters.

Another narration on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) and Qatadah (RA) indicates that the whole Sura was revealed in Mecca except for the two verses (91, and 141), *“They have no grasp of God’s true measure when they say, ‘God did not reveal anything to a mortal.’ Say, ‘Who was it who sent down the Scripture, which Moses brought, as a light and a guide to humankind, which you have put on parchments of which you show some, but you hide much, and (by which) you were taught that which you knew not yourselves nor (did) your fathers?’ Say, ‘God (sent it down).’ Then leave them to cavil.”* (91); and *“It is He who produces both trellised and untrellised gardens, date palms, crops of diverse flavors, the olive, the pomegranate, alike yet different. So when they bear fruit, eat some of it, paying what is due on the day of harvest, but do not be wasteful. God does not like wasteful people.”* (141) The first was revealed regarding the Jews Malek bin Sayef and Ka’b bin Al-ASHraf and the second was revealed regarding Thabet bin Quais. Ibn Jareej and Al-Mawardi said it was revealed regarding Moa’az bin Jabal (RA).

The reason behind the revelation of verse 91 mentioned above is probable because of the reference to the Scripture revealed to Moses (PBUH), however, Mejahed and Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) argued that the verse came to address objections raised by the idolaters of Mecca and consequently the verse must have been revealed in Mecca.

People who understood that the words *“paying what is due”* in verse 141 refer to paying Zakat concluded that the verse was revealed in Medina. However, *“paying what is due”* may not necessarily have been a reference to Zakat, and since the flow of the topics in the Sura portrays Meccan characteristics, one can conclude that verse 141 is also a Meccan verse. Thus, the whole Sura must have been revealed in Mecca.

We are therefore, of the opinion that this Sura has been revealed in its totality in one night in Mecca. This opinion is supported by the coherent structure of the Sura which flows like a river with no obstacles to resist its flow.

The Sura deals with a single topic: the belief in the Oneness of God. This topic is dealt with in a sequence of waves that complement one another. The first wave consists of three verses. The verses confront the idolaters of Mecca: how can they associate partners with God, in spite of the fact that they are surrounded with many signs which attest to the Oneness of God. The three verses encompass the truth of the whole universe. The first verse talks about the creation of the universe, the second verse talks about the creation of humankind and the third verse brings humankind and the universe together in the context of the Oneness of God. The three verses contrast the existence of the universe and humankind against the baseless disbelief of the idolaters of Mecca, as a proof for the existence of God.

The second wave deals with those who deny the signs of the existence of the One God. It describes the fate of the previous disbelievers and threatens the new ones with similar ending.

The third wave addresses the essence of God. God the Creator, the Provider, the Lord who owns everything, the Vanquisher, the Protecting Friend, the All-Wise, and the Totally-Aware.

The fourth wave describes evidence provided by previous revelations which supported the Quran. The verses in this wave describe associating partners with God as the worst kind of injustice. They paint a picture of the encounter between those who associate partners with God and their false gods on the Day of Judgment.

A fifth wave provides moral support to the Prophet (PBUH) in his endeavor. Reminding the Prophet (PBUH) that he is a member of a brotherhood of the messengers sent by God to guide people to the right path and provides a consolation to support the Prophet (PBUH) in facing the hardships.

### **Verses: 1 to 3**

1. *All praise is due to God, Who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light; yet those who disbelieve set up equals with their Lord.*
2. *He it is who created you from clay, then He decreed a term; and there is a term named with Him; still you doubt.*
3. *And He is the God in the heavens and on earth; He knows your secrets and what you make public, and He knows what you earn.” (6:1-3)*

These first three verses establish the foundation for the Sura's topic. They start with praising God and confessing His right to be worshipped alone as the sole Creator of heavens and earth. They emphasize the first attribute of God as the sole Creator of the universe, pointing to two of the major cosmic signs: light and darkness. The ending of the

verse expresses amazement at those who are not only ungrateful but they also associate partners with God. The second verse refers to the creation of humankind, the creation that followed the creation of heavens and earth. It is the creation that brought life to the dormant universe. The verse points to the transition from the darkness of mud to the light of life. The verse refers to the appointed terms of death and resurrection. One can sense the correspondence between the stillness accompanying death and the dormant state of mud; and between the energy accompanying resurrection and the dynamic state of the original birth. This is a correspondence separated by a vast distance and enormous time. Such expressions should fill the human heart with infinite trust in God's plan and a certainty in meeting Him. The verse ends with an appropriate statement, "*still you doubt.*"

The third verse puts the creation of the universe and the creation of humankind in the context of the Oneness of the Creator and His boundless ability and complete control, "*And He is the God in the heavens and on earth; He knows your secrets and what you make public, and He knows what you earn.*" It is God who created heavens and earth. He is the only Lord of heavens and earth. He controls everything. It is then, appropriate for the human being to follow God's law in whatever decisions he /she makes. Human beings can achieve well balanced lives by aligning their initial natural dispositions, controlled by God, with the material needs of their physical existence. This will bring harmony to human lives. It will protect human life from being subjected to the discord that may result from the often contradictory God-made laws and manmade laws.

This group of verses appeals to the human heart and human logic through the signs of the creation of the universe and humankind. It appeals to the initial natural disposition of humankind to use these signs as a means which lead to the belief in the Oneness of God. The idolatrous Arabs did not challenge the concept of the existence of God. They believed in God, but they challenged the concept of the Oneness of God. They refused to allow God's law to shape their daily lives and they associated partners with God.

#### **Verses: 4 to 11**

4. *And there does not come to them any sign of the signs of their Lord but they would turn aside from it.*
5. *So they have indeed denied the truth when it came to them; therefore, the truth of what they mocked at will shine upon them.*
6. *Do they not consider how many a generation We have destroyed before them, whom We had established on earth as We have not established you, and We sent the clouds pouring rain on them in abundance, and We made the rivers to flow beneath them, then We destroyed them on account of their sins and raised up after them another generation?*
7. *And if We had sent you a Scripture written on paper, then they had touched it with their hands, certainly those who disbelieve would have said, "This is nothing but clear magic."*



8. *And they say, "Why has not an angel been sent down to him?" And had We sent down an angel, the matter would have certainly been decided and then they would not have been granted a respite.*
9. *And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves.*
10. *And certainly messengers before you have been mocked, but that which they were mocked for encompassed the scoffers among them.*
11. *Say, "Travel in the land, then see what was the end of the deniers." (6: 4-11).*

*"And there does not come to them any sign of the signs of their Lord but they would turn aside from it. So they have indeed denied the truth when it came to them; therefore, the truth of what they mocked at will shine upon them."* The verses describe the attitude of the disbelievers and how adamant they were in opposing the message and denying the signs of God that were sent to them. A warning was then issued so that they may take heed. The warning was given in general terms; no specific details were given that shed light on the nature of the impending punishment, nor the time it will take place. It reminded them with the fate the previous disbelieving generations met before, *"Do they not consider how many a generation We have destroyed before them, whom We had established on earth as We have not established you, and We sent the clouds pouring rain on them in abundance, and We made the rivers to flow beneath them, then We destroyed them on account of their sins and raised up after them another generation."* These previous generations had more power and wealth, but their power and wealth did not avail them safety or security and they were destroyed. People usually forget the blessings of God. The wealth and power that people acquire are gifts from God. It is easy for Him to take it away since He is the one who has given it in the first place. God's blessings are bestowed to test people. The test shows whether those who have been given power and wealth will be grateful to God or will they become tyrants. This is God's law that many forget, except those who are saved by Him. Power and wealth blind the tyrants and entice them to annul the covenant they had with God; and they breach the conditions that God had established for humankind to qualify as God's vicegerent on earth. But the tyrants will be destroyed on account of their own sins. A study of history shows clearly how sins destroyed many civilizations before.

*"And if We had sent you a Scripture written on paper, then they had touched it with their hands, certainly those who disbelieve would have said, 'This is nothing but clear magic.'"* The verse continues to paint an image for the obstinacy of the disbelievers and their determination to reject faith. They were given many signs but they chose to ignore them. Even if they were given a written book that they can touch with their hands, they would have still denied the truth and dismissed it as clear magic. They were not interested in the truth. So, they adopted an argumentative attitude. They asked, why did not God send an angel? *"And they say, 'Why has not an angel been sent down to him?' And had We sent down an angel, the matter would have certainly been decided and then they would not have been granted a respite. And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man, and thus, We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves."* Two conclusions can be drawn from this

request. First, that the idolatrous Arabs were not atheists. They were merely in doubt that the Prophet (PBUH) is a messenger of God. They wanted a proof that he was truly a messenger of God and that the Book he recites is a revelation from God. They requested God to send an angel to support the Prophet's (PBUH) claim. This was only one of the many requests that were made by the disbelievers. The Quran records several of these requests. These were cited in Surat Al-Israa (Chapter 17) *"They say, 'We will not believe you (Muhammad) until you make a spring gush out of the ground for us, or until you have a garden of date palms and vines, and make rivers pour through them; or make the sky fall down on us in pieces, as you claimed will happen; or bring God and angels before us face to face; or have a house made of gold; or ascend into the sky- even then, we will not believe in your ascension until you send a real book down for us to read'"* (17: 90 - 94). In the present Sura, one of these requests was reiterated, namely, to bring down an angel who would support the Prophet (PBUH) and corroborate his claim that he is a true messenger of God.

The vanity of these requests is apparent from the fact that the Arabs of Mecca knew the Prophet (PBUH) as he grew up among them, and they never doubted his truthfulness until he proclaimed himself a messenger of God. They even used to call him the truthful the honest. When the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to announce his message for the first time, he stood on the top of a hill and asked the Arabs to gather around him and listen to a speech he was going to make. He started his talk asking them, would they believe him if he would tell them that there was an invading army behind the hill on which he was standing. Their response was that they never doubted the truth of whatever he said before and they had no reason to doubt anything he said. But they immediately recanted when he announced that he was sent to them as a messenger of God. However, they continued to trust him with their precious possessions even after he declared himself a messenger of God and until he had to flee Mecca to Medina. When he left Mecca for fear of his life, he entrusted his cousin Ali (RA) to return all possessions that were entrusted to him for safekeeping to their rightful owners.

The idolatrous Arabs were fluent in their language. They appreciated the beauty of the language and the eloquence of the speakers. They were puzzled by the eloquence of the Quran. They must have realized that the Quran could not have been composed by a human being. This was proof enough for them, if they were seeking the truth.

The second conclusion that one may glean from this request is that the Arabs knew of the existence of angels. They wanted God to send an angel to support the Prophet's (PBUH) claim. However, it is clear that they did not understand the nature of the angels, the relationship between God and the angels, and the relationship between the angels and the human beings. The Quran tells about the myth around the Arab's understanding of the angels and their nature and provided corrections for this myth. Their argument shows that they were not only stubborn in their denial of the message but that their denial is rooted in a myth.

The verse sheds light on the Islamic perspective of the concept of the “unseen.” Islam talked about the unseen as part of the creation of God so that a Muslim should be aware of the concept. Islam also educated Muslims how to deal with the topic of the unseen. The angels belong to the realm of the unseen. Belief in the angels is an article of faith in Islam. It has been mentioned in the commentary on Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2) that the belief in the unseen moves the human being from the narrow space of the senses to the wide space of the unknown. The scope of the senses is limited; the unseen is limitless. The belief in the unseen widens the horizon from the scope of the senses to the scope of the awareness.

*“And certainly messengers before you have been mocked, but that which they were mocked for encompassed the scoffers among them. Say, ‘Travel in the land, then see what was the end of the rejecters.’”* The last two verses of this paragraph provide moral support and consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). All messengers before him faced the same impertinency. However, the end result was not in favor of those who rejected the faith. A lesson that can easily be learnt from history: travel in the land and see what the end of those who rejected faith was? This last verse embodies a brand new philosophy in life. It is not only an invitation to study history and reflect on lessons from the past, but it also encourages people to explore new avenues for improving life. It is an invitation to seek new methods in trade, innovation, and discovery. This is the methodology which transformed the Arabs within a quarter of a century from a backward nomadic society to a dynamic progressive society.

#### **Verses: 12 to 19**

12. Say, *“To whom belongs what is in the heavens and the earth?”* Say, *“To God;”* He has ordained mercy on Himself; most certainly He will gather you on the Day of Resurrection- there is no doubt about it. (As for) those who have lost their souls, they do not believe.
13. *And to Him belongs whatever dwells in the night and the day; and He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
14. Say, *“Shall I take a protecting guardian other than God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and He feeds (others) and is not (Himself) fed.”* Say, *“I am commanded to be the first who submits himself. You should not be of the polytheists.”*
15. Say, *“Surely I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the torment of a grievous day.*
16. *He, from whom it is averted on that day, God indeed has shown mercy unto him; and this is a manifest achievement.”*
17. *And if God touches you with affliction, there is none to remove it but He; and if He touches you with good, then He has power over all things.*
18. *And He is the Dominator over His servants; and He is the Wise, the Totally-Aware.*
19. Say, *“What thing is the greatest in testimony?”* Say, *“God is witness between you and me; and this Quran has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other gods with God?”* Say, *“I do not bear witness.”* Say, *“He is only one God, and surely I disown that which you set up (with Him).”* (6: 12-19).

This paragraph starts with a rhetorical question, *“To whom belongs what is in the heavens and the earth?”* The answer follows, *“Say, ‘To God;’ He has ordained mercy on Himself; most certainly He will gather you on the Day of Resurrection - there is no doubt about it. (As for) those who have lost their souls, they do not believe. And to Him belongs whatever dwells in the night and the day; and He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”*

The verse prepares the Messenger (PBUH) for the confrontation with the idolaters of Mecca. The idolaters of Mecca knew that God is the Creator but they still set up equals to Him. The Messenger (PBUH) is directed to pose the question to them, *“To whom belongs what is in the heavens and the earth?”* The Messenger (PBUH) was then directed to answer the question, *“To God.”* The Arabs did not dispute this fact. They believed that God is the Creator and that everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him. The verses continue to state that God ordained mercy on Himself without suggestion or compulsion from any authority. Mercy is the foundation underlying How He treats His creation. His is a universal mercy that has been dictated only by His grace; it encompasses all aspects of life. This mercy was manifested in the creation of humankind from nothing; in the empowerment of humankind to be able to live on earth; in educating humankind and giving him the gift of the desire and ability to seek knowledge; in the guidance sent to humankind through the succession of messengers to guide him to the right path; in forgiving the sins of those who repent; and in rewarding those who do good deeds ten-folds while only recompensing those who sin according to their sin. A large number of traditions elaborate on the extent and scope of the mercy of God and urges humankind to be merciful in their dealings with each other and with other creations of God. The knowledge about the mercy of God fills the heart of the believer with security and tranquility. It also induces the believer to acquire the character of mercy and practice being merciful, forgiving, and kind towards people and other creatures of God. The verse continues to remind people of the certainty of the Day of Judgment. This will be an opportunity to benefit from the mercy of God. Those who did well will be rewarded ten-fold and those who sinned are left to the mercy of God, He can either punish them or forgive their sins. Only those who did not believe will be losers.

The paragraph continues with another rhetorical question: to whom belongs whatever dwells in the night and the day? This expresses the spaciousness of the kingdom of God. The first question is a statement of the extent of the kingdom in space while the second question outlines the extent of the kingdom in time. The second question ends with a reference to the ability of God to hear and know everything which emphasizes His absolute control over this vast kingdom.

Further emphasis of the Godliness of God, is the rhetorical question posed in verse 14, *“Say, ‘Shall I take a protecting guardian other than God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and He feeds (others) and is not (Himself) fed.’ Say, ‘I am commanded to be the first who submits himself. You should not be of the polytheists.’”* Who is more worthy of my loyalty than God, who created heavens and earth and who feeds and is not fed. The use of the word protecting guardian exemplifies the fundamental concept underlying Islam: the absolute and voluntary submission to God and the rejection of all forms of associating partners with God. This is a clear and unequivocal statement of

submission to God. Submission means that one does not take a protecting guardian other than God. It means listening, obeying, surrendering, and worshiping God alone. It also means seeking help from God alone. He is the absolute ruler in all affairs.

*“Say, ‘Surely I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the torment of a grievous day. He, from whom it is averted on that day, God indeed has shown mercy unto him; and this is a manifest achievement.’”* One motivation for this submission is the fear of the torment on the Day of Resurrection. It will be a grievous day. Those who escape the punishment of that day will be the successful ones.

The paragraph ends with an unequivocal statement of the absolute submission to the one God, a clear declaration of the belief in the Oneness of God. *“And if God touches you with affliction, there is none to remove it but He; and if He touches you with good, then He has power over all things. And He is the Dominator over His servants; and He is the Wise, the Totally-Aware. Say, ‘What thing is the greatest in testimony?’ Say, ‘God is witness between you and me; and this Quran has been revealed to me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other gods with God?’ Say, ‘I do not bear witness.’ Say, ‘He is only one God, and surely I disown that which you set up (with Him).’”* This is the climax of the discourse. The Prophet (PBUH) has been commanded to submit to God alone. He confronted the idolaters who associate partners with God refuting all their claims and stating in unequivocal terms the demarcation between submitting to God and associating partners with Him. He calls them to submit and accept God’s witness as it has been presented in the Quran which he was commanded to convey to people.

### **Verses: 20 to 32**

20. *Those whom We have given the Scripture recognize (this revelation) as they recognize their sons; (as for) those who have lost their souls, they do not believe.*
21. *And who does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God or (he who) rejects His revelation; surely the wrongdoers will not be successful.*
22. *And on the day when We shall gather them all together, then We shall say to those who associated others (with God), “Where are your associates whom you claimed?”*
23. *Then their excuse would be nothing but that they would say, “By God, our Lord, we were not polytheists.”*
24. *See how they lie against themselves, and that which they forged has failed them.*
25. *And of them is he who listens to you, and We have cast veils over their hearts lest they understand it, and deafness in their ears; and even if they see every sign they will not believe in it; so much so that when they come to you they will only dispute with you; those who disbelieve say, “This is nothing but the stories of the ancients.”*
26. *And they prohibit (others) from it; and they go far away from it, and they only bring destruction upon their own souls though they do not realize it.*

27. *And if you could see when they are made to stand before the fire, then they shall say, "Would that we were sent back, and we would not reject the revelations of our Lord and we would be of the believers."*
28. *Nay, what they concealed before shall become manifest to them; and if they were sent back, they would certainly go back to that which they are forbidden, and most surely they are liars.*
29. *And they say, "There is nothing but our lives of this world, and we shall not be raised."*
30. *And if you could see when they are made to stand before their Lord. He will say, "Is not this the truth?" They will say, "Yes, by our Lord." He will say, "Taste then the torment because you disbelieved."*
31. *They are losers indeed who deny the meeting of God; until when the hour comes upon them all of a sudden they shall say, "Alas for us, that we neglected it." And they shall bear their burdens on their backs; now surely evil is that which they bear.*
32. *And this world's life is nothing but a game and a distraction and certainly the abode of the Hereafter is better for those who remain conscious of God; do you not then understand? (6:20-32)*

*"Those whom We have given the Scripture recognize (this revelation) as they recognize their sons; (as for) those who have lost their souls, they do not believe."* The statement that the people who were given the Scripture before realized that the Quran was God's revelation and that Muhammad (PBUH) was His Messenger has been repeatedly mentioned in the Quran. This statement was addressed both to the people of the Scripture themselves and to the idolaters of Mecca. The statement was made to confront the people of the Scripture when they opposed the new message. This verse, which has been revealed in Mecca, was addressed to the idolaters of Mecca to remind them that the people of the Scripture knew of the authenticity of this message because they were familiar with God's revelation. Rejection of the new message was then only motivated by their obstinacy and their bigoted attitude. The verse continues to warn that this denial will only result in the loss of the souls of those who disbelieve.

*"And who does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God or (he who) rejects His revelation; surely the wrongdoers will not be successful. And on the day when We shall gather them all together, then shall We say to those who associated others (with God), 'Where are your associates whom you claimed?' Then their excuse would be nothing but that they would say, 'By God, our Lord, we were not polytheists.' See how they lie against themselves, and that which they forged has failed them."* The term "wrongdoing" has been used in the Quran as a synonym to associating partners with God. Associating partners with God constitutes rejection of the truth. It is an injustice committed against the truth, an injustice against oneself, and injustice against people. Associating partners with God amounts to usurping God's right to be worshipped. Surely those who committed injustice will never be successful.

Associating partners with God has different forms, worshiping idols is only one of them. Associating partners with God, in its essence, is to attach one of God's attributes to

someone other than God. Forms of associating partners with God include the belief that someone has the power to control the events of life. Another form is to follow manmade laws which contravene the divine project. Those who practice any kind of associating partners with God will be gathered on the Day of Judgment and will be asked, *“Where are those whom you associated with God?”* Faced with this great trial, they will renounce everything they believed in besides God, during their worldly lives. However, it will be too late for salvation. They have believed in a lie, and on this day all lies will be useless.

*“And of them is he who listens to you, and We have cast veils over their hearts lest they understand it, and deafness in their ears; and even if they see every sign they will not believe in it;”* The verse describes the argumentative attitude of the disbelievers and their determination to fight the truth. The verse describes an example of people whose senses do not function, they listen but do not hear, and they see but do not comprehend. Their minds are sealed. This is God’s decree that they would not be able to listen and understand. However, God showed us the way for guidance, *“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our Paths; for verily God is with those who do right.”* (29:69). God also says, *“By the soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and how He imbued it with moral failings as well as God consciousness. Truly he succeeds who purifies it; and he fails who corrupts it.”* (91: 7-10). It is the divine formula that guidance is bestowed on those who strive to achieve it. But those mentioned in the verse above did not try to reach for guidance. On the contrary they tuned out the receptors that feed into their initial natural disposition which is designed to reach for guidance. Thus, their initial natural dispositions were sealed off and could not receive guidance. Every human being is born with an initial natural disposition that is designed to seek the truth. They chose to suppress this initial natural disposition so God sealed their minds. They not only prevented themselves from listening to the Quran, but they also banned others to listen. This will only result in their destruction. On the Day of Judgment, they will be faced with a situation that they cannot escape. The truth will be manifest and they will be overwhelmed by their own regret. They will only wish if they can get a second chance. However, even if they were given a second chance they would not take advantage of this new chance. Their attitudes do not change.

*“And they say, ‘There is nothing but our life of this world, and we shall not be raised.’ And if you could see when they are made to stand before their Lord. He will say, ‘Is not this the truth?’ They will say, ‘Yes, by our Lord.’ He will say, ‘Taste then the torment because you disbelieved.’ They are losers indeed who reject the meeting of God; until when the hour comes upon them all of a sudden they shall say, ‘Alas for us, that we neglected it.’ And they shall bear their burdens on their backs; now surely evil is that which they bear. And this world’s life is nothing but a game and a distraction and certainly the abode of the hereafter is better for those who remain conscious of God; do you not then understand?”* These verses address the issue of accountability.

Accountability is an integral part of the belief system in Islam. It is one of the foundations upon which the Islamic way of life is built. It is also the foundation for the holistic approach to life that Islam embraces. From an Islamic perspective, human life extends along the dimensions of time and space. Death is not the end of human life. The life of a human being spans this world and the Hereafter. The life in this world is finite

but the life in the Hereafter is eternal. This motivates people to look beyond this life to the Hereafter and work for the eternal life as hard as they work for this life. Human life extends in space because space spans the earth and the heaven with its paradise and Hell fire. The nature of the life in the Hereafter is one of the secrets that only God knows. The verses end with the ultimate verdict: the great loss for those who denied the meeting with God. They refused to believe in the Day of Judgment and the Hereafter; and they thought that they will not be accountable for their actions in this life. They will carry their sins on their backs in their trek to Hell fire.

### **Verses: 33 to 39**

33. *We know indeed that what they say certainly grieves you. It is not you they reject; but the wrongdoers deny the revelations of God.*
34. *And certainly messengers before you were rejected, but they persevered over their rejection and their persecution until Our help came to them; and there is none to change the words of God; and you have already received some account of those messengers.*
35. *And if their turning away is hard on you, then if you can seek a tunnel in the ground or a ladder to the skies so that you should bring them a sign; and if God had pleased He would certainly have gathered them all on guidance, therefore be not one of the ignorant.*
36. *Only those who listen will accept; and (as to) the dead, God will raise them, then to Him they shall be returned.*
37. *And they say, "Why has not a sign been sent down to him from his Lord?" Say, "Surely God is able to send down a sign, but most of them do not know."*
38. *And there is no animal that walks on the ground nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) communities like yourselves; We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord shall they be gathered.*
39. *And they who rejected Our revelations are deaf and dumb, in utter darkness; whom God pleases He leaves to go astray and whom He pleases He puts on the straight path. (6:33-39)*

The first three verses bring consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). The idolatrous Arabs, especially those who fiercely resisted the message of Islam, never doubted the honesty and integrity of the Prophet (PBUH). They also realized that the language of the Quran is beyond the linguistic skills of humans. But they were adamant in their rejection. The Quran states that this rejection was not because they thought that the Prophet (PBUH) is a liar, but because they chose to deny the revelations of God. There is a large volume of traditions which supports this thesis and explains the reason behind their rejection. The Arab chiefs were afraid that the new religion would rob them of their authority and power. The new religion came to state that God has the ultimate authority. They did not want to confess that, "*there is no deity except God,*" which is the foundation of Islam, because that meant they would abdicate the limitless authority that they had over their people. The verses reminded the Prophet (PBUH) with what happened to all prophets who came before him and whose stories were told in the Quran, stories that describe the extent of their perseverance and forbearance. God sent prophets, one after the other since



the beginning of time to guide people to the right path. They faced denial and persecution and they persevered only to triumph at the end. But the Quran also tells the Prophet (PBUH) to be realistic in dealing with the rejection and to persevere. What other course can he follow? Did he have the means to dig an underground tunnel or to climb a ladder into the skies to bring the idolaters a convincing sign, a sign that they cannot refute.

God, in His wisdom, created humankind for a purpose. Humankind had to have certain skills and abilities to enable him to achieve that purpose. God, in His wisdom, also decreed that diversity of the human race is the rule. People are different in their ability to receive, to understand, and to respond to the signs of God. Humankind was commanded to seek the truth and was given the ability to choose whether to accept or reject the truth. The verse explained the divine project to His Prophet (PBUH), and admonished him not to be one of those who do not understand this plan.

*“Only those who listen will accept; and (as to) the dead, God will raise them, then to Him they shall be returned.”* God told His Prophet (PBUH) that he will meet two kinds of people. The first group is alert, with an initial natural disposition that is tuned to receive the truth. This group listens and responds favorably to the call. The other group, whose members chose to shut off their receptors and tune out their initial natural disposition are like those who are dead. This was a fundamental principle that defined the role of the Prophet (PBUH); it is people’s prerogative to choose whether they follow or reject the guidance.

*“And they say, ‘Why has not a sign been sent down to him from his Lord?’ Say, ‘Surely God is able to send down a sign, but most of them do not know.’ And there is no animal that walks on the ground nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) communities like yourselves; We have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord shall they be gathered. And they who rejected Our revelations are deaf and dumb, in utter darkness; whom God pleases He leaves to go astray and whom He pleases He puts on the straight path.”* The disbelievers asked for a sign and the Quran says God is able to bring down a sign but there is a reason for not bringing down a sign and most of them do not understand. And if they reflect on the life around them, they would realize that God’s creations are all around them. Humankind is not alone in this universe. There are other creations leading well organized lives. Everything has been planned, and nothing was left to chance. Those who choose to deny these facts and reject the revelations of God are like the deaf and the dumb in vast darkness. God will leave whom He wills to go astray, and He will guide whom He wills to the straight path. Humankind is equipped with the ability to choose between right and wrong. God helps those who seek the truth and lets those who do not, to go astray. Although everything is controlled by the will of God, but God is fair and does not treat anybody unjustly.

#### **Verses: 40 to 49**

*40. Say, “Tell me if the torment of God should overtake you or the hour should come upon you, will you call (on others) besides God, if you are truthful?”*

41. *No, it is He you would call, He would remove that which made you to pray if He pleases and you would forget (the false gods) which you join (with Him).*
42. *And certainly We sent (messengers) to nations before you then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves.*
43. *If only, when Our affliction came on them, they humbled themselves. But their hearts were hardened and Satan made all that they used to do seem fair to them.*
44. *But when they forgot the warning they had received, We opened for them the doors of all things, until when they rejoiced in what they were given We seized them suddenly, and they were in utter despair.*
45. *So the roots of the people who were wrongdoers were cut off; and all praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds.*
46. *Say, "Have you considered that if God takes away your hearing and your sight and sets a seal on your hearts, who is the deity besides God that can bring them back to you?" See how We explain the revelations, yet they turn away.*
47. *Say, "Have you considered if the torment of God should overtake you suddenly or openly, will any be destroyed but the wrongdoers?"*
48. *And We send the messengers only to give good news and to warn, then whoever believes and acts aright, they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
49. *And (as for) those who reject Our revelations, torment shall afflict them because they transgressed. (6:40-49)*

*"Say, 'Tell me if the torment of God should overtake you or the hour should come upon you, will you call (on others) besides God, if you are truthful?' No, it is Him you would call, He would remove that which made you to pray if He pleases and you would forget (the false gods) which you join (with Him)."* The Quran uses different approaches to address the initial natural disposition of humankind. In the previous verses, the approach was to remind people of the miracle of the creation and how it portrays the comprehensiveness of the divine project. In the present set of verses, the approach is to remind people of their spontaneous reaction when an affliction befalls them. Would they call upon anyone else except God? The question is rhetorical and the answer follows directly. It is God that they would call upon and they would forget all the false gods that they have associated with Him.

*"And certainly We sent (messengers) to nations before you then We seized them with distress and affliction in order that they might humble themselves. If only, when Our affliction came on them, they humbled themselves. But their hearts were hardened and Satan made all that they used to do seem fair to them."* Trials can come in the form of afflictions to be suffered, or bounty to be enjoyed. Previous generations were tried first with afflictions but in their obstinacy they refused to humble themselves to God. Their hearts were hardened and they succumbed to the temptation of the devil. When they forgot the warning, they were tested with a bounty from God. The verses paint an image of abundant bounty pouring upon them from every direction. Wealth, provisions, and worldly pleasures filled them with joy. They forgot who bestowed the blessings on them and never expressed gratitude to God. Then God seized them and they were left in utter despair. They were then completely destroyed to the last one of them. Praise be to the Lord of the worlds who cleansed the earth from the transgressors.

*“Say, ‘Have you considered that if God takes away your hearing and your sight and sets a seal on your hearts, who is the god besides God that can bring them back to you?’ See how We explain the revelations, yet they turn away.”* The afflictions are then personalized and brought close to people by reminding them that God can take away their hearing and their sight. He can seal upon their hearts. No one of their false gods would be able to restore their lost faculties. In spite of having all these signs explained to them they still turned away. The Arabic word used for “turning away” was usually used to describe how a camel walks askew when it is afflicted by a wound in one of its feet. The expression hints to the similarity between the two situations.

*“Say, ‘Have you considered if the torment of God should overtake you suddenly or openly, will any be destroyed but the wrongdoers?’”* The verses continue to threaten the disbelievers with an image of torment that will destroy the wrongdoers. Do you know that when the torment of God befalls you only the wrongdoers will perish? God’s torment can descend on them whenever He wills. It can come suddenly and unexpectedly while they are asleep, or it can come during the day when they are up and active. Either way, the torment will destroy the wrongdoers. The term “wrongdoers” is used here, as in other places in the Quran, to describe those who associate partners with God.

*“And We send the messengers only to give good news and to warn, then whoever believes and acts aright, they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. And (as for) those who reject Our revelations, torment shall afflict them because they transgressed.”* This paragraph ends by outlining the duties of the messengers of God. They were sent to deliver the message, to bring glad tidings, and to warn the people. Messengers are human beings who are sent to deliver the message to their fellow human beings. Those who receive the message have the choice either to believe or disbelieve. Those who believe and do righteous deeds, they shall not grieve for what to come nor they will be saddened for what was done. They will be forgiven for their previous sins and will be rewarded for their good deeds. As for those who denied the truth and transgressed they will be punished.

### **Verses: 50 to 55**

50. *Say, “I do not say to you, I have the treasures of God, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel; I only follow that which is revealed to me.” Say, “Are the blind and the seeing one alike? Do you not then reflect?”*
51. *Use the Quran to warn those who fear that they shall be gathered to their Lord- there is no protecting guardian for them, nor any intercessor besides Him- that they may remain conscious of God.*
52. *And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His face; you are in no way accountable for them nor they are for you; if you should drive them away you would become one of the wrongdoers.*

53. *And thus We have made some of them a test for the others so that they say, "Are these whom God favored among us?" Does not God know best those who are grateful?*
54. *And when those who believe in Our revelations come to you, say, "Peace be on you, your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself, verily, if any of you did evil through ignorance, then repents after that and acts aright, then He is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
55. *And thus do We explain the revelations and so that the way of the guilty may become clear. (6:50-55)*

*"Say, 'I do not say to you, I have the treasures of God, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I say to you that I am an angel; I only follow that which is revealed to me.' Say, 'Are the blind and the seeing one alike? Do you not then reflect?'"* The arrogant idolaters of Mecca challenged the Prophet (PBUH) to bring about a miracle. They asked him if he could transform the hills of Safa and Marwa into gold or move them so that they can plant the land in their place. They asked him if he could foretell what will happen in the future, could he bring down an angel, or could he bring down a book from heaven. These questions were the product of previous mythologies that the Arabs were privy to. Old mythologies conveyed distorted concepts of the nature of prophets and prophet-hood. This verse was revealed to correct these false conceptions of the nature, duties and capabilities of the messengers of God. It also portrays the merciful characteristics of God and His grace in accepting the repentance of those who err. One of the aspects of His grace is the detailed guidance given so that people can base their choice of belief or disbelief on clear evidence.

So, the Messenger was asked to respond to the idolatrous Arabs, who demanded the Prophet (PBUH) to perform miracles, explaining to them that he is a mere mortal. He was not given the treasures of God, he was not an angel, nor was he able to prophesize about the future. He brought them a faith that appeals to the initial natural disposition of humankind, free of the myth that distorted previous faiths. The new faith brought guidance that opens the eyes of people to new meanings. The verses likened those who received and accepted the guidance to people who can see, but those who refused the guidance were blind. God gave humankind a brain that is able to receive, reflect, and understand the divine revelations. This is humankind's opportunity for salvation. If humankind turns away from the divine revelation and endeavors to make it independently on his own, then he will certainly stray away from the straight path. Those who claim that human beings can arrive at the truth through a human thought process are misled. Their claim is based on the assumption that human thought and revelation are both God inspired. This claim is certainly untrue. Human intellect is unable to perceive and comprehend in a comprehensive way the whole picture of the universe and the creation. The divine revelation provides a holistic approach to life and the universe. It allows humankind to perceive, comprehend, and experience the universal balance without which humankind becomes a prey of his own whims and desires. Humankind is commanded to think and reflect. The divine revelation provides a light to guide the thought process and protect it against going astray. Complying with God's revelation does not limit the domain of the human thought process, but provides the needed protection.

*“Use the Quran to warn those who fear that they shall be gathered to their Lord- there is no protecting guardian for them, nor any intercessor besides Him- that they may remain conscious of God. And do not drive away those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, they desire only His face; you are in no way accountable for them nor they for you; if you should drive them away you would become one of the wrongdoers. And thus We have made some of them a test for the others so that they say, ‘Are these whom God favored among us?’ Does not God know best those who are grateful? And when those who believe in Our revelations come to you, say, ‘Peace be on you, your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself, verily, if any of you did evil through ignorance, then repents after that and acts aright, then He is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to deliver the message to all people but be sensitive to those who are seeking the grace of their Lord. He was commanded to treat people equally because all members of the human race have equal worth in front of God. These verses came to address a situation which arose when some of the chiefs of Mecca refused the call of the Prophet (PBUH) because they looked down upon those who accepted Islam before them. The earlier followers of Islam were mostly poor and came from the lower strata of the society. The chiefs wanted to be members of an exclusive club. However, the Quran clearly tells the Prophet (PBUH) that humankind’s worth is not measured by his earnings. This was a test for the chiefs: what did they consider more important, seeking the grace of God or enjoying the worldly benefits of their social status? The verse gives a clear message that humankind’s worth is not measured in terms of ethnicity, gender, wealth, or social status. People have equal worth in the sight of God. He favors those who reflect and embrace His guidance and seek His grace. The arrogant chiefs were taken by surprise, *“Are these whom God favored among us?”* They thought, God should favor them over the poor, were they not the chiefs? The answer they got is full of meaning, *“Does not God know best those who are grateful?”* Guidance is not awarded to people according to their status. Guidance is a blessing from God to be bestowed upon those who appreciate God’s blessing. The objections that the chiefs raised were motivated by their ignorance of God’s standard.

*“And when those who believe in Our revelations come to you, say, ‘Peace be on you, your Lord has ordained mercy on Himself, verily, if any of you did evil through ignorance, then repents after that and acts aright, then He is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’”* Those who believe do not only receive the blessing of guidance, but they are also rewarded by God’s mercy. God has ordained on himself to be merciful to His servants. The door for God’s forgiveness will always be left wide open for those who fall then repent. The word “evil” is quite general, it includes any type of sin. God has promised to forgive all sins upon repentance.

*“And thus do We explain the revelations and so that the way of the guilty may become clear.”* The message came to clarify and explain the criteria to be used to differentiate between right and wrong for people so that they are able to choose on the basis of clear definitions. The message does not only define what is right and shows the path that the believers should follow, but it also defines the falsehood so that those who choose to follow the path of falsehood would realize their error.

## Verses: 56 to 65

56. Say, "I am forbidden to worship those whom you call upon besides God." Say, "I do not follow your whims, for if I did, I would go astray and I would not be of those who are rightly guided."
57. Say, "I do have a clear proof from my Lord while you deny Him; what you seek to hasten is not in my power; the judgment is God's alone; He tells the truth and He is the best of judges."
58. Say, "If that which you desire to hasten were in my power, the matter would have certainly been decided between you and me; and God knows best who the wrongdoers are."
59. And with Him are the keys of the unseen - none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and sea, and no leaf falls without His knowledge, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear record.
60. And He it is who takes your souls at night (in sleep), and He knows what you have done by day, then He raises you up again; that an appointed term may be fulfilled; then to Him is your return, then He will inform you of what you were doing.
61. And He is the Dominator, over His servants, and He sends keepers over you; until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss.
62. Then are they sent back to God, their true Lord; certainly His is the judgment and He is swiftest in taking account.
63. Say, "Who is it that delivers you from the darkness of land and sea (when) you call upon Him in humility, and discretely: if He delivers us from this, we should certainly be of the grateful ones."
64. Say, "God delivers you from them and from every distress, but again you set up partners (with Him)."
65. Say, "He has the power to send on you a torment from above you or from beneath your feet, or to throw you into confusion, (making you) different parties; and to make you taste mutual vengeance - each from the other." See how We explain the revelations that they may understand. (6:56-65)

"Say, 'I am forbidden to worship those whom you call upon besides God.' Say, 'I do not follow your whims, for if I did, I would go astray and I would not be of those who are rightly guided.'" This verse responds to a compromise that the idolaters of Mecca suggested. If the Messenger (PBUH) were to worship their deities, they would join him in worshipping God. God commanded His Messenger (PBUH) to rebuff the idolaters of Mecca, telling them that he could not worship those whom they associate with God. One should reflect on the use of the words "those whom" which would usually refer to living beings. So the reference here is not only to the idols that the idolaters used to worship but also to the chiefs who used to determine the lawful and the forbidden. This is considered a kind of associating partners with God. Since these chiefs usurp God's right as the sole

legislating authority. Islam considers following manmade rules which contravene God's law a sin equivalent to associating partners with God.

*" Say, 'I do have a clear proof from my Lord while you deny Him; what you seek to hasten is not in my power; the judgment is God's alone; He tells the truth and He is the best of judges.'"* This was a command to the Prophet (PBUH) to make an unequivocal proclamation of his belief in God, a belief based on deep understanding of the concept of the Oneness of God and the revelation that he received. It is the same proclamation that Noah, Saleh, Abraham, and Jacob (PBUT) all made before. This is a proclamation that reflected a deep faith in God.

*"Say, 'If that which you desire to hasten were in my power, the matter would have certainly been decided between you and me; and God knows best who are the wrongdoers.'"* The Messenger (PBUH) reiterated the limits of his power. The idolaters wanted to see a prophet who performs miracles. So, God commanded him to explain to them the limits of his authority. He was only a mortal who received God's revelations and was commanded to convey them to the people. God states the truth and judges between people. He is totally aware of who the wrongdoers are.

*"And with Him are the keys of the unseen - none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and sea, and no leaf falls without His knowledge, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear record."* The verses continue to talk about the attributes of God, only God has the comprehensive knowledge of everything. The verses outline the vastness of the unseen. God is aware of every minute detail of everything that happens on land or at sea. Whether it is a falling leaf or a hidden grain; green or dry everything is recorded in a book. God's knowledge is comprehensive. It encompasses the known and the unknown; and that which grows, and that which perishes.

The verses mention the unseen and its keys and state that the knowledge of these keys belongs only to God. The belief in the unseen is one of the articles of faith. The belief in God encompasses the belief in the unseen. No human is able to understand the essence of God, so we can only recognize God through His actions. The belief in the Hereafter is a part of the belief in the unseen because the Hereafter, the resurrection, the accountability of humankind, and Hellfire are all matters of the unseen. The belief in the unseen includes the belief in the angels and in destiny whether good or bad.

The Quran identifies two realms in this world: the seen and the unseen. Not everything unknown to humankind is unseen. Humankind is given the capability of acquiring the knowledge so he can further the boundaries of the unknown and discover the rules that govern this universe within the boundaries decreed by God. Understanding the rules that govern the universe allows humankind to control the universal powers in order to be able to fulfill the purpose of his creation. Humankind was created to be the vicegerent of God on earth. This entails advancing the knowledge to better utilize the available resources for the benefit of the inhabitants of the earth. The fact that humankind is unable to know the unseen let alone control it does not mean that it does not exist. This is the Islamic concept

of the unseen. Muslims believe in the unseen but they also believe that there are rules that govern the universe. We are commanded to explore these rules, understand them, and use them to the advancement of life on earth. This is the way to fulfill the mission of God's vicegerent on earth.

*“And He it is who takes your souls at night (in sleep), and He knows what you have done by day, then He raises you up again; that an appointed term may be fulfilled; then to Him is your return, then He will inform you of what you were doing.”* Humankind cannot deny the existence of the unseen while we experience its forms in our daily life. The Quran reminds us of the different aspects of the unseen that we experience every day. Sleep, which is a form of death, is one aspect of the unseen. God moves us from the realm of the unseen to the realm of the seen to continue our lives for a certain period of time. He is well aware of what gain or loss, good or bad we attain using our senses. Then to Him we return to be held accountable for our deeds.

*“And He is the Dominator, over His servants, and He sends keepers over you; until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers cause him to die, and they are not remiss. Then are they sent back to God, their true Lord; certainly His is the judgment and He is swiftest in taking account.”* God reigns supreme over His servants, and He has the absolute authority over His creation. No amount of freedom, knowledge, or power can allow humankind to escape God's reach. He sends keepers over His servants. In other places of the Quran, it is explained that the keepers are angels, but the present verses do not dwell on the nature of these keepers. The focus here is on the task of the keepers: keeping records of humankind's actions. Everything humankind does is recorded. Humankind is not alone even for a split second. Each single deed and each single movement are recorded by the keepers. Then the predetermined moment of death comes, a moment predetermined in God's knowledge but is unknown to humankind. It is part of the unseen. At this precise moment which comes unexpectedly, a dedicated messenger performs his task and puts the human being to death. Everyone will return to the true Lord. He is the one who created people, allowed them to lead their lives under His control, and brought them back to Him at the appointed time to judge them. Only He can judge, and only to Him people are accountable. He is swift in His reckoning.

*“Say, ‘Who is it that delivers you from the darkness of land and sea (when) you call upon Him in humility, and discretely: If He delivers us from this, we should certainly be of the grateful ones.’ Say, ‘God delivers you from them and from every distress, but again you set up partners (with Him).’”* At times of adversity, the initial natural human disposition forces human beings to seek help from God. However, once the affliction is removed and life becomes comfortable, these same human beings quickly forget their Lord. The verses paint vivid images for the times of adversity and images of darkness on land and at sea.

*“Say, ‘He has the power to send on you a torment from above you or from beneath your feet, or to throw you into confusion, (making you) different parties; and to make you taste mutual vengeance - each from the other.’ See how We explain the revelations that they may understand.”* Then people are reminded that God can overwhelm them with His torment, which can come in the form of a natural disaster or in the form of struggle



between different groups of people. Depicting a disaster coming from above or below is more frightening than if it were coming from left or right. One may be able to avoid danger coming from the side, but danger coming from above or below is usually unavoidable.

### **Verses: 66 to 70**

66. *And your people rejected it, although it is the very truth. Say, "I have not been put in charge of you."*
67. *Each prophecy has an appointed term, and you will come to know (it).*
68. *And when you see those who engage into false discourses about Our revelations, turn away from them until they turn to another topic, and if Satan causes you to forget, then, when you have remembered, do not sit with the wrongdoers.*
69. *The righteous are not held in any way accountable for them (the wrongdoers), but their duty is to remind them, that they may become conscious of God.*
70. *And leave those who have taken their religion for a play and amusement and are deceived by this worldly life. And continue to remind (them) with the Quran, lest a soul should be damned for what it has earned; it shall not have besides God neither a protecting guardian nor an intercessor, and if it should seek to offer every ransom, it shall not be accepted from it; these are the ones who will be ruined for what they earned; they shall have a drink of boiling water and a painful torment because they disbelieved. (6:66-70)*

*"And your people rejected it, although it is the very truth. Say, 'I have not been put in charge of you.' Each prophecy has an appointed term, and you will come to know (it)."* The verse addressed the Prophet (PBUH) and comforted him and the believers, telling him that what was revealed to him is the truth, even if his people rejected it. Their rejection does not change the reality. It is God that decrees what is true and what is false. The Prophet (PBUH) was told that he is not responsible for changing the hearts of people. His task is to deliver the message and it is up to the people to decide and face the consequences of their decision on the appointed date.

*"And when you see those who engage into false discourses about Our revelations, turn away from them until they turn to another topic, and if Satan causes you to forget, then, when you have remembered, do not sit with the wrongdoers. The righteous are not held in any way accountable for them (the wrongdoers), but their duty is to remind them, that they may become conscious of God."* The command was then issued to the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers, not to socialize with those who denigrate the words of God. It is a command to abandon an assembly once its participants start reviling the message. However, the disbelievers are only accountable to God and the only responsibility that the believers have is to remind the disbelievers with the message, perhaps they would heed the advice.

*"And leave those who have taken their religion for a play and amusement and are deceived by this worldly life. And continue to remind (them) with the Quran, lest a soul should be damned for what it has earned; it shall not have besides God neither a*

*protecting guardian nor an intercessor, and if it should seek to offer every ransom, it shall not be accepted from it; these are the ones who will be ruined for what they earned; they shall have a drink of boiling water and a painful torment because they disbelieved.”* The command was then reiterated to the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers to leave those who consider their religion a game alone. Those were the ones who were deluded by the gains of this worldly life. However, it is the duty of the believers to continue to remind them with the message and the consequences of their behavior. Each soul will be held accountable for its deeds, there will be no intercessor to intercede on its behalf, nor will there be a protecting guardian to protect it from the wrath of God. No ransom will be big enough to save any soul. Those who rejected will be given boiling drinks that will burn their throats and their stomachs. They will be subjected to a painful chastisement for their rejection.

### **Verses: 71 to 73**

71. *Say, “Shall we call on things besides God, which do not benefit nor harm us, and turn back on our heels after receiving guidance from God, like him whom the devils have lured and confused him so he wanders around through the earth? He has companions who call him to the right way, (saying), ‘Come to us.’” Say, “Definitely, the guidance of God is the only true guidance, and we are commanded that we should submit to the Lord of the worlds.”*
72. *And that you should establish prayers and be conscious of Him; to Him you will be gathered.*
73. *And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in truth, and on the day He says, “Be” and it will be.” His word is the truth, and His is the Sovereignty the Day when the trumpet shall be blown. He is the Knower of the unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise, the Totally-Aware. (6:71-73)*

*“Say, ‘Shall we call on things besides God, which do not benefit nor harm us, and turn back on our heels after receiving guidance from God, like him whom the devils have lured and confused him so he wanders around through the earth? He has companions who call him to the right way, (saying), “Come to us.””* The verses continue to elaborate on the theme of the belief in the Oneness of God and to repudiate associating partners with Him in a strong cadence. It draws the parallel between those who abandon Islam after they have been guided and a person who is confused; he wanders around and does not know the right direction to follow. Only God’s guidance is the true guidance. This strong cadence ends with a note of a high pitch expressing the absolute authority of God. This authority will become apparent to all His creation on the day the trumpet will be blown. On that day all those in the graves will be resurrected, and the truth will become clear to everyone: God has absolute authority, and to Him everyone will return.

*“Say, ‘Definitely, the guidance of God is the only true guidance, and we are commanded that we should submit to the Lord of the worlds.’ And that you should establish prayers and be conscious of Him; to Him you will be gathered. And it is He who created the*

heavens and the earth in truth, and on the day He says, 'Be' it will be. His word is the truth, and His is the kingdom on the day when the trumpet shall be blown. He is the Knower of the unseen and the seen; and He is the Wise, the Totally-Aware. Muhammad, say to the idolaters that they are worshiping those who can neither benefit nor harm them. Whether it is a person, an idol, a tree, an angel, or a spirit no one can benefit or harm them except God. Things happen only according to God's will. Those who are lured by the devils to turn their backs to the guidance, will be thrown in a state of disarray and confusion. Their hearts will be torn between the various deities they worshiped. Certainly, God's guidance is the only true guidance.

The use of the term, "Lord of the worlds" here is significant. It states unequivocally that God is the Lord of the universe. We are commanded to submit to Him. The whole universe has submitted to God, why would humankind be an exception? God created the heavens and the earth in truth. God has the absolute power to create, change, and transform. He simply says, "Be," and it is. He knows the seen and the unseen and He is the Wise, Totally-Aware.

#### **Verses: 74 to 94**

74. *And when Abraham said to his father, Azar, "Do you take idols for deities? Surely I see you and your people in manifest error."*
75. *And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth so that he may have certitude.*
76. *So when the night covered him over, he saw a star; he said, "Is this my lord?" So when it set, he said, "I do not love things that set."*
77. *Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, "Is this my lord?" So when it set, he said, "Unless my Lord guides me I shall certainly be among those who go astray."*
78. *Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, "Is this my lord? This is the greatest?" So when it set, he said, "My people, surely I disown all that what you set up as partners with God."*
79. *Surely I have set my face firmly and truly, towards Him who originated the heavens and the earth, and I shall never set up partners with God."*
80. *His people disputed with him. He said, "Do you dispute with me about God? And He has indeed guided me; and I do not fear in any way what you associate with Him, unless my Lord pleases; my Lord encompasses all things in His knowledge; will you not then be admonished?"*
81. *And how should I fear what you have associated (with Him), while you do not fear that you have associated partners (with God) about which He did not send down to you any authority; which then of the two parties has more right for security, if you know?*
82. *Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with wrongdoing, those who shall have the security and they are the rightly guided."*
83. *And this was Our argument which we gave Abraham against his people; We exalt in dignity whom We please; your Lord is Wise, Omniscient.*

84. *And We gave him Isaac and Jacob; each did We guide, and We guided Noah before, and of his descendants, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, and Aaron; and thus We reward the doers of good.*
85. *And Zachary and John and Jesus and Elijha; all in the ranks of the righteous;*
86. *And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot; and all of them We preferred above all other people.*
87. *And from among their fathers and their descendants and their brethren, and We chose them and guided them to the straight way.*
88. *This is God's guidance; He guides whom He pleases of His servants. If they were to associate partners with Him, certainly what they did would be in vain.*
89. *These whom We gave the Scripture, the Wisdom, and the Prophet-hood; therefore, if these disbelieve in it We have already entrusted it to a people who believe in it.*
90. *These are they whom God guided, therefore follow their guidance. Say, "I do not ask you for any reward for it; it is nothing but a reminder for the worlds."*
91. *They have no grasp of God's true measure when they say, "God did not reveal anything to a mortal." Say, "Who revealed the Scripture which Moses brought, a light and guidance to people, which you put on parchments, you show some while you conceal much? And you were taught what you did not know, (neither) you nor your fathers. Say, "God;" Then leave them to play in their vain discourses.*
92. *And this is a Book We have revealed, blessed, confirming that which is before it, and that you may warn the mother of the cities and those around it; and those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they attend to their prayers constantly.*
93. *And who does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God, or says, "It has been revealed to me;" While nothing has been revealed to him, and he who says, "I can reveal the like of what God has revealed?" And if you could see the wrongdoers in the agonies of death and the angels shall spread forth their hands, "Give up your souls; today you will be recompensed with an ignominious torment because you spoke against God other than the truth and (because) you showed arrogance against His revelations."*
94. *And certainly you have come to Us alone as We created you the first time, and you have left behind your backs the things which We gave you, and We do not see with you your intercessors whom you alleged to be God's associates; certainly the ties between you are now cut off and what you alleged has deserted you. (6:74-94)*

This long paragraph uses a different approach to discuss the main theme of this Sura. It establishes the fundamentals of faith by introducing a comprehensive understanding of God and the relationship between humankind and his Creator. The paragraph uses a new style. The concept of the Oneness of God is introduced through an example of a dialogue which would have taken place between the messengers of God who were sent before Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and their people. The verses narrate the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and the dialogue between him and his father. It shows how the sound initial natural disposition rejects the belief in the idols and longs to find the One true God.

This initial natural human disposition motivated Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to reflect on the creation of God in his search for God. He reached the conclusion that his father and his people were committing a great error in worshiping idols and he confronted his father with this conclusion.

*“And when Abraham said to his father, Azar, ‘Do you take idols for gods? Surely I see you and your people in manifest error.’ And thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth so that he may have certitude. So when the night covered him over, he saw a star; he said, ‘Is this my lord?’ So when it set, he said, ‘I do not love things that set.’ Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘Is this my lord?’ So when it set, he said, ‘Unless my Lord guides me I shall certainly be among those who go astray.’ Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, ‘Is this my lord? This is the greatest?’ So when it set, he said, ‘My people, surely I disown all that what you set up as partners with God. Surely I have set my face firmly and truly, towards Him who originated the heavens and the earth, and I shall never set up partners with God.’”* Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) argument reflected the disposition of the sound initial human nature which refuses to accept idol worship which his people were practicing. Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) portrays the example of the sound initial natural disposition which God imbued humans with.

Prophet Abraham (PBUH), who was known for his kindness, must have endured a great hardship to confront his father with this conclusion. So, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was rewarded by God. He was shown the nature of the divine kingdom and the secrets of the universe. His initial disposition to reject the worship of idols is strengthened by this knowledge to move him from the stage of rejecting the worship of idols to the stage of the belief in the One true God. The process is described in a series of observations and conclusions that he drew. This was a difficult journey for Prophet Abraham (PBUH). It was the journey from a belief motivated by the initial natural human disposition to a belief based on awareness, a belief which led to the acceptance of duties and laws dictated by the divine project. These were the duties and laws included in the message delivered by the different messengers of God. The Message became then the covenant between God and humankind.

*“His people disputed with him. He said, ‘Do you dispute with me about God? And He has guided me indeed; and I do not fear in any way those that you associate with Him, unless my Lord pleases; my Lord encompassed all things in His knowledge; will you not then be admonished? And how should I fear what you have associated (with Him), while you do not fear that you have associated with God that about which He has not sent down to you any authority; which then of the two parties has more right for security, if you know?’”* His people were misguided in their idol worship, unable to think or reflect. They argued with him, at no avail. He completed his journey seeking the truth, and he was guided by his Lord. He had no fear of the false gods which they worshiped. He responded to his people threats; it is they who should be afraid of God. He asked them a rhetorical question: who is worthy of the security? The answer came from the higher heaven, and God’s decree was pronounced, *“Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with*

*wrongdoing, those who shall have the security and they are rightly guided. And this was Our argument which we gave Abraham against his people; We exalt in dignity whom We please; surely your Lord is Wise, Omniscient.*” This was the argument that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) had against his people; a God inspired argument that refuted his people’s claims and raised his status high above them. God is surely Wise and Omniscient.

*“And We gave him Isaac and Jacob; each did We guide, and We guided Noah before, and of his descendants, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, and Aaron; and thus We reward the doers of good. And Zachary and John and Jesus and Elijah; all in the ranks of the righteous; and Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot; and all of them We preferred above all other people. And from among their fathers and their descendants and their brethren, and We chose them and guided them to the straightway. This is God’s guidance; He guides whom He pleases of His servants. If they were to associate partners with Him, certainly what they did would be in vain. These whom We gave the Scripture and the Wisdom and the Prophet-hood; therefore, if these disbelieve in it We have already entrusted it to a people who believe in it. These are they whom God guided, therefore follow their guidance. Say, ‘I do not ask you for any reward for it; it is nothing but a reminder for the worlds.’”* The verses continue to mention a number of the messengers of God, seventeen in total, in addition to Prophets Noah (PBUH) and Abraham (PBUH). All were chosen by God, all excelled in performing their tasks and all were rewarded by God. Their status was raised high above their people just like Abraham’s (PBUH) status was raised high above his people before. These are the messengers who brought God’s guidance to their people, who declared that the deeds of all who associate partners with God will be frustrated. This is a statement which identifies the source of guidance that people on earth can avail. The messengers brought God’s guidance to people. This is the only source of guidance and the deeds of those who seek different sources for guidance will be frustrated.

The messengers were given the Scripture, the Prophet-hood and the Wisdom to guide people to the straight path. They are the examples to be followed by those who are guided. Those who are guided will follow the example set by the messengers and will carry the responsibility of spreading the message, in spite of those who associate partners with God. The Prophet (PBUH) should follow the example of the previous messengers. He should make it clear to the idolaters that he is not expecting a reward from them. He is bringing them a reminder so that they can heed God’s guidance.

*“They have no grasp of God’s true measure when they say, ‘God did not reveal anything to a mortal.’ Say, ‘Who revealed the Scripture which Moses brought, a light and guidance to people, which you put on parchments which you show some while you conceal much? And you were taught what you did not know, (neither) you nor your fathers. Say, ‘God;’ then leave them to play in their vain discourses. And this is a Book We have revealed, blessed, confirming that which is before it, and that you may warn the mother of the cities and those around it; and those who believe in the Hereafter believe in it, and they attend to their prayers constantly.”* The idolatrous Arabs refused to admit that Muhammad (PBUH) was a messenger of God. This rejection amounted to a denial

that God can send a messenger. They underestimated the power of God. This rejection also portrayed their ignorance of the attributes of God. He is the Generous, the Great, the Just, the Merciful, the Omniscient, and the Wise. He will not leave His creation without guidance. God knows best His creation and knows best their needs. He knows the struggle that humankind has to go through against his whims and desires on one side and against Satan on the other side. So, humankind needs guidance to support him in this struggle. God provided guidance through His messengers.

An example of these messengers is Prophet Moses (PBUH) who was given a Scripture a light and guidance for people. The Quran is another example for the Scripture that was revealed by God to His messengers. It is a blessed Book that confirms the Scripture that was revealed before it. It brings warning to the people of Mecca and its surroundings. Mecca is the site of the first house that was established on earth for people to worship the One true God. God made this house a safe and secure place for people. From that house came out the universal call to all people to believe in God and to it the believers come back to perform pilgrimage, thus they complete the circle. Those who believe in the accountability of humankind do not find it difficult to believe that God sent messengers to guide people to the straight path. They keep their prayers to maintain a strong relationship with their Lord.

*“And who does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God, or says, ‘It has been revealed to me;’ While nothing has been revealed to him, and he who says, ‘I can reveal the like of what God has revealed?’ And if you could see the wrongdoers in the agonies of death and the angels shall spread forth their hands, ‘Give up your souls; today you will be recompensed with an ignominious torment because you spoke against God other than the truth and (because) you showed arrogance against His revelations.’ And certainly you have come to Us alone as We created you the first time, and you have left behind your backs the things which We gave you, and We do not see with you your intercessors whom you alleged they were God's associates; certainly the ties between you are now cut off and what you alleged has deserted you.”* It has been narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) and Qatadah (RA) that these verses were revealed to respond to Musailimah the liar, his wife Sagah bint El-Hareth, and Al-Aswad Al-A’nsi who claimed that they were prophets. Each one of them claimed that they received God’s revelation. It was also narrated on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA) that ‘Abd-Allah bin Sa’ad bin Abi Sarh was the one who said, *“I can reveal the like of what God has revealed.”* He was a Muslim and one of the scribes of the Prophet (PBUH), however he became an apostate. The verses paint a horrible scene for the torment that the wrongdoers will meet. What is worse than those who make false claims about receiving a revelation from God? Those will suffer most when they are on the death bed as a result of making these false claims. They will meet their Lord as individuals, just as they were created individually in the first place. No supporters will be available to support them, nor will they have intercessors who can intercede on their behalf.

## Verses: 95 to 111

95. *It is God who splits the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living; that is God. How you then turn away from the truth?*
96. *He causes the dawn to break; and He has made the night for rest, and the sun and the moon for reckoning; this is laid down by the will of the Eminent, the Omniscient.*
97. *And He it is who has made the stars for you that you may be guided by them in the darkness of the land and the sea; truly We explain Our revelations for a people who know.*
98. *And He it is who has brought you into being from a single soul, then there is (for you) a resting-place and a depository; indeed, We have explained the revelations for a people who understand.*
99. *And He it is who sends down water from the sky, then We bring forth with it buds of all (plants), then We bring forth from it green (foliage) from which We produce thick-clustered grain; and from the palm-tree, and its sheaths, come forth clusters (of dates) within reach, and gardens of grapes and olives and pomegranates, alike and unlike; watch their fruits as they grow and ripen; most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.*
100. *And they assign partners to God from among the jinn, while He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters without knowledge; glory be to Him, and highly exalted is He above what they ascribe (to Him).*
101. *He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He has no consort, and He (Himself) created everything, and He is the Knower of all things.*
102. *That is God, your Lord, there is no deity but He; the Creator of all things, therefore worship Him, and He is the Guardian in charge of all things.*
103. *No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all visions; and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware.*
104. *Indeed, there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, it is for his own soul and whoever will be blind, it shall be to his detriment and I am not a keeper over you.*
105. *And thus do We explain the revelations and that they may say, "You have studied;" and that We may make it clear to a people who know.*
106. *Follow what is revealed to you from your Lord; there is no deity but He; and turn away from those who associate partners with God.*
107. *And if God had pleased, they would not have associated partners (with Him); and We have not appointed you a keeper over them and you are not a guardian in charge of them.*
108. *And do not revile those whom they call upon others besides God, lest they wrongfully revile God. Thus, to every nation have We made their deeds seem fair; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did.*
109. *And they swear a solemn oath by God, that if a sign came to them they would most certainly believe in it. Say, "Certainly, signs are in the power of God; and what makes you sure that when it comes they will not believe?"*



110. *We confounded their hearts and their eyes, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We let them wander on blindly in their contumacy.*

111. *And even if We had sent down to them the angels and the dead had spoken to them and We had brought together all things before them, they would not believe unless God so willed, but most of them are ignorant. (6:95-111)*

*“It is God Who splits the grain and the fruit stone. He brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living; that is God. How you then turn away from the truth?”*

It is the miracle which no one knows how it happens let alone how to duplicate it, the miracle of initiating life. This paragraph presents yet another approach to establish the belief in the Oneness of God. It invites humankind to reflect on various phenomena that surround us: the germination of seeds, the alternation of day and night, the motion of the sun and the moon, the use of the stars for navigation on land and at sea, and the creation of humankind.

One of the miracles that happen every moment and no one can fathom, let alone control, is the miracle of how life originates from a seemingly dead grain or a fruit stone. Each moment a grain is split and germinates; and a solid fruit stone splits and grows to produce a new tree. How does life originate from a grain or a fruit stone is still a mystery, known only to God. In the beginning, God created life from nothing. This statement is mentioned often in the Quran to point the attention to the process of creation as a confirmation of the fact of the Oneness of God, the Creator. How can people turn away from these facts?

*“He causes the dawn to break; and He has made the night for rest, and the sun and the moon for reckoning; this is laid down by the will of the Eminent, the Omniscient. And He it is who has made the stars for you that you may be guided by them in the darkness of the land and the sea; truly We explain Our revelations for a people who know.”*

Astronomical phenomena are also signs that point to the Oneness of the creator. God is the one who alternates the day and night and He is the One who created the sun and the moon. These phenomena point to the delicate control needed to maintain the creation and can only be provided by the One God. Among these signs are the stars which guide people in the darkness on land and at sea. The verses do not present these facts in the form of dry theories but it appeals to the initial natural human disposition. It appeals to the ability of humankind to observe and reflect on these signs. The verse ends by appealing to those who know, because to be guided by the stars one has to know which stars to look for and to understand their movements.

*“And He it is who has brought you into being from a single soul, then there is (for you) a resting-place and a depository; indeed, We have explained the revelations for a people who understand.”* The next phenomenon to be addressed in this group of verses is how life began and how it continues through the mating of a male and a female. This verse ends by appealing to the understanding of humankind, because to understand this phenomenon one needs a higher level of knowledge to understand how the sperm (the depository) and egg (the resting-place) come together to form the embryo from which a new human being is formed.

*“And He it is who sends down water from the sky, then We bring forth with it buds of all (plants), then We bring forth from it green (foliage) from which We produce thick-clustered grain; and from the palm-tree, and its sheaths, come forth clusters (of dates) within reach, and gardens of grapes and olives and pomegranates, alike and unlike; watch their fruits as they grow and ripen; most surely there are signs in this for a people who believe.”* Another sign of the Creator is the water cycle and the role of water in growing plants: a fact that is known to every one. The verse paints a beautiful scene of green plants that grow into gardens full of fruit bearing trees: palm-trees, grapevines, olive groves, and pomegranate trees. The branches bring the fruits to be handpicked and provide shade. The verse appeals to the sense of appreciation of the beauty of nature. Look at the beauty of the fruits that come out and reflect on the Creator who created this beauty. These are signs for people who believe, because belief opens up the heart of the believer to receive the signs and it provides the insight so that one can sense what is behind the visible.

*“And they assign partners to God from among the jinn, while He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters without knowledge; glory be to Him, and highly exalted is He above what they ascribe (to Him). He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He has no consort, and He (Himself) created everything, and He is the Knower of all things.”* Having laid the foundation for the signs that point to the Oneness of the Creator, the verses begin to refute the false claims of the idolaters who worshipped the jinn. The idolatrous Arabs were once, the followers of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), but they deviated from the faith he preached which is based on the belief in the Oneness of God. The deviation must have started slowly, and then developed into a full blown polytheism which claimed that God has partners from among the jinn. But how can this be, while it is God Who created the jinn. This mythology claimed that God has sons and daughters. Glory be to God Who is high above all these false claims. He is the Creator of every thing, how can He have a son while He has no mate. His knowledge encompasses every thing. This is certainly your Lord, the creator of every thing, so serve Him. Since God is the Creator, He controls every thing and He is the provider, then only He deserves to be worshipped.

*“That is God, your Lord, there is no deity but He; the Creator of all things, therefore worship Him, and He takes charge of all things. No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all visions; and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware.”* Humans do not have the ability to see God. Those who request to see God and those who request a material proof for the existence of God do not appreciate the meaning of their requests. It is beyond the ability of human beings to see God, but He sees everything. It is sufficient for them to see God through the signs of His creation. These are the signs that guide humankind to the belief in the Oneness of God. These signs provide the insight for the spiritual sight. Those who got the insight can see clearly, while those who do not get the insight are blind and the Prophet (PBUH) was not appointed a keeper over people.

*“Indeed there have come to you clear proofs from your Lord; whoever will therefore see, it is for his own soul and whoever will be blind, it shall be to his detriment and I am not a keeper over you. And thus do We explain the revelations and that they may say, ‘You*

*have studied;’ and that We may make it clear to a people who know. Follow what is revealed to you from your Lord; there is no deity but He; and turn away from those who associate partners with God. And if God had pleased, they would not have associated partners (with Him); and We have not appointed you a keeper over them, and you are not a guardian in charge of them.”* The verses talk about the reaction of the idolatrous Arabs when they heard the revelations explaining the astronomical phenomena and the other signs of God which they thought were beyond the understanding of an illiterate human being like Muhammad (PBUH). So, they said to the Prophet (PBUH) you must have studied the Scripture that was revealed before. They did not realize that even the old Scripture did not address such issues. The explanation of the signs of God given in these verses was met with two kinds of reactions. Those who were not interested in the guidance nor wanted the truth, tried to find an explanation to justify Muhammad’s (PBUH) knowledge of these phenomena. They fabricated the story that he studied earlier Scripture. But those who were interested in the guidance and endeavored to seek the truth knew that this knowledge is divine and believed in it. Those are the “*people who know*”.

So, God commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to follow what has been revealed to him and to turn away from the idolaters. Had God willed that they follow the guidance, they would have been forced to follow. Had God willed that they would be created with an inclination towards guidance only, like the angels, He could have done that. But God created humankind with equal disposition to guidance and misguidance. God gave humankind the ability to choose, within the limits that God set, the way to follow and to reap the appropriate compensation for his choice. God’s will does not force humankind to follow one way or the other so that he can fulfill the role for which he was created. This freedom of choice is further emphasized by reiterating the role of the Prophet (PBUH), he was neither a keeper over them nor was he appointed as a guardian in charge of them. This also outlined the limits of responsibility of the Prophet (PBUH).

*“And do not revile those whom they call upon others besides God, lest they wrongfully revile God. Thus, to every nation have We made their deeds seem fair; then to their Lord shall be their return, so He will inform them of what they did. And they swear a solemn oath by God, that if a sign came to them they would most certainly believe in it. Say, ‘Certainly, signs are in the power of God; and what makes you sure that when it comes they will not believe?’ We confounded their hearts and their eyes, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We let them wander on blindly in their contumacy. And even if We had sent down to them the angels and the dead had spoken to them and We had brought together all things before them, they would not believe unless God so willed, but most of them are ignorant.”* This was a command to the Prophet (PBUH), and consequently to the believers, to turn away from the idolaters politely. They were commanded not to revile the false deities of the idolaters, so that the idolaters would not have the excuse to revile God. Leave them to God, they will return to Him and they will be told about what they have done. The command indicated also that it does not behoove the believers to use indecent language even in connection with false deities. It is also doubtful that using an abusive language would be productive; it may actually increase the obstinacy of the idolaters.

The paragraph ends with refuting the claim of the idolaters that if they receive a sign from God, they will believe. The Quran pointed out that the signs of God were all around them but they were obstinate in their rejection so they ignored these signs. God knew their hearts. He knew how they will react. Even if angels came down to them, or the dead were able to speak to them they would not have believed.

### **Verses: 111 to 113**

111. *And even if We were to send down angels to them, and if the dead were to speak to them, and (even if) We were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things (that can prove the truth), they would still not believe unless God so willed. But (of this) most of them are ignorant.*
112. *Thus, have We appointed to every prophet an enemy - devils of humankind and jinn who inspire in one another plausible discourse through guile. If your Lord willed, they would not do so; so leave them alone with their devising.*
113. *That the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter may incline thereto, and that they may take pleasure therein, and that they may earn what they are earning. (6:111-113)*

The first verse is a continuation of the paragraph which was discussed in the previous part. It deals with the challenge that the idolatrous Arabs were posing to the Prophet (PBUH): they wanted the Prophet (PBUH) to bring a miracle to support his claim. They repeatedly assured the Prophet (PBUH) that if he were to bring about a miracle they would believe him. The verses dealing with this episode say, *“And they swear a solemn oath by God, that if a sign came to them they would most certainly believe in it. Say, ‘Certainly, signs are in the power of God; and what makes you sure that when it comes they will not believe?’ We confounded their hearts and their eyes, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We let them wander blindly on in their contumacy.”* Even the believers entertained hopes that the idolaters were honest in their statements. They wished that God would respond favorably to their request. These verses were discussed in the previous section. In this section we will simply outline lessons that we learn from these verses.

The first lesson is that faith, disbelief, guidance, and misguidance are not dependent on factual proofs. The truth is itself the proof of its validity. The truth overwhelms the heart and opens it to accept and submit to guidance. There are other obstacles that prevent people from accepting the truth other than the lack of proof. The verse says, *“Certainly, signs are in the power of God; and what makes you sure that when it comes they will not believe?” We confounded their hearts and their eyes, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We let them wander blindly on in their contumacy.”* Even if they receive a miracle, there is no assurance that what happened in the first instance will not repeat again and they would continue to deny the truth as they did before. Faith is a matter of the heart. Sound hearts are ready to receive the truth.

The second lesson is that the will of God is the deciding factor regarding matters of guidance and misguidance. In His wisdom, God allowed humans a certain level of

freedom of choice. Humans will be tested how they use this freedom. Those who use their freedom of choice in pursuing the truth and searching for guidance will be helped by God in their pursuit; but those who choose to turn away from pursuing the truth will not get the help and will be left to dwell in darkness. The will of God prevails in any case. To God is the ultimate decision. This is what the verse, *“We confounded their hearts and their eyes, as they did not believe in it the first time, and We let them wander blindly on in their contumacy,”* means. And, *“had we sent Angels to them, or allowed the dead to talk to them, and grouped everything forward in front of them, they would have not believed- except by the will of God- but most of them do not know.”* This has also been referred to in the verse, *“follow that which have been revealed to you from Your Lord, no God but Him, and turn away from the disbelievers. Had God willed, they would not have associated partners with Him. We have not made you a keeper over them and you are not a controller of their affairs.”* In another verse it is stated, *“Thus have We appointed to every prophet an enemy - devils of humankind and jinn who inspire in one another plausible discourse through guile. If Your Lord willed, they would not do so; so leave them alone with their devising.”*

Thus, it is God who makes the final decision. He has the power to offer or withhold guidance. However, He is going to test people according to the limited freedom of choice that He granted them. He has decreed that those who strive for the truth will be guided with His help, and those who chose the road to misguidance will be left to their devices. There is no contradiction between the infinite power of God and the limited freedom of choice that was granted to humans.

The third lesson is that although humans can exercise their limited freedom of choice to obey or disobey God, but both categories are under His control. No one has the ability to escape God’s Omnipotence. However, there are two distinct domains of activities in the life of each human being. The first domain includes activities which human beings have no control over e.g. activities dictated by the biological and psychological composition of the human being. The second domain includes activities which the human being is free (within the boundaries set by God) to make decisions based on knowledge and guidance. The believers are able to maintain a balance between the two domains. This balance allows them to live in peace with themselves, because the two domains are interacting together under one set of rules. The disbelievers, on the other hand, suffer from the conflicting demands of the two domains.

The third lesson is specifically relevant to the topics dealt with in the remaining part of this Sura. The same issue comes up over and over again in different places in the Sura and under various forms. This is simply because the remaining part of the Sura deals with the concept of divinity and the authority and omnipotence of the Divine. Even those who choose to disobey the divine law cannot escape the control of God.

An interpretation of the verse, *“And even if We were to send down angels to them, and if the dead were to speak to them, and (even if) We were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things (that can prove the truth), they would still not believe unless God so willed. But (of this) most of them are ignorant,”* was given by Abo Ga’far Muhammad

bin Jareer Al-Tabari as follows, “*God told His Prophet (PBUH), ‘Muhammad, do not have any hope that these who associate partners with God would believe. Those, who said, ‘We will believe if you bring about a miracle to convince us,’ will not believe even if we were to bring the angels down to meet them face to face, or raised the dead to speak to them as a sign that you are the messenger of God; they will not believe except by God’s grace.’*” Al-Tabari continued to say, “*Most of these idolaters do not realize this. They think that faith and disbelief are within their power and according to their will. But God says, ‘Faith and disbelief are in my hand. No one will be guided or misguided except by the will of God.’*”

I agree with Al-Tabari’s statement, however, we need to elaborate on it in light of the collection of verses which deal with the topics of guidance, misguidance, the will of God, and the freedom of choice.

Faith and misguidance are occurrences, and every occurrence takes place according to a specified measure. “*We created everything according to specific measure.*” (54:49) The verses that we will cite explain the law according to which a person would believe or disbelieve. Humankind has a measure of freedom in choosing the direction he wants to follow. If a person chooses to head towards guidance and strives to find the truth, he/she will be helped by God in finding the truth and becomes guided by it. If a person chooses the direction of falsehood and hated the truth, then he/she will be misguided.

In other words, humankind has the freedom to choose an attitude, but the final destination is in the hand of God. If the attitude is to seek the truth and look for true guidance, the person will be helped by God to reach that destination. However, if the attitude is to choose falsehood and avoid seeking the truth then no help will be offered by God to change that attitude.

“*Thus have We appointed to every prophet an enemy - devils of humankind and jinn who inspire in one another plausible discourse through guile. If your Lord willed, they would not do so; so leave them alone with their devising. That the hearts of those who believe not in the Hereafter may incline thereto, and that they may take pleasure therein, and that they may earn what they are earning.*” These devils, from among humans and jinn, and who have been destined by God to be enemies to the messengers, inspire each other with delusional and polished speech. The use of the word *inspire* refers to the effect that these speeches may have on the psyche of disbelievers and how they delude themselves into disbelief.

We know about the devils form among humans. We have seen them in action fighting the prophets, the truth which they brought, and those who believed with them. What about the devils from among the jinn? Jinn belong to the domain of the unseen. Only God knows the unseen. We only know about jinn that which God has told us. On this account, we know that jinn are created from fire, they have supernatural powers, and that some of them are righteous while others are evil. We also know that they are invisible but they have the ability to see us. The devils from among the jinn are able somehow to whisper to humans and try to lure them away from the straight path. However, these devils have no

power over the believers who often remember God. The remembrance of God disarms the devil in his battle to tempt the believer. We know that jinn, like humans, will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. They will be either rewarded and allowed to enter paradise or punished and destined to Hell fire. Compared to angels, jinn are the weak creation.

This verse tells us about how God made to each prophet enemies from among the devils of the humans and the jinn. Had He willed, He could have subdued these devils and prevented them from fighting the prophets, hurting the believers, and luring people away from the path of God. God could have forced them to be righteous or He could have guided them to the right path if they showed any inclination towards it. But God in His wisdom gave them the freedom of choice. He permitted them, if they wanted to, to inflict a measured amount of harm on the believers. Thus, it is a dual test: a test for the devil's desire to hurt people, and a test for the believer's ability to persevere. Ultimately, the devil can only inflict that measure of harm that God permits, "*Had Your Lord willed, they would not have done it.*"

What do we conclude from this analysis? First, only the devils – humans and jinn- oppose the prophets and try to harm their followers. They have one role to play: the role of a mutineer. Their objective is to lure the believers away from the path of God, and in doing this, they delude themselves.

Second, these devils are not able to do all of this except by the leave of God. God, in His wisdom, uses them as a tool to test the perseverance of the believers, and to purify their hearts. If the believers pass the test they receive the help of God which fortifies them against their enemies: the devils from among the humans and jinn.

Third, God in His wisdom chose to test both the devils and the believers in this way. The devils are given measured power to inflict harm and to lure the believers away from the truth. This way the sincerity and perseverance of believers are tested. Are they sincere in their belief and can they persevere in face of the affliction? Will they support the truth against falsehood?

Fourth, the devils are weak. They have no innate power to inflict harm on the believers. The believer who believes that all the power is in God's hand is able to recognize the weakness of his/her enemy, and will not be scared by the enemy no matter how powerful they may seem. This meaning is captured in the sentence, "*so leave them alone with their devising.*" It sent a message to the Prophet (PBUH) not to worry about what they fabricate. God is watching over them and He is able to seize them and they will be recompensed for what they did.

In addition to being a test for the devil and the believers, God may have wanted this enmity between the devil and the believers for another reason as well, "*And this is in order that the hearts of those who disbelieve in the Hereafter may incline to such (deceit), and that they may remain pleased with it, and that they may commit what they are committing*" So, let those who do not believe in the Hereafter, those who lead hedonistic

life listen to the whisper of the devils. They are fascinated with the way that the devil attacks the prophets and the believers, so they become deluded by their inspiration and they commit whatever sin they can commit.

This is what God wanted, and that what life is about: tests and choices; then fair recompense. The worldly life would not have continued without the struggle between right and wrong; and truth and the falsehood. The crucible of life will separate between the righteous and the devil.

**Verses: 114-127**

114. *Shall I then seek a judge other than God? And He it is who has revealed to you the Book (which is) explained in detail; and those whom We have given the Scripture know that it is revealed by your Lord with truth, therefore you should not be of those who doubt.*
115. *And the word of your Lord has been accomplished truly and justly; there is none who can change His words, and He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
116. *And if you follow most of those on earth, they will lead you astray, away from the way of God; they follow nothing but conjecture and they do nothing but lie.*
117. *Surely your Lord knows best who goes astray from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided.*
118. *Therefore, eat of that on which God's name has been mentioned if you are believers in His revelations.*
119. *And why should you not eat of that on which God's name has been mentioned, and He has already explained to you what He has forbidden to you—unless you are compelled out of necessity; and most surely many do mislead (people) by their own whims out of ignorance; surely your Lord knows best those who exceed the limits.*
120. *And abandon all sin, whether committed openly or secretly; surely they who earn sin shall be recompensed with what they have earned.*
121. *And do not eat of that on which God's name has not been mentioned, and that is most surely a transgression; and most surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you; and if you obey them, you shall most surely be idolaters.*
122. *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness from which he can never come out? Thus the deeds of the disbelievers were made to seem pleasing to them.*
123. *Thus have We placed leaders in every town, its wicked men, to plot (and burrow) therein: but they only plot against their own souls, and they realize it not.*
124. *And when a sign comes to them they say, “We will not believe till we are given the like of what God's messengers are given.” God knows best where to place His message. There shall befall those who are guilty humiliation from God and severe torment because of what they used to scheme.*



125. *And whomsoever it is God's will to guide, He expands his breast for Islam, and whomsoever He wills to leave to go astray, He makes his breast constricted and narrow as though he were ascending upwards in the sky; thus does God lay penalty on those who do not believe.*
126. *And this is the path of your Lord, (a) right (path); indeed, We have explained the revelations for a people who take heed.*
127. *They shall have the abode of peace with their Lord, and He is their Guardian because of what they did. (6:114-127)*

*“Shall I then seek a judge other than God? And He it is who has revealed to you the Book (which is) explained in detail; and those whom We have given the Scripture know that it is revealed by your Lord with truth, therefore you should not be of those who doubt.”*

This is a rhetorical question that the Prophet (PBUH) was asked to pose to the idolaters. It expresses an unequivocal refusal that anyone other than God should have the right to be the judge in the affairs of this world. It is an attestation to the right of God to be the sole judge. The verse also states the logic behind this attestation. God revealed the detailed Book which can be used to establish justice and resolve the disputes that arise in the society with fairness. The Book includes all the fundamentals upon which a system to establish life on earth can be built. It also includes, to a certain extent, details of certain aspects of life that are needed for the welfare of the society. Those who were given the Scripture before were aware that the Book revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the truth. The verse ends by admonishing the Prophet (PBUH) not to be doubtful. But, the Prophet (PBUH) was not doubtful. It was narrated that, when this verse was revealed to him, he said, *“I have never doubted.”* So, why was he admonished? This is an indication of the tremendous pressure that the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers were subjected to in the course of their mission. This is not an admonition but it is a statement meant to lend support to the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers in their struggle and strengthen their resolve in the face of the severe resistance of the disbelievers.

*“And the word of your Lord has been accomplished truly and justly; there is none who can change His words, and He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* The word of your Lord has been perfected, what He said is the truth, and what He legislated is just. There is nothing left to be added to the message in the matter of faith, values, morals, or traditions. He hears and knows what His servants say and what they mean. He also knows best what is good for them.

*“And if you follow most of those on earth, they will lead you astray, away from the way of God; they follow nothing but conjecture and they do nothing but lie.”* Most of the people do not consider God to be their judge in the affairs of life. Even the law that organizes life is not inspired, in most cases, by the Book of God. The way of life adopted by most people does not follow the revealed guidance. This is the falsehood of ignorance: conjectures are preferred over ascertained knowledge. This is why the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers were admonished not to follow those people. Although, this verse was revealed to deal with the specific issue of the permissibility of eating slaughtered animals, a topic that will be dealt with later, but the veracity of the verse applies to other situations as well.

*“Surely your Lord knows best who goes astray, away from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided.”* The verse states that it is only God who has the right to judge people and it is only He who decides who is guided and who is lost. Because it is only He who knows the inner thoughts, feelings, and intentions of people and He judges them accordingly. The criterion for judging people according to their faith, their values, their activities, and their deeds can only be established by God alone and should not be left to people’s whims and desires. The verse declares that only God has the right to establish this criterion. It should not be left to “the society” to decide upon a criterion to differentiate between right and wrong. The composition, the values, and norms of the society are always changing. Different societies have different values, traditions and norms. If the criterion to differentiate between right and wrong is left to be decided by the society, we will end up with different criteria: one for an industrial society, another for a capitalist society, and a third for a socialist society.

The previous verses serve as an introduction to the discussion of the rules regarding the slaughtering and eating of animals, *“Therefore eat of that on which God's name has been mentioned if you are believers in His revelations. And why should you not eat of that on which God's name has been mentioned, and He has already explained to you what He has forbidden to you- unless you are compelled out of necessity; and most surely many do mislead (people) by their own whims out of ignorance; surely your Lord knows best those who exceed the limits. And abandon all sin, whether committed openly or secretly; surely they who earn sin shall be recompensed with what they have earned. And do not eat of that on which God's name has not been mentioned, and that is most surely a transgression; and most surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you; and if you obey them, you shall most surely be idolaters.”* Before we delve into the legal interpretations of these verses, let us first highlight the basic principles of the doctrine underlying these rules. The verses command that one should eat only that which the name of God has been pronounced upon. It further links obedience to faith, *“Therefore eat of that on which God's name has been mentioned if you are believers in His revelations.”* The question is then posed: why don’t you eat from that which the name of God has been pronounced upon? That which God has made lawful to you! The question addressed the myth underlying the rules of the lawful and unlawful which were followed by the idolaters of Mecca. They declared some animals, which God has made lawful, to be unlawful and vice versa. The verses state clearly that the idolater’s laws were only based on their whims and desires. They were usurping God’s role in deciding what is lawful and what is unlawful, *“and most surely many do mislead (people) by their own whims out of ignorance; surely your Lord knows best those who exceed the limits.”*

They were then commanded to abstain from sinning, whether it is committed in the open or secretly. Leading people astray by fabricating rules and regulations and claiming that these rules have been divinely ordained is a major sin. Those who commit this sin will be punished, *“And abandon all sin, whether committed openly or secretly; surely they who earn sin shall be recompensed with what they have earned.”*

The verses go on to detail which animals are decreed to be unlawful. These include sacrificial animals slaughtered for the gods, animals slaughtered for gambling, and dead animals. They also warn the believers of the temptation posed by the devils, both humans and jinn, who argue the legality of their claims, *“And do not eat of that on which God's name has not been mentioned, and that is most surely a transgression; and most surely the devils suggest to their friends that they should contend with you; and if you obey them, you shall most surely be idolaters.”* This verse established a fundamental rule: following manmade rules that contravene the rules of Islamic jurisprudence amounts to associating partners with God. Ibn Katheer says, *“A person commits the crime of ascribing partners to God, when he prefers to follow manmade rulings that contravene a rule dictated by God. This is confirmed by the verse, ‘They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords besides God.’”* (9:31) When ‘Aadi bin Hatem (RA) exclaimed to the prophet (PBUH), *“They did not worship their rabbis and their monks.”* The Prophet’s (PBUH) answer was that they followed the rules devised by their rabbis and their monks regarding what is allowable and what is forbidden and such rules contravened the rules revealed by God. This amounted to setting up their rabbis and their monks as equals to God.

Ibn Katheer summarized the opinions regarding the allowable meat. The opinions addressed the question whether it is allowable to eat an animal over which the name of God was not invoked at the time of the slaughter. The scholars are divided into three groups regarding this issue.

The first group is of the opinion that it is unlawful to eat the meat of a slaughtered animal over which the name of God was not invoked at the time of the slaughter. This ruling is valid whether the person who is performing the slaughter forgot to mention the name of God at the time of slaughter or did not mention God’s name intentionally. It was narrated that this is the opinion of Ibn ‘Umar (RA), his servant Nafe’ (RA), ‘Amer Al-Sha’abi, and Mohamed ibn Sereen. This has also been narrated about Imam Malek and Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal. It is also the choice of Abu Thor, Dawood Al-Zaheri, and Abu El-Fotooh Mohamed ibn Mohamed ibn ‘Ali (one of the late followers of Imam Al-Shafey’s school who wrote a book titled “The Forty”). This group made their ruling on the basis of this verse and also based on the verse, *“Then eat of that which was held for you and invoke the name of God”* (5:4) which was also emphasized by the statement that *“it is a transgression.”* Two alternative explanations were mentioned for the verse. One relates the transgression to eating unlawful meat and the second relates the transgression to the neglect of invoking the name of God during the slaughter. This group also relied on the prophetic traditions which commanded invoking the name of God at the time of the slaughter or during hunting.

The second group is of the opinion that invoking the name of God during slaughtering animals is recommended but not an obligation. No harm has been done if God’s name was not invoked whether intentionally or as an act of forgetfulness. This is the opinion of Imam Al-Shafe’i and all his companions. It has also been narrated that this is the opinion of Imam Ahmed and Imam Malek. This is also the opinion of Ashhab ibn ‘Abdel ‘Aziz who is a follower of Imam Malek’s school. It was also narrated that this is also the

opinion of Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), Abu Huraira (RA), and ‘Attaa ibn Rabah, God knows best. Al-Shafe’i explained the verse, *“Do not eat of that over which the name of God was not invoked,”* to mean that do not eat that which was sacrificed for deities other than God. Ibn Jareej narrated that ‘Attaa said, *“That the verse prohibits eating the animals that Quraish used to sacrifice for their idols.”* This is the opinion that has been chosen by Imam Al-Shafe’i. This opinion is supported also by prophetic traditions that have been quoted by Abu Dawood. Although these traditions are considered Mursal traditions but they support one another. One of the traditions states, *“It is lawful to eat an animal slaughtered by a Muslim, whether he invoked the name of God or not.”* Another states, *“It is lawful to eat the meat of an animal slaughtered by a Muslim, even if he did not invoke the name of God at the time of the slaughter because a Muslim has a name of the names of God.”*

The third group is of the opinion that it is lawful to eat the meat of a slaughtered animal if the person who did the slaughter forgot to invoke the name of God at the time of the slaughter, but if that was intentional, then it is unlawful. This opinion is adopted by most of the schools of Imam Malek and Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal. Also, it has been adopted by Abu Hanifa and his companions, Ishaq ibn Rahawaih, Ibn ‘Abbas (RA), Sa’eed ibn Al-Mussaib, ‘Ataa, Tawoos, Al-Hassan Al-Basri, Abu Malek, ‘Abdel Rahman ibn Abu Laila, Jaa’fer ibn Muhammad, and Rabee’aa ibn Abu ‘Abdel Rahman.

Ibn Jareer stated that the scholars differed in the status of the ruling expressed in this verse. Some are of the opinion that it has been abrogated, while others believe that it continues to be valid. The latter is the opinion of Mejahed and many of the scholars. However, it has been narrated on the authority of Eakremah and Al-Hassan Al-Basri that they said, *“That the two verses ‘eat, then, of that over which God's name has been pronounced,’ and ‘Hence, eat not of that over which God's name has not been pronounced: for this would be sinful conduct indeed’ were abrogated and replaced by the verse ‘The food of the people of the book is lawful to you.’* Ibn Abi Hatem said on the authority of Ibn Makhool that the two verses were abrogated and replaced by *“Today all good things have been made lawful to you, and the food of the people of the book has been made lawful to you.”* Ibn Jareer then said, *“That there is no contradiction between the legality of eating the food of the people of the book and the prohibition of that which the name of God has not been invoked upon.”* This is also my opinion and God knows best. “

*“Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness from which he can never come out? Thus the deeds of the disbelievers were made to seem pleasing to them. Thus have We placed leaders in every town, its wicked men, to plot (and burrow) therein: but they only plot against their own souls, and they realize it not. And when a sign comes to them they say, ‘We will not believe till we are given the like of what God's messengers are given.’ God knows best where to place His message. There shall befall those who are guilty, humiliation from God and severe torment because of what they used to scheme. And whomsoever it is God’s will to guide, He expands his breast for Islam, and whomsoever He wills to leave straying, He makes his breast constricted and narrow as though he were ascending upwards in the sky; thus does God*

*lay penalty on those who do not believe.*” When a heart espouses the faith it is revived as if it was resurrected after death. Faith fills the heart with light that shows the way to a new life. No words can describe such an experience. Disbelief cuts humankind off the eternal reality of life and therefore it is akin to death, and belief connects humankind to the reality of life to communicate and respond. Disbelief covers the spirit in darkness and prevents the light from coming through; and it makes all senses and feelings become dull. Belief brings security, happiness, and easiness in life. Disbelief promotes insecurity, unhappiness and difficulty.

When the light of belief shines on the human heart, it reveals the essence of this religion and how it fits and matches the initial natural human disposition. It also reveals the true nature of life around us. It allows humankind to discover the reality of life, people, and the daily events. These meanings are all captured in the verse, *“Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people”*

But what keeps those who choose to disbelieve from seeing the light, *“Thus, to the disbelievers their own deeds were made to seem pleasing.”* God gave humankind the dual disposition to enjoy light and darkness. Humankind was also given the ability to choose between the two. If he chooses darkness, then darkness becomes more appealing to him. There are also the devils from among humans and jinn who make darkness seem more pleasing and appealing. Those are the guilty ones, who are allowed to plot to tempt others away from the light into darkness, *“Thus have We placed leaders in every town, its wicked men, to plot (and burrow) therein: but they only plot against their own souls, and they realize it not.”* It is the standing natural law to see in each town a group of people who appoint themselves to fight God’s religion. This is a fight that the prophets and the believers cannot avoid. The guilty ones want to exercise their control over people and defy the rule of God, and the prophets and their believing followers strive to bring back the control to God and His rule. This is a never ending battle that will continue to the Day of Judgment. However, there is hope for the believers because the guilty ones are in fact plotting against themselves without perceiving it. The verse ending assures the believers that they will win.

*“We will not believe till we are given the like of what God's messengers are given. God knows best where to place His message. There shall befall those who are guilty humiliation from God and severe torment because of what they used to scheme.”* This verse captures the arrogance of the chiefs of the idolaters of Mecca and God’s response. Al-Waleed ibn Al-Mugheerah said addressing the Prophet (PBUH), *“If what you got is true prophet-hood, I would have been more deserving than you. I am older and richer than you.”* Abu Jahl said, *“We will never accept him as a Prophet, and we will never follow what he says, unless we receive a revelation like the revelation that he receives.”* But God states that it is only He who decides whom He chooses to convey His Message. Conveying the Message is a grave task. Conveying the Message is a process where the divine decision and the human effort come together. It is a process where a human being becomes completely devoted to God. The devotion is not only spiritual but also physical. Conveying the Message is an interface between the human being and God. This requires a human being with certain qualifications and characteristics. Only God knows who is

best qualified to deliver the Message. Needless to say, that the self-centered idolaters of Mecca who envied Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) for being a messenger of God and wanted to be messengers themselves were not suited for that mission. One of the most important characteristics of the messenger is selflessness. This makes the messenger's soul a suitable receptacle for this grave task. Prophet-hood is not to be requested, it is to be granted. The consequence of their arrogance will be exactly the opposite. Their arrogance will be replaced by humiliation. Instead of being arrogant they will be made abject.

A description of the states of the believers and the disbelievers follows. Those whom God bestowed the blessing of guidance on – according to God's law which makes the way easy for those who pass the test and choose guidance – have their bosoms open to receive guidance. But those who were deprived from guidance – according to God's rule regarding the ability of humankind to choose – will find their bosoms tight as if they were ascending higher in the sky where the air is rarefied and it is difficult to breath. This is how they meet their punishment.

*“And this is the path of your Lord, (a) right (path); indeed, We have explained the revelations for a people who take heed. They shall have the abode of peace with their Lord, and He is their Guardian because of what they did.”* The paragraph ends by a clear statement defining the right path. God's path is the straight path. Salvation is attained by following the straight path. The straight path is the path of Islam which encompasses the doctrine and the law. No separation should be made between these two components. The signs of your Lord are made clear for those who seek the truth. Those will be rewarded with peace, security, and success.

### **Verses: 128 to 135**

128. *And on the day when He shall gather them all together, “Assembly of jinn, you seduced a great part of humankind.” And their friends from among the people shall say, “Our Lord, some of us profited by others and we have reached our appointed term which You did appoint for us.” He shall say, “The fire is your abode, to abide in it for ever, except as God is pleased; surely your Lord is Wise, Omniscient.”*

129. *And thus do We make some of the wrongdoers to befriend each other on account of what they earned.*

130. *“Assembly of jinn and humankind, did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My revelations and warning you of the meeting of this day of yours?” They shall say, “We bear witness against ourselves.” And this world's life deceived them, and they shall bear witness against their own souls that they were disbelievers.*

131. *This is because your Lord would not destroy the towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless.*

132. *And for all, there will ranks according to their deeds; and your Lord is not unaware of what they do.*

133. *And your Lord is Self-sufficient, the Possessor of Mercy; if He pleases, He could destroy you, and in your place appoints whom He pleases as your successors, as He raised you up from the seed of another people.*
134. *Surely what you are threatened with must come to pass and you cannot escape (it).*
135. *Say, "My people, do whatever you can, I will do (my part); soon will you know who it is whose end will be (best) in the Hereafter; certain it is that the wrongdoers will not succeed. (6:128-135)*

*"And on the day when He shall gather them all together, "Assembly of jinn, you seduced a great part of humankind." And their friends from among the people shall say, 'Our Lord, some of us profited by others and we have reached our appointed term which You did appoint for us.' He shall say, 'The fire is your abode, to abide in it for ever, except as God is pleased; surely your Lord is Wise, Omniscient.'" And thus do We make some of the wrongdoers to befriend each other on account of what they earned."* These verses present a scene from the Day of Judgment when the sins of jinn will be stated: you have seduced so many humans away from the straight path. The statement is for the record; it also brings forward the gravity of their deeds. A crime so grave, that they will be speechless. Instead, the response will come from the humans, those who succumbed to the seduction. It reveals the weak nature of these humans. They were looking for a way to indulge in the material pleasures of life which opened a door for the devil to enter into their lives. The devils used their weakness to control them and to steer them to achieve the devils' goals. This enjoyment lasted for a lifetime but now the time for reckoning has come. Today, they assemble to get their punishment. Hellfire is their abode. However, God controls their lives in the Hereafter as He did in their worldly life. Whatever He wills will be. His will is based on His knowledge and His wisdom.

Friendship will bind the transgressors as it bounds the jinn and humans who were misguided. This is a general statement which goes beyond the present scene. It is a general rule, valid for all times. Their enmity to God's religion and Godly people unites them. The loyalty that bound them together is based on the similarity in their nature and the oneness of their objective. Their joint abode in the Hereafter will be commensurate with their evil deeds in this life.

The scene continues with a rhetorical question to both the jinn and the humans, *"Assembly of jinn and men, did there not come to you messengers from among you, relating to you My revelations and warning you of the meeting of this day of yours? They shall say, 'We bear witness against ourselves.' And this world's life deceived them, and they shall bear witness against their own souls that they were disbelievers."* This indicates that messengers were sent to the jinn as they were sent to humans. Other verses in the Quran indicate that some jinn were able to listen to the Quran as it was recited and they told their fellow jinn. However, this is part of the unseen which is unknown to us and there is no need to speculate on it. The reply comes with a confession. The scene is concluded by stating how they ended up in this misery.

*“This is because your Lord would not destroy the towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless. And for all, there will be ranks according to their deeds; and your Lord is not unaware of what they do.”* The mercy of God has dictated that no judgment will be passed before a messenger was sent. The initial natural human disposition was prepared to receive guidance and to recognize the existence of God. The initial natural human disposition was also supported by human intellect. But, the initial natural human disposition may be misguided and the human intellect may succumb to temptation. That is why God sent His messengers to sharpen the initial natural human disposition and to provide a neutral environment for the human intellect to seek the truth. The message clearly indicates that human values have to be supported by God’s revealed message to create a better life for humankind and to support them in the struggle against worldly temptations. The reward is guaranteed according to the deed. God is well aware of what they do.

*“And your Lord is Self-sufficient, the Possessor of Mercy; if He pleases, He could destroy you, and in your place appoints whom He pleases as your successors, as He raised you up from the seed of another people.”* People should not forget that their existence is contingent on the mercy and will of God. Whatever one has of wealth or power is granted by God. If He wills He can replace the present generation with a new one as He has done with previous generations. This is a strong message to the transgressors who plot to control, those who defy God, and those who challenge the rules of religion. It is also a strong message to the believers who suffer from the transgression of the disbelievers.

*“Surely what you are threatened with must come to pass and you cannot escape (it). Say, ‘My people, do whatever you can, I will do (my part); soon will you know who it is whose end will be (best) in the Hereafter; certain it is that the wrongdoers will not succeed.’”* This message provides security and contentment in the hearts of the believers and poses a threat to the transgressors. Certainly, the promise will be fulfilled. Everything is in the firm grasp of God and under His will and control. There is no escape. One day, you will certainly be part of the scene of the Day of the Judgment that has been described. A challenge is posed, *“My people, do whatever you can”* This is a challenge posed by one who knows that he is on the right path; one who is confident that this path is supported by the truth from his Lord; one who is confident of the final result. Certainly, the transgressors will never succeed. This is a fundamental truth that has been established by God.

### **Verses: 136 to 153**

136. *And they assign a portion for God out of what He has created of tilth and cattle, and they say, “This is for God - so they claim- and this for our associates; but the share of their associates, does not reach God, while the share of God reaches their associates; evil is that which they judge.*
137. *In the same way, their idols have induced many of the idolaters to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith; and if God had pleased, they would not have done it, therefore leave them to what they fabricate.*



138. *And they say, "Such cattle and crops are forbidden, none shall eat of them except such as we please - so they claim." And cattle whose backs are forbidden, and cattle on which they would not mention God's name - forging a lie against Him; He shall requite them for what they forged.*
139. *And they say, "What is in the wombs of these cattle is reserved for our males, and forbidden to our wives, and if it be stillborn, then they are all partners in it;" He (God) will reward them for their attributing (falsehood to Him); surely He is Wise, Omniscient.*
140. *They are lost indeed those who kill their children foolishly without knowledge, and forbid what God has given them forging a lie against God; they have indeed gone astray, and they are not guided.*
141. *And He it is who produces gardens (of vine), with trellises and without, and dates, and crops of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in variety); eat of its fruit when it bears fruit, and pay its dues on the day of its reaping, and do not act extravagantly; surely He does not love the extravagant.*
142. *And of cattle (He created) beasts of burden and those which are fit for slaughter only; eat of what God has given you and do not follow in the footsteps of the Satan; surely he is your avowed enemy.*
143. *Eight in pairs- two of sheep and two of goats. Say, "Has He forbidden the two males or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me on the basis of knowledge if you are truthful."*
144. *And two of camels and two of cows. Say, "Has He forbidden the two males or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you witnesses when God gave you these commands?" Who, then, does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God to lead people astray without knowledge? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
145. *Say, "I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, except that it be carrion, or flowing blood, or flesh of swine- for that surely is unclean- or a sinful offering over which a name other than God's name has been invoked; but whoever is compelled, neither craving nor transgressing the limit, then surely your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
146. *And to those who were Jews We made unlawful every animal having claws, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep, except what adheres to their backs or their entrails or what was mixed up with a bone. Thus did We recompense them for their rebellion, and We are surely truthful.*
147. *If they accuse you of falsehood, then say, "Your Lord is the possessor of vast mercy; and His punishment cannot be averted from the guilty people."*
148. *Those who are idolaters will say, "If God had pleased we would not have associated partners with Him, neither had our fathers, nor would we have forbidden (to ourselves) anything." Thus, did those who were before them reject until they tasted Our punishment. Say, "Have you any knowledge so you should bring it forth to us? You only follow a conjecture and you only tell lies."*
149. *Say, "Indeed God has the conclusive argument; had He willed, He would certainly guide you all."*

150. Say, "Bring your witnesses who can bear witness that God has forbidden this, then if they bear witness, do not bear witness with them; and do not follow the whims of those who reject Our revelations, those who do not believe in the Hereafter, and those who deem (others) equal to their Lord."
151. Say, "Come, I will recite to you what your Lord has prohibited you from: do not associate anything with Him; be good to your parents; and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty, We provide for you and for them; and do not come near indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed; and do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirements of justice. This He has commanded you, that you may understand.
152. And do not approach the property of the orphan except in the best manner, until he attains his maturity; and give full measure and weight with justice, We do not burden any soul beyond its ability; and when you speak, then be just even though it be (against) a close relative; and fulfill God's covenant. This He has commanded you that you may be mindful.
153. Verily, this is My path, leading straight, therefore follow it, and do not follow (other) paths, for they will lead you away from His path; this He has commanded you that you may remain conscious of Him." (6:136-153)

*"And they assign a portion for God out of what He has created of tilth and cattle, and they say, 'This is for God - so they claim- and this for our associates;' but the share of their associates, does not reach God, while the share of God reaches their associates; evil is that which they judge."* The verse describes a practice that was prevalent among the idolaters. They forgot that God is He who created the plants and the animals and He is the only provider. They dedicated part of their provision to their idols and part to God. They were very careful that the part dedicated to their idols reaches the idols, but they were not as scrupulous about the part that was dedicated to God. Mejahed mentioned that they used to dedicate part of their harvest to the idols and another part to God. They did not care if some of the harvest dedicated to God was blown by the wind to fall on the part dedicated to the idols. However, if the opposite happened, then they were quick to compensate their idols for the loss in their share. They said that God does not need that which has been dedicated to the idols.

This is how the devils from among the jinn and humans justify their unjust practice. One can find parallels to this example in other communities. Some of these communities are ancient like the Romans, the Persians, and the Greek, while some still exist today in Africa, India and Asia. This can also be extended to modern practices in managing the wealth of the community when the rules of practice are controlled by the whims of the chiefs and they do not abide by the rule of God.

*"In the same way, their idols have induced many of the idolaters to kill their own children, bringing them ruin and confusion in their faith; and if God had pleased, they would not have done it, therefore leave them to what they fabricate."* Their idols also induced them to practice infanticide against their baby girls for fear of poverty. They also induced them to sacrifice their sons to the idols, as did Abdul Muttalib. These traditions were established to confuse people and to keep them away from understanding and

following the true faith. Such practices result in moral degradation and will ruin the society as a whole. The message is that societal norms based on human thought with no divine guidance will not lead to a happy and healthy society. This is a fundamental rule that is valid for all times and places. The stories in the Quran are not meant only to narrate the history of ancient communities but also to establish fundamental principles that need to be observed at all times and in all places. However, believers should not be overwhelmed by the task of fighting these devils because this is the will of God. Ultimately, He is in control. They are given the leave to transgress for a wisdom that only God knows.

*“And they say, ‘Such cattle and crops are forbidden, none shall eat of them except such as we please - so they claim.’ And cattle whose backs are forbidden, and cattle on which they would not mention God's name - forging a lie against Him; He shall requite them for what they forged.”* Ibn Jareer said, *“This is a statement by God, describing idolater’s practices for making things lawful or unlawful without divine guidance.”* This rebuts their claim that they only did this because it was God’s law. They did usurp God’s right by introducing laws regarding the lawful and forbidden based on their whims and desires. God promised to punish them for the falsehood they invented.

*“And they say, ‘What is in the wombs of these cattle is reserved for our males, and forbidden to our wives, and if it be stillborn, then they are all partners in it;’ He will reward them for their attributing (falsehood to God); surely He is Wise, Omniscient.”* They went far in devising rules defining the lawful and prohibited based on old idolatrous myths. They will be punished for that. God surely knows what they are doing and He is wise in managing the affairs.

*“They are lost indeed those who kill their children foolishly without knowledge, and forbid what God has given them forging a lie against God; they have indeed gone astray, and they are not guided.”* Those who kill their children lost everything. They lost this life as well as the Hereafter. They lost themselves as well as their offspring. They lost their souls. They lost the dignity that God bestowed on them. They lost the guidance and they went astray.

*“And He it is who produces gardens (of vine), with trellises and without, and dates, and crops of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in variety); eat of its fruit when it bears fruit, and pay its dues on the day of its reaping, and do not act extravagantly; surely He does not love the extravagant. And of cattle (He created) beasts of burden and those which are fit for slaughter only; eat of what God has given you and do not follow in the footsteps of the Satan; surely he is your avowed enemy.”* God is the Creator, the Provider, the Lord, the Owner of everything. No one should dispense of His wealth except by His leave and His law, the law that came with the message revealed to the messengers. God created gardens which provide humankind with different types of crops. He created palm trees and plants with different colors, taste, and shapes. He created olives and pomegranates. He is the Creator of the animals which are used to carry burdens from one place to the other. It is God who created life, planned diversity, and decreed harmony.

Quran often addresses the issue of provision, stating that God is the Provider. It uses this fact as a platform to establish the requirement that it is only God who deserves to be served. No one else but the Creator, the Provider deserves to be worshipped. It is only He, who has the control, the power and the command. The words describe a scene of the harvest of different plants and the creation of different animals to support this concept. Then the command is issued: *“Eat of its fruit when it bears fruit, and pay its dues on the day of its reaping, and do not act extravagantly; surely He does not love the extravagant.”* Some of the commentators are of the opinion that this verse referred to the Zakat (poor dues) that is mandated when a crop is harvested. Accordingly, this would be a verse that was revealed in Medina. It is known that this whole Sura was revealed in Mecca. The contradiction is resolved if we take the opinion that what is meant here is a voluntary charity that is given when the crops are harvested. The verse provides two reminders: do not be extravagant and remember that the devil is your avowed enemy.

*“Eight in pairs- two of sheep and two of goats. Say, ‘Has He forbidden the two males or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Tell me on the basis of knowledge if you are truthful.’ And two of camels and two of cows. Say, ‘Has He forbidden the two males or the two females or that which the wombs of the two females contain? Or were you witnesses when God gave you these commands?’ Who, then, does greater wrong than he who forges a lie against God to lead people astray without knowledge? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers.”* This is a list of the animals that the idolaters prohibited. The verse reiterated the fact that when it comes to making things lawful or unlawful we have to take recourse to divine guidance. The lawful and unlawful is determined by God alone.

*“Say, ‘I do not find in that which has been revealed to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, except that it be carrion, or flowing blood, or flesh of swine- for that surely is unclean- or a sinful offering over which a name other than God’s name has been invoked; but whoever is compelled, neither craving nor transgressing the limit, then surely your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’ And to those who were Jews We made unlawful every animal having claws, and We forbade them the fat of the ox and the sheep, except what adheres to their backs or their entrails or what was mixed up with a bone. This is recompense for their rebellion, and We are surely truthful. If they accuse you of falsehood, then say, ‘Your Lord is the possessor of vast mercy; and His punishment cannot be averted from the guilty people.’”*

Ibn Jareer said, *“God said to His Prophet (PBUH) ‘Muhammad, ask the idolaters - who dedicated a share of their harvest and their animals to God and a similar share to their idols, those who prohibited some of their animals and harvest so that nobody can eat it without their permission, those who did not invoke the name of God intentionally when they slaughter their animals, those who prohibited specific animals to the females and allowed the males to eat from it, and they made a false claim that these were the commands of God – did God send a messenger with these commands? Or did you receive these commands directly from God? You are certainly telling a lie.’ Tell them, Muhammad, ‘The Book that has been revealed to me did not prohibit any of the things*

*that you have prohibited. Only a dead animal, flowing blood, pig meat, or that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice to the idols has been declared unlawful as food”*

This was a declaration to the idolaters who argued with the Prophet (PBUH). The declaration determined clearly what has been prohibited by divine guidance. Even these foods which have been prohibited in normal life are allowed when human life is endangered. If one is faced with the choice whether to eat an unlawful food or to die, the choice should be clear. The duty to preserve human life changes the command.

God’s mercy is all encompassing. It is big enough for all of His creation: the believers as well as the disbelievers, and the pious as well as the sinners. However, His punishment is also severe.

*“Those who are idolaters will say, ‘If God had pleased we would not have associated partners with Him, neither had our fathers, nor would we have forbidden (to ourselves) anything.’ Thus, did those who were before them reject until they tasted Our punishment. Say, ‘Have you any knowledge so you should bring it forth to us? You only follow a conjecture and you only tell lies.’”* The idolaters lay the burden of their sins – associating partners with God and making what lawful unlawful and vice-versa – on the will of God. How did the Quran respond to this claim? The Quranic response consists of two steps. The first step was to point out the falsehood of their claim. They lied as did who came before them. Those who lied before did taste the wrath of God and so will they.

The second part of the response to the idolater’s claim consisted of correcting they way they think and argue. God did forbid them to do certain things. This is a fact of which they should be certain, but they had no way of knowing what God’s will was. They are simply following a conjecture and only telling lies.

*“Say, ‘Then God has the conclusive argument; had He willed, He would certainly guide you all.’”* This is God’s conclusive argument. God is able to create a race that has no choice but to accept guidance. But, God in His wisdom, wanted to test humankind with the ability to choose between guidance and misguidance.

*“Say, ‘Bring your witnesses who can bear witness that God has forbidden this, then if they bear witness, do not bear witness with them; and do not follow the whims of those who reject Our revelations, those who do not believe in the hereafter, and those who deem (others) equal to their Lord.’”* So, we finally come to the challenge. The prophet was asked to confront the idolaters and declare that what they were saying is falsehood. This confrontation states Islam’s rejection of the concept of associating partners with God, whether, these partners are physical like the idols which the idolaters worshipped, or they are manmade laws that are obeyed in spite of the fact that they defy what God has commanded. These are two sides of the same coin; both are rejected by Islam. This is the rule of God regarding those who usurp His role as the sole authority in judicial matters. God accuses those who invent laws without divine guidance of denying the revelations of God. Anyone who denies the right of God to be the sole authority in judicial matters denies the revelations of God. God also accused them of disbelieving in the Day of

Judgment, because those who believe in the Day of Judgment would not dream of usurping the role of God as the sole authority in judicial matters. They were also accused of associating partners with God, because had they believed in the Oneness of God, they would not have allowed others to be partners with Him. The role of decreeing what is permissible and what is impermissible is God's only; no one else should assume that role.

*“Say, ‘Come, I will recite to you what your Lord has prohibited you from.’”* So, Muhammad (PBUH) tell them what are the things that are declared prohibited by your Lord; the Lord who is the sole authority in declaring what is lawful and what is unlawful.

*“Do not associate anything with Him,”* This is the fundamental principle on which the faith has been built. This is the principle which organizes the rituals, the commands, the duties, and the rights. It requires the absolute belief in God as a deity and as a Lord. It eliminates associating partners with God as a deity and as a Lord. To Him everyone is accountable. He controls the universe and the creatures that live in this universe. This fundamental concept purifies the soul from the impurities of associating partners with God and it purifies the intellect from the impurities of ancient mythology. All forms of associating partners with God are prohibited. That is why associating partners with God figures at the top of the list of what has been declared unlawful by God.

*“Be good to your parents; and do not slay your children for (fear of) poverty, We provide for you and for them;”* Maintaining strong family relations comes after maintaining a strong relation with God through the concept of the belief in the Oneness of God. God is most merciful, He admonished the children to be good to their parents and He admonished the parents to be kind to their children. He declared that He is the Provider so no child shall be overburdened by his duties towards his parents and no parent will be in fear of poverty because of his children.

*“Do not come near indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed;”* The third command addressed the health of the community. Abstaining from indecencies protects the society and provides the right environment for strong families to exist and survive.

*“Do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirements of justice.”* Very often in the Quran the three crimes of associating partners with God, committing adultery, and killing of human beings are mentioned in this particular sequence. All of these crimes involve one form or another of killing. Associating partners with God can be construed as a killing of the initial natural human disposition. The initial natural human disposition which does not find its way to the realization of the Oneness of God is a dull nature. Adultery can result in the destruction of the community. One of the factors which led to the decline of previous civilizations was the spread of indecencies including adultery. The histories of the Roman and Greek civilizations attest to this. Murder is killing of individuals. The command is a general prohibition of the crime of murder and underscores the sanctity of life in Islam. This has been supported by another verse in the Quran which equates the murder of a single soul to the murder of whole humanity.

God admonishes you to think and reflect. The list of prohibitions continues:

*“Do not approach the property of the orphan except in the best manner until he attains his maturity”* Orphans are vulnerable, they lost their protecting parents. It is the duty of the community to protect its members who are vulnerable. Before Islam, orphans were often abused. God assigned the honorable task of delivering His Message to humankind to an orphan, and instituted in the religion of Islam the obligation to protect and care for orphans. Those who are trustees should be careful in handling an orphan’s wealth. They should invest it wisely and grow it the best way they can until the orphan comes out of age and receives his/her trust.

The point at which a child reaches the age of maturity has been debated by the scholars. ‘Abdel Rahman ibn Zaid and Malek are of the opinion that children reach the age of maturity when they reach the age of puberty, while Abu Haneefa and Al-Sadia fix the age at 25, years and 30 years, respectively. The scholars of Medina have two criteria: reaching the age of puberty and the ability to behave wisely.

*“Give full measure and weight with justice, We do not burden any soul beyond its ability.”* The command to be fair in all types of business ventures provides a link between human business dealings and the doctrine of Islam which emphasizes its importance. The belief in the Oneness of God should provide the foundation on which all practical human interactions are built. Faith should be reflected on the daily dealings between people. Quran condemned previous communities which used to consider matters of faith and daily business dealings as two separate issues.

*“When you speak, then be just even though it be (against) a close relative.”* Telling the truth even if it may be against one’s family is one of the principles that Islam emphasized to protect the society against injustice. People usually feel vulnerable when they are alone and therefore they seek protection with their families or tribes. In return, they have to provide support to their family members whether they are right or wrong. Islam came to tell people that security and protection can only be provided by God, so they have to tell the truth when they are asked to give a testimony even if it seems that the truth will hurt someone they care very much for. This is directly related to the next command, *“Fulfill God’s covenant.”* Telling the truth is a component of God’s covenant. In fact, the covenant of God encompasses all the commands made previously. The verse ends by reiterating that these are God’s commands and that they have to remember it and remind each other not to forget it.

These fundamental principles provide an outline of the doctrine and law in Islam. They outline the straight path of God that the believers should follow. These commandments provide a closure to the long discourse which started with the verse, *“Should I seek a judge other than God.”* The discourse included references to the issues of the enactment of laws and the issues of faith and the relationship between humankind and God. The closure emphasizes the requirement to follow the straight path and never deviate from it. The finishing verse reminds people that these are God’s commands and request the believers to endeavor to remain conscious of God, *“This He has commanded you that you*

*may be mindful. Verily, this is My path, leading straight, therefore follow it, and do not follow (other) paths, for they will lead you away from His path; this He has commanded you that you may remain conscious of Him.”*

**Verses: 154 to 165**

154. *Then, We gave Moses the Scripture completing Our favor on those who do good, and explaining all things in detail and a guide and a mercy, so that they might believe in the meeting of their Lord.*
155. *And this is a blessed Book which We have revealed; so follow it and be conscious of God that you may receive mercy.*
156. *Lest you say that the Book was only revealed to two parties before us and We were unaware of what they read.*
157. *Or lest you say, “If the Book had been revealed to us, we would certainly have been better guided than they.” So indeed there has come to you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance, and a mercy. Who then does more wrong than he who rejects God's revelations and turns away from them? We will reward those who turn away from Our revelations with a dreadful torment because they turned away.*
158. *Are they waiting to see if the angels come to them, or that your Lord, or some of the signs of your Lord come. On the day when some of the signs of your Lord shall come, no soul will benefit from faith if it had not believed before, or earned good through its faith. Say, “Wait; we too are waiting.”*
159. *As for those who divided their religion and broke it up into sects, you have no concern with them; their case will go to God, then He will inform them of what they did.*
160. *Whoever brings a good deed, he will receive tenfold the like of it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.*
161. *Say, “Surely, my Lord has guided me to the straight path - a right religion - the faith of Abraham the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters.*
162. *Say, “Surely my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for God, the Lord of the worlds;*
163. *He has no partner; and this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.”*
164. *Say, “What! Shall I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things.’ Each soul is accountable only for its own actions, and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; then to your Lord is your return, so He will inform you of that in which you differed.”*
165. *And He it is who has made you successors in the land and raised some of you above others in rank, that He might try you by what He has given you; surely your Lord is swift in punishment, and He is most surely the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.” (6:154-165)*

*“Then, We gave Moses the Scripture completing Our favor on those who do good, and explaining all things in detail and a guide and a mercy, so that they might believe in the*



*meeting of their Lord.*” This is a continuation of the previous section in which the lawful and prohibited were discussed. God blessed Moses (PBUH) with the Scripture in which were given the details of everything as a reward for his obedience and his dedication in performing the tasks that he was asked to do.

*“And this is a blessed Book which We have revealed; so follow it and be conscious of God that you may receive mercy.”* God also revealed a blessed Book to Muhammad (PBUH). The believers are asked to follow it so they may receive mercy and guidance from their Lord. It should be pointed out that the Book was referred to earlier in the Sura in connection with the doctrine, and here it is mentioned in connection with the law. So, this Book deals with both the doctrine and the law and the believers are asked to follow it to receive the mercy and guidance of their Lord. The Book has all the details that are needed to conduct a life along the straight path. There is no need for other references.

*“Lest you say, ‘that the Book was only revealed to two parties before us and We were unaware of what they read.’ Or lest you should say, ‘If the Book had been revealed to us, we would certainly have been better guided than they.’ So indeed there has come to you a clear proof from your Lord, a guidance, and a mercy. Who then does more wrong than he who rejects God's revelations and turns away from them? We will reward those who turn away from Our revelations with a dreadful torment because they turned away.”* Prior to the advent of Muhammad (PBUH), God sent messengers to their people to convey the message to them in their own language. Then, God sent Muhammad (PBUH) to deliver the final Message to all humankind. No one can claim that the Message was not delivered. Those who deny the truth of this Message are truly committing injustice against themselves and against people. This message calls people to guidance and success and those who reject it aim at spreading mischief in the land by applying the manmade laws of the time of ignorance. God will punish those who turn away from the straight path.

A warning is posed to those who deny the truth, *“Are they waiting to see if the angels come to them, or that your Lord, or some of the signs of your Lord come. On the day when some of the signs of your Lord shall come, no soul will benefit from faith if it had not believed before, or earned good through its faith. Say, ‘Wait; we too are waiting.’”* It is a warning to the idolaters that they should be mindful of what they ask. If their requests were to be answered, and God would bring down the angels to speak to them or another of His signs, it will be too late.

There are various narrations which indicate that the verse, *“On the day when some of the signs of your Lord shall come,”* refers to the signs of the coming of the Day of Judgment. At that time, no deed will be accepted and no faith will be of benefit.

*“As for those who divided their religion and broke it up into sects, you have no concern with them; their case will go to God, then He will inform them of what they did.”* This is the demarcation line between the Prophet (PBUH) and the others who follow different faiths and traditions. The Prophet (PBUH) is then told not to associate with those who divided their religion into groups and sects. His path is distinct from their paths. His path

is based on God's Book and law. God will judge among them on the Day of Judgment. God will reward everyone according to his/her deeds. God is merciful, those who will do good will get their reward tenfold, but those who do bad deeds will only be recompensed for what they had done. However, God in His mercy will deal with them fairly, "*Whoever brings a good deed, he will receive tenfold the like of it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.*"

"*Say, 'Surely, my Lord has guided me to the straight path - a right religion - the faith of Abraham the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters.'*" Muhammad (PBUH), tell them that you have been guided to the straight path. It is an announcement that embodies gratitude for the blessing that was received and an announcement full of confidence that he is on the right path.

The announcement is followed by an absolute submission and complete dedication. My acts of worship, my life, and my death are all dedicated to God. This is the ultimate expression of the belief in the Oneness of God. "*Say, 'Surely, my prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are (all) for God, the Lord of the worlds; He has no partner; and this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit.'*"

The expression is followed by a rhetorical question: who else is deserving of my dedication? Who else deserves to be my Lord and He is the Lord of everything, "*Say, 'What! Shall I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things.'* Each soul is accountable only for its own action, and no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; then to your Lord is your return, so He will inform you of that in which you differed." *And He it is who has made you successors in the land and raised some of you above others in rank, that He might try you by what He has given you; surely your Lord is swift in punishment, and He is most surely the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.*"

It is a rhetorical question which berates the thought, "*What! Shall I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of all things.*" He is the Lord who controls me, arranges my affairs, guides me, and advises me. He knows my intention and my deeds and will recompense me for whatever sin or virtue I gain. He is the owner of the whole universe. He is my Lord and your Lord. He is the Lord who will not burden a soul beyond its capacity and will not punish a soul for someone else's sin. He is my Lord to whom we will all return, and to whom we will be all accountable. He is my Lord who established people as vicegerents on earth. He is my Lord who tested people with prosperity and adversity. He is my Lord who is swift in reckoning and He is Merciful, Compassionate.

The Sura ends with this magnificent rosary of praise of God the Lord.

## **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. Little you do remember.*
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 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. Little you do remember.*” 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 you desire, but come not near this tree lest 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 nature been 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 a 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.

*"Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from wherever you desire, but come not near this tree lest 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 reject faith.*

*28. And when they commit a lewd act they say, "We found our fathers doing it and God enjoined it on us." Say, "God, verily, does not enjoin lewdness. 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 error was their justly earned due. 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 indecencies, 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 reject faith. And when they commit a lewd act they say, 'We found our fathers doing it and God enjoined it on us.' Say, 'God, verily, does not enjoin lewdness. 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 His. As He created you in the beginning, so shall you return. A group has been guided by Him, while another error was their justly earned due. 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 a lewd 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 lewdness.*” Being nude in public is a lewd act. These acts are unacceptable. Ages of ignorance are all similar even if they come centuries apart. God did neither command nor condone lewd 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 indecencies, 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 eat 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 indecencies whether open or secret. Indecencies include 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 rejected 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 invents a lie against God or rejects 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 said 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 rejected 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 requite the guilty.*

*41. Theirs will be a bed of Hell, and over them coverings (of Hell). Thus, do We requite 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 rejected faith."*

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 the things they invented will fail 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 rejected 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 lewd 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 invents a lie against God or rejects 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 said 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 rejected 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 requite 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 requite 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 the best they could to perform 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 rejected faith.’”* 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 the things they invented will fail 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, by the will of its Lord, springs up produce, 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, by the will of its Lord, springs up produce, 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 serve 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 but 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 Ark. We drowned in the flood those who rejected 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 serve God. You have no other deity but Him, will you not be conscious of God?"*

66. *The chiefs of those 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 true 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 serve God alone, and forsake what our fathers used to serve? 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 rejected Our revelations and did not believe.*

73. *To the (tribe of) Thamud, (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren. He said, "My people serve 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 of those who disbelieved from 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 reject 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 lewdness, 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 serve 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 invented 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 serve 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 Ark. We drowned in the flood those who rejected 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 serve 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 Ark. We drowned in the flood those who rejected 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 serve God. You have no other deity but Him, will you not be conscious of God?’ The chiefs of those 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 true 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 serve God alone, and forsake what our fathers used to serve? 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 rejected 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 ark. So the tribe of ‘Ad were the descendants of people who believed in God, but as time passed 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 serve 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 serve 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 rejected 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 serve 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 of those who disbelieved from 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 reject 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 serve 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 reject 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 lewdness, 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 clean.’ 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 lewdness, 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 clean.”* See how twisted their logic was? Those who want to keep clean and 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 serve 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 invented 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 serve 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 invented 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 by 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 called them to account 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 rejected (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 what they had rejected 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 by 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 called them to account 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 rejected (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 by 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 called them to account 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 rejected (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 serve 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 what they had rejected 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 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 wizard.*

*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 wizards 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 brought low.*

120. *The wizards 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 persvererance, 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 “rejecting faith” and “associating partners with God,” repeatedly. The present verse is an example of this usage. 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 reject faith 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 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 wizard. 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 wizard.’”*

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 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 wizard. 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 wizard.”* 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 wizards 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 brought low.”* 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 wizards 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 must 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 (of communion) 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 crashing down. 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 deny 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 rewarded 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 invent 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 who will succeed."*

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 disregarded the warnings that had been given them, 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 (of communion) 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 an 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 crashing down. 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 rewarded 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 crashing down.”* 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*

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*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.”*

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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

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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 invent 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.

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*“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 inflicted 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 who will succeed.”* 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*

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*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.

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*“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 disregarded the warnings that had been given them, 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*

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*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

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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 may have taken false gods, but we are (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 them off. 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 reject Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect.*
177. *Evil is the example of people who reject Our revelations and wrong their own souls.*
178. *Whomever God guides is indeed on the right path and whomever He rejects from His guidance, 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 reject 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 perspicuous 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 rejects from His guidance, will have no other guide; He will leave them in their trespasses, wandering in distraction.*
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."*
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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 support them, nor can they support 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 support you, and indeed they cannot support 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)
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*"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 Greer 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

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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 a human being.

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.

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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 may have taken false gods, but we are (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.

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*"Relate to them the story of him to whom We gave Our revelations but he sloughed them off. 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 reject Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect. Evil is the example of people who reject 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 exuviate 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 reject Our revelations. So relate the story; perchance they may reflect. Evil is the example of people who reject 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 rejects from His guidance, 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 reject 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 perspicuous 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 saneness, 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 rejects from His guidance, will have no other guide; He will leave them in their trespasses, wandering in distraction.”* 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 invented 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 support them, nor can they support 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 Abo Bakr (RA). They would hit him with their shoes and mutilate his face. During these torture episodes, Abo 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 worshiping these idols, *“Those whom you call upon besides Him, are unable to support you, and indeed they cannot support 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, remember God and 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 serve 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, remember God and 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 Gareer 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 serve 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 Abo 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 serve 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 serve God. It is the provision needed for the road.

## **Sura 8: Al-Anfal (The Spoils of War)**

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

Following the two Meccan Suras of Al-An'am (Chapter 6) and Al-A'raf, (Chapter 7) we come to the Sura titled Al-Anfal which is a Medinian Sura. It should be noted that we have chosen to follow the order of the Suras as they appear in the Qur'anic text. We did not choose to follow the chronological order of the revelation because there is no definite authentic tradition that determines the correct chronological order of the revelation of the different Suras in the Qur'an. Authentic traditions which show the time of revelation of a specific verse or a number of verses exist only in few cases. It may be interesting to study the historical progress of the Islamic call by following the verses of the Qur'an in a chronological order. However, such feat is not only extremely difficult to achieve but will also result in mostly unsubstantiated order. It is then better to follow the order of the Suras as given in the well accepted Qur'anic text that we have today.

The Sura titled Al-Anfal (The Spoils of War) was revealed after the revelation of Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2). As a matter of fact, it was exactly revealed during the battle of Badr which took place during the month of Ramadan in the second year Hijri. We remind the reader that, the order of revelation of the Suras is assigned on the basis of the order of revelation of the opening verses in each Sura. It is known that the revelation of the verses of Surat Al-Baqara continued for about nine years, during this period other Suras were revealed including Surat Al-Anfal.

Some narratives claim that verses 30 to 36 were revealed in Mecca. These narratives may have been based on the fact that these verses deal with issues that were relevant to the Meccan period before the migration to Medina took place. However, this should not be considered enough of a reason to support such claim. Many of the verses that were revealed in Medina deal with issues which relate to events that happened in Mecca before the migration to Medina took place. Verse 26 in this Sura supports our opinion, *"Remember when you were a small (band), despised through the land, and afraid that people might extirpate you, how He gave you refuge, strengthened you with His help, and provided you of the good things, that haply you might be thankful."* (8:26) Verse 36, which is supposed to have been revealed in Mecca according to this narrative, deals with an issue that occurred after the battle of Badr when the disbelievers were preparing for the battle of Uhud, *"The disbelievers spend their wealth to avert people from the path of God. They will continue to spend it; then it will be a source of intense regret for them and they will be conquered. The disbelievers will be gathered together to Hell."* (8:36)

So, this Sura was revealed during the battle of Badr which was a milestone in the history of the Islamic movement. God called the day of Badr, *"the day of the criterion, the day when the two armies met."* (8:41) God also designated it as a demarcation point between believers and disbelievers, not only in this life but also in the Hereafter, *"These two antagonists disputed with each other about their Lord. But those who deny (their Lord), for them will be cut out garments of fire, over their heads will be poured out boiling*

*water melting their insides, as well as (their) skins. In addition, there will be maces of iron (to punish) them. Every time they wish to get away therefrom, from anguish, they will be forced back therein, and (it will be said), 'Taste the torment of burning.' God will admit those who believe and do righteous deeds, to gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk. For they have been guided (in this life) to the purest of speeches; they have been guided to the path of Him who is Worthy of (all) Praise." (22:19-24)* It has been narrated that these verses came down to describe the two armies who met in the battle of Badr. These verses describe the end which each group will meet, not only in this life but also in the Hereafter.

We will be able to appreciate the dimensions of this battle only if we look at it from the perspective of the concept of striving (Jihad) in Islam. We need to understand that it was simply one of the links in the chain of striving in the way of God. We need to understand the reasons for and the objectives of striving in Islam. We will not be able to understand this, unless we understand the nature of the religion of Islam.

Imam Ibn El-Qaiem summarized the nature of striving in Islam in his book entitled (Zad El-Ma'ad), in a chapter entitled, *"A chapter on the Prophet's (PBUH) model of behavior in dealing with the disbelievers and the hypocrites from the time he was sent until the time he died."*

The first revelation he (Muhammad, PBUH) received from his Lord commanded him to read in the name of his Lord who created. This command proclaimed the beginning of his assignment as a prophet. This verse indicated that he was only commanded to read to himself, he was not commanded to deliver the message yet. Then the verse, *"You, wrapped in your cloak, arise and give warning," (74:1-2)* was revealed. God appointed him (Muhammad, PBUH) a prophet using the word, *"Read,"* and God appointed him a messenger with the word, *"You, wrapped in your cloak."* God then gave him the command to warn. Muhammad (PBUH) was commanded to start with the call to his kinsfolk, then proceed to the surrounding Arab tribes, then to all Arabs, then to the rest of the world. He continued in the beginning to call people to Islam peacefully. He was commanded to persevere and forgive the persecution. Then, he was commanded to migrate to Medina and was given the permission to fight only those who fought him. Then he was commanded to fight the idolaters in Arabia so that the religion becomes pure to God.

The disbelievers were then divided into three categories: those who had a peace treaty with the Muslims, those who were at war with the Muslims, and those who were given a pledge to be protected by the Muslim state.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to fulfill the conditions of the peace treaty that he concluded with the first category. He was asked to announce the annulment of the treaty, if he suspected treacherous behavior by the disbelievers. The Prophet (PBUH) was not allowed to start a fight until he had made his

intentions public. He was also commanded to fight those who abrogate their peace treaty with the Muslims.

These rules were detailed in the Surat Al-Tawbah (Chapter 9). The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to fight his enemies of the people of the Scripture until they surrender and pay the Poll tax or accept Islam. He was also commanded to strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and treat them harshly. He strove against the disbelievers with the sword and against the hypocrites with a clear convincing argument. He was commanded to abrogate the peace treaty with the disbelievers before fighting them.

The command classified those who had a peace treaty with the Muslims into three categories: a group who betrayed the treaty, a group who had a treaty valid for a specific period of time, and a group who did not have a treaty with Muslims but did not start any hostilities against them either. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to fight the first group, to fulfill the term of the treaty between him and the second group, and to give the third group an amnesty period of four months before he could fight them. Members of the third category accepted Islam at the end of the four months. The people of the Scripture accepted to pay the poll tax. Thus, people of the land became divided into three groups: Muslims, peaceful non-Muslims, and frightened enemy.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to accept the hypocrites' statement of Islam at its face value, only God is privy to their intentions. He was commanded to strive against them using eloquent speeches, to turn away from them, and to treat them harshly. However, he was commanded not to perform funeral prayers for their dead, nor to seek forgiveness for them because even if he would ask God to forgive them, God will not forgive them. (Zad El-M'ad)

Those who try to apologize for the concept of striving in Islam do not understand the difference between two basic Islamic principles: let there be no compulsion in religion and fighting oppression which does not allow people the freedom of religion. Islam does not seek to change people's faith by force. Jihad has not been instituted to force people to accept Islam. But, it is the obligatory duty of Muslims to fight oppression, whether those who are oppressed are Muslims or non-Muslims. Freedom of faith is guaranteed to every human being. The principle of freedom of faith goes hand in hand with the concept of free will.

Islam came to announce the end of humankind's enslavement on earth by proclaiming God as the only one that deserves to be worshiped. This meant that Islam came to start a revolution against all forms of enslavement and oppression of people. It is a call to disinvest those who want to control others of their power. Systems which allow people to control their fellow human beings through manmade laws are systems which allow enslavement. These rulers have usurped the role of God. Islam came to abolish the kingdom of humankind and establish the kingdom of God. In Qur'anic terms, "*It is He who is God in heaven and God on earth; and He is the Wise, the Omniscient.*" (43:84)

*“The command is for none but God. He has commanded that you worship none but Him, that is the right religion...” (12:40) “Say, ‘People of the Scripture, come to common terms between us and you: that we worship none but God, that we associate no partners with Him; that we do not establish, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God.’ If then they turn back, say, ‘Bear witness that we have submitted to God’s will.’” (3:64)*

The kingdom of God does not mean accepting the rule of a theocratic government, but it means that the government should rule according to God’s law. Everything is referred to God for His ruling according to the law that He has decreed.

Establishing God’s kingdom on earth, removing the kingdom of humankind from power, and establishing God’s law as the law of the land will not happen peacefully. Those who are in power, who usurped God’s role, and who are controlling other human beings will not give up all of this voluntarily. This is the reality of life which this religion came to deal with. It was therefore, important that the “proclamation” should be supported by a “movement” to address the realities of human life on earth.

The proclamation confronted the prevailing ideologies, but the movement was confronted with material obstacles. The ruling power, the social system, and the established traditions are some of these obstacles. This religion was not only a message to the Arabs alone, nor did it come to free only Arabs, but it is a message for all humanity and it came to free all humankind on earth. God is not the Lord of the Arabs alone. God is not even the Lord of the Muslims only, but He is the Lord of the worlds. This religion wants to establish the fact that only God deserves to be worshiped. This frees people from being enslaved by other human beings. The major act of enslavement is embodied in ignoring God’s law and allowing manmade laws to govern people.

Al-Termidhi narrated, on the authority of ‘Adiey bin Hatem (RA) that ‘Adiey, who had previously converted to Christianity, fled to Syria upon receiving a call to Islam. His sister and a group of her people were captured by Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) freed ‘Adiey’s sister and later she embraced Islam. She went to her brother and convinced him to adopt Islam, which he did. ‘Adiey (RA) then went to visit the Prophet (PBUH). Upon entering the Mosque to meet the Prophet (PBUH), he heard him reciting a verse, *“They take their scholars and their monks as lords besides God,” (9:31)*. ‘Adiey (RA) said to the Prophet (PBUH), *“They did not worship their scholars and monks.”* The Prophet (PBUH) responded, *“Did they (the scholars) not change what was rendered lawful (by God) to become unlawful and what was unlawful to become lawful and the people followed their ruling. This is the interpretation of the verse.”*

The interpretation that the Prophet (PBUH) gave for this verse is unequivocal in rendering as disbelievers those who follow manmade laws which contravene God’s law.

It was therefore, imperative that Islam would take the necessary steps to change the reality of human life which runs against its proclamation. It was important to take the measures which allow all people to have access to the proclamation and allow them to



choose freely. Islam came to free humankind from all forms of enslavement to anyone except God. Humankind should serve God only. The Islamic proclamation and movement aim at guaranteeing that each and every human being enjoys the right of the freedom of religion.

The battle of Badr was not the first battle between the Muslims and the idolaters of Mecca. This battle was preceded by a number of minor encounters between the two groups. Only one of these minor encounters involved real fighting. All these encounters followed the Islamic protocol for striving. It is true that all these encounters involved only the tribe of Quraish which expelled the Prophet (PBUH) and did not observe the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque, but the basic objective of striving in Islam is to free people from the persecution of tyrants and to establish their right to the freedom of religion. At that time, Quraish was the tyrant who persecuted people and deprived them the right to adopt the religion they choose.

Let us review briefly the events of the battle of Badr before we discuss the Sura so we can appreciate the ambience which surrounded the revelation of the verses of this Sura. This will help us understand the goals of the Sura. We can also comprehend the dual purpose of the verses: to describe the events as they were unfolding and to direct and guide the events as well. One cannot completely understand Qur'anic verses by studying the language in which they were written only but one needs also to live the history and understand the dynamics of the environment in which these verses were revealed. Understanding the context of the revelation provides a necessary ingredient to understand the intent of the verses.

Ibn Ishaq narrated that, *“The Messenger of God (PBUH) came to know that Abu Sufian bin Harb was leading a group of about thirty to forty men bringing a big caravan with goods that belong to Quraish from Syria to Mecca. The Messenger (PBUH) arranged an expedition to capture the caravan. He said to his companions, ‘Go seek this caravan which carries goods for Quraish, it may be that God enables you to capture it as spoils of war.’ Some people obliged, while others were indolent because they understood that the command sounded like they have a choice to join the expedition or not.”* Ibn El-Qaiem said, *“The total number of those who participated in the battle of Badr was about three hundred and seventeen: eighty-six from the migrants, sixty-one from the tribe of Al-Aws, and hundred and seventy from the tribe of Al-Khazraj. The participants from the tribe of Al-Aws were less in number than the participants from the tribe of Al-Khazraj because the residence of the tribe of Al-Aws was far. However, the men from Al-Aws were stronger and more persistent in war than the men from the tribe of Al-Khazraj. The call to join the expedition was made in a hurry which left no time to prepare for people who wanted to join the expedition. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘Only those who have readily available mounts should follow us.’ When some asked for permission to go to bring their mounts, he did not give permission. So, the expedition was assembled in a hurry with very little preparation. The call came suddenly. It was God’s will to bring them together with their enemy without previous planning.”*

Abu Sufian had his own intelligence apparatus who brought him news about the Muslims' campaign. When he came to know that Muhammad (PBUH) is preparing an expedition to attack his caravan, he employed a person by the name Damdam Al-Ghafary to go to Mecca to alert Quraish of the impending danger posed by the Muslims and to exhort them to form an army to defend their caravan.

Al-Maquerizi described in his book (Imta' Al-Asma', Bringing Pleasure to the Listeners) the reaction of Quraish to the news that Damdam brought. They were shocked to hear Damdam lamenting with a loud voice the lost caravan and warning the people of Quraish that they will lose all the money that they invested in the caravan if they do not hurry to defend it against Muhammad's expedition. A group of the chiefs of Quraish started a fund raising campaign to organize an army. They exhorted people to join the army to fight the "apostates" meaning the Muslims. Anyone who was not able or did not want to join the army supported another one to fight on his behalf. A'tikah bint Abd Al-Muttalib saw a dream which foretold a perilous encounter for Quraish. This dream discouraged many men to join the army. However, the chiefs were finally able to form an army of nine hundred and fifty fighters of those one hundred were well equipped knights. The army had seven hundred camels.

In the meantime, Abu Sufian decided to take a detour thus changing the caravan route to escape the Muslim's expedition. Abu Sufian diverted his caravan away from the traditional route that caravans between Syria and Mecca normally used. He took a route along the coast, thus avoiding the expedition and was able to escape with the caravan unhurt. Not aware of this development, the Quraishite army went towards the regular caravan route. They were met with Qais bin Imroi Al-Qais, who told them that the caravan was able to escape and they should go back to Mecca. He warned them that they may be slaughtered at the hands of the Yathribites (the people of Medina). However, Abu Jahl insisted that the army should continue until they reach Badr. He said, *"By God, we will not go back until we reach Badr. We will stay for three days to celebrate, eat, drink, and listen to music and songs, so that the Arabs would fear us."* When Qais went back to Abu Sufian to tell him about Abu Jahl's decision, he said, *"My People, this is Abu Jahl's way of thinking. He did not want to return back because of his arrogance. Arrogance is a bad character and a bad omen. If Muhammad defeated our army we will be humiliated."*

Ibn Ishaq mentioned that Al-Akhnas bin Shuraiq Al-Thaqafi said to Bani Zahra (he had an alliance with them), *"Bani Zahara, God has saved your share of the goods. That was the objective for which you joined the Qurashite army. You do not need to fight so go back to your homes."* The people from Bani Zahara heeded the advice and abandoned the army. Al-Maquerizi also mentioned that Taleb bin Abi Taleb was among the people who joined the army but decided to return back after he had heard that the caravan arrived Mecca safely.

Ibn Ishaq narrated that, *"The Prophet (PBUH) and his companions left Medina some time during the month of Ramadan. They had a total of seventy camels so they used to have turns riding these camels. The Prophet (PBUH), Ali bin Abi Taleb and Marthad Al-*

*Ghanawi shared one camel; and Abu Bakr, Omar and Abd Al- Rahman bin Ao'uf shared another."*

Al-Maquerizi mentioned that,

Upon arrival at the wells of Badr, the Messenger of God (PBUH) received the news of the Qurashite army. He asked his companions for advice. Abu Bakr (RA) gave an eloquent speech, then Umar (RA) gave an eloquent speech, he said, "Messenger of God, this is Quraish coming in its glory, by God they were never defeated before, by God, they never believed, and they will not capitulate easily. They will fight you so prepare yourself for a fierce fight." Al-Miqdad bin Amr (RA) said, "Messenger of God, go forward on the mission that has been decreed by God, we are with you. By God, we will never say to you what the children of Israel said to their prophet, 'Go, you and your Lord to fight, we are sitting right here.' But we are going to say, 'Go, you and your Lord to fight, we are going to fight alongside you.' By God, if you ask us to walk with you until you reach Berk Al-Ghamad (a place near Yemen) we would walk with you." The Messenger of God (PBUH) thanked him and asked again for advice. He wanted to know the stance of Al-Ansar (the original people of Medina). He did not know if they will join the fight because the terms of the agreement with Al-Ansar only stated their obligation to defend the Prophet and the Muslims if attacked within the boundaries of Medina. Sa'd bin Moa'z (RA) said, "I answer for the Ansar. Do you want us to join you in fighting Quraish?" The Messenger said, "Yes." Sa'd said, "It seems that the original purpose of the expedition has been changed by a revelation. We believed in you, we bore witness that what you brought is the truth, and we gave you our pledges to listen to you and to obey you. So, go forward to achieve the objective you aspire to attain. By God, who sent you with the truth, if you cross this sea we will cross it with you, no one will remain behind. Give your gift to whomever you wish, deprive from your gift whomever you wish, and take from our wealth whatever you desire. By God, we love to give you as a gift whatever wealth we have. I never came this road before, but we are not afraid to meet our enemy on the battle field tomorrow. You will find us perseverant in the battle and truthful in our words. I ask God to show you some of our deeds which will please you." When Sa'd finished his speech, the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, "Go with the blessing of God. God promised me one of the two groups. By God, I see now their images as they will meet their death in battle." The Muslims realized then that they will be fighting Quraish. The Messenger's words filled them with hope for victory. The Prophet (PBUH) gave the banners under which Muslims will fight to three people: Mosa'b bin O'mair (RA), Ali bin Abi Taleb (RA), and Sa'd bin Moa'z (RA). He then asked people to prepare their arms.

The Messenger (PBUH) and his army arrived at a well in the area of Badr closest to Medina on the evening of Friday, the seventeenth of Ramadan. The Messenger

(PBUH) sent Ali (RA), Al-Zubair (RA), and Sa'd bin Abi Waqas (RA) on a reconnaissance mission. He pointed to a small hill and said, "I hope you find news at that hill." They went there and found three young men from Quraish getting water for the army, they captured two of them and the third managed to escape. The man who fled went back to the Qurashite with the news that Muhammad's (PBUH) men took hold of the well. The two who were captured were taken back to the Prophet (PBUH). They told the Prophet (PBUH) that Quraish's army is camping behind the hill and their assignment was to bring water to army. He asked them how many camels they slaughter each day, they told him that one day they slaughter ten camels and the following day they slaughter nine camels. The Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, "The army is between nine hundred and a thousand."

The Prophet (PBUH) then asked his companions about the best place for the army to camp. Al-Habab bin Al-Munzer bin Al-Jamooah (RA) said to the Prophet (PBUH), "Let us go to the well closest to the Qurashite army. I know a well full of sweet water, we can then camp in front of it. This way, our army will be able to access the water to drink but their army will not be able to reach any of the wells to get water to drink." The Prophet agreed and they camped at the place that Al-Habab (RA) suggested. Rain came down which solidified the ground on the side of the believers but the ground on the side of the disbelievers became slippery. The rain was a blessing for the believers and was a curse on the disbelievers. Then the believers experienced a state of slumber.

A tent was built as a command quarters for the Messenger (PBUH) and Sa's bin Mo'az (RA) stood guard in front of it. The Messenger (PBUH) surveyed the battle field, telling his companions the place where each one of the disbelievers will meet his death. The prophecies of the Messenger (PBUH) were all happened as in the exact way he mentioned. The Messenger (PBUH) organized the believers for the battle then went into his command quarters together with Abu Bakr (RA).

*Ibn Ishaq said, "When the Messenger (PBUH) saw the Qurashite army standing at a nearby small hill, he prayed God saying, 'God, here it is Quraish coming with all its might and pride to fight You and to deny Your Messenger. God, I pray for the victory You have promised. God, smite them today.'"*

Khofaf Al-Ghafary, seeing the Qurashite army passing by, gave them food. He also offered to join the army to fight the Muslims. The army chiefs thanked him and said, "*If it is the people we are fighting, we are more powerful than them, but if it is God we are fighting – as Muhammad claims – no human power could fight God.*"

The Messenger (PBUH) allowed some men from Quraish to drink from his well. It was narrated that all of them perished in the battle afterwards except for Hakim bin Hezam (RA) who survived and accepted Islam.

It was also narrated by Ibn Ishaq that, *“The Qurashites sent O’mair bin Wahb El-Jamhi on a reconnaissance mission. He reported, ‘The Muslims are around 300 men armed with swords. They are full of determination to win. Each one of them is determined to kill one of you before he would be killed.’ He then asked the chiefs of Quraish to contemplate what they want to do, having been warned that they will suffer major losses if they fight.”*

*When Hakim bin Hezam heard El-Jarhi’s report he tried to convince the chiefs of Quraish to rethink the situation and to refrain from fighting the Muslims. He was able to get some of the chiefs to side with him, however, Abu Jahl was able to stem the tide of dissent and to stay the course.*

Ibn Ishaq narrated that, *“Al-Aswad Al-Makhzoumi was an ill-mannered person, he swore to fight the Muslims until he is either killed or he would kill them and drank from the well they kept for themselves. Hamza bin Abd El-Muttalib (RA) killed Al-Aswad. Next came out ‘Otba bin Rabee’a, his brother Shaiba and his son Al-Waleed requesting a duel with three of the Muslims. Three young men from Al-Ansar came out to fight them. However, when ‘Otba realized that their opponents were from Al-Ansar, he cried out, ‘Although we respect you but we want to fight our equals from Quraish.’ The Messenger (PBUH) commanded ‘Obaida bin Al-Hareth (RA), Hamza bin Abd El-Muttalib(RA), and Ali bin Abi Taleb (RA) to fight them. The three Qurashite duelers were killed. O’baida (RA) was wounded so Hamza (RA) and Ali (RA) attacked his opponent and killed him.”*

The two armies moved closer to each other, however, the Messenger (PBUH) commanded his companions not to engage the Qurashites until he commanded them to do so. He told them to defend themselves by throwing arrows at the Qurashites. He arranged the Muslim army in rows and went back together with Abu Bakr (RA) to his tent. The Messenger (PBUH) was engaged in an intense prayer to God for victory. He appealed to God saying, *“God, if the Muslims were to be destroyed today, no one will remain to serve You.”* Abu Bakr (RA) and Abd-Allah bin Rawaha (RA) were trying to comfort the Messenger (PBUH) but he continued to pray. The Messenger then came out of his tent and exhorted the Muslims to fight hard. He said, *“I swear with Him who holds my soul in His hand, God will admit to paradise whoever perseveres in fighting the idolaters and dies moving forward on the battle field.”* The Messenger (PBUH) then took a palm-full of dust and threw at the Qurashites saying, *“God mar your faces.”* The Muslims attacked and the Qurashites were defeated. Many of the idolaters were taken captives.

The Messenger then asked the fighters to bring back the spoils that they collected. An argument then ensued between those who fought and those who were protecting the Messenger (PBUH). This dispute was one of the topics dealt with in this Sura.

Ibn Ishaq said, *“I have been told on the authority of Abd-El-Rahman bin Al-Hareth that ‘Obada bin El-Samet said, ‘Sura Al-Anfal dealt with the dispute that ensued among the companions who participated in the battle of Badr. We argued about how to distribute the spoils of war, so God took that right from us and gave it to the Messenger (PBUH). The Messenger (PBUH) gave each one of us an equal share.”*

Ibn Ishaq also narrated, on the authority of Nabeeh bin Wahb (RA), that, “*The Messenger (PBUH) distributed the captives among his companions and said, ‘Take good care of the captives.’ The companions obeyed the Messenger’s (PBUH) command and took good care of the captives to the extent that they would give them the best food they had.*”

This is a summary of the events of the battle of Badr during which Surat Al-Anfal was revealed. The Sura described some of these events and illustrated the divine intervention which directed these events and made this battle a turning point in the history of humankind.

This battle was the first major battle between the Muslims and the idolaters of Mecca in which the Muslims had won a great victory over their enemy. However, initially the objective of the Muslims was not to engage in a battle with the idolaters. The initial objective was to capture Quraish’s caravan as a substitute for the wealth that they were forced to leave behind in Mecca when they were forced out of their homes and their families. However, God’s plan was different. God wanted this battle to be a turning point in the history of the struggle between the truth and falsehood. Muslims had been persecuted by the idolaters of Mecca, they were driven out of their homes and their country; their wealth was confiscated. The relationship between the idolaters (the tyrants) and the Muslims (victims) changed dramatically as a result of the victory in the battle of Badr. The battle taught the Muslims the practical application of the principle of putting their trust in God. They were taught that perseverance is an integral part of achieving success. They were taught that the divine plan eventually lead to victory even though conditions may be difficult in the beginning. The Sura also included guiding principles regarding the laws of peace and war, the distribution of the spoils of war, treating the captives, covenants and treaties, and the elements of victory and loss in war. The Sura also juxtaposed the living conditions of the Muslims before and after the battle and reminded the Muslims of the fulfillment of God’s promise which resulted in their victory.

## **Verses 1 - 29**

*1. They ask you (Prophet) about (the distribution of) the spoils of war. Say, “The decision concerning the distribution of the spoils is for God and the Messenger. So be conscious of God, and mend the relations between yourselves. Obey God and His Messenger, if you are true believers.”*

*2. The believers are those, whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith is strengthened when they hear His revelations are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord.*

*3. Who establish regular prayers and spend (freely) out of what We have bestowed on them.*

*4. Those are the true believers. For them are high levels of honor with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision.*

5. *Just as your Lord brought you out of your house in truth, even though a party among the believers disliked it;*
6. *Disputing with you concerning the truth after it was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death while they were looking on.*
7. *And when God promised you one of the two bands (of the enemy), that it should be yours. You wished that the unarmed one should be yours, but God willed to establish the truth according to His words and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers.*
8. *That He might establish the truth and abolish falsehood, even if the criminals disliked.*
9. *Remember when you sought the help of your Lord, and He answered you, "I will assist you with a thousand of the angels, following one another."*
10. *God made it a message of hope and a reassurance to your hearts. Victory comes only by the help of God. Certainly, God is Eminent, Wise.*
11. *Remember when He made the slumber fall on you as a reassurance from Him and sent down water from the sky to purify you, to remove from you the fear of Satan, to strengthen your hearts, and to firm (your) feet thereby.*
12. *Remember when your Lord inspired the angels (saying), "I am with you. Make those who believe stand firm. I will cast terror into the hearts of the disbelievers. Strike above their necks and smite of them every finger-tip."*
13. *That is because they opposed God and His Messenger. Whoever opposes God and His Messenger – indeed God is severe in punishment.*
14. *Thus (will it be said), "Taste you then of the (torment)." Certainly, for the disbelievers is the torment of the Fire.*
15. *Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in battle, never turn your backs to them.*
16. *Whoso on that day turns his back to them - unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) - he truly has incurred on himself the wrath of God, and his refuge is Hell – what an evil destination.*
17. *It is not you who slew them; it was God who slew them. And you did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw, that He might test the believers by a gracious trial from Himself. Certainly, God is He All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
18. *That, and also (know) that indeed, God is He who weakens the plotting of the disbelievers.*
19. *(Disbelievers,) If you sought a judgment, now has the judgment come to you. If you desist (from wrong), it will be best for you, and if you return (to the attack), so shall We.*

*Not the least good will your forces be to you even if they were multiplied. Verily, God is with the believers.*

*20. Believers, obey God and His Messenger, and do not turn away from him when you hear him speak.*

*21. Do not be like those who say, "We hear," but they do not listen.*

*22. Indeed, the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf, the dumb, and those who do not understand.*

*23. Had God known of any good in them He would have made them hear, but had He made them hear they would have turned away, averse.*

*24. Believers, respond to God and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which will give you life; and know that God comes in between a human being and his own heart, and that it is He to whom you shall (all) be gathered.*

*25. And fear a trial, which does not affect, in particular, only those of you who do wrong, and know that God is severe in punishment.*

*26. Remember when you were a small band, despised through the land, and afraid that people might extirpate you, how He sheltered you, strengthened you with His help, and provided you of the good things, that you might be thankful.*

*27. Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you.*

*28. And know that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial; and that with God is immense reward.*

*29. Believers, if you remain conscious of God, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), absolve you of all your sins, and forgive you. God is the possessor of Great Bounty. (8:1-29)*

*"They ask you (Prophet) about (the distribution of) the spoils of war. Say, 'The decision concerning the distribution of the spoils is for God and the Messenger.' So be conscious of God, and mend the relations between yourselves. Obey God and His Messenger, if you are true believers. The believers are those, whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith is strengthened when they hear His revelations are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord. Who establish regular prayers and spend (freely) out of what We have bestowed on them. Those are the true believers. For them are high levels of honor with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision." El-Thawri narrated on the authority of Abi Saleh, that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, "On the day of Badr, the Messenger (PBUH) defined the reward for those who fought in the battle, each according to his achievement. Sa'd bin 'Obada (RA) objected saying to the Prophet*



*(PBUH), 'If you give those who fought what you indicated, nothing will be left for those who stayed around you to protect you. We did not stay behind because we were not interested in earning a reward nor we were cowards. We were afraid that the enemy would come around from the back, so we stayed behind to protect you against enemy attacks.'*” The two groups continued to argue together until these verses were revealed.

Imam Ahmed narrated on the authority of Moa'yeeah (RA), that Sa'd bin Abi Waqass (RA) said, *“On the day of Badr my brother 'Umair (RA) was killed. I then fought Sa'eed bin Al-Ass and killed him and took his sword. I took the sword to the Prophet (PBUH) who commanded that I turn the sword to the collection of the spoils. I was devastated for the death of my brother and the confiscation of my gain. Very soon after this, the first verses of Surat Al-Anfal were revealed and the Prophet (PBUH) told me to go and get back the sword that I won in the battle.”*

Imam Ahmed also narrated on the authority of Aswad bin 'Amer, that Sa'd bin Malek (RA) said to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Messenger of God, I completed my fight safely today, so give me this sword (which I gained in my fight). The Messenger (PBUH) said, 'This sword is not yours and it is not mine so put it back with the rest of the spoils of war,' which I did. I then heard the Prophet (PBUH) saying that he received a revelation and I should go get the sword.”*

All these stories describe the atmosphere which surrounded the revelation of this Sura. It may be shocking to read this story and realize how much those who fought the battle of Badr were obsessed by a strong interest in the gains from the battle. The army that fought this battle was comprised of those who migrated from Mecca leaving all their belongings behind their backs and fleeing with their faith and those who were the original inhabitants of Medina who gladly hosted their brethren who came to them from Mecca and gladly shared their wealth with them. Details of these stories shed some light on this strange phenomenon. According to the norms of the day, the allocation of the spoils of war should commensurate with the effort that a fighter expended in the battle. The share in the spoils of war was considered to be a measure of the valor of the fighter. It was a testament to the fighter's courage and effort. This testament had a special significance for the Muslims especially when it came from the Prophet (PBUH) himself. Their obsession with this achievement made them forget the noble characters that they were commanded to exercise towards each other. When the verses of Surat Al-Anfal were revealed, they were suddenly reminded with their transgression. The reminder came in two forms: a physical action and a long lecture. The action was taken by assigning the authority of the distribution of the spoils to the Prophet (PBUH). The lecture started by these verses and continued throughout the Sura to remind them of the behavior that went amiss.

The message to those who disputed about the distribution of the spoils of war, which woke them up, was a reminder of their duty to remain conscious of God. God knows best. The best way to divert the focus off the material gains is to remind people of a higher calling: their duty to remain conscious of God. God consciousness is the key to the hearts of the believers, *“So be conscious of God, and mend the relations between yourselves.”*

This message softened their hearts and reminded them with the duty to obey God and His Messenger.

The first step is to obey God's verdict regarding the distribution of the spoils of war. The spoils are not theirs. The spoils of war are the property of God and His Messenger. God and His Messenger have the right to dispose of it as they wish. Taking the right to dispose of the spoils off their hands removed the source of contention between them. Now they should go back and treat each other in a brotherly way as they used to do before this issue arose. The verse challenged the believers to listen and obey, *"if you are true believers."* Belief is not a lip service. Belief is an action. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *"Belief is not wishful thinking nor it is a superficial quality. Belief is something that rests deep in the heart and is reflected on the deed."* The verses then continued to elaborate on the characteristics of the believers, *"The believers are those, whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith is strengthened when they hear His revelations are recited to them, and who put their trust in their Lord. Who establish regular prayers and spend (freely) out of what We have bestowed on them. Those are the true believers. For them are high levels of honor with their Lord, forgiveness, and generous provision."* The construction of the Qur'anic expression is very precise in its meaning. It indicates that the list of attributes mentioned in the verses constitute the characteristics which a believer should enjoy. Anyone who does not enjoy all these characteristics is not a believer. This meaning was emphasized by the sentence, *"Those are the true believers."* Pointing to the fact that one can be either a true believer or a disbeliever. There is nothing in between.

The believers' hearts tremble in awe when God's commands are mentioned. Remembering God's majesty and their own shortcomings are strong incentives for the believers to work hard seeking the pleasure of God. The believers' faith is strengthened when they listen to the verses of the Qur'an being recited. Qur'an finds its way to the hearts of the believers unobstructed to fill them with calmness and certitude. Disbelief forms a barrier that blocks the link through which Qur'an reaches the heart. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) used to say, *"We learnt how to believe before we learnt the Qur'an."* Through their faith they were able to delve into the mystery of the Qur'an, sense its beauty, and taste its sweetness. That is how they were able to live according to the Qur'an. The sweet taste of the Qur'an was enhanced by the fact that they were able to translate faith into action guided by practical Qur'anic directives. It is no longer possible to experience the feelings of the first generation who witnessed the process of the revelation of the Qur'an. But every group of Muslims whose aim is to establish an Islamic way of life should be able to taste the sweetness of translating faith into action in the same way as the first generation.

Believers know how to put their trust in God, and never to associate anything with Him. Imam Ibn Kathir commented on this saying, *"They have no hope in anyone but God. They seek help from no one but God. He is their only refuge. They ask no one but Him. They know that whatever He wills will be, and whatever He does not wish will not be. He is the absolute owner of the kingdom. He has no partners and His decrees cannot be appealed. He is swift in reckoning."* Sa'id bin Jubair said, *"Putting one's trust in God is*

*the epitome of belief.*” But trusting in God does not imply that a person does not do his/her best to achieve a result. Doing one’s best is a sign of the belief in God. God created the means to reach an end. Using the means that God created is an act of obedience to God. Once a person did his/her best by using the means that God created then he/she should trust God with the result. A believer should not think that the results are contingent only on the means. God decides the results and He is the one who created the means. He commanded us to use the means which He created and leave the attainment of the results for Him to decide. This frees the believer from being obsessed by the means and forgetting who created them.

Prayers are a visible expression of belief. Belief rests deep in the heart and should be reflected on the deeds of the believer; the first visible reflection is seen in establishing prayers. Establishing prayers means more than just performing prayers. Prayers are a communication between God and the believer. To establish prayers is to perform it in a way which reflects the sanctity of the meeting and makes it a testament of the belief in God.

Believers spend out of that which God gave them. The wealth is God’s wealth. God entrusted them with the wealth to be used in addressing their needs and to spend some of it in the sake of God.

These are the characteristics which identify the believers: the belief in the oneness of God, the continuous remembrance of God, the feeling of awe when listening to God’s verses, trusting in God, establishing prayers, and spending in God’s way. This list of characteristics is not exhaustive, other characteristics were mentioned in other places in the Qur’an, but these are the characteristics which are relevant to the situation addressed by these verses. The verses stated that those who do not enjoy these characteristics lost the sense of true belief.

The early Muslims realized that it is incumbent on the individual to seek and find the essence of true belief. Belief is not a proclamation, a lip service, nor wishful thinking. Al-Hafez El-Tabarani narrated on the authority of Abu Kareeb, that Al-Hareth bin Malek Al-Ansari (RA) said, *“I came across the Messenger of God (PBUH) one morning, he asked me, ‘Hareth, how are you this morning?’ I answered, ‘I feel I am a true believer.’ The Messenger (PBUH) said, ‘Be careful of what you say. Each matter has an essence. What is the essence of your belief?’ I said, ‘I withdraw myself from this worldly life. I spend the night praying and the day fasting. It is as if I see the throne of my Lord, and as if I see the people of paradise enjoy their lives and the people of Hell suffering.’ The Messenger (PBUH) said, ‘Hareth, you have known the essence of belief, so keep it up.’ He said that three times.”* Al-Hareth (RA) described his feelings and how these feelings drove him to act. His actions reflected his deep sense of belief.

*“Just as your Lord brought you out of your house in truth, even though a party among the believers disliked it, disputing with you concerning the truth after it was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death while they were looking on. And when God promised you one of the two bands (of the enemy), that it should be yours. You wished*

*that the unarmed one should be yours, but God willed to establish the truth according to His words and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers. That He might establish the truth and abolish falsehood, even if the criminals disliked.”* We have reviewed the details of the battle of Badr and mentioned how Abu Bakr (RA) and ‘Umar (RA) gave good counsel to the Messenger (PBUH) when he asked for an advice whether to fight or not. Al-Miqdad bin ‘Amr (RA) said to the Messenger (PBUH), *“Messenger of God, go forward to fulfill the command of your Lord. By God, we will not say to you as the children of Israel said to their prophet, ‘You and your Lord go and fight, we are going to wait right here.’ We will say to you, ‘You and your Lord go and fight, we are going with you.”* When Sa’d bin Mo’az (RA) realized that the Prophet (PBUH) is waiting hear the opinion of Al-Ansar, he reassured the Prophet (PBUH) that Al-Ansar are with him. However, the opinions of Abu Bakr (RA), ‘Umar (RA), Al-Miqdad (RA), and Sa’d (RA) did not reflect the views of all Muslims in the army. Some Muslims objected to the decision to fight. They hated being dragged into a fight they did not prepare for. They came out after the caravan. When they realized that the caravan escaped and that Quraish has sent a huge army to fight them they hated the encounter, *“as if they were being driven to a death they while they were looking on.”*

Al-Hafez bin Mardaweeh narrated that Abi Ayoub Al-Ansari (RA) said, *“While we were in Medina, the Messenger (PBUH) said, ‘I was told that Abu Sufian is leading a caravan for Quraish, would you like to go after it? God may enable you to win it.’ We agreed. We went after the caravan, however, after walking for about two days, the Messenger (PBUH) said, ‘The people (Quraish) were told about us, what you would say if we have to fight them?’ We said, ‘By God, we are no equal to them. We only came after the caravan.’ The Messenger (PBUH) repeated his question and we repeated the same answer. Al-Miqdad (RA) the said, ‘We will not say to you as the children of Israel said to their prophet, ‘You and your Lord go and fight, we are going to wait right here.’ We will say to you, ‘You and your Lord go and fight, we are going with you.’ We (Al-Ansar) wished that we said what Al-Miqdad (RA) had just said. This was when the verse, ‘Just as your Lord brought you out of your house in truth, even though a party among the believers disliked it.’”*

This tradition describes what was going in the minds and hearts of some of the Muslims. They hated to fight as if, *“they were being driven to death.”* Even after the truth has been made manifest to them and they were promised victory over one of the two bands. However, it was clear that they had no choice but to fight after they came to know that the caravan was able to escape.

This illustrates the first reaction of human nature when faced with danger even for those who have a strong faith. It makes us aware of the frailness and vulnerability of human beings. We should be realistic in our expectations of people. However, we should not also despair of the ability of the believers to overcome such frailness and to regain their composure after the first shock. That was what the people of Badr did. They came together and won. They thus, deserved what the Prophet (PBUH) said about them, *“It may be that God looked upon the people of Badr and said to them, ‘I have forgiven whatever you do.’”*

They desired that the unarmed one should be theirs. But “*God willed to establish the truth according to His words and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers.*” God wanted that the encounter becomes an encounter between truth and falsehood. So that truth prevails and falsehood would be rooted out. God wanted the divine project to prevail over tyranny. This battle was a part of the process of the birth of the Muslim nation. After Badr, the Muslim nation stood on equal footing with the mighty Quraish. This could not have happened unless the Muslims won the battle of Badr. The Muslims needed this victory to prove to themselves that they are able to face a bigger power in the field and win the battle. The enemy needed this to realize that the few Muslims who fled Mecca escaping persecution are now a force to contend with.

In hindsight, this was by all means better for the Muslims than if they had been able to capture the caravan. Winning the caravan may have been a good project for the short term but winning the battle was much more impressive and effective in the long term.

*“Remember when you sought the help of your Lord, and He answered you, ‘I will assist you with a thousand of the angels, following one another.’ God made it a message of hope, and a reassurance to your hearts. Victory comes only by the help of God. Certainly, God is Eminent, Wise. Remember when He made the slumber fall on you as a reassurance from Him and sent down water from the sky to purify you, to remove from you the fear of Satan, to strengthen your hearts, and to firm (your) feet thereby. Remember when your Lord inspired the angels (saying), ‘I am with you. Make those who believe stand firm. I will cast terror into the hearts of the disbelievers. Strike above their necks and smite of them every finger-tip.’ That is because they opposed God and His Messenger. Whoever opposes God and His Messenger – indeed God is severe in punishment. Thus (will it be said), ‘Taste you then of the (torment). Certainly, for the disbelievers is the torment of the Fire.’”* Imam Ahmed narrated, on the authority of ‘Umar bin El-Khatib (RA), the story of God’s help. He said, *“The Messenger (PBUH) looked at the battle field on the day of Badr. He estimated the number of the Muslims to be about three hundred and the number of the idolaters of Mecca to be more than one thousand. He then faced the Qibla and started praying. He said, ‘God, I ask you to fulfill the promise You made to me. God, if Your will is to destroy this band of Muslims, You will never be worshipped on earth again.’ He was so immersed in his prayer that he did not realize that his coat had slipped off his shoulders. Abu Bakr (RA) put the coat back on him and started comforting him saying, ‘Prophet of God, your Lord will fulfill His promise.’ This was when the verse, ‘Remember when you sought the help of your Lord, and He answered you, ‘I will assist you with a thousand of the angels, following one another,’ was revealed.”*

There are many narrations that describe the details of how the angels fought alongside the believers. However, it suffices to take recourse to the verses of the Qur’an instead of citing unauthentic narrations dealing with the unseen. God responded favorably to the prayer of His Messenger. This was a glad tiding to reassure the believers. Although they were asked to do their best but they should know that victory is in the hand of God and is not contingent only on the means.

The slumber that fell on the believers before the start of the fight is an amazing psychological state that could not have happened except by the will of God. The believers panicked when they found out that they were fighting a much stronger and a better equipped army. Suddenly they were taken by slumber and when they woke up they were engulfed in a state of tranquility and serenity. The same experience was repeated in the battle of Uhud.

The story of the water, *“and sent down water from the sky to purify you, to remove from you the fear of Satan, to strengthen your hearts, and to firm (your) feet thereby,”* tells of another form of God’s support for the believers. This happened before the Muslims took their final camp site as suggested by Al-Habbab bin Al-Mundher (RA). It is known that when the Muslims reached the area of Badr (which had several wells), the Prophet (PBUH) commanded his companions to camp at the well closest to Medina. This left a number of wells between the Muslims and the idolaters of Mecca. Al-Habbab (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH), *“Messenger of God, were you commanded by God to camp here? Or is this your own choice?”* The Messenger (PBUH) said, *“It is not a command of God but it is my choice.”* Al-Habbab (RA) said, *“Then, this is not the best place to camp. Let us move forward to a place where we can have as many wells as we can behind us and we block the remaining wells between us and Quraish. This way, we can avail ourselves of the water and they would have no a source of water to drink.”* The Messenger (PBUH) commanded the Muslims to set camp according to Al-Habbab’s (RA) advice.

The rain came down during the night before they changed their camp site. They needed the water to purify themselves for prayers and to make the ground firm under their feet. God supported them with spiritual as well as material help. Then came the help of the angels, *“Remember when your Lord inspired the angels (saying), ‘I am with you. Make those who believe stand firm. I will cast terror into the hearts of the disbelievers. Strike above their necks and smite of them every finger-tip.’”* It was a great experience, God told the angels, *“I am with you.”* We believe that angels exist but we do not know anything about them except what has been mentioned in the Qur’an about them. We know that they were commanded to fight alongside the believers and they did, because they do whatever God commands them to do. However, we do not know how they fought. God promised to cast fear in the hearts of the disbelievers and again we do not know how this happened.

*“That is because they opposed God and His Messenger. Whoever opposes God and His Messenger – indeed God is severe in punishment. Thus (will it be said), ‘Taste you then of the (torment). Certainly, for the disbelievers is the torment of the Fire.’”* It was not a coincidence that the believers won the battle and overcame the disbelievers by the support of God. The disbelievers chose to fight God and His Messenger, so they deserved to be punished. This is the rule.

*“Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in battle, never turn your backs to them. Whoso on that day turns his back to them - unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) - he truly has incurred on himself the wrath of God, and his refuge is Hell - an evil destination.”* This verse carried a dire warning for the

believers. The believers are told to stand firm in the battle field and not to flee the field unless they were following a strategy that allowed them a better position to continue fighting. Those who flee the battle ground are doomed.

The scholars agreed that this is a general rule that applies to Muslim armies. Fleeing a battle field is one of the seven calamities. It was narrated by Al-Bukhary on the authority of Abu Hurriarah (RA) that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, “*Avoid the seven calamities.*” When he was asked what are the seven calamities? he said, “*Associating partners with God, sorcery, killing the soul that God has forbidden except for a legitimate reason, usury, devouring the wealth of an orphan, fleeing the battle field, slandering chaste believing women.*”

A believing heart is a steadfast heart; it will not be overcome by any earthly power because it derives its strength from God. A believing heart may feel insecure when faced with an overwhelming crisis, but it recovers very quickly. Fleeing the battle field is not a thought that would be entertained by a believing heart because it knows that the time of death has been previously ordained by God. Fleeing the battle field will not change this fact. This is not an extraordinary burden for such a heart. When the believers face their enemy on the battle ground they know that they fight backed by the power of God which their enemy cannot avail themselves of. They know that they belong to God dead or alive.

The verses continued to warn the believers of the consequences of fleeing the battle field, and to explain God’s role in achieving victory, “*It is not you who slew them; it was God who slew them. And you did not throw when you threw, but it was God who threw, that He might test the believers by a gracious trial from Himself. Certainly, God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*” It was God’s plan that the believers win this battle. The battle was a test for the believers to give them the chance to achieve God’s reward and blessing. God heard the believer’s call for help and He responded favorably to their call. He continued to bless them with His favor. God’s favor was not only meant to strengthen the believers but also to weaken their enemy, “*That, and also (know) that indeed, God is who weakens the plotting of the disbelievers.*”

“*(Disbelievers,) if you sought a judgment, now has the judgment come to you. If you desist (from wrong), it will be best for you, and if you return (to the attack), so shall We. Not the least good will your forces be to you even if they were multiplied. Verily, God is with the believers.*” The verse addressed the disbelievers denying them any hope that God would rule in their favor. God’s rule has already been decreed against the disbelievers who fought God and His Messenger. However, they were given a second chance, “*If you desist (from wrong), it will be best for you,*” But if they persist, then “*Not the least good will your forces be to you even if they were multiplied.*” God is with believers.

*“Believers, obey God and His Messenger, and do not turn away from him when you hear him speak. Do not be like those who say, ‘We hear,’ but they do not listen. Indeed, the worst of beasts in the sight of God are the deaf, the dumb, and those who do not understand. Had God known of any good in them He would have made them hear, but had He made them hear they would have turned away, averse.”* This was a command to the believers. They should obey God and His Messenger. They should not turn away from him when he recites God’s verses to them. The command comes at the end of the verses discussing the events of the battle. These events exhibited clearly to the believers God’s role in helping them. They were able secure victory only by the grace of God who supported them and weakened their enemy. There is no room now for any hesitation in expressing complete obedience to God and His Messenger. Only those who have no intellect and are unable to reason do not see the necessity of expressing obedience to God and His Messenger. Those who did not understand the lesson are similar to the beasts who do not think, hear, nor speak. God knew that such people are unable to reason and benefit of what they hear and see, *“Had God known of any good in them He would have made them hear, but had He made them hear they would have turned away, averse.”* They have corrupted the initial natural disposition that God gave them. They closed their hearts and prevented God’s guidance to reach them. Even if God made them to hear, they will not respond rightly to the commands.

*“Believers, respond to God and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which will give you life; and know that God comes in between a man and his own heart, and that it is He to whom you shall (all) be gathered. And fear a trial, which does not affect, in particular, only those of you who do wrong, and know that God is severe in punishment. Remember when you were a small band, despised through the land, and afraid that people might extirpate you, how He sheltered, strengthened you with His help, and provided you of the good things, that you might be thankful.”* The Messenger of God (PBUH) only calls the believers to that which will give them life. It is a call to a life full of meaning. He is calling them to a faith that gives life to the hearts and minds. It is a faith which frees the hearts and minds from beliefs based on superstition and ignorance, a faith that frees the human beings from being enslaved by anyone and anything except God. He is calling them to abide by God’s law which proclaims the freedom of all humankind and honors all humankind. It is a law under which all people are equal. No individual oppresses a people, no class oppresses a nation, no race oppresses another race, and no people oppress other people. Freedom and equality are guaranteed for all people.

The Messenger (PBUH) is calling to a way of life that guarantees freedom of thought and encourages the creativity of humankind. It frees the intellect of all shackles within the framework of the initial natural human disposition. This is a framework which God designed to protect wasting time and energy in useless pursuits.

The Messenger (PBUH) is calling the believers to be proud of their faith and their way of life and to feel secure by putting their trust in God. He is calling them to help all human



beings in obtaining their freedom and in saving them from the tyranny of the tyrants. He is calling them to struggle in the way of God to establish His right to be worshipped on earth and to destroy all false deities. This is the call to life that the Messenger (PBUH) proclaimed to the believers.

*“And know that God comes in between a human being and his own heart.”* It is a frightening image which exhibits the dimensions of God’s power. God is able to control the heart of a person and do whatever He wants with it, while that person becomes helpless, unable to control his/her own heart. This is an image which impels the human being to be always alert to the feelings that fill his/her heart, fearing to entertain the slightest desire to slip away from God’s grace. This is a great danger. Even the infallible Messenger of God (PBUH) used to pray, *“God, it is You who control the hearts, make my heart to be steadfast on Your way.”* This is an image which shakes the heart of the believer, a shaking which would spread to engulf the whole body.

There is no escape from God, your hearts are under His control and you will be gathered to Him, *“that it is He to Whom you shall (all) be gathered.”* However, the call here is made to people who are free to choose. The consequences of denying the invitation and ignoring the call are explained, *“And fear a trial, which does not affect, in particular, only those of you who do wrong, and know that God is severe in punishment.”* The trial is a test. A nation which allows oppression in any form, does not stand up against the tyrants, and allows corruption is a nation which deserves to be punished as a whole. Islam encourages collective action against tyrants. It does not allow turning a blind eye to corruption and transgressions.

*“Remember when you were a small band, despised through the land, and afraid that people might extirpate you, how He gave you refuge, strengthened you with His help, and provided you of the good things, that you might be thankful.”* Remember this so that you realize that the Messenger (PBUH) is calling you to a good life. Remember this so that you do not shy away from standing up in face of corruption and oppression. Remember how weak you were before you were commanded to fight and how did you hate fighting the disbelievers, then you won and were honored and got your reward. God provided you with good things and gave you the opportunity to be grateful to Him so He would reward you again for being grateful.

The expression, *“afraid that people might extirpate you,”* paints an image for the believers as a small and weak group who were overcome with fear and apprehension, anticipating harm to befall them at the hands of their enemy. Then their lot changed and they became safe and secure, enjoying the newly acquired strength and good provision. The change happened when God, *“gave you refuge, strengthened you with His help, and provided you of the good things, that you might be thankful.”*

*“Believers, do not betray God and the Messenger, nor misappropriate knowingly things entrusted to you. And know that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial; and that with God is immense reward.”* To abdicate the responsibility that God commanded the Muslim nation to undertake is a betrayal of the covenant of God. The main objective

of this religion is to establish the concept of the oneness of God. Muhammad's (PBUH) message is the way to establish this truth. The human race, over its long history, never doubted the existence of God. The problem was associating partners with God. Sometime people believed in other gods whom they worshipped, and very often they allowed other human beings to control their lives; they treated them as gods. The basic objective of this religion is to establish the concept of the oneness of God.

Abandoning this objective is construed as a betrayal of the believer's covenant with God. Muslims are warned not to betray God by abandoning their responsibility. The pledge that a Muslim undertook when he/she accepted Islam is not a lip service. Islam is not words and supplication to be recited without real conviction. It is a complete and comprehensive way of life. It is a way of life based on the belief in the oneness of God. The basic principles underlying this way of life include the right of God to be worshipped alone, the use God's law in shaping the laws which govern the society, resisting tyrants until they stop oppressing people, establishing justice in society on the basis of the rule of law, and establishing a flourishing civilization on earth. This is the mandate of a believer and whoever did not undertake this mandate has betrayed God's covenant which he/she pledged to observe. It is not easy to undertake such a responsibility. Undertaking such a responsibility requires perseverance and sacrifice. It requires perseverance and steadfastness in resisting the temptation posed by wealth and progeny, *"And know that your possessions and your progeny are but a trial;"* This Qur'an uses a style to address the human beings which is based on the knowledge of the Creator of His creatures. The Creator knows the deep secrets of the human soul and the inner thoughts of the human intellect. The Creator is aware of human weaknesses and He knows that the love of wealth and children is one of the weak points of the human being. The verse alludes to the fact that wealth and children are gifts from God. These are gifts that God bestowed on His servants to test them. Will they be grateful or will they be thankless? The trial can be effected with either abundance or scarcity, *"and we test you with evil and with good as trial."* (21:35)

Having alerted the believers to the impending test, God provides the support that can help them succeed in the test, *"and that with God is immense reward."*

The final message in this passage to the believers is to remain conscious of God, *"Believers, if you remain conscious of God, He will grant you a criterion (to judge between right and wrong), absolve you of all your sins, and forgive you. God is the possessor of Great Bounty."* This is the sustenance that the believers need to support them on the road. It is the provision that arouses the hearts from their sleep and provides beacons to guide them along the way. It is a fact that God consciousness provides the heart with the light (a criterion) that shows the road to the believer, but it is a fact that only those who experienced it know it.

The sound initial natural human disposition can easily discover the truth. The road to the truth is fogged by caprice and vain desires. One cannot overcome caprice by a logical argument. Only God consciousness can drive caprice away. This is how the heart acquires the light (criterion) which makes the heart able to differentiate between truth and

falsehood. It is a priceless gift from God, *“the possessor of Great bounty.”*

### **Verses: 30 to 40**

*30. Remember how the disbelievers plotted against you, to take you captive, to slay you, or to evict you. They schemed and God also schemed. God is certainly the best of schemers.*

*31. When Our revelations are recited to them, they say, “We have heard this (before), we could say (words) like these, if we wanted to. This is nothing but ancient fables.”*

*32. Remember when they said, “God, if this is indeed the truth from You, then rain down on us a shower of stones from the sky, or send us a grievous torment.”*

*33. But God was not going to torment them while you were among them; nor was He going to torment them while they could seek forgiveness.*

*34. Why should God not torment them, when they bar people from the Sacred Mosque and they are not its guardians? Only those who are God conscious (deserve) to be its guardians; but most of them do not know.*

*35. Their prayer at the House (of God) is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. So, taste the torment because you rejected faith.*

*36. The disbelievers spend their wealth to avert people from the path of God. They will continue to spend it; then it will be a source of intense regret for them and they will be conquered. The disbelievers will be gathered together to Hell.*

*37. In order that God may separate the wicked from the good and place the wicked, one on top of another, heaping them all together, and consign them to Hell. They will be the losers.*

*38. Say (Prophet) to the disbelievers, if they desist, that which is past will be forgiven them; but if they persist, then the precedent of those who went before them has already taken place.*

*39. And fight them on until there is no oppression and the religion is all for God. But if they cease, then God sees what they do.*

*40. If they turn away, be sure that God is your Patron. Excellent is the Patron and excellent is the Helper. (8:30-40)*

*“Remember how the disbelievers plotted against you, to take you captive, to slay you, or to evict you. They schemed and God also schemed. God is certainly the best of schemers.”* The verse brings to mind the situation in Mecca just before Hijra (migration

to Medina) took place. It carried a message of hope in the future. It was a reminder of God's infinite power and wisdom in planning. The Muslims who were listening to these verses as they were being revealed experienced the situations before and after Hijra. They were able to still remember the experience of living in Mecca, a life of insecurity, fear and apprehension. They could compare between the two states, as their situation changed from persecution to freedom, from fear to security, and from weakness to strength. The Qurashites were contemplating different schemes: do they tie the Messenger (PBUH) down and imprison him until he dies, do they kill him, or do they exile him to a place far away from Mecca? They finally decided that they should kill him. They selected a number of strong young men, one from each tribe, to form the assassination team. This team was assigned to kill Muhammad (PBUH) in one collective strike. This way the crime would fall on all the tribes. Banu Hashem would not be able to seek revenge, since they will not be able to fight all the tribes which participated in killing the Messenger (PBUH).

But, *"They schemed and God also schemed."* One can see with the eye of imagination the chiefs conspiring in their meeting completely unaware of God's plan which was designed to thwart their scheme. It is an ironic image but in the meantime, it is a fearful one. It is a reminder of the helplessness of the weak human beings in face of the overwhelming power of God.

*"When Our revelations are recited to them, they say, 'We have heard this (before), we could say (words) like these, if we wanted to. This is nothing but ancient fables.'" Ibn Katheer mentioned in his interpretation of the Qur'an on the authority of Sa'eed bin Jubair (RA) and others that the person who said this was Al-Nadhr bin El-Hareth. He said, "Al-Nadhr went to Persia and studied the history of their pervious kings. When he came back to Mecca he used to watch the Messenger (PBUH) as he was reciting the Qur'an to people. Once the Messenger (PBUH) had finished his recitation, Al-Nadhr would sit in the same place and start reciting the fables that he learned in Persia. Then he would ask his listeners who do they think is a better story teller, he or Muhammad (PBUH)." Al-Nadhr was captured in the battle of Badr and was executed by the Muslims.*

The Qur'an tells very often of how the disbelievers called the Qur'an "ancient fables." This was one of the tactics that they used to fight back the Qur'an. The Qur'an was successful in reaching and touching the initial natural human disposition. The message of the truth was delivered and received. The chiefs felt threatened and they were looking for tactics to bedevil the people. This was one of these tactics.

The verses continue to describe the amazing tenacity of the disbelievers in opposing the truth. Their arrogant defiance made them challenge God, *"Remember when they said, 'God, if this is indeed the truth from You, then rain down on us a shower of stones from the sky, or send us a grievous torment.'" Instead of asking for guidance, they made this strange request. Those who have a sound initial natural disposition ask God to guide them to the truth. They would incline to the truth when they recognize it. But, the disbelievers*

in their arrogant refusal of the truth would rather be destroyed by a shower of stones from sky or punished by a grievous torment than to follow the truth brought by the Messenger (PBUH).

God's response was that even though they deserve whatever torment they wished for, God will not annihilate them with torment – as was done to peoples before them – as long as the Prophet (PBUH) continued to call them to guidance, since there was still a chance that they may turn around and seek forgiveness, *“But God was not going to torment them while you were among them; nor was He going to torment them while they could seek forgiveness.”* It is God's mercy that protected them from being destroyed as a result of their obstinacy which allowed them to bar Muslims from visiting and worshipping God in the Sacred Mosque, *“Why should God not torment them, when they bar people from the Sacred Mosque and they are not its guardians? Only those who are God conscious (deserve) to be its guardians; but most of them do not know.”* They claimed that they are the guardians of the Sacred Mosque and allowed themselves to bar Muslims from it, but they were neither the guardians of the Sacred Mosque nor they deserved to be. Even their prayers at the Mosque were a mockery and empty of respect to the Mosque, *“Their prayer at the House (of God) is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. So, taste the torment because you rejected faith.”* They should then taste the torment if they do not desist.

*“The disbelievers spend their wealth to avert people from the path of God. They will continue to spend it; then it will be a source of intense regret for them and they will be conquered. The disbelievers will be gathered together to Hell. In order that God may separate the wicked from the good and place the wicked, one on top of another, heaping them all together, and consign them to Hell. They will be the losers.”*

This verse described the actions that the disbelievers embarked upon after their failure in the battle of Badr. Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated on the authority of El-Zuhary and others, they said, *“When the remnants of the Quraishite army returned to Mecca after the battle of Badr a group of the disbelievers, which included of Abd-Allah bin Rabia'h, E'kremah bin Abi Jahl, and Safwan bin Omayah in addition to people whose fathers and sons were killed in the battle of Badr, went to Abi Sufian bin Harb who led the caravan to safety and asked him and the merchants who profited from this caravan to pledge some of their profits to prepare an army to attack the Muslims in revenge for the loss of their relatives who died in the battle of Badr.”* This verse came down to warn the disbelievers that the money that they were collecting to prepare an army to attack the Muslims will only be a source of great grief for them. At the end, they will not only lose their wealth in this life but they will also end up in Hell fire in the Hereafter.

*“Say (Prophet) to the disbelievers, if (now) they desist, that which is past will be forgiven them; but if they persist, then the precedent of those who went before them has already taken place. And fight them on until there is no oppression and the religion is all for God. But if they cease, then God sees what they do. If they refuse, be sure that God is your Patron –Excellent is the Patron and excellent is the Helper.”* The Qur'an commanded

the Prophet (PBUH), to tell the disbelievers that they were given a second chance. They were given a chance to stop their attacks on Muslims and to seek God's forgiveness. If they desist, then all previous mischief will be forgiven. But if they persist, then God's law will take its course.

The verse commanded the believers to fight the disbelievers, *“And fight them on until there is no oppression and the religion is all for God. But if they cease, then God sees what they do. If they refuse, be sure that God is your Patron – Excellent is the Patron and excellent is the Helper.”* The verse enunciates some of the rules of fighting in the way of God. However, these were not the final rules. These rules were supplemented with the rules given in Surat Al-Tawbah (Chapter 9). Islam is a dynamic movement. Its rules continuously evolve to be able to deal with the ever changing requirements of the situation. However, the rule enunciated in, *“And fight them on until there is no oppression and the religion is all for God,”* states a general rule that should be always applied in face of the ever present ignorant society. It is important to understand what is meant by, *“the religion is all for God.”* It means the removal of the physical barriers set up by the tyrants who want to oppress and enslave people. Without these barriers people will be able to choose freely what to believe in. This is the only way that the freedom of faith will be guaranteed.

#### **Verses: 41 to 54**

*41. And know that one fifth of all the battle gains is for God, the Messenger, near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer; if you believe in God and in that which We have sent down to Our servant on the day of the criterion, the day when the two armies met. God has power over all things.*

*42. When you were on the near bank (of the valley), and they were on the far side, and the caravan was below you. Even if you had made a mutual appointment to meet, you would certainly have failed in keeping the appointment. But (thus you met), that God might bring about something that has already been ordained; so that he who would perish might perish by a clear proof, and he who would live might live by a clear proof; and most surely God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*

*43. Remember (Prophet) when God showed them to you in your dream as few; if He had shown them to you as many, you would have certainly faltered, and you would have certainly disputed the matter; but God saved (you). He knows well what is in the breasts.*

*44. And remember when you met, He showed them to you as few in your eyes, and He made you appear as contemptible in their eyes, so that God might accomplish a matter already destined. To God all things are brought back.*

*45. Believers, when you meet an army, stand firm, and remember God much; that you may succeed.*

46. *And obey God and His Messenger; and do not dispute one with another lest you lose heart and your power desert you; and persevere. God is with those who are perseverant.*

47. *And do not be like those who came forth from their homes boastfully and showing off to people, to hinder them from the path of God. God's knowledge encompasses all that they do.*

48. *Remember when Satan made their deeds seem fair to them, and said, "No one among people can overcome you this day, for I am your protector." But when the two armies came in sight of each other, he turned on his heels, and said, "I disassociate myself from you; I see what you do not see; I fear God. God is severe in punishment."*

49. *When the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease say, "These were deluded by their religion." Whoso puts his trust in God, God is indeed Eminent, Wise.*

50. *If you could see, when the angels took the souls of the disbelievers, (how) they did smite their faces and their backs, (saying), "Taste the torment of the blazing Fire."*

51. *This is because of the deeds which your (own) hands sent forth; for God is never unjust to His servants.*

52. *They are like the people of Pharaoh and those before them. They rejected the revelations of God, and God seized them for their crimes. God is indeed Strong, and severe in punishment.*

53. *That is because God will never change the blessings which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in themselves. Verily, God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*

54. *In the same manner as Pharaoh's people and those before them; they rejected the revelations of their Lord, therefore We destroyed them on account of their sins and We drowned Pharaoh's people, and they were all wrongdoers. (8:41-54)*

*"And know that one fifth of all the battle gains is for God, the Messenger, near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer; if you believe in God and in that which We have sent down to Our servant on the day of the criterion, the day when the two armies met. God has power over all things."* There are many variant opinions in the books of jurisprudence regarding the definitions of the "battle gains" and the "Anfal," whether they are the same thing or not. There are also discussions on how to distribute the one fifth of the battle gains which is left for God, the Messenger, near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer. We will not comment on the jurisprudence rules that can be derived from this verse and we will leave that to books on jurisprudence. In addition, the discussion of the battle gains is really an academic endeavor. The issue of battle gains is not an issue that touches upon the daily lives of Muslims. At the moment there is no Muslim nation in the world to which these rules would apply.

The general rule that the verse indicates is that battle gains are to be divided into five portions: four portions are divided among those who fought the battle, and the spending of the fifth portion is left to the discretion of God and His Messenger (PBUH). However, verse introduces the criteria which can be used to differentiate between believers and disbelievers. The verse bases the entitlement of the Muslims who fought in the battle of Badr to be described as “believers” on their acceptance of God’s ruling regarding the distribution of the battle gains. Thus, the condition for becoming a believer is to accept and apply the divine law. Disbelief is simply refusal to accept and apply the divine law.

The battle of Badr – the battle that was started, planned, and executed under divine guidance - was certainly a demarcation point and a milestone (a criterion) which differentiated the truth from falsehood. It provided a demarcation point between the truth - which is the basis of the creation of the heavens and earth, which supports the sound initial natural disposition of all living things, and which is the symbol of the oneness of God - and the falsehood supported by the tyrants.

It was a criterion which differentiated between truth represented by the belief in the absolute oneness of God and the falsehood which is represented by associating partners with God.

It was a milestone in the history of Islam. It separated two different eras in the history of the Islamic movement: the era of perseverance, preparation, and anticipation and the era of maturity, taking initiative, and forward motion. It was a milestone at which Islam assumed its identity as a new way of life, a new project for humankind, a new order for the society, and a new form for governing. This is a milestone which gave rise to a new Islamic perspective, the perspective of Islam as a universal proclamation for liberating the human being and destroying the tyrants.

The battle of Badr provided a change in the Islamic perspective on the kernels of victory and defeat. The battle between Quraish and the Muslims, started with Quraish having all the means of victory while the Muslims had all the reasons for defeat. This was reflected in the comments made by the hypocrites, who said, “*These were deluded by their religion.*” God wanted the first battle, between the few believers and the many disbelievers, to start this way to manifest the difference between two different perspectives on the kernels of victory and defeat. One perspective considers the strong faith as the kernel of victory, while the other considers the numbers of fighters and the magnitude of the equipment as the means to victory. This demonstrated to people that the ultimate victory belongs to strong and sound faith. The believers should not delay the engagement with the falsehood until they attain the same level of apparent material power as their enemy, because they have another power which will tip the balance in their favor. This statement is not merely words to be uttered but it is a fact that has been proven on the battle field.

There is also another dimension to the fact that the battle of Badr is considered a criterion between truth and falsehood. This was the dimension which was stated early in the Sura, “*And when God promised you one of the two bands (of the enemy), that it should be*



*yours. You wished that the unarmed one should be yours, but God willed to establish the truth according to His words and to cut off the roots of the disbelievers. That He might establish the truth and abolish falsehood, even if the criminals disliked.*” The original objective of the Muslim expedition was to capture the caravan but God wanted them to fight the Quraishite army instead. The reason behind this change in objective is that this was the way to establish the truth and to eradicate the falsehood. This statement points out to a major fact: the truth could not be established by issuing a manifesto nor by stating a theoretical belief. Falsehood had to be eradicated before the truth could be established. The forces of the truth should overcome the forces of the falsehood on the battle ground. This religion uses a dynamic approach to deal with the realities of life.

The truth has been established and the falsehood has been eradicated on the battle ground. The actual victory was then the criterion which differentiated between the truth and falsehood. This is the criterion which the verses alluded to in its narrative. This the truth which was behind the will of God in bringing the Prophet (PBUH) with the truth to the battle ground, allowing the caravan to evade the pursuit of Muslims, and bringing the army of Quraish to fight the Muslims.

*“When you were on the near bank (of the valley), and they were on the far side, and the caravan was below you. Even if you had made a mutual appointment to meet, you would certainly have failed in keeping the appointment. But (thus you met), that God might bring about something that has already been ordained; so that he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof; and most surely God is All-Hearing, Omniscient. Remember (Prophet) when God showed them to you in your dream as few; if He had shown them to you as many, you would have certainly faltered, and you would have certainly disputed the matter; but God saved (you). He knows well what is in the breasts. And remember when you met, He showed them to you as few in your eyes, and He made you appear as contemptible in their eyes, so that God might accomplish a matter already destined. To God all things are brought back.”* Reading these verses, one can see with the eyes of imagination the troops lined up against each other. One can sense the divine planning in the background, moving people around in a strategic way. The divine plan was to belittle the number in each group in the eyes of the other group. This was so that the Muslims would not be scared to fight a much larger army than theirs and the disbelievers would become lax in fighting what they think a much smaller army than theirs. The timing of the meeting was divinely ordained as well to achieve a pre-ordained decree, and the Muslims were the tool to make this achievement. What was it that God decreed? *“So that he who would perish might perish by clear proof, and he who would live might live by clear proof.”* The word “perish” could be construed to mean death or to mean disbelief. Similarly, the word “live” could be construed to mean the literal meaning of being alive or it can be used to indicate faith. It seems that in these verses the words perish and live are used to mean disbelief and belief, as they were used in the verse, *“Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, like him whose likeness is that of one in utter darkness from which he can never come out?” (6:122)* In this verse life and death were used to mean a state of belief and disbelief, respectively. The reason we choose this interpretation of the words “perish” and “live” here is that God called the

battle of Badr the “Day of the Criterion” in which God differentiated between truth and falsehood. So, the choice of belief or disbelief would be based on a clear proof that would be gleaned from the battle.

The way the battle was conducted shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that the divine power was behind the planning and the execution of the battle. If the battle was left to human measures the Muslims would have never won. The disbelievers themselves said to their ally who offered to support them with fighters from his tribe, *“If it is the people we are fighting, we are more powerful than them, but if it is God we are fighting – as Muhammad claims – no human power could fight God.”* They soon realized that they were fighting God, as they were told by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

This is what comes to mind when one reads these verses, but there is also another meaning. A battle in which the army of the truth conquers the army of falsehood and establishes the truth in reality after it had been established in the believers’ consciousness is a means for opening up the eyes and minds of people to see the truth. This clarifies all misunderstandings and removes all doubts. It provides the people with a clear evidence to enable them to make their choice: to believe or not to believe. God is certainly, *“All-Hearing, Omniscient.”*

*“Remember (Prophet) when God showed them to you in your dream as few; if He had shown them to you as many, you would have certainly faltered, and you would have certainly disputed the matter; but God saved (you). He knows well what is in the breasts.”* It was the divine planning which made the Messenger (PBUH) see in his dream that the army of disbelievers is small in number. When he told the believers about his dream, they were reassured and were encouraged to fight. In this verse, God told His Prophet (PBUH) that this was deliberate because had the believers known of the true size of the army of the disbelievers they would have been discouraged and they would have faltered. This would have had catastrophic consequences but, *“God saved (you). He knows well what is in the breasts.”*

The dream was not a lie, because even if they were large in number they were few in effectiveness. This was the true message that was delivered in the dream: the disbelievers are weak and can be easily conquered by the believers. When the two armies met, the same message was delivered to the fighting armies. This was the divine plan to get the two sides to fight.

*“Believers, when you meet an army, hold firm, and remember God much; that you may succeed. And obey God and His Messenger; and do not dispute one with another lest you lose heart and your power desert you; and persevere. God is with those who are perseverant. And do not be like those who came forth from their homes boastfully and showing off to people, to hinder them from the path of God. God’s knowledge encompasses all that they do.”* These are the true kernels of victory: to persevere and to be steadfast in facing the enemy, to continuously remember God, to obey God and His Messenger, to avoid disputes, to persevere, and to avoid showing off.

Being perseverant and steadfast is the first step towards victory. The army who is perseverant and steadfast is the army who will win the battle. The believers should know that their enemy suffers as much as they suffer but they do not have hope in God as the believers have. The disbelievers do not get the divine support that the believers get. If they persevere for another moment, their enemy will crumble. Is there anything that can shake the ground under the feet of the believers when they are certain they will get one of the two excellent results: martyrdom or victory?

Remembrance of God at the time of battle provides the believer with constant guidance and continuous training. Obedience to God and His Messenger guarantees that the believers engage in the battle with hearts submitting to the will of God. This will eliminate any tendency for disputes to arise. Disputes arise when orders emanate from multiple sources. Submitting to God and His Messenger eliminates personal whims and desires. Disputes do not arise because there are different points of view but they arise when personal whims and desires take control and prevent objective dialogue from taking place. Any army should exercise a great deal of discipline hence the requirement to obey God and His Messenger (PBUH).

The last piece of instruction was to avoid arrogance and showing off. The believers fight for the sake of God. They fight to destroy the tyrants and establish God's right to be worshipped alone. The believers fight to proclaim the liberation of the human being and free humankind from the shackles of all types of slavery. They fight to protect people against oppression. They do not fight to control people or for the mere love of aggression against people. The believers do not fight for any worldly gain.

It was Quraish who came out to fight in arrogance as was demonstrated by Abu Jahl who refused to go back to Mecca after he was told that the caravan escaped and that there were no longer reasons for fighting. He was adamant to engage in a battle with the Muslims. He said, *“By God, we will not go back to Mecca. We will go and camp at Badr for three days. We will slaughter animals, eat, drink, and listen to music. This way the Arabs would continue to fear us.”* When the messenger, whom Abu Sufian sent to tell Abu Jahl that the caravan escaped and that there is no longer a need to fight, came back with Abu Jahl's answer Abu Sufian said, *“This is characteristic of Abu Jahl, he hated to change his mind because he was a tyrant. Tyranny is a bad trait and a bad omen. If Muhammad wins, we will be ever humiliated.”* It did happen and Muhammad (PBUH) won and the disbelievers were humiliated. God is aware of what they do, *“God's knowledge encompasses all that they do.”*

*“Remember when Satan made their deeds seem fair to them, and said, ‘No one among people can overcome you this day, for I am your protector.’ But when the two armies came in sight of each other, he turned on his heels, and said, ‘I disassociate myself from you; I see what you do not see; I fear God. God is severe in punishment.’”* The verse states that Satan enticed the disbelievers to think that what they were doing was the right thing. This enticement encouraged them to prepare for fighting the believers. However, when the fight was about to start, *“he turned on his heels, and said, ‘I disassociate myself*

*from you; I see what you do not see; I fear God. God is severe in punishment.*” We accept the truth of this statement. However, we have no way of knowing how did this take place. I am not in agreement with the interpretations made by Sheikh Muhammad Abdu and Sheikh Rasheed Reda for this verse. They belong to a school which tries to find logical material explanations for events which belong to the unseen.

The hypocrites thought that the believers were doomed, *“When the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease say, ‘These were deluded by their religion.’ Whoso puts his trust in God, God is indeed Eminent, Wise.”* The hypocrites were people who adopted Islam but their faith was weak. They joined the Muslim army reluctantly. When they saw the Qurashite army they thought that the Muslims had been deluded. The hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease had no insight to make them perceive the true kernels of victory and defeat. They were only able to judge on the basis of the superficial balance of material power. They were unable to understand how deep faith and strong trust in God could change this balance of power. Only believing hearts are able to perceive the complete set of forces that will decide the final result of war. These forces include both the material as well as the spiritual forces, because believing hearts realize that, *“Whoso puts his trust in God, God is indeed Eminent, Wise.”* The believers are always asked to include the effect of faith and creed in the balance of power and to see with the insight of a believer how this effect is able to change the balance. They were asked to use God’s light as their guide. They were asked not to fear the material power of the tyrants. God will always be there to support the believers who put their trust in Him, *“Whoso puts his trust in God, God is indeed Eminent, Wise.”*

*“If you could see, when the angels take the souls of the disbelievers, (how) they did smite their faces and their backs, (saying), ‘Taste the torment of the blazing Fire.’ This is because of the deeds which your (own) hands sent forth; for God is never unjust to His servants.”* It may be that these two verses were describing what happened to the disbelievers as they were dying in the battle of Badr. The verses could also be giving a description of what will happen to the disbelievers whenever and wherever they die. The expression, *“If you could see,”* is used to address anyone who could see. The verses paint a fearful image for the death of the disbelievers, having the souls taken away in humiliation. The Qur’anic style changed to a dialogue between the angels and the disbelievers. The angels will address the disbelievers as if they were present, *“Taste the torment of the blazing Fire.”* You have not been wronged; you only reap the result of what you had done.

These verses give rise to a question: do the disbelievers suffer the torment of the blazing fire immediately after they die, or will it be postponed till the Day of Judgment? Both explanations are equally probable. This is one of the matters of the unseen. Only God has knowledge of the answer. We are obliged to believe in the certainty of its occurrence.

The verses continued to relate the response of the disbelievers to other disbelievers, *“They are like the people of Pharaoh and those before them. They rejected the revelations of God, and God seized them for their crimes. God is indeed Strong and*

*severe in punishment.*” All people are judged according to the same divine standard, whatever happened to the disbelievers in the battle of Badr did happen to other disbelievers before them, like the people of Pharaoh, *“They rejected the revelations of God, and God seized them for their crimes. God is indeed Strong and severe in punishment.”* God bestowed upon them his blessings, gave them abundant provisions, and appointed them kings and rulers. This was a test to see whether they would be grateful or thankless. But they were thankless and they became tyrants, oppressing people and spreading injustice. They rejected God’s revelations. So, they deserved to be punished. *“That is because God will never change the blessings which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in themselves. Verily God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* They were destroyed when they rejected the revelations. God could have destroyed them even before they were given the revelations, but the divine law is, *“nor do We punish until We had sent a Messenger (to give warning).”*

We need to stop here for a moment and discuss this verse, *“God will never change the grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in themselves.”* It outlines God’s justice in holding people to account. He would not take away a blessing that He had previously bestowed on them unless they change their intentions, behavior, and where they stand. When they fail the test and declare their ingratitude then they deserve to be deprived of the blessings of God. The verse also indicates that the destiny that has been pre-ordained is linked to human behavior. This destiny will not take place until the human behave in a certain way that makes him/her deserve the pre-ordained destiny. This is in a way an honor that God bestowed on humankind. It is the responsibility of humankind to appreciate this honor and to strive to earn the blessings of God by showing gratitude to Him.

This major truth represents one of the dimensions of the Islamic perspective of the nature of humankind, the relationship between humankind and the will of God, and the relationship between humankind and the universe. It is clear from this verse that God values humankind. It also becomes clear that humankind has a role in shaping his/her own destiny as well as what is happening around them. The intentions, actions, and behavior of humankind are effective tools in shaping his own destiny – with the will of God and according to His pre-ordained destiny. God honored humankind by bestowing on them this effective role in contrast to the negative role that humankind is thought to play in the materialistic approach to life. In the materialistic approach, humankind is hopelessly lost in the dialectic materialism.

This truth also establishes the principle that the recompense is always commensurate with the deeds which is a sign of the divine justice, *“God is never unjust to His servants.”*

*“In the same manner as Pharaoh’s people and those before them; they rejected the revelations of their Lord, therefore We destroyed them on account of their sins and We drowned Pharaoh’s people, and they were all wrongdoers.”* Praise be God the Lord of the worlds.

## Verses: 55 to 75

55. *The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those who reject Him. They will not believe.*

56. *The ones with whom you made a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they are not conscious of God.*

57. *Therefore, if you gain dominance over them in war, then disperse those who are behind them ((by making them an example), that they may be mindful.*

58. *If you (have a reason to) fear treachery from a group, throw back (their covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms. Indeed, God does not love the treacherous.*

59. *Let not the disbelievers think that they have won. They will never escape.*

60. *Prepare for them all you can muster of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may terrify the enemy of God and your enemy, and others beside them whom you do not know. God knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of God it will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.*

61. *But if they incline to peace, incline you also to it, and put your trust in God. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*

62. *And if they intend to deceive you, verily God is sufficient for you. It is He who strengthened you with His help and with the believers.*

63. *And (moreover) He has put affection between their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth you could not have put affection between their hearts, but God has done it. He is Eminent, Wise.*

64. *Prophet, God is Sufficient for you and those who follow you of the believers.*

65. *Prophet, exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty perseverant they shall overcome two hundred and if there be of you a hundred (perseverant) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieved, because they (the disbelievers) are people who do not understand.*

66. *Now has God lightened your burden, for He knows that there is weakness in you. So, if there be of you a hundred perseverant they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a thousand (perseverant) they shall overcome two thousand by God's permission. God is with the perseverant.*

67. *It is not fitting for a prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. You desire the temporal goods of this world; but God desires the Hereafter. And God is Eminent, Wise.*

68. *Had it not been previously ordained by God, an awful torment would have befallen you for the (ransom) that you took.*

69. *Now enjoy what you have won, as lawful and good, and remain conscious of God. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

70. *Prophet, say to those captives who are in your hands, "If God knows any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*

71. *And if they intend to betray you, indeed, they have betrayed God before, but He gave (you) power over them. God is Omniscient Wise.*

72. *Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove with their wealth and their lives in the cause of God, as well as those who sheltered and aided, these are (all) friends and protectors, one of another. As to those who believed but did not emigrate, you owe no duty of protection to them until they emigrate; but if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them, except against a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance. Indeed, God is All-Seeing of what you do.*

73. *And those who disbelieve are protectors one of another - If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land, and great corruption.*

74. *Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove in the cause of God as well as those who sheltered and aided, these are the true believers. For them, is forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous.*

75. *And those who afterwards believed and emigrated and strove along with you, they are of you; and those of (blood) relationship are more entitled (to inheritance) in God's Book. God knows of all things. (8:55-75)*

*"The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those who reject Him. They will not believe. The ones with whom you made a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they are not conscious of God. Therefore, if you gain dominance over them in war, then disperse those who are behind them (by making an example of them), that they may be mindful. If you (have a reason to) fear treachery from a group, throw back (their covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms. Indeed, God does not love the treacherous. Let not the disbelievers think that they have won. They will never escape. Prepare for them all you can muster of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may terrify the enemy of God and your enemy, and others beside them whom you do not know. God knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of God it will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged. But if they incline to peace, incline you also to it, and put your trust in God. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient. And if they intend to deceive you, verily God is sufficient for you. It is He who strengthened you with His help and with the believers. And (moreover) He has put affection between their hearts. If you had*

*spent all that is in the earth you could not have put affection between their hearts, but God has done it. He is Eminent, Wise.”*

These verses address a situation that faced the fledgling Muslim community in Medina. They established the rules which delineate the dealings with external states and organizations. The rules organize the relationships between the Muslim states and other states. These rules continue to apply. Verses in Surat Al-Tawba (Chapter 9) came later on to amend these rules and to state the details of the final protocol for war and peace between Muslims and other states.

The rules stated that the Muslim state can have peace agreements with other non-Muslim states. The Muslim state should respect these agreements and take them very seriously. However, if it came to be known that the other state is using such an agreement to camouflage their aggressive intent and is actively involved in the preparation for war against the Muslims, then the Muslims should announce the annulment of the agreement. The Muslims then are able to respond to the aggression posed by its enemy in whatever way they feel appropriate. The Muslim state should retain its peaceful relationship with those who choose to have peaceful relationships with the Muslims. This is obviously, a reasonable and realistic approach to international relations.

*“The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those who reject Him. They will not believe. The ones with whom you made a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they are not conscious of God.”* The word “creature” which is used in this verse includes any creature that walks on earth. However, the use of this word in reference to a human being is an aspersion. It denigrates those who are in a state of mind which not only prevents them from accepting the truth but it does not allow them also to honor their agreements. They keep reneging on their agreements over and over again.

There are several narratives which identify those whom the verse is referring to. One narrative indicated that the verse refers to one of the Jewish tribes of Medina. Another narrative stated that the verse refers to Arab tribes living near Medina. Regardless of to whom the reference was made, the verse delineated general rules to be followed in similar situations.

Those who rejected faith and were obstinate in their rejection, corrupted the initial natural human disposition that God gave them. Having lost aspects of their human nature, they resist any binding constraints which usually come with an agreement, just like beasts who roam around freely resisting any constraints. They are even worse than beasts, because beasts are controlled by their own initial natural disposition while these human beings have broken every constraint.

These people could not be trusted. Their just recompense is to take away from them the security that they took away from others, *“Therefore if you gain dominance over them in war, then disperse those who are behind them (by making an example of them), that they may be mindful.”* It is a strange expression. It paints a picture of overwhelming fear



which acts as a deterrent to those who are contemplating aggression but have not yet started to rethink their plans against the Muslims.

This is the nature of the divine project which needs to be instilled in the hearts of the Muslims. This religion should be strong and it should be respected so that it will be able to destroy the tyrants who fight it and try to stop its movement to free people on earth.

This is the first rule regarding those who breach their peace agreement with the Muslims. The second rule deals with the case when the Muslims anticipate treacherous behavior from a party that has a peace agreement with them, *“If you (have a reason to) fear treachery from a group, throw back (their covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms. Indeed, God does not love the treacherous.”* Muslims should honor their pledges and agreements. If there is a threat that the people, with whom a peace agreement has been ratified, would breach their agreement then Muslims should take a proactive step and proclaim the annulment of the agreement. This is the honorable way to deal with an enemy in such a situation. Muslims should behave in an honorable manner even when dealing with a treacherous enemy. Declaring the agreement null and void brings the conflict to light instead of scheming in the dark. Muslims should not launch a surprise attack against an enemy, with whom they had a peace agreement, before they announce that the agreement has become null and void.

Islam promotes high ethical behavior. Islam does not permit treachery and treason. Islam does not approve of the principle that the results justify the means. Muslims should uphold these principles because, *“God does not love the treacherous.”*

We have to put these laws and rules in perspective. These rules were being established at a time when people fighting each other were required only to observe one law: the law of the jungle. Islam introduced the concept and rules of a just war while Europe was still immersed in its medieval traditions.

Qur’an then assured the Muslims and promised them a victory over their disbelieving enemy, *“Let not the disbelievers think that they have won. They will never escape.”* Betrayal and treachery will not avail them victory nor will they be able to escape. God will support the believers and will not acquit the treacherous. The disbelievers will never be able to frustrate God and they will never be able to frustrate the believers because God is on the side of the believers. Those who behave ethically will always win over the unethical, as long as they are sincerely devoted to God.

Islam, however, commands its followers to use all possible material tools necessary for the achievement of victory. This is the solid ground that the Muslims should stand on before high expectations in victory are granted by God, *“Prepare for them all you can muster of (armed) force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may terrify the enemy of God and your enemy, and others beside them whom you do not know. God knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of God it will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged.”* The obligation to prepare all material means necessary for the achievement of victory is part of the obligation to fight in the way of God. The verse commands the

believers to amass all sorts of material means that can make them superior over their enemy in the battle field. The verse mentions horses because they were the familiar war equipment at that time. However, the general statement, “*Prepare for them all you can muster of (armed) force,*” encompasses all sorts of war equipment.

Islam needed force and power to free people from the tyranny of the tyrant. This power provides security to the believers and allows them to practice their faith freely without being subjected to oppression or persecution. It deters any attempt of the enemy of Islam to attack the Muslim state. It fills the hearts of the enemy of Islam with fear so they would not entertain any notion of standing in the way of the spread of Islam. Power is also necessary to destroy the tyrants who assume godship, do not acknowledge the supremacy of God, and force human beings to follow their self-made rules.

Let us explore the limits of the command, “*Prepare for them all you can muster of (armed) force.*” The command implies that all means should be explored and prepared. Muslims should not ignore any means within their reach. The first objective of this command is to, “*terrify the enemy of God and your enemy, and others beside them whom you do not know. God knows them.*” This preparation needs money. Therefore, the command for fighting in the way of God has been conjoined with the command to spend in the way of God. This spending should be made with the sole intention of seeking the pleasure of God. This removes any doubt that Islam engages in wars which aim at achieving any worldly gains. Islam does not condone wars which are waged by a nation to exploit people, to open markets for its products, to conquer and humiliate other nations, or to establish the supremacy of its race or ethnicity. God does not want a nation, a race, a class, or a people to rule over another nation or a people. God wants to establish the supremacy of His law. God does not need people to worship Him, but the supremacy of His law paves the road for happiness, freedom, and dignity for all people on earth.

The third rule that these verses indicate is the rule regarding how to deal with those who want to establish peaceful relations with the Muslim camp, “*But if they incline to peace, incline you also to it, and put your trust in God. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*” The term used to describe this interest in peace is a gentle expression: *if they incline to peace.* It paints an image of the elegant motion of a wing which points nicely to the objective of establishing peace. The command to Muslims to incline to peace is conjoint with command to put their trust in God. He hears everything and knows all secrets. Putting their trust in God provides a safety net for the believers.

“*And if they intend to deceive you, verily God is Sufficient for you. It is He who strengthened you with His help and with the believers. And (moreover) He has put affection between their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth you could not have put affection between their hearts, but God has done it. He is Eminent, Wise.*” The Qur’an addressed the Prophet (PBUH) saying that, “*God is Sufficient for you,*” God supported you in achieving victory and He supported you by making the believers, who fulfilled their pledge to God, a force to reckon with. They were a disparate group but God united them together. This was the state of the Arabs before Islam. They were always fighting each other for one reason or another, but when they adopted Islam they became

one brotherhood. This was a miracle. Only God was able to do it through the faith of Islam. The antagonists became friends. The Prophet (PBUH) has been reported to have said, *“The status of some of God’s servants, who were neither prophets nor martyrs, will be the envy of the prophets and martyrs on the Day of Judgment.”* The companions asked the Prophet (PBUH), *“Will you tell us who these people are?”* He said, *“Those who love each other. They were motivated to share this love because they shared the spirit God. They were neither kin nor did they have business interests that brought them together. Their faces will have lights and they walk with this light. They will not fear when people will be frightened and they will not grieve when people are saddened.”* The Prophet (PBUH) has also been quoted to have said, *“When a Muslim takes the hand of his fellow Muslim to greet him when they meet, both their sins will fall off as the leaves fall off a tree on a windy fall day. God will forgive all their sins even if these sins were like the foam on sea surface.”*

*“Prophet, God is Sufficient for you and those who follow you of the believers. Prophet, exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty perseverant they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred (perseverant) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieved, because they (the disbelievers) are people who do not understand. Now has God lightened your burden, for He knows that there is weakness in you. So if there be of you a hundred perseverant they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a thousand (perseverant) they shall overcome two thousand by God’s permission. God is with the perseverant.”* These verses bring to mind the image of a tiny force represented by those who oppose God’s army standing in the face of the mighty power of God. Such trivial force stands no chance in front of the overwhelming power of God. The result is then easy to predict as reflected in, *“Prophet, God is Sufficient for you and those who follow you of the believers.”* Then a command which exhorts the believers to fight is issued, *“Prophet, exhort the believers to fight.”* They are on par with their enemy, even though they are much fewer in number, *“If there be of you twenty perseverant they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a hundred (perseverant) they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieved,”* Why can they overcome a much bigger army, *“because they (the disbelievers) are people who do not understand.”* On the face of it, one may not be able to perceive that a relationship between understanding and winning a battle exists. However, the relationship between the two is real and strong. The believers understand their program, they understand the purpose of their lives, they understand the relationship between the true God and His servants, and they accept the supremacy of God. The believers understand that they are guided by God’s guidance, they are the vicegerents of God on earth and they are given the task of bringing guidance to people to take them from the realm of the worship of the creatures to the realm of worship of the Creator. They understand that their task is to establish a flourishing and sustainable life on earth, a life that is ruled with justice. They understand that their task is to establish the kingdom of God on earth, a kingdom based on justice. This understanding fills the hearts of the believers with light, confidence, strength, and certainty. It motivates them to fight their enemy who do not understand. The ratio one to ten is the standard for the measure of strength between the believers who do understand and the disbelievers who do not understand. For the weak among Muslims the ratio is reduced to one to two, *“Now has God lightened your burden, for He knows*

*that there is weakness in you. So if there be of you a hundred perseverant they shall overcome two hundred, and if there be of you a thousand (perseverant) they shall overcome two thousand by God's permission. God is with the perseverant."*

*"It is not fitting for a prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land. You desire the temporal goods of this world; but God desires the Hereafter. And God is Eminent, Wise. Had it not been previously ordained by God, an awful torment would have befallen you for the (ransom) that you took. Now enjoy what you have won, as lawful and good, and remain conscious of God. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Prophet, say to those captives who are in your hands, 'If God knows any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.' And if they intend to betray you, indeed, they have betrayed God before, but He gave (you) power over them. God is Omniscient, Wise." Ibn Ishaq narrated in his account of the battle of Badr, "The Prophet (PBUH) was in his tent surveying the battle ground, while Sa'd bin Mo'az (RA) together with other companions were standing guard at the tent's door when the Muslim army overpowered the disbelievers and Muslims started taking the disbelievers captives. The Prophet (PBUH) sensed that Sa'd (RA) did not like what he saw. He asked Sa'd (RA), 'I can see in your face that you are not happy with what the Muslims are doing.' Sa'd (RA) said, 'Yes, by God, Messenger of God. This is our first battle with the disbelievers. We should have finished off the men instead of taking them captives.'"*

Imam Ahmed narrated on the authority of Ali bin Hashem, that Anas (RA) said, *"The Prophet (PBUH) asked his companions to advise him what to do with the men that were taken captives in the battle of Badr. 'Umar bin Al-Khattab (RA) said, 'Messenger of God, they should be executed.' The Prophet (PBUH) declined this advice and said, 'Not long ago, these people were your brethren. Today, God has given you power over them.'* 'Umar (RA) repeated his suggestion again and the Prophet (PBUH) ignored it for the second time. Abu Bakr (RA) said, *'Messenger of God, I suggest that you forgive them and accept a ransom from each one of them.'* The Prophet (PBUH) was pleased with this suggestion and freed the captives for a ransom. It was then that the verse, *'Had it not been previously ordained by God, an awful punishment would have befallen you for the (ransom) that you took.'*"

Al-Aa'mash narrated on the authority of 'Umar bin Murrah that Abd-Allah (RA) said, *"The Messenger of God (PBUH) asked his companions what to do with the enemy combatants who were taken as captives after the battle of Badr. Abu Bakr (RA) said, 'Messenger of God, these are your people and your family do not execute them and ask them to repent, may God accept their repentance.'* 'Umar (RA) said, *'Messenger of God, these are people who denied you and exiled you, they deserve to be executed.'* Abd-Allah bin Rawahah (RA) said, *"Set up a big fire and throw them into it.'* The Prophet (PBUH) did not comment and went into his tent. The Muslims were wondering which advice would the Prophet (PBUH) follow. When the Prophet (PBUH) came out of his tent, he said, *'God softens hearts of some men and their hearts become softer than milk; and God hardens hearts of others until their hearts become harder than a rock. Abu Bakr (RA) you*

*follow the example of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) who said (to God), "Whoever followed me is from me and whoever disobeyed me, You are the All-Forgiving the Giver of Mercy," and the example of Prophet Jesus (PBUH) who said (to God), "If You torment them, they are your servants but if You forgive them, You are certainly the Eminent, Wise." 'Umar (RA) you follow the example of Prophet Moses (PBUH) who said (to God), "Our Lord, obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts so that they will not believe until they see the painful punishment," and the example of Prophet Noah (PBUH) who said (to God), "My Lord, do not leave upon earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant." I say they either pay the ransom or would be killed.' Ibn Maso'od (RA) said, 'I said to the Messenger of God, "Messenger of God, make an exception for Suhail bin Baidaa because he accepted Islam." I was never so frightened in my life as I was frightened that day that stones would fall from the sky on top of my head (because I said this).' The Prophet (PBUH) said, 'with the exception of Suhail bin Baidaa.' Then the verse, 'It is not fitting for a prophet that he should have prisoners of war until he has thoroughly subdued the land,' was revealed." (This tradition was narrated by Imam Ahmed and Termidhi).*

The verse reprimanded the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims for taking prisoners of war and freeing them later for a ransom, before making sure that the enemy has been completely subdued. Those prisoners of war who were freed will go back to join the ranks of the disbelievers' army and will continue to fight the Muslims. The battle of Badr was the first battle, in a long war, between the disbelievers and the believers. The believers were still very few in number. The freed prisoners of war would most certainly join the ranks of the disbelievers' army again to fight the believers. This puts the believers at a disadvantage because they were few in number in comparison with their enemy. Another principle may have been behind the reprimand that needed to be established. This is the principle which was outlined in 'Umar's (RA) statement, *"So that God would know that we do not harbor any kind feelings towards the disbelievers."*

God has forgiven the believers who fought in the battle of Badr and bestowed His grace upon them so He gave them the permission to enjoy the gains of the battle including the ransom they received. They were also reminded to remain conscious of God, *"Now enjoy what you have won, as lawful and good, and remain conscious of God. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*

The verses made a proposition to the captives, a proposition that could have touched their hearts with kindness and filled them with light and hope. The proposition promised a future better than their past, a life more dignified than they had before, and a gain that would compensate what they had already lost, *"Prophet, say to those captives who are in your hands, 'If God knows any good in your hearts, He will give you something better than what has been taken from you, and He will forgive you. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.'"*

This grace is contingent on the sincerity of their hearts. If their hearts are opened to receive the light of the truth, then God will bestow all His blessings on them. However, the promise of hope is followed by a warning, *"And if they intend to betray you, indeed,*

*they have betrayed God before, but He gave (you) power over them. God is Omniscient, Wise.”*

They did betray God before because they associated partners with Him and did not take Him as their only Lord. This is a betrayal of the covenant that all human beings pledged to their Creator. They should remember that their betrayal to God was the cause of their captivity, and their punishment will be greater if they harbor an intention to betray the Messenger (PBUH). God knows what they harbor in themselves and He is Wise.

The Sura ends with a lesson about the nature of the bonds between people in a Muslim society and the rules and regulations that control these bonds. The relationships that bond Muslims together are not formed by blood relationships, patriotism, ethnicity, history, language, economic interests, or nationalism. The bond that binds Muslims together in one community is a bond that is rooted in sharing the same faith, the same leadership, and the membership in the same dynamic movement. Those who believed and migrated to the house of Hijra and Islam leaving behind all their belongings, their homes, their interests, and strived for the sake of God with their wealth and their lives; and those who joined them in the same faith, accepted them in their land, opened up their homes for them, supported them, and joined their movement are protectors of one another.

The Muslim community does not owe those who believed but did not migrate any obligation for protection. They believed but they did not completely devote themselves to the faith. They did not obey the leadership, nor did they follow the organization. These are the main principles that govern the relationship between Muslims as enunciated in the following verses, *“Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove with their wealth and their lives in the cause of God, as well as those who gave (them) asylum and aid, these are (all) friends and protectors, one of another. As to those who believed but did not emigrate, you owe no duty of protection to them until they emigrate; but if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them, except against a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance. And (remember) God sees all that you do. And those who disbelieve are protectors one of another - If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land, and great corruption. Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove in the cause of God as well as those who gave (them) asylum and aid, these are the true believers. For them, is forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous. And those who afterwards believed and emigrated and strove along with you, they are of you; and those of (blood) relationship are more entitled (to inheritance) in God’s Book. God knows of all things.”*

The brotherhood pact that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established between the Muslims in the fledgling Muslim society at the time of Hijra and which continued till the time of the battle of Badr replaced the blood relationship that they acquired by birth. It implied that those who enter into a brotherhood pact can inherit, support, and be responsible for paying ransom money if required for each other. When the Muslim state was established and became recognized as a state after the battle of Badr the rights of inheritance attained by virtue of brotherhood pacts were revoked.

The verses refer to the migration from Mecca to Medina for those who were able to migrate but chose not to migrate. The Muslim state did not have any obligation to protect Muslims who were able to migrate but chose to stay in Mecca because they cared more for their interests or their families than for their faith. However, the Muslim state is obligated to help those Muslims, if they were persecuted because of their faith provided that those who persecuted them did not have a peace agreement with the Muslim state. A Muslim state should keep its word and should respect its agreements with others.

*“Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove with their wealth and their lives in the cause of God, as well as those who sheltered and aided, these are (all) friends and protectors, one of another. As to those who believed but did not emigrate, you owe no duty of protection to them until they emigrate; but if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them, except against a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance. And (remember) God sees all that you do. And those who disbelieve are protectors one of another - If you do not do the same, there will be persecution in the land, and great corruption.”* Once a person made the proclamation that he/she bears witness that *“there is no deity but God, and that Muhammad is His messenger,”* the loyalty to a family, a nation, a people, or a tribe is replaced by the loyalty to the Messenger (PBUH). The Messenger (PBUH) brought these individuals together into the fold of a new fledgling community which persevered in the face of the persecution of the idolatrous tribal community. The common faith, which they strongly believed in, was the binding principle which brought all Muslims together into one community. When the Muslims migrated to Medina, the Prophet (PBUH) established the brotherhood pacts between the Muslims of Mecca and the Muslims of Medina.

*“Those who believed, and emigrated, and strove in the cause of God as well as those who sheltered and aided, these are the true believers. For them, is forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous.”* These are the true believers. Islam is not established by a mere oral announcement, a proclamation of faith, or even by performing its rituals. Islam is established by adopting it as a dynamic way of life for the community. Those who live according to the Islamic way of life are the true believers. God will provide for them generously. They will be compensated generously for the money that they spent in hosting the migrants and in preparing for the war.

Those who became believers afterwards, migrated, and strived in the way of God will be counted among the early believers, *“And those who afterwards believed and emigrated and strove along with you, they are of you; and those of (blood) relationship are more entitled (to inheritance) in God’s Book. God knows of all things.”*

The requirement for Hijra remained valid until the Muslims captured Mecca. After the opening of Mecca, the whole Arab land came under the control of Muslims and the need for Hijra ceased to exist.

The establishment of the state and the community in the early days of Islam required the use of certain rules to organize the relationships within the community and to meet the special requirements of the fledgling society. One of these rules was that brotherhood in

faith took priority over blood relationship among family members, which was reflected in the laws of inheritance adopted after Hijra. After the battle of Badr temporary inheritance laws were revoked, *“those of (blood) relationship are more entitled (to inheritance) in God’s Book.”* This was a natural step after the community became well established and there was no need to institute special measures to meet the consequences of Hijra. *“God knows of all things.”*

Islam sought to bring people together around the solidarity in faith. This solidarity aimed at promoting the value of the human being. It is a solidarity based on free choice and not on compulsion. The human being is unable to change his/her sex, ethnic roots, or his/ her color of skin, but he/she is able to choose his/her faith. Ethnicity, language, and color of skin cannot be changed once the individual has been born, but a human being has the free will to adopt whatever faith he/she believes in. This concept dignifies the human being.



## Sura 9: Al-Tawba (Repentance)

This Medinian Sura was one of the last few Suras of the Quran to be revealed. The first few verses of the Sura were revealed in the 9<sup>th</sup>. year after Hijra. The Prophet (PBUH) sent ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb (RA) to recite in front of people during the season of Pilgrimage.

Most of its verses were revealed after the battle of Tabuk, which was the last battle that the Prophet (PBUH) participated in. The battle of Tabuk was conducted in the summer, when the weather was hot. The hypocrites used this as an excuse for not participating in the battle. The Sura stated the final version of the rulings which organize the relationship between the Islamic state and the international community. The Sura also included a classification of the Muslim community, a definition of its values, and ethics. It described the different groups that constituted this community. It described clearly the actual condition of the community and the conditions of each group and class in this community.

This Sura, unlike the other Suras in the Quran, does not start with the traditional opening of, *“In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.”* It has been narrated that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“I asked ‘Uthman bin A’fan, why did you join the two Suras Al-Infal and Al-Tawba without using the traditional ‘In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,’ between the two Suras. ‘Uthman replied, ‘The Prophet (PBUH) used to tell his scribes where to place the different verses when they were revealed to him. Surat Al-Anfal was among the first Suras to be revealed in Medina while Surat Al-Tawba was among the last Suras to be revealed in Medina. Both these two Suras dealt with similar topics so, I thought they belonged together. The Prophet (PBUH) died before I was able to ask him about this. That is why I put them together without placing, ‘In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy,’ between them as usual.” I included these two Suras among the seven long Suras.”*

This narration provides a reasonable explanation for the absence of *“In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy,”* in the beginning of this Sura. The narration emphasized that the order of the verses within each Sura, as well as the order of the Suras in the Quran, were dictated by the Prophet (PBUH) himself. This indicates that there is a rationale for the order of the verses within each Sura and for the order of the different Suras in the Quran.

Hawwa indicated that the Sura has three main divisions. The first consists of the first thirty-seven verses. The second division consists of the verses thirty-eight to verse one hundred and twenty-two. The third division consists of the verses one hundred and twenty-three to the end.

Verses: 1 to 28

1. *Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty.*
2. *Travel freely in the land for four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers.*

3. *And a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His Messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know that you cannot escape God. Give tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment to those who disbelieve.*
4. *Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill your obligations of the treaty to them to the end of their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him.*
5. *Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayers and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.*
7. *How can there be a treaty between God and His messenger and the idolaters, save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him.*
8. *How (can there be any treaty with the others) when, if they have the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie with you of kinship or of treaty? They please you with their mouths while their hearts are averse to you. And most of them are transgressors.*
9. *They have sold God's revelation for a little gain, and barred others from His way. Surely, evil is that which they were doing.*
10. *They neither observe a tie of kinship nor a treaty with a believer. These are they who are aggressors.*
11. *But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor-due, then they are your brethren in faith. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge.*
12. *But if they break their pledges after they have entered in a treaty with you, and defame your faith, then you should fight the chiefs of disbelief – oaths mean nothing to them – so that they may desist.*
13. *Will you not fight people who broke their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and attacked you first? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear if you are believers.*
14. *Fight them, God will torment them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you to have victory over them, and heal the hearts of a believing people.*
15. *And He will remove the anger of their (the believers) hearts. God relents toward whom He wills. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
16. *Or do you think you shall be left alone while God has not yet made evident those of you who will strive hard and will not take any one besides God and His Messenger and the believers as intimates. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
17. *It is not for the idolaters to maintain God's mosques, bearing witness against themselves of disbelief. As for such, their deeds are in vain and in the Fire they will abide.*
18. *The mosques of God are only to be maintained by those who believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, pay the poor due, and fear none (at all) except God. It is they, who will be among the rightly guided.*

19. *Have you made providing drinking water to pilgrims, or maintaining the Sacred Mosque, equal to (the pious service of) those who believe in God and the Last Day, and strive with might in the cause of God? They are not equal in the sight of God. God certainly does not guide the wrongdoers.*
20. *Those who believe, emigrated, and strived with might in God's cause, with their wealth and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God. Those are the achievers (of triumph.)*
21. *Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Himself, His good pleasure, and gardens for them, wherein lasting bliss will be theirs.*
22. *They will dwell therein for ever. Verily, with God there is an immense reward.*
23. *You who believe, do not take your fathers and your brothers as protecting guardians if they prefer disbelief over faith. Whosoever of you do so, such are the wrongdoers.*
24. *Say (Prophet), "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have acquired; the trade in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His cause, then wait until God brings His command to pass." God does not guide the transgressors.*
25. *God has given you victory in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain, when you exulted in your great numbers, but they were of no use to you; and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you; then you turned back in flight.*
26. *Then God sent His tranquility down upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts you could not see, and tormented those who disbelieved. Such is the reward of the disbelievers.*
27. *Then afterward God will accept the repentance from whom He wills. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
28. *You who believe, truly the idolaters are unclean. So let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if you fear poverty, soon will God enrich you, if He wills, out of His bounty, for God is Omniscient, Wise. (9:1-28)*

*"Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty. Travel freely in the land for four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers. And a proclamation from God and His Messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His Messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know that you cannot escape God. Give tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment to those who disbelieve. Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill your obligations of the treaty to them to the end of their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him. Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayers and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know."*

These verses -and the following verses up to verse 28 – were revealed to provide the final version of the protocol which establishes the basis for the relationship between the Muslim community, which had settled in Medina, and the idolaters who did not embrace Islam and were still living in Arabia. Arabs who did not embrace Islam were divided into three groups. Some concluded a treaty with the Prophet (PBUH) but later reneged on their treaty when they thought that the Romans will annihilate the Muslims. The second group were idolaters who were neutral to the Muslims but never concluded a treaty with them. The third group were idolaters who concluded a treaty with the Muslims and did not breach that treaty.

The verses came to provide a proclamation; the style and rhyme of the verses fit the style of such a proclamation. There are many narrations which describe who delivered the proclamation, how it was delivered, and the general ambience in which it was delivered. The most plausible of these is the version narrated by Ibn Jareer. Ibn Jareer quoted Mejahed (RA) saying, *“When the Messenger of God (PBUH) returned back from the battle of Tabuk he wanted to perform pilgrimage but he said, ‘I do not want to perform pilgrimage while the idolaters perform pilgrimage in the nude because I fear that it would be construed that I approve of their actions.’ The Messenger (PBUH) sent Abu Bakr (RA) and ‘Ali (RA) to perform pilgrimage in his stead. They then offered the tribes which concluded an armistice agreement with the Muslims an extension of the agreement for four months, at the end of which fighting would resume unless the idolaters chose to embrace Islam. All of them embraced Islam.”* Mejahed (RA) then continued by saying, *“Having reviewed all narrations regarding what is meant by the word ‘Obligation’ in the first verse of this group of verses, to whom was this obligation owed, and the duration of the obligation, we conclude that, the word “obligation” referred to the armistice agreement between the Muslims and the idolaters who breached their treaty with the Prophet (PBUH) and allied themselves with the enemy of Islam. The verse offered those idolaters a unilateral extension of the armistice agreement for a period of four months. On the other hand, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to honor his treaties with the idolaters who did not breach their agreements with him to the end of the appointed terms of such agreements.”* Those who think otherwise, namely, those who think that the verses commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to fight all idolaters at the end of the four months’ armistice extension are in error. Verse 6, supports our conclusion, *‘How can there be a treaty with God and with His messenger for the idolaters save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him.’ (9:6)* The verse clearly commanded the Messenger of God (PBUH) to remain true to the idolaters as long as they remain true to him.”

We thus, conclude, having reviewed all narrations, that the Prophet (PBUH) appointed Abu Bakr (RA) as a leader of the pilgrimage expedition and when the first verses of this Sura were revealed he sent ‘Ali (RA) to make the proclamation regarding the armistice agreement. Al-Termidhi narrated that ‘Ali (RA) said, *“When the first few verses of Surat Al-Tawba were revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) sent me with four announcements: No one should circumambulate around the Ka’ba in the nude, no idolater is allowed near the Ka’ba after this year, the Messenger (PBUH) will honor existing peace treaties with the idolaters, only Muslims will be admitted to paradise.”* This is the best account we could find for this incident.

*“Release from obligation (is proclaimed) from God and His messenger toward those of the idolaters with whom you made a treaty.”* This was a general proclamation which delineated the

protocol organizing the relationship between the Muslims and the idolaters within Arabia. The proclamation was clear, unequivocal, and binding for each and every Muslim. Then came the conditions, *“Travel freely in the land four months, and know that you cannot escape God and that God will disgrace the disbelievers.”* The idolaters were given a grace period of four months, during which they can travel, conduct their business, and make arrangements and future plans. During this grace period, their safety and security were guaranteed by the Muslims, even though they were the ones who acted treacherously and breached their treaty with the Muslims when they thought that the Muslims will be defeated and taken captives by the Romans. They repeatedly breached their treaties with the Muslims. However, Muslims treated them according to the Islamic traditions which came to replace the law of the jungle that ruled the world at the time of the advent of Islam. In case of conflicts, Islam replaced the law of the jungle with a civilised war protocol. These rules did not evolve over time but were the standard that Islam brought to the world since its advent. The verse warned the idolaters that they should not be deluded by the generosity of the Muslims because they will not be able to escape God. Where would they escape? Could they escape God in whose hand is the control of heavens and earth? He has decreed that the idolaters will be disgraced.

The date of the proclamation was also given, *“And a proclamation from God and His messenger to all people on the day of the greater pilgrimage that God is dissociated from any connection to the idolaters, and (so is) His messenger. So, if you repent, it will be better for you; but if you turn away, then know that you cannot escape God.”* The scholars differed whether it was the day of ‘Arafat or the day of the sacrifice that was meant by the expression, *“the day of greater pilgrimage.”* It seems that the reference here was to the day of the sacrifice. The proclamation was made in a general form and then the exception was made in the verses that followed. The verse also opened the door for repentance. This is an example of the style of the Quran which provides the warning of the consequences of disobedience and in the same time opens up the opportunity for the reward that comes with obedience. The Quran’s objective is to provide a way for guidance. So an opportunity is given for people to reflect and make an informed decision. However, the consequences of making the wrong decision are clearly indicated. This approach also reassures the Muslims that the final decision is in God’s hand. They need not be hesitant or fearful in dealing with the idolaters.

An exception from the general rule was then made, *“Excepting those of the idolaters with whom you have a treaty, and who have honored the treaty you made with them and have not supported anyone against you. (As for these), fulfill their treaty to them till their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him. Then, when the Sacred Months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.”*

The exception in the verse referred to a clan called Banu Khuzaimah who honoured the treaty which they concluded with the Muslims when the Hudaibiyah armistice agreement was ratified. The term of this agreement was ten years. The verse came to command the Muslims to honor the terms of the agreement. The verse emphasized the strong relationship between the fulfilment of

the promise and God consciousness, *“fulfill their treaty to them till their term. God loves those who are conscious of Him.”* Fulfilment of the promise is an integral component of the code of Islamic ethics, God promised to reward those who fulfill their promises. Ethical behaviour in Islam is a means to achieve God consciousness. Ethical behaviour is an integral component of worship in Islam and it is an important tool for building safe and secure communities.

However, once the appointed term of the grace period (four months) has expired then, *“slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each ambush. But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the poor-due, then let them travel freely on their way. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This command reflects the fact that the state of war between the Muslims and the idolaters will resume after the grace period had ended. Ample warning had been given to the idolaters to opt either for the resumption of hostilities or seeking peace by entering the fold of Islam. Establishing prayers and paying the poor due (Zakat) are used in this verse as a sign for their acceptance of Islam.

However, the war between the Muslims and the idolaters was not a war to annihilate all idolaters. It was a war against those who committed treason and started the fight against Muslims. Those who were not party to this conspiracy and who sought refuge and protection with the Muslims should be granted such protection. So that they get an opportunity to learn about this religion, *“If one of the idolaters should seek your protection (Muhammad), then grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward bring him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know.”* Even if they did not accept Islam, Muslims are obliged to grant them protection until they reach their safe destination. Islam brought a program for guidance not for revenge and annihilation. This verse refutes the claim that some make saying that the objective of Jihad was to convert people and force them to accept Islam. The objective of Jihad is to destroy the tyrants and to establish the people’s right to be free to adopt the religion of their choice.

*“How can there be a treaty with God and with His Messenger for the idolaters save those with whom you made a treaty at the Sacred Mosque? So long as they are true to you, be true to them. God loves those who remain conscious of Him. How (can there be any treaty for the others) when, if they have the upper hand over you, they would not respect any tie with you, of kinship or of treaty? They please you with their mouths while their hearts refuse. And most of them are transgressors. They have sold God’s revelation for a little gain, and barred others from His way. Surely, evil is that which they were doing. They neither observe a tie of kinship nor a treaty toward a believer. These are they who are aggressors.”* How can there be a treaty between the idolaters and God and His Messenger (PBUH) when they only take recourse to these treaties when they are weak and unable to conquer the Muslims? Had they been strong enough to overcome the Muslims, they would have overwhelmed the Muslims and assaulted them regardless of any existing treaty. They would have not had any regard to kin relationships, a treaty with the Muslims, nor would they have observed any human decency in dealing with the Muslims. They were bent on taking revenge against the Muslims.

This verse indicates that prohibiting the Muslims to be party to a treaty with the idolaters was a matter of principle. These idolaters did not submit completely to God and they neither believed

in His Message nor His Messenger. How can God have a treaty with them; while they challenge God's authority and refuse adamantly to show any gratitude to Him? This may seem at odds with the fact that the Messenger of God (PBUH) had conducted agreements with the idolaters at that time and the verses of this Sura conveyed God's command to the believers to honor these agreements. Our understanding of the Islamic dynamic program is that the treaties that were conducted with the idolaters before the revelation of this verse constituted a temporary phase for the interaction between the Muslims and the idolaters. These agreements were conducted to meet certain needs that were dictated by the realities of life at that time. However, the final rule is that the Muslims should not conduct treaties with the idolaters after the revelation of this verse.

*“But if they repent and establish prayer and pay the alms, then they are your brethren in faith. We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge.”* So the door was open for forgiveness if they repent. They would then become part of the Muslim community and all previous sins would be wiped out. But if they break their pledges, then the only alternative is the resumption of hostilities.

*“Will you not fight people who broke their oaths, plotted to expel the Messenger, and did attack you first? Do you fear them? It is God you should fear if you are believers.”* The idolaters had a long history of breaking the agreements they made with the Muslims. The latest in this series of broken agreements was the agreement of Hudaibiyah. The Messenger (PBUH) accepted – based on God's revelation - all the conditions that the idolaters stipulated, even though some of the Prophet's (PBUH) companions considered them unfair. The Prophet (PBUH) respected and honored each and every stipulation they made. But it was they, who less than two years later, reneged on their agreement. They were the same people who conspired to kill the Prophet (PBUH) and forced him to flee his home. They did not honor the sanctity of the Sacred Mosque and planned to kill the Prophet (PBUH) in defiance of God's command to keep the Sacred Mosque a safe place for everyone. Their aggression continued even after the Muslims migrated to Medina. These memories flash in the minds of Muslims when they listen to the question, *“Do you fear them?”* The response follows quickly with a reminder and a rebuke, *“It is God you should fear if you are believers.”* A believer should never fear another human being, a believer should only fear God.

*“Fight them, God will torment them by your hands, cover them with shame, help you to have victory over them, and heal the hearts of a believing people, And He will remove the anger of their (the believers) hearts.”* When you fight them, God will give you the power and the ability to be the tool with which He will punish them. They will be defeated at your hands and the believers will be pleased. In addition, you will be rewarded with God's forgiveness, *“God relents toward whom He wills. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The believers' victory may also act as a wakeup call for some disbelievers. They may open their eyes to heed the guidance and see the truth when they see the miracles which the believers performed and realize that there is a super natural power behind these miracles.

*“Or do you think you shall be left while God has not yet made evident those of you who will strive hard and will not take any one besides God and His Messenger and the believers as intimates. God is aware of what you do.”* The test was absolutely necessary to uncover those who did not completely submit to God, those who excelled in conniving with the disbelievers for their own benefit while pretending to be part of the Muslim community.

*“It is not for the idolaters to maintain God's Mosques, bearing witness against themselves of disbelief.”* It is quite illogical that those who do not believe in God claim the right to maintain God's mosques. God's mosques are built so that only God would be worshipped therein. Those who disbelieve associate partners with God. Thus, it is against the nature of things that the disbelievers would be entrusted with the maintenance of God's mosques, and even if they do, their deeds would not be accepted, *“As for such, their deeds are in vain and in the Fire they will abide.”* Worship is an expression of faith; bad faith can only produce bad worship. Thus, only those who have pure faith can maintain God's mosques, *“The mosques of God are only to be maintained by those who believe in God and the Last Day, establish regular prayers, pay the poor due, and fear none (at all) except God. It is they who are expected to be rightly guided.”* The verse did not only stress the requirements that a believer should have deep belief in God and that this belief should be reflected on his/her deeds, but also emphasized that a believer should fear God alone. A believer should not fear anyone else but God. Believers should rid themselves of any shadow of associating partners with God. They should devote themselves fully to God. This devotion should be embedded in their psyche and be manifested on their behaviour. Those who will be rightly guided and those who deserve to carry the responsibility of maintaining God's mosques.

Can one say that those who used to provide water for the pilgrims but did not believe fully in God have the same status as those who believed in God and strived in His cause? They are not equal according to God's standard, *“Have you made providing drinking water to pilgrims, or maintaining the Sacred Mosque, equal to (the pious service of) those who believe in God and the Last Day, and strive with might in the cause of God? They are not comparable in the sight of God. God certainly does not guide the wrongdoers.”* God does not guide those who associate partners with Him. These are the wrongdoers.

*“Those who believe, emigrated, and strived with might in God's cause, with their wealth and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God. Those are the achievers (of success.) Their Lord gives them glad tidings of mercy from Himself, His good pleasure, and gardens for them, wherein lasting bliss will be theirs. They will dwell therein forever. Verily, with God there is an immense reward.”* This is a clear statement that outlines the status of the believers who migrated and strived in God's cause. They are promised the highest rank with their Lord. As for the others, their deeds will be nullified and in Hell fire they will abide forever.

*“You who believe, do not take your fathers and your brothers as protecting guardians if they prefer disbelief over faith. Whosoever of you do so, such are the wrongdoers.”* All blood relationships should be broken if the bonds between the hearts are broken as a result of the deviation in faith. God's bond between the believers should be valued more than the tribal or



family bonds. God's bond brings the whole humanity in one family. Those who pledge allegiance to the disbelievers are truly wrongdoers. The term wrongdoers in this verse refer to those who associate partners with God.

The verses did not only state the general principle regarding the formation of alliances with others but provided a detailed list of all possible relationships that may pose a temptation for the believers, *"Say (Prophet), "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that you have acquired; the trade in which you fear a decline; or the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than God, and His Messenger, and striving in His cause, then wait until God brings His command to pass." God does not guide the transgressors."* A question is posed. Will the scale be tipped in favour of the love for fathers, sons, brothers, mates, or kindred (an expression of relationships acquired through blood or marriage), wealth, trade (an expression for the natural disposition towards the love of ownership), or the dwellings in which you delight (an expression for worldly pleasures) over the love of God, His Messenger, and striving in God's cause?

This kind of devotion is not only a requirement for the individuals but it is also mandated for the whole Muslims community and the Muslim nation. No benefit or a relationship should take precedence over the requirement of the faith in God and striving in His cause. This kind of obligation would not have been mandated unless God knew that the believers were able to fulfil the undertaking. God inculcated in the initial natural disposition of His servants a great ability for endurance and dedication. The endurance and dedication are rewarded by the great pleasure obtained from feeling the closeness to God, hoping for His grace, rising high above the material requirements of the physical body, and aspiring to a brilliant horizon.

*"God has given you victory in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain, when you exulted in your great numbers, but they were of no use to you; and the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for you; then you turned back in flight."* The memory of the victory that they achieved in the different battles which was only possible because of God's grace was still fresh in their memory. The battle of Hunain took place after the conquest of Mecca in the 10<sup>th</sup> month of the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Hijra. After the conquest of Mecca, most of the people in Mecca embraced Islam. News came to the Prophet (PBUH) that the tribe of Hawazen under the leadership of Malek bin 'Awf Al-Nadari had formed an alliance with the tribes of Thuqaif, Banu Jashm, Banu Bakr, and others to attack the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) moved with his army of ten thousand Muslims who came from Medina in addition to two thousand from the people of Mecca. The two armies met at a valley called Hunain which is located between Mecca and Al-Taieef. The battle started early in the morning. The disbelievers camped stealthily around the valley and ambushed the Muslims as they came in. The Muslims turned back on their heels and fled the battle field. The Prophet (PBUH) together with few of his companions stood fast. The Prophet (PBUH) charged towards the enemy while calling the Muslims to come back to fight. The Prophet (PBUH) asked his uncle Al-'Abbas (RA) to call upon the companions of the tree (those were the companions who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) during the battle of Hudaibiyah, the pledge which was called the pledge of Riddwan). Muslims started to gather around the Prophet (PBUH) and he lead them against the disbelievers. The battle ended by a victory for the Muslim army.

This was the first battle in which the Muslims were able to form an army of twelve thousand people. They were impressed by their numbers and thought that an army of this size could not be defeated. They forgot the basic requirement for victory, so God reminded them. God made them suffer defeat first and then showed them that a small army of true believers can achieve the victory that eludes a huge non-committed army, *“Then God sent His tranquility down upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts you could not see, and tormented those who disbelieved. Such is the reward of disbelievers. Then afterward God will accept the repentance from whom He wills. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verses paint a dynamic picture, first there was rejoicing, jubilation, and exultation in numbers; then there came the earthquake of defeat, the feeling of collapse, and the turning away. Then, the picture changed by the arrival of God’s help. Tranquility engulfed the believers and made them to stand their ground and God’s host fought with them and turned the balance against the disbelievers. The disbelievers were punished, but the door for God’s forgiveness is always open for those who sin and later repent.

The story of the battle of Hunain, narrated through these verses to illustrate the futility of the dependence on any power other than God’s, highlights another principle. It is the principle of the power of true and strong faith. Strength is not in the large number, but strength is in true and strong faith.

A final verdict is then given regarding the idolaters, *“You who believe, truly the idolaters are unclean. So let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if you fear poverty, soon will God enrich you, if He wills, out of His bounty, for God is Omniscient, All-wise.”* The verse indicates that idolatry is a spiritual impurity. This spiritual impurity defiles the purity of the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. Thus, idolaters are not fit to gain access to the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. But, what about the economic opportunities and the wealth that were brought to Mecca during the time of pilgrimage. The people of Mecca depended in their living on the financial gains which they made from people who come to perform pilgrimage. The verse reminded the believers that it is God who provides.

## **Verses: 29 to 35**

29. *Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they were) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*
30. *The Jews said, “Ezra is the son of God,” and the Christians said, “The Messiah is the son of God.” That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?*
31. *They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)*
32. *They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it.*

33. *It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may hate it.*
34. *You who believe, many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God. Those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in the way of God, give them tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment.*
35. *On the Day when it will (all) be heated in the fire of Hell, and their foreheads and their sides and their backs will be branded therewith (and it will be said to them), "Here is that which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard." (9:29-35)*

*"Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they were) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."* This verse and the subsequent ones were revealed shortly before the battle of Tabuk against the Romans and their Christian Arab vassals. These verses were revealed to deal specifically with the impending battle with the Romans. The verses describe the doctrine of these people and explain the reasoning behind fighting them. It should not be taken as a directive to fight the people of the Scripture in general. The bases for fighting the Romans and their allies were summarized as: they disbelieve in God and the Last Day, they do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, and they do not acknowledge the religion of truth. Four facts were given to support these statements.

First, *"The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son of God.' That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?"* Those who make such a claim do not believe in God and the Day of Judgment.

Second, *"They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)"* This contravenes the belief in the oneness of God.

Third, *"They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it."* They launched war against the religion of God.

Fourth, *"Many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God."* They did not forbid what God and His Messenger forbade.

These were actual attributes of the Romans and their Christian Arab vassals whom the Muslims were getting ready to engage in battle. The rule enunciated in these verses is a general rule that should be applied to all people of the Scripture who satisfy the above mentioned criteria. However, there were exceptions made by the Prophet (PBUH). Muslims were commanded not to attack non combatants like women, children, and elderly people; and priests and hermits.

The verse commands the believers to fight the people of the Scripture who, *"who disbelieve in God and the Last Day."* Those who believe that Ezra or the Messiah are the sons of God do not

believe in the Oneness of God. The verse gives another criterion for the people of the Scripture who should be fought, *“who do not forbid that which God and His Messenger have forbidden.”* The command applies whether the word Messenger in the verse refers to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or refers to the Messenger that God sent to these people before. The succeeding verses explained this by stating that they used to, *“devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God,”* which was forbidden in all God’s messages. The verses also indicated that they, *“do not acknowledge the religion of truth.”*

The condition that the Quran gave for the believers to stop fighting these people was not that they would become Muslims – let there be no compulsion in religion - but was that, *“they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”* Why was paying the Jizya a condition for the hostilities to cease? The people of the Scripture who satisfied the above mentioned criteria represented a threat to Islam. They had different ideology and their behavior contravened the norms of Islam. They also posed a threat to the Muslim society because of the confrontation between their doctrine and the doctrine of Islam. History bears witness that the threat did materialize later. The only way Islam would have been able to establish its objective, to guarantee the freedom of religion for every human being, was to subdue the tyrants who oppressed the people. Those authorities who were placing obstacles in the way of people and robbing them of the freedom to choose had to be subdued. Agreeing to pay the Jizya was the sign they have been subdued.

The objectives of paying this tax were

- It is a sign of submission and an agreement not to attack the Muslims or hinder others from receiving information about Islam.
- It is a contribution to the state’s treasury to cover protection expenses. The Muslim community was obliged to offer protection for those who pay the tax.
- It is a contribution to the state’s treasury dedicated to helping those who need help whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Muslims were required to pay the poor due; this tax was the contribution by non-Muslims to the treasury.

*“The Jews said, ‘Ezra is the son of God,’ and the Christians said, ‘The Messiah is the son of God.’ That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?”* This verse draws a parallel between the doctrine of those who say Ezra the son of God and those who say the Messiah is the son of God and the doctrine of the idolatrous Arabs. A doctrine that claims that God has a son defies the fundamental doctrine that states that God is One. Although these verses were revealed to prepare the believers for the impending fight with the Romans and their Christian Arab allies, but we notice that the verses also mention the Jews as well. We think that they were mentioned in this verse for two reasons:

- The verses establish a general rule that applies to all people of the Scripture. The verses explain the reasons for fighting the people of the Scripture. The people of the Scripture include the Christians and the Jews.

- The Jews, at this time, resided in an area north of Syria after they had been evacuated from Medina. The Muslims may have had to pass by them on their route to meet the Romans.

*“That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before. May God destroy them; how deluded are they?”* The Quranic expression indicates that this was their statement which they made using their mouths. The expression provides a dynamic image as if the reader hears their statement as they spoke. It also alludes to the fact that the statement is mere words that were not supported by any proof. Their statement is similar to the statement made by the idolaters before. The scholars explained that the similarity between the statements of the Christians and the Jews and the statement of the idolatrous Arabs stems from the fact that the Arabs claimed that the angels were the daughters of God. But the similarity is much deeper than this. The concept of the trinity existed in many religions before Christianity; of these we mention the old Egyptian and the Hindu religions. The Assyrians believed in the concept that God has a son. This shows the parallel between the sayings of the Jews and Christians on one side and the idolaters on the other side. These facts were not known to the Arabs at that time which provides another proof that Quran is a revealed message.

*“They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God, (also) the Messiah, the son of Mary. They were commanded to worship only One God. There is no deity but He. Be He glorified above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him.)”* Ibn Katheer mentioned in his interpretation of the Quran that, *“‘Adi bin Hatem (RA), who was a Christian, fled to Syria when he received the Messenger’s (PBUH) invitation to Islam. His daughter was taken captive in a skirmish with the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) freed ‘Adi’s sister and she accepted Islam. She later went to her brother and asked him to accept Islam. ‘Adi went to Medina to meet with the Prophet (PBUH) and heard him reciting, ‘They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God.’ ‘Adi (RA) objected saying, ‘They did not worship their rabbis and their monks.’ The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘did not the rabbis and the monks forbade them to do things that God made lawful and allowed them to do things which God forbade. This is worship.’”*

Based on the obvious meaning of the Quranic text, the interpretation of the Prophet (PBUH) (which is the final reference) and the understanding of the early and later scholars who interpreted the Quran, we come to the following conclusion:

- Worship means following the rules enunciated in the Quran and explained in the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). The statement, *“They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords beside God,”* does not mean they believed in them as gods. It means that they followed blindly the laws devised by the rabbis and priests. These were laws which contravened the law of God. This is synonymous to associating partners with God. Blindly accepting laws devised by a human being and which contravene the laws of God is synonymous to worshipping that human being.

Although the main objective of these verses was to prepare the Muslims for the battle with the Romans, and to deal with hesitation on the part of Muslims to fight people of the Scripture, but they state general principles.

The fundamental meaning of the word “religion” is the complete submission to God. This is the only religion that God will accept. Submission encompasses following God’s law as well as performing the rituals. Those who perform the rituals but follow those who usurp God’s right to legislate cannot be considered Muslims. These are the ones who take lords beside God.

*“They want to extinguish the light of God with their mouths, but God refuses except to perfect His light, though the disbelievers hate it. It is He Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may hate it.”* They fight Islam and would like to extinguish the light of God. They fabricate lies against Islam and motivate their followers to attack Islam. But, God’s light will prevail. God sent His Messenger (PBUH) with the true religion. The true religion is God’s light. God will perfect His light in spite of the attempts of those who want to extinguish it. The verse indicates that the religion of truth is the religion that God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with.

*“You who believe, many of the rabbis and the monks devour the wealth of people unjustly and turn them away from the way of God. They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of God, give them tidings (Muhammad) of a painful torment.”* The verses continued to deal with the rabbis and monks who usurped the right of God to legislate and were followed blindly by their followers by referring to the ways they devised to devour people’s wealth. It should be noted that the verse did not generalize. It stated that “many” of the rabbi’s and monks do this and not all of them. Then the warning of a severe torment in the Hereafter is issued, *“On the Day when it will (all) be heated in the fire of hell, and their foreheads and their flanks and their backs will be branded therewith (and it will be said to them), ‘Here is that which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard.’”*

### **Verses: 36 to 37**

36. *God has decreed that the number of months is twelve - so ordained by Him in His book, the day He created the heavens and the earth - of them four are sacred. That is the straight religion. So wrong not yourselves in them. And wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that God is with those who remain conscious of Him.*

37. *Postponement (of a sacred month) is only an excess in disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled. They allow it one year and forbid it (another) year that they may make up the number of the months which God has hallowed, so that they allow that which God has forbidden. Their evil deeds have been made pleasing to them. God does not guide the disbelieving folk. (9:36-37)*

*“God has decreed that the number of months is twelve - so ordained by Him in His book, the day He created the heavens and the earth - of them four are sacred. That is the right religion.”* This verse indicates that time is a part of God’s original plan of the creation of the universe. The verse

indicates that there is a perpetual periodic cycle which is composed of twelve months. God fixed the length of the cycle as well as the number of the months. This is God's law. God also fixed the number and the place of the Sacred Months within this periodic cycle. No one has the right to change this. This is part of the right religion which conforms to God's creation plan.

*“So wrong not yourselves in them.”* Do not wrong yourselves during these months which had been established by God's law. Do not wrong yourselves by violating what God has forbidden during these months. God wanted these months to be a period of safety and security for people, free of hostilities. But when the Sacred Months had ended, *“wage war on all of the idolaters as they are waging war on all of you. And know that God is with those who remain conscious of Him.”* They fight you indiscriminately, so repel their aggression by fighting all of them together. The idolaters collectively are party to the battle between faith and disbelief, the battle between guidance and misguidance. This is a battle between two distinct groups. The differences between these two groups cannot be reconciled and there is no hope of an eternal peace between the two. The differences between the two groups are not caused by a difference in interest that can be settled through compromise or land claims that can be settled through negotiations. It is a battle between different doctrines which cannot be resolved through compromise. The verse ends by a reminder to the believers to remain conscious of God by following God's commands regarding the lawful and forbidden, by participating in fighting the idolaters, and by observing the protocol of war that God had decreed.

*“Postponement (of a Sacred Month) is only an excess in disbelief whereby those who disbelieve are misled. They allow it one year and forbid it (another) year that they may make up the number of the months which God has hallowed, so that they allow that which God has forbidden. Their evil deeds have been made pleasing to them. God does not guide the disbelieving folk.”* Mejahed (RA) explained this verse by saying, *“A man from the tribe of Kenanah used to come each year (during the time of pilgrimage) riding a donkey. The man would say, ‘People, what I say goes, we have made the month of Muharram a Sacred Month and we have postponed the month of Safar.’ The following year, he would say, ‘we have made Safar a Sacred Month and we have postponed the month of Muharram.’ This is how they used to change God's law regarding the Sacred Months.”* Another story was narrated by Abd El-Rahman bin Aslam. He said, *“The Arabs used to honour the Sacred Months by abstaining from fighting during these months to the extent that a man would face his father's killer but would not raise a hand against him to avenge his father's death, till a man from Kenanah commanded his tribe to fight during the month of Muharram. When his people reminded him that they could not fight during the month of Muharram, he said, ‘We will postpone Muharram, the present month is the month of Safar. This year has two months by the name of Safar. The month of Safar of the following year would then be considered a Sacred Month.’”*

These are two versions of the way the idolaters used to change the Sacred Months around. In one version they make the month of Safar sacred instead of the month of Muharram. Thus, the number of Sacred Months remains four but they are not the months which God had decreed to be sacred. In the second version, they would have three sacred months in one year and five sacred months in the subsequent year. Either way they change God's law. This is an excess in disbelief.

## Verses: 38 to 41

38. *You who believe, what is the matter with you, that, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of God, you cling heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.*
39. *Unless you go forth, He will punish you with a grievous torment, and replace you with others and you will not harm Him at all. God is Able to do all things.*
40. *If you do not help him, God did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two; when the two of them were in the cave, when he said to his companion, "Do not grieve. God is with us." Then God caused His tranquility to descend upon him and supported him with hosts you could not see, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost. God is Eminent, Wise.*
41. *Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of God. That is best for you if you only knew. (9:38-41)*

It is most probable that these verses were revealed right after the Prophet (PBUH) announced his intention to form an army to fight the Romans in the battle of Tabuk. The Prophet's (PBUH) move was in response to the intelligence he received that the Roman emperor has formed a huge army to fight the Muslims. The emperor gave his soldiers one-year salary as an incentive to fight the Muslims. The vassal Christians Arab tribes who lived near the boundary between Arabia and the Romans also allied themselves with the Romans against the Muslims and the front of the Roman army had already reached Syria. It was the Prophet's (PBUH) policy to keep the objective of his expedition confidential to gain the advantage of surprising his enemy. However, in this particular incident he did announce that the objective was to fight the Romans. The reason for this change in policy was that this was a particularly difficult battle for the Muslims. The distance that the army had to travel was very long, the people of Medina were preparing to harvest their fields, and it was summer time which made travel more difficult. This was a golden opportunity for the hypocrites to dampen the spirits of the Muslims and to tempt them to stay home and to abandon the Prophet's (PBUH) expedition.

*"You who believe, what is the matter with you, that, when you are asked to go forth in the cause of God, you cling heavily to the earth?"* The love of life, the love of wealth, and the love of comfort and worldly pleasures make people heavy in weight and hinder their movement. All of these meanings are reflected on the expression, *"Cling heavily to the earth."* Greed and short sightedness are shackles which increase the gravity of the body and impede its movement.



*“Are you satisfied with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of this life, as compared with the Hereafter.”* Going out to fight in the cause of God is a step towards destroying the worldly shackles which attach humankind to the earth and prevents him from flying in the space of spirituality towards the eternal life. No one with a sound faith in God would resist the call to strive in the cause of God.

The verses issue a very stern warning, *“Unless you go forth, He will punish you with a grievous torment, and replace you with others and you will not harm Him at all. God is Able to do all things.”* Although the warning was meant to address a specific group of people, in a specific circumstance but its scope can be generalized. The torment that was promised in the verse was not only meant to happen in the Hereafter but it included a punishment in this life as well. God is able to replace you with another people who will obey His commands and will be able to overcome the weakness to cling to the earth. The following verses provide an example, that they knew very well, *“If you do not help him, God did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of two; when the two of them were in the cave, when he said to his companion, “Do not grieve. God is with us.” Then God caused His tranquility to descend upon him and supported him with hosts you could not see, and made the word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost. God is Eminent, Wise.”* The verse tells the story of the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina. When Quraish was fed up with the Prophet (PBUH) they plotted to kill him. But God revealed their plot to the Prophet (PBUH) and commanded him to migrate to Medina. The Prophet (PBUH) migrated from Mecca in the company of his friend Abu Bakr (RA). On their way to Medina, they hid in a cave to lose the idolaters who were in their pursuit. While they were in the cave, they saw the idolaters who were following them standing at the opening of the cave. Abu Bakr (RA) was worried that they may decide to enter the cave and apprehend them. The Prophet (PBUH) calmed the fears of Abu Bakr (RA) saying, *“What do you think of two, God is their third?”* Quraish had the might and the physical power, but with God on their side, Muhammad (PBUH) and his companion prevailed. God sent His host to support them and made, *“The word of those who disbelieved the lowest, while God's word became the uppermost.”*

This was an example of how God’s intervention awarded His Messenger victory over the idolaters and made God’s word to prevail. God is able to repeat this intervention for another group who are willing to strive in God’s cause.

The command to strive in God’s cause was then given subsequent to the reminder of God’s help, *“Go forth, light-armed and heavy-armed, and strive with your wealth and your lives in the way of God. That is best for you if you only knew.”* The believers were then commanded to stop making excuses and to go forth and strive with their wealth and their persons. The believers realized the benefit of following God’s command and they fought and won; and God’s word prevailed.

## **Verses: 42 to 92**

*42. Had it been a near adventure and an easy journey they would have followed you, but the distance seemed too far for them. Yet, they will swear by God (saying), “If we had been*

- able, we would surely have set out with you.” They destroy their souls, and God knows that they are indeed liars.*
43. *God pardoned you (Muhammad); why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?*
  44. *Those who believe in God and the Last Day do not ask you for an exemption from fighting with their wealth and their persons. And God knows well those who are conscious of Him.*
  45. *Only those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day will ask you for an exemption, those whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt.*
  46. *If they had intended to go forth, they would certainly have prepared for it; but God was averse to their being sent forth, so He made them lag behind. They were told, “Sit among those who stayed behind.”*
  47. *Had they gone forth with you, they would have contributed nothing save trouble and they would have scurried around seeking to cause sedition among you; and among you there are some who would have listened to them. God knows the wrongdoers.*
  48. *Indeed, they sought to cause sedition before and raised difficulties for you until the truth came out and God’s decree was made manifest, though they hated it.*
  49. *Of them is he who says, “Grant me an exemption (to stay at home) and do not subject me to temptation.” Indeed, it is into temptation that they (thus) have fallen. Certainly, Hell will encompass the disbelievers.*
  50. *If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if a misfortune befalls you, they say, “We took indeed our precautions beforehand,” and they turn away rejoicing.*
  51. *Say, “Nothing will befall us except that which God has decreed for us, He is our Protecting Guardian,” and in God let the believers put their trust.*
  52. *Say, “Do you expect for us (any fate) other than one of the two glorious things (Martyrdom or victory)? But we expect that God will either torment you Himself, or by our hands. So wait (expectantly); we too will wait with you.”*
  53. *Say, “Spend (for the cause) willingly or unwillingly. It will not be accepted from you. You were indeed a transgressing folk.”*
  54. *The reasons their contributions were not accepted, were that they rejected God and His Messenger; that they come to prayer slothfully; and they offer contributions grudgingly.*
  55. *So let not their riches nor their children impress you (Muhammad). God only wishes to torment them thereby in the life of this world and that their souls shall pass away while they are disbelievers.*
  56. *They swear by God that they indeed belong to you while they do not belong to you, but they are people who are afraid.*
  57. *If they could find a place to flee to, or caves, or a place of concealment, they would turn to it in great haste.*
  58. *And among them are those who disparage you in the matter of (the distribution of) the poor due. If they are given part thereof, they are pleased, but if not, they become enraged.*
  59. *If only had they been content with what God and His Messenger gave them, and had said, “God is sufficient for us. God and His Messenger will soon give us of His bounty, and to God do we turn our hopes.”*
  60. *The poor due are only for the poor, the needy, those who are employed to administer the (funds), those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth), those in bondage,*

*those in debt, in the cause of God, and for the wayfarer. This is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*

61. *Among them are men who abuse the Prophet and say, "He is (all) ear." Say, "He listens to what is best for you. He believes in God, has faith in the believers, and is a mercy to those of you who believe." But those who abuse the Messenger will have a painful torment.*
62. *They swear by God to you (Muslims) to please you, but it is more fitting for them to please God and His messenger, if they were believers.*
63. *Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger, he shall certainly have the fire of Hell to abide in it? That is the great ignominy.*
64. *The Hypocrites are apprehensive lest a Sura should be revealed telling them plainly of what is in their hearts. Say, "Go on mocking; God will certainly expose what you fear."*
65. *If you (Muhammad) ask them, they will say, "We were only talking idly and in jest." Say, "Was it at God and His revelations and His Messenger that you were mocking?"*
66. *Make no excuses. You have disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon a party of you, We shall torment another party because they were criminals.*
67. *The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike; they enjoin evil and forbid good and withhold their hands; they have forsaken God, so He has forsaken them; indeed, the hypocrites are the transgressors.*
68. *God promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers the fire of Hell. Therein shall they dwell. It will suffice them. God cursed them, and theirs is a lasting torment.*
69. *As in the case of those before you, they were mightier than you in power and more abundant in wealth and children. They had their portion of enjoyment and you had yours, as did those before you; and you indulged in idle talk as they did. Such are they whose deeds are fruitless in this world and in the Hereafter, and it is they who are the losers.*
70. *Have they never heard the stories of those who came before them? - The People of Noah, 'Ad, and Thamud; the people of Abraham, the people of Madyan, and the cities overthrown. Their messengers came to them with clear signs. God would have never wronged them, but they wronged their own souls.*
71. *The believers, men and women, are protecting guardians of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil; they establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed poor due; and they obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy on them. God is Eminent, Wise.*
72. *God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme triumph.*
73. *Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be harsh against them. Their refuge is Hell, an evil destination indeed.*
74. *They swear by God that they said nothing (evil), but indeed they uttered the word of disbelief, and they did disbelieve after they had accepted Islam. They meditated a plot which they were unable to carry out. They were not resentful except (for the fact) that God and His Messenger had enriched them of His bounty. So, if they repent it will be better for them; and if they turn away, God will afflict them with a painful torment in the world and the Hereafter, and they have no protecting guardian nor a helper on earth.*

75. *And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying), "If He gives us of His bounty we will certainly spend in charity and become of the righteous."*
76. *But when He bestowed of His bounty on them, they became niggardly, and turned back (from their covenant), averse.*
77. *He penalized them with hypocrisy in their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him - because they broke their covenant with God, and because they lied (again and again).*
78. *Do they not know that God knows their secret (thoughts) and their secret counsel, and that God knows well all things unseen?*
79. *Those who criticize the believers who give freely to charity and those who can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour, so they mock them. God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.*
80. *Whether you (Muhammad) ask God to forgive them, or do not. If you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger. God does not guide the transgressors.*
81. *Those who were left behind (in the Tabuk expedition) rejoiced for staying behind when the Messenger of God departed. They hated to strive and fight, with their wealth and their persons, in the cause of God. They said, "Do not go forth in the heat." Say, "The fire of Hell is more intense in heat." If only they could understand.*
82. *Let them laugh a little (then) weep much. This is the recompense they earned for the (evil) that they did.*
83. *If God should return you to a party of them, and they ask for your permission to go out (with you), say, "Never shall you go out with me, nor fight an enemy with me. Indeed, you preferred to stay (at home) on the first occasion. Then sit you (now) with those who lag behind."*
84. *And never (Muhammad) pray for one of them who dies nor stand by his grave. They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors.*
85. *Let not their wealth nor their children impress you. God intends to punish them with these things in the world, and that their souls may perish while they are disbelievers.*
86. *When a Sura is revealed, enjoining them to believe in God and to strive along with His Messenger, those with wealth and influence among them ask you for exemption saying, "Let us stay (behind). We would be with those who sit (at home)."*
87. *They preferred to be with those who remain behind (at home). A seal was set on their hearts so they understand not.*
88. *But the Messenger, and those who believed with him, strived with their wealth and their persons. For them are all the good things and it is they who will be successful.*
89. *God prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein. That is the supreme triumph.*
90. *And those among the wandering Arabs who had excuses came in order that permission might be granted them. And those who lied to God and His messenger stayed at home. A painful torment will fall on those of them who disbelieved.*
91. *There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to God and His Messenger. No ground (of complaint) can there be against such as do right. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
92. *Nor (is there blame) on those who came to you to be provided with mounts, you said, "I can find no mounts for you," they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief*

*that they could not find the means to spend. (9:42-92)*

Had it been a short trip which they considered safe, they would have followed you. But, it was a long and difficult trip that you have invited them to. This was a test for the weak who did not aspire to higher goals. This is a common human model, *“Had it been a near adventure and an easy journey they would have followed you, but the distance seemed too far for them.”* Many people fall short of achieving higher goals. They are tempted with minor worldly achievements. They live on the fringe of life. They never venture into attempting higher feats, *“Yet, they will swear by God (saying), ‘If we had been able we would surely have set out with you.’ They destroy their souls, and God knows that they are indeed liars.”* So they lie to hide their cowardice. Lying and cowardice go hand in hand. They destroy themselves with their oaths and lying. They thought that they will be saved by lying to people, but God knows the truth and He revealed it. Thus, the liars become exposed.

It is out of the grace of God that He forgave His Messenger before He blamed him, *“God forgave you (Muhammad); why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?”* Those who stayed behind used the Prophet’s (PBUH) permission as an excuse to avoid joining the army. However, even if they had not obtained the Prophet’s (PBUH) permission, they would have stayed behind. But, then their delinquency would have been exposed. The verses then describe the different attitudes of the believers and the hypocrites, *“Those who believe in God and the Last Day do not ask you for an exemption from fighting with their wealth and their persons. And God knows well those who are conscious of Him. Only those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day will ask you for an exemption, those whose hearts are in doubt, so they waver in their doubt.”* This is the true criterion. Those who believe in God and the Day of Reckoning are not hesitant to strive in the way of God with their wealth and persons. They hasten to respond to the call to strive. The hypocrites, on the other hand, are hesitant. They try hard to find a way out which allows them to stay behind. The way to God is straight and clear. Only those who do not know the way and those who know it but find it difficult to follow are hesitant to join the ranks of the believers in their strive. Those who stayed behind could have gone forth, if they wanted to, *“If they had intended to go forth, they would certainly have prepared for it; but God was averse to their being sent forth, so He made them lag behind. They were told, ‘Sit among those who stayed behind.’”* But God was aware of their hypocrisy, so He made them lag behind. They stayed back with the elderly, the women, and children.

This was better for the believers, *“Had they gone forth with you, they would have contributed nothing save trouble and they would have scurried around seeking to cause sedition among you; and among you there are some who would have listened to them. God knows the wrongdoers.”* Had they went forth with the believers, they would have gone forth half hearted. This would have spread trouble among the ranks of the believers. They would have also sought to spread sedition among the Muslims. *“Indeed they sought to cause sedition before and raised difficulties*

for you until the truth came and God's decree was made manifest, though they hated it." They tried to spread sedition before when the Prophet (PBUH) arrived at Medina, but God supported him and gave him victory over the hypocrites.

*"Of them he is who says, 'Grant me an exemption (to stay at home) and do not subject me to temptation.' Indeed, it is into temptation that they (thus) have fallen. Certainly, Hell will encompass the disbelievers. If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if a misfortune befalls you, they say, 'We took indeed our precautions beforehand,' and they turn away rejoicing. Say, 'Nothing will befall us except that which God has decreed for us, He is our Protecting Guide,' and in God let the believers put their trust. Say, 'Do you expect for us (any fate) other than one of the two glorious things (Martyrdom or victory)? But we expect that God will either torment you Himself, or by our hands. So wait (expectantly); we too will wait with you.'"* Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated on the authority of Al-Zuhary, *"While the Messenger of God (PBUH) was preparing for the battle of Tabuk, he asked Gad bin Qais, 'Gad, will you fight the Romans?' Gad said, 'Messenger of God, grant me an exemption and do not subject me to temptation. I am extremely prone to seduction by women. I fear that I would fall for the women of the Romans.' The Prophet (PBUH) granted him an exemption."* Such were the lame excuses that the hypocrites advanced to seek exemptions from joining the Muslim expedition to Tabuk. The verse paints the image of an abyss in which those who were tempted fall in and then get torched by Hell fire. They never wished the Messenger and the believers well. They would rejoice when something bad befalls the believers. They had a very short sighted view of what was happening. The believers on the other hand, looked at the big picture. They were promised victory by God and it is in God that they had put their trust. They had absolute trust in God and His decrees. However, they also knew that putting one's trust in God goes hand in hand with preparing the best they can to achieve their goal. The believers knew that either way it is good for them. If they die in battle, they will gain martyrdom and if they survive they will enjoy victory. The hypocrites on the other hand had nothing to look forward to except severe punishment from God.

*"Say, 'Spend (for the cause) willingly or unwillingly. It will not be accepted from you. You were indeed a transgressing folk.' The reasons their contributions were not accepted, were that they rejected God and His Messenger; that they come to prayer slothfully; and that they offer contributions grudgingly."* The verses paint a classic picture for the hypocrites. Hypocrisy results in hearts with no conviction. Hypocrisy breeds cowardice. Hypocrites are afraid to express their true beliefs. They have no internal drive to motivate them to perform prayers or to spend in the way of God. They perform prayers reluctantly and they spend out of fear. God does not accept superficial acts which are not based on a deep conviction of the belief in Him.

The hypocrites were wealthy and powerful in their community. But no one should be impressed by their wealth or power because this was the way God tested them. *"So let not their riches nor their children impress you (Muhammad). God only wishes to torment them thereby in the life of this world and that their souls shall pass away while they are disbelievers."* Wealth and offspring are blessings from God; He bestows them on His servants. Servants who are blessed with wealth and offspring should express their gratitude to God for His bounty. Gratitude is expressed by raising good offspring and spending the wealth in a way that pleases God. In this

case, wealth and offspring will be a source of happiness and content. If they suffer a loss in wealth or offspring, then they put their trust in God and they say “*God is sufficient for us.*” Wealth and offspring are a source of trouble and misery for those who do not put their trust in God.

Hypocrites came to the fold of Islam motivated by fear and greed. “*They swear by God that they indeed belong to you while they do not belong to you, but they are people who are afraid.*” They tried all the time to assure the Muslims that they were part of the Muslim community. They wanted to cover up their true nature, a nature of cowardice and insecurity. The expression, “*If they could find a place to flee to, or caves, or a place of concealment, they would turn to it in great haste,*” reflects how desperate they were to cover up their true feelings.

“*And among them are those who disparage you in the matter of (the distribution of) the poor due. If they are given part thereof, they are pleased, but if not, they become enraged.*” The verse addresses the Messenger of God (PBUH) telling him about the hypocrites who were critical of the Messenger’s way of distributing the poor due. Their criticism was motivated by their greed. If they were given plenty, they were pleased. They did not care whether there were others who were more deserving than them. Several stories were narrated about those hypocrites who complained about the Prophet’s (PBUH) unfairness in distributing the poor due among the believers. Their complaints were only motivated by greed and the hatred they harboured for the believers. Their approach was not befitting a believer. The Quran illustrated how the proper approach should have been, “*If only had they been content with what God and His Messenger gave them, and had said, ‘God is sufficient for us. God and His Messenger will soon give us of His bounty, and to God do we turn our hopes.’*” This is the proper approach for those who learnt the manners in the school of faith. Believers should be content with whatever God and His Messenger (PBUH) bestow on them. It is a contentment that is the result of voluntary submission to God, not a contentment that is forced upon them. Believers should put their hopes in God and devote themselves to Him without looking for any material gains.

Having clarified the proper etiquette in dealing with God and His Messenger, the verses continue to emphasize that the Messenger (PBUH) had no say in how the poor due are to be distributed. Poor due are distributed according to God’s command, “*The poor due are only for the poor, the needy, those who are employed to administer the (funds), those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth), those in bondage, those in debt, in the cause of God, and for the wayfarer. This is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*” This is God’s legislation regarding the poor due. It is not a gift or a donation that is given by the rich. It is a duty that has to be fulfilled by those who are eligible to pay; and it is a right for those who are eligible to receive. It is an integral part of the system of social justice in Islam. The poor due is only one of the components of the social justice in Islam. There are other components which complement the poor due which make the system a comprehensive system that covers all aspects of the needs of the members of the society.

The verse lists those who are eligible to receive the poor due. The first category includes the poor and the needy. Then, there are those who are employed to collect the poor due. Next come those whose hearts have been reconciled. This category includes those who reverted to Islam recently and those who are in the process of reverting to Islam. There is a difference in opinion between the scholars whether this category exists today or not. It is important to continue to give people in this category their due share from the poor due because of the real life dynamics of the Muslim society. The verse indicates that the poor due can also be used to free slaves. At the time of the revelation of the Quran, slavery was a well established world-wide institution. Islam established a practical tool to help slaves who wanted to buy their freedom. The poor due can also be used to pay the debt for those who are in debt and are unable to pay their debt. The poor due can also be spent in the way of God. This is a comprehensive category which encompasses any activity that would be beneficial to the community. Finally, the poor due can be used to support the travellers whose means were depleted and are unable to cover the expenses needed for them to reach their destination. The verse ends by a reminder that that the poor due and its distribution have been mandated by God, He knows best what is good for His servants.

Having stated the rules for distributing the poor due, the verses return to address those who casted doubt on the fairness of the Prophet (PBUH), *“Among them are men who abuse the Prophet and say, ‘He is (all) ear.’ Say, ‘He listens to what is best for you. He believes in God, has faith in the believers, and is a mercy to those of you who believe.’ But those who abuse the Messenger will have a painful torment.”* They misunderstood the decency of the Prophet (PBUH) in dealing with people. The Prophet (PBUH) used to treat people nicely according to the Islamic etiquette. He listened to people and took what they said at its face value. The hypocrites underestimated the Prophet (PBUH) and thought they could deceive him. The Quran responds to their allegations, saying that the Prophet (PBUH) has a good ear. He listens to the revelations and conveys it to them and he listens to people but he is able to differentiate between the truthfulness and falsehood. The Prophet (PBUH) believed in God and he was sent as a mercy to those who believed. Those who attempted to hurt the Prophet (PBUH) will suffer a painful torment.

*“They swear by God to you (Muslims) to please you, but it is more fitting for them to please God and His messenger, if they were believers.”* The verse described the classical approach for the hypocrites at all times. The hypocrites always avoid confrontation. They work behind the scenes but when they come face to face with the believers they try to please them by all means. It is God that they should try to please. They deserved to be rebuked and they should be warned of the consequence of their deeds, *“Do they not know that whoever opposes God and His Messenger, he shall certainly have the fire of hell to abide in it? That is the great ignominy.”*

*“The Hypocrites are apprehensive lest a Sura should be revealed telling them plainly of what is in their hearts. Say, ‘Go on mocking, God will certainly expose what you fear.’”* The verse provided a general description of the insecurity of the hypocrites. The verse was revealed to address several incidents which occurred at that time. Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated that a group of the hypocrites were among the army that the Prophet (PBUH) led to the battle of Tabuk. They were talking to each other about how deluded the Muslims were in trying to fight the Romans. They were spreading rumours to weaken the spirits of the Muslims. The verse came to tell the Prophet (PBUH) about the hypocrites’ talk. The Prophet (PBUH) sent ‘Ammar bin Yaser (RA)



to warn them that the Prophet (PBUH) is aware of their plots. One of them came to the Prophet (PBUH) to apologize saying that they were only joking, *“If you (Muhammad) ask them, they will say, ‘We were only talking idly and in jest.’ Say, ‘Was it at God and His revelations and His Messenger that you were mocking?’ Make no excuses. You have disbelieved after you had believed. If We pardon a party of you, We shall torment another party because they were criminals.”* The verse emphasized the gravity of their deed. Their deed brought them back to disbelief after they had adopted Islam. The verse warned them of the grievous punishment that awaits those of them who did not repent.

*“The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike; they enjoin evil and forbid good and withhold their hands; they have forsaken God, so He has forsaken them; indeed, the hypocrites are the transgressors. God promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and the disbelievers the fire of Hell. Therein shall they dwell. It will suffice them. God cursed them and theirs is a lasting torment.”* All hypocrites share the same characteristics and they have the same nature. They behave in deceptive ways. They are afraid to look people in the eye and say exactly what they actually believe in. They encourage evil and discourage good deeds. They are stingy unless they want to show off. They forgot God, and God will forget them. They are truly transgressors. They have transgressed the limits of faith. They have been cursed and destined to Hell fire.

The Quran reminded the hypocrites with previous generations who behaved similarly. The Qur’an warned them that they will meet the same fate, *“As in the case of those before you, they were mightier than you in power and more flourishing in wealth and children. They had their portion of enjoyment and you had yours, as did those before you; and you indulged in idle talk as they did. Such are they whose deeds are fruitless in this world and in the Hereafter, and it is they who are the losers.”* God bestowed on those who came before them power and children to test them. Those who were afraid of God spent their wealth in God’s way. They showed their gratitude for the bounty that God bestowed on them by raising their children to obey God. But those who forgot the source of the blessings and the power they received became arrogant. Their deeds were all in vain and they lost everything.

*“Have they never heard the stories of those who came before them? - The People of Noah, ‘Ad, and Thamud; the people of Abraham, the people of Madyan, and the cities overthrown. Their messengers came to them with clear signs. God would have never wronged them, but they wronged their own souls.”* The verse narrates the examples of people who were destroyed before, Noah’s people who perished in the flood, the tribe of ‘Ad who were destroyed with severe wind, the tribe of Thamud who met their death as a result of the loud scream, the tribe of Madyan who were destroyed in an earth quake, and others. The Quran wonders at the heedlessness of people who knew about these stories. God did not wrong them. It is they that wronged themselves by being heedless. They were blinded by their power and wealth and forgot that these were means that God used to test them. So, they failed the test.

Opposite to those who were heedless, stand the true believers, *“The Believers, men and women, are protecting guardians of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil; they establish regular prayers and pay the prescribed alms; and they obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy on them. God is Eminent, Wise.”* The verse describes the believers as *“protecting guardians”* of one another while the previous verse which talked about the hypocrites said, *“The hypocrite men and hypocrite women are all alike;”* Offering protection to one another requires a noble character which is bent on courage and sacrifice. Such attributes are part of the character of a believer. Hypocrites are usually lacking in this area. The believers are engaged in enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. Such actions require a united front which is formed by the believers who stand side by side each others. They establish prayers and pay the prescribed poor due and obey God. They follow the commands of God and His Messenger (PBUH) and they are happy with whatever God and His Messenger (PBUH) decree for them. They will gain the mercy of God. Mercy is not meant to be in the Hereafter only, but it will engulf the believers in this life as well. The believers enjoy four attributes: they enjoin what is right, they forbid what is evil, they establish prayers, and they pay the prescribed poor due. The hypocrites, on the other hand, have four opposing attributes: they enjoin what is evil, they forbid what is good, they forget God, and they are stingy. God is able to bestow His honour on the believers and He is wise in timing this honour.

The reward for the believers are then stated, *“God promised the believers, men and women, gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of God. That is the supreme felicity.”*

*“Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell, an evil destination indeed.”* The Messenger was quite lenient in dealing with the hypocrites. This verse commanded him to change his strategy in dealing with the hypocrites. The verse combined the hypocrites and the disbelievers in one category. Leniency did not work with the hypocrites so it was time to try another strategy.

The hypocrites had a long history of trying to hurt the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers, *“They swear by God that they said nothing (evil), but indeed they uttered the word of disbelief, and they did disbelieve after they accepted Islam. They meditated a plot which they were unable to carry out. They were not resentful except (for the fact) that God and His messenger had enriched them of His bounty. So, if they repent it will be better for them; and if they turn away, God will afflict them with a painful torment in the world and the Hereafter, and they have no protecting guardian nor a helper on earth.”* They were never ill treated by Muslims, so why were they bent on hurting the Muslims? Were they angry because they were given their share of the wealth that the Muslims gained? However, God gave them another chance for repentance. Those who forfeited this chance will suffer great torment in this life as well as in the Hereafter.

The verses continued to describe examples of the hypocrites, *“And of them is he who made a covenant with God (saying), ‘If He gives us of His bounty we will certainly spend in charity and become of the righteous.’ But when He bestowed of His bounty on them, they became niggardly, and turned back (from their covenant), averse. He penalized them with hypocrisy in their hearts, (to last) till the Day whereon they shall meet Him - because they broke their covenant with God, and because they lied (again and again).”* Of them were those who asked God of His bounty, promising God that they if He bestows His bounty on them they would be generous to the needy. However, when God responded favourably to their request and provided them with His bounty, they reneged on their promise. Hypocrisy took hold of their hearts as a result of reneging on their promise to God. Reneging on the promise is one of the signs of hypocrisy. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“A hypocrite has three attributes: He lies when he talks, he reneges on his promise when he makes a promise, and he betrays the trust when he is entrusted with a trust.”*

*“Do they not know that God knows their secret (thoughts) and their secret counsel, and that God knows well all things unseen?”* They should have known that God knows what is in their hearts. Did they really, thought that they can keep a secret from God?

*“Those who criticize the believers who give freely to charity and those who can find nothing to give except the fruits of their labour, so they mock them. God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.”* Ibn Jareer narrated a story, on the authority of E’kremah (RA), about an event that occurred before the revelation of this verse. He said, *“The Messenger (PBUH) urged the believers to provide financial support for the army going to the battle of Tabuk. Abd El-Rahman bin A’wf (RA) contributed half his wealth and kept the other half as a provision for his family. The Prophet (PBUH) said, ‘God bless what you contributed and what you kept.’ Another man by the name of Abu O’kael (RA) contributed half the date that he had and kept the other half for his family. The hypocrites scoffed at these contributions saying, ‘Ibn A’wf’s (RA) contribution is only a show off and Abu O’kael’s (RA) contribution is trivial.”* The verse responded to their mocking, *“God will mock them and they shall have a painful torment.”*

*“Ask (Muhammad) God to forgive them, or do not. If you ask seventy times for their forgiveness, God will not forgive them. This is because they disbelieved in God and His Messenger. God guides not the transgressors.”* Their destiny has been sealed. There is no use for asking God to forgive them because they have already gone too far and there is no hope that they will return back to the straight path. The number “seventy” is a number which indicates a multitude in the Arabic language and should not be taken literally.

The theme changes to address the case of those who remained behind, *“Those who were left behind (during the Tabuk expedition) rejoiced at sitting still behind the Messenger of God. They hated to strive and fight, with their wealth and their persons, in the cause of God. They said, ‘Do not go forth in the heat.’ Say, ‘The fire of Hell is more intense in heat.’ If only they could understand.”* Those are the people whose love for a comfortable life and their greed kept them from joining the ranks of the believers in fighting their enemy. Their hearts were void of faith and they did not have the spirit to fight. They said to each other, *“Do not go forth in the heat.”*

Tell them, *“The fire of Hell is more intense in heat.”* Their happiness will be short lived and soon they will be recompensed for what they had done, *“Let them laugh a little (then) weep much. This is the recompense they earned for the (evil) that they did.”* They will laugh in this life for a few days but they will weep in the Hereafter forever. They will receive a reward commensurate with their deeds.

*“If God should return you to a party of them, and they ask your permission to go out (with you), say, ‘Never shall you go out with me, nor fight an enemy with me. Indeed, you preferred to sit still on the first occasion. Then sit you (now) with those who lag behind.’”* Those were people who were not worthy of joining the ranks of the believers because of their weak will and lack of commitment. They forfeited their right to be treated honourably when they die, *“And never (Muhammad) pray for one of them who dies nor stand by his grave. They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors.”* There are narratives which relate this verse to specific incidents. However, the verse states a general rule. It indicated that honor should be bestowed only on those who work hard and are committed to the Muslim nation at the time of need. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded not to perform funeral prayers for the hypocrites because, *“They disbelieved in God and His messenger, and they died while they were transgressors.”*

*“Let not their wealth nor their children impress you. God intends to punish them with these things in the world, and that their souls may perish while they are disbelievers.”* Being impressed with their wealth or children is a recognition that they did not deserve.

*“When a Sura is revealed, enjoining them to believe in God and to strive along with His Messenger, those with wealth and influence among them ask you for exemption saying, ‘Leave us (behind). We would be with those who sit (at home).’ They preferred to be with those who remain behind (at home). A seal was set on their hearts so they understand not. But the Messenger, and those who believed with him, strived with their wealth and their persons. For them are all the good things and it is they who will be successful. God prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein. That is the supreme triumph.”* Whenever a Sura came to command the believers to strive in the way of God, those who have the means to fight came seeking an exemption. They were happy to be left behind with the women and children who do not fight. They did not feel any shame that their delinquency became apparent because they had no appreciation of the pride of being part of a striving force. On the other hand, the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers with him strived very hard with their wealth and their selves. They carried the burden and performed the duty entrusted to them. They will reap the best results in this life and in the Hereafter. They will be honoured in this life and they will have the great reward in the Hereafter.

*“And those among the wandering Arabs who had excuses came in order that permission might be granted them. And those who lied to God and His messenger sat at home. A painful torment will fall on those of them who disbelieved.”* Those who had legitimate reasons for seeking exemption not to fight, their reasons were accepted. But those who had no legitimate reasons

only told a lie. Those among them who had disbelieved will suffer grievous torment.

*“There is no blame on those who are infirm, or ill, or who find no resources to spend (on the cause), if they are sincere (in duty) to God and His Messenger. No ground (of complaint) can there be against such as do right; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Nor (is there blame) on those who came to you to be provided with mounts, you said, ‘I can find no mounts for you,’ they turned back, their eyes streaming with tears of grief that they could not find the means to spend.’* Neither the weak, the elderly, nor the ill who were unable to bear arms were to be blamed for not joining the Muslim army in its expedition. No blame also should fall on those who were able to fight but could not afford an animal to ride on. These were sincere in their wish to help in God’s cause. They felt bad for their inability to provide such help. It was narrated that Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“A group of people came to the Prophet (PBUH) asking for rides so that they can fight with the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) told them that he had no rides for them. They left crying and feeling sad they were unable to join the expedition. It was then that this verse was revealed to accept their excuse.”*

### **Verses: 93 to 96**

93. *Indeed, there is grounds for a complaint against those who claim exemption while they are rich. They preferred to stay with those who remained behind. God has placed a seal over their hearts so that they do not know.*
94. *They will make excuses to you (Muslims) when you return back to them. Say, “Make no excuse, for we shall not believe you. God has informed us of your news. God and His Messenger will observe your deeds, and then you will be brought back to Him who knows the unseen as well as the seen, and He will tell you what you used to do.*
95. *They will swear to you by God, when you return to them, that you would leave them alone. So leave them alone. They are indeed an abomination, and their refuge is Hell as a reward for what they used to earn.*
96. *They will swear to you, that you may be pleased with them but if you are pleased with them, God is not pleased with the transgressing folk. (9: 93 – 96)*

*“The ground (of complaint) is against only those who claim exemption while they are rich. They preferred to stay with those who remained behind. God has sealed their hearts so they do not know.”* The verse states that only those who could afford, both physically and financially, to fight with the Muslim army but chose to stay behind are the one who deserve to be rebuked. They had no real excuse that prevented them to join the army but they were delinquent in the fulfilment of their duty. For these reasons God sealed upon their hearts. God told His Messenger (PBUH) on the way back from the expedition how those who remained behind will continue to make excuses and how he should respond to them, *“They will make excuses to you (Muslims) when you return back to them. Say, ‘Make no excuse, for we shall not believe you. God has informed us of your news. God and His messenger will observe your deeds, and then you will be brought back to Him who knows the unseen as well as the seen, and He will tell you what you used to do.’”* Nothing can be kept secret from God. He knows your secret intentions.

*“They will swear to you by God, when you return to them, that you would leave them alone. So leave them alone. They are indeed an abomination, and their abode is hell as a reward for what they used to earn.”* The verse continued to tell the Prophet (PBUH) about the hypocrites. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to turn away from them because they are an abomination. They are destined to Hell fire; this is a result that they gained because of their deeds.

*“They will swear to you, that you may be pleased with them but if you are pleased with them, God is not pleased with the transgressing folk.”* They started by asking the Muslims to forgive them, they will ask for Muslims’ acceptance to secure their safety in the Muslim community. They were hoping that the Muslims would continue to take what they say at its face value as they used to do before. However, this verse came with the final decree regarding these hypocrites. They were transgressors because they stayed behind. God is not pleased with them because He does not like those who are transgressors.

## **Verses: 97 to 110**

97. *The wandering Arabs are worst in disbelief and hypocrisy and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which God has revealed to His messenger; and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
98. *Some of the wandering Arabs consider what they spend as a loss and wait for an (evil) turn of fortune for you. The evil turn of fortune will be theirs; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
99. *But some of the wandering Arabs believe in God and the Last Day, and consider what they spend as pious gifts bringing them nearer to God and receiving the blessings of the Messenger. Indeed, their gifts bring them nearer (to Him); God will admit them to His Mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
100. *God is pleased with the forerunners (in faith) of the emigrants (who migrated from Mecca) and the supporters (inhabitants of Medina) and those who followed them in good deeds; as they are well pleased with Him. He prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein for ever. That is the supreme triumph.*
101. *And among those around you of the wandering Arabs, there are hypocrites; and among the townspeople of Medina (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy. You (Muhammad) do not know them, We know them. We will torment them twice; then they will be relegated to grievous torment.*
102. *And (there are) others who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
103. *Take from their wealth a charity, wherewith you may cleanse and purify them, and pray for them. Your prayer will be a source for comfort for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
104. *Do they not know that God accepts repentance from His servants and receives their charity? God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.*
105. *And say (Prophet), “Act,” God will observe your deeds, and His Messenger, and the believers. Soon you will be brought back to Him who knows what is seen and what is unseen, and He will tell you what you used to do.*

106. *There are (yet) others who await God's decree, whether He will torment them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
107. *And there are those who chose a place of worship to cause harm and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who fought against God and His Messenger aforetime. They will certainly swear, "We only intended the best." God bears witness that they are indeed liars.*
108. *Never stand (to pray) there. A place of worship which was founded upon God consciousness from the first day is more worthy for you to stand (to pray) therein, wherein are men who love to purify themselves. God loves those who purify themselves.*
109. *Is he who founded his building upon God consciousness and His good pleasure better; or he who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling, overhanging precipice so that it toppled with him into the fire of Hell? God guides not the wrongdoing folk.*
110. *The building which they built will never cease to be a source of doubt in their hearts until their hearts are torn to pieces; God is Omniscient, Wise. (9:97-110)*

This section of the Sura provides a description of the different groups which constituted the Muslim community at the time when the battle of Tabuk took place. The first group of people were the wandering Arabs who lived around the city of Medina. These Arabs used to attack the Muslims in Medina but later they accepted Islam. The verse described the nature of this group, *"The wandering Arabs are stronger in disbelief and hypocrisy, and more likely to be ignorant of the limits which God has revealed to His messenger; and God is Omniscient, Wise."* These tribes lived an isolated life in the desert with little interaction with the civil society in Medina. They had little chance to learn from the Messenger of God (PBUH). They lived a tough life dominated by material values. The harshness of the character of the wandering Arabs is the subject of many old anecdotes.

After this general statement about the original characteristic of the wandering Arabs, the verse describes how Islam changed some of them while it failed to change others. *"Some of the wandering Arabs consider what they spend as a loss and await for an (evil) turn of fortune for you. The evil turn of fortune will be theirs; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."* This was the group that reluctantly accepted Islam motivated by greed. They neither wanted to contribute to the community, nor did they care for the welfare of this community. They hated the duties that were ordained for the Muslims: paying the poor due and striving in God's cause. They bemoaned the fact that they had to spend in the way of God and considered the money they spent a loss. They had ill wishes for the Muslims and wanted them to be defeated. God hears what they say and knows what they do.

But the hearts of some of the wandering Arabs were touched by Islam, *"But some of the wandering Arabs believe in God and the Last Day, and consider what they spend as pious gifts bringing them nearer to God and obtaining the prayers of the Messenger. Indeed, they (their gifts) bring them nearer (to Him); God will admit them to His Mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* They accepted Islam motivated by true belief in God and the Last Day. These people considered spending in the way of God a means for pleasing God and seeking His

nearness. They aspired for the Messenger's (PBUH) prayers as a sign for the acceptance of their deeds. God will forgive them and admit them to His mercy. The verse visualizes God's mercy as a home to which they would be admitted.

*“God is pleased with the first forerunners (in faith) of the emigrants (who migrated from Mecca) and the supporters (inhabitants of Medina) and those who followed them in good deeds; as they are well pleased with Him. He prepared for them gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever. That is the supreme triumph.”* The verse mentions the three categories of Muslims who constituted the strong foundation of the Muslim community in Arabia after the conquest of Mecca. There are many interpretations given for the term “first forerunners,” but we think that most probably it refers to those who accepted Islam before the battle of Badr. God will reward the first forerunners as well as those who followed in their footsteps by bestowing His pleasure on them. God's pleasure is the greatest reward. They will also be pleased with their Lord. Their pleasure emanates from their feelings of security under God's care, their trust in Him, their acceptance of His decrees, their gratitude for His blessings, and their perseverance during times of trial. The term “pleasure” conveys a comprehensive meaning of contentment that shapes the relationship between them and God. It is a great honour for them that they were allowed to engage in such a relationship with their Lord. This is truly the supreme triumph.

In contrast to those who will win the supreme triumph, there was another group, *“And among those around you of the wandering Arabs there are hypocrites, and among the townspeople of Medina (there are some who) persist in hypocrisy. You (Muhammad) do not know them, We know them. We will torment them twice; then they will be relegated to grievous torment.”* The verse warned the Prophet (PBUH) of a group of the hypocrites who excelled in the practice of hypocrisy to the extent that even the Prophet (PBUH) did not recognize their true colors. But, God knows them and He will foil their plots. They will be punished twice in this life: a punishment which they will suffer as a result of living in fear that their plot will be discovered, and a second punishment at the hands of the angels who will come to capture their souls at the time of death.

There was yet a third group, *“who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The verse commanded the Prophet (PBUH) to deal with this group in a specific way which indicates that they were known to him. They were the people who did not join the Muslim army in the battle of Tabuk, but later recognized their sin and repented. Ibn Gareer said that *“It may be that God will relent toward them”* implies that God will forgive them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to *“Take from their wealth a charity, wherewith you may purify them and may make them grow, and pray for them. Your prayer will be a source for comfort for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.”* They regretted what they had done and repented so, God gave them hope and filled their hearts with comfort. God listens and knows.



*“Do they not know that God does accept repentance from His servants and receives their charity? God is verily the Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.”* This is a rhetorical question. They should know that God accepts the repentance of His slaves, receives their charity, and forgives them.

The Islamic project is based on a creed that should be manifested in the deeds of the believers. *“And say (Prophet), ‘Act,’ God will observe your deeds, and His Messenger, and the Believers. Soon you will be brought back to Him who knows what is seen and unseen, and He will tell you what you used to do.”* The sign that shows the truth of their repentance is if they act upon their words. In this life, their deeds will be seen by God, His Messenger, and all the believers. But in the Hereafter, It is God who will judge their deeds; He knows their actions as well as the secrets of their hearts. It is not enough to regret one’s sin and to express repentance but it is important to act accordingly. Islam provides a plan for a realistic way of life. Good intentions have to be confirmed with appropriate deeds.

The last group mentioned in these verses is a group whose fate had not been decreed by God yet, *“There are (yet) others who await God's decree, whether He will torment them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* This was a group of people who did not participate in the battle of Tabuk but they were not among the other groups described above.

*“And there are those who chose a place of worship to cause harm and disbelief, and in order to cause dissent among the believers, and as an outpost for those who fought against God and His messenger aforetime. They will certainly swear, ‘We only intended the best.’ God bears witness that they are indeed liars.”* The verse narrates an event contemporaneous to the battle of Tabuk. Ibn Katheer mentioned in his interpretation of Quran that, *“One of the chiefs of the tribe of Khazraj by the name of Abu A’mer El-Raheb who had embraced Christianity resented the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina and became the head of the Medinian government. When the Prophet (PBUH) called him to Islam, he refused and decided to move from Medina to join the idolaters of Mecca in their war against the Muslims. Abu A’mer then approached the Roman king to move against Muhammad (PBUH). The Roman king was agreeable. Abo A’mer wrote to his followers in Medina, in anticipation of the Roman expedition against the Muslims in Medina, to build a place to be used as his headquarters upon his victory over the Muslims. Abo A’mer’s followers established a building which looked like a Mosque near the Mosque of Qibaa. They were able to finish the building just before the battle of Tabuk had started. They came to the Prophet (PBUH) asking him to bless their Mosque with his prayers. However, the Prophet (PBUH) was already on his route to Tabuk so he said to them that he will do that after he comes back from Tabuk. On his way back from Tabuk, the Prophet (PBUH) received a revelation disclosing the plan of the hypocrites and their collusion with Abu A’mer. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded one of his companions to destroy the mosque.”* This was the story of the mosque that was built to be a base for hypocrites who wanted to hurt the believers.

*“Never stand (to pray) there. A place of worship which was founded upon God consciousness from the first day is more worthy for you to stand (to pray) therein, wherein are men who love to*

*purify themselves. God loves those who purify themselves. Is he who founded his building upon God consciousness and His good pleasure better; or he who founded his building on the brink of a crumbling, overhanging precipice so that it toppled with him into the fire of Hell? God guides not the wrongdoing folk. The building which they built will never cease to be a source of doubt in their hearts until their hearts are torn to pieces. God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The verses paint a dynamic image of two buildings side by side. One of the buildings is well established on a strong foundation, while the other is built on an overhanging edge that has no support. The overhanging edge very quickly gave way and the building that it carried fell into Hell fire. The destruction of the building left traces of doubt into their hearts. These doubts will linger forever in their hearts depriving them of safety and security.

## **Verses: 111 to 129**

111. *Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their persons and their wealth in return for paradise. They fight in God’s cause, and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more faithful to his covenant than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme triumph.*
112. *(The believers are) those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God’s cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God; and give glad tidings to the believers.*
113. *It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for the idolaters, even though they may be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the Fire.*
114. *The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to God, he (Abraham) disowned him. Abraham was soft hearted, forbearing.*
115. *And God will not mislead a people after He had guided them, until He had made clear to them what they should avoid. God has knowledge of all things.*
116. *Indeed, to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He takes it. You have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper besides God.*
117. *God has forgiven the Prophet, the migrants (Muhajirin) and the supporters (Ansar) who followed him in the time of distress, after the hearts of a group of them had nearly swerved aside; then He turned to them (also) in mercy. He is to them All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
118. *And (He also forgave) the three who were left behind, when the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for them, and their own souls were straitened for them till they knew for certain that there is no refuge from God except with Him. Then turned He to them in mercy that they (too) might turn (repentant to Him); God, He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*
119. *You who believe, be conscious of God and be with the truthful.*

120. *It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the wandering Arabs of the neighbourhood, to refuse to follow God's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his. Nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness - whether they suffered thirst, fatigue, or hunger in the cause of God, or they trod paths to raise the ire of the disbelievers, or received any injury from an enemy. Certainly, God does not waste the reward of those who do good.*
121. *Nor do they spend anything (for the cause) - small or great- nor cut across a valley, but the deed is recorded to their credit so that God may reward them the best (possible reward).*
122. *And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every company of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware.*
123. *You who believe, fight the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find harshness in you, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him.*
124. *Whenever a Sura is revealed, there are some of them who say, "Which one of you has this increased his faith? As for those who believe, it has increased them in faith and they rejoice.*
125. *But those in whose hearts is a disease, it will add wickedness to their wickedness, and they die while they are disbelievers.*
126. *Do they not see that they are tested once or twice every year? Yet they do neither turn in repentance, nor do they take heed.*
127. *And whenever a Sura is revealed, they look at each other (as if to say), "Does anybody see you?" Then they turn away. God turned away their hearts because they are a folk who do not understand.*
128. *Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering. He is full of concern for you; to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful.*
129. *But if they turn away, say (Muhammad), "God suffices me. There is no deity but He. In Him I put my trust. He is the Lord of the Supreme Throne." (9:111-129)*

*"Indeed, God has purchased from the believers their persons and their wealth in return for paradise. They fight in God's cause, and shall slay and be slain. It is a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more faithful to his covenant than God? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme triumph. The believers are) those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God's cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God; and give the glad tidings to the believers." I have heard and read these verses numerous times while reciting, memorizing and studying the Quran for more than twenty-five years. Yet, only when I read this text during writing this book that I understood meanings that I did not understand before. It is a tremendous text. It reveals the nature of the relationship between the believers and God and the nature of the oath of allegiance that the believers made to God. Only those who made that oath of allegiance*

are true believers. Through this oath of allegiance, which God by His grace called “purchase,” the believers gave up all rights to their persons and their wealth and devoted them solely to God. They have given up all rights to their persons and their wealth so, they have no right to dispose of any of them in any way except as God ordains. He had bought their wealth and their persons and thus, He acquired the sole right to dispose of them as He wishes. Those who sold their souls and their wealth no longer had any right to argue or contest how they are being disposed of. The price that they will receive for their bargain is paradise; the road to paradise is striving and fighting; and the end result is either victory or martyrdom.

The believers sold their persons and their wealth to God. It is by God’s grace that He decreed a price for this merchandise. It is by the Grace of God that He honoured the believers and allowed them to have the will to sell their persons and their wealth. God bestowed on humankind the right and ability to engage in contracts. Humankind was honoured by the ability to engage in a contract with God Himself. The fulfilment of the contract of God is a criterion that differentiates humans and beasts, *“The worst of creatures in the sight of God are those who reject Him. They will not believe. The ones with whom you made a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they are not conscious of God.”* (8:55-56) I was awed by these words. It is a great responsibility. It is an obligation for each one of those who call themselves Muslims, who abandoned striving in the way of God allowing tyrants to rule the earth.

The early Muslims used to listen to the words of Quran and act upon them. It was narrated that Abd Allah bin Rawaha (RA) said to the Prophet (PBUH), during the deliberations that preceded the Oath of Allegiance of ‘Aqaba, *“Tell us the terms of the oath of allegiance that would satisfy you and your Lord.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“I ask you to serve my Lord alone and do not associate partners with Him and I ask for your protection the same way you protect yourselves and your wealth.”* Ibn Rawaha (RA) said, *“If we do this, what do we get in return?”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Paradise.”* Ibn Rawaha (RA) said, *“This is a profitable bargain. We will keep our part of the deal.”*

This is God’s covenant, *“And who is more faithful to his covenant than God?”* which He made in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran. The original Torah and Gospel are no longer available. The present texts have suffered many changes. However, the old Testament still has references to the obligation of striving in the way of God but there are no similar references in the Gospel.

Striving in the way of God is not simply an impulse to fight. It is a duty that is based on a solid foundation of faith. Faith is a combination of feelings, high morals, ethical behaviour, and actions. Those who strive in the way of God are, *“those who turn (to God) in repentance, who serve Him, who praise Him, who wander in devotion in God’s cause, who bow down, who prostrate themselves in prayer, who enjoin good, who forbid evil, and who observe the limits set by God.”* They regret their previous sins and they seek God’s forgiveness. They have the strong conviction to abandon bad practices and purify themselves. They serve God alone, never associating partners with Him. They praise God. Their hearts beat with the gratitude to God. Their tongue continuously utter God’s praises, both in secret and in the open, whether rich or poor.

There are different interpretations of the expression that has been translated here as “*who wander in devotion in God’s cause.*” Some say the expression refers to those who migrate. Some say it refers to those who strive in God’s cause. Others say, it refers to those who travel seeking knowledge. Still others say, it refers to those who fast. We are of the opinion that it refers to those who contemplate God’s creation. They are those who were mentioned in the verse, “*In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Those who celebrate the praises of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say, “Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain.” Glory be to You.*” (3: 190 – 191) This interpretation seems a logical extension of the other attributes of the believers which are mentioned in these verses. Repentance, worshiping God, and showing gratitude to Him lead to the contemplation about the wonders of the creation of God. Through contemplation they gain knowledge of the purpose of God’s creation which helps them build a better life on this earth.

The verse continues to list the attributes of the believers; those who bow and prostrate in prayers; those who enjoin good and forbid evil; and those who observe the limits set by God. These are the attributes of the believers who made an oath of allegiance with God and who sold their persons and their wealth for a place in paradise.

“*It is not fitting, for the Prophet and those who believe, that they should pray for forgiveness for the idolaters, even though they may be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the Fire.*” It seems that some Muslims used to pray God to forgive their parents who were idolaters. They also used to ask the Prophet (PBUH) to pray God to forgive their parents. The verse was revealed to command the Muslims to cease asking for forgiveness for their relatives who were still, or who died while, being idolaters. The bond of faith takes precedent over the blood bond.

“*The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to God he (Abraham) disowned him. Abraham was soft hearted, forbearing.*” Prophet’s Abraham (PBUH) request for forgiveness for his father should not be taken as a precedent. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) wanted his father to believe, however, when his father died while being an idolater, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) stopped praying God to forgive him.

When the believers heard the previous two verses, they were worried that they had committed a sin by asking God to forgive their idolatrous parents. So, the next verse was revealed to assure the believers that God does not pass laws retroactively, “*And God will not mislead a people after He had guided them, until He had made clear to them what they should avoid. God has knowledge of all things.*” God will take people to task only after He had made things clear to them. God had made this religion a religion of ease. God stated what is allowable and what is forbidden. There were things which were not mentioned in either category. God did not forget them, but they were left out deliberately to make things easy for people. We should accept God’s mercy gratefully.

“*Indeed to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He gives life and He takes it.*”

*You have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper besides God.*” God has control over wealth, souls, heavens, earth, life, death, protection, and victory. The most important relationship that we need to maintain is our relationship with God. The main theme that these verses emphasized over and over again is that the faith bond is the real bond between people. It takes precedence over blood relationships.

*“God has forgiven the Prophet, the migrants (Muhajirin) and the supporters (Ansar) who followed him in the time of distress, after the hearts of a group of them had nearly swerved aside; then He turned to them (also) in mercy. He is to them the All-Pitying, Giver of Merc.”* God’s forgiveness of the Prophet (PBUH) may be understood in the context of an earlier verse which referred to the permission that some of the strong wealthy Muslims requested in order not to participate in the battle of Tabuk and the Prophet (PBUH) gave them the permission they requested, *“God forgave you (Muhammad), why did you grant them leave before it had become clear to you those who spoke the truth and you had known the liars?” (9:43)* The forgiveness that God bestowed on the migrants and the supporters was for the sin which some of the sincere believers committed by being slothful in joining the army going to the battle of Tabuk but later they joined the army.

It may be better to describe the atmosphere during which the battle took place and some of the details leading to the battle, which was nick-named the “hour of adversity,” so that we can appreciate the feelings of the Muslims and the dynamics of the situation. The following is a summary that is based on the books by Ibn Hesham, Ibn Katheer and Al-Maqreezi. The Prophet (PBUH) started the preparation for fighting the Romans upon the receipt of the verse, *“Fight those who disbelieve in God and the Last Day, who forbid not that which God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Scripture, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.” (9:29)* This was at the beginning of the summer when people were ready to harvest the fruits from the fields. It was also the time during which the Arabs liked to stay in the shade of their gardens to avoid the scorching heat of the desert. The Prophet (PBUH) used to keep the objectives of his expeditions confidential, but this time he announced the destination of the expedition. Some of the hypocrites came to seek his permission for not joining the army and he gave them his permission. The hypocrites said to each other do not go forth in the heat. They schemed together to demoralize the believers and to weaken their spirits so that they would not go with the expedition. The Prophet (PBUH) urged the believers to support the expedition. Muslims responded favourably. Notable among those who made great contributions was ‘Uthman bin ‘Afan (RA). It is narrated that he paid a thousand Dinar. The Prophet (PBUH) prayed God to bless ‘Uthman (RA). Some Muslims wanted to join the army but could not afford the rides. They asked the Prophet (PBUH) to provide them with rides, but he was not able to secure rides for them. These sincere Muslims went away with eyes welling with tears when they realized that they will not be able to join the army. Finally, an army of thirty thousand people was ready to go forth. A group of Muslims had sincere intentions to join the army but for one reason or another were not prompt in joining the army, so they were left behind. Some of the people in this group were K’ab bin Malek (RA), Mararah bin El-Rabi’ (RA), Helal bin Umaiya (RA), Abu Khaithamah (RA) and ‘Umair El-Jamhi (RA). As the army went forth, people started to fall behind. Some were deserters but others could not keep up with the moving army. The first deserters were a group of hypocrites under the leadership of ‘Abd Allah bin Saloul, the chief of

hypocrites. One of those who fell behind was Abu Zar El-Ghafary (RA). Abu Zar's camel could not keep up with the army, so Abu Zar (RA) abandoned his camel and continued the trip walking until he joined the army again. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"May God have mercy on Abu Zar. He was a loner when he walked, he will be a loner when he dies and when he will be resurrected."* Abu Khaithamah (RA) regretted his tardiness, so he decided to embark of a trip to join the army, which he did.

This was the story of the "hour of adversity." The Muslims who remained behind were divided into three groups. The first group were the hypocrites. The second group were, *"those who have admitted their sins. They mixed a righteous deed with another that was bad. It may be that God will relent toward them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* God forgave them. The third group were those, *"who await God's decree, whether He will punish them or will forgive them. God is Omniscient, Wise."* Before we discuss the verse, let us hear their story as narrated by one of them. K'ab bin Malek (RA) said, "I always participated in the expeditions that the Prophet (PBUH) led, except for the battles of Badr and Tabuk. No one was rebuked for missing the expedition to Badr because the Prophet (PBUH) did not make it mandatory for Muslims to participate. I pledged my allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) at 'Aqaba. This was a great day for me. When the Prophet (PBUH) decided to lead an army to fight the Romans, he urged the Muslims to get ready and join the army. I was in my best shape both physically and financially. However, I procrastinated until the army departed Medina. A huge number of the Muslims joined the army. Many thought that they would not be missed if they remained behind because there was no record for those who volunteered. The Prophet (PBUH) enquired about me when he reached Tabuk. They told him that I was delinquent. When I heard that the Prophet (PBUH) returned to Medina, I went to see him. I thought about ways to explain my delinquency. I finally decided that the best way to deal with this is to tell the truth. Those who remained behind came to the Prophet (PBUH) and offered their excuses and he accepted their excuses and asked God to forgive them. When he saw me, he said, 'Come here. Why did you remain behind? Did you not buy a camel for the expedition?' I said, 'Messenger of God, if it were anyone other than you I would have made excuses. But I don't want to make a false excuse and later you become angry with me. I will tell you the truth. I did not have any excuse to miss the expedition. I was physically and financially able to join your expedition.' The Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, 'He is telling the truth.' Then he said to me, 'Wait for God's judgement.' Some of the brothers from Bani Salamah rebuked me for not making an excuse like the others. I asked them, 'Did anyone else approach the Prophet (PBUH) the same way I did? They said, 'Yes. Mararah bin El-Rabi' (RA) and Helal bn Omaiya (RA).' These were two of the men who participated in Badr and I always looked up to them. The Prophet (PBUH) commanded the Muslims to boycott the three of us. Suddenly, everything was different. This continued for about fifty days. During this time, the other two stayed home, but I used to go the Mosque to pray and go to the market but people ignored me and no one ever spoke to me. I used to watch the Prophet (PBUH) to see if he would relent. One day, while I was in the Market a man approached me with a message from the king of Ghassan. The message was an invitation to abandon Islam and join the king's court. I said to myself, 'This is a real trial.' I burned the message. After forty days of boycott had passed, I received a message from the Prophet (PBUH) commanding me to separate from my wife. I asked whether this meant that I should divorce her. They said no, but you should not have intimate relationship with her.

On the fiftieth day of the boycott, after I prayed Fajr, I heard someone bringing me glad tidings. I realized that I was forgiven and prostrated myself in gratitude to God. I gave the person who brought me the glad tidings my dress as a gift. I went to see the Prophet (PBUH) at the Mosque. On my way to Mosque many people offered their congratulations. Upon my arrival at the Mosque, I saw the Prophet (PBUH) sitting with a group of his companions. Talha bin 'Ubaid (RA) was among them, when he saw me he rose hurriedly to welcome and congratulate me. This was something that I cherished and I loved him for it. I saw that the Prophet (PBUH) was quite pleased, when I greeted him he said to me, 'Rejoice, this is the best day that you have ever seen since you were born.' I asked him, 'Is this your decision? Or is it God's forgiveness?' He said, 'It is God's forgiveness.' I said, 'Messenger of God, I would like to confirm my repentance by giving away all my wealth as a charity in the way of God.' The Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Keep some of your wealth. This would be better for you.' I said, 'I will keep my share that I received from the Khaiber. Messenger of God, God saved because I told the truth. I vow to tell the truth as long as I live.' I never told a lie deliberately since I made this vow."

This story shows the depth of the meaning of the verse, "*when the earth, vast as it is, was straitened for them,*" what is the meaning of "the earth"? Is it not the people, the morals, and the relationships? Then, "*their own souls were straitened for them,*" as if their souls were crowded in a tight place. And, "*till they knew for certain that there is no refuge from God except with Him.*" Is there any place to go to other than God? But then came the deliverance, "*then turned He unto them in mercy that they (too) might turn (repentant unto Him); God, He is the Ever-Relenting, the Giver of Mercy.*"

"*You who believe, be conscious of God and be with the truthful.*" The people of Medina were the ones who supported Islam, and welcomed the Prophet (PBUH) in their city. They were the solid foundation upon which Islam was supported. It was not befitting for them to be indolent when the call to fight was proclaimed. They were then called upon to be among those who are truthful to their faith and their messenger. "*It was not fitting for the people of Medina and the wandering Arabs of the neighbourhood, to refuse to follow God's Messenger, nor to prefer their own lives to his. Nothing could they suffer or do, but was reckoned to their credit as a deed of righteousness - whether they suffered thirst, fatigue, or hunger in the cause of God, or they trod paths to raise the ire of the disbelievers, or received any injury from an enemy. Certainly, God does not waste the reward of those who do good. Nor do they spend anything (for the cause) - small or great - nor cut across a valley, but the deed is recorded to their credit so that God may reward them the best (possible reward).*" The verse provides a mild rebuke to remind the Muslims of their duty. Nothing is more painful for a believer than to be considered of those who prefer themselves over the Prophet (PBUH). This call is still valid today as it was valid then. God will reward them for each and every effort they make, difficulty they face, or money they spend. Each contribution, small or large, will be rewarded.

"*And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every company of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware.*" Not all the believers should go out to fight every time there is an expedition. They should be divided into groups and these groups should participate alternately in the different expeditions. The experience of being



in the army is part of the education of people. Those who go out with the army will understand the meaning of striving in God's way and they will receive practical training in the protocol of war. They can then teach the others when they return to their homes. Our opinion has origins in Ibn Abbas' (RA) interpretation; and agrees with the interpretation by Al-Hassan Al-Basri, as well as opinions made by Ibn Jareer and Ibn Katheer. Islam is a dynamic religion. A great deal of knowledge is gained by getting actively involved in the different aspects of life. Those who strive in the way of God will become most knowledgeable about the rules of striving in the way of God.

*"You who believe, fight the disbelievers who are near to you, and let them find firmness in you, and know that God is with those who are conscious of Him."* This was the strategy of the Prophet (PBUH) and the guided caliphs after him. They needed to secure the boundaries around the Muslims land. However, we understand that the text commands Muslims to go forth rather than engage the disbelievers only when they attack. We differ with those who place the condition that Muslims should not fight unless they are attacked first. The intention to fight the disbelievers should be made known to them before the war is waged. They should be given the choice of accepting Islam, paying the Jiziah, or fight. No war should be waged against any people who have a treaty with the Muslims unless they breach the treaty first.

*"Whenever a Sura is revealed, there are some of them who say, 'Which one of you has this increased in faith?' As for those who believe, it has increased them in faith and they rejoice."* Such query reflects a confused state of mind that doubts the value of the revelation and shows a lack of belief in its authenticity. The query is answered unequivocally, only the faith of those who believe will increase. *"But those in whose hearts is a disease, it will add wickedness to their wickedness, and they die while they are disbelievers."*

*"Do they not see that they are tested once or twice every year? Yet they neither turn in repentance nor do they take heed."* How many times they were tested but they did not benefit from these tests. They continue in their hypocritical ways, *"whenever a Sura is revealed, they look at each other (as if to say), 'Does anybody see you?' Then they turn away. God turned away their hearts because they are a folk who do not understand."*

Finally, the Sura ends with two verses which we believe were revealed in Medina. The two verses describe the Prophet's (PBUH) relationship with his people and his interest in their welfare. It is a timely reminder that the request to go forth in the heat of the summer was not motivated by a desire to make them suffer. The second verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to put his trust fully in his Lord when others turn away from him.

*"Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your suffering. He is full of concern for you; to the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful."* The verse announced that the Messenger was from "among them" to emphasize the deep and personal relationship between the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims. He is not only one of them

but he is also connected spiritually to them. He grieves when they suffer. He is keen on their welfare. He does not want them to suffer nor does he want them to be humiliated.

*“But if they turn away, say (Muhammad), ‘God suffices me. There is no deity but He. In Him I put my trust. He is the Lord of the Supreme Throne.’”* God is the Almighty, the King. He is the Lord of the Supreme throne. He is sufficient for those who seek refuge in Him. This is an appropriate ending for the Sura which talks about striving and fighting in the way of God.

## Sura 10: Yunus (Jonah)

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

We return once more to the Meccan Quran with its special atmosphere, its shadows, and its allusions after having lived with two Medinian Suras, Al-Anfal and Al-Tawba. Although the Meccan Quran enjoys the same general characteristics of the Quran as a whole, but it has its own specific features which enable it to express its main topics: the essence of God, the nature of the creation of God, and essence of the relationship between God and His creation. The Meccan Suras exhibit clearly the nature of pure faith and introduce people to their true God who deserves to be worshipped alone.

### Verses 1 to 25

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. These are the verses of the wise Book.*
2. *Is it a wonder for people that We have revealed to a man among them, that he should warn people; and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sure footing with their Lord? The disbelievers said, "This man is clearly a wizard."*
3. *Verily your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself firmly on the throne, governing all things. No intercessor (can plead with Him) except after His leave (has been obtained). This is God, your Lord so worship Him. Will you not take heed?*
4. *To Him you will all return. This is a true promise from God. It is He who begins the process of creation, and repeats it, that He may justly reward those who believe and do good deeds; but those who disbelieve will have boiling drink and painful torment, because they disbelieved.*
5. *It is He who made the sun a shining glory and the moon a light, and determined for it phases that you may know the number of years and the reckoning (of time). God did not create this except in truth. Thus, does He explain His signs in detail, for people who know.*
6. *Verily, in the alternation of the night and the day, and in all that God has created, in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who are conscious of Him.*
7. *Certainly, those who do not expect to meet with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of this world, and those who are heedless of Our signs,*
8. *Their refuge is the Fire, because of the (evil) they earned.*
9. *Those who believe and do righteous deeds, their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Beneath them will flow rivers in gardens of bliss.*
10. *Their prayer therein, "Glory be to You, God;" and their greeting is, "Peace." Their final prayer is, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds."*
11. *If God were to hasten for people the evil (they have earned) as they wish to hasten on the good, their respite would already have expired. But We leave those who do not expect to meet with Us to wander blindly on in their contumacy.*
12. *And if an affliction touches a man, he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We relieve him of his affliction, he passes on as though he had never cried out to Us to remove his affliction. Thus, do the deeds of those who are given to excesses seem fair to them.*

13. *We destroyed the generations before you when they did commit injustice; and their messengers (from God) came to them with clear signs but they would not believe. Thus do We recompense the criminal folk.*
14. *Then We made you their successors in the land after them, to see how you would behave.*
15. *And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, they who do not expect to meet Us say, "Bring a Quran other than this, or change it." Say (Muhammad), "It is not for me to change it of my own accord. I only follow that which is revealed to me. If I disobey my Lord, I fear the torment of a grievous Day.*
16. *Say, "If God had so willed, I would not have recited it to you nor would He have made it known to you. I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense?*
17. *Who does greater wrong than he who forged a lie against God, or denied His revelations? Certainly the criminals will never succeed.*
18. *They worship beside God that which neither hurts them nor profits them, and they say, "These are our intercessors with God." Say, "Would you inform God of (something) that He does not know in the heavens or in the earth? Glory be to Him; He is Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).*
19. *Humankind was but one nation then they differed. Had it not been for a word that had already gone forth from your Lord, the matter in which they differed would have been settled.*
20. *And they say, "Why is a sign not sent down to him from his Lord?" Say, "The unseen is only for God (to know), then wait, I too will wait with you."*
21. *When We make people taste some mercy after an adversity has touched them, they take to plotting against Our revelations. Say, "God is more swift in plotting." Verily, Our messengers record all the plots that you make.*
22. *He it is who enables you to travel through land and sea; when you are aboard ships and they sail with them in a favorable wind, and they rejoice therein; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed; they cry to God, professing their sincere devotion to Him saying, "If You deliver us from this, we shall indeed show our gratitude."*
23. *But when He delivered them, they transgress insolently through the earth in defiance of the truth. People, your transgression is against your own souls - an enjoyment of the life of the present - in the end you will return to Us and We shall tell you of all that you did.*
24. *The likeness of the life of this world is as the rain which We send down from the sky which is absorbed by the plants of the earth of which people and cattle eat. When the earth has taken on its ornaments and is embellished, and its people deemed that they are its masters, Our command comes by night or by day and We make it as a field mown down as if it had not flourished yesterday. Thus, do we expound the revelations for people who reflect.*
25. *And God summons to the abode of peace, and leads whom He wills to a straight path.*  
(10:1-25)

*"Alif. Lam. Ra. These are the verses of the wise Book."* The wise Book is composed of words that use the same letters of the Alphabet that the idolatrous Arabs were familiar with. They were unable to compose a single verse similar to it. Yet, they deny that this is a revelation from God. They should reflect on the fact that Muhammad (PBUH), a human being like them, brought this

Book. He could not have concocted it; otherwise anyone of them could have been able to do the same. It must have been a revelation from God. The wise Book addresses people in a style that is appropriate to their nature. The wise Book exposes specific aspects of the nature of humankind which are reflected on the behavior of different generations of the human race. The wise Book invites people to think and reflect on the signs of God around them.

*“Is it a wonder for people that We have revealed to a man among them, that he should warn people, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sure footing with their Lord? The disbelievers say, ‘This man is clearly a wizard.’”* This verse questions the disbelievers reprovingly, deprecating their amazement at the fact that a human being like them should receive a revelation from God. This reaction reflects how human beings underestimate their own value. They were amazed that a human being should become a messenger of God. They expected the messenger of God to belong to a superior kind of creation. They forgot that God honored humankind and made him worthy of delivering God’s message, which guides to the straight path, to his fellow human beings. The intent of the revelation was to warn people of the consequences of disobedience and to bring glad tidings to those who obey. The warning is for all people, while the glad tidings are only for those who believe. Obedience is rewarded by giving the believers a firm footing in the presence of their Lord.

The rationale behind sending a human being as a messenger of God is obvious. A human messenger knows his people and they know him. He is able to communicate with them easily and naturally. We may ask why God would send a messenger in the first place. Humankind was created with propensity to both goodness and evil; however, he was given an intellect to distinguish between good and evil and to be able to make the right choice. The human mind needs a constant reminder of the standard of right and wrong to save it from the perils of succumbing to human desires and lust. This standard is provided by God’s guidance and law.

The disbelievers were unable to find an explanation for the miracle that the Prophet (PBUH) brought, so they said, *“This man is clearly a wizard.”* Had they been open to the truth, they could have reached the conclusion that he was a messenger of God. They should have realized the difference between this revelation and wizardry. Wizardry is unable to produce a divine project which helps people in leading life on earth.

*“Verily your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then established Himself firmly on the throne, governing all things. No intercessor (can plead with Him) except after His leave (has been obtained). This is God your Lord so worship Him. Will you not take heed?”* This is the fundamental principle in the doctrine: the principle of the Lordship of God. The principle of existence of God was not challenged by the idolaters. The Quran does not indulge in philosophical arguments about the nature of God but it addresses the initial natural disposition of the human being. It is He who created the heavens and earth and what they encompass. He gave the sun its shining glory and the moon its light. He decreed that the moon should have phases and that day and night should alternate. These phenomena, which are obvious to anyone who can see, should touch the inner feelings and motivate the heart to reflect. The Creator of the universe who maintains it in its equilibrium state is the only one who deserves to be the Lord to be worshiped by all people. He created the heavens and earth in *“six days.”* We

are not going to discuss the nature, meaning, and length of these days because they are part of the unseen. This discussion is irrelevant. The lesson to be learnt is that the process of creation needed careful planning and wise execution.

Then God, *“established Himself firmly on the throne, governing all things.”* This expression is a metaphorical representation of the well-established and absolute authority of God. The expression has been phrased in a language that can be easily understood by humans. The word, *“then,”* in the verse does not mean a sequential arrangement of events because *“time”* as we know it has no meaning in this context. God governs and controls everything. No intercessor can plead with Him, except after His leave has been obtained. This statement rebuts the false belief of the idolaters that the idols are able to intercede on their behalf.

*“This is God your Lord so worship Him.”* We mentioned before that the idolaters believed that God is the Creator, the Provider, the One Who gives life, and the One who takes it. However, that belief was not reflected on their way of life. What they missed was to believe in God as a Lord. The direct consequence of this belief is to worship God alone. Worship is servitude, obedience and submission to God. Worship is not limited to the performance of rituals, as the idolaters believed. Performing the rituals is only a component of worship.

Remember that you will return to Him alone, *“To Him you will all return. This is a true promise from God. It is He Who begins the process of creation, and repeats it, that He may justly reward those who believe and do good deeds; but those who disbelieve will have boiling drink and painful torment, because they disbelieved.”* God’s promise will be fulfilled and His judgment will pass and people will be judged fairly. Those who believed and did good deeds will receive the endless and perfect bliss that they were promised. But those who disbelieved will be recompensed justly for their deeds.

Then the narrative goes back to describe cosmic phenomena, *“It is He who made the sun a shining glory and the moon a light, and determined for it phases that you may know the number of years and the reckoning (of time). God did not create this except in truth. (Thus) does He explain His signs in detail, for people who know.”* We are used to the scenes of the sunrise, sunset, moon rise and moon set. We see them every day so they no longer evoke any feeling of awe in our hearts. The verse urges us to look at the scenes as if we are seeing them for the first time. What kind of feelings would be evoked in our hearts, when we see for the first time a blazing sun and a moon that gives light? Phases of the moon help us keep track of time. This can only be a reflection of the truth behind the creation. God is the truth. The truth is His tool and His object.

The alteration of night and day, the changing lengths of the day and night, the creation of God in heavens and earth are all signs of the truth, *“Verily, in the alternation of the night and the day, and in all that God has created, in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who are conscious of Him.”* Those who observe and reflect should become conscious of God.

Those who observe all these phenomena and do not expect to meet God are heedless of the fact that there will be an end to this transient life and there will certainly be a Day of Judgment, *“Certainly, those who do not expect to meet with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of this world, and those who are heedless of Our signs,”* Those who do not reflect on the creation of the universe, a universe that indicates that it has been created by a Creator, do not reach the conclusion that this universe will end one day. The Hereafter is an integral part of the creation of God and it is necessary for justice to be implemented. These people have no sense of accountability. They are pleased with the life of this world and their souls do not seek a higher goal other than their material satisfaction of this worldly life, *“Their refuge is the Fire, because of the (evil) they earned.”*

On the other side, those who believed and did good deeds and worked hard for the Hereafter will be rightly guided, *“Those who believe and do righteous deeds, their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Beneath them will flow rivers in gardens of bliss.”* God will guide them to do good deeds. The faith that connects them to God will guide them to the straight path. They will be admitted to a paradise having flowing rivers. Water is the symbol of fertility and growth. They will have nothing to worry about in paradise. Their main interest will be to be fully engaged in the remembrance of God, *“Their prayer therein, ‘Glory be to You, God;’ and their greeting is, ‘Peace.’ Their final prayer is, ‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds.’”*

*“If God were to hasten for people the evil (they have earned) as they would hasten on the good, their respite would already have expired. But We leave those who do not expect to meet with Us to wander blindly on in their contumacy.”* The idolaters used to challenge the Messenger of God (PBUH) to hasten the torment that they were promised if they deny him. Several verses in the Quran reiterated this challenge, *“And they say, ‘When is this promise, if you are truthful;”* (34:29) this challenge reflected their obstinacy in rejecting God’s guidance. God, in His wisdom, chose to give them respite. God did not send a punishment to wipe them out as has been done to previous peoples because He knew that many of them will later accept Islam. The verse told them that had God accepted their challenge they would have been decimated. But He gave them respite.

The verses continue to explore the contradictory nature of humankind. They challenged the Prophet (PBUH) to hasten the punishment, yet when they were touched by an affliction they would pray God, *“And if an affliction touches a man he cries out to Us, whether lying on his side or sitting or standing; but when We relieve him of his affliction, he passes on as though he had never cried out to Us to remove his affliction. Thus, do the deeds of those who are given to excesses seem fair to them.”* The verse paints an image for an all too common model of people. When they are in good health and feeling well they enjoy life and commit sins forgetting to remember God. They remember God only when an adversity strikes. They resort to prayers asking God to remove such adversity. However, once the adversity has been removed they go back to their old ways.

*“We destroyed the generations before you when they did commit injustice; and their messengers (from God) came to them with clear signs but they would not believe. Thus, do We recompense the criminal folk.”* The transgression of previous generations led them to self-destruction. Their

remnants still exist in the Arabian desert as a witness to their demise. Their messengers came to them, as your Messenger came to you, but they were tyrants and were not prepared to receive God's guidance. Thus, they ended up criminals. God made you their successors, "*Then We made you their successors in the land after them, to see how you would behave,*" to test you. It is a message that moves the heart of a person having been told that he became the heir of a powerful kingdom whose owners perished a long time ago. The message also stresses the fact that just as the previous generations perished before, so will the present one. Life on earth is merely a testing period.

*"And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, they who do not expect to meet Us say, 'Bring a Quran other than this, or change it.' Say (Muhammad), 'It is not for me to change it of my own accord. I only follow that which is revealed to me. If I disobey my Lord, I fear the torment of a grievous Day.'"* The new heirs were not any better than the previous ones. They made a strange request of the Prophet (PBUH): bring another Quran. This is a silly request which reflects complete ignorance of the objective of the Quran and its seriousness. Only a people who do not expect that one day they will stand before God could make such a request. The Quran brought a comprehensive constitution for the way of life that human beings should lead, a way of life that is well designed to suit people, to meet their expectations, and to satisfy their needs. No one can change it. They may have thought that the Quran is only a piece of prose that can be composed by those who are fluent and articulate in the language. But the Prophet (PBUH) was not sent to participate in literary competitions.

*"Say, 'If God had so willed I would not have recited it to you nor would He have made it known to you. I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense?'"* Tell them Muhammad (PBUH) that this is a revelation from God. I was commanded to deliver it to you. Had He willed, I would have never recited it to you. The Messenger (PBUH) lived in Mecca for forty years before he became a messenger of God. During these forty years he never recited anything similar to the Quran. Can he suddenly do that out of his own accord? It is God's revelation and he has no control over it.

Say to them that I could never tell a lie about God, "*Who does greater wrong than he who forged a lie against God, or denied His revelations? Certainly the criminals will never succeed.*"

*"They worship beside God that which neither hurts them nor profits them, and they say, 'These are our intercessors with God.' Say, 'Would you inform God of (something) that He does not know in the heavens or in the earth? Glory be to Him; He is Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).'"* They worship those who neither benefit nor harm them. They think that they can intercede on their behalf. This is indeed ludicrous.

*"Humankind was but one nation then they differed. Had it not been for a word that had already gone forth from your Lord, the matter in which they differed would have been settled."* This verse indicates that God created humankind with an initial natural disposition towards the concept of the Oneness of God. The idea of idolatry was developed later. God in His wisdom



gave people respite to a certain time before He would settle what they differed about.

*“They say, ‘Why is a sign not sent down to him from his Lord?’ Say, ‘The unseen is only for God (to know), then wait, I too will wait with you.’”* As if all of the signs given in this great miraculous Book were not enough. The signs of God were all around them. They requested a material miracle similar to the ones that the previous prophets brought. They did not completely understand the nature of the message that Muhammad (PBUH) was asked to deliver. Muhammad’s message did not need a miracle that happens only once to show its authenticity. A miracle is only witnessed by those who were present at the time it occurred. The effect of such a miracle is limited and temporary. This message was meant to be an eternal Message, so it required an eternal miracle which addresses the hearts and minds of people one generation after the other. The unseen is only for God. He is able to produce a miracle if He so wills, *“then wait, I too will wait with you.”* The statement conveys several messages. It implies that the waiting period is a respite given by God; it also carries a threat to the disbelievers; and it shows that even though Muhammad (PBUH) is one of the greatest messengers of God, he has no authority over the unseen. Muhammad (PBUH) is a servant of God and has no authority over people. This statement clearly defines the demarcation line between God’s authority and the Messenger’s authority.

*“When We make people taste some mercy after an adversity has touched them, they take to plotting against Our revelations. Say, ‘God is more swift in plotting.’ Verily, Our messengers record all the plots that you make.”* One wonders at the nature of humankind. They only remember God at the time of need. God is quickly forgotten when life is safe and comfortable, except for those who believe; those whose initial natural disposition remained pure and are always in contact with God. This is clearly exemplified in the way the people of Pharaoh dealt with Prophet Moses (PBUH). Whenever an affliction befell them, they would hurry to Moses (PBUH) asking him to pray God to remove that affliction and making promises to believe in God once the affliction has been removed. However, once Moses’ (PBUH) prayers were granted they renege on their promises and go back to their old habits. God’s messengers record everything. God is Omniscient, His knowledge encompasses everything.

The following verse paints a dynamic picture illustrating God’s power, *“He it is who enables you to travel through land and sea; when you are aboard ships and they sail with them with a favorable wind, and they rejoice therein; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed; they cry to God, professing their sincere devotion to Him saying, ‘If You deliver us from this, we shall indeed show our gratitude.’”* The verse describes the scene of people enjoying a trip at sea. The sea was calm and the ship was pushed gently by the wind. Then suddenly the wind picked up and the sea became stormy, threatening the safety of the ship. When they recognized the eminent danger and their vulnerability became evident, they prayed God to save them.

But when the storm subsided and they became safe, they forgot God and became tyrants, *“But when he delivered them, they transgress insolently through the earth in defiance of the truth.”*

*People, your transgression is against your own souls - an enjoyment of the life of the present - in the end you will return to Us and We shall tell you of all that you did.*” The verse reminds them that they will be the victims of their own transgression. They will taste the result of their transgression in this life before they receive the ultimate punishment in the Hereafter.

*“The likeness of the life of this world is as the rain which We send down from the sky which is absorbed by the plants of the earth of which people and cattle eat. When the earth has taken on its ornaments and is embellished, and its people deemed that they are its masters, Our command comes by night or by day and We make it as a field mown down as if it had not flourished yesterday. Thus, do we expound the revelations for people who reflect.”* This is an example that illustrates the situation of those who lead a hedonistic life. When water falls down from the sky the plants grow and flourish. The earth becomes covered with plants of different types and colors, such a beautiful scene. Then suddenly, it is destroyed by the command of God and in a split second the beautiful scene disappears as if it never existed before. This is an example of this worldly life for those who are only interested in its material benefits.

*“And God summons to the abode of peace, and leads whom He wills to a straight path.”* It is quite a contrast between the example of life described in the previous verse and the peace and security that God calls to.

## **Verses: 26 to 70**

26. *For those who did well is a good (reward) and more. Neither darkness nor ignominy will cover their faces. Such are the rightful owners of the Garden; they will abide therein eternally.*
27. *And those who earned evil, the recompense of an evil deed is its equivalent and ignominy will cover them. They have no protector from God, as if their faces had been covered with a cloak of a very dark night. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.*
28. *On the day when We gather them all together, then We say to those who ascribed partners (to God), “Stand back, you and your partners.” And We separate them, one from the other. Their partners will say, “It was not us you worshipped.”*
29. *God suffices as a witness between us and you, that we were unaware of your worship.*
30. *There, (on that day) every soul will be put to trial for what it did before. They will be brought back to God their rightful Lord, and their invented falsehoods will leave them in the lurch.*
31. *Say (Muhammad), “Who provides for you from the sky and the earth? Who owns the hearing and the sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living? And who manages everything? They will say, “God.” Then say, “Will you not be conscious of Him?”*
32. *That is God, your true Lord. What is there beyond the truth except error? How then are you turned away?*
33. *Thus is the word of your Lord proved true against those who rebel - they will not believe.*

34. Say (Muhammad), "Is there of your partners who can originate creation and repeats it?" Say, "It is God who originates the creation and repeats it, then how deluded you are?"
35. Say, "Is there of your partners who guides to the truth?" Say, "It is God who guides to the truth, is then He who gives guidance to the truth more deserving to be followed, or he who does not find guidance (himself) unless he is guided? What is then the matter with you? How do you judge?"
36. But most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Assuredly conjecture can by no means replace truth. God knows what they do.
37. It was not possible for this *Quran* to be produced by other than God; but it is a confirmation of (revelations) that came before it, and an explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from the Lord of the worlds.
38. Or do they say, "He forged it"? Say, "Bring then a sura like it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can besides God, if you are truthful."
39. But they denied that whose knowledge they cannot encompass, even before the elucidation thereof had reached them. Similarly, those before them did deny. See what the end of the wrongdoers was?
40. Of them there are some who believe therein, and some who do not. Your Lord knows best those who are the mischief-makers.
41. And if they deny you, say, "For me are my deeds and for you are your deeds. You are neither responsible for my actions nor I am responsible for yours."
42. And of them are some who listen to you. But can you make the deaf to hear even though they do not understand?
43. And of them is he who looks at you. But can you guide the blind even though they see not?
44. Verily God does not wrong people at all; but it is people who wrong themselves.
45. And on the day He will gather them together, (it will seem) as if they had tarried but an hour of a day. They will recognize each other. Assuredly those will be lost who denied the meeting with God; and they were not guided.
46. Whether We show you some of what We promise them or We take your soul - in any case - to Us is their return. Ultimately God is a witness to all that they do.
47. To every people (was sent) a messenger. When their messenger comes, it will be judged between them fairly and they will not be wronged.
48. And they say, "When will this promise be fulfilled if you are truthful?"
49. Say, "I have no power over any harm or benefit to myself except as God wills. To every people is an appointed term. When their term is reached, they can neither delay it nor can they hasten it, even for an hour."
50. Say, "Have you considered: When His torment comes to you by night or by day, what is there of it that the guilty ones desire to hasten?"
51. Would you then believe in it at last when it actually comes to pass?" It will be said, "Now (you believe), when before you wished to hasten it.
52. Then it will be said to the wrongdoers, "Taste the torment of eternity, are you being recompensed except for what you used to earn?"
53. And they ask you, "Is it true?" Say, "Yes, by my Lord, verily it is true, and you cannot escape."

54. *And if every soul that did commit injustice had all that is on earth, it would be willing to give it in ransom. They will express remorse within themselves when they see the torment, but they will be judged with justice, and they will not be wronged.*
55. *Verily, whatever is in the heavens and on earth belongs to God? God's promise is true, but most of them do not know.*
56. *It is He who gives life and who takes it, and to Him shall you all be brought back.*
57. *People, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, and a healing for what is in your breasts; and guidance and mercy for the believers.*
58. *Say, "In the grace of God and in His Mercy let them rejoice." That is better than what they amass.*
59. *Say, "Have you considered the provision which God has sent down for you, how you have made (some) lawful and (some) unlawful?" Say, "Did God permit you (to do so), or do you invent a lie concerning God?"*
60. *And what do those who invent lies against God will think on the Day of Judgment? Verily God is bountiful towards people, but most of them are ungrateful.*
61. *Whatever business you may be engaged in, whatever portion you may be reciting from the Quran, and whatever deed you (people) may be doing, We are witnesses thereof when you are deeply engrossed therein. Nothing is hidden from your Lord (even as much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven. Nor what is less than that or greater than that, but it is (recorded) in a clear Record.*
62. *Verily the allies of God shall have no fear nor will they grieve?*
63. *Those who believe and are conscious of God,*
64. *For them are glad tidings, in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. The words of God will not be changed. This is indeed the supreme triumph.*
65. *And let not their speech grieve you (Muhammad). All might belong wholly to God; He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
66. *Verily to God belong whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth? Those who invoke other than God do not (actually) follow (His) partners. They follow only a conjecture, and they are only telling lies.*
67. *He it is who made the night that you may rest therein, and the day to make things visible (to you). Verily in this are signs for those who listen.*
68. *They say, "God has begotten a son;" Glory be to Him; He is Self-Sufficient. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. You have no authority to say this. Do you say about God that which you do not know?*
69. *Say, "Those who invent a lie against God will never succeed."*
70. *(They will have) a little enjoyment in this world. Then, to Us will be their return. Then shall We make them taste the severe torment for their disbelief. (10:26-70)*

*"For those who did well is a good (reward) and more. Neither darkness nor ignominy will cover their faces. Such are rightful owners of the Garden; they will abide therein eternally. And those who earned evil, the recompense of an evil deed is its equivalent and ignominy will cover them. They have no protector from God, as if their faces had been covered with a cloak of a very dark night. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally." This verse gives details of the reward that awaits those who are guided and the punishment that awaits those who are misguided. The details exhibit God's mercy and justice. Those with strong faith who did*

good deeds and who understood God's universal law theirs will be a good reward and more. The extra reward is an unlimited bounty from God. They will be secure on the Day of Judgment, *"Neither darkness nor ignominy will cover their faces."* They will not display any sign of sadness. They are the owners of paradise. They will live therein forever. Those who earned evil in their lives will be judged fairly. They will only be punished according to the evil they have done, nothing more, *"the recompense of an evil deed is its equivalent and ignominy will cover them. They have no protector from God, as if their faces had been covered with a cloak of a very dark night. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire; they will abide therein."* They will feel humiliated and their faces will be darkened by their sadness; they will be destined to Hellfire, where they are going stay forever.

But where did their partners go, and why did not they protect them from God's wrath? Here is their story, *"On the day when We gather them all together, then We say to those who ascribed partners (to God), 'Stand back, you and your partners.' And We separate them, one from the other. Their partners will say, 'It was not us you worshipped.'"* Those who associated partners with God will be gathered with whom they associated as partners with God. The Quran sarcastically calls them "the partners" to emphasize that they never were associates to God. They will be told to stand back and wait for God's command. The associates will defend themselves claiming their innocence and denying that they had asked anyone to worship them. They will ask for God's testimony, *"God suffices as a witness between us and you, that we were unaware of your worship."* At this moment the deeds of every person will be evaluated by the One true God, and all false claims will vanish, *"There, (on that day) every soul will be put to trial for what it did before. They will be brought back to God their rightful Lord, and their invented falsehoods will leave them in the lurch."* These verses paint a dramatic account of the scene of the gathering on the Day of Judgment.

*"Say (Muhammad), 'Who provides for you from the sky and the earth? Who owns the hearing and the sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living? and who manages everything?' They will say, 'God.' Then say, 'Will you not be conscious of Him?'"* We have mentioned before that the idolatrous Arabs did not contest the fact that God is the Creator. This verse reminds them of that belief to eradicate any doubt about the fact that the idols they worship have no power. God is He who brings down water from the sky to make the plants grow. He provides for them from the sky as well as on land. These facts were easy for them to understand. God is He who awards the power of hearing and seeing. He *"brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living."* The word "dead" is used metaphorically to describe the state of being quiescent or dormant. The Arabs used to refer to a dormant plant as dead and to a growing plant as alive. They knew how a dormant seed produces a live plant and how a dormant egg produces a live chicken. God is He who controls the universe. If you ask them, Muhammad (PBUH), these questions they will admit that God is He who does all of that. Should not they then be conscious of Him?

*"That is God, your true Lord. What is there after the truth except error? How then are you turned away?"* There is only one truth, those who deviate from the truth have only error to fall in. God's command will pass, *"Thus is the word of your Lord proved true against those who rebel - they will not believe."* Not because God steered them away from belief but because they

chose to deviate from the straight path which leads to belief.

*“Say (Muhammad), ‘Is there of your partners who can originate creation and repeats it?’ Say, ‘It is God who originates the creation and repeats it, then how deluded you are?’”* The idolatrous Arabs did acknowledge God’s power and His ability to start the creation but they did not accept the idea of life after death. The verse explained that God’s power is not only limited to starting life on earth and to ending it by death, but God’s power encompasses the resurrection and bringing people to account on the Day of Judgment. He who started the creation is able to repeat it again. How can they miss this fact? The argument continues, *“Say, ‘Is there of your partners who guides to the truth?’ Say, ‘It is God who guides to the truth, is then He who gives guidance to truth more deserving to be followed, or he who does not find guidance (himself) unless he is guided? What is then the matter with you? How do you judge?’”* God sent messengers and Scripture to explain His divine project which guides to goodness and forbids evil. God who guides to the truth deserves to be followed. The verse berates the idolaters for being blind to the fact that those whom they associate with God, whether humans or idols, are unable to offer any guidance. In fact, they need guidance.

*“But most of them follow nothing but conjecture. Assuredly conjecture can by no means replace truth. God is Aware of what they do.”* They only follow baseless conjectures. Certainly, conjectures are not legitimate alternative to the truth.

*“It was not possible for this Quran to be produced by other than God; but it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and an explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from the Lord of the worlds.”* The Quran is a miraculous book in its literary style. It is a comprehensive book. It deals with a wide range of topics which not only explain the doctrine but they also teach the correct appreciation of the Creator, the understanding of human nature, the understanding of the nature of life, and the understanding of the nature of the universe. Only God could reveal a book with such depth and breadth. The Quran came to confirm the previous Scriptures and to provide a detailed explanation for God’s message embodied in them. The different Scriptures which have been revealed to different messengers agree on the fundamentals but differ in the details. The details of each revelation were appropriate for the time at which it was revealed. The Quran came to provide the final details of God’s message.

*“Or do they say, ‘He forged it?’ Say, ‘Bring then a sura like it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can besides God, if you are truthful.’”* They were challenged and they failed to meet the challenge. They had the same linguistic ability and resources that Muhammad (PBUH) had but they failed to compose a book like the Quran. Those who are able to appreciate the linguistic beauty of the Quran and understand the various systems which it brought are certain that this book could not have been written by a human being. The Quran is a miraculous book, not only because of the beauty of its language but also because it embodies a collection of harmonious systems which organize human life.

*“But they denied that whose knowledge they cannot encompass, even before the elucidation thereof had reached them. Similarly, those before them did deny. See what the end of the wrongdoers was.”* They denied the truth so they will meet the fate of those who denied the truth before them.

*“Of them there are some who believe therein, and some who do not. Your Lord knows best those who are the mischief-makers.”* Those who do not believe are the mischief-makers. Those who lost guidance and strayed away from the straight path are the source of mischief on earth. They only follow their whims and desires which demonize their lives as well as people’s lives.

*“And if they deny you, say, ‘For me are my deeds and for you are your deeds. You are neither responsible for my actions nor I am responsible for yours.’”* So, the Messenger was commanded to simply ignore those who denied him. Everyone will be judged according to their deeds. Leaving them alone may send a message which reaches their inner consciousness.

Types of those who denied the Messenger (PBUH) are then described, *“And of them are some who listen to you. But can you make the deaf to hear even though they do not understand? And of them is he who looks to you. But can you guide the blind even though they see not?”* Some hear but do not understand and some see but do not reflect. They stopped utilizing the senses that God bestowed on them. The Messenger (PBUH) can be of no benefit to them because they rendered their senses useless, *“Verily God does not wrong people at all; but it is people who wrong themselves.”*

These verses carried a message of consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). The message stated that the Messenger (PBUH) was not derelict in his duty. He did his best but these people were determined not listen therefore; they could not understand the truth.

The verses turn to a description of a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“And on the Day He will gather them together, (it will seem) as if they had tarried but an hour of a day. They will recognize each other. Assuredly those will be lost who denied the meeting with God; and they were not guided.”* The verse reminds people that the life of this world will pass as if it were merely an hour long event. Or does the verse describe the lives of people who made no contribution to life? They only spend an hour to get to know each other. They certainly lost the opportunities that were awarded them during their lives.

The following verses address a new theme. They start by emphasizing the fact that all people will return to God, *“Whether We show you some of what We promise them or We take your soul - in any case - to Us is their return. Ultimately God is a witness to all that they do.”* God’s plan will pass: a messenger will be sent to each people, they will be then judged according to their response to their messenger, *“To every people (was sent) a messenger. When their messenger comes, it will be judged between them fairly and they will not be wronged.”* These two verses emphasize God’s role as the Creator and the Messenger’s role as a deliverer of the message. The Messenger’s role is to deliver the message; God’s role is to judge people.

*“And they say, ‘When will this promise be fulfilled if you are truthful?’”* The idolaters used to challenge the Prophet (PBUH) to hasten the punishment which the Quran threatened them with if they reject the message. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to tell them, *“I have no power over any harm or benefit to myself except as God wills. To every people is an appointed term. When their term is reached, they can neither delay it nor can they hasten it, even for an hour.”* So if the Prophet (PBUH) has no power over any harm or benefit to himself, how can he inflict harm on them or provide benefit to them. God controls the fate of people, when their term has been reached they will get their recompense. Nothing can change the appointed term. The term for a nation can either end by physical destruction, as it did happen to nations before, or by suffering a loss of identity as a result of general defeat. Some nations recover from the loss of identity but some never recover. The revival of the Muslim nation is contingent on following the Messenger’s way. The Messenger (PBUH) came to invite the nation to its revival, not only by adopting the Islamic creed but also by adopting a way of life which reflects this creed in all aspects of life.

Their challenge is rebuffed by a threat, *“Say, ‘Have you considered: When His torment comes to you by night or by day,’ what is there of it that the guilty ones desire to hasten?”* What would you do if the punishment came by day or by night? Why then you want to hasten this punishment? The following verse addressed the disbelievers as if the punishment had already taken place, *“Would you then believe in it at last when it actually comes to pass?”* *It will be said, “Now (you believe), when before you wished to hasten it.”* This group of verses ends with a scene from the Day of Judgment, *“Then it will be said to the wrongdoers, ‘Taste the torment of eternity, are you being recompensed except for what you used to earn?’”*

The following verse indicates the doubt that fills the hearts of the disbelievers, *“And they ask you, ‘Is it true?’* *Say, ‘Yes, by my Lord, verily it is true, and you cannot escape.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) is commanded to give them a definite and unequivocal answer. The punishment is true and you will not escape.

*“And if every soul that did commit injustice had all that is on earth, it would be willing to give it in ransom. They will express remorse within themselves when they see the torment, but they will be judged with justice, and they will not be wronged.”* No ransom will be accepted from anyone, even if they could afford paying the ransom, to be able to escape the punishment. Their hearts will be full of remorse when they see the torment. They will be judged fairly and they will not be wronged.

*“Verily, whatever is in the heavens and on earth belongs to God? God’s promise is true, but most of them do not know. It is He who gives life and who takes it, and to Him shall you all be brought back. People, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, and a healing for what is in your breasts; and guidance and mercy for the believers. Say, ‘In the grace of God and in His Mercy let them rejoice.’ That is better than what they hoard.”* It is a loud proclamation



that God's kingdom encompasses all what is on earth and all what is in heavens. His promise will come to pass no one can frustrate Him. The disbelievers deny or doubt only because they are ignorant. God controls life and death and to Him all will return. The purpose of the proclamation is then pronounced, *"People, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, and a healing for what is in your breasts; and guidance and mercy for the believers."* The admonition came to you in the Book that was sent to you from your Lord. It is not a fabrication, and it has not been authored by a mortal. The admonition will revive your hearts and cleanse your breasts. It will replace the myth that fills your hearts with doubt and insecurity with the certainty and security of faith. You then can revel in God's grace and enjoy His mercy. These are the true sources of happiness for the believers. Islam teaches people that there is more to life than accumulating wealth. Wealth is a mean not an end in itself, but the purpose of life for a believer is to enjoy God's grace and mercy.

*"Say, 'Have you considered the provision which God has sent down for you, how you have made of it lawful and unlawful?' Say, 'Did God permit you (to do so), or do you invent a lie concerning God?'"* This is an address to those who associate partners with God. Consider the provision that God sent you to manage it according to His leave and law. Who gave you the right to classify parts of it as lawful and other parts as unlawful? Did God give you permission to do that? Only God decrees what is lawful and what is unlawful. The concept that only God has the right to decree what is lawful and what is unlawful appears often throughout the Quran. This concept is the practical application of the fundamental statement, *"there is no deity except God."* The recognition that God is the Creator and the Provider implies that He is the only one who deserves to be worshiped and that He alone has the right to control people's lives. The verses continue by confronting the idolaters with the lies they fabricated about God, and warns them with the consequences of these lies on the Day of Judgment, *"And what do those who invent lies against God will think on the Day of Judgment? Verily God is bountiful toward people, but most of them are ungrateful."* Following the threat issued to those who associate partners with God, the verse reminds them with the bounty that God blessed them with. The bounty does not only include the material provisions but also the divine project which God bestowed on people. This divine project enables people to lead a better life on earth. It is a project that brings out the best in everyone. It is a project that provides a balance between the needs of this life and the needs of the Hereafter and allows humans to live in harmony with the universe. But most people are heedless of this bounty and they are ungrateful. They abandon the divine project and associate partners with God; and as a result, they end up leading unhappy life because the divine project provides healing to the ailments of the breasts. When people abandon the divine project, they lose the benefit of the healing that it provides. It is an amazing expression which describes a deep truth. The Quran heals all the ailments of the heart. It addresses the natural innate human feelings and fills the hearts with security and contentment.

*"Whatever business you may be engaged in, whatever portion you may be reciting from the Quran, and whatever deed you (people) may be doing, We are witnesses thereof when you are deeply engrossed therein. Nothing is hidden from your Lord (even as much as) the weight of an atom on the earth or in heaven. Nor what is less than that or greater than that, but it is (recorded) in a clear Record."* This verse stirs, in the heart, feelings of security and awe at the

same time. This mixture of feelings is evoked by the knowledge that the God Almighty who manages the universe is with us every moment, He sees what we do, He knows what we go through, and He looks after us. We are not atoms that are left to wander aimlessly in this vast universe. There is nothing that escapes God. He is fully aware of all things. Certainly, those who are under the care of God will never fear or grieve, *“Verily the allies of God shall have no fear nor will they grieve?”* How can they fear or grieve when they know that God looks after them? They are true believers. They are fully conscious of God, *“Those who believe and are conscious of God,”* True faith is what rests deep in the heart and is reflected on the deeds. Those have the glad tidings of great success, *“for them are glad tidings, in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. The words of God will not be changed. This is indeed the supreme triumph.”*

God then addresses His Messenger (PBUH), *“And let not their speech grieve you (Muhammad). All might belong wholly to God; He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* The Messenger (PBUH) should not worry about those who fabricate lies about God; even though they are the elite in the community. God who has all the might will protect His Messenger (PBUH).

*“Verily to God belong whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth? Those who invoke other than God do not (actually) follow (His) partners. They follow only a conjecture, and they are only telling lies.”* God controls all people, strong and weak alike. Those who associate partners with God are only following a mirage. God has no partners.

*“He it is who made the night that you may rest therein, and the day to make things visible (to you). Verily in this are signs for those who listen.”* The verse stresses some of the cosmic signs which people take for granted and ignore the power behind them. God controls the universe. It is He who chose to make the day for work and the night for rest.

This group of verses ends by refuting the lies made by those who associate partners with God and stresses the consequences of such lies, *“They say, ‘God has begotten a son.’ Glory be to Him; He is Self-Sufficient. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. You have no authority to say this. Do you say about God that which you do not know? Say, ‘Those who invent a lie against God will never succeed.’ (They will have) a little enjoyment in this world. Then, to Us will be their return. Then shall We make them taste the severe torment for their disbelief.”* It is silly to imagine that God has begotten a son. It reflects a lack of imagination which causes confusion between the nature of the Creator and the nature of the creature. The Creator is eternal while humans are mortals. God does not need progeny; He does not need help or support. He is Self-Sufficient and Independent. These lies are mere baseless conjectures. Uttering such lies is a great sin. Those who commit this sin will never succeed, neither in this life nor in the Hereafter.

## **Verses 71 to 103**

71. *And recite to them the story of Noah, when he told his people, “My people, if my presence among you and my reminding you of God's revelations offend you, I have put my trust in God, so decide upon your course of action you and your partners. Let not your course of action be obscure for you. Then execute your decision against me and give me no respite.*

72. *But if you turn away, (consider that) I never asked you for a reward. I seek my reward only from God, and I have been commanded to be of those who submit to God's will."*
73. *They denied Him so We saved him and those with him in the Ark, and We made them inherit (the earth), while We drowned those who denied Our revelations. Then see what the end of those who had been warned was.*
74. *Then after him, We sent messengers to their peoples. They brought them clear signs, but they would not believe what they had already denied beforehand. Thus, do We seal the hearts of the transgressors.*
75. *Then after them We sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his chiefs with Our signs. But they were arrogant. They were a guilty folk.*
76. *When the truth did come to them from Us, they said, "This is indeed evident sorcery."*
77. *Moses said, "Is this what you call the truth when it comes to you? Is this magic? Magicians are never successful.*
78. *They said, "Did you come to us to turn us away from that which we found our fathers following, in order that you and your brother may have greatness in the land? But we will not believe in you."*
79. *Pharaoh said, "Bring me every learned sorcerer."*
80. *When the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, "Cast what you will cast."*
81. *When they had cast, Moses said, "What you have brought is sorcery. God will certainly render it useless. God does not uphold the deeds of those who make mischief. "*
82. *And God will vindicate the truth by His words, however much the guilty will be averse."*
83. *But none believed in Moses except some offspring of his people, in fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them. And certainly Pharaoh was mighty in the land and one who was given to excesses.*
84. *Moses said, "My people, if you have believed in God, then in Him put your trust if you have indeed submitted to Him."*
85. *They said, "In God do we put our trust. Our Lord, do not subject us to the persecution of the wrongdoers.*
86. *And deliver us by your mercy from the disbelievers."*
87. *We inspired Moses and his brother (saying), "Settle your people in houses in Egypt, make your houses places of worship, and establish prayers. And give glad tidings to the believers."*
88. *Moses prayed, "Our Lord, You have indeed bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendor and wealth in the life of this world. Our Lord, they mislead people from Your path. Our Lord, destroy their wealth and harden their hearts, so they do not believe until they see the painful torment."*
89. *He (God) said, "Your prayer has been answered, so stay on the straight path and do not follow the path of those who have no knowledge."*
90. *We took the Children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite. When the drowning overtook him, he said, "I believe that there is no deity except Him whom the Children of Israel believe in. I am of those who submit (to God)."*
91. *Now! When you had been a rebel before and had been of the mischief-makers?"*
92. *This day We save you in body that you may be a sign for those who come after you. Most people are, indeed, heedless of Our signs.*

93. *And We had certainly settled the Children of Israel in a good dwelling-place, and provided for them sustenance of the best. It was after knowledge had been granted to them, that they fell into schisms. Verily God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment regarding that over which they used differ.*
94. *If you are in doubt concerning that which We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth had indeed come to you from your Lord, so do not be of those who doubt.*
95. *Do not be among those who deny the revelations of God, for then you would become of the losers.*
96. *Those against whom the word of your Lord has passed will not believe.*
97. *Even if every sign was brought to them, until they see the painful torment.*
98. *If only there had been a community (of all those that were destroyed of old) that believed and profited by its belief as did the folk of Jonah. When they believed We relieved them of the torment of disgrace in the life of this world and gave them comfort for a while.*
99. *And if your Lord had willed, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Would you (Muhammad) compel people until they become believers?*
100. *It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of God. He has set uncleanness upon those who have no sense.*
101. *Say, "Consider all that is in the heavens and on earth"; but neither signs nor warnings avail those who do not believe.*
102. *What are they waiting for but (what happened in) the days of those who passed away before them? Say, "Wait then, I too will wait with you."*
103. *In the end We deliver Our messengers and those who believe. It is binding on Us that We should deliver those who believe. (10:71-103)*

*"And recite to them the story of Noah, when he told his people, 'My people, if my presence among you and my reminding you of God's revelations offend you, I have put my trust in God, so decide upon your course of action you and your partners. Let not your course of action be obscure for you. Then execute your decision against me and give me no respite. But if you turn away, (consider that) I never asked you for a reward. I seek my reward only from God, and I have been commanded to be of those who submit to God's will.' They denied Him so We saved him and those with him in the Ark, and We made them inherit (the earth), while We drowned those who denied Our revelations. Then see what the end of those who had been warned was."*

These verses narrate the last episode of the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH). It is an episode which describes the last challenge posed by Prophet Noah (PBUH) to his people after a long series of episodes in which he exhorted them to join the ranks of the believers. Many of the details of the story are absent from these verses because the focus here is on the last attempt of Prophet Noah (PBUH) and his absolute reliance on God. The verses then mention the salvation of Prophet Noah (PBUH) and the few believers who joined him on the Ark. This episode starts with Prophet Noah's (PBUH) resolution, *"My people, if my presence among you and my reminding you of God's revelations offend you, I have put my trust in God, so decide upon your course of action you and your partners. Let not your course of action be obscure for you. Then execute your decision against me and give me no respite."* Plan whatever you can plan and execute your plan I will put my trust in God alone. God is sufficient for me. It is the final statement which reflects the absolute reliance of the believer on God and the absolute trust in His

power and protection. God's messengers are role models for the believers who want to call to God. They should not fear the tyranny of the despots. God will support them and will protect them. The story of Prophet Noah (PBUH) is an example of the struggle of the messenger against the tyrants. His message was that he never asked them a reward for guiding them. So, whether they listen or turn away he will get his reward from God. He will remain steadfast in his faith, *"I have been commanded to be of those who submit to God's will."* God saved him in the Ark when his people denied him.

The verses continue to mention God's messengers who came after Noah (PBUH), *"Then after him, We sent messengers to their peoples. They brought them clear signs, but they would not believe what they had already denied beforehand. Thus do We seal the hearts of the transgressors."* These messengers brought clear signs to their people but the people continued in their obstinacy to deny the truth because their hearts were sealed.

The following verses narrate the story of Moses (PBUH) in a little more detail. The story encompasses five scenes. *"Then after them We sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his chiefs with Our signs. But they were arrogant. They were a guilty folk. When the truth did come to them from Us, they said, 'This is indeed evident sorcery.' Moses said, 'Is this what you call the truth when it comes to you? Is this magic? Magicians are never successful.'"* The verses refer to the nine miracles that Moses (PBUH) brought very briefly, no details are given. The verses stress the fact that *"the truth did come to them from Us,"* to emphasize the enormity of their sin in calling the truth *"evident sorcery."* Moses (PBUH) was appalled by their response. He (PBUH) tried to explain that magic does not guide people to the straight path and it has no basis to stand on; that is why it is doomed to failure.

At this point in the discussion, their true motive becomes apparent, *"They said, 'Did you come to us to turn us away from that which we found our fathers following, in order that you and your brother may have greatness in the land? But we will not believe in you.'"* They wanted to hang on to their old beliefs, in spite of the fact that these beliefs were deeply rooted in myth and falsehood. These beliefs gave them the power over people and they did not want to relinquish that power. Like all arrogant tyrants, they resisted the call to believe in God because the call threatened their power and control.

It seems that Pharaoh and his chiefs believed that they can fight Moses' (PBUH) claims with magic, *"Pharaoh said, 'Bring me every learned sorcerer.' When the sorcerers came, Moses said to them, 'Cast what you will cast.' When they had cast, Moses said, 'What you have brought is sorcery. God will certainly render it useless. God does not uphold the deeds of those who make mischief. And God will vindicate the truth by His words, however much the guilty be averse.'"* One notices the brief account of the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and the magicians. The main emphasis is placed on Moses' (PBUH) statement, *"What you have brought is sorcery. God will certainly render it useless."* The statement points out clearly that magic cannot stand in the face of the belief in God. All their tricks will be in vain and the truth will remain unshaken. It is a statement which reflects the deep confidence of the believer in God. The truth will prevail by

God's words even though it is against the wish of the disbelievers. The truth prevailed and the magicians lost.

*“But none believed in Moses except some offspring of his people, in fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them. And certainly Pharaoh was mighty in the land and one who was given to excesses.”* Moses said, *‘My people, if you have believed in God, then in Him put your trust if you have indeed submitted to Him.’* They said, *‘In God do we put our trust. Our Lord, do not subject us to the persecution of the wrongdoers. And deliver us by your mercy from the disbelievers.’* We inspired Moses and his brother (saying), *‘Settle your people in houses in Egypt, make your houses places of worship, and establish prayers. And give glad tidings to the believers.’*” It seems that only a group of young people declared publicly their belief in Moses’ (PBUH) message. This group of young people was persecuted by the Egyptians. They needed to be comforted and assured by Moses (PBUH), *“My people, if you have believed in God, then in Him put your trust if you have indeed submitted to Him.”* Putting one’s trust in God is a sign of the deep faith in Him. Putting one’s trust in God provides a source of power and support to the believer. They responded positively to his words, *“In God do we put our trust. Our Lord, do not subject us to the persecution of the wrongdoers. And deliver us by your mercy from the disbelievers.”* It should be noted that there is no contradiction between this supplication and the fact that they have put their trust in God. On the contrary, it emphasizes their trust in God because it shows that they were certain that God is in control of all affairs. A believer should not wish to be persecuted however, if subjected to persecution, one should persevere. God then commanded Moses (PBUH) to start organizing the campaign for leaving Egypt, *“We inspired Moses and his brother (saying), ‘Settle your people in houses in Egypt, make your houses places of worship, and establish prayers. And give glad tidings to the believers.’”* During this stage, Moses (PBUH) was commanded to launch a campaign to prepare the children of Israel both physically and spiritually for the exodus. Both parts of the campaign were necessary for the exodus to succeed. People may belittle the need for spiritual preparation, but experience has shown repeatedly that a soldier needs a strong faith as well as good fighting equipment to win a battle.

*“Moses prayed, ‘Our Lord, You have indeed bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendor and wealth in the life of this world. Our Lord, they mislead people from Your path. Our Lord, destroy their wealth, and harden their hearts, so they do not believe until they see the painful torment.’”* Pharaoh and his chiefs used the power and wealth that God bestowed on them to sway people away from the straight path. They did this both by temptation and persecution. Some people do not persevere in such tests. They are easily influenced by those who have power and wealth. Moses (PBUH) prayed God to remove from Pharaoh and his chiefs the means to tempt and persecute people. His prayer showed that he had despaired that Pharaoh and his chiefs would ever believe in God. God responded favorably to Moses’ prayer, *“Your prayer has been answered, so stay on the straight path and do not follow the path of those who have no knowledge.”*

We now come to the second scene, the scene of the exodus. *“We took the Children of Israel across the sea. Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite. When the drowning*

overtook him, he said, *“I believe that there is no deity except Him whom the Children of Israel believe in. I am of those who submit (to God).”* This is the last scene in the story of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh. The narrative provides a brief description of the scene. The focus is on the end of the tyrant and the salvation of the believers. The emphasis is not on the details but on the fact that God’s promise, made earlier in the Sura, has been fulfilled. When Pharaoh realized that his end was near and that his power and arrogance did not save him, he begged for salvation. But, it was too late, *“Now! When you had been a rebel before and had been of the mischief-makers?”*

God chose to save his corpse so that people would know the consequences of arrogance and tyranny, *“This day We save you in body that you may be a sign for those who come after you. Most people are heedless of Our signs.”* However, many people do not reflect on these signs.

The verses continue to narrate the events which the children of Israel encountered after the exodus, *“And We had certainly settled the Children of Israel in a good dwelling-place, and provided for them sustenance of the best. It was after knowledge had been granted to them, that they fell into schisms. Verily God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment regarding that over which they used differ.”* The Arabic words which are translated here as *“good dwelling-place”* suggest that God gave them safe and secure dwellings. However, they differed in their opinions regarding the allowable and the forbidden, so God will settle these differences on the Day of Judgment.

*“If you are in doubt concerning that which We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth had indeed come to you from your Lord, so do not be of those who doubt.”* The Messenger (PBUH) was not in doubt. It was narrated that, when this verse was revealed, he said, *“I do not doubt and I am not going to ask.”* Furthermore, the verse ends by saying, *“The truth had indeed come to you from your Lord.”* So what is the reason behind the command? The verse refers to the difficult situation in which the Prophet (PBUH) found himself after the incident of Israa and Mi’raj (the trip to the Farthest Mosque and the ascension to heaven). Some Muslims simply could not believe the story and they became apostates. This saddened the Prophet (PBUH) in addition to the sadness brought about by the loss of his wife and his uncle. This verse consoled the Prophet (PBUH) and assured him that he was on the right path. It also indicated that punishment is awaiting those who abandoned their faith. The verse also established a basic Islamic principle: when in doubt ask those who have the knowledge. Is there a contradiction between the command not to be of those who doubt and the command to seek clarification? The answer is no. The command not to be of those who doubt means that one should not be of those who persist in doubting; those who do not seek the knowledge which would clarify their doubts.

But those who stubbornly persisted in their denial after they saw the truth are losers *“do not be among those who deny the revelations of God, for then you would become of the losers.”* They were those who earned the painful torment because they closed their eyes so that they do not see the truth, *“Those against whom the word of your Lord has passed will not believe. Even if every*

*sign was brought to them, until they see the painful torment.”*

*“If only there had been a community (of all those that were destroyed of old) that believed and profited by its belief as did the folk of Jonah. When they believed We relieved them of the torment of disgrace in the life of this world and gave them comfort for a while.”* This statement describes the state of the communities of the past. They did not believe; only a few people believed in each of these communities. Had they believed they would have benefited but they chose to disbelieve except one community: the folk of Jonah. The verse does not detail what happened to Jonah’s (PBUH) folk but simply outlines the end result. The verse states that when they believed they achieved salvation, had they not believed at the right time, they would have suffered the grave torment.

One can glean two lessons from this account:

1. No one should despair of God’s mercy. It is never too late to repent and return to the straight path. This may be a reason for the exemption from the disgraceful torment in this life. God saved the people of Jonah when they repented.
2. God’s law has taken effect. Saving Jonah’s people from the torment in this life is an expression of this law. When they believed they were saved.

*“And if your Lord had willed, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Would you (Muhammad) compel people until they become believers?”* This is a fundamental rule. Had God willed, He could have created all people the same. He could have made them all believers like the angels. Had God willed, He could have deprived people of the free will, they would have had no ability to choose. God Almighty in His wisdom created human beings with propensity to goodness and evil and gave them the ability to choose either way. People have the free will to choose whether to believe or disbelieve. The Prophet (PBUH) could not compel any one to adopt faith. There should be no compulsion in matters of the heart and conscience.

*“It is not for any soul to believe save by the permission of God. He has set uncleanness upon those who have no sense.”* The verse does not imply that God will force people to believe or disbelieve. It states that faith can be reached only through a certain route, outlined by God. To be a believer one should follow God’s route to belief. Those who choose not to apply their ability to discern right from wrong have lost their cleanliness. They will see the signs of God in heavens and earth but will not be able to understand them because they disabled their intellectual ability to think and reflect, *“Say, ‘Consider all that is in the heavens and on earth’; but neither signs nor warnings avail those who do not believe.”* The Arabs who lived at the time of the revelation of the Quran did not know much about the universe, the heavens and the earth. However, it is important to understand that there is a connection between the initial natural disposition of the human beings and the universe. When humankind tunes this disposition to listen to the universe the communication between the two is established.



God's law is firmly established and never changes. The consequences of denying the truth are well known. No one should expect God's law to change. Thus an ultimatum has been issued, *"What are they waiting for but (what happened in) the days of those who passed away before them? Say, 'Wait then, I too will wait with you.'"* This group of verses ends with a promise to the believers, a promise that God will fulfill, *"In the end We deliver Our messengers and those who believe. It is binding on Us that We should deliver those who believe."*

## Verses 104 to 109

104. Say, *"People, if you are in doubt of my religion, then (know that) I do not worship those whom you worship, other than God. But I worship God who will take your souls (at death). I am commanded to be of the believers,"*
105. *And, (Muhammad) set your face resolutely towards religion, and be not of those who ascribe partners (to God).*
106. *And do not call besides God on that which can neither benefit you nor harm you, for if you do then surely you will in that case be of the wrong-doers.*
107. *If God afflicts you with harm, there is none who can remove it save Him; and if He desires good for you, there is none who can repel His bounty. He strikes with it whom He wills of his servants. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.*
108. Say, *"People, the truth has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever is guided, is guided only for (the good of) his soul, and whosoever goes astray only goes astray against it. And I am not a guardian over you.*
109. *And (Muhammad) follow that which is being revealed to you, and persevere until God gives judgment. And He is the Best of Judges. (10: 104-109)*

The Sura ends with a proclamation to all humanity, even though, only the idol worshippers of Quraish were the only people who heard it directly from the Prophet (PBUH), *"Say, 'People, if you are in doubt of my religion, then (know that) I do not worship those whom you worship, other than God. But I worship God who will take your souls (at death). I am commanded to be of the believers,'"* The verse commanded the Messenger (PBUH) to state his position to the idolaters, *"I know that I call you to the truth. If you have any doubts about it, I am still going to persevere and I will never worship any except God who will put you to death. I will obey God's command to be a believer."*

God's command to His Messenger (PBUH) continued, *"And, (Muhammad) set your face resolutely towards religion, and be not of those who ascribe partners (to God)."* Do not call upon those who do could not benefit or harm you, *"And do not call besides God on that which can neither benefit you nor harm you, for if you do then surely you will in that case be of the wrongdoers."*

*"If God afflicts you with harm, there is none who can remove it save Him; and if He desires good for you, there is none who can repel His bounty. He strikes with it whom He wills of his servants. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."* God's law of causality is in effect. The consequences of each deed are well established and no one can change them. Only God can change His own law.

The final proclamation then follows, “Say, ‘People, the truth has come to you from your Lord. So whosoever is guided, is guided only for (the good of) his soul, and whosoever goes astray only goes astray against it. And I am not a guardian over you.’” This is the final proclamation; each one should choose the way ahead. The consequences will follow.

Finally, a command is issued to the Prophet (PBUH) to follow what has been revealed to him, “And (Muhammad) follow that which is being revealed to you, and persevere until God gives judgment. And He is the Best of Judges.”

## Sura 11: Hud

### In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

This Sura has been revealed, in its totality, in Mecca. Some scholars are of the opinion that verses 12, 17, and 114 were revealed in Medina but when one reflects on the narrative, this seems to be less likely. The three verses flow naturally with the narrative of the whole Sura. In addition, these verses deal with topics which are typical of the verses of the Quran revealed in Mecca. They deal with the issues of the doctrine and Quraish's stance and opposition to the new religion. One can cite for example verse 12 which says, "*Perchance you may (feel inclined) to give up a part of what is revealed to you, and your heart may feel straitened because they say, 'Why is not a treasure sent down to him, or why does not an angel come down with him?'" But you are only there to warn. It is God that arranges all affairs.*" This verse clearly describes Quraish's obstinacy and alludes to the distress that the Prophet (PBUH) suffered as a result of this obstinacy. The verse offers a consolation to the Prophet (PBUH). It is thus clear that such circumstances could only have happened during the Meccan period and around the time of the death of the Prophet's (PBUH) wife and uncle.

It is clear that verse 17, "*Is he (to be counted equal with them) who has a clear proof from his Lord and a witness from Him recites it, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a mercy? Such believe therein, and whoso disbelieves therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place. So be not you in doubt concerning it. It is the Truth from your Lord; but most people do not believe,*" has all the characteristics of the Meccan Quran. It deals with the fundamentals of faith and it builds a case that this Quran is a divine revelation similar to the revelation that Prophet Moses (PBUH) received before.

Verse 114 came to comfort the Prophet (PBUH) and to remind him of similar difficulties which Prophet Moses (PBUH) faced. It admonished the Prophet (PBUH) to seek help in prayers and perseverance to be able to face these difficult times.

The whole Sura was revealed after Surat Yunus (Chapter 10) which was revealed after Surat Al-Israa (Chapter 17). This order helps us determine the time when this Sura was revealed. The Sura was revealed during one of the most difficult periods of the life of the Prophet (PBUH) in the Meccan era. This was the period when the Prophet's (PBUH) uncle and wife died. The idolaters of Mecca were reluctant to challenge the authority of Abu Taleb who announced that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) enjoys his protection. Abu Taleb's death encouraged many of the idolaters of Mecca to take advantage of the situation and ridicule and assault the Prophet (PBUH).

### Verses 1 to 24:

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. (This is) a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from One who is Wise, Totally-Aware.*
2. *(Say Prophet), "Worship none but God. I am sent to you from Him as a warner and a bringer of glad tidings."*

3. *And (Saying), "Seek forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance, that He may grant you enjoyment, good (and true), for an appointed term, and He may bestow His grace on all who merit grace. But if you turn away, then I fear for you the torment of a great day.*
4. *To God is your return, and He has power over all things."*
5. *Undoubtedly, they enshroud their hearts that they may hide from Him. Even when they cover themselves with their garments, He knows what they conceal, and what they reveal, for He knows well the (innermost secrets) of the hearts.*
6. *There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on God. He knows the time and place of its definite dwelling place and its temporary deposit. All is in a clear Record.*
7. *He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six Days - and His Throne was over the waters - that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct. But if you were to say to them, "You shall indeed be raised again after death", the disbelievers would surely say, "This is nothing but obvious sorcery."*
8. *And if We delay the torment for them for an appointed time, they will surely say, "What is keeping it back?" On the day it (actually) comes upon them, nothing will divert it away from them, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to mock at.*
9. *And if we give humankind a taste of mercy from Us and then We withdraw it from him, indeed he is despairing, ungrateful.*
10. *And if We give him a taste of comfort after distress has afflicted him, he will certainly say, "The misfortune has gone away from me." Most surely he is exultant, boastful.*
11. *Save those who persevere and do good deeds. Theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward.*
12. *Perchance you may (feel inclined) to give up a part of what is revealed to you, and your heart may feel straitened because they say, "Why is not a treasure sent down to him, or why does not an angel come down with him?" But you are only there to warn. It is God that arranges all affairs.*
13. *Or they may say, "He forged it." Say, "Then bring ten suras forged like it and call whomsoever you can, other than God, if you are truthful."*
14. *If then they do not respond to you, then you should know that this revelation has been sent down containing knowledge from God, and that there is no deity but He. Will you then submit to Him?"*
15. *Those who desire the life of this world and its glitter; We shall repay them in full according to their deeds therein and they will not suffer any loss.*
16. *Those are they for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire. Their designs here will be fruitless and their deeds will be futile.*
17. *Is he (to be counted equal with them) who has a clear proof from his Lord, recited by a witness from Him, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a mercy? Such believe therein, and whoso disbelieves therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place. So do not be in doubt concerning it. It is the Truth from your Lord; but most people do not believe.*
18. *Who can be more unjust than those who invent a lie against God? They will be brought back to the presence of their Lord, and the witnesses will say, "These are the ones who lied against their Lord." The curse of God is on the wrongdoers.*

19. *Those who would avert (people) from the path of God and desire to make it crooked, these were they who denied the Hereafter.*
20. *They will not frustrate (God's design) on earth, nor will they have protecting guardians besides God. Their torment will be doubled. They could not hear; and they did not see.*
21. *Those are the ones who lost their own souls, and that which they used to invent has failed them.*
22. *Assuredly in the Hereafter they will be the greatest losers.*
23. *But those who believe, do righteous deeds, and humble themselves before their Lord they will be companions of the paradise, to dwell therein forever.*
24. *The similitude of the two parties is as the blind and the deaf and the seer and the hearer. Are they equal in similitude? Will you not then take heed? (11:1-24)*

*“Alif. Lam. Ra. (This is) a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from One who is Wise, All-Aware. (Say Prophet), “Worship none but God. I am sent to you from Him as a warner and a bringer of glad tidings.” And (Saying), “Seek forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance, that He may grant you enjoyment, good (and true), for an appointed term, and He may bestow His grace on all who merit grace. But if you turn away, then I fear for you the torment of a great day. To God is your return, and He has power over all things.”* These four verses state a number of fundamental principles of the doctrine. These include the truth of the revelation and message, God alone is worthy of being worshipped, the reward in the Hereafter for those who chose to follow the divine project, the punishment for those who deny God, the promise that all people will return to God, and the unlimited power of God.

*“Alif. Lam. Ra. (This is) a Book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail from One who is Wise, Totally-Aware.”* The Book has been composed using the letters of the Arabic Alphabet. Its verses were perfected. They are well written and provide unequivocal meanings. Each word has been chosen carefully to provide exactly the intended meaning. The sentences are in harmony and the narrative flows without contradictions. It is God who composed the Book. This is why it came in a perfect form.

The Book states the fundamental principles of the doctrine. The first principle, *“Worship none but God.”* This is a statement of the Oneness of God. He is the only one worthy of worship, worthy of obedience, and worthy of service. The second principle is the Message which includes both a warning and a glad tidings. The third principle is the duty to repent and turn back to God. Those who will follow the divine project are then promised a great reward in the Hereafter, *“He may grant you enjoyment, good (and true), for an appointed term, and He may bestow His grace on all who merit grace.”* Then there is the threat of grievous punishment for those who deny God. All people will return to God because God has limitless power, *“To God is your return, and He has power over all things.”* God has absolute power; He is in total control of everything.

This is the Book which brought the fundamental principles on which the religion of Islam is established. The most important principle is the belief in the Oneness of God. It draws a

demarcation line between order and chaos. It liberates people of the myth which drives them to worship human beings like themselves. It allows the establishment of objective and rational systems which are not dictated by the whims and desires of tyrant rulers. The dispute between the believers and disbelievers was not about who is the Creator, but the main issue was and is about who is worthy of taking control of people's lives. Is it God or is it the tyrant rulers? This is the issue that has been addressed in these verses, "*Worship none but God.*" Worshipping God alone means that one accepts to be governed by God's rules and that people should live according to the divine project.

People should then believe in the Message because it came to teach people the details of the divine project. It also implies that only God has the authority to issue the laws which control people's lives. Seeking God's forgiveness is a sign of sound hearts. Only sound hearts feel the pain of sinning and have the desire to be forgiven. The first condition of a genuine repentance is to relinquish sin. The verses then discuss the belief in the Day of Judgment to establish the fact that there is a purpose for this life. The purpose of life is to achieve goodness, and whoever fulfills his/her duty will be rewarded fully. The reward is comprehensive, "*He may bestow His grace on all who merit grace.*" Some of the scholars believe that the reward will be obtained in the Hereafter, but I believe that the verse implies that the reward is in this life as well as in the Hereafter. Any community that lives according to the divine project will be rewarded with a good life; a life of prosperity, peace, and justice.

The verses continue to describe the reaction of the disbelievers to the principles stated in the Book, "*Undoubtedly, they enshroud their hearts that they may hide from Him. Even when they cover themselves with their garments, He knows what they conceal, and what they reveal, for He knows well the (innermost secrets) of the hearts.*" The verse may be describing the actual response of the idolaters of Mecca when they heard the Quran being recited. They lowered their heads as if they were trying to hide from God. However, they were reminded that God knows what people reveal and what they conceal. God even knows their thoughts.

*"There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on God. He knows the time and place of its definite dwelling place and its temporary deposit. All is in a clear Record."* This is another form of God's comprehensive knowledge and power. He provides for each living creature on earth and knows its place of dwelling. His knowledge is all encompassing and His power is limitless. Although God has pledged to provide for each living creature but this should not be taken as an excuse to stop people from working hard to earn their livelihood. These two verses assert two of God's attributes which should be clear in the minds of people: His is Omniscient and He is the Provider.

The verses continue to teach people about the attributes of their Lord, "*He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six Days - and His Throne was over the waters - that He might try you, which of you is best in conduct. But if you were to say to them, 'You shall indeed be raised again after death,' the disbelievers would surely say, 'This is nothing but obvious sorcery.'*" We discussed the creation of heavens and earth before in Surat Yunus (Chapter 10). It is mentioned here to relate the organization of the universe to people's lives. This verse mentions a new aspect

of the creation of heavens and earth, “*and His Throne was over the waters,*” which indicates that water was present when the heavens and earth were fashioned in their final forms and God’s throne was on water. However, we will not speculate on where was this water and how did it carry the throne. The verse does not mention any details about the process of creation. However, the purpose of the creation is to test people’s conduct.

God created the heavens and earth in six days this was necessary for the earth to become, in its final form, suitable for sustaining human life. God created people and designed the earth to become a livable environment for them. God also equipped humankind with the tools and skills suitable for life on earth. God gave humankind an initial natural disposition that is adept to understand the laws that govern the universe. However, God also gave humankind the ability to discriminate between right and wrong and to choose between them. God will help those who choose to follow guidance and will let those who choose not to follow guidance to wander blindly in their misguidance. God made life on earth a testing ground to determine who of them will do good deeds. God does not need the results of the test, because His knowledge is encompassing, however, the results of the test are necessary for the reward or punishment to be decided on the basis of clear material evidence. This is a testament of God’s justice.

But people deny the Hereafter and the accountability, “*But if you were to say to them, ‘You shall indeed be raised again after death,’ the disbelievers would surely say, ‘This is nothing but obvious sorcery.’*” They also have the audacity to mock the prophets, “*And if We delay the torment for them for an appointed time, they will surely say, ‘What is keeping it back?’ On the day it (actually) comes upon them, nothing will divert it away from them, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to mock at.*” In the early time of the history of human race on earth, God chose to destroy nations which continued to reject the guidance brought to them after they have received physical miracles which testified to the truth of the Message. God sent specific messages to individual nations. The miracles that God sent to support a message were meant only to be an evidence for those who witnessed it. These were transient situations. The Message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought is the last Message that God sent to the whole human race. The miracle that Prophet (PBUH) brought as an evidence for the truth of the Message is the Quran which is an everlasting miracle. It is available to be witnessed and read by all human generations since the time it was revealed till the end of time. The divine wisdom chose not to destroy those who rejected the message because guidance is a continuous process. The same rule was applied to the previous monotheistic religions. The people who rejected these messages were not annihilated. The disbelievers were ignorant of God’s rule. They were wondering why the punishment had not befallen them. They did not appreciate the fact that God created humankind with the ability to choose between right and wrong. They rejected the concept of accountability. That is why they challenged the Prophet (PBUH) and kept asking, “*What is keeping it back.*”

On the Day of Judgment God will hold every one accountable to what they have done during their lives, “*On the day it (actually) comes upon them, nothing will divert it away from them, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to mock at.*” No believer should ask for God’s punishment to be hastened. It is out of God’s mercy that people are given respite. When we consider the number of people who adopted Islam after they had initially rejected it, we

understand the wisdom of God in delaying the punishment till the Day of Judgment. God knows best.

The narrative then moves on to a discussion of the human psyche, *“And if we give man a taste of mercy from Us and then We withdraw it from him, indeed he is despairing, ungrateful. And if We give him a taste of comfort after distress has afflicted him, he will certainly say, ‘The misfortune has gone away from me.’ Most surely he is exultant, boastful.”* The verses describe the short sightedness of the human being. Humankind lives the present moment, he easily forgets the past and finds it difficult to think about the future. He does not realize that a loss that he suffered may have been a blessing from God. The difficulty is quickly forgotten when God removes his difficulty and redresses his misery. He then becomes, *“Most surely he is exultant, boastful.”* Except those, *“who persevere and do good deeds. Theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward.”* Those who persevered at the time of difficulty and did not forget God’s favor in the time of comfort will be forgiven and will have a great reward. Certainly the strong faith which is reflected on good deeds is the safeguard which protects the believer against despair in the time of adversity and against ingratitude in the time of comfort.

The Messenger (PBUH) was confronted with many of those short sighted ungrateful people who did not understand why God should send a human being as a messenger. They wanted a material proof. They wanted the Messenger (PBUH) to be an angel or at least to be accompanied by one. Then they wondered why the Messenger (PBUH) would not have a treasure. The Quran consoled the Prophet (PBUH) and reminded him of his duty and assured him of God’s support, *“Perchance you may (feel inclined) to give up a part of what is revealed to you, and your heart may feel straitened because they say, ‘Why is not a treasure sent down to him, or why does not an angel come down with him?’ But you are only there to warn. It is God that arranges all affairs.”* It is a reminder in the form of a rhetorical question. No, you will not succumb to their harassment and give up a part of what is revealed to you. You are only there to warn them; their accountability is to God.

*“Or they may say, ‘He forged it.’ Say, ‘Then bring ten suras forged like it and call whomsoever you can, other than God, if you are truthful.’”* The idolaters of Mecca accused the Prophet (PBUH) repeatedly of forging the Quran. The Quran challenged them in Surat Yunus to forge one verse similar to the verses of the Quran, why then the challenge is repeated here asking them to compose ten Suras? The early scholars who interpreted the Quran are of the opinion that the idolaters were first challenged to bring about a Quran similar to the Quran that was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH). When they failed, the challenge was reduced to ten Suras, then to a single Sura. However, there is no evidence to support this opinion. Our opinion (God knows best) is that these challenges were posed to address specific incidents. Each one had its own circumstance and consequently required a different type of challenge. The challenge posed to the disbelievers to compose a book similar to this Quran aimed at showing that they will not be able to compose a book at the same level of eloquence as the Quran. In such case, the amount does not matter; it is the quality that matters. They were asked to assemble the best authors they can manage to attempt to compose ten Suras similar to this Quran. They were doomed to failure in this endeavor, *“If then they do not respond to you, then you should know that this revelation has been sent down containing knowledge from God, and that there is no god but He. Will you then*



*submit to Him?"* Their failure should be a clear proof that it has been revealed by God. There is no deity but He. Should not you then submit? But they continued to be stubborn. They were more interested in their wealth and earthly power than in the truth, *"Those who desire the life of this world and its glitter, We shall repay them in full according to their deeds therein and they will not suffer any loss. Those are they for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire. Their designs here will be fruitless and their deeds will be futile."* The efforts that aimed at worldly gains will be rewarded justly in this life, but there will be no reward for them in the Hereafter. We should emphasize that had these efforts been done with the intention of seeking God's pleasure, the reward would have been in both this life as well as in the Hereafter.

*"Is he (to be counted equal with them) who has a clear proof from his Lord, recited by a witness from Him, and before it was the Book of Moses, an example and a mercy? Such believe therein, and whoso disbelieves therein of the clans, the Fire is his appointed place. So do not be in doubt concerning it. It is the Truth from your Lord; but most people do not believe."* There are different opinions regarding the interpretations of the two sentences, *"Is he (to be counted equal with them) who has a clear proof from his Lord, recited by a witness from Him."* The most probable interpretation, in my opinion, is that, *"Is he (to be counted equal with them) who has a clear proof from his Lord,"* refers to the Messenger (PBUH) as well as to anyone who believes in his message. The sentence, *"recited by a witness from Him,"* refers to the Quran, which God sent as a witness to confirm the truth of the message that Muhammad (PBUH) brought. The previous Book that Moses (PBUH) was given testifies to truthfulness of Muhammad (PBUH) as well.

It seems to me that the verse describes the relationship between God and His Messengers. It indicates that God places faith in the heart of the messengers who have been sent by Him. We can see this clearly from the discussions between the messengers and their people. Noah (PBUH) said, *"My people, think: if I have a clear sign from my Lord, and that He has sent mercy to me from His own presence, but that the mercy has been made obscure to you? Shall we compel you to accept it when you are averse to it?"* (11:28). The same address was made by Saleh (PBUH), *"My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He has bestowed His mercy on me, who then can help me against God if I were to disobey Him? You would only increase my loss."* (11:63). Also, Shu'ayb (PBUH) said, *"My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He gave me fair provision? I do not wish, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my power; and my success (in my task) can only come from God. In Him I trust, and to Him I always turn."* (11:88). All these messengers used the same wording in addressing their people. This expression reflects the deep belief that fills their hearts and confirms the connection between them and their true Lord. The objective of the repetition of the same message is to confirm the unity that binds all the messengers of God including Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This refutes the claims made by the idolaters that Muhammad (PBUH) fabricated this Quran.

The verse questions the logic behind the idolaters' claim that Muhammad (PBUH) has fabricated the Quran. It reiterates the argument which supports the prophet-hood of Muhammad (PBUH), showing clearly that he is a member of the group of messengers that God sent to lead humanity to the straight path. Muhammad's (PBUH) message is supported by all the previous messengers. So, let there be no doubt about the authenticity of the Message.

*“Who can be more unjust than those who invent a lie against God? They will be brought back to the presence of their Lord, and the witnesses will say, ‘These are the ones who lied against their Lord.’ The curse of God is on the wrongdoers.”* Those who invent lies against God will be paraded on the Day of Judgment and the witnesses will point to them labeling them liars. The witnesses include the angels, the messengers, and the believers. They will then be cursed for their efforts to bar people from the straight path, *“Those who would avert (people) from the path of God and desire to make it crooked, these were they who denied the Hereafter.”* They wanted people to follow the crooked path and they denied the Hereafter. People servitude to God is a source of honor and dignity while servitude to anyone other than God is a source of humiliation.

*“They will not frustrate (God’s design) on earth, nor will they have protecting guardians besides God. Their torment will be doubled. They could not hear, and they did not see.”* No one will be able to frustrate God; had He willed He could have punished the idolaters during their lives. They will have no protector to support them against God. In the Hereafter, they will have the punishment that they earned for the deeds they committed during their lives. Those are the ones who lost themselves, *“Those are the ones who lost their own souls, and that which they used to invent has failed them.”* This is the greatest loss that a person can suffer. They lost their dignity in the life of this world and they will suffer the humiliation in the Hereafter. They will also lose that which they fabricated against God, *“Assuredly in the Hereafter they will be the greatest losers.”* They lost their souls both in the worldly life and in the Hereafter.

On the other side, one finds the believers who did good deeds secure in their faith, *“But those who believe, do righteous deeds, and humble themselves before their Lord they will be companions of the paradise, to dwell therein forever.”* The Arabic sentence which has been translated as *“humble themselves before their Lord,”* has the connotation of being secure with God, confident of His help, and happy in submitting to Him.

*“The similitude of the two parties is as the blind and the deaf and the seer and the hearer. Are they equal in similitude? Will you not then take heed?”* The verse paints an image which juxtaposes the two groups: the believers and the disbelievers. The disbelievers are blind and deaf; they do not see nor can they hear. The main function of the senses in the humankind is to act as gates to the heart and mind so that one can understand and reflect. The disbelievers closed these gates and thus deprived themselves of the benefit of the senses. The believers on the other hand enjoy the full benefit of their senses so they become guided. They are certainly not equal.

### **Verses 25 to 49:**

25. *And We sent Noah to his people (and he said), “I have come to you with a plain warning*
26. *That you serve none but God. Verily I do fear for you the torment of a painful Day.”*
27. *But the chiefs of the disbelievers among his people said, “We see you but a mortal like ourselves. And we see that those who followed you are but the meanest among us, whose*

- judgment is immature. Nor do we see in you (all) any merit above us. In fact, we think you are liars.”*
28. *He said, “My people think, if I have a clear sign from my Lord, and He has sent mercy to me from His own presence, but that the mercy has been made obscure to you? Shall we compel you to accept it when you are averse to it?”*
  29. *And my people, I do not ask you any reward in return. My reward is from none but God. But I will not drive away (in contempt) those who believe. Verily they are to meet their Lord, and I see that you are the ignorant ones,*
  30. *And my people, who would help me against God if I drove them away? Will you not then take heed?*
  31. *I tell you not that I have the treasures of God, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I claim to be an angel. I will not say, to those whom your eyes do despise, that God will not grant them (all) that is good. God knows best what is in their souls. I should, if I did, indeed be a wrongdoer.”*
  32. *They said, “Noah, you have argued with us for too long, now bring upon us what you threaten us with, if you speak the truth.”*
  33. *He said, “Truly, God will bring it on you if He wills and you will not be able to escape.*
  34. *My counsel will not profit you if I were to advise you, if God's will is to keep you astray. He is your Lord and to Him you will be brought back.*
  35. *Or do they say, “He forged it?” Say, “If I forged it, I will bear the consequence of my sin. I am innocent of (all) that you commit.”*
  36. *It was revealed to Noah, “None of your people will believe except those who have believed already. So grieve no longer over their (evil) deeds.*
  37. *But construct an Ark under Our eyes and by Our inspiration, and do not speak to Me on behalf of the wrongdoers. They are about to be drowned.”*
  38. *And he was building the Ark, and every time the chieftains of his people passed by him, they mock him. He said, “You may mock us now, but we will mock you as you used to mock (us).*
  39. *You will soon know who it is on whom will descend a torment that will cover them with shame and on whom will a lasting torment come down.”*
  40. *(Thus it was) till, when Our command came to pass and water gushed out of the oven. We said, “Carry therein two of every kind, a pair (the male and female), and your household, save him against whom the word has gone forth already, and those who believe. But only a few believed with him.*
  41. *And he said, “Embark therein. In the name of God be its course and its mooring. My Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*
  42. *And it sailed with them amid waves like mountains, and Noah cried to his son – who separated himself from the others – “My son, come ride with us, and be not with the disbelievers.”*
  43. *He (the son) said, “I shall take refuge in some mountain that will save me from the water.” (Noah) said, “This day there is none that saves from the command of God save him on whom He bestowed His mercy.” And the waves came in between them, so he was among those who drowned.*
  44. *And it was said, “Earth, swallow your water and, sky, be cleared of clouds.” And the water subsided. And the command was fulfilled. And it (the Ark) came to rest upon (the mount) Al-Judi and it was said, “Gone are the wrongdoers.”*

45. *And Noah called upon his Lord. He said, "My Lord, my son is of my household, and Your promise is the truth, and You are the Most Just of Judges."*
46. *He (God) said, "Noah, he is not of your household. His conduct was unrighteous. So ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge. I admonish you lest you act like the ignorant."*
47. *He (Noah) said, "My Lord, I do seek refuge with You, lest I ask You that of which I have no knowledge. And unless You forgive me and have mercy on me, I should indeed be lost."*
48. *It was said, "Noah, go you down with peace from Us and blessings upon you and some nations (that will spring) from those who are with you. (There will be other) nations to whom We shall give enjoyment for a while, then a painful torment from Us will overtake them."*
49. *These are accounts of the unseen which We reveal to you (Muhammad). Neither you nor your people had any previous knowledge of them, so persevere. The future belongs to those who are conscious of God. (11:25-49)*

*"And We sent Noah to his people (and he said), 'I have come to you with a plain warning, that you serve none but God. Verily I do fear for you the torment of a painful Day.'" This is almost the same wording that was used in describing Muhammad's (PBUH) mission. This emphasizes the oneness of the message which was delivered by all messengers. In the Arabic text the verse does not explicitly have "(and he said)" which we added in the translation. The Arabic text narrates the encounter between Noah (PBUH) and his people as if it were a live scene that plays in front of us. The verse sums up the role of the messenger, "I have come to you with a plain warning." It also emphasizes the essence of the message, "That you serve none but God." Then it outlines the consequences of not heeding the warning, "Verily I do fear for you the torment of a painful Day." What was the response of the elite among his people? "But the chiefs of the disbelievers among his people said, 'We see you but a mortal like ourselves. And we see that those who followed you are but the meanest among us, whose judgment is immature. Nor do we see in you (all) any merit above us. In fact, we think you are liars.'" This was their arrogant response to Noah's (PBUH) call. It is the same response that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received from the chiefs of Quraish. They did not think that a human being is worthy of being a messenger of God. It is true that delivering God's message is an enormous task, but God in His wisdom must have prepared humankind to carry this responsibility. They were also indignant that a messenger was not chosen from among the elite. They did not understand that carrying the message requires more than being wealthy or powerful. A messenger should be a highly spiritual, honest and perseverant person. They objected to the fact that the messenger was a human being, then they raised another objection about those who followed the messenger, "those who followed you are but the meanest among us," They confused poverty with meanness. They refused to be grouped in one class with those who were less fortunate. They used a materialistic measure to evaluate the worth of people. They did not understand that people's worth is not measured by their wealth, their power, or their status in the society. They forgot that the values of honor, understanding, and knowledge are more important. Then the chieftains made their final conclusion, "In fact we think you are liars."*

Noah (PBUH) endured their accusations and arrogance with expressions of tolerance. However, his response reflected his confidence in the true message that he brought them. He ignored their rudeness and spoke to them kindly, *“He said, ‘My people think, if I have a clear sign from my Lord, and He has sent mercy to me from His own presence, but that the mercy has been made obscure to you? Shall we compel you to accept it when you are averse to it?’”* He opened his address with an endearing phrase, *“My people.”* Then he explained in plain words, that he may have had certain attributes which made him qualified to receive the true message from his Lord. This is a great mercy from God. However, he did not intend to force them to accept the message if they were averse to it. In his response to them, Noah (PBUH) tried in a nice way to point out the values that they were turning away from.

*“And my people, I do not ask you any reward in return. My reward is from none but God. But I will not drive away (in contempt) those who believe. Verily they are to meet their Lord, and I see that you are the ignorant ones.”* Noah (PBUH) continued to refute their argument, pointing out that he was not seeking any reward from them and he does not care how wealthy his followers were. He would not expel those who followed him simply because they were poor. He would not transgress God’s standards, *“And my people, who would help me against God if I drove them away? Will you not then take heed?”*

He then reminded them of the essence of his true message, *“I tell you not that I have the treasures of God, nor do I know the unseen, nor do I claim to be an angel. I will not say, to those whom your eyes do despise, that God will not grant them (all) that is good. God knows best what is in their souls. I should, if I did, indeed be a wrongdoer.”* In this verse, Noah (PBUH) purified the Message which he brought, from all superficial values. It is a true message from God.

*“They said, ‘Noah, you have argued with us for too long, now bring upon us what you threaten us with, if you speak the truth.’”* This was a response that disguised impotence under a veil of power, weakness under a veil of strength, and fear under a veil of arrogance. Noah (PBUH) responded in a way a noble prophet would respond, *“He said, ‘Truly, God will bring it on you if He wills and you will not be able to escape.’”* He was only a messenger; his duty was to deliver the Message. It is God’s role to inflict His punishment if He wills and when He wills. If God’s will is that you would perish because of your misguidance then you will perish and, *“My counsel will not profit you if I were to advise you, if God's will is to keep you astray. He is your Lord and to Him you will be brought back.”*

The story of Prophet Noah (PBUH) is then interrupted briefly to refute Quraish’s denial of the message which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought, *“Or do they say, ‘He forged it?’ Say, ‘If I forged it, I will bear the consequence of my sin. I am innocent of (all) that you commit.’”* Forging the Quran is a crime that a prophet would not commit.

After this brief digression, the narrative resumes the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH). We are presented by a scene of Noah (PBUH) receiving a revelation from his Lord, *“It was revealed to*

*Noah, 'None of your people will believe except those who have believed already. So grieve no longer over their (evil) deeds.'*" No more people will believe in you, so should not grieve. The warning has been delivered, the period of respite has ended, and it is now time for action, *"But construct an Ark under Our eyes and by Our inspiration, and do not speak to Me on behalf of the wrongdoers. They are about to be drowned."*

The following verses describe the third scene of the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH). The scene of building the Ark, *"And he was building the Ark, and every time the chieftains of his people passed by him, they would mock him. He said, 'You may mock us now, but we will mock you as you used to mock (us). You will soon know who it is on whom will descend a torment that will cover them with shame and on whom will a lasting torment come down.'*" The verses paint a vivid scene. We can see Noah (PBUH) in our imagination, a messenger of God turned carpenter, confidently building the Ark. He was not bothered by the folk mocking him because he knew they cannot comprehend the concept of God's revelation.

Then the expected event occurred, *"(Thus it was) till, when Our command came to pass and water gushed out of the oven. We said, 'Carry therein two of every kind, a pair (the male and female), and your household, save him against whom the word has gone forth already, and those who believe.' But only a few believed with him."* Stories explaining water gushing from the oven are abound, however, all what we will say is that this may have been a sign for Prophet Noah (PBUH) to load the Ark. He was commanded to allow those who believed to embark the Ark with him, *"And he said, 'Embark therein. In the name of God be its course and its mooring. My Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.'*"

The verses describe the stages of the process one after another. The first stage was the command to build the Ark. Then came the stage of loading the Ark. The command excluded those who earned the wrath of God from the list of those who would be allowed to join Noah (PBUH) on the Ark.

The verses continued to describe the horrible image of the flood, *"And it sailed with them amid waves like mountains, and Noah cried to his son – who separated himself from the others – 'My son, come ride with us, and be not with the disbelievers.'*" In addition to the horror brought about by the tremendous flood, Noah's (PBUH) heart was filled with the agony of the prospect of losing his son. He called upon his son to join them on the Ark but the son, full of arrogance, replied, *"I shall take refuge in some mountain that will save me from the water."* Noah (PBUH), knowing the truth, tried again to persuade his son, *"(Noah) said, 'This day there is none that saves from the command of God save him on whom He bestowed His mercy.'*" On that day, there was no escape from what God had ordained. The moment of truth came in a split second, *"And the waves came in between them, so he was among those who drowned."* Even now, after the passing of thousands of years, one can still feel the terror as if we were watching the events unfold in front of our eyes.

The storm abated and the universe was wrapped in stillness and, *“it was said, ‘Earth, swallow your water and, sky, be cleared of clouds.’ And the water subsided. And the command was fulfilled. And it (the Ark) came to rest upon (the mount) Al-Judi and it was said, ‘Gone are the wrongdoers.’”* This is a very brief verse which captures the dramatic event. The command was passed and the disbelievers met their doom.

Noah (PBUH) having seen the horrible events of the flood come to end, remembered his loss. He turned to God, *“And Noah called upon his Lord. He said, ‘My Lord, my son is of my household, and Your promise is the truth, and You are the Most Just of Judges.’”* He asked God about His promise to save Noah’s family. God then reminded him with the truth that he forgot in the midst of the dramatic events, *“He (God) said, ‘Noah, he is not of your household. His conduct was unrighteous. So ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge. I admonish you lest you act like the ignorant.’”* A family in God’s book is not merely a group of people who share a blood relationship. A family is a group of people who share a specific creed. By this definition, Noah’s (PBUH) disbelieving son is not part of the family of the believers. The verse carries the semblance of a warning to Noah (PBUH). The warning came to address Noah’s (PBUH) request of God to fulfill His promise. Noah (PBUH) should have known that the relationship between the believers is stronger than blood relationships. God’s promise has been fulfilled; He saved the family of the believers. Noah (PBUH) understood the lesson and sought God’s forgiveness, *“He (Noah) said, ‘My Lord, I do seek refuge with You, lest I ask You that of which I have no knowledge. And unless You forgive me and have mercy on me, I should indeed be lost.’”*

God extended His mercy over Noah (PBUH) and blessed him and his followers, *“It was said, ‘Noah, go you down with peace from Us and blessings upon you and some nations (that will spring) from those who are with you. (There will be other) nations to whom We shall give enjoyment for a while, then a painful torment from Us will overtake them.’”* This was the end of the story. God granted those who believed with Noah (PBUH) and their progeny security and safety while issuing a dire warning to those who preferred the pleasure of this world. The believers received the glad tidings while the disbelievers were promised a severe punishment in the Hereafter.

This part of the Sura ended with a general statement, *“These are accounts of the unseen which We reveal to you (Muhammad). Neither you nor your people had any previous knowledge of them, so persevere. The future belongs to those who are conscious of God.”* The statement declared the truth of the revelation which the disbelievers denied. There are several objectives for this story and the stories mentioned in the Quran in general. The verses narrated events which were known neither to the Prophet (PBUH) nor to the Arabs at that time. These stories were part of a revelation that the Prophet (PBUH) received from the Wise, the Omniscient. The stories are also a statement of the oneness of the creed from the time Noah (PBUH) the second father of the human race. The stories cited the objections that were raised by the disbelievers whenever a messenger was sent to them. The stories also express the eternal truth, *“the future belongs to those who are conscious of God.”*

The story of Prophet Noah (PBUH) left many questions unanswered: was this a universal flood? Was the whole earth covered with water? Or was it a local flood? Where did it take place? We can only speculate about the answers, but there is no way one can find the correct answers to these questions. One can state that, on the face of it, the verses indicate that Noah's (PBUH) people were the only human beings living on earth at that time. The piece of land that they lived on was the only part of the earth that was inhabited at that time. It seems that the flood covered the area on which they were living. Everything perished in the flood except those who were on the Ark.

We would like to outline the lessons that we learn from Noah's (PBUH) story before we continue with the rest of the verses in this Sura. Noah's (PBUH) people were the descendants of Adam (PBUH). Adam (PBUH) was prepared and entrusted to the task of establishing the life of the human race on earth. God struck a covenant with Adam (PBUH) to follow God's guidance. God took the same covenant from Adam's wife and children. The covenant embodied the first articles of faith known to the human race. These articles of faith emanated from the principle of complete submission to God. They all received a warning to beware of the Devil's efforts to tempt them away from the straight path. God promised to guide those who submit to Him; this guidance protects them against the Devil's temptation. As time passed, generation after generation the commitment of the progeny of Adam (PBUH) to God's covenant was weakened. The Devil worked hard and used the natural weaknesses of the human beings to tempt them away from the straight path. The Devil succeeded in convincing people to worship idols as was the case with Noah's (PBUH) people. Thus, the lesson that is given in these few verses is the fact that submission to God is the first creed given to the human race. It is the protection against the Devil's temptation.

Another lesson that can be gleaned from the story is the appreciation of the value of those who submit to God. It is being said that Noah (PBUH) continued to call people to submit to God during his life on earth which is estimated to have been about nine hundred and fifty years. It has also been reported that only twelve people followed him. God saw that this small number of people is worthy of a miraculous change in the natural laws which govern the universe: causing the flood to happen. This is a very important message to the believing few who committed themselves to the absolute submission to God. They will be supported by God, even if this support came in the form of a miracle which breaks the norm of the natural laws which govern the universe. They should continue on the straight path and never despair of God's support.

### **Verses 50 to 68:**

50. *And to (the tribe of) A'ad (We sent) their brother, Hud. He said, "My people, worship God. You have no other god save Him; you are only making up lies.*
51. *My people, I ask of you no reward for it. My reward is the concern only of Him who created me. Do you not have sense?*
52. *And my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him (in repentance). He will cause the sky to rain abundance on you and will add strength to your strength. Do not turn away, guilty."*



53. *They said, "Hud, you did not bring us a clear proof and we will not abandon our gods on the basis of your words. Nor shall we believe in you.*
54. *We say nothing but that (perhaps) some of our gods may have possessed you in an evil way." He said, "I call God to witness, and you too bear witness, that I am innocent of the sin of associating partners with Him.*
55. *So plot (your worst) against me, all of you, and give me no respite.*
56. *I put my trust in God, My Lord and your Lord. There is no moving creature, but He has grasp of its forelock. Verily, my Lord's way is straight.*
57. *If you turn away, I (at least) have conveyed the message with which I was sent to you. My Lord will make other people to succeed you, and you will not harm Him in the least. For my Lord is Keeper over all things."*
58. *So when Our command came to pass, We saved Hud and those who believed with him, by (special) grace from Ourselves. We saved them from a severe torment.*
59. *And such were A'ad. They denied the revelations of their Lord and disobeyed His messengers and followed the command of every obstinate tyrant.*
60. *And they were pursued by a curse in this life, and on the Day of Judgment. For A'ad denied their Lord. Away with A'ad, the people of Hud.*
61. *And to (the tribe of) Thamud (We sent) their brother Salih. He said, "My people, worship God. You have no other god save Him. He brought you forth from the earth and has made you dwell in it. So ask forgiveness of Him and turn to Him repentant. My Lord is near, Responsive.*
62. *They said, "Salih, we used to have such great hope in you. Do you (now) forbid us to worship what our fathers used to worship? We are really in grave doubt concerning that which you are calling us to."*
63. *He said, "My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He has bestowed His mercy on me, who then can help me against God if I were to disobey Him? You would only increase my loss.*
64. *And my people, this is God's she-camel a sign for you. Leave her to pasture on God's earth, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift torment will seize you."*
65. *But they did ham-string her. So he said, "Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. This is a threat that will not be belied."*
66. *When Our commandment came to pass, We saved Salih, and those who believed with him, by a mercy from Us, from the ignominy of that day. Your Lord is verily the Strong, the Eminent.*
67. *The (mighty) blast overtook the wrongdoers and they lay dead in their homes before the morning;*
68. *As if they had never dwelt and flourished there. Thamud rejected their Lord; away with Thamud. (11:50-68)*

Hud (PBUH) was a member of the tribe of A'ad. The verses reflect the strong tie between the members of the tribe. Such tie should have been an important asset in helping to convince the tribe that the message brought by one of them must be good for them. The verses also highlight the error committed by the people when they rejected such a message and how the rejection resulted in creating a divide between the believers and the disbeliever, a divide based on

difference in faith. Hud (PBUH) addressed his people in an endearing fashion, *“And to (the tribe of) A'ad (We sent) their brother, Hud. He said, ‘My people, worship God. You have no other god save Him,’”* reminding them of the strong tribal ties that binds him to them then asking them to believe in the Oneness of God. This is the same message that each and every messenger brought to his people. Hud (PBUH) reminded them that idol worship is only a lie, *“You are only making up lies.”* He stressed that his motivation is to serve God alone, he does not expect any reward from them, *“My people, I ask of you no reward for it. My reward is the concern only of Him who made me.”* His statement may have been in response to an accusation made by his people that his aim was to receive a material gain. He then stressed his objective, *“Do you not have sense?”* How can a messenger of God ask people for a material gain? God is the owner of everything and it is He who sends the messengers and it is He who provides for everyone. Hud (PBUH) directed them to the way to receive provisions in abundance, *“And my people, ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him (in repentance). He will cause the sky to rain abundance on you and will add strength to your strength. Do not turn away, guilty.”* He finished the statement by a warning them against rejecting God’s revelations.

It is interesting to note the relationship between asking God for forgiveness and the increase in provision and strength. Forgiveness is in the realm of the spiritual while provisions and strength are in the realm of the physical which is controlled by God’s universal laws. It is easy to explain the relationship between the spiritual and the physical in regard to strength. Those who have pure hearts and are keen on doing good deeds are in pursuit of pure food which usually promote their well-being. Piety is a sure medicine for stress and other psychological ailments. It provides a sense of security, safety, and a hope in the mercy of God.

Rain is controlled by natural laws. Rain can be useful in sustaining life but it can also be a destructive force. God controls the natural laws. He can direct these laws to produce the amount of rain which help sustain life. On the other hand, He is able also to direct these laws to produce rain which becomes a tool for destruction. God has the power to control the laws and to change them according to His will.

However, they took his warning lightly, *“They said, ‘Hud, you did not bring us a clear proof and we will not abandon our gods on the basis of your words. Nor shall we believe in you. We say nothing but that (perhaps) some of our gods may have possessed you in an evil way.’”* They rejected his call claiming that he did not bring them enough proof to support its veracity. The concept of the Oneness of God does need a proof. A reminder is sufficient to excite the initial natural disposition of the human being to accept this concept. However, they dismissed his reminder arrogantly, thinking that his argument is lacking and he did not bring a solid proof. In explaining what happened to him, they came up with the idea that one of their gods must have struck Hud (PBUH) with a touch of madness.

Hud (PBUH) had no alternative but to accept their challenge and to call upon his Lord as a witness that he has delivered the message, *“He said, ‘I call God to witness, and you too bear witness, that I am innocent of the sin of associating partners with Him. So plot (your worst) against me, all of you, and give me no respite. I put my trust in God, My Lord and your Lord. There is no moving creature, but He has grasp of its forelock. Verily, my Lord’s way is straight.”*

*If you turn away, I (at least) have conveyed the message with which I was sent to you. My Lord will make other people to succeed you, and you will not harm Him in the least. For my Lord is a Keeper over all things.*” It is a strong declaration that severs the ties between Hud (PBUH) and the disbelievers. He was one of them, the ties between Hud (PBUH) and his tribal brothers were very strong but now, the difference in faith placed a barrier between them. One marvels at the courage of a lone person like Hud (PBUH) to stand up against his tribe and to call upon them to change their faith, not fearing their reprisal. It is the strength of faith and the belief in God which filled Hud (PBUH) with the confidence to stand up against the disbelievers. He had complete confidence in God’s support. God controls every living thing and His path is the straight path. Hud (PBUH) finished his statement by indicating that he had fulfilled his task, he delivered the message and if they turn away they will suffer the consequences. God is the keeper of everything. God can always destroy the disbelievers and establish others on earth. No one can harm God in the least.

The dialogue ended and the time to exercise the threat came, *“So when Our command came to pass, We saved Hud and those who believed with him, by (special) grace from Ourselves. We saved them from a severe torment.”* Hud (PBUH) and those who believed were saved from the severe torment that befell the disbelievers. A’ad perished and they were cursed till the Day of Judgment, *“And such were A’ad. They denied the revelations of their Lord and disobeyed His messengers and followed the command of every obstinate tyrant.”* Although they only rejected one messenger, but the verse states that they rejected God’s messengers. It is a reference to the fact that all God’s messengers came with the same message. They committed a grievous error by denying God’s “revelations” and rejecting God’s “messengers.” They followed the command of those obstinate tyrants who refused to acknowledge the truth that came to them from God. They met their doom *“And they were pursued by a curse in this life, and on the Day of Judgment. For A’ad denied their Lord; away with A’ad, the people of Hud”*

The issue at hand is the right of the human beings to free themselves from the hold of the tyrants and to think and choose for themselves. The issue that arose between Hud (PBUH) and the tribe of A’ad is the principle of who has the ultimate authority and is worthy of being followed? Is it God or the obstinate tyrants? The sin that the people of A’ad committed is that they rejected the command which the messenger brought and they followed the commands of the tyrants. Their messenger commanded them to submit to God. It is the same message that all the messengers of God brought to their people. The absolute submission to God is the essence of the belief in the oneness of God.

The same message was given to Salih (PBUH), *“And to (the tribe of) Thamud (We sent) their brother Salih. He said, ‘My people worship God. You have no other god save Him. He brought you forth from the earth and has made you dwell in it. So ask forgiveness of Him and turn to Him repentant; my Lord is near, Responsive.’”* It is the same message: worship God alone, seek His forgiveness, and acknowledge the closeness and responsiveness of God. Salih (PBUH) continued to remind his people of their creation and the blessings of God Which He bestowed on them.

The corruption sealed their hearts and prevented them from seeing the truth. They ignored Salih's (PBUH) kind approach and doubted his words, *"They said, 'Salih, we used to have such great hope in you. Do you (now) forbid us to worship what our fathers used to worship? We are really in grave doubt concerning that which you are calling us to.'"* How dare he forbid them to continue worshipping that which their forefathers used to worship? They followed blindly in the footsteps of their fathers. The essence of the call to believe in the Oneness of God is to free oneself from the shackles of servitude to customs and tyrants.

Their statement, *"We used to have such great hope in you,"* reminds one with the response of Quraish to Muhammad (PBUH). They used to call him the trustworthy but when he brought them the message of Islam they turned around and called him magician and liar. They forgot how he lived among them before he was sent as a messenger of God.

Salih (PBUH) responded in the same way his grandfather Noah (PBUH) responded, *"He said, 'My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He has bestowed His mercy on me, who then can help me against God if I were to disobey Him? You would only increase my loss. And my people, this is God's she-camel a sign for you. Leave her to pasture on God's earth, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift torment will seize you.'"* God gave me clear signs that led me to the straight path and He chose me to carry His message to you, would I then disobey Him? No one will help me escape the wrath of God if I disobey Him to please you. I will only suffer a greater loss: the loss of the honor of being a messenger of God, the humiliation in this life, and the punishment in the Hereafter. He then gave them a sign: God's she-camel. The expression, "God's she-camel," indicates that the camel was known to them. He also gave them a warning.

But they did not heed the warning, *"But they did hamstring her. So he said, 'Enjoy yourselves in your homes for three days. This is a threat that will not be belied.'"* God gave them respite for three days and God's threat came to pass, *"When Our commandment came to pass, We saved Salih, and those who believed with him, by a mercy from Us, from the ignominy of that day. Your Lord is verily the Strong, the Eminent. The (mighty) blast overtook the wrongdoers and they lay dead in their homes before the morning."* God saved Salih (PBUH) and those who believed with him as a sign of His mercy. They were saved from death and from the humiliation of that day. The death of Thamud was humiliating, they were seized by God and they perished as if they never existed before, *"As if they had never dwelt and flourished there. Thamud rejected their Lord; away with Thamud."*

### **Verses 69 to 83:**

69. *And Our messengers came to Abraham with good news. They said, "Peace." He answered, "Peace," and without delay he brought a roasted calf.*
70. *But when he saw their hands did not reach towards the (meal), he mistrusted them, and was fearful of them. They said, "Have no fear. We have been sent to the people of Lot."*
71. *And his wife was standing (there), she laughed. We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac of Jacob.*
72. *She said, "Alas for me! How am I to bear a child, seeing that I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? This would be indeed a wonderful thing."*

73. *They said, "Do you wonder at God's command? The grace of God and His blessings on you people of the house. He (God) is indeed worthy of all praise, full of all glory."*
74. *When fear left Abraham and the glad tidings had reached him, he began to plead with us on behalf of Lot's people.*
75. *Verily Abraham was, without doubt, forbearing, tender-hearted, and penitent.*
76. *Abraham, forsake this; your Lord's command has gone forth, there will come to them a torment which cannot be averted.*
77. *When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed and knew not how to protect them. He said, "This is a difficult day."*
78. *And his people came rushing towards him, and they had been long in the habit of practicing abominations. He said, "My people, here are my daughters. They are purer for you (if you marry). Be conscious of God, and do not disgrace me with my guests. Is there not among you a single right-minded man?"*
79. *They said, "You have certainly known that we have no claim on your daughters. Indeed, you know quite well what we want."*
80. *He said, "If only I had the power to stop you or that I could take refuge in a strong support."*
81. *They said (The Messengers), "Lot, we are messengers from your Lord. They will not reach you. So travel with your people in the dead of the night and let not one of you turn round, except your wife. Whatsoever befalls them shall befall her. Verily their appointed time is the morning, is not the morning soon?"*
82. *When Our command came to pass, We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay, spread, layer on layer;*
83. *Marked with fire in the providence of your Lord (for the destruction of the wicked); and they are never far from the wrongdoers. (11:69-83)*

*"And Our messengers came to Abraham with good news." The angels came to Abraham (PBUH) with good news. The nature of the good news was not revealed until Abraham's (PBUH) wife was present. "They said, 'Peace.' He answered, 'Peace,' and without delay he brought a roasted calf." Abraham (PBUH) prepared a meal for the guests in keeping with the tradition of hospitality. However, the angels did not eat, "But when he saw their hands did not reach towards the (meal), he mistrusted them, and was fearful of them." When the angels refused to eat, Abraham (PBUH) took this as a sign of bad intention on the part of the guests. This made him apprehensive and he mistrusted them. Feeling this, they disclosed their nature to him, "They said, 'Have no fear. We have been sent to the people of Lot.'" His wife joined them, she was surprised to hear the good news, "And his wife was standing (there), she laughed. We gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac of Jacob." She exclaimed, how could she become pregnant being a barren old woman? In addition, her husband was also old, "She said, 'Alas for me! How am I to bear a child, seeing that I am an old woman, and my husband here is an old man? This would be indeed a wonderful thing.'" One should not wonder at miracles decreed by God. He is the one who created the laws that govern the nature, and He is able to change these laws as He wishes, "They said, 'Do you wonder at God's command? The grace of God and His blessings on you people of the house. He (God) is indeed worthy of all praise, full of all glory.'"*

Having heard the angels, the trust returned to Abraham (PBUH) but he was saddened with what will happen to the people of Lot (PBUH). He started praying God on behalf of Lot's (PBUH) people, *"When fear left Abraham and the glad tidings had reached him, he began to plead with us on behalf of Lot's people. Verily Abraham was, without doubt, forbearing, tender-hearted, and penitent."* Abraham (PBUH) was forbearing, tender-hearted, and penitent. This indicates that Abraham (PBUH) was perseverant, constant in praying God, and always repenting. These attributes made Abraham (PBUH) to argue with the angels about the doom that was about to befall the people of Lot (PBUH). However, he was admonished by God, *"Abraham, forsake this; your Lord's command has gone forth, there will come to them a torment which cannot be averted."*

The verses turned from Abraham (PBUH) and his wife to the story of the people of Lot (PBUH), *"When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed and knew not how to protect them. He said, 'This is a difficult day.'"* Lot (PBUH) knew what his people will do. They deviated from practicing the natural relationship between males and females which was designed to maintain the human race. One can understand the existence of individuals who are homosexuals but the homosexuality of the people of Lot (PBUH) is a strange phenomenon. The whole community practiced homosexuality. Lot (PBUH) tried to argue with his people to save his guests from the expected assault, *"And his people came rushing towards him, and they had been long in the habit of practicing abominations. He said, 'My people, here are my daughters. They are purer for you (if you marry). Be conscious of God, and do not disgrace me with my guests. Is there not among you a single right-minded man?'"* He pleaded with them not to shame him in front of his guests. He suggested that heterosexual relationships are better for them. He appealed to their sense of honor and hospitality, but it was all in vain, *"They said, 'You have certainly known that we have no claim on your daughters. Indeed, you know quite well what we want.'"*

The verses describe Lot's (PBUH) sense of helplessness, *"He said, 'If only I had the power to stop you or that I could take refuge in a strong support.'"* He saw how young the guests were and he realized that they would not be able to defend themselves. He wished that he had a strong support from someone. He forgot that God promised support to those who believe. Then the relief came, *"They said (The Messengers), 'Lot, we are messengers from your Lord. They will not reach you. So travel with your people in the dead of the night and let not one of you turn round, except your wife. Whatsoever befalls them shall befall her. Verily their appointed time is the morning, is not the morning soon?'"* They gave Lot (PBUH) the glad tidings that he and those who believed will be saved but the rest of his people will be destroyed. His wife was among those who were destroyed because she approved of the practices of her people.

*"When Our command came to pass, We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay, spread, layer on layer; marked with fire in the providence of your Lord (for the destruction of the wicked); and they are never far from the wrongdoers."* These verses describe the last scene in the story of the people of Lot (PBUH), what a devastating scene. The cities were completely demolished. Marked stones were sent down from the sky to destroy everything.

## **Verses 84 to 95:**

84. *And to Midian (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb. He said, "My people, worship God. You have no other god save Him. And do not give short measure and short weight. I see you are well-to-do, and I fear for you the torment of an overwhelming day.*
85. *And my people give full measure and weight, do not withhold from the people the things that are rightly theirs, and do not commit evil in the land with intent of making mischief.*
86. *That which God leaves to you is better for you, if you are believers; and I am not a keeper over you."*
87. *They said, "Shu'ayb, does your (religion of) prayer command you that we should forsake that which our fathers (used to) worship, or that we should refrain from doing what we please with our own property. You are the forbearing who guides to good behavior."*
88. *He said, "My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He gave me fair provision? I do not wish, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my ability; and my success (in my task) can only come from God. In Him I trust, and to Him I always turn.*
89. *And my people, let not the schism between you and me cause you to sin so that there befalls you that which befell the people of Noah and the people of Hud, and the people of Salih; and the people of Lot are not far off from you.*
90. *But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him (in repentance). For my Lord is indeed Giver of Mercy, Loving."*
91. *They said, "Shu'ayb, we do not understand much of what you say. We do see you weak among us. If it were not for your family, we would have stoned you, for you are not mighty against us."*
92. *He said, "My people, is my family more honored by you than God? Did you put Him behind your backs? Verily my Lord encompasses what you do.*
93. *And my people, do whatever you can, I will do (my part). Soon you will know who it is on whom descends a disgraceful torment, and who is a liar. And you watch, for I too am watching with you."*
94. *When Our commandment came to pass, We saved Shu'ayb, and those who believed with him, by a mercy from Us, the (mighty) blast overtook the wrongdoers and they lay dead.*
95. *As if they had never dwelt and flourished there; away with Midian as was Thamud removed. (11:84-95)*

*"And to Midian (We sent) their brother Shu'ayb. He said, 'My people, worship God. You have no other god save Him. And do not give short measure and short weight. I see you are well-to-do, and I fear for you the torment of an overwhelming day.'" It is the same message: the belief in the oneness of God. This is the basic principle that should govern the way of life, the law and the dealings of people.*

*"And my people give full measure and weight, do not withhold from the people the things that are rightly theirs, and do not commit evil in the land with intent of making mischief. That which God leaves to you is better for you, if you are believers; and I am not a keeper over you."*

Another message that Shu'ayb (PBUH) brought the people of Midian. He commanded them to be honest and fair in their dealings. This is a message that springs directly from the basic principle of the belief in the Oneness of God. The people of Midian, who lived on the route between the Arabian Peninsula and Syria, used to cheat people in their business dealings. This is

a bad trait and an immoral act. They abused their strategic location which controlled the trading route between the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. The verses stress the link between the belief in the Oneness of God and business dealings between people. This link guarantees the establishment of a fair trading system and ensures peaceful life for people. It introduces a permanent standard for people to refer to in all their dealings. The desire of people to gain God's favor is the assurance that they will follow that standard. Shu'ayb (PBUH) reminded his people that God gave them good provision and they do not need to cheat to make more money. He threatened them the torment of an encompassing day. This could happen in the Hereafter or it could happen in this life. In the Hereafter God will punish them for their sins. In this life, cheating will lead to mistrust among people and this will lead to chaos in life. Shu'ayb (PBUH) even goes beyond observing fair practices in trading, he asks his people to be more generous in the exchange of commodities, not to deprive the people their fair share, and not to spread mischief in the land. He reminded them that what God has for them is much better than any other material gain. Shu'ayb (PBUH) reminded them that everyone will answer to his/her own behavior; and that he will not be held accountable for their mistakes.

But they were obstinate, they ridiculed Shu'ayb (PBUH), *"They said, 'Shu'ayb, does your (religion of) prayer command you that we should forsake that which our fathers (used to) worship, or that we should refrain from doing what we please with our own property. You are the forbearing who guides to good behavior.'"* This logic clearly indicates that they did not understand the link between the doctrine and the practices in their daily life. Many of the present day people, Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike, subscribe to the same ideology. They separate between the doctrine of their faith and the daily life practices. They follow God's doctrine in performing the rituals but they follow man made laws in their dealings. Many present day Muslims object to linking the faith to daily practices. They do not see the link between personal behavior and faith. They object on imposing any codes of practice dictated by religion on matters they consider related to personal freedom or even economic matters. In a way this is a kind of associating partners with God. The people of Midian not only objected to what Shu'ayb was asking them to do but they ridiculed him saying, *"You are the forbearing who guides to good behavior,"* while they meant the opposite.

Being confident of his message, Shu'ayb (PBUH) ignored their mockery and addressed them nicely stressing the truth of his message, *"He said, 'My people, do you see if I have a clear proof from my Lord and He gave me fair provision? I do not wish, in opposition to you, to do that which I forbid you to do. I only desire (your) betterment to the best of my ability; and my success (in my task) can only come from God. In Him I trust, and to Him I always turn.'"* His response was clear: he is not seeking personal gains, power, or money. His objective is to improve their characters. He assured them that they will not lose anything if they follow his advice. On the contrary, he assured them of great gains if they change their bad habits. In addressing them, Shu'ayb (PBUH) used endearing language reminding them of the fact that he is one of them. He assured them that his advice is only motivated by the desire to improve their lot. His objective is to bring improvements to their way of life so that everyone in the society can benefit of the pure gain that will result. He then reminded them of the fate that met those before them who refused guidance, *"And my people, let not the schism between you and me cause you to sin so that there befalls you that which befell the people of Noah and the people of Hud, and the people of Salih;*



*and the people of Lot are not far off from you.” Do not let your obstinacy drive you away from the guidance that has been brought to you. Shu’ayb (PBUH) opened a door for them to turn back from their obstinacy, “But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him (in repentance). For my Lord is indeed Giver of Mercy, Loving.” But, they were locked in their misguided ways and refused to open their minds and hearts to the truth that has been sent to them, “They said, ‘Shu’ayb, we do not understand much of what you say. We do see you weak among us. If it were not for your family, we would have stoned you, for you are not mighty against us.’” They thought that they can use their material standards to measure the extent of the danger that they may be subjecting themselves to. They saw that Shu’ayb (PBUH) has no material support and they reminded him with this fact. They told him that if it were not out of respect to his family, they would have stoned him to death.*

Shu’ayb (PBUH) became angry for their trespassing against God, *“He said, ‘My people, is my family is more honored by you than God? Did you put Him behind your backs? Verily my Lord encompasses what you do. And my people, do whatever you can, I will do (my part). Soon you will know who it is on whom descends a disgraceful torment, and who is a liar. And you watch, for I too am watching with you.’”* Shu’ayb (PBUH) told them that his family members are only mortals with no power; they should worry more about the wrath of God not the pleasure of his family. God knows everything. The verse describes a model for the believer who cherishes his Creator more than anything else. He then made his final statement indicating the parting of ways and expressing his absolute trust in God.

The curtain falls on the final scene of the story showing the destruction of the people of Shu’ayb (PBUH) and how they vanished from life as if they had never existed, *“When Our commandment came to pass, We saved Shu’ayb, and those who believed with him, by a mercy from Us, the (mighty) blast overtook the wrongdoers and they lay dead. As if they had never dwelt and flourished there. Away with Midian as were Thamud removed.”*

### **Verses 96 to 99:**

- 96. And we sent Moses, with Our verses and a clear authority*
- 97. To Pharaoh and his chiefs. They followed the command of Pharaoh but Pharaoh was misguided.*
- 98. He will go before his people on the Day of Judgment, and lead them into the Fire. But woeful indeed will be the place to which they are led.*
- 99. And they were followed by a curse in this (life) and on the Day of Judgment. Woeful is the gift which shall be given (to them). (11:96-99)*

The scene that the verses describe starts with sending Moses (PBUH), supported by the power and authority from God, to Pharaoh and his chiefs, *“And we sent Moses, with Our verses and a clear authority to Pharaoh and his chiefs.”* Then the verses jump to the end of the story, *“They followed the command of Pharaoh but Pharaoh was misguided.”* God gave them the free will

and the power to make the right decision but they abdicated their will to Pharaoh. He will lead them in the Hereafter, as he led them in the life of this world, to their doom, *“He will go before his people on the Day of Judgment, and lead them into the Fire. But woeful indeed will be the place to which they are led.”* They will be cursed, *“And they were followed by a curse in this (life) and on the Day of Judgment.”* And they will be disappointed when they find that the gift that Pharaoh has promised them is only Hellfire, *“Woeful is the gift which shall be given (to them).”*

### **Verses 100 to 123:**

100. *These are some of the stories of communities which We relate to you, of them some are still standing, and some have been mown down (by the sickle of time).*
101. *We wronged them not, but they did wrong themselves; and their gods, on whom they used to call beside God, availed them naught when your Lord's command came to pass; they added to them naught save ruin.*
102. *Such is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes communities while they are committing wrongdoing. Painful, indeed, and severe is His seizure.*
103. *In that is a sign for those who fear the torment of the Hereafter. That is a Day for which all people will be gathered together. That will be a Day that will be witnessed.*
104. *Nor shall We delay it but for an appointed term.*
105. *The Day it arrives, no soul shall speak except by His leave; of those (gathered) some will be wretched and some will be happy.*
106. *As for those who will be wretched, they will be in the Fire sighing and wailing.*
107. *They will dwell therein for all the time that the heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills. Your Lord always does what He wills.*
108. *And as for those who have been blessed with happiness, they will be in paradise, abiding there so long as the heavens and the earth endure save for that which your Lord wills - unfailing gift.*
109. *Do not be in doubt as to what these worship. They worship nothing but what their fathers worshipped before. Verily We shall pay them back (in full) their portion unabated.*
110. *We certainly gave Moses the Book but differences arose about it. Had it not been for a word that had already gone forth from your Lord, the matter would have been decided between them, but they are in grave doubt concerning it.*
111. *Certainly, your Lord will repay them for their deeds in full. He is well informed of what they do.*
112. *Therefore, stand firm (on the straight path) as you were commanded, you and those who repented. Do not transgress. He (God) certainly sees well all that you do.*
113. *And do not incline to the wrongdoers lest the Fire touches you; and you have no protecting guardians other than God, nor shall you be helped.*
114. *And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and during parts of the night, for those things, that are good remove those that are evil. This is a reminder for the mindful.*
115. *And persevere; for verily God will not waste the reward of those who do good.*
116. *If only there had been among the generations before you people possessing a remnant (of good sense) to warn against corruption in the earth, as did a few of those*

*whom We saved from among them. The wrongdoers pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and they were guilty.*

117. *Nor would your Lord be the One to destroy communities for a single wrongdoing, if its members were likely to mend their way.*

118. *If your Lord had so willed, He could have made humankind one nation, but they will continue to differ.*

119. *Except those on whom your Lord has bestowed His mercy, and for this did He create them. And the Word of your Lord shall be fulfilled, "I will fill Hell with jinn and humans all together."*

120. *And all that We narrate to you of the stories of the messengers to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth, an admonition, and a reminder to the believers.*

121. *Say to those who do not believe, "Do whatever you can, we shall do our part;*

122. *And wait, we too shall wait."*

123. *To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and to Him goes back every affair. Then worship Him, and put your trust in Him. Your Lord is not unmindful of what you do. (11: 100- 123)*

*"These are some of the stories of communities which We relate to you, of them some are still standing, and some have been mown down (by the sickle of time). We wronged them not, but they did wrong themselves; and their gods, on whom they used to call beside God, availed them naught when your Lord's command came to pass; they added to them naught save ruin. Such is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes communities while they are committing wrongdoing. Painful, indeed, and severe is His seizure."* The previous verses presented several images of the doom that befell different peoples when they refused the guidance and rejected their messengers. Of these, those who drowned in the flood, those who perished in the severe wind, those who were destroyed with the blast, and those whose city was turned upside down. Finally, there was the image of the Pharaoh who will lead his people to Hellfire. The present verses sum up the previous stories, telling the Messenger of God (PBUH) that he had no knowledge of these stories before they were revealed to him in the Quran. The remnants of some of these peoples were still there for all to see, e.g. the ruins of the tribes of A'ad and Thamud in Al-Ahqaf and Al-Hijr, respectively. The others, like the people of Noah (PBUH) and the people of Lot (PBUH), left no ruins as if they were like a plant that was completely harvested. God did not wrong them, but it was they who wronged themselves. They did not use the faculties that God gave them, rejected the guidance that was sent to them, and ignored the messengers' warning. Thus, they became wrongdoers. The false gods they adopted did not benefit them. On the contrary their loss was multiplied because their false gods encouraged them in their wrongdoing. They were seized. God's seizure is severe.

*"In that is a Sign for those who fear the torment of the Hereafter. That is a Day for which all people will be gathered together. That will be a Day that will be witnessed. Nor shall We delay it but for an appointed term. The Day it arrives, no soul shall speak except by His leave; of those (gathered) some will be wretched and some will be blessed. As for those who will be wretched, they will be in the Fire sighing and wailing. They will dwell therein for all the time that the*

*heavens and the earth endure, except as your Lord wills. Your Lord always does what He wills. And as for those who have been blessed, they will be in paradise, abiding there so long as the heavens and the earth endure save for that which your Lord wills - unfailing gift.”*

The verses are a reminder of the Day of Judgment. Only those who fear that day will heed the warning. Their sense of God consciousness will be sharpened. The hearts of those who don't fear the Day of Judgment will remain sealed blocking their senses. They cannot see God's signs, nor will they be able to understand God's wisdom. They only understand what they can physically sense. On that day, everyone will be gathered. No one will escape that day. Silence will encompass the place and the scene will be shrouded in fear. No one will be able to speak except by God's leave. Then people will be sorted out: some will be happy and some will be wretched. The wretched will suffer great stress as they are driven into Hellfire. But those who are happy will be led nicely to paradise; they will get their promised gift. Both groups will continue in their places as long as the heavens and earth endure according to God's will. God does what He wills.

*“Do not be in doubt as to what these worship. They worship nothing but what their fathers worshipped before. Verily We shall pay them back (in full) their portion unabated.”* This is an address to the Prophet (PBUH), a summary of the moral of the stories which were told. This address provides support to the Prophet (PBUH) and those who believed with him but it provides warning to the disbelievers. The disbelievers will surely meet the fate of those who preceded them in rejecting the guidance.

*“We certainly gave Moses the Book but differences arose about it. Had it not been for a word that had already gone forth from your Lord, the matter would have been decided between them, but they are in grave doubt concerning it.”* We have given Moses (PBUH) the Scripture but his followers differed among themselves, but God decreed that they will face their reckoning on the Day of Judgment. God's wisdom decreed that those who received a Scripture will be given respite until the Day of Judgment. The Scripture is a permanent record of God's message. It is a continuous source of guidance for people, generation after generation. It is different from the physical miracles that God provided to support many of His messengers. A physical miracle can only be witnessed by those who were present when the miracle took place. But the Scripture is a lasting material evidence for everyone to see and read. The Torah and the Bible were revealed to complement each other; then the Quran was revealed as the last and final Book which came to confirm the previous messages. The followers of Moses (PBUH) differed among themselves and they were in doubt of the contents of the Torah because it was written generations after Moses (PBUH) passed away. Even though God gave people respite but they will be given their reward in full, *“Certainly, your Lord will repay them for their deeds in full. He is well informed of what they do.”* The statement that emphasizes that God will repay everyone according to their deeds was meant to be a strong warning to the disbelievers and a support for the believers at the difficult times that they were facing in Mecca.

*“Therefore stand firm (on the straight path) as you were commanded, you and those who repented. Do not transgress. He (God) certainly sees well all that you do. And do not incline to the wrongdoers lest the Fire touches you; and you have no protecting guardians other than God, nor shall you be helped. And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and during parts of the night, for those things, that are good remove those that are evil. This is a reminder for the mindful. And persevere; for verily God will not waste the reward of those who do good.”*

This was a command to the Prophet (PBUH) to stand firm. This was a demanding request. Standing firm requires continuous effort to be careful in following God’s message, to be agile in recognizing the boundaries of the permissible, and to control one’s feelings and desires. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said that he felt the gravity of the contents of Surat Hud when this verse was revealed. It should be noted that the command to stand firm was not a command that was meant to address the shortcomings of the Prophet (PBUH) in fulfilling his task but it was a command to warn against excesses and transgression. There is always fear of excesses and transgression when people are too sincere and too enthusiastic in performing their duties which will move the injunctions of the religion outside the circle of ease which God wanted for His religion. God wanted the practice of this religion to be rightly balanced without any excesses. Excesses which make the practices extremely difficult as well as excesses which trivializes the practices are both rejected. The essence of this religion is moderation. The believers are warned not to take the side of those who transgress lest they be tormented in Hellfire. They should only seek God’s support. They have no helper but Him. The believers were commanded to perform prayers; prayers provided the support they needed to stand firm in the face of the difficulties they were facing. Prayers provide the link to God and thus bring solace and spiritual strength. The verse mentioned praying at the ends of the day and by night which would cover the five compulsory prayers; however, no other details about these prayers were mentioned. Authentic Prophetic traditions gave the details of the rules that govern the performance of prayers. The command to perform prayers was directly followed by a statement that, *“things, that are good remove those that are evil,”* which is a general rule that applies to all good deeds including prayers. This is a reminder for those who remember. Prayers itself is a reminder. Standing firm requires patience and perseverance, hence the command to persevere. God’s does not waste the reward of those who do good deeds: standing firm is a good deed, establishing prayers is a good deed, and perseverance in the face of difficulty is a good deed.

*“If only there had been among the generations before you people possessing a remnant (of good sense) to warn against corruption in the earth, as did a few of those whom We saved from among them. The wrongdoers pursued the enjoyment of plenty, and they were guilty. Nor would your Lord be the One to destroy communities for a single wrongdoing, if its members were likely to mend their way.”* These verses state one of the principles that God has decreed in treating nations or groups of people. God will punish a nation whose members give in to corruption and do not try to stand up against tyranny and oppression. But, God will help a nation whose members stand up against corruption and tyranny and He will spare this nation of any torment. A group of people who call to the belief in the oneness of God are the saviors of their nation from God’s torment.

*“If your Lord had so willed, He could have made humankind one nation, but they will continue to differ. Except those on whom your Lord has bestowed His mercy; and for this did He create*

*them. And the Word of your Lord shall be fulfilled, 'I will fill Hell with jinns and humans all together.'*" Had God willed, He could have created all people the same. But it is God's will and wisdom to create people different, each human being is different from any other human being. God created human beings with different attitudes, attributes, and aptitudes. Each one is free to choose the way he/she will follow in life. Consequently, human beings bear the responsibility for the decisions they make. Those who chose guidance will be saved but those who chose to transgress against God will be among those who are destined to Hellfire.

*"And all that We narrate to you of the stories of the messengers to strengthen your heart therewith; and in this has come to you the truth, an admonition, and a reminder to the believers.*

*Say to those who do not believe, 'Do whatever you can, we shall do our part; and wait, we too shall wait.' To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and to Him goes back every affair. Then worship Him, and put your trust in Him. Your Lord is not unmindful of what you do.'*" The Messenger (PBUH) faced great difficulty and staunch opposition from his people. God revealed these verses to provide the Messenger (PBUH) with moral support and consolation to enable him to withstand the difficulty that he was facing. The stories that were narrated in this Sura and others assured the Messenger (PBUH) of the ultimate success of his call. The verses brought the truth from God, the glad tidings to the believers, and a warning to the disbelievers. God knows everything, He knows the unseen. He controls everything in the heavens and earth, so worship Him alone and put your trust in Him. God is aware of all what you do.

The Sura ends on the same note that was mentioned in the beginning of the Sura: the note of calling people to worship God alone. It is the same theme that runs through all the Meccan Suras: the belief in the Oneness of God.

## Sura 12: Yusuf (Joseph)

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It comes in sequence after Surat Hud (Chapter 11). It was revealed during the critical period of time that started after the death of both the uncle and the wife of the Prophet (PBUH) and ended by the pledges of allegiance of Al-‘Aqabah. These pledges of allegiance brought relief to the persecuted Muslims of Mecca and were a prelude for the migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina.

There is an opinion that verses 1,2,3, and 7 were revealed in Medina. However, we are of the opinion that the whole Sura was revealed in Mecca. The first three verses read, “*Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear. We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand. We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforesaid you were one of those who were unaware.*” These verses provided a logical introduction to the body and topic of the Sura. The Sura begins with the letters *Alf, Lam, Ra*; stating that these are verses of the Book that makes things clear; and that the Quran has been revealed in the Arabic language. This echoes the typical issues that can be seen in the Quranic verses revealed in Mecca. This introduction is also closely related to the ending of the Sura. Verse 8 is also closely related to verse 7 and complements it. Thus, it is clear that these four verses form an integral part of this Sura and they must have been revealed at the same time at which the rest of the rest of the Sura was revealed.

The Sura came down to console the Prophet (PBUH) who was saddened by the death of his uncle then the death of his wife. The Sura narrates the story of the suffering of Prophet Joseph (PBUH) being betrayed by his brothers, thrown in the well, sold in slavery, seduced by the wife of the Egyptian governor, and imprisoned. The story goes on to tell how Joseph (PBUH) moved from the prison to the palace and how he treated his brothers when they came to Egypt as traders. Yusuf (PBUH) gave the highest example of forgiveness and humility. He was not spoiled by the glory and power which were bestowed on him and he did not lose sight of the final goal, he only asked God for one thing, “*My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter. Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will, and unite me with the righteous.*”

I can almost feel that the verses introduce the idea of migration from Mecca as a means for Muslims to attain power and security, similar to what happened to Prophet Joseph (PBUH). This thought was confirmed in my mind when I read the last verses in the Sura, “*All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand? (They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty. There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who understand. It is not an invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and guidance and mercy for people who believe.*” These

verses remind people of God's promise to His believing servants: ease will follow difficulty even when it seems that difficulty will never cease.

This Sura has a special style which sets it apart from the other Suras of the Quran. The Sura narrated the complete story of Prophet Joseph (PBUH) contrary to the style used in narrating stories of other prophets, where different parts of the story would be told in different Suras. It is interesting to note that the Sura starts by the mention of Joseph's (PBUH) dream and ends by explaining the interpretation of the dream.

### **Verses 1 to 20:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear.*
2. *We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand.*
3. *We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforetime you were one of those who were unaware.*
4. *When Joseph said to his father, "My father, I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me."*
5. *He (the father) said, "My (dear) little son, do not tell your brothers of your dream, lest they plot a plot against you. Satan is certainly, for man an open enemy."*
6. *Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events) and perfect His blessing upon you and upon the posterity of Jacob - as He perfected it upon your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime. Your Lord is Omniscient, Wise.*
7. *Verily in Joseph and his brothers are lessons for those who seek them.*
8. *They said, "Truly Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a many. Our father is certainly in manifest error.*
9. *Slay Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, so that the favor of your father may be all for you, and (that) you may afterward be righteous folk."*
10. *One among them said, "Do not kill Joseph but, if you must be doing, fling him into the depth of the pit; some caravan will find him."*
11. *They said, "Our father, why do you not trust us with Joseph, seeing we are indeed his sincere well-wishers?"*
12. *Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take good care of him."*
13. *(Jacob) said, "Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear that a wolf would devour him while you are heedless."*
14. *They said, "If the wolf were to devour him while we are (so large) a party, then we would indeed be losers."*
15. *So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well. And We inspired him, "You will (one day) tell them the truth of this affair while they do not realize it."*
16. *Then they came to their father in the evening, weeping.*
17. *They said, "Our father, we went racing with one another, and left Joseph with our things; and the wolf devoured him. But you will never believe us even though we are telling the truth."*



18. *And they came with false blood on his shirt. He said, "No, your souls have enticed you into something. (My course is) comely patience. And it is God whose help is to be sought in such (predicament) which you describe."*
19. *Then there came a caravan of travelers. They sent their water-carrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well). He said, "Good news, here is a (fine) young man." So they concealed him as a treasure. But God knows well all that they do.*
20. *And they sold him for a low price, a few silver coins; and they showed no interest in him. (12: 1 – 20)*

*"Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book that makes things clear. We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran, in order that you may understand. We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran, though aforetime you were one of those who were unaware."* We used the letters of the Alphabet that the people know and use to write this Book. It came down in the Arabic language so that you may recognize that He who used the simple letters of the Alphabet to compose such a miraculous book cannot be a human being. It is imperative then that the Book must be a revelation from God. The Quran provides an invitation for people to use their intellect to reflect on this Book.

The main theme of the Sura revolves around the story of Prophet Joseph (PBUH), that is why it starts with stating this objective, *"We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives in what We have revealed to you of this Quran,"* in spite of the fact that before this Quran you were not aware of any of these stories.

This was the introduction, which is then followed by the first scene of the story. In the first scene we see Prophet Joseph (PBUH) talks to his father about his dream, *"When Joseph said to his father, "My father, I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves to me."* Joseph (PBUH) was a young boy. However, his father with his insight and wisdom realized that this is not just a young boy's dream. He immediately instructed his son, *"My (dear) little son, do not tell your brothers of your dream, lest they plot a plot against you. Satan is certainly, for man an open enemy."* The father realized that if the brothers came to know about this dream, their jealousy of Joseph (PBUH) will increase. He explained to his son how Satan finds a way to trap human beings and seduce them to do evil deeds.

Jacob (PBUH) may have realized that the dream is an introduction to the good news that Joseph (PBUH) will be the second in line as an heir of prophet-hood. The fathers (a grandfather is also considered a father) of Joseph (PBUH), Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (PBUT) were all prophets of God. These thoughts were communicated to Joseph (PBUH), *"Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events) and perfect His blessing upon you and upon the posterity of Jacob - as He perfected it upon your fathers Abraham and Isaac aforetime. Your God is Omniscient, Wise."* It is interesting that Jacob (PBUH) said, *"Thus, will your Lord choose you and teach you the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events),"* Knowing the interpretation of events means knowing how the events will end, but what did he

mean by the word, “narratives?” Did he mean that God will give Joseph (PBUH) the insight to see through the events which he will be part of, and predict how they will unravel? Or did he mean that Joseph (PBUH) will be given the ability to interpret dreams, as we will see happen when we read the Sura? Either explanation is possible.

It might be useful at this time to digress a little bit and talk about dreams. We are commanded to believe that some dreams give us glimpses of what will happen in the future. The rationale of this belief is the dreams which Joseph (PBUH) saw, the dream of the two men who were imprisoned with Joseph (PBUH) and the dream that the king of Egypt saw. All these dreams were realized later on. In addition, our own individual experience tells us that sometimes we see in our dreams certain things which would materialize later on.

The verses move to another scene: the scene of Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers conspiring against him. The new scene starts with a strong note which grasps the attention of the reader, “*Verily, in Joseph and his brothers are lessons for those who seek them.*” There are many signs in the story of Joseph’s (PBUH) and his brothers for those who are seeking to learn from these stories. The focus of their complaint was the attention that Joseph (PBUH) and his brother were getting from their father; while they, who were a strong group that can provide protection and power for their father, were not getting similar attention, “*They said, ‘Truly, Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we are, although we are a many. Our father is certainly in manifest error.’*” They did not mention Joseph’s (PBUH) dream which indicates that they were not aware of the dream, contrary to what is mentioned in the Old Testament. Their hearts became full of hate which blinded them and allowed Satan to seduce them to plot a scheme to get rid of Joseph (PBUH). It was a heinous crime to contemplate the killing of Joseph (PBUH). How could the children of a prophet – even though they were not themselves prophets – even think of committing such a heinous crime, “*Slay Joseph or cast him out to some (unknown) land, so that the favor of your father may be all for you, and (that) you may afterward be righteous folk.*” This is how Satan seduced them: if you kill Joseph (PBUH) your father’s attention will turn towards you, then you can repent and ask forgiveness for your evil deeds and become righteous again. What kind of repentance is this? True repentance occurs after an individual has committed a crime as a result of negligence or weakness then regrets what he/she has done. One of their brothers realized the enormity of what they were contemplating, so he suggested a compromise, “*One among them said, ‘Do not kill Joseph but, if you must be doing, fling him into the depth of the pit; some caravan will find him.’*” The use of the phrase, “*if you must be doing,*” shows his reluctance to join them and indicates that he was trying to dissuade them from going on with their plans.

They went to their father to entice him to let Joseph (PBUH) join them on their outing. Their appeal carried a tone of hidden reproach. How can their father doubt their love for Joseph (PBUH) and their interest in his well-being, “*They said, ‘Our father, why do you not trust us with Joseph, seeing we are indeed his sincere well-wishers?’*” They assured their father of their sincerity, “*Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take good care of him,*” enticing the father to comply for the benefit of his son.

Jacob (PBUH) ignored their hidden reproach and expressed his fear that a wolf might devour him while they were busy, *“(Jacob) said, ‘Indeed, it saddens me that you should take him away. I fear that a wolf would devour him while you are heedless.’”* His statement that he will miss Joseph (PBUH) must have revived the feelings of jealousy and hatred in their hearts. However, they found an exit in their father’s statement, *“They said, ‘If the wolf were to devour him while we are (so large) a party, then we would indeed be losers.’”* If it is the wolf that you are worried about, then there is no need for you to worry, we are a large and strong group who is able to scare any wolf away.

So, their father capitulated and they went off with Joseph (PBUH), *“So they did take him away, and they all agreed to throw him down to the bottom of the well.”* They made up their mind to throw him in the pit. Joseph (PBUH) must have felt helpless facing his strong brothers. It must have been a scary moment for Joseph (PBUH) to be thrown in a pit in the middle of nowhere, with no hope of being rescued. At this critical moment, God assured him that he will be saved and he will live to face his brothers and remind them with what they have done to him, *“We inspired him, ‘You will (one day) tell them the truth of this affair while they do not realize it.’”*

We leave Joseph (PBUH) in his moment of difficulty, alone in the pit with God’s inspiration as the only consolation and walk with Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers, *“Then they came to their father in the evening, weeping.”* In their haste to get rid of Joseph (PBUH), they did not think of a better plan than to retell their father what he himself had suggested before, *“They said, ‘Our father, we went racing with one another, and left Joseph with our things; and the wolf devoured him.’”* They made up a story to tell their father. However, it is clear that they felt that the story was so flimsy that they doubted that their father would believe them, *“But you will never believe us even though we are telling the truth.”* They brought Joseph’s (PBUH) shirt stained with blood, thinking that this trick might convince their father of the truth of their story. However, their father realized what they had done, and he was convinced their story was a fabrication, so he confronted them with his opinion of what had happened, *“He said, ‘No, your souls have enticed you into something. (My course is) comely patience. And it is God whose help is to be sought in such (predicament) which you describe.’”*

Now we go back to the pit to find out what happened to Joseph (PBUH). The pit was on a caravan route. One of these caravans was passing by and they sent a man to get them water from the pit, *“Then there came a caravan of travelers. They sent their water-carrier (for water), and he let down his bucket (into the well). He said, ‘Good news, here is a (fine) young man.’ So they concealed him as a treasure. But God knows well all that they do.”* The verses do not tell how Joseph (PBUH) ended up in the bucket and what transpired between him and the man who found him in the pit. The verses go directly to the conclusion of this episode, *“And they sold him for a low price, a few silver coins; and they showed no interest in him.”*

## Verses 21 to 34:

21. *The man in Egypt who bought him, said to his wife, "Give him an honorable home, he may bring us much good, or we shall adopt him as a son." Thus, did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events). And God has full power and control over His affairs; but most among humankind know it not.*
22. *When Joseph attained His full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward those who do right.*
23. *But she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him to do an evil act. She bolted the doors, and said, "Now come, you (dear one)." He said, "God forbid. Truly, he (your husband) is my lord. He gave me an honorable home. Certainly, the wrongdoers do not succeed."*
24. *And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, had it not that he saw the evidence of his Lord. Thus, (did We order) that We ward off from him (all) evil and shameful deeds, for he was one of Our chosen servants.*
25. *And they raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind, and they met her husband at the door. She said, "What shall be his reward the one who intended evil to your wife, save prison or a painful torment?"*
26. *He said, "It was she who sought to seduce me." And a witness of her own folk testified, "If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth and he is of the liars.*
27. *And if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is of the truthful."*
28. *So when he saw his shirt was torn at the back, (her husband) said, "This is another instance of your cunning. Indeed, your (women's) cunning is great.*
29. *Joseph, turn away from this, and you, (woman), ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were of the sinful."*
30. *And some women in the city said, "The Governor's wife is seeking to seduce her slave-boy; indeed, he has impassioned her with love. We see her (to be) in plain error."*
31. *When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them. She gave each one of them a knife; and she said (to Joseph), "Come out before them." When they saw him, they were stunned with his beauty and (in their amazement) they cut their hands. They said, "God is perfect. This is not a human being. This is none but a gracious angel."*
32. *She said, "There before you is the man about whom you did blame me. I did seek to seduce him but he did firmly save himself guiltless; but if he does not do what I, command him to do, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and shall be of those who are in a state of ignominy."*
33. *He said, "My Lord, I would prefer prison to that which they are inviting me to. Unless You protect me from their plotting, I shall incline unto them and become of the foolish."*
34. *So his Lord heard his prayer and fended off their cunning from him. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient. (12: 21 – 34)*

The narrative did not disclose, so far, who bought Joseph (PBUH), but we will learn later that he was bought by the Governor of Egypt (some say he was the first minister). However, we know that Joseph's (PBUH) time of difficulty has ended and that he is now secure in this new place,

*“The man in Egypt who bought him, said to his wife, “Make his stay (among us) honorable, he may bring us much good, or we shall adopt him as a son.”* The man asked his wife to make Joseph’s (PBUH) stay with them pleasant. He hoped that Joseph (PBUH) would bring goodness to his house or that they may even adopt him as a son – some scholars are of the opinion that the couple did not have children.

The narrative digressed to emphasize that these developments happened by God’s leave. Establishing Joseph (PBUH) in the land started by settling him securely in the house of the Governor. God’s will cannot be overturned, *“Thus, did We establish Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of narratives (dreams and events).”* Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers plotted to harm him, but God’s will have overturned their plotting and saved Joseph (PBUH), *“God has full power and control over His affairs; but most among humankind know it not.”*

The verses continued to follow Joseph (PBUH) as he grew up, *“When Joseph attained His full manhood, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward those who do right.”* Joseph (PBUH) was given insight and wisdom to discharge the affairs that he was entrusted with. However, it was not long before Joseph (PBUH) faced the second time of difficulty in his life. This time he faced a worse trial than the one he faced before, *“But she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him to do an evil act. She bolted the doors, and said, “Now come, you (dear one).” He said, “God forbid. Truly, he (your husband) is my lord. He treated me honorably. Certainly, the wrongdoers do not succeed.”* Joseph (PBUH must have been a teenager at that time and he was facing the temptation of a full grown up woman who knew what she wanted, she plotted to get it, and she was determined to get it. Her invitation to Joseph (PBUH) was unambiguous; she bolted the doors and prepared herself to seduce him.

The following verse (in the Arabic wording) poses a problem in reconciling the chastity of Joseph (PBUH) and the fact that he could have had entertained a desire to succumb to her temptation, but the following translation reflects the interpretation of most of the scholars, *“And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, had it not that he saw the evidence of his Lord. Thus, (did We order) that We ward off from him (all) evil and shameful deeds, for he was one of Our chosen servants.”* The verses hint to the persistence of the woman in trying to seduce Joseph (PBUH) and the steadfastness of Joseph (PBUH) in refusing her. When at a moment of human weakness, he was about to fall for her, God intervened and saved him from this fall.

When he *“saw the evidence of his Lord,”* he ran towards the door to escape and she was in pursuit, she was about to catch him but instead she ripped his shirt from behind, *“And they raced each other to the door, and she tore his shirt from behind,”* Suddenly, they came face to face with her husband, *“and they met her husband at the door.”* But she was a sophisticated woman and she was able to quickly find a way out of the trap she found herself in, *“She said, ‘What shall be his reward the one who intended evil to your wife, save prison or a painful torment?’”* Joseph (PBUH) responded truthfully, *“It was she who sought to seduce me.”* One of her relatives provided a suggestion to sort out the dispute; he suggested that they should examine the ripped

shirt, *“If his shirt is torn from the front, then she has told the truth and he is of the liars, and if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he is of the truthful.”* The verses do not detail the circumstances during which the dispute was resolved. We do not know when or where her family member was consulted, but the verse intimates that he was consulted and he gave his suggestion. However, it is interesting to note the reaction of the husband when he realized that his wife lied, *“So when he saw his shirt was torn at the back, (her husband) said, ‘This is another instance of your cunning. Indeed, your (women’s) cunning is great. Joseph, turn away from this, and you, (woman), ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were of the sinful.’* First, he deflected the blame to the whole feminine sex, blaming her act of seduction on women’s cunning nature. Then, he turned to the innocent Joseph (PBUH) to say, *“, turn away from this,”* meaning that Joseph (PBUH) not only should ignore the whole story but he should also keep it a secret. This was the important thing for him, not to make the story public. He was afraid of the scandal. Finally, he asked his wife to repent for her sin.

Life in the palace continued as usual; Joseph (PBUH) continued to live in the palace in close proximity with the woman who tried to seduce him. Very soon after that, rumors started to circulate, *“And some women in the city said, ‘The governor’s wife is seeking to seduce her slave-boy; indeed, he has impassioned her with love. We see her (to be) in plain error.’”* This is the first time it is mentioned that the woman was in fact the governor’s wife, and we understand that it was the governor who bought Joseph (PBUH).

Her reaction reflected both her audacity and her cunning, *“When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them. She gave each of them a knife; and she said (to Joseph), ‘Come out before them.’ When they saw him, they were stunned with his beauty and (in their amazement) they cut their hands. They said, “God is perfect. This is not a human being. This is none but a gracious angel.”* She invited those aristocratic women to a party in her house. They were leaning on cushions while eating. She gave each one of them a knife to use in cutting up food. She then, commanded Joseph (PBUH) to come out before them while they were busy cutting meat or peeling fruits using the knives. They were stunned when they saw Joseph (PBUH). They said, *“God is perfect,”* expressing their amazement of how perfect God’s creation can be.

This was the reaction she expected of them and thus, she felt vindicated, *“She said, ‘There before you is the man about whom you did blame me.’”* See for yourselves how handsome he is. Like you, I admired him and, *“I did seek to seduce him but he did firmly save himself guiltless;”* She did not refrain from admitting her guilt in front of her women friends. She did not show any remorse, instead she promised to relentlessly pursue him and punish him if he does not yield to her wishes, *“but if he does not do what I command him to do, he shall certainly be cast into prison, and shall be of those who are in a state of ignominy.”*

When Joseph (PBUH) heard the conversation, he had no choice but to seek God’s help, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I would prefer prison to that which they are inviting me to. Unless You protect me from their plotting, I shall incline to them and become of the foolish.’”* This is the prayer of a man who knew the inherent human weaknesses and he did not want to expose himself to the risk, so he prayed for the help of God to strengthen him while facing this difficult test. God responded

favorably to his prayer, “So his Lord heard his prayer and fended off their cunning from him. He is All-Hearing, Omniscient.” God’s support could come in different ways. God may have made the women despair of being able to seduce Joseph (PBUH) so they left him alone, or God may have strengthened Joseph (PBUH) so he became immune to their seduction. Thus, Joseph (PBUH) was able to cross safely the second trial in his life.

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

35. *Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), (that it was best) to imprison him for a time.*
36. *Now with him there came into the prison two young men. One of them said, "I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine." The other said, "I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating, thereof." "Tell us," (they said) "The truth and meaning thereof, for we see you are one of those who do good."*
37. *He said, "I shall tell you the interpretation of your dreams before the food which you are given (daily) shall come to you. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in God and they deny the Hereafter.*
38. *And I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute a partner to God. This is of the bounty of God upon us (the seed of Abraham) and upon humankind; but most people are ungrateful.*
39. *My two companions of the prison, (I ask you): are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, the Dominator.*
40. *Those whom you worship beside Him are but names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has revealed no sanction for them. The decision rests with God only, who has commanded you that you worship none save Him. This is the true religion, but most men do not know.*
41. *My two companions of the prison, as for one of you, he will pour out wine for his lord to drink; and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquired."*
42. *And he said to him of the twain, whom he knew would be released, "Mention me to your lord." But Satan caused him to forget to mention it to his lord, so he (Joseph) stayed in prison for some years.*
43. *The king (of Egypt) said, "I do see (in a dream) seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered. Chiefs, explain to me my vision if you can interpret dreams."*
44. *They said, "A confused medley of dreams, and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams."*
45. *And he of the two who was released, and (now) at length remembered, said, "I am going to inform you of the interpretation, therefore send me forth."*
46. *(And when he came to Joseph in the prison, he exclaimed), "Truthful Joseph, tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones and the seven green ears of corn and other (seven) dry, that I may return to the people, so that they may know."*
47. *He (Joseph) said, "You shall sow seven years as usual, but that which you reap, leave it in the ears, all save a little which you eat.*

48. *Then after that will come seven hard years which will devour all that you have prepared for them, save a little of that which you will store.*
49. *Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plenteous crops and when they will press (wine and oil)."*
50. *And the king said, "Bring him to me." And when the messenger came to him, he (Joseph) said, "Return to your lord and ask him what was the case of the women who cut their hands. My Lord knows their plot."*
51. *He (the king) (then sent for those women and) said, "What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?" They answered, "God forbid! We know no evil about him." The wife of the Governor said, "Now the truth is out. I tried to seduce him, and he is indeed of the truthful."*
52. *(Then Joseph said, "I asked for) this, that he (my lord) may know that I betrayed him not in secret, and that surely God does not guide the mischief of the betrayers.*
53. *Nor do I absolve my own self (of the blame) - the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil unless my Lord bestows His Mercy - but surely my Lord is All-forgiving, Giver of Mercy." (12: 35 -53)*

Such was the impudence of the society that they decided to imprison Joseph (PBUH), *"Then it occurred to them, after they had seen the signs (of his innocence), (that it was best) to imprison him for a time."* It may be they thought that this is a way to deflect the blame from the Governor's wife to the innocent Joseph (PBUH).

*"Now with him there came into the prison two young men."* These were two of the men working for the king. They somehow enraged the king so he threw them into the prison. The verses jump directly to the encounter between the two men and Joseph (PBUH), *"One of them said, 'I see myself (in a dream) pressing wine.' The other said, 'I see myself (in a dream) carrying bread on my head, and birds are eating, thereof.' 'Tell us,' (they said) 'The truth and meaning thereof, for we see you are one of those who do good.'"* It seems from the verse that they saw that Joseph (PBUH) was fit to be their council. Joseph (PBUH) started by assuring them that he will be able to explain to them what their dreams meant, *"I shall tell you the interpretation of your dreams before the food which you are given (daily) shall come to you. This is of that which my Lord has taught me"* His answer reflected his confidence in his expertise but explained that he only got this expertise because of a special gift bestowed on him by his Lord. He gained this gift because of his devotion to his Lord, *"I have forsaken the religion of a people who do not believe in God and they deny the Hereafter."* He referred to the religion adopted by the governor and his household which happened to be also the religion that these two men followed, but he did not want to confront them with what he thought of their religion in an ugly. He did not want to discourage them to listen to what he was going to tell them. He wanted to tell them about his religion, *"I follow the religion of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute a partner to God. This is of the bounty of God upon us (the seed of Abraham) and upon humankind; but most people are ungrateful."* The verse tells us that he explained to them that he and his forefathers believe in the Oneness of God. He then continued to expound on the logic underlying his faith, *"My two companions of the prison, (I ask you): are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, the Dominator."* He addressed them in an endearing way, *"My two companions of the prison,"* so that they open up to him. Then he questioned them



about their beliefs. This was a question that appealed to the initial natural disposition which yearns to the belief in the One God, the Creator. Then he continued to show them the falsehood embodied in associating partners with God, *“Those whom you worship beside Him are but names which you have named, you and your fathers. God has revealed no sanction for them.”* These gods whether they are human, angels, spirits, or cosmic phenomena are controlled by God. They have no power on their own. God has full control over everything and only He has the power to make the decisions, *“The decision rests with God only, Who has commanded you that you worship none save Him. This is the true religion, but most men do not know.”* The word worship is more comprehensive than performing the rituals. The word worship in Arabic means to humble oneself. When these verses were revealed there were no prescribed rituals to be performed. Thus, the word worship in the Quran meant that one should obey God in all matters: ritualistic, ethical, and legal. God’s law controls all aspects of human life. We worship God by following His commands in all our human activities. When we understand the true meaning of the word worship, we understand the reason that Joseph (PBUH) made the right of God to be worshipped alone contingent on the fact that He is in control of everything. A god who is not in full control of everything does not deserve to be worshipped. A religion whose adherents practice these principles is the true religion, which deserves to be followed. Unfortunately, most people do not know. The fact that some people do not know places them outside the circle of the adherents to this religion, even if they considered themselves Muslims. Their ignorance is not an excuse for them to be called Muslims.

It is better for humankind to worship God the Dominator than to worship a multitude of gods who are not in control of anything. Humanity suffered as a result of being under the control of a multitude of gods who usurped the right of God and who continually fight among themselves over power and authority. God the Dominator is Independent and Self-Sufficient. He only wants pity, righteousness, and prosperity.

With these few words, Joseph (PBUH) outlined the hallmark of the religion and the principles underlying the faith. These words undermine the foundations of associating partners with God. One of the characteristics of tyrants is that they usurp the right to be treated like gods. They do not accept less than absolute obedience from their subjects in all matters of life. Even if this principle is not stated explicitly, it is practiced as an unwritten law. Tyranny flourishes only in the absence of a strong faith. It vanishes when it is faced with a strong faith in God deeply rooted in people’s hearts. When a deeply rooted belief in God fills the hearts of people, they will only be obedient to God alone. Worship is in its essence obedience to God’s law.

Having delivered the message, he turned to address the request of the two prison companions, *“My two companions of the prison, as for one of you, he will pour out wine for his lord to drink; and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head. The matter has been decreed about which you both inquired.”*

Joseph (PBUH) asked the man whom he thought will be saved to give a message to the king. He wanted the king to investigate his case, *“And he said to him of the twain, whom he knew would*

*be released, 'Mention me to your lord.' But Satan caused him to forget to mention it to his lord, so he (Joseph) stayed in prison for some years.*" The man was saved and went back to work for the king but he forgot to deliver Joseph's (PBUH) message. So, years went by and Joseph (PBUH) remained in the prison. This may have been meant as a lesson for Joseph (PBUH) to remind him to rely only on God and not to seek help from a human.

The king saw a dream and wanted someone in his court to interpret the dream, "*The king (of Egypt) said, 'I do see (in a dream) seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears of corn, and seven (others) withered. Chiefs, explain to me my vision if you can interpret dreams.'*" No one in his court was able to provide an explanation for the dream, or it may be that they sensed that the dream carried ominous news and no one wanted to be the bearer of bad news, so they said, "*A confused medley of dreams, and we are not skilled in the interpretation of dreams.*"

At this moment, the man who was freed from imprisonment remembered Joseph's (PBUH) ability to interpret dreams, "*He said, 'I am going to inform you of the interpretation, therefore send me forth.'*" He then went to see Joseph (PBUH) in the prison, he said to him, "*Truthful Joseph, tell us the meaning of seven fat cows being eaten by seven lean ones and the seven green ears of corn and other (seven) dry, that I may return to the people, so that they may know.*" Joseph (PBUH) did not only explain what the dream meant but also gave him an advice how to deal with the impending difficult situation, "*He (Joseph) said, 'You shall sow seven years as usual, but that which you reap, leave it in the ears, all save a little which you eat. Then after that will come seven hard years which will devour all that you have prepared for them, save a little of that which you will store. Then, after that, will come a year when the people will have plenteous crops and when they will press (wine and oil).'*" The difficult years will be followed by a good year during which people will be able to grow plants and grapes and they will press their grapes and olives to get wine and oil. It should be noted that the king's dream did not refer to this last year. This was an addition that Joseph (PBUH) was able to predict by virtue of the knowledge that God bestowed on him.

The verses do not mention any details on how the king's messenger delivered Joseph's (PBUH) interpretation to the king, but they jump to a scene in the king's court after the king had been told of Joseph's (PBUH) interpretation of the dream. The king decided that he wanted to meet the man who gave the interpretation of the dream in person, "*And the king said, 'Bring him to me.'*" The king's messenger went to tell Joseph (PBUH) of the king's command. Here we see the effect of the years of training in the divine school on Joseph's (PBUH) attitude. He was no longer impatient to get out of the prison. Clearing his name was more important to him than leaving the prison. This was a drastic difference in attitude from Joseph (PBUH) who said to the prison companion, "*Mention me to your lord,*" and Joseph (PBUH) who said to the messenger who came to invite him to the king's presence, "*Return to your lord and ask him what was the case of the women who cut their hands. My Lord knows their plot.*" He wanted the king to discover by himself that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent. Joseph (PBUH) did not want to defend himself in front of the king. He wanted to meet king after his name has been cleared.

The king asked the women, *“What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?”* They answered, *“God forbid! We know no evil about him.”* The wife of the Governor said, *“Now the truth is out. I tried to seduce him, and he is indeed of the truthful.”*

The Governor’s wife confessed to her guilt and admitted that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent. This brings us to the end of another episode of Joseph’s (PBUH) trials.

### **Verses 54 to 79:**

54. *And the king said, “Bring him to me that I will appoint him exclusively to serve me.” And when he had talked with him he said, “You are today in our presence established and trusted.”*
55. *He (Joseph) said, “Set me over the store-houses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian.”*
56. *Thus, We established Joseph in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We grant Our mercy to whom We will. We do not allow the reward of those who do good to be lost.*
57. *And certainly the reward of the Hereafter is much better for those who believe and are conscious of God.*
58. *And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him, and he knew them but they knew him not.*
59. *And when he provided them with their provision, he said, “Bring me a brother of yours from your father. Do you not see that I give full measure and I am the best of hosts?”*
60. *Now, if you do not bring him to me you shall have no measure (of corn) from me, nor shall you (even) come near me.”*
61. *They said, “We shall certainly do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall do.”*
62. *And he (Joseph) told his servants to put their merchandise back into their saddle-bags, so they should know it only when they have returned to their people, in order that they might come back.*
63. *So when they went back to their father they said, “Our father, we have been denied any more corn, so send with us our brother that we may obtain another measure, surely we will guard him well.”*
64. *He said, “Can I entrust him to you as I entrusted his brother to you before? God is better at guarding, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.”*
65. *And when they opened their belongings they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said, “Our father, what (more) can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us. We shall get provision for our people, guard our brother, and we shall have an extra measure of a camel (load). This is an easy measure.*
66. *He (Jacob) said, “Never will I send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me, in God's name, that you will be sure to bring him back to me unless you are yourselves surrounded (and made powerless).” And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said, “God is a witness over all that we say.”*

67. *And he (Jacob) said, "My sons, do not enter through one gate; but go in through different gates. I cannot help you against God's will. The decision rests with God only. In Him I put my trust, and in Him let all the trusting put their trust."*
68. *And when they entered in the manner which their father had enjoined, it did not help them against God's will; it was but a need of Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied; and he was a person of knowledge because We had taught him; but most people know not.*
69. *And when they went in before Joseph, he drew his brother closer to him, saying, "I am your brother, therefore grieve not for what they did."*
70. *And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking-cup in his brother's saddlebag, and then a crier cried, "Camel-riders, you are indeed thieves."*
71. *They said, turning towards them, "What is it that you have lost?"*
72. *They said, "We have lost the king's cup, and he who brings it shall have a camel-load," and "I (said Joseph) am answerable for it."*
73. *They said, "By God, you know for certain that we did not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves."*
74. *(The Egyptians) said, "What then shall be the penalty for this, if you are liars?"*
75. *They said, "The penalty should be that he, in whose saddle-bag it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime). Thus, it is we punish the wrongdoers."*
76. *Then, he (Joseph) began the search with their bags before his brother's bag, then he produced it from his brother's bag. Thus, did We contrive for Joseph. He could not have taken his brother according to the king's law unless God willed. We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will, and above everyone who have knowledge there is the One who is all knowing.*
77. *They said, "If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before (him)." But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, and he did not reveal it to them. He (simply) said (to himself), "You are in a far worse situation; and God knows best the truth of what you assert."*
78. *They said, "Noble one, he has a father, aged and venerable, (who will grieve for him); so take one of us in his place; for we see that you are a good-doer."*
79. *He said, "God forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property; indeed (if we did so), we should be wrongdoers." (12:54 – 79)*

When the king realized that Joseph (PBUH) was innocent and that he is both knowledgeable and wise he wanted to get Joseph (PBUH) to work for him, *"And the king said, 'Bring him to me that I will appoint him exclusively to serve me.' And when he had talked with him he said, 'You are to-day in our presence established and trusted.'"*

The verses do not tell us what transpired after that, but we find Joseph (PBUH) speaking to the king, *"He (Joseph) said, 'Set me over the store-houses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian.'"* Joseph (PBUH) knew that his expertise will be needed to save the country of an impending famine. He asked the king to appoint him as a manager of the store-houses. He did not ask this as a personal favor. On the contrary, he was making the king a favor.

It is important to examine Joseph's (PBUH) request, *"He (Joseph) said, 'Set me over the store-houses of the land. Indeed, I am a skilled custodian,'"* in light of the Islamic tradition. Was this

request appropriate? There are two known principles in Islam. It is not allowed to appoint someone to a position of authority, if that person requested such an appointment. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“By God, we do not appoint a person to a position of authority, if that person requested such an appointment.”* The second principle is that it is considered inappropriate to promote oneself as can be gleaned from the verse, *“Do not assert your own goodness.”* (53:32) We will not respond to this question by saying that these rules were established after the revelation of the Quran, so they did not exist in Joseph’s (PBUH) time and therefore were not binding on him. This may be true, but these are fundamental principles and we do not want to base an exception on a technicality. Islamic jurisprudence is a product of the intellectual effort of the Muslim scholars to address the actual needs of an existing Muslim community. The laws produced as a result of such an exercise were developed, evolved, and continue to evolve to address the changing needs of the community. The laws of Islamic jurisprudence were developed to address the actual needs of the community, and since these needs are ever changing the process should be dynamic. These are two fundamental principles that should be understood by the scholars of jurisprudence: the laws are dynamic and they are developed to address actual needs. They cannot be developed in isolation of the real conditions of the society. Islamic jurisprudence can then be applied only in a Muslim society and it should be applied in its entirety. Only in a Muslim society people will accept Islamic jurisprudence, will be willing to live by its injunctions, and will be able to benefit from it. Applying Islamic jurisprudence in a non-Muslim society is a futile exercise. One cannot pick and choose certain rules to apply and others to ignore. At the time of this story, the Egyptians were not Muslims and therefore no one can expect them to apply Islamic rules in their daily life.

There is a rationale behind abiding by the two principles mentioned above in an Islamic society. The first principle is not to appoint in positions of authority those who request to be appointed. The second principle is that it is considered inappropriate to promote oneself in public spheres. Holding positions of authority in an Islamic society is a responsibility not a privilege. Being in a position of responsibility is a great burden on people who are charged with such responsibility. People who are most suitable to discharge the responsibility and only those who are seeking God’s reward should be chosen.

We come back to Joseph’s (PBUH) story after this brief digression. The verses do not narrate the king’s response to Joseph’s (PBUH) request, as if all what Joseph’s (PBUH) needed to do was to ask. We understand implicitly that Joseph (PBUH) got what he wanted from the following verse, *“Thus, We established Joseph in the land to settle therein wherever he willed. We grant Our mercy to whom We will. We do not allow the reward of those who do good to be lost. And certainly the reward of the Hereafter is much better for those who believe and are conscious of God.”* God established Joseph (PBUH) in the land, allowing him to choose where to settle. God replaced Joseph’s (PBUH) difficulty with ease and rewarded him because He does not let the reward of those who do good to be wasted. The reward in the Hereafter will certainly be better.

The famine plagued the lands around Egypt but Egypt was saved because of Joseph’s (PBUH) planning, wisdom, and vision. The famine drove Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers to Egypt looking for food for their people. They did not recognize him when they saw him; however, he recognized

them but he did not reveal his identity to them, *“And Joseph's brothers came and presented themselves before him, and he knew them but they knew him not.”* He had a plan so he treated them well and gave them what they wanted. It is implicit that he must have approached them in a way that made them trust him and reveal to him that they have a half-brother who stayed back with their father. They must have mentioned that their father loves this son very much and cannot bear the thought that his son would travel with them looking for food. He must have shown that he was intrigued and requested to see their half-brother, *“Bring me a brother of yours from your father. Do you not see that I give full measure and I am the best of hosts? Now, if you do not bring him to me you shall have no measure (of corn) from me, nor shall you (even) come near me.”* They responded that they will do every effort to do as Joseph’s wishes, *“They said, ‘We shall certainly do all we can to persuade his father to send him with us, indeed we shall do.’”*

In the meantime, Joseph (PBUH) told his servants to return the goods that his brothers brought to barter in exchange for the food they wanted to get from Egypt. He knew that when they go home and find that they received the food free of charge they will come back again, *“And he (Joseph) told his servants to put their merchandise back into their saddle-bags, so they should know it only when they have returned to their people, in order that they might come back.”*

The succeeding verses take us to a scene where we listen to an exchange between Joseph’s father and his sons after they had returned home, *“So when they went back to their father they said, ‘Our father, we have been denied any more corn, so send with us our brother that we may obtain another measure, surely we will guard him well.’”* Their promise to guard their half-brother must have reminded Jacob (PBUH) with the promise they made before when they took Joseph (PBUH) in their outing and he ended up losing his son. So, he exclaimed, *“Can I entrust him to you as I entrusted his brother to you before? God is better at guarding, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.”* It is God whom I should ask for protection.

*“And when they opened their belongings they discovered that their merchandise had been returned to them. They said, ‘Our father, what (more) can we ask? Here is our merchandise returned to us. We shall get provision for our people, guard our brother, and we shall have an extra measure of a camel (load). This (that we bring now) is an easy measure.’”* They used the fact that their money was returned to them to support their argument that Jacob (PBUH) should send their half-brother with them. They also argued that with their brother in the caravan they will be able to get one more share of food from Joseph (PBUH). It seems that Joseph (PBUH) was rationing the food so each person gets one share only. Finally, Jacob (PBUH) did agree to send his son with them, but he made one condition, *“Never will I send him with you until you swear a solemn oath to me, in God's name, that you will be sure to bring him back to me unless you are yourselves surrounded (and made powerless).”* And when they had sworn their solemn oath, he said, *“God is a witness over all that we say.”* Jacob (PBUH) reminded them that God is a witness over their oath. Jacob (PBUH) advised his sons to be careful, *“And he (Jacob) said, ‘My sons, do not enter through one gate; but go in through different gates. I cannot help you against God’s will. The decision rests with God only. In Him I put my trust, and in Him let all the trusting put their trust.’”*

Let us reflect on Jacob's (PBUH) statement, *"The decision rests with God only."* It is clear that what he meant was that one should accept God's decrees. No one can change God's decrees; belief in destiny is one of the articles of faith in Islam. However, there is another kind of God's decisions. These are decisions that are accomplished through people's actions and choices. These kinds of decrees are expressed in terms of God commands and prohibitions. God gave his servants the ability to choose whether to follow these commands and prohibitions or not. They have the free will to comply or not to comply; either way they have to bear the consequences of their actions and choices. Those who submit truly to God are the those who choose to follow God's commandments.

There is nothing in the verses that explains why Jacob (PBUH) advised his sons to enter Egypt through different gates. We will not speculate on the reasons. We will just accept that it was something that Jacob (PBUH) wanted his sons to do and they obeyed his command. The verses tell us that God bestowed knowledge on Jacob (PBUH) and that the sons obeyed their father, *"And when they entered in the manner which their father had enjoined, it did not help them against God's will; it was but a need of Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied; and he was a person of knowledge because We had taught him; but most people know not."*

The verses go on directly to describe the encounter between Joseph (PBUH) and his brothers. The first thing that the verses describe is the meeting between Joseph (PBUH) and his brother and his effort to assure his brother that he is now safe with him. It may have taken Joseph (PBUH) sometime to arrange for such a meeting but it is the style of the Quran to focus on the main issues, *"And when they went in before Joseph, he took his brother to himself, saying, 'I am your brother, therefore grieve not for what they did.'"*

The verses then go on directly to the scene when the brothers were about to leave. The verses describe an exciting scene. First, Joseph (PBUH) hides his cups inside the saddle-bag of his brother. Then a strong voice accuses them of theft, *"And when he provided them with their provision, he put the drinking-cup in his brother's saddlebag, and then a crier cried, 'Camel-riders, you are indeed thieves.'"* Joseph's (PBUH) brothers became terrified. How can they be accused of theft and they are the sons of the prophets: Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (PBUT)? So they went back to find out what was going on, *"They said, turning towards them, 'What is it that you have lost?' They said, 'We have lost the king's cup, and he who brings it shall have a camel-load, and I (said Joseph) am answerable for it.'"*

Joseph's (PBUH) brothers tried to explain to the king's servants that they did come to Egypt to steal, *"They said, 'By God, you know for certain that we did not come to make mischief in the land, and we are not thieves.' (The Egyptians) said, 'What then shall be the penalty for this, if you are liars?'"* Now we understand the scheme which God inspired Joseph's (PBUH) to carry out so that he would be able to keep his brother with him. One of Jacob's (PBUH) religious laws was that the thief would be taken as a captive in exchange of what he stole, *"They said, 'The penalty should be that he in whose saddle-bag it is found, should be held (as bondman) to atone for the (crime). Thus it is we punish the wrongdoers.'"* It was God's plan that they would apply Jacob's (PBUH) religious laws rather than the Egyptian's law. This was the only way for

Joseph's (PBUH) to keep his brother with him. Had they applied the Egyptian law the thief would have been punished but he would have been able to travel back to his country with his brothers.

This encounter was in the presence of Joseph (PBUH), so he commanded a search of their belongings. The search started with the brothers' belongings and finally the cup was found in Joseph's (PBUH) younger brother belongings, *"Then he (Joseph) began the search with their bags before his brother's bag, then he produced it from his brother's bag. Thus did We contrive for Joseph. He could not have taken his brother according to the king's law unless God willed. We raise by grades (of mercy) whom We will, and above everyone who have knowledge there is the One who is all knowing."* This was God's inspired plan which Joseph (PBUH) undertook so that he could keep his younger brother.

The verse explains what is meant by the word "Deen" which is translated as "religion." The word religion is used to indicate a whole system and a way of life. Those who think the word religion is limited only to the articles of faith and the rituals are missing the point. Religion is much more than beliefs and rituals. It is a whole system of life. This meaning has been lost on many of today's Muslims. They limit their understanding of religion to the acceptance of the articles of faith and the performance of the acts of worship. Religion is a comprehensive way of life.

Joseph's (PBUH) brothers wanted to absolve themselves of the crime and to lay all the blame on their younger brother, *"They said, 'If he steals, there was a brother of his who did steal before (him).' But these things did Joseph keep locked in his heart, and he did not reveal it to them. He (simply) said (to himself), 'You are in a far worse situation; and God knows best the truth of what you assert.'"*

They were faced with the problem of the oath that they made to their father. They pleaded with Joseph (PBUH), *"They said, 'Noble one, he has a father, aged and venerable, (who will grieve for him); so take one of us in his place; for we see that you are a good-doer.'"*

But Joseph (PBUH) wanted to teach his brothers a lesson, *"He said, 'God forbid that we take other than him with whom we found our property; indeed (if we did so), we should be wrongdoers.'"* One notices the accuracy of Joseph's (PBUH) expression. He did not say, *"God forbid that we take other than the one who stole,"* because he knew that his brother was not a thief.

### **Verses 80 to 101:**

80. *When they saw no hope of him (yielding), they held a conference in private. The leader among them said, "Do you not remember that your father did take an oath from you in God's name, and how, before this, you did fail in your duty with Joseph? Therefore, I*



*will not leave this land until my father permits me, or God decides for me; and He is the best of decision Makers.*

81. *Return to your father and say, "Our father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know; we are not guardians of the unseen.*
82. *Ask in the town where we have been and the caravan in which we traveled with, and (you will find) we are indeed telling the truth."*
83. *He (Jacob) said, "No, your souls have prompted you to do wrong. So patience is most fitting (for me). Maybe God will bring them (back) all to me (in the end), for He is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise."*
84. *And he turned away from them, and said "How great is my grief for Joseph." And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.*
85. *They said, "By God, (Never) will you cease to remember Joseph until your health is ruined or you are of those who perish."*
86. *He said, "I only complain of my distress and anguish to God, and I know from God that which you do not know.*
87. *My sons, go and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of God's Mercy, truly no one despairs of God's Mercy, except the disbelievers."*
88. *And when they came (again) before him (Joseph) they said, "Noble one, misfortune has touched us and our folk, and we bring but poor merchandise, so fill for us the measure and be charitable to us. God will certainly reward the charitable."*
89. *He said, "Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?"*
90. *They said, "Are you indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us (all). Indeed, he who is God conscious and perseverant (will be rewarded), never will God allow the reward to be lost, of those who are good-doers."*
91. *They said, "By God, indeed has God preferred you above us, and we certainly were sinners."*
92. *He said, "This day let no reproach be (cast) on you. God will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.*
93. *Go with this shirt of mine, and cast it over the face of my father; he will become (again) seeing. Then come back to me together with all your family."*
94. *When the caravan left (Egypt), their father said, "You may think I am senile, but I do indeed smell the scent of Joseph."*
95. *They said, "By God, you are indeed lost in your old illusions."*
96. *Then, when the bearer of the glad tidings came, he cast (the shirt) over his face, and he (Jacob) regained clear sight. He (Jacob) said, "Did I not say to you, 'I know from God that which you do not know?'"*
97. *They said, "Our father, ask forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly sinners."*
98. *He said, "I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."*
99. *And when they came in before Joseph, he drew his parents closer to him, and said, "Come into Egypt safe, God willing."*
100. *And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they fell down in prostration, (all) before him. He said, "My father, this is the fulfillment of my old dream. God has made it come true. He was indeed good to me when He took me out of the prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me*

*and my brothers. Verily, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills; indeed, He is the Omniscient, the Wise.*

101. *“My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power, and taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events. You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth. You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter. Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will, and unite me with the righteous.” (12: 80 - 101)*

Joseph’s brothers lost any hope they could convince Joseph (PBUH) to let their younger brother go free. They sat down to discuss the situation, the verses do not mention the details of the discussion but they outline the end result of the discussion, *“When they saw no hope of him (yielding), they held a conference in private. The leader among them said, “Do you not remember that your father did take an oath from you in God's name, and how, before this, you did fail in your duty with Joseph? Therefore, I will not leave this land until my father permits me, or God decides for me; and He is the best of the decision Makers.”* The older brother reminded them of their failure to guard Joseph (PBUH) before. He then told them of his decision not go back with them but to stay in Egypt until his father allows him to go back or God would command him to go back.

He also asked them to go back to their father and tell him what happened to their brother, *“Return to your father and say, ‘Our father, your son has stolen. We testify only to that which we know; we are not guardians of the unseen. Ask in the town where we have been and the caravan in which we traveled with, and (you will find) we are indeed telling the truth.’”*

The father simply repeated the same words he said when he lost Joseph (PBUH), *“Jacob said, “No, your souls have prompted you to do wrong. So patience is most fitting (for me).”* However, this time he had hope, *“Maybe God will bring them (back) all to me (in the end), for He is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise.”* God is indeed the Omniscient, the Wise. He knows Jacob’s (PBUH) condition, He knows the rationale behind these trials, and He allows the events to take place at the appropriate times so that the intended lessons would be learnt. Where did the ray of hope in the old man’s heart come from? It is the close connection with God and the deep feeling of God’s presence and mercy. These are the feelings which fill the hearts of the chosen few, feelings which are more real than the reality that can be seen and touched.

*“And he turned away from them, and said ‘How great is my grief for Joseph.’ And his eyes became white with sorrow, and he fell into silent melancholy.”* The verse paints a very emotional image for the father who lost his son. He felt lonely. There was no one to share his sorrow or to console him. His sons whose hearts were full of envy were not kind to him. On the contrary, they chastised him for what seemed to them as false hope, *“They said, ‘By God, (Never) will you cease to remember Joseph until your health is ruined or you are of those who perish.’”* He only wanted to be left alone with his Lord. He did not seek their help, he was only seeking God’s mercy, *“He said, ‘I only complain of my distress and anguish to God, and I know from God that which you do not know.’”* These were words which describe the deep faith in a heart connected to his Lord. The apparent reality defied any hope in the return of Joseph (PBUH). He has long been gone. His brothers ridiculed their father for his seemingly farfetched hope in the return of his

son. However, the feeling that filled the heart of this righteous man and the trust in the mercy of his Lord filled his heart with hope. He knows about his Lord that which others would not know. This is the benefit of faith which fills the heart and opens it to the divine light to see and feel that which others would not see or feel, *“I know from God that which you do not know.”*

This hope moved Jacob (PBUH) to command his sons never to despair of God’s mercy, *“My sons, go and enquire about Joseph and his brother, and never give up hope of God's Mercy, truly no one despairs of God's Mercy, except the disbelievers.”* He told them to go back and enquire discreetly about Joseph (PBUH) and his brother.

Joseph’s (PBUH) brothers went back to Egypt for the third time carrying their merchandise to barter it in exchange for food, but they knew that the merchandise was poor and they appealed to Joseph’s (PBUH) sense of charity to overlook this fact, *“And when they came (again) before him (Joseph) they said, ‘Noble one, misfortune has touched us and our folk, and we bring but poor merchandise, so fill for us the measure and be charitable to us. God will certainly reward the charitable.’”* Joseph (PBUH) felt that the time for the big surprise has come and that his brothers were ready to learn the lesson, *“He said, ‘Do you know what you did to Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?’”*

They heard this voice before and the face looked familiar, *“They said, ‘Are you indeed Joseph?’”* The answer came to confirm the surprise and to remind them of what they have done a long time ago, *“He said, ‘I am Joseph, and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us (all). Indeed, he who is God conscious and perseverant (will be rewarded), never will God allow the reward to be lost, of those who are good-doers.’”* He did not lay any blame on them, but he showed his gratitude to His Lord who bestowed His bounty on him and his brother because they persevered and were conscious of their Lord. The brothers remembered the shameful way they treated Joseph (PBUH) and they felt sorry, *“They said, ‘By God, indeed has God preferred you above us, and we certainly were sinners.’”*

They have admitted their guilt and expressed their sorrow for what they had done. Joseph (PBUH) response was honorable and generous, *“He said, ‘This day let no reproach be (cast) on you. God will forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy.’”* Not only he did not blame or chastise them but he also asked God to forgive them. He then turns his attention to what happened to his father. He yearned to meeting his father and erasing the sorrow which filled his heart all these years, *“Go with this shirt of mine, and cast it over the face of my father; he will become (again) seeing. Then come back to me together with all your family.”* How did Joseph (PBUH) know that the smell of his shirt will bring back the sight to the eyes of the old man? This must have been part of the knowledge that God blessed him with.

The verses tell of many surprises one after another, *“When the caravan left (Egypt), their father said, ‘You may think I am senile, but I do indeed smell the scent of Joseph.’”* No one had imagined that Joseph (PBUH) would come back. How can an old man smell the scent of Joseph

(PBUH) over that long distance? The people around Jacob (PBUH) did not smell anything. They thought that senility must have filled the old man's mind with illusions, *"They said, 'By God, you are indeed lost in your old illusions.'"*

But they were up for another surprise, *"Then, when the bearer of the glad tidings came, he cast (the shirt) over his face, and he (Jacob) regained clear sight. He (Jacob) said, 'Did I not say to you, I know from God that which you do not know?'"* The sons then asked their father's forgiveness, *"They said, 'Our father, ask forgiveness for our sins, for we were truly sinners.'"* However, he was not ready for that yet but he promised to do it later, *"He said, 'I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy'"*

The verses continue to describe the meeting between Joseph (PBUH) and his parents after a long time of separation, hope, and despair. It must have been a very dramatic scene full of emotions and feelings. *"And when they came in before Joseph, he drew his parents to him, and said, 'Come into Egypt safe, God willing.'"* Joseph (PBUH) then reminded his father of the old dream which have now come true, *"And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they fell down in prostration, (all) before him. He said, 'My father, this is the fulfillment of my old dream. God has made it come true. He was indeed good to me when He took me out of prison and brought you (all here) out of the desert, (even) after Satan had sown enmity between me and my brothers.'"* He did not forget to show his gratitude to God, who blessed him with all these bounties, *"Verily, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills; indeed, He is the Omniscient, the Wise."*

The final scene of this story, shows Joseph (PBUH) extracting himself out of celebrating the unification of his family to pray, praising his Lord and expressing his gratitude, *"My Lord, You have indeed bestowed on me power,"* My Lord, You have bestowed on me power, status, honor, and wealth. These are bounties for this life. *"And taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events."* You have given me the knowledge to interpret dreams and events; and You have given me the vision to predict the future events which these dreams indicate. *"You are the Creator of the heavens and the earth."* You created them and they run under your control, You decide what will happen to them. *"You are my Patron in this world and in the Hereafter."* You provide the support and the help. My Lord, I do not ask for power, health, or wealth all I ask is this, *"Take my soul (at death) as one submitting to Your will, and unite me with the righteous."*

The images of success, power, and happiness of the unification of the family recede to the background and the image of the sincere servant of God comes to the forefront. It is the image of a sincere servant who prays God to keep him blessed with the bounty of submission to God until he is put to death and to unite him after death with God's righteous servants. Joseph (PBUH) achieved the total success in the final test.

### **Verses 102 to 110:**

102. *This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not present with them when they put together their plan while they conspired.*

103. *And though you try much, most men will not believe.*
104. *You did not ask them a reward for this; it is nothing but a reminder to humankind.*
105. *And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them.*
106. *And most of them will not believe in God without associating (others as partners) with Him.*
107. *Do they then feel secure that there will not come to them an overwhelming torment of God, or that the Hour will not come upon them suddenly while they do not realize it?*
108. *Say, "This is my Way. I and all those who follow me, call to God with sure knowledge. Glory be to God; and I am not of the idolaters.*
109. *All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand?*
110. *(They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty.*
111. *There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who understand. It is not an invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and guidance and mercy for people who believe. (12: 102 – 111)*

The Sura started with a verse, *"We narrate to you (Muhammad) the best of narratives,"* and ends with reiterating the fact that Muhammad (PBUH) was not privy to such stories before. The story that was narrated in this Sura was not common knowledge among the people at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This story has been revealed to you and you were not present with them when they were scheming, *"This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not present with them when they put together their plan while they conspired."* The story tells of the schemes that Joseph's (PBUH) brother contrived to get rid of Joseph (PBUH), the schemes that women contrived to seduce Joseph (PBUH), and the schemes that the king's court contrived to put Joseph (PBUH) in jail.

People should have been moved by these verses. They should have realized that they are revelations from God, however most people do not believe. They do not pay attention to many of God's signs which they see in the heavens and the earth. What are they waiting for? God's wrath may descend on them any time, *"And though you try much, most men will not believe.* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was keen that his people believe and avail themselves of the goodness which is associated with this belief, but God who knows the nature of these people tells him that many of them will not believe because they do not want to heed God's signs. Muhammad (PBUH) will not benefit whether they believe or not, *"You did not ask them a reward for this;"* His task was only to remind people, *"it is nothing but a reminder to humankind."* God's signs are all around them. These signs lead those who reflect to the belief in the oneness of God and His power, *"And how many signs in the heavens and the earth do they pass by? Yet they turn (their faces) away from them."* Have they reflected on sunrise and sunset? Have they reflected on the shadows, and how they change? Have they reflected on the growing plants, the flying birds, the swimming fish, the crawling worms, the persevering ants, and the animal kingdoms? One

moment of reflection at the beginning or the end of the day is enough to remind the human being of the Creator; but many people are heedless when they pass by these signs.

Associating partners with God may crawl surreptitiously into the hearts of the believers, “*And most of them will not believe in God without associating (others as partners) with Him.*” Pure faith requires vigilance on the part of the believer, so that the heart remains in a state of absolute submission to God avoiding any form of concealed association of partners with God. Many traditions address this point. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “*Associating partners with God is as surreptitious as the crawl of an ant.*” There are many practices that may lead to concealed association of partners with God. Ibn Umar (RA) narrated that, “*Whoever took an oath in the name of anything except God has associated partners with God.*” The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “*Whoever wore a talisman has associated partners with God.*”

What are they waiting for, “*Do they then feel secure that there will not come to them an overwhelming torment of God, or that the Hour will not come upon them suddenly while they do not realize it?*” This is a statement that is meant to wake them up from their heedlessness. No one knows what will happen next, so how can the heedless guarantee their safety?

“*Say, ‘This is my Way. I, and all those who follow me, call to God with sure knowledge. Glory be to God; and I am not of the idolaters.’*” It is a straight path, unique in its clarity, illuminated by the guidance of God. Those who walk this way are sure of their path. They do not use guess work to know what is right and what is wrong. I do not associate partners with God. This is my way, people are free to choose which way they take but I am going to remain on this way, the straightway.

“*All the messengers We sent before you were men to whom We made revelations, men chosen from the people of their towns. Have (the disbelievers) not travelled through the land and seen the end of those who went before them? But the home of the Hereafter is best, for those who are conscious of God. Will you not then understand?*” Muhammad (PBUH) was not the first messenger to be sent by God. God sent many messengers before Muhammad (PBUH). They were men, not angels. They were chosen from people living in towns not people living in the desert. They were kind and perseverant. Observing the relics of the past fills the heart with awe. Imagine these places which were once full of people leading a bustling life, and now they became relics of the past; they remind us of the perpetual cycle of life. These reflections will lead to the fact that the worldly life is only a transient phase of life; the Hereafter is the true everlasting life. Those who remain conscious of God in this life will have the good reward in the Hereafter.

The following verse paints a horrific image of God’s messengers who met difficult times dealing with their people who denied them and rejected the guidance they brought. But when the road became darkest, the divine will intervened and help was provided, “*(They continued) until, when the messengers despaired and thought that they were denied, then came to them Our help, and whom We willed was saved. And Our wrath cannot be averted from the guilty.*” This is one of

God's subtle laws. Victory is guaranteed but it only comes after the messenger has made use of all the tools available to him and has worked extremely hard to bring the message to people. Delivering the message is not an easy task nor should it be taken lightly but at the end, God's reward awaits those who work very hard so that God's guidance is delivered.

Joseph's (PBUH) story is full of examples of the trials and tests that God's messengers faced in their lives. He suffered when he was thrown in the pit, when he was working in the governor's house, and when he was imprisoned. But God's reward was waiting for him at the end of the road. God's promise never fail. These stories provide lessons for those who reflect, "*There was certainly a lesson in their stories for those who understand. It is not an invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy for people who believe.*"

## **Sura 13: Al-Ra'd (The Thunder)**

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

According to al-Asas, there is a difference in opinion where this Sura has been revealed. The most general opinion is that it was revealed in Mecca, except for the verses (8-13). All the verses of the Sura have a single rhyme. It takes the human being around the universe, speaking of different physical phenomena. Al-Asas is of the opinion that this Sura elaborates on the verses 26 and 27 of Surat al-Baqarah.

### **Verses 1 to 18:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim. Ra. These are verses of the Book. That which is revealed to you from your Lord is the Truth, but most of humankind do not believe.*
2. *God is He who raised the heavens without any visible supports; then He established Himself on the Throne. He has subjected the sun and the moon each one runs (its course) for an appointed term. He regulates all affairs and explains the signs in detail so that you may have certitude in the meeting with your Lord.*
3. *And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers, and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two. He draws the night as a veil over the day. Verily in these things there are signs for those who reflect.*
4. *And in the earth are tracts side by side, vineyards and ploughed lands, and date-palms, like and unlike, which are watered using the same water. And we have made some of them taste better than others. Herein verily are signs for people who have sense.*
5. *If you do marvel (at their want of faith), strange is their saying, "When we are (actually) dust, shall we then (be raised) in a new creation?" Such are they who disbelieve in their Lord; such have chains on their necks; such are the rightful owners of the Fire, they will abide therein forever.*
6. *They ask you to hasten on the evil rather than the good, when exemplary punishments have indeed occurred before them. But your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness to people, notwithstanding their injustice; and most surely your Lord is severe in punishment.*
7. *And the disbelievers say, "Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?" But you are indeed a warner, and to every people (We sent) a guide.*
8. *God knows what every female (womb) bears, and by how much the wombs fall short (of their time or number) or do exceed. And everything with Him is measured.*
9. *He is the Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Great, the Most High.*
10. *It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he is hidden by night or walk forth freely by day.*
11. *For each (such person) there are angels ranged before him and behind him, who guard him by God's command. God does not change the condition of a people until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if God wills misfortune for a people there is none that can repel it, nor have they a protector beside Him.*
12. *It is He who shows you the lightning (causing) fear and hope. It is He who raises up the clouds, heavy (with rain).*



13. *The thunder sings His praise, and so do the angels in awe. He launches the thunder-bolts, and smites with them whomsoever He wills, while they dispute, and He is mighty in wrath.*
14. *For Him (alone) is prayer in truth. And those on whom they call upon besides Him hear them no more than a one who stretches forth his hands toward water (asking) that it may come into his mouth, and it will never reach it. The prayer of the disbelievers goes (far) astray.*
15. *Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to God, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening hours.*
16. *Say, "Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth?" Say, "(It is) God." Say, "Do you then take (for worship) protecting guardians other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?" Say, "Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Or is darkness equivalent to light?" Or do they assign to God partners who created the like of His creation so that the creation (which they made and His creation) seemed alike to them? Say, "God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Dominator."*
17. *He sends down water from the skies, so that the valleys flow according to their measure, and the flood bears (on its surface) swelling foam. And from that which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools rises foam like it. Thus, God compares the truth and the falsehood. Then, as for the foam, it passes away as scum upon the banks, while, as for that which benefits the people, it remains in the earth. Thus, God coins parables.*
18. *For those who answered God's call is bliss; and for those who did not answer His call, if they had all that is in the earth, and the like thereof, they would certainly offer it as a ransom. (As for) those, an evil reckoning shall be theirs and their refuge is hell, and evil is the resting-place. (13: 1 – 18)*

The Sura starts with a fundamental principle of the principles of creed: the principle that this Book is a divine revelation which has been revealed by God. This principle is the foundation of the remaining components of the creed. These include the belief in the oneness of God, the belief in the resurrection, and the necessity of doing good deeds in this life. The validity of these components is contingent on the belief that this Book is a true revelation from God and therefore it embodies God's commandments.

*"Alif. Lam. Mim. Ra. These are verses of the Book."* The verses of the Quran are signs which indicate that this Book is a divine revelation. The fact that the Book has been composed using the known Alphabetical letters is an evidence that it has not been composed by a human being but it is a divine revelation. *"That which is revealed to you from your Lord is the Truth."* It is the truth and nothing but the truth, *"but most of mankind do not believe."* They do not believe that this Book is a divine revelation and consequently they do not believe in the consequences of this belief. These consequences include the absolute submission to God and the belief in the resurrection after death.

This opening summarizes the whole Sura and points to the issues that the Sura deals with. The succeeding verses review the cosmic signs which show the extent of the power of the Creator, His ability to control the universe, and His wisdom in managing the universe. A consequence of God's wisdom is that he decreed that people should be given a divine revelation to open up their

eyes on the realities of life and the fact that they will stand one day in front of God to account for their deeds in life.

The miracle brush starts to paint an image of gigantic cosmic scenes, a touch on heaven and another on earth and the secrets of life, *“God is He Who raised the heavens without any visible supports;”* Regardless of how people perceive the sky, it is there and everyone sees it. One should reflect on the statement, *“without any visible supports.”* Then, *“He established Himself on the Throne.”* High above everything is the Throne. The verse moves from the physical elevation of the sky to the absolute (metaphorical) elevation of the Throne. Then the verses move from the elevation to the control, *“He has subjected the sun and the moon each one runs (its course) for an appointed term. He regulates all affairs and explains the signs in detail so that you may have certitude in the meeting with your Lord.”* Everything runs according to God’s law. Every physical phenomenon is managed by God’s power. Part of this management is making its details known to people at appointed times so they can understand the secrets of the creation and realize that they will one day meet their Lord.

The next verse paints an image for the miracles on earth, *“And it is He who spread out the earth, and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers, and fruit of every kind He made in pairs, two and two. He draws the night as a veil over the Day. Verily in these things there are signs for those who reflect.”* The earth is extended in front of us, we may think of it as a wide flat land even though its true shape is otherwise. The mountains are standing firm and the rivers are flowing. Then two general phenomena are mentioned. The fruits were made in pairs: male and female. The male and female components may exist in different plants or they may be combined in the same plant. This is a true fact that was not known to people until very recently, a phenomenon to reflect upon. Then the perpetual cycle of the day and night is mentioned. It is a marvelous phenomenon that calls for reflection for those who reflect.

Let us stop a moment here to think about the artistic style which juxtaposes the fixed mountains versus the flowing rivers, the male plant versus the female plant, the day versus the night, and the earth versus the heavens in one gigantic cosmic scene.

The following verses continue to paint an image of the amazing scene of the earth. Many of us pass by these scenes and do not pay attention to it. *“And in the earth are tracts side by side,”* Pieces of land, side by side but different in nature. Some are fertile, some are infertile, and some are rocky. The same land may have different plants, *“vineyards and ploughed lands, and date-palms, like and unlike, which are watered using the same water,”* even the same plant may have different types and forms. All these different plants are watered with the same water. Although it is the same soil and the same water but it produces fruits having different taste, *“And we have made some of them taste better than others. Herein verily are signs for people who have sense.”* Who of us did not find that fruits from the same plant could have different taste? How many of us reflected on this simple fact that the Quran asks us to pay attention to? The Quran has these scenes which explore the universe and the soul and motivate the mind of the human being. This is a limitless resource for reflection.

The verses move on to another theme, *“If you do marvel (at their want of faith), strange is their saying, ‘When we are (actually) dust, shall we then (be raised) in a new creation?’ Such are they who disbelieve in their Lord; such have chains on their necks; such are rightful owners of the Fire; they will abide therein forever.”* The Creator who created this magnificent universe has the power to bring people to life after they die once more. It is the shackles that bind the minds and the hearts of the disbelievers that prevent them from reflecting on God’s creation. Since they chose to place their minds under the shackles of disbelief, their necks will be bound by shackles as well and they will end up in Hell fire. They ask you to hasten the punishment, *“They ask you to hasten on the evil rather than the good, when exemplary punishments have indeed occurred before them. But your Lord is the Lord of forgiveness to people, notwithstanding their injustice; and most surely your Lord is severe in punishment.”* Although they asked the Prophet (PBUH) to hasten the punishment before guidance, the verse cites God’s forgiveness before God’s punishment to show the contrast between the goodness that God wants for them and the evil they want for themselves.

*“And the disbelievers say, ‘Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?’ But you are indeed a warner, and to every people (We sent) a guide.”* The disbelievers asked the Messenger of God (PBUH) to bring forth a miracle in order for them to believe in him. The Quran tells them that it is not for the Messenger to bring forth a miracle. It is only God who decides when and how a miracle is delivered. The Messenger’s (PBUH) task is to warn and guide people to the right path.

*“God knows what every female (womb) bears, and by how much the wombs fall short (of their time or number) or do exceed. And everything with Him is measured.”* How many females live in this universe? God knows what each and every one of them bears in her womb. He knows each and every change that occurs in each womb. He knows what is hidden and what is seen, *“He is the Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Great, the Most High.”* He knows what everyone says whether the words were uttered loudly or were uttered in whisper, *“It is the same (to Him) whether any of you conceal his speech or declare it openly; whether he is hidden by night or walks forth freely by day.”*

The keepers (angels) follow each human being and they record everything a human being does, *“For each (such person) there are angels ranged before him and behind him, who guard him by God’s command.”* The Quran did not give any details on the nature or form of these keepers. We should not speculate on such matters. God follows people through the keepers to watch the changes they seek to accomplish, then He deals with them accordingly. Although God knows beforehand what people will do but His actions are based on their actual deeds.

*“God does not change the condition of a people until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if God wills misfortune for a people there is none that can repel it, nor have they a protector beside Him.”* This verse places a heavy responsibility on people because it states that God’s will is to recompense people according to their deeds. The verse also shows the honor that God bestowed on humankind. People’s deeds are an expression of the will of God.

Another theme is then explored, *“It is He who shows you the lightning (causing) fear and hope. It is He who raises up the clouds, heavy (with rain).”* Lightning and thunder are well known

phenomena. They result because of the nature of the universe which God created. These phenomena are awe-inspiring whether we understand the physics behind them or not. The feelings of fear and hope fill the human heart when a person sees lightning, fear of the destruction that may accompany lightning and hope in the rain that revives the earth and fills the rivers. God raises the clouds to bring down rain. Thunder is another consequence of the way God created the universe. The perfection of its creation is an expression of the glory of the Creator. The apparent meaning of the text indicates that the sound of thunder is in a way an expression of how the nature sings the praise of the Creator. This adds dynamics to the scene and allows the cosmic phenomena to join the angels in painting a lively scene. The awesome scene is completed by adding the occurrence of the horrific scene of thunderbolts, *“The thunder sings His praise, and so do the angels, with awe. He launches the thunder-bolts, and smites with them whomsoever He wills, while they dispute, and He is mighty in wrath.”*

It is surprising that in the midst of this dynamic scene - in which the horrific atmosphere generated by the lightning, thunder and thunderbolts overlaps the atmosphere of spirituality created by the angels praising the glory of their Lord - we find people who argue about God, *“For Him (alone) is prayer in truth. And those on whom they call upon besides Him hear them no more than a one who stretches forth his hands toward water (asking) that it may come into his mouth, and it will never reach it. The prayer of the disbelievers goes (far) astray.”* They associate partners with God instead of calling upon the true God. Only He is the Truth and anything else is falsehood. They call in vain upon those whom they associate as partners with God. Their weak voices will be overshadowed by the truth from God. They call upon others beside God while all the other creatures prostrate themselves to God, *“Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to God, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening hours.”* The verses refer to the most profound form of worship – prostration. Not only the beings in heavens and earth do prostrate themselves to God but also their shadows do prostrate.

Rhetorical questions were then posed, *“Say, ‘Who is the Lord of the heavens and the earth? Say, ‘(It is) God.’ Say, ‘Do you then take (for worship) protecting guardians other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?’ Say, ‘Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Or is darkness equivalent to light?’ Or do they assign to God partners who created the like of His creation so that the creation (which they made and His creation) seemed alike to them? Say, ‘God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Dominator.’”* The questions were posed and the answers were given to be heard by those who associated partners with God. The contrast between the blind and the seeing is clear, similarly the contrast between darkness and light is clear. The verse uses the terms blind and seeing to allude to the disbelievers and the believers and it uses the terms darkness and light to allude to the conditions of the disbelievers and the believers. Blindness and darkness are barriers which prevent the disbelievers from seeing the truth.

Did those, whom they associated with God, create creatures similar to the creatures created by God? Did that confuse them? If this were true, then they would be justified in worshipping them side by side with God. But this is not true, *“God is the Creator of all things, and He is the One,*

*the Dominator.*” God is unique in His creation and He is unique in His power.

The verses then give a parable to juxtapose the truth against the falsehood, *“He sends down water from the skies, so that the valleys flow according to their measure, and the flood bears (on its surface) swelling foam. And from that which they smelt in the fire in order to make ornaments and tools rises foam like it. Thus God compares the truth and the falsehood. Then, as for the foam, it passes away as scum upon the banks, while, as for that which benefits the people, it remains in the earth. Thus, God coins parables.”* The coming down of rain is part of the image that was given before for the lighting and thunder. It is also a sign of the power of God. Water flows in each valley according to a measure decided by God. As water flows through the valley, it carries foam which floats on the water surface. Sometimes this foam is plenty to the extent that it covers the quite flow of water underneath. This is similar to the process of melting metals. The foam surfaces on top of the molten metal but when it is removed it leaves behind the pure and useful metal. This is the parable of truth and falsehood. Falsehood rises to the top and may cover the truth for a while but eventually it is removed and leaves behind the truth which benefits people.

Those who respond to God’s call will get the best reward but those who did not respond, they will be destined to bad reckoning. It is so bad a reckoning that they would wish they could ransom themselves, even if the ransom is all what is on the earth, *“For those who answered God’s call is bliss; and for those who did not answer His call, if they had all that is in the earth, and the like thereof, they would certainly offer it as a ransom. (As for) those, an evil reckoning shall be theirs and their refuge is hell, and evil is the resting-place.”*

### **Verses 19 to 43:**

19. *Is he who does know that which has been revealed to you from your Lord is the Truth, like him who is blind? But it is only people of understanding who heed (the reminder).*
20. *Those who fulfill the covenant of God and do not break the covenant;*
21. *Those who join together those things which God has commanded to be joined, hold their Lord in awe, and fear the terrible reckoning;*
22. *Those who persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord; establish regular prayers; spend out of (the gifts) We have bestowed for their sustenance, secretly and openly; and repel evil with good; theirs will be the sequel of the (heavenly) Home;*
23. *Gardens of Eden which they enter, along with all who do right of their fathers and their spouses and their offspring. The angels will enter upon them from every gate,*
24. *(Saying), "Peace be on you because you persevered. And excellent is the final home.*
25. *But those who break the covenant of God, after ratifying it, and sever that which God has commanded to be joined, and make mischief in the land, on them is the curse; for them is the terrible abode.*
26. *God extends provision for whom He wills and restricts (it); and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of the world is but a brief comfort as compared with the Hereafter.*

27. *The disbelievers say, "Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?" Say, "Truly God leaves, to stray, whom He wills. And He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence;*
28. *Those who believe, and whose hearts find assurance in the remembrance of God. Verily in the remembrance of God hearts are assured.*
29. *For those who believe and do righteous deeds, is (every) blessedness, and a beautiful place of (final) return.*
30. *Thus, have We sent you (Muhammad) to a people before whom (long since) have (other) peoples (gone and) passed away; in order that you recite to them what We revealed to you; yet they reject (Him), the Lord of Mercy. Say, "He is my Lord. There is no deity but He. In Him, I put my trust, and to Him do I turn."*
31. *Had it been possible for a Quran to cause the mountains to move, or the earth to be torn asunder, or the dead to speak, (this Quran would have done so); but to God belongs the affair entirely. Do not those who believe know that, had God willed, He could have guided all humankind? As for those who disbelieve, disaster will not cease to strike them because of what they do, or it dwells near their home until the threat of God comes to pass. Indeed, God does not fail in keeping His promise.*
32. *And verily messengers (of God) were mocked before you, but I gave respite to those who disbelieved, then I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment.*
33. *Is He who is a sustainer of every soul, (knowing) what it has earned? Yet they ascribe partners to God. Say, "Name them. Or do you inform Him of something which He does not know in the earth? Or of what is apparent in speech?" Their contrivance has been made attractive to those who disbelieve and they have been averted from the road. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no guide.*
34. *For them is torment in the life of this world, and verily the torment of the Hereafter is harder, and they have no defender from God.*
35. *The similitude of the Garden which is promised to those who are conscious of God, underneath it rivers flow, its food is everlasting, and its shade. This is the reward of those who remain conscious of God, while the reward of the disbelievers is the Fire.*
36. *Those to whom We have given the Scripture rejoice at what has been revealed to you; but there are among the clans those who reject a part thereof. Say, "I am commanded to worship God, and not to join partners with Him. To Him I invite, and to Him is my return."*
37. *And thus We have revealed it, a true judgment in Arabic. Were you to follow their whims after the knowledge which has reached you, then you would find neither protecting guardian nor defender against God.*
38. *We did send messengers before you, and appointed for them wives and children. It was not (given) to any messenger that he should bring a sign save by God's leave. For everything there is an appointed time.*
39. *God does blot out or confirm what He pleases, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.*
40. *Whether We shall show you (within your life-time) part of what We promised them or take to Ourselves your soul (before it is all accomplished), your duty is the conveying (of the Message) and Ours is the reckoning.*
41. *Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And God decides; there is no adjuster of His decision. And He is swift in reckoning.*

42. *Those before them did (also) devise plots; but to God belongs the plan entirely. He knows what every soul earns, and the disbelievers will know who gets the final home.*
43. *The disbelievers say, "You are not a messenger." Say, "God is sufficient as a witness between me and you, and whoever has knowledge of the Book (is also a witness)." (13: 19 – 43)*

The verses come back to deal with the issue of the revelation, *"Is he who does know that which has been revealed to you from your Lord is the Truth, like him who is blind? But it is only people of understanding who heed (the reminder)."* The one who knows that what has been revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) is the truth is juxtaposed against the blind. This is an amazing style in building an argument that touches the hearts. In the meantime, there is no exaggeration. Being ignorant of such an obvious fact can only happen if the person is completely blind. People in this regard can be classified into two groups: a seeing group who know the truth, and a blind group of people who do not know the truth. Blindness here refers to insights that have been lost, hearts that have been sealed, senses that have been rendered useless, and knowledge that does not exist. Only those who have understanding will heed the reminder, *"Those who fulfill the covenant of God and do not break the covenant;"* The covenant of God encompasses all covenants. The major covenant with God is the covenant to believe in the Oneness of God. The covenant to believe in God is an old covenant but it is being renewed. It is old in the sense that it has been implanted in the initial natural disposition of all people. It has been since renewed by the message which the messengers of God brought to guide humanity. In order to fulfill the covenant with God, one has to fulfill all covenants or pledges in which the human being ventures. This is one of the basic rules that form the foundation of the structure of the human society.

Another general rule that has to be fulfilled, *"Those who join together those things which God has commanded to be joined, hold their Lord in awe, and fear the terrible reckoning;"* One of the attributes of the believers is that they join everything God has commanded to be joined. The verse does not detail the things to be joined but it stated the general rule. This implicitly indicates that a believer has to be completely obedient to God and to follow the Prophet's (PBUH) tradition. This requires the believers to maintain a continuous connection to God and absolute adherence to the straight path. This is motivated by the fact that the believers, *"hold their Lord in awe, and fear the terrible reckoning."* They are the ones who, *"persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord."* There are many categories of perseverance. These include: enduring the difficulties involved in trying to maintain God's covenant, persevering in times of ease and in times of difficulty, and enduring the hurt people some time inflict on the believer. They persevere and endure all these difficulties for the sake of pleasing their Lord and not because they are interested in the praise of people or because they want to avoid people's criticism. Their perseverance is not motivated by the interest in a worldly gain or the avoidance of a worldly loss. They persevere because they submit to the will of God and they are content with whatever God decrees.

They, *"establish regular prayers."* Although, establishing prayer is a part of the fulfillment of God's covenant but it has been mentioned explicitly in this verse because it is a fundamental component of this covenant. It is a symbol of complete submission and devotion to God. Prayer represents a true portrayal of the relationship between the believer and God.

And they, *“spend out of (the gifts) We have bestowed for their sustenance, secretly and openly.”* This is also a part of the fulfillment of God’s covenant and joining what God has commanded to be joined but it has been mentioned explicitly because spending represents an important aspect of the relationship between the people. It purifies the souls of the one who gives and the one who receives. It removes the stinginess from the heart of the one who gives and the hatred from the heart of the one who receives. It allows a healthy environment to prevail in the Muslim society. There are two types of spending and each has its own advantage: spending in secret preserves the dignity of people; while spending in the open provides an example for others to follow.

They, *“repel evil with good.”* They treat people graciously in their daily dealings. They do not only forgive people’s transgression against their persons but they also respond kindly to the transgression of the others. This applies only to situations when repelling evil with good will not be construed as a weakness and thus encourages the aggressor to continue in his/her aggression. Also, this applies only in the areas of human interactions and daily dealings which do not break God’s law.

*“Theirs will be the sequel of the (heavenly) Home, Gardens of Eden which they enter, along with all who do right of their fathers and their spouses and their offspring. The angels will enter upon them from every gate, (Saying), ‘Peace be on you because you persevered. And excellent is the final home.’”* They will be admitted to the Gardens of Eden to settle and live there with their righteous fathers, spouses, and offspring. Each will be admitted as a reward for his/her righteous deeds however, they will enjoy the company of their righteous families as an extra reward from God.

On the other side are those who lost their understanding so they became heedless and lost their vision so they became blind to the straight path, *“But those who break the covenant of God, after ratifying it, and sever that which God has commanded to be joined, and make mischief in the land, on them is the curse; for them is the terrible abode.”* They broke their covenant with God, the covenant that God implanted in their initial natural dispositions. Consequently, they break every covenant or pledge they make. Those who break their covenant with God cannot respect other covenants. They sever that which God commands to be joined and they spread mischief in the land. In short, their behavior is contrary to the behavior of those who have understanding in all aspects.

They were happy with the worldly gain that they received in their life and forgot that the pleasure of this life is only transient, while the everlasting pleasure is in the provision of the Hereafter, *“God extends provision for whom He wills and restricts (it); and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of the world is but a brief comfort as compared with the Hereafter.”*

The disbelievers asked the Prophet (PBUH) to show them a miracle, *“The disbelievers say, ‘Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?’”* The answer to their request is that miracles do not lead people to become believers. The road to faith starts from within, and the choice to become a believer is an individual determination, *“Say, ‘Truly God leaves, to stray, whom He*



*wills. And He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence, ’’* God guides those who turn to God in penitence. They humble themselves to God and God reciprocates by guiding them. Those who do not humble themselves to God do not deserve to be guided.

Those who believe enjoy security and peace, *“Those who believe, and whose hearts find assurance in the remembrance of God. Verily in the remembrance of God hearts are assured.”* Living in the nearness of God provides them with a limitless source of happiness, security and safety. They are reassured by the feeling that they are under God’s protection. Their provision is guaranteed by God. They are content with whatever God decrees.

No one is more miserable than those who are deprived of the feeling of being near to God. Those have no way to connect with the universe and they live a lonely life. The remembrance of God provides a continuous flow of reassurance and security. Those who continuously remember God will receive a great reward in the Hereafter, *“For those who believe and do righteous deeds, is (every) blessedness, and a beautiful place of (final) return.”*

The verses address the Prophet (PBUH) telling him that the security of faith had not touched the hearts of those who requested that he should bring them a miracle. However, this is not the first time that a messenger had faced this situation. God sent many messengers before you (Muhammad), *“Thus have We sent you (Muhammad) to a people before whom (long since) have (other) peoples (gone and) passed away; in order that you recite to them what We revealed to you; yet they reject (Him), the Lord of Mercy. Say, ‘He is my Lord. There is no deity but He. In Him, I put my trust, and to Him do I turn.’”* It is surprising that these people rejected the belief in the Lord of Mercy whose remembrance brings security and happiness to the hearts. The command issued to the Prophet (PBUH), was that: your task is to recite to them what has been revealed to you. If they turn away, then declare to them that it is God that you put your trust in, and to Him is your return.

God says, We have sent you only to recite the Quran. The function of this Quran is not to bring about material miracles like moving mountains or talking to the dead but it came to address people who are alive, *“Had it been possible for a Quran to cause the mountains to move, or the earth to be torn asunder, or the dead to speak, (this Quran would have done so); but to God belongs the affair entirely. Do not those who believe know that, had God willed, He could have guided all humankind? As for those who disbelieve, disaster will not cease to strike them because of what they do, or it dwells near their home until the threat of God comes to pass. Indeed, God does not fail in keeping His promise.”* This Quran has changed people who received and accepted it more than moving mountains, tearing the earth asunder, or making the dead speak would have done. The Quran has special powers that affect the souls of those who are able to receive it, and live according to its injunctions. There is no doubt that God’s promise will be fulfilled.

The verse then poses a rhetorical statement, *“And verily messengers (of God) were mocked before you, but I gave respite to those who disbelieved, then I seized them, and how (awful) was*

*My punishment.”*

The second issue that this Sura intended to deal with is the issue of associating partners with God. The following verse raises this issue in a sarcastic way, *“Is He who is a sustainer of every soul, (knowing) what it has earned? Yet they ascribe partners to God. Say, ‘Name them. Or do you inform Him of something which He does not know in the earth? Or of what is apparent in speech?’ Their contrivance has been made attractive to those who disbelieve and they have been averted from the road. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no guide.”* The verse juxtaposes God who is the Sustainer of each and every soul against the helpless associates. The verse also implies that the Sustainer is ever watching over people. The thought that God is watching every move we make sends a shiver throughout our spines. Would any one dare then to associate partners with God? If they do, then they should name them because they are not known. The verse asks sarcastically, *“do you inform Him of something which He does not know in the earth?”* The torment that awaits those who associate partners with God is then reiterated, *“For them is torment in the life of this world, and verily the torment of the Hereafter is harder, and they have no defender from God. “*

On the other hand, the felicity that awaits the believers is detailed and juxtaposed against the fate that awaits the disbelievers, *“The similitude of the Garden which is promised to those who are conscious of God, underneath it rivers flow, its food is everlasting, and its shade. This is the reward of those who remain conscious of God, while the reward of the disbelievers is the Fire.”*

The verses continue to discuss the issues of the revelation and the belief in the Oneness of God. The verses address the response of the people of the Book to the Message which Muhammad (PBUH) brought, and refers to the previous revelations, *“Those to whom We have given the Scripture rejoice at what has been revealed to you;”* Those who are true believers from the people of the Scripture were happy with the agreement they found between their religion and the new revelation. They appreciated that the Quran refers to, accepts, and respects the previous Scriptures. Imagine the link that unites all those who believe in God together. It is a link that spreads happiness in the pure hearts. This is happiness that emanates from being united around the true belief in God and the fact that the new Book strengthens that belief.

However, there is a party from the disbelievers and some of the people of the Scripture who reject some parts of the new Book, *“but there are among the clans those who reject a part thereof.”* The verse does not name the parts that were rejected but the response to that rejection is given, *“Say, ‘I am commanded to worship God, and not to join partners with Him. To Him I invite, and to Him is my return.’”* Only God is worthy of being worshipped and to Him we will all return. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to declare that he believes in the Book as a whole, whether the others agreed or not. This is the final message from God, revealed in an Arabic language, *“And thus We have revealed it as a true judgment in Arabic. Were you to follow their whims after the knowledge which has reached you, then you would find neither protecting guardian nor r against God.”* What you have been given is the truth and what the clans have is only conjecture. The verse also states a fundamental principle: God does not allow anyone to change the Book which He revealed. Whoever does that is doomed.

*“We did send messengers before you, and appointed for them wives and children. It was not (given) to any messenger that he should bring a sign save by God's leave. For everything there is an appointed time.”* This is a statement of the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) was a human being. It was not within his power to bring about miracles except by the leave of God.

It is only natural that some differences exist between the new and the previous revelations because they were revealed at different times, *“God does blot out or confirm what He pleases, and with Him is the Mother of the Book.”* God has the power to change whatever He wills.

*“Whether We shall show you (within your life-time) part of what we promised them or take to ourselves your soul (before it is all accomplished), your duty is the conveying (of the Message) and ours is the reckoning.”* This is an important and a fundamental principle. The Messenger's only task is to deliver the message. Reckoning is for God.

The remnants of previous civilizations are a proof of how the strong hand of God destroyed ancient powerful states when they transgressed; and reduced their power, wealth, status, and land. Whatever God wills will take effect, *“Have they not seen that We set upon the land, reducing it from its borders? And God decides; there is no adjuster of His decision. And He is swift in account. Those before them did (also) devise plots; but to God belongs the plan entirely. He knows what every soul earns, and the disbelievers will know who gets the final home.”*

The Sura began by providing proofs of the truth of the Message and it ends by addressing the disbelievers' rejection of the Message, *“The disbelievers say, ‘You are not a messenger.’ Say, ‘God is sufficient as a witness between me and you, and whoever has knowledge of the Book (is also a witness.)’* There different interpretations that explain who is he who, *“knowledge of the Book (is also a witness.)”* Some scholars are of the opinion that this refers to God, who has all knowledge. Others, are of the opinion that it refers to people of the Book who embraced Islam. They have knowledge of the Quran from their Books.

## **Sura14: Ibrahim (Abraham)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It deals, like other Meccan Suras, with the fundamentals of the doctrine: the revelation, the message, the belief in the Oneness of God, and the accountability of human beings. However, its style differs from other Meccan Suras. The attributes of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) the father of the prophets - the blessed, the grateful, the repentant - cast their shadow on this Sura. The emphasis of the Sura is on two fundamental issues: the oneness of the message and the bounty of God which He bestowed on His creation. However, there are other issues which the Sura has touched upon.

#### **Verses 1 to 27:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. A Book which We have revealed to you (Muhammad), in order that you may lead people out of the depths of darkness into light - by the leave of their Lord - to the way of the Eminent, the Praised.*
2. *God, to whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, and woe to the disbelievers from an awful torment.*
3. *Those who love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, who hinder (people) from the path of God, and would have it crooked; these have gone far astray.*
4. *And We have never sent a messenger who did not speak the language of his people, so that he might make (the message) clear for them. Then God leaves whom He wills to stray and guides whom He wills. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
5. *We verily sent Moses with Our revelations, saying, "Bring your people forth from darkness to light. And remind them of the days of God." Certainly, there are signs in this for each steadfast, thankful (heart).*
6. *And (remind them) how Moses said to his people, "Remember God's blessings on you when He delivered you from Pharaoh's people who were afflicting you with dreadful torment, and were slaying your sons and sparing your women; that was a tremendous trial from your Lord."*
7. *And when your Lord proclaimed, "If you give thanks, I will give you more; but if you are thankless, My torment is dire."*
8. *And Moses said, "If you show ingratitude, you together and all those on earth, indeed God is Self-sufficient, Praised."*
9. *Has not the story of those before you reached you: the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) 'Aad and Thamud, and those after them? None save God knows them. Their messengers came to them with clear proofs, but they thrust their hands into their mouths, and said, "We disbelieve in that which you have been sent with, and we are in grave doubt concerning that which you call us to."*
10. *Their messengers said, "Is there a doubt about God, The Creator of the heavens and the earth? It is He who invites you, in order that He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for an appointed term" They said, "You are no more than human, like us. You wish to turn us away from the (gods) our fathers used to worship. Then bring us some clear authority."*

11. *Their messengers said to them, "True, we are human like you, but God bestows His grace on whomever of his servants as He pleases. It is not for us to bring you an authority except as God permits. And in God let the believers put their trust.*
12. *How should we not put our trust in God when He has shown us our ways? We surely will persevere and endure the hurt you inflict on us. In God let the trusting put their trust.*
13. *And the disbelievers said to their messengers, "Verily we will drive you out from our land, unless you return to our religion." Then, their Lord inspired them, (saying), "Verily We shall destroy the wrongdoers.*
14. *And verily We will settle you in the land after them. This is for him who fears My Majesty and fears My threats."*
15. *And they sought victory and decision (from their Lord), and frustration was the lot of every powerful obstinate transgressor.*
16. *Hell is before him, and he is made to drink festering water.*
17. *In gulps will he sip it, but will be hardly able to swallow it, and death comes to him from every side while yet he cannot die, and before him is a harsh torment.*
18. *The example of those who reject their Lord: their deeds are like ashes which are blown away by strong wind on a stormy day. They have no control of anything that they have earned. That is the extreme misguidance.*
19. *Do you not see that God created the heavens and the earth with truth? If He wills, He can remove you and bring (in) some new creation;*
20. *And that is not difficult for God.*
21. *They will all come forth in front of their Lord. Then those who were weak will say to those who were arrogant, "We were your followers, will you then avert from us some of God's torment? They will say, "Had God guided us, we would have guided you. It is all the same for us whether we rage or persevere; we have no place to escape to.*
22. *And Satan will say when the matter has been decided, "It was God who gave you the true promise. I too promised, but I failed you. I had no authority over you except to call you and you responded to me: then do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before. A painful torment awaits the wrongdoers."*
23. *And those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted to Gardens underneath which rivers flow, they will abide in it eternally by the permission of their Lord, their greeting therein is "Peace."*
24. *Have you not seen how God sets forth examples? A good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens;*
25. *Yielding its fruits at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So God sets forth examples for people, in order that they may be mindful.*
26. *And the example of an evil word is that of an evil tree, uprooted from upon the earth, possessing no stability.*
27. *God will confirm those who believe, with the firm word in this world and in the Hereafter; but God will leave, to stray, the wrongdoers. God does what He pleases. (14: 1-27)*

*"Alif. Lam. Ra. A Book which We have revealed to you (Muhammad)," This is a Book written using the letters of the Alphabet. You did not write it yourself, but God did. We have revealed this Book to you, "in order that you may lead people out of the depths of darkness into light - by*

*the leave of their Lord - to the way of the Eminent, the Praised.*” You (Muhammad) received this Book so that you lead people out from the darkness of the myth and fairy tales, the darkness of old traditions, and the darkness of the confusion created by polytheism. You should lead people from this darkness to the light of the belief in the One God. This is the light that makes the human being who was created from mud to shine. The light of guidance and the spirit of God which He breathed into the body made out of mud transform this body into a human being. Both humankind and animals were created from mud but humankind became different because of the spirit of God.

The belief in God is a shining light which clear the path to equality, brotherhood, knowledge, and peace. The belief in God, the Creator is an internal light which illuminates the road to God through the clouds of myth, fairytales, desires, and greed. The belief in God is a light; it is the light of justice, the light of freedom, and the light of knowledge. It is a light that emanates from the feeling of the nearness of God and fills the human soul with security and safety. The Prophet’s (PBUH) task was only to deliver the message. The end is achieved only by, *“the leave of their Lord.”* The light guides to God’s way. God’s way is His law which governs the universe and His rules which govern life. The two attributes of God which are used to end this verse imply a warning to the disbelievers to avoid the wrath of God the Eminent, and a reminder to the believers to be grateful to God the Praised.

The verse is followed by a reminder that God is the owner of the kingdom of heavens and earth, *“God, to whom belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth,”* and a warning to the disbelievers of God’s wrath, *“and woe to the disbelievers from an awful torment.”*

The following verse discloses the secret behind the resistance of the disbelievers to the blessing that God sent His Messenger (PBUH) with, *“Those who love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, who hinder (people) from the path of God, and would have it crooked; these have gone far astray.”* The love of this world makes it difficult for them to fulfill the responsibilities that come with the belief in God. The believers who love the Hereafter more than they love this world find it easy to fulfill their obligations. Islam does not require people to forfeit the enjoyment of this world for the sake of the Hereafter. Islam implores people to work to establish good life on this earth. That includes enjoying this life. However, life on earth should be based on justice, truth, and good character as dictated by God’s guidance. Those who love this world more than the Hereafter have no scruples. They do not refrain from using any means good or bad to satisfy their desires. Not only they follow crooked paths to achieve their goals but they hinder others to follow the straight path.

*“And We have never sent a messenger who did not speak the language of his people, so that he might make (the message) clear for them.”* It is a blessing for all people to receive God’s guidance in their own language. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent as a messenger to the whole world. However, the message was revealed in Arabic so that the Arabs will carry the task of disseminating the message to the whole world. As a human being, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) could not have delivered the message to the whole world in his limited lifetime. The messenger’s duty is fulfilled once he had delivered the message then, *“God leaves whom He*

*wills to stray and guides whom He wills. He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

Likewise, Moses (PBUH) was given a message in the language of his people, *“We verily sent Moses with Our revelations, saying, ‘Bring your people forth from darkness to light. And remind them of the days of God.’ Certainly, there are signs in this for each steadfast, thankful (heart).”* The same command was issued to both Muhammad (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH). The only difference is that the command for Muhammad (PBUH) was to lead the, *“people”* out of the depths of darkness into light, while the command to Moses (PBUH) was to bring, *“his people,”* forth from darkness to light. Muhammad’s (PBUH) message was for the whole humanity, while Moses’ (PBUH) message was for his own people.

All days are God’s days but the expression, *“days of God,”* refers to days when major events occur. Some of these events are difficult and some are happy. Difficult days require steadfastness while happy days call for gratitude. Moses (PBUH) did what he was commanded to do. *“Moses said to his people, ‘Remember God’s blessings on you when He delivered you from Pharaoh’s people who were afflicting you with dreadful torment, and were slaying your sons and sparing your women; that was a tremendous trial from your Lord.’”* He reminded his people of the bounty of God when He saved them from the persecution inflicted upon them by Pharaoh and his people. The Egyptians killed the new born males and let the new born females live. This was certainly a great trial. The trial had two sides, the persecution which required perseverance and the deliverance which called for gratitude.

Moses (PBUH) explained what will be the reward for gratitude and the punishment for ingratitude, *“And when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you give thanks, I will give you more; but if you are thankless, My torment is dire.’”* This is a true promise from God. Gratitude reflects the mindset of a normal person who responds with gratitude to a blessing bestowed on him/her. A normal person also recognizes that the source of all blessings is God. A normal person uses the blessings bestowed on him/her for the benefit of people. This purifies the soul and entices it to do good deeds and to work hard which in turn causes these blessings to grow. Ingratitude can be the result of thinking that God is not the source of the blessing, or that God does not deserve to be thanked.

God does not need our gratitude and He is not hurt by ingratitude, *“And Moses said, ‘If you show ingratitude, you together and all those on earth, indeed God is Self-sufficient, Praised.’”*

Moses continued to remind his people, *“Has not the story of those before you reached you: the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) ‘Aad and Thamud, and those after them? None save God knows them. Their messengers came to them with clear proofs, but they thrust their hands into their mouths, and said, ‘We disbelieve in that which you have been sent with, and we are in grave doubt concerning that which you call us to.’”* The style of the narrative changes, Moses (PBUH) is taken out of the narrative and the verses continued to narrate the experience of previous messengers. Messengers were sent to many people before you with guidance, but the people expressed their doubts about the truth of the message. Their messengers responded, *“Is there a doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth? It is He who invites you, in*

*order that He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for an appointed term” They said, “You are no more than human, like us. You wish to turn us away from the (gods) our fathers used to worship. Then, bring us some clear authority.”* Although the messengers called their people to believe in God, the verse refers to God’s invitation for forgiveness to emphasize God’s mercy and grace. It is surprising that people would refuse an invitation to be forgiven. The verse cites another of the blessings of God. God will, *“give you respite for an appointed term.”* Instead of accepting the generous invitation, they raise another ignorant objection, *“You are no more than human, like us. You wish to turn us away from the (gods) our fathers used to worship.”* Instead of feeling proud that God has favored one of them to deliver His Message; they reject this bounty expressing their doubts as to the authenticity of the Message. They accused their messengers that they only want to turn them away from the false gods they were worshipping. They did not stop to ask why the messengers would want to turn them away from their old traditions. Instead of evaluating the new message, they asked for a material proof, *“bring us some clear authority.”*

The messengers did not deny that they were human beings. They even went a step further by emphasizing this, but they explained to their people that God has the power to bestow His grace on whomsoever He pleases, *“Their messengers said to them, ‘True, we are human like you but God does bestow His grace to whomever of his servants as He pleases.’”* Being selected to deliver God’s Message is a blessing from God, and being chosen to receive His guidance is a blessing from God as well.

Only God can bring about miracles, *“It is not for us to bring you an authority except as God permits. And in God let the believers put their trust.”* There should be no confusion between the limitless power of God and the limited power of the messengers. The messengers reiterated the fact that only in God one should put his trust.

The messengers remained steadfast in face of the tyranny of the disbelievers and reiterated their trust in God, *“How should we not put our trust in God when He has shown us our ways?”* This is a statement that can only be made by a believer who is sure of his way, his belief, and the ultimate support of God. The heart that feels it is being led by God is a heart which is connected to God. This feeling leaves no room for hesitation in pursuing the road that God has chosen regardless of the obstacles and the tyranny that may try to hinder the progress. It is then appropriate here to make the connection between the feelings of the messengers that they have been guided by God and their reliance on God. Only those who are moving on God’s road feel that connection. This connection strengthens the messengers and supports them in the face of persecution and temptation, *“We surely will persevere and endure the hurt you inflict on us. In God let the trusting put their trust.”*

The tyrants did not try to understand or reflect on what the messengers said. The answers only enhanced their stubbornness, *“And the disbelievers said to their messengers, ‘Verily we will drive you out from our land, unless you return to our religion.’”* This statement highlights the nature of the battle between Islam and the societies living in ignorance. Such societies do not espouse the concept of freedom of religion. Not only they request that the messengers stop



inviting people to Islam but they also wanted them to abandon Islam completely and go back to the old religion of their people. However, God interfered to settle the dispute between the tyrants and the messengers, *“Then their Lord inspired them, (saying), ‘Verily, We shall destroy the wrongdoers.’”* We need to understand that God does not interfere until the messengers had done their duties and exhausted all the ways of convincing their people to the truth of the message. God will destroy the tyrants and will settle the believers in the land and will make them the heirs of the earth. This is God’s true promise for, *“him who fears My Majesty and fears My threats.”*

Thus, a small group of believers stood in the face of tyranny and persecution. However, the believers had God on their side. Each side sought victory, *“And they sought victory and decision (from their Lord), and frustration was the lot of every powerful obstinate transgressor.”* But tyranny only brings disappointment to the tyrant. The transgressor will be frustrated on earth but in the background there is also Hell fire. One can see the image of the transgressor in Hell fire where, *“he is made to drink festering water. In gulps will he sip it, but will be hardly able to swallow it, and death comes to him from every side while yet he cannot die, and before him is a harsh torment.”*

The scene of dust blown away by wind on a windy day is familiar. The image is drawn to describe in a dramatic way how bad deeds will be lost as if they were dust blown away by wind, *“the example of those who reject their Lord: their deeds are like ashes which are blown away by strong wind on a stormy day. They have no control of anything that they have earned. That is the extreme misguidance.”* The image shows the disbelievers trying in vain to protect the dust from being dispersed by the wind. The verse describes how the deeds which are not based on a foundation of faith are like dust. Deeds are mechanical actions; they get their value from the intention that motivated them. Good deeds are bound by the strong links which connect the deed to the intention and connects the intention to God.

The text then moves from the discussion of the issues of the message, faith, and the messengers to a discussion of heavens and earth. Such jump is an inherent feature of the style of the Quran. There is a secret language between the initial natural disposition of humankind and the universe. When the human being makes the effort to understand the universe, the secrets of this language will be disclosed and harmony will occur, *“Do you not see that God created the heavens and the earth with truth? If He wills, He can remove you and bring (in) some new creation; and that is not difficult for God.”* The verse uses the word *“with truth.”* The “truth” has the connotations of power and stability, the limitless power of God and the stability of the universe.

The narrative then moves to another level of God’s power. The verse describes the situation that the disbelievers will encounter on the Day of Judgment, *“They will all come forth in front of their Lord. Then those who were weak will say to those who were arrogant, ‘We were your followers, will you then avert from us some of God's torment?’ They will say, ‘Had God guided us, we would have guided you. It is all the same for us whether we rage or persevere; we have no place to escape to.’”* All the disbelievers and their weak followers will come forth in front of God. No cover will protect them. The followers will call upon those who led them in life asking them to

avert even a small portion of the torment. Those who were weak, were weak because they gave up the most precious attribute that God gave the human being. They gave up their freedom to think and choose and they followed the tyrants blindly. They refused to be God's servants and chose to be servants to the tyrants. Being weak is not an excuse for their bad choice but it is their sin because God does not want human beings to be weak. God wants human beings to be proud by seeking God's protection. Seeking the tyrant's protection deprived them of their status as free human beings. The tyrants cannot force people to change their beliefs. They may be able to control the body with torture and persecution but they cannot control the mind, the spirit, or the conscious. They were weak because they chose to be weak.

The dialogue between these two groups of people shows the lowliness of the weak and the evasiveness of the arrogant. Those who were arrogant will make excuses saying, "*Had God guided us, we would have guided you.*" On that Day, they will recognize the extent of God's power, the same power they denied in life. But God does not command misguidance, "*God does not enjoin lewdness.*" (7:28). Those who were arrogant will implicitly rebuke those who were weak pointing to the fact that there is no escape of the fate that God had decreed. There is no use of exchanging the blame, "*It is all the same for us whether we rage or persevere; we have no place to escape to.*"

Satan, the top seducer, then appears on the scene tantalizing both those who were weak and those who were arrogant, "*And Satan will say when the matter has been decided, 'It was God who gave you the true promise. I too promised, but I failed you.'*" Satan who whispered to people to disobey, seduced people to commit sin, and lured people away from guidance will tell them on the Day of Judgment that they should not have listened to him. God's promise is the true promise. He will also remind them, "*I had no authority over you except to call you and you responded to me: then do not blame me, but blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before. A painful torment awaits the wrongdoers.*" Satan will clearly say to the two groups that they have only themselves to blame. He had no power over them in life and now he cannot help them and they cannot help him. He then delivers the last bit of news, "*A painful torment awaits the wrongdoers.*"

On the other side, "*those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted to Gardens underneath which rivers flow, they will abide in it eternally by the permission of their Lord; their greeting therein is 'Peace.'*" What a difference between the fates of the believers and the tyrants?

The narrative moves to another theme, "*Have you not seen how God sets forth examples? A good word like a good tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens, yielding its fruits at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So God sets forth examples for people, in order that they may be mindful. And the example of an evil word is that of an evil tree, uprooted from upon the earth, possessing no stability.*" The juxtaposition of the good tree which is firmly rooted and the bad tree which has been uprooted from upon the earth symbolizes the contrast between the fates of the prophets and the tyrants. The similarity between the good tree and the tree of prophet-hood which started by Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and continued to yield its fruits,

one prophet after another, is quite clear. However, the example of the good tree given in the verse has many more dimensions than the one we mentioned.

The good word, the word of truth, is like a good tree. It is firmly rooted, continuously yielding its fruits. The good word stands firm in face of the winds of the persecution of the tyrants. The bad tree may grow big and may seem strong, but in fact its roots are very shallow. Not only it does not yield any fruit but it is shaky and will quickly vanish from the face of the earth. It is a true fact that goodness does not fade out while evil does not last.

God confirms the believers with a strong faith which rests deep in their hearts. God confirms the believers with His words and the words of His Messenger (PBUH). God confirms the believers with His promise that they will prevail in this life and will be successful in the Hereafter, “*God will confirm those who believe, with the firm word in this world and in the Hereafter;*” On the other hand God will leave the wrongdoers to go astray. Their wrongdoing will become a barrier between them and the light of guidance. They will be lost in the darkness of associating partners with God and the confusion of myths, traditions, and desires, “*but God will leave, to stray, the wrongdoers. God does what He pleases.*” God has total control of the all laws. He changes whatever laws He wishes to change and keeps whatever law He wishes to keep.

### **Verses 28 to 52:**

28. *Have you not seen those who exchanged God's blessings with ingratitude and led their people down to the abode of ruin;*
29. *Into Hell? They will burn therein, an evil place to stay in.*
30. *And they set up (idols) as equal to God, to mislead (people) from His path. Say, “Enjoy yourselves, for indeed your journey's end will be the Fire.”*
31. *Tell My servants who believe to establish prayer and spend of that which We have given them, secretly and publicly, before a day comes wherein there will be neither trading nor friendship.*
32. *God is He who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky, thereby producing fruits as provision for you, and made the ships to be of service for you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and has made the rivers of service to you;*
33. *And He has made the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service for you, and has made the night and the day of service for you.*
34. *And He has given you of all that you ask for. But if you count the blessings of God, never will you be able to enumerate them. Verily, humankind is a wrongdoer, ungrateful.*
35. *And when Abraham said, “My Lord, make this town safe, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols.*
36. *My Lord, they have led many people astray. But whoso follows me, he verily is of me. And whoso disobeys me, You are All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
37. *Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivable valley near Your Holy House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer; make the hearts of some people incline to them and provide them with fruits in order that they may be thankful.*
38. *Our Lord, You certainly know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from God.*

39. *Praise be to God who has given me, in my old age, Ishmael and Isaac. My Lord is indeed All-Hearing of prayer.*
40. *My Lord, make me to establish prayer, and some of my offspring (also). Our Lord, accept my prayer.*
41. *Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers on the Day of Reckoning.”*
42. *And do not think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers do; He only gives them respite until a day on which the eyes stare (in horror.)*
43. *They will be running forward with necks outstretched, their heads uplifted, their gaze does not return towards them, and their hearts a (gaping) void.*
44. *And warn people of a day when the torment will come upon them, and those who did wrong will say, “Our Lord, delay us for a little while. We will obey Your call and will follow the messengers. (It will be answered), “Did you not swear before that there would be no end for you?*
45. *And you dwelt in the dwellings of the people who wronged themselves. You were clearly shown how We dealt with them; and We put forth (many) examples for you.”*
46. *Verily they have plotted their plot, and their plot is with God, though their plot was one whereby the mountains could be moved.*
47. *Do not think that God would fail to keep His promise to His messengers. Indeed, God is Eminent, avenger of evil.*
48. *On the day when the earth will be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens (also will be changed) and they will come forth to God, the One, the Dominator,*
49. *You will see the guilty on that day linked together in chains,*
50. *Their garments of liquid pitch, and their faces covered with Fire;*
51. *That God may repay each soul what it had earned. God is swift in reckoning.*
52. *This is a clear message for people in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is only One God, and that people of understanding may take heed. (14: 28-52)*

*“Have you not seen those who exchanged God’s blessings with ingratitude and led their people down to the abode of ruin into Hell? They will burn therein, an evil place to stay in.”* Do you not wonder (Muhammad) at those people who were blessed by God who sent them a messenger to guide them to the right path, to be forgiven by God, and to be admitted to paradise, and they reject all of this. Those are the chiefs of your community (Muhammad.) They did exactly like many leaders before them did; they led their people to a fate of doom. They rejected God and worshipped idols, *“And they set up (idols) as equal to God, to mislead (people) from His path.”* The verse implies that these leaders were determined to sway their people away from the path of God by associating idols with God. The belief in the Oneness of God frees people from the tyranny of their leaders. It is easy to control people when they turn away from the belief in One God. When people turn away from the belief in the Oneness of God and submit to their human rulers they lose their freedom and identity. Tell them (Prophet) that the enjoyment that you have indulged yourself in, is not going to last, *“Say, ‘Enjoy yourselves, for indeed your journey's end will be the Fire.’”*

Turn away (Prophet) from those people to My servants who will listen to your admonition. These are the people who accept gratefully God’s blessings and grace. Teach them how they can show

their gratitude to God, *“Tell My servants who believe to establish prayer and spend of that which We have given them, secretly and publicly, before a day comes wherein there will be neither trading nor friendship.”* Establishing prayer is one of the most sincere ways of expressing gratitude to God. Another way for expressing gratitude to God is by giving the poor either in secret or openly. Giving in secret is more honorable for the poor; however, sometimes giving openly fulfills the purpose of providing a role model.

The following verses open up the book of the universe so people can appreciate the blessings of the Creator, *“God is He who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky, thereby producing fruits as provision for you, and made the ships to be of service for you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and has made the rivers of service to you;”* One of the miracles of this Book is how it relates the signs of the universe to the belief in the Oneness of God. God *“sent down water from the sky, thereby producing fruits as provision for you.”* The plants are an important source of food. It is one of the signs of the blessing of God. Growing plants is part of God’s plan. The rules that govern the universe were made to establish harmonious relationships between the different parts of the universe.

When people hear the word “provision,” they only think money. But the word “provision” has a much wider and deeper meaning than only money. Think of the effort that is needed to bring all the components of the universe to work harmoniously together so that we can exist. God made us understand how to build and operate ships, and how to benefit from the running rivers. The sun and the moon provide sources of energy that is necessary for life, *“And He has made the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service for you, and has made the night and the day of service for you.”* Even the day and night cycle is essential for life.

*“And He has given you of all that you ask for. But if you count the blessings of God, never will you be able to enumerate them. Verily, man is a wrongdoer, ungrateful.”* No one can enumerate God’s favors.

The following few verses describe the scene of Abraham (PBUH) standing in humble prayer in front of God’s Sacred House, *“And when Abraham said, ‘My Lord, make this town safe, and save me and my sons from worshipping idols.’”* Safety is one of the basic needs of human beings. The verse reminds people living in this place that safety is a blessing from God; God responded favorably to Abraham’s (PBUH) prayer and made this place safe. Instead of following the example of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), they followed a different path, they rejected God’s blessing and associated partners with Him. Abraham’s (PBUH) second prayer reflects his total submission to God. He asked God to save him and his offspring from worshipping idols, seeking God’s help and guidance, and expressing his gratitude for another blessing of the blessings of God. This is the blessing of guidance which moves the heart of the believer from the darkness of disbelief to the light of faith, from the confusion and loss to the knowledge and security, and from the humiliating worship of idols to being a proud worshipper of the Lord of people. Abraham (PBUH) said this prayer because he saw how people lost their way as a result of idol worship, *“My Lord, they have led many people astray. But whoso follows me, he verily is of me. And whoso disobeys me, You are All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The last statement shows

Abraham's (PBUH) characters of kindness and mercy. He did not ask God to destroy those, from among his offspring, who rejected him nor he asked God to hasten their punishment but he suggested politely that God's mercy and forgiveness may be exercised if God wills.

Abraham's (PBUH) prayer continued stating that the purpose for which he settled some of his offspring in this empty barren land was to establish prayer, *"Our Lord, I have settled some of my offspring in an uncultivable valley near Your Holy House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer;"* He then asked God to make people yearn to come to that place and provide for them so they may be thankful, *"make the hearts of some people incline to them and provide them with fruits in order that they may be thankful."*

The object of settling Abraham's (PBUH) offspring near the Sacred House is mentioned explicitly in these verses. The object is to establish proper worship of God and to express gratitude to God for His blessings of provision and the yearning of hearts which incline to the House. These verses carry an implicit rebuke to the people of Mecca who did not fulfill these objectives.

Abraham's (PBUH) prayer continued, *"Our Lord, You certainly know what we conceal and what we reveal. Nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from God."* Then he expressed his gratitude to God, *"Praise be to God who has given me, in my old age, Ishmael and Isaac. My Lord is indeed All-Hearing of Prayer."* Having offspring is a great bounty from God. Abraham (PBUH) continued his prayer requesting God to keep him and his offspring among those who establish prayer, *"My Lord, make me to establish prayer, and some of my offspring (also). Our Lord, accept my prayer."* The prayer ends with a request of God's forgiveness, *"Our Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers on the Day of Reckoning."*

This prayer shows Abraham (PBUH) as the model of the righteous grateful servant of God who continuously remembers his Lord. One should note the use of "My Lord" and "Our Lord" in the prayer of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The use of "Our Lord" instead of "Our God" stresses the acceptance of leading a life according to God's laws. The word God expresses the majestic attributes of the Creator while the word Lord expresses the attributes which deals with the daily life of human beings. One has to believe in both. Those who believe in God as the Creator but refuse to live by the rules that the Lord has decreed do not fulfill the requirements of faith.

The verses continue to describe the fate of the disbelievers in scenes from the Day of Judgement, *"And do not think that God is unaware of what the wrongdoers do; He only gives them respite until a day on which the eyes stare (in horror.)"* The Messenger (PBUH) knew that God was aware of what the wrongdoers were doing. This message is for those who may think wrongly that the wrongdoers will continue to enjoy the pleasures of this life. The wrongdoers will be punished on that difficult day when the eyes will be forced to stare in horror. People will, *"They will be running forward with necks outstretched, their heads uplifted, their gaze does not return towards them, and their hearts a (gaping) void."* The verse paints an image of people who are terrified. They keep running in confusion trying to find an escape from the overwhelming

torment. Their hearts are void of feelings and their eyes are gazing but not seeing. This is the day which they will meet after the period of temporary reprieve that God granted them. So, warn them (Prophet) before that day comes, *“And warn people of a day when the torment will come upon them, and those who did wrong will say, ‘Our Lord, delay us for a little while. We will obey Your call and will follow the messengers.’”* Now they call upon God saying, *“Our Lord.”* Have they not rejected Him before? One should note that the style of the narrative has changed from a story telling mode to a dialogue mode, as if they were there praying God for a second chance. However, they will be answered, *“Did you not swear before that there would be no end for you? And you dwelt in the dwellings of the people who wronged themselves. You were clearly shown how We dealt with them; and We put forth (many) examples for you.”* You have seen how the wrongdoers before you were destroyed and you settled in their houses but you never thought that you will meet the same fate.

The scene changes from the events of the Day of Judgment to the events taking place at the time of the Prophet (PBUH), describing the activities of the idolaters of Mecca, *“Verily they have plotted their plot, and their plot is with God, though their plot was one whereby the mountains could be moved.”* God is aware of their conspiracy and He will deal with it. They may think it is well contrived plot but God has the power to deal with it. No matter how strong their plotting is, God will not fail His messengers, *“Do not think that God would fail to keep His promise to His messengers, Indeed God is Eminent, avenger of evil.”* God is Almighty and will execute His punishment on the wrongdoers and the plotters. Justice will be done and the crime of the wrongdoers and the plotters will be avenged. This will happen, *“On the day when the earth will be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens (also will be changed) and they will come forth to God, the One, the Dominator,”* We do not know how these changes will happen nor we know what will be the nature of the new earth and heaven. The verse clearly expresses the limitless bounds of God’s power.

On that day, *“You will see the guilty on that day linked together in chains, their garments of liquid pitch, and their faces covered with Fire;”* It will be a humiliating scene; the scene of the chained wrongdoers marching in rows. They will be dressed in flammable dirty black garments and their faces will be covered with fire. This will be the reward that awaits them. They will be humiliated because they bargained for conniving and wrongdoing, *“That God may repay each soul what it had earned. God is swift in reckoning.”*

The Sura ends, as it started, with a proclamation to people, *“This is a clear message for people in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is only One God, and that people of understanding may take heed.”* The proclamation acknowledges the fact that God is One. This is the corner stone of God’s religion on which God’s way of life is established. The intent of the proclamation is not only for people to acknowledge this fact but also to establish a way of life that is based on this acknowledgment. God’s way of life is a comprehensive program that includes all aspects of life: faith, rituals, ethics, manners, values, and standards. The political, economic, and social systems that govern the society should be based on this acknowledgement.

## **Sura 15: Al-Hijr (Stoneland)**

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

This is a Meccan Sura. According to the chronological order it comes after Surat Joseph. It was revealed during the period between the year of sadness and the time of migration to Medina. This was a critical time in the life of the Prophet (PBUH). The narrative in the Sura reflects the nature of this period. The Sura includes clear and realistic instructions to the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslim community to help them in their struggle against the disbelievers.

After the death of the Prophet's uncle, Abu Taleb, the spread of Islam slowed down. The persecution of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions at the hands of the idolaters of Mecca intensified and the levels of mockery and derision exercised by the idolaters against the Message and the Messenger (PBUH) escalated. Quranic verses revealed during this period responded by threatening the idolaters with a fate similar to previous generations of disbelievers. Examples of previous peoples who were punished and cities which were destroyed were cited. The verses also attempted to console the Prophet (PBUH) and to explain that the rejection that he was facing was simply the result of the stubbornness of the disbelievers.

The style of the Sura and its content are similar to other Suras revealed during this phase of the history of the Muslim community. Similar to the other Suras revealed during the same period, it included the strategy that the Muslim community should adopt in order to deal successfully with the requirements of that phase in the progress of the Islamic movement. This strategy is also applicable whenever similar circumstances arise.

An important feature of the Quran is that it always provides a strategy that is tailored to the specific situation at hand. It takes into consideration the factors of time, place, and circumstances that are relevant to the specific situation. It is important to understand this feature because it is the key to understanding the Quran, its laws, and its objectives. One has to understand this feature in order to be able to understand the motives behind the strategies that were suggested by the Quran to deal with different situations. The verses of the Quran dealt with real life situations and took into consideration the realities of these situations. To understand the meaning and the objectives of the verses of the Quran one has to study the prevalent circumstances in each of these situations.

Those who are undertaking the responsibility of the Call to Islam at any time can correlate the difficulties they are having with the difficulties mentioned in the Sura. They experience the same adverse conditions that the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions experienced in the early days of Islam. The problem we are facing now is the same problem that existed then: the turning away from the comprehensive reality of this religion. One cannot accept the comprehensive reality of this religion without having an absolute belief in God. This will translate into applying His rules in all aspects of life. God's rules should be applied in matters of faith and rituals as well as in the political, economic, social, and ethical spheres.



## Verses 1 to 15:

1. *Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book, a Quran that makes things clear.*
2. *It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims.*
3. *Let them eat and enjoy life, and let (false) hopes beguile them. They will soon know.*
4. *And never did We destroy a town but it had a decreed term made known.*
5. *Neither can a people anticipate its term, nor delay it.*
6. *And they said, "You, on whom the message has been revealed, you are indeed a madman.*
7. *Why do not you bring us angels, if you are truthful?"*
8. *We do not send the angels down except with the truth. (If they come to the ungodly), no respite would they have.*
9. *We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly be its guardian.*
10. *We did send messengers before you among different former communities.*
11. *But never came a messenger to them but they mocked him.*
12. *Even so We do let it creep into the hearts of the sinners.*
13. *They do not believe in it, though the example of the former peoples has already passed.*
14. *And even if We opened to them a gate into heaven and they kept ascending through it.*
15. *They would only say, "Our eyes have been dazzled. No, we have been bewitched by sorcery." (15: 1-15)*

This is the first group of verses in this Sura. It talks about the nature of the Book which was rejected by the idolaters. The verses threaten the idolaters of a day when they wish they had been Muslims. The verses also explain why God's punishment has been delayed. They are told that God has decreed that the punishment will occur on a previously designated date. The verses refer to their request that angels should bring the message. They are told that the angels will come only to exact God's punishment. The verses finally state that the reason behind their rejection is not the lack of evidence of the truth of the Message but because they are arrogant and stubborn.

*"Alif. Lam. Ra. These are verses of the Book, a Quran that makes things clear."* The Book has been written using these Alphabetical letters. Although everyone is familiar with these letters but it takes a miracle to use it to compose the Quran. This is beyond the ability of any human being. Those who rejected the Quran will wish one day they had accepted it, *"It may be that those who disbelieve wish ardently that they were Muslims."* The use of the word, "may be" carries the tones of threat and ridicule. When that day comes, it will be too late and they would have missed the opportunity. This is followed with another threat, *"Let them eat and enjoy life, and let (false) hopes beguile them. They will soon know."* Let them lead a material life that is void of contemplation, thought, or curiosity. Leave them in their indulgence of material pleasures unaware of the passing of life, thinking that it will last for ever. But one day, when it will be too late, they will come to know the truth.

*"And never did We destroy a town but it had a decreed term made known."* They should not be deceived with the delay in punishment. God has decreed a limited span of time for each nation. God will extend this time for nations which believe, do good deeds, and remain on the straight path. If they swerve from the right path they meet their end and their decreed term expires. It may be said that there are nations which do not believe nor do good deeds but they continue to

flourish. This may be true if we examine the situation superficially but if we look deeper we find that these nations still harbor a measure of goodness. They may be contributing to the development of life on earth in some way, they may be instituting justice even in a narrow sense for their citizens, or they may be contributing to the material benefit of people. This goodness is a cause for life on earth to prosper and for justice to prevail even in a narrow sense. When this goodness expires, the lives of such nations expire. This is God's law. Every nation has a specific term, *"Neither can a people anticipate its term, nor delay it."*

The verses describe the rudeness of the idolaters in responding to the Prophet (PBUH). He brought them a Book which clarified everything and alerted them to the consequences of their deeds. However, they said to him, *"You, on whom the message has been revealed, you are indeed a madman."* Not only they rejected the Message in a rude way, but they also called the Prophet (PBUH), *"a madman."* They even went further asking him to bring down angels to support his message, *"Why do not you bring us angels, if you are truthful?"* The request of the disbelievers for angels to deliver the message is a sign that they do not have faith in their fellow human beings whom God has chosen to deliver the message. The response comes from God, *"We do not send the angels down except with the truth. (If they come to the ungodly), no respite would they have."*

The narrative then continued to assure them that it is God who sends His Messengers with guidance, *"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly be its guardian."* If they were really interested in God's guidance, then they better believe in His Message which He revealed to His Messenger. It is God's mercy that He sent them a message instead of sending them angels to destroy them.

The promise has been fulfilled. The Quran has been kept intact for centuries. No one was able to tamper with it. There were many turbulent times in the history of Islam. During these times, many groups were formed each claiming that they were the true Muslims and the others were deviants. Each group tried to support its point of view using corrupted Prophetic traditions. However, no one of them was able to tamper with even one verse from the Quran. There are also times of decline during which Muslims were oppressed. Their enemies could have easily tampered with the Quran and the Muslims could not have raised a finger. But God kept the Quran intact as He promised.

God then consoled His Prophet (PBUH), *"We did send messengers before you among different former communities. But never came a messenger to them but they mocked him."* God sent many messengers before Muhammad (PBUH) and like him they were rejected by their people. God told His Messenger (PBUH) that his people's hearts, like the hearts of those who rejected their messengers before him, were not open to receive and benefit from the guidance that the messengers brought, *"Even so We do let it creep into the hearts of the sinners."* Even though, the Quran creeps into their hearts, but it does not leave any trace on them; as if they have never seen it. Those who reject guidance are all alike regardless of when they lived or where they lived, *"They do not believe in it, though the example of the former peoples has already passed."*

The problem was not that there was a lack of proof of the authenticity of the message. The problem was that they were blinded by their arrogance and stubbornness, “*And even if We opened to them a gate into heaven and they kept ascending through it. They would only say, ‘Our eyes have been dazzled. No, we have been bewitched by sorcery.’*” These two verses paint an image of their persistence in rejecting the faith. Imagine them ascending into the sky to a door that leads to heaven but they still reject the reality of what they see. They simply think that they are imagining things. Such a trip would be stronger as evidence than having angels coming down to them. But they would have still made an excuse not to believe saying, “*No, we have been bewitched by sorcery.*” This shows the extent of their stubbornness. The verses portrayed the arrogance of those who reject God and presented a model for all those who reject guidance. The materialists who reject God establish the social structure and the political and economic systems of their nations on the basis of the claim that the universe existed without a Creator; and that the universe does not need the Creator to manage and control it. They claim that these systems are ethical systems based on a scientific approach. Their failure to feel the existence of God, in spite of the cosmic signs that corroborate the need for a creator, indicates that their receptors have malfunctioned. The claim that the universe existed without a creator is against the initial natural disposition of the human being. It is an idea that is unacceptable to the normal human mind.

### **Verses 16 to 25:**

16. *It is We who have set out the zodiacal signs in the heavens, and made them fair-seeming to the beholders;*
17. *And We have guarded them from every cursed devil.*
18. *Save him who steals the hearing, he will be pursued by a visible flame.*
19. *And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it.*
20. *And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.*
21. *And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure.*
22. *And We send the winds fertilising, then We caused water to descend from the sky, and gave it to you to drink. It is not you who are the holders of the store thereof.*
23. *And most surely We bring to life and cause to die and We are the heirs (of everything).*
24. *And certainly We have known those of you who have gone before and We certainly know those who shall come later.*
25. *And indeed, your Lord will gather them together. Indeed, He is Wise, Omniscient. (15: 16 – 25)*

“*It is We who have set out the zodiacal signs in the heavens, and made them fair-seeming to the beholders; And We have guarded them from every cursed devil. Save him who steals the hearing, he will be pursued by a visible flame.*” This is the first line in a large canvas. This canvas portrays the amazing universe; a canvas which speaks of the signs of the creative power, the meticulous management, and the accurate control behind the creation and the maintenance of the

universe. The word zodiacal signs may be a reference to the stars and planets or to their paths, either case they are signs of the power of the Creator, the accuracy of the control, and the beauty of the scene, *“and made them fair-seeming to the beholders.”* This is a subtle remark indicating that the beauty of the creation was a deliberate plan of God. The scene of the scattered stars over the blue clear sky is a beautiful scene that evokes many feelings in the hearts of the beholder. In addition to the beauty, God also provided protection for the sky; no devil can gain access to it. He protected its purity from being defiled by the temptation of the devil, *“And We have guarded them from every cursed devil.”* The verse refers to the devil who *“steals the hearing.”* The nature of the devil and how he will steal the hearing is a matter of the unseen. We will not attempt to discuss this because it is futile to speculate about the unseen. The message is that God will protect the sky from any attempt by the devil to penetrate it.

The second line in this amazing canvas is the scene of the extended land; it is easy to tread on, and it is supported by huge mountains. It provides plants and provisions for people and other living things, *“And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it.”* The verses describing the scenes of the sky and the earth are dominated by enormous structures. The sky has zodiacal signs, the earth has huge mountains, and the plants are well balanced. The verses go on to include the whole creation in the scene, *“And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.”* The verses not only refer to the cosmic creation of God but also to the living things that God created on earth. It reminds us of the fact that He is the provider not only for the human beings but also for the other living creatures. The human race is but one group of the living creation of God but there are other living creatures which God created and He provides for. It is by the grace of God that He created these living creatures to support the life of the human race on earth. God did not leave the responsibility of providing for these living creatures to the people but He provides for them Himself. These provisions, like everything else, are accurately measured according to God’s will, *“And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure.”* No one owns or controls the resources on earth. It is God who owns, controls, and disburses all the resources according to His will. These resources are allocated in an, *“appointed measure.”*

God sends the wind in an appointed measure, *“And We send the winds fertilising, then We caused water to descend from the sky, and gave it to you to drink. It is not you who are the holders of the store thereof.”* God sent the wind which delivers rain for people to drink however; they will not be able to store it. The wind blows according to certain physical laws, but who created these laws? It is the Creator who created them.

One notices that the verses defer all actions to God even the water that we drink, it is God who gave it to us to drink, *“gave it to you to drink.”* This can be interpreted that God created humans in such a way that they need water to survive, and He made the water available and beneficial for humans to drink. This flows well with the general theme of these verses. The verses stress the power of God and His ability to control and maintain all His creations. The verses continue along the same lines to stress that life and death are also under God’s control, *“And most surely We bring to life and cause to die and We are the heirs (of everything).”*

The underlying theme then changes to connect this group of verses with the verses in the first group above, “*And certainly We have known those of you who have gone before and We certainly know those who shall come later.*” God will certainly gather them together in the end “*And indeed, your Lord will gather them together. Indeed, He is Wise, Omniscient.*” The verse stresses that life and death are in God’s hand. He is the heir after life, He knows when each one will be put death

## **Verses 26 to 48:**

26. *Verily We created man of potter's clay from an altered black mud.*
27. *And the jinn did We create aforetime of intensely hot fire.*
28. *And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, "I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay from altered black mud,*
29. *When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down prostrating to him."*
30. *So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together.*
31. *Except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated.*
32. *(God) said, "Iblis, what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?"*
33. *(Iblis) said, "I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud."*
34. *(God) said, "Then get you out from here; for you are rejected, accursed.*
35. *And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment."*
36. *(Iblis) said, "My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when they are raised."*
37. *He (God) said, "Indeed, you are of those reprieved;*
38. *Till the Day of the appointed time."*
39. *He (Iblis) said, "My Lord, because You has sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them on the earth, and shall mislead them every one,*
40. *Except Your sincere servants."*
41. *He (God) said, "This is a right course incumbent upon Me.*
42. *You have no authority over My servants, except those who will follow you from among the ones who go astray.*
43. *And verily, Hell is the promised abode for all of them.*
44. *It has seven gates, and each gate has an appointed portion.*
45. *Those who are God conscious (will be) amid gardens and fountains.*
46. *(Their greeting will be), 'Enter you here in peace and security.'*
47. *And We shall remove whatever is in their breasts of rancor. (They will be) Brethren, face to face, (they rest) on couches raised.*
48. *No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave. (15: 26 – 48)*

This group of verses discuss the major story of humanity, the story of the initial natural disposition of humankind. It is also the story of guidance versus misguidance and the factors that affect both. It is the story of Adam (PBUH). From what has he been created? What were the events that occurred during and after the process of his creation? This story has been discussed

twice before in this book, the first time in Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2) and the second time in Surat Al-Aaraf (Chapter 7). However, the account that was given in the previous Suras served different purposes and consequently the presentation was different. Each account had its own style, environment, and tempo. However, the beginning of all three accounts had a common theme: the concept of establishing Adam (PBUH) on earth and making him a vicegerent. In Surat Al-Baqara the story of the creation of Adam (PBUH) started with the verse, *“It is He who created for you all things that are on earth; then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. And He knows all things.”* (2: 29). In Surat Al-Aaraf the verses which described the creation of Adam (PBUH) were preceded by the verse, *“And We have given you (humankind) power on earth, and appointed for you therein livelihoods. Little you give thanks.”* (7: 10). In this Sura, the story is preceded by the verse, *“And We have spread out the earth, and placed in it firm mountains, and caused each balanced thing to grow in it. And We have provided in it means of subsistence, for you and for those for whose sustenance you are not responsible.”* (15: 19)

However, as we mentioned before the account given in each Sura is unique. In Surat Al-Baqara the emphasis was on the establishment of Adam (PBUH) on earth as a vicegerent, *“And when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’”* (2: 30) The following verses explained the rationale behind the establishment of Adam (PBUH), *“They said, ‘Will You place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your Holy (name)?’ He said, ‘I know what you know not.’ And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, ‘Tell me the names of these if you are truthful.’ They said, ‘Glory be to You. We have no knowledge, except that which You have taught us. Verily, You are Omniscient, Wise.’ He said, ‘Adam, tell them their names.’ When he had told them, God said, ‘Did I not tell you that I know the unseen in the heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?’”* (2: 30 – 33) The verses continued to narrate the story of God’s command, Satan’s disobedience, the temptation of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse, the descent of Adam (PBUH) and his spouse to live on earth to fulfil their undertaking as vicegerents after they have gone through the difficult experience which prepared them for life on earth, and finally their repentance.

In Surat Al-Aaraf the focus was on the enmity between humankind and Satan. The verses narrated Adam’s (PBUH) journey in heaven and how he was seduced by Satan; and Satan’s request for a reprieve from God and his vow to devote his life until the Day of Judgement to the temptation of the humankind. The verses emphasized the fact that human beings have the choice, if they obey God and do good deeds then they are readmitted to heaven from which their first father was driven out when he disobeyed God; while those who choose to follow Satan and disobey God will end up in Hell fire.

The story in the present Sura deals with the nature of Adam (PBUH) and the innate factors that affect his accepting or rejecting guidance. So, the verses start by stating that Adam (PBUH) was created from potter’s clay from an altered black mud. Then God breathed into Adam (PBUH) from His spirit, *“Verily We created man of potter’s clay from an altered black mud. And the jinn did We create aforesaid of intensely hot fire.”* The verses state clearly the difference between the nature of Adam (PBUH) and the nature of Satan. The former was created from clay and the latter was created from fire.

*“And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay from altered black mud, When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down prostrating to him.’ So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together. Except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated. (God) said, ‘Iblis, what is your reason for not being among those who prostrated themselves?’ (Iblis) said, ‘I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud.’ (God) said, ‘Then get you out from here; for you are rejected, accursed. And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment.’”* When did God speak to the angels? Where did this take place?

How did He speak to the angels? We do not have any answers to these questions. It is a matter of the unseen and there is no authentic text that provides answers to these questions. We also do not know how did God created Adam (PBUH) from clay. It may be said that the main elements that form the human body are the same elements that compose the clay. Then God breathed in Adam (PBUH) of His spirit. God's spirit transformed this lowly formation of clay to the honored human species. The transformation gave the humankind unique characteristics and made him worthy of being a vicegerent on earth. How did this happen? Is it possible for the human creature to ever fathom how the Great Creator works?

We know that Satan was created from intensely hot fire and that he was created before Adam (PBUH). We do not know the nature of Satan nor do we know how he was created. However, he must have acquired some of the characteristics of the intensely hot fire from which he was created. One of these characteristics is the ability to affect clay causing it to change. This change could be harmful since the fire is very hot. We can sense also from the narrative that Satan is arrogant.

Humankind was created from potter's clay and was given a breath from the spirit of God. The spirit differentiated him from the rest of God's creation and made him able to reach to high heaven and made him worthy of the honor of connecting with God. The spirit gave humankind the ability to break the material barrier and be able to receive inspiration from God.

But humankind is weighed down to the earth by the muddy nature of his formation. This nature evokes in him the various desires which are required to satisfy the needs of the physical body. The physical body needs food, drink, and clothes. It has passion and carnal desires. Humankind is a mixture of these two components, physical and spirit. They are inseparable. The goal set for humankind is to maintain the balance between these two components. No component should be nurtured or satisfied on the account of the other component. It is neither desirable for human beings to suppress the needs of the physical body in favor of nurturing the spirit; nor it is desirable for them to indulge in the lusty desires of the physical body and ignore the lofty needs of the spirit. The former course of action could bring them nearer to the circle of angels while the latter course of action brings them nearer to the circle of animals. Neither scenario was intended for the human race. The objective of humankind is to reach and maintain a balance between the body and the spirit. The Prophet (PBUH) admonished three men, the first vowed to lead a celibate life, the second vowed to fast every day his whole life, and the third vowed to spend the whole night praying his whole life. He (PBUH) said according to 'Aisha (RA), *“Whoever steered away from my tradition does not belong to me.”*

*“So the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together; except Iblis. He refused to be among those who prostrated.”* The angles prostrated themselves to Adam (PBUH) because they do what they are commanded to do. But Iblis has a different nature he was created from fire while the angels were created from light. Iblis disobeyed the command. When he was asked why he did not obey the command he said, *“I am not one to prostrate myself to a mortal, whom You created out of potter's clay from altered black mud.”* The arrogant Satan ignored the fact that Adam (PBUH) was not created from clay only but he also carried a breath from God. Satan had to suffer the consequence of his disobedience, *“(God) said, ‘Then get you out from here; for you are rejected, accursed. And the curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment.’”*

The vindictive nature of Satan motivated him to seek revenge, *“(Iblis) said, ‘My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when they are raised.’”* God granted him the reprieve which he requested, *“He (God) said, ‘Indeed, you are of those reprieved till the Day of the appointed time.’”* Satan wanted time to exact his revenge against Adam (PBUH) and his progeny, *“He (Iblis) said, ‘My Lord, because You has sent me astray, I verily shall adorn the path of error for them on the earth, and shall mislead them every one, except Your sincere servants.’”* He defined the battle ground. He vowed to adorn the path of error for the children of Adam. However, he knew that he had no power over God’s sincere servants. God said, *“This is a right course incumbent upon Me. You have no authority over My servants, except those who will follow you from among the ones who go astray.”* This is God’s law. Satan has no power over God’s sincere servants. Their devotion to God protects them from succumbing to Satan’s adorned temptation. But those who choose to go astray will join Satan, *“And verily, Hell is the promised abode for all of them. It has seven gates, and each gate has an appointed portion.”*

On the other hand, those who remain conscious of God will be rewarded by an abode, *“amid gardens and fountains. (Their greeting will be), ‘Enter you here in peace and security.’ And We shall remove whatever is in their breasts of rancor. (They will be) Brethren, face to face, (they rest) on couches raised. No sense of fatigue shall touch them, nor shall they (ever) be asked to leave.”* Those who remain conscious of God protect themselves from God’s wrath by avoiding the roads that lead to this wrath. The contrast between those who will end up in paradise and those who will end up in Hell fire is to be noted. The sincere servants of God lead a peaceful and secure life in gardens full of springs. Peace and security will remove rancor and hatred from their hearts. On the other hand, Satan’s host live in fear and agony. Their hearts are full of envy and rancor.

Islam does not attempt to change the nature of humankind. It acknowledges the fact that people’s hearts may incorporate rancor. This is part of the human nature. Islam does not attempt to expunge these feelings from the hearts. Islam tries to attenuate the severity of such feelings and replace it with love and tolerance. Muslims should love only that which brings them nearer to God and should hate only that which separates them from God. How else can one describe faith? But in heaven rancor would be completely expunged from their hearts. Only pure and loving brotherhood remains. This is one of the characteristics that the people of heaven will enjoy. Whoever believes in God and finds that he /she enjoys this characteristic in this life should celebrate it and consider it a good omen for a future in heaven.



## Verses 49 to 84:

49. *Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy;*
50. *And that My torment will be indeed the most painful torment.*
51. *And tell them about the guests of Abraham.*
52. *When they entered his presence and said, "Peace," He said, "We are afraid of you."*
53. *They said, "Fear not, we give you glad tidings of a son endowed with great knowledge."*
54. *He said, "Do you give me glad tidings that old age has seized me? Of what, then, is your good news?"*
55. *They said, "We give you glad tidings in truth. So do not despair."*
56. *He said, "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, save those who have gone astray?"*
57. *Abraham said, "Messengers (of God), what then is the business on which you (have come)?"*
58. *They said, "We have been sent to a people (deep) in sin,*
59. *(All) save the family of Lot. Them, we shall deliver every one,*
60. *Except his wife, whom We had decreed that she should be of those who stay behind."*
61. *And when the messengers came to the family of Lot,*
62. *He said, "You are unknown people."*
63. *They said, "We have come to you with that about which they disputed.*
64. *And we bring you the truth, and we are indeed truthful.*
65. *So travel with your household in a portion of the night, and follow behind them. Let none of you look back, but go where you are commanded."*
66. *And We revealed to him (the decree) of that matter: that the root of those (who did wrong) was to be cut off at the early morning.*
67. *And the people of the town came rejoicing.*
68. *He (Lot) said, "These are my guests, so do not disgrace me.*
69. *Be conscious of God and do not shame me."*
70. *They said, "Have we not forbidden you from (entertaining) anyone?"*
71. *He said, "Here are my daughters, if you must be doing (lawful marriage)."*
72. *Verily, by your life (Muhammad), in their wild intoxication, they wandered in distraction, to and fro.*
73. *But the (mighty) blast overtook them before morning,*
74. *And We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay.*
75. *In this are signs for those who discern.*
76. *And the (cities were) right on the high-road.*
77. *In this is a sign for the believers.*
78. *And the companions of the thicket were also wrongdoers.*
79. *So We exacted revenge on them. They were both on an open highway, plain to see.*
80. *And the dwellers of Al-Hijr denied the messengers.*
81. *And we gave them Our revelations, but they turned away from them.*
82. *And they used to carve out dwellings in the hills, (wherein they dwelt) secure.*
83. *But the (mighty) blast seized them at the early morning.*
84. *And what they earned did not avail them. (15: 49 -84)*

This group of verses portray a number of examples describing God's mercy and torment. These examples were given through a number of narratives: the glad tidings that the angels brought the old Prophet Abraham (PBUH), that a son will be born to him; the deliverance of Prophet Lot (PBUH) and his family except his wife who was among the wrongdoers; and the torment that the people of the thicket and the people of Al-Hijr suffered.

The previous verses described the reward that those who remain conscious of God will get and the torment that those who chose to go astray will suffer. God then issued this command to His Messenger (PBUH), *"Tell My servants that I am indeed the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy; and that My torment will be indeed the most painful torment."* God mentioned His forgiveness before He talked about His torment, according to the fundamental principle which God decreed. God prescribed mercy on Himself. In some verses God's torment is mentioned first or even mentioned without a reference to God's mercy to illustrate a specific point that needs to be emphasized.

*"And tell them about the guests of Abraham. When they entered his presence and said, 'Peace,' He said, 'We are afraid of you.'"* The verse skips the details that was mentioned in Surat Hud (Chapter 11) which explain why was Prophet Abraham (PBUH) fearful of these people because the focus here was on the mercy of God which was expressed in the glad tidings that these messengers brought Prophet Abraham (PBUH). They said, *"Fear not, we give you glad tidings of a son endowed with great knowledge."* The immediate reaction of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was astonishment, *"He said, 'Do you give me glad tidings that old age has seized me? Of what, then, is your good news?'"* He was old and his wife was barren, how could they have a son? He needed to be reminded of God's mercy, *"They said, 'We give you glad tidings in truth. So do not despair.'"* Quickly he remembered and responded appropriately, *"He said, 'And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord, save those who have gone astray?'"* One should note Prophet Abraham's (PBUH) reference to God's mercy. He also stated one of the fundamental principles, only those who go astray despair of God's mercy. The believers whose hearts are connected to God never despair because they know that no matter how difficult it gets, God's mercy is always near them. God controls the means as He controls the results.

When his fear was gone and he was reassured by the angels he wanted to know what is the business they came to conduct. He asked, *"Messengers (of God), what then is the business on which you (have come)?"* They answered, *"We have been sent to a people (deep) in sin, (All) save the family of Lot. Them, we shall deliver every one, except his wife, whom We had decreed that she should be of those who stay behind."* We note that the narrative here ignored the details of the dialogue that ensued between Abraham (PBUH) and the angels about Lot and his people. These details were mentioned previously in Surat Hud.

The narrative continues with the angels going to Lot (PBUH) and his people, *"And when the messengers came to the family of Lot, He said, 'You are unknown people.'"* This statement shows Lot's (PBUH) frustration. He knew what his people were after and he knew how will they behave towards his guests. He had no support to protect his guests and he was concerned for their safety. But the angels quickly explained to him that they came to impose God's

punishment, the punishment that they were promised but they doubted that it will ever happen, *“They said, ‘We have come to you with that about which they disputed. And we bring you the truth, and we are indeed truthful.’”* These assurances indicate the worried state of mind that Lot (PBUH) was in. They assured him first then gave him the command, *“So travel with your household in a portion of the night, and follow behind them. Let none of you look back, but go where you are commanded.”* The command indicated that Lot should leave the town with his followers during the night. He should be at the end of the caravan and he should make sure that no one of his followers looks back towards the town. The time for the destruction of the town was set for the morning, *“And We revealed to him (the decree) of that matter: that the root of those (who did wrong) was to be cut off at the early morning.”* Lot (PBUH) was made privy to the fact that the people of the town will be annihilated in the early morning.

This was a quick outline of the whole episode of the people of Lot (PBUH). It was given as an introduction to the full story which will follow. The detailed account starts when the people of the town came to know about Lot’s (PBUH) guests so they hurried towards his house, *“And the people of the town came rejoicing.”* The verse expresses the extent of the audacity of the people of Lot (PBUH). They came hurriedly in a group announcing their joy to have found a new prey to satisfy their desires. Lot (PBUH) was stressed trying to find a way to protect his guests and his honor as a host. He tried to argue with his people to evoke the feelings of God consciousness in their hearts, *“He (Lot) said, ‘They are my guests, do not disgrace me. Be conscious of God and do not shame me.’”* Instead of heeding his admonition, they blamed Lot (PBUH) that he is hosting these people, *“They said, ‘Have we not forbidden you from (entertaining) anyone?’”* Lot (PBUH) continued to argue with them exploring other ways to keep them away from his guests, *“He said, ‘Here are my daughters, if you must be doing (lawful marriage).”* Lot (PBUH) tried to address their initial natural disposition by urging them to form families according to the classical definition of the family.

The verses then turn to address the Prophet (PBUH) to describe the state of mind of the people of the town of Lot (PBUH). They were not going to change their life style, *“Verily, by your life (Muhammad), in their wild intoxication, they wandered in distraction, to and fro.”*

The scene ends with a description of the punishment that had been decreed, *“But the (mighty) blast overtook them before morning, And We turned (the cities) upside down, and rained down on them brimstones hard as baked clay.”* The verses describe the devastation that was inflicted on the town of Lot (PBUH). It was said that what happened to the town of Lot (PBUH) can be caused by an earthquake. We are certain that cosmic phenomena occur according to God’s physical laws. But God who established the physical laws in the first place is also able to change their outcomes. It is not necessary then to assume that an earthquake was needed to destroy the town of Lot (PBUH). God has the power to destroy any town with whatever means He wills and whenever He wills. He only needs to say, “Be,” and it will be. This is the approach of the believer in understanding the miracles which were brought about by God’s messengers.

The town of Lot (PBUH) lies on the road between Saudi Arabia and Syria. Travellers between these two destinations pass by its geographical location often. There are lessons and admonitions for those who watch and reflect. However, only open hearts which are able to receive the admonitions are able to benefit from these accounts, *“In this are signs for those who discern. And*

*the (cities were) right on the high-road. In this is a sign for the believers.”*

The people of Shu'ayb (PBUH) (the companions of the thicket) and the people of Saleh (PBUH) (the companions of Al-Hijr) had similar experiences, *“And the companions of the thicket were also wrongdoers. So, We exacted revenge on them.”* The detailed account of the discourse between Shu'ayb (PBUH) and his people has been given in other Suras. In this Sura, the verses refer to their wrongdoing and the consequence of their deeds. They have been punished and their town was destroyed when their term ended. This confirms the verse in the beginning of Sura which stated that each people have an appointed term. The city of Median and the thicket were near the town of Lot (PBUH). The verse, *“They were both on an open highway, plain to see,”* could be a reference to Median and the thicket since they are located on a clear road or it could be a reference to the towns of Lot (PBUH) and Shu'ayb (PBUH) both of them are located on the road from Saudi Arabia and Syria. The sites of these towns were on a road travelled by many which make them a suitable reminder of the fate of the disbelievers.

The companions of the Al-Hijr are the people of Saleh (PBUH). The site of their town is still known till the present day. They have carved their houses in the mountains, *“And the dwellers of Al-Hijr denied the messengers.”* The verse refers to Prophet Saleh (PBUH) in the plural form simply because he brought to them the same message that all other prophets brought to their people. So if they reject Saleh (PBUH) it is as if they rejected all the prophets. *“And we gave them Our revelations, but they turned away from them.”* God sent the camel as a sign to support Prophet Saleh (PBUH). But God's signs are many and they are all around us. We can see God's sign in the universe and in ourselves. The people of Saleh (PBUH) not only rejected the specific miracle that came to them but they also rejected all God's signs that surround them.

*“And they used to carve out dwellings in the hills, (wherein they dwelt) secure. But the (mighty) blast seized them at the early morning. And what they earned did not avail them.”* The verses portray a huge leap from a secure state to a complete devastation. They were secure in their formidable houses carved out in the mountains; they were probably just waking up from a comfortable sleep and suddenly the blast seized them and they were not able to escape the annihilation.

This brings us to the end of these three quick accounts which act as illustrative examples of the application of the verse stating God's law that a town is only destroyed when God's decreed term has been reached.

### **Verses 85 to 99:**

85. *And We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except with the truth, and the Hour will certainly come. So forgive, (Muhammad), with a gracious forgiveness.*

86. *Indeed, your Lord is the Creator of all things, the Omniscient.*

87. *We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the great Quran.*
88. *Do not extend your eyes toward that which We have given (certain) categories of them to enjoy. And do not grieve on their account, and lower your wing (in tenderness) for the believers.*
89. *And say, "Surely, I am the plain warner."*
90. *Such as We send down for those who make divisions,*
91. *Those who break the Quran into parts.*
92. *So, by your Lord, We will most certainly question them all,*
93. *About what they used to do.*
94. *Therefore, declare openly what you are commanded with and turn away from the polytheists.*
95. *Indeed, We are sufficient for you against those who scoff,*
96. *Those who adopt, with God, another god. They will soon come to know.*
97. *We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say.*
98. *Therefore, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate. And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain. (15: 85 -99)*

*“And We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except with the truth, and the Hour will certainly come. So forgive, (Muhammad), with a gracious forgiveness. Indeed, your Lord is the Creator of all things, the Omniscient.”* The previous stories are capped with this articulate and meaningful passage. The verses indicate that the creation is entrenched in truth. God created everything to fulfill a definite purpose in consonance with His planning and wisdom. The creation of the heaven and earth was not accidental but it was designed, created, and controlled with deliberate perfect planning. The term truth indicates that the creation of the universe was perfect and the control of the universe is perfect. The promise of God is the truth and the Day of Judgement will certainly come. So Muhammad, be gracious in your forgiveness and free your heart from hate and rancor. Your Lord is certainly the Creator, the Omniscient.

The truth of the Message emanates from the truth of the creation, *“We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the great Quran.”* Most probably the term *“seven of the oft-repeated (verses),”* refers to Surat Al-Fatiha (Chapter 1) and the term *“the great Quran,”* refers to the rest of the Quran. The reference to the Quran in this verse connects the Quran to the original truth that upholds the existence of the universe. The Quran is one of the fundamental aspects of the truth. It embodies God’s laws and attracts the human heart to them. The Quran reveals God’s signs in people and in the universe and encourages the hearts to understand these signs. The Quran reveals the means of achieving guidance and the roads that lead people astray. The Quran is part of the truth of this universe. It is an everlasting document that will continue to direct life in spite of the rejection and denials of the disbelievers.

Having been given these seven oft repeated verses and the greatest Quran, both originate in the truth and embody the truth, it does not behove Muhammad (PBUH) to be interested in the transient pleasures of this world, *“Do not extend your eyes toward that which We have given (certain) categories of them to enjoy. And do not grieve on their account, and lower your wing (in tenderness) for the believers.”* The eye does not extend, it is only the sight that can extend, but the expression paints this picture of an eye going out of its place to see. The expression

presents an image of great interest and curiosity. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded not to be saddened by the fate of the disbelievers. They will be treated justly by God. In the meantime, be kind to the believers.

Your role is to warn people, *“And say, ‘Surely, I am the plain warner.’”* This is the same message that each and every messenger of God brought to his people. Some of these people were still living in the Arabian Peninsula like the Jews and the Christians who only believed in parts of the Quran, *“Such as We send down for those who make divisions, those who break the Quran into parts.”* They will certainly be held accountable, *“So, by your Lord, We will most certainly question them all, about what they used to do.”*

Then a command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Therefore declare openly what you are commanded and turn away from the polytheists. Indeed, We are sufficient for you against those who scoff, those who adopt, with God, another god. They will soon come to know.”* The Prophet (PBUH) was asked to make his call known. He was told that he should not fear the polytheists, God will take care of them. The disbelievers will soon come to know the consequences of their disbelief.

The Prophet (PBUH) was a human being. He could not control his feelings of annoyance when he heard people openly express their polytheism and utter obscenities against the Message of truth which he brought. The Prophet (PBUH) was given a cure for these feelings, *“We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say. Therefore, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and be of those who prostrate. And serve your Lord until there comes to you that which is certain.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) continued to celebrate the praise of God all his life and he sought a remedy in praying to God until that which is certain came to him: death. Thus, the last message from the Sura was to turn away from the disbelievers and to seek refuge with God. One day the disbelievers will wish that they were Muslims.

## **Sura 16: Al-Nahl (The Bees)**

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

The rhythm of the verses in this Sura is slow and the cadence is quite but it covers a wide scope of issues. The issues are presented in a comprehensive framework. Similar to other Meccan Suras, it deals with the major issues related to the doctrine: the divine nature of God, God's revelation, and the concept of resurrection after death. It also touches upon a number of related side issues. It articulates the relationship between the religions of Abraham (PBUH) and Muhammad (PBUH), the divine Will regarding guidance and misguidance, the responsibility of the Messengers of God, God's decree concerning those who reject guidance, the myth of idolatry, the migration for the sake of God, the trials that Muslims were subjected to, and the issue of apostasy. In addition, it touches upon ethical issues among which establishing justice, doing good, spending in the way of God, and fulfilment of promise. In the background of the Sura, the heavens and earth; the descending rain and the growing trees; the dark night, the daylight, the sun, the moon and the stars; the mountains, the seas, and the rivers all cast their shadows on the events unfolding.

### **Verses 1 to 21:**

- 1. The commandment of God will come to pass, so do not seek to hasten it. Glorified and Exalted is He above all that they associate (with Him).*
- 2. He sends down the angels with the spirit of His command on whom He wills of His servants, (saying), "Warn that there is no God save Me, so be conscious of Me."*
- 3. He created the heavens and the earth in truth. High is He Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).*
- 4. He created humankind from a sperm-drop; and behold this same (humankind) becomes an open adversary.*
- 5. And the cattle He has created for you, from them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) you eat.*
- 6. You find beauty in them for you when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture).*
- 7. And they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not (otherwise) reach except with great trouble to yourselves. Your Lord is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
- 8. And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for ornament. And He creates that which you do not know.*
- 9. And God points to the direction of the (right) way, but there are ways which deviate. If God had willed, He could have guided all of you.*
- 10. It is He who sends down rain from the sky, from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle.*
- 11. With it He produces crops for you, and the olive and the date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruits. Indeed, in this there is a sign for a people who reflect.*
- 12. And He has subjected to you the night and the day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are all subjected by His Command. Verily, in this are signs for people who understand.*
- 13. And what He has created on earth of varied hues, therein indeed a sign for a people who take heed.*

14. *It is He who subjected the sea, that you may eat from it flesh that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract from it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships plowing through, that you may seek of the bounty of God and that you may be grateful.*
15. *And He has cast into the earth firm mountains, lest it shifts with you, and streams and roads that you may be guided.*
16. *And landmarks (too), and by the star they are (also) guided.*
17. *Is then He who creates like the one who does not create? Will you not take heed?*
18. *If you count up the favours of God, never would you be able to enumerate them.  
Certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
19. *And God does know what you conceal, and what you reveal.*
20. *And those whom they invoke besides God create nothing and they are themselves created.*
21. *(They are) dead, not living. And they realize it not when they will be raised. (16: 1 -21)*

*“The commandment of God will come to pass, so do not seek to hasten it. Glorified and Exalted He above all that they associate (with Him). He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command on whom He wills of His servants, (saying), ‘Warn that there is no God save Me, so be conscious of Me.’”* The idolaters in Mecca were hounding the Prophet (PBUH) about the promised punishment from God. They were challenging the veracity of the promise. The more the punishment was delayed the more their harassment grew and the more aggressive they became in ridiculing the Prophet (PBUH). They did not realize that the reprieve that they were given was a mercy from God and that there was a rationale behind it. They never tried to reflect on the signs of God in the universe and in the Quran. They did not try to reflect on the verses of the Quran which addressed their minds and challenged their intellect. They did not appreciate the Quranic methodology which appeals to the human intellect. This methodology appreciates the abilities and rights of the human being which God bestowed on him. These include the ability to think and feel, the right of expression, and the freedom of will.

The Sura starts with an unequivocal statement, *“The commandment of God will come to pass.”* This indicates that the command has been issued and this is sufficient for the command to be fulfilled at the time that God has decreed. So, do not be impatient. Nothing will change God’s plan. The decisiveness of the opening statement has a strong impact on the soul of the person, no matter how obstinate that person is. In addition, it only states the reality of the situation. God’s command will be fulfilled. God is high above what the idolaters associate with Him. God sends down the angels with His revelation. The use of the word *“spirit”* here indicates more than a revelation. It is a revelation that revives the souls, the consciousness, the intellect, and the emotions of people. It is a revelation that revives the society and protects it from corruption and decay. The message is the message of the belief in the Oneness of God. This spirit is the best of the blessings of God that He bestowed on humankind and it is the source of all other blessings which will be detailed in the rest of the Sura. The delivery of the message as a, *“warning,”* is congruent with the theme of the Sura which addresses those who rejected the message.

*“He created the heavens and the earth with the truth. High is He Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).”* The creation, control and management of heavens and earth are based on the truth. Nothing has been created accidentally. God’s plan is perfect and meaningful. God is



One and has no associates.

*“He created humankind from a sperm-drop; and behold this same (humankind) becomes an open adversary.”* This is a great leap from a humble beginning to an adversarial status. This is a great leap between the sperm-drop and the open adversary who argues with and rejects his Creator.

The narrative then starts to review the creation of God which has been created for the benefit of humankind, *“And the cattle He has created for you, from them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) you eat. You find beauty in them for you, when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture). And they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not (otherwise) reach except with great trouble to yourselves. Your Lord is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”* The use of cattle could be appreciated greatly in an environment like the one in which the Quran was revealed as well as in many other rural communities. The Arabs were used to camels, cows, sheep, and goats. They also had horses, mules, and donkeys which were used in riding and were sometimes owned for their graceful look. The verses explore the benefits and uses which satisfy the needs and desires of people. The cattle provide skin that can be used to make warm clothes and tents, meat to eat, and milk to drink. They are used to carry heavy loads and to transport people. It also has a sight pleasing to the beholder.

The sentence, *“You find beauty in them,”* emphasizes the value of beauty in life. Beauty is an essential aspect of life on earth. God’s blessings are not limited to the necessities of life but they extend to cover human aspirations for the fulfillment of the sense of beauty in the hearts of people.

*“And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for ornament. And He creates that which you do not know.”* This verse opens the door for the human creativity to think about new modes of transportation which carry heavy cargo and people.

The faith of Islam is a flexible and broad minded faith. It is open for new developments that use all the tools and means which God created to help us lead a better life. It accepts new innovations that are made possible through knowledge, ability, and science. The means of transportation will be ever changing as life progresses.

In juxtaposition to the cattle which are used to transport people physically, the Quran talks about another mode of transportation which transport people spiritually along God’s straight path, *“And God points to the direction of the (right) way, but there are ways which deviate. If God had willed, He could have guided all of you.”* God promised to make the road leading to Him clear through His messengers and His signs. God warns us not to follow the crooked ways which lead away from His path. Had God willed He could have guided all the people on earth. But God created humankind with equal propensity towards good and evil. God also gave the humankind the ability to differentiate and choose between right and wrong. Some will follow the straight path and some will choose the crooked path all according to the will of God which gave the humankind the free will.

The verses continue to describe another group of God's blessings, *"It is He who sends down rain from the sky, from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it He produces crops for you, and the olive and the date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruits. Indeed, in this there is a sign for a people who reflect."* Rain comes down from the sky according to a physical law created by God. This is one of the laws which God created to control the behavior of the universe. People use rain water to drink, to grow vegetation to feed the cattle, and to plant trees and plants which produce food to eat. One should reflect on the creation of God which ensured this harmony between the different components of His creation.

The third group of blessings include the cosmic phenomena which makes life on earth possible, *"And He has subjected to you the night and the day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are all subjected by His Command. Verily in this are signs for people who understand."* The presence of the cosmic phenomena like the night, daylight, the sun, the moon, and the stars makes one think about the harmony in God's creation. God created these cosmic phenomena and controlled them to create a suitable environment for human life. These phenomena are signs to be understood by those who reflect.

A fourth blessing from God, *"And what He has created on earth of varied hues, therein indeed a sign in this for a people who take heed."* God also created a vast number of minerals and metals that are kept underground for the human beings to use. These are treasures for people to extract one after the other. This is a sign for those who pay heed and recognize God's power which created these treasures and kept them safe until they are discovered by people.

The fifth blessing is the creation of living beings that live in the salty sea. This is the salty sea whose water cannot be used for drinking but God allows it to be an environment in which fish and other species can live, *"it is He who subjected the sea, that you may eat from it flesh that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract from it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships plowing through, that you may seek of the bounty of God and that you may be grateful."* The sea provides fish for food and pearls for jewelry in addition to the shells which are used to make other types of ornaments. The words that were used to describe the motion of ships at sea do not only point to their use as a means of transportation, but also to draw the attention to the beautiful scene of a ship going through the water. It indicates that human beings should not only focus on the necessities of life but they also should find time to appreciate the beauty of nature around them. These blessings are a reason for us to be grateful to God.

Now we come to the last blessing that is mentioned in this group of verses, *"And He has cast into the earth firm mountains, lest it shifts with you, and streams and roads that you may be guided. And landmarks (too), and by the star they are (also) guided."* God created the mountains to maintain the earth's stability. It is appropriate to mention the high mountains in connection with the flowing rivers. The foot of a mountain is usually the starting point of a river.

The previous verses which discussed the creation and the blessings of God which He bestowed on His creatures lead to a final conclusion. The conclusion is posed in the form of a question, *"Is then He who creates like the one who does not create? Will you not take heed?"* The inevitable answer should be no. No one can equate the Creator to those who cannot create. This calls for reflection.

*“If you count up the favours of God, never would you be able to enumerate them. Certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Are we able to count the blessings of God? The answer is no, so how about showing gratitude to God for the numerous blessings? Humankind is unaware of many of the blessings that God bestowed on him. We take many of these blessings for granted we only appreciate their value when we miss them. However, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

The Creator knows His creation, *“And God does know what you conceal, and what you reveal.”* How can these idolaters equate Him to those idols who create nothing and know nothing? They are dead and the dead have no feelings, *“And those whom they invoke besides God create nothing and they are themselves created. (They are) dead, not living. And they realize it not when they will be raised.”* How can they be considered gods while they do not know when their followers will be resurrected from death?

### **Verses 22 to 50:**

22. *Your God is one God. As to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant.*
23. *Undoubtedly God does know what they conceal, and what they reveal. Verily, He does not love the arrogant.*
24. *When it is said to them, "What has your Lord send down?" they say, "Fables of former peoples."*
25. *That they may bear their burdens undiminished on the Day of Resurrection, with some of the burdens of those whom they mislead without knowledge. Evil is that which they bear.*
26. *Those before them did also plot (against God's Way), but God demolished their buildings from their foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above; and the torment came to them from wherever they did not realize.*
27. *Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will cover them with shame, and will say, "Where are My partners, for whose sake you opposed (My guidance)? Those who have been given knowledge will say, "Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers."*
28. *Those whom the angels cause to die while they were wronging themselves will make full submission (saying), "We did not do any wrong." Surely God has full knowledge of what you used to do.*
29. *So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein forever. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant.*
30. *And it is said to those who were God conscious, "What has your Lord send down?" They will say, "Good." For those who do good in this world there is a good (reward) and the home of the Hereafter will be better. Pleasant indeed will be the home of those who are God conscious;*
31. *Gardens of Eden which they enter, underneath which rivers flow, wherein they have what they please. Thus God rewards those who are conscious of Him.*
32. *Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good, they (the angels) say, "Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do."*

33. *Do they (the ungodly) wait until the angels come to them, or there comes the command of your Lord (for their doom)? So did those who went before them. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves,*
34. *But the evil results of their deeds overtook them, and that which they used to mock surrounded them.*
35. *And the idolaters say, "Had God willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him, we and our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything without (a command from) Him." So did those before them. Are the messengers charged with anything except plain conveyance (of the message)?*
36. *We assuredly sent into every nation a messenger, (with the command), "Serve God, and shun false gods." Then some of them were among those whom God guided, and some of them were upon whom error was (deservedly) decreed. Do travel in the land and see what the end of those who denied was.*
37. *Even if you are keen on guiding them, God does not guide those whom He leaves to go astray, and there is none to help them.*
38. *They swear their strongest oaths by God that God will not raise up those who die. But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him, but most people do not know.*
39. *(They must be raised up), in order that He may explain to them the truth of that wherein they differ, and that the disbelievers would know that they were liars.*
40. *Indeed, to anything which We have willed, We but say the word, "Be", and it is.*
41. *And those who emigrated for (the sake of) God after they had been oppressed, We verily shall give them goodly lodging in the world, and surely the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but know;*
42. *Those who persevered and put their trust in their Lord.*
43. *And We did not send (as messengers) before you other than men to whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the message (former Scriptures) if you do not know.*
44. *(We sent them) with clear proofs and written ordinances; and We have sent down to you (also) the Message; that you may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them, and that they may reflect.*
45. *Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them up, or that the torment will not come on them from where they do not realize?*
46. *Or that He will not seize them in their going to and fro so that there is no escape for them?*
47. *Or that He will not seize them gradually? Your Lord is indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
48. *Have they not observed all things that God has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration to God, and they are humble?*
49. *And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth of creatures, and the angels (too) and they are not arrogant.*
50. *They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded. (16: 22 – 50)*

*"Your God is one God. As to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant."* The verse links the belief in the oneness of God with the belief in the Hereafter. It goes further and makes one predicated on the other. The belief in resurrection is an integral part of the belief in the Oneness of God. God's ultimate justice will be

displayed in the Hereafter. The previous verses presented the logic that leads to the conclusion that the Creator is One. Those who do not believe in the Oneness of God and in the Hereafter are simply denying the truth. Their denial is not based on a lack of evidence but is rooted in their arrogance. God knows all about their arrogance, *“Undoubtedly God does know what they conceal, and what they reveal. Verily He does not love the arrogant.”*

*“When it is said to them, ‘What has your Lord send down?’ they say, ‘Fables of former peoples.’”* There is no way to reach the hearts of those arrogant people. Their arrogance drives them to be dishonest. They read the Quran and claim that it is some of ancient fables. They fail to see the value of the Quran which delineates a perfect way of life for the benefit of individuals and society. This denial makes them fully responsible for their own sins and also partially responsible for the sin of those who followed them and believed in them, *“That they may bear their burdens undiminished on the Day of Resurrection, with some of the burdens of those whom they mislead without knowledge. Evil is that which they bear.”* The sins are called burdens because they weigh down on the souls as actual weights weigh down on the body which carries them.

Ibn Abi Hatem has narrated on the authority of Assadi, that the (leaders of the tribe of) Quraish gathered in a meeting to discuss their strategy to curb the spreading of Islam. It was said that Muhammad (PBUH) has a way with words and he is able to talk people into joining his new religion. It was suggested that some of their well known chiefs should intercept foreigners, those who come from other towns, before Muhammad (PBUH) was able to talk to them; and tell them that Muhammad (PBUH) is a liar and only the weak minded and the slaves have followed him. They should also say that the honored chiefs of the tribe have abandoned him. Many of the people who came seeking to meet with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to know about Islam were turned back by Quraish and were never able to talk to the Prophet (PBUH). The few who were sincere in seeking the truth refused to go back before hearing from Muhammad (PBUH) personally. They went ahead to meet with the Prophet (PBUH). When they asked the believers what does Muhammad (PBUH) say, the believers said, “He says good.”

The tribe of Quraish waged an organized and systematic propaganda war against Islam. The same war was launched by other peoples in different places at different times. Their arrogance blocked their way to the truth. The following verse describes the end of those who schemed and plotted against guidance before Quraish, *“Those before them did also plot (against God's Way), but God demolished their buildings from their foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above; and the torment came to them from wherever they did not realize.”* The verse describes their scheme as a building with a foundation, walls and a roof. The foundation was destroyed and the roof fell on their heads, a scene of utter destruction. This was their end in this life. The torment will continue, *“Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will cover them with shame, and will say, ‘Where are My partners, for whose sake you opposed (My guidance)?’ Those who have been given knowledge will say, ‘Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers.’”* On the Day of Judgement, they will be asked about those whom they took as partners with God. They will be dumbfounded. Those who were given the knowledge from among the angels, the messengers, and the believers and who will be given the right to speak will say, *“Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers.”* Those, *“Whom the angels cause to die while they were*

*wronging themselves will make full submission (saying), "We did not do any wrong." Surely God has full knowledge of what you used to do."* The verse displays the scene at the time of death of these disbelievers and the dialogue between them and the angels who were sent to capture their souls. Finally, it will be said to them, *"So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein forever. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant."*

On the other side we see those who remained conscious of their Lord, *"And it is said to those who were God conscious, 'What has your Lord send down?' They will say, 'Good.' For those who do good in this world there is a good (reward) and the home of the Hereafter will be better. Pleasant indeed will be the home of those who are God conscious; gardens of Eden which they enter, underneath which rivers flow, wherein they have what they please. Thus, God rewards those who are conscious of Him. Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good, they (the angels) will say, 'Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do.'"* Those who remain conscious of their Lord recognize that goodness is the essence of God's message. So when they are asked about what God brought down they simply sum it up in one word: goodness. The verse continues to detail the reward for those who remain conscious of their Lord. The verse then takes us back to the time of death of these people, *"Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good. They (the angels) say, 'Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do.'"* Those who remained conscious of their Lord yearn to His meeting. The angels will reassure their hearts. They will greet them and give them glad tidings of earning their place in paradise, an ample reward for what they did during their lifetime.

The scene moves now to the idolaters of Quraish. What did they expect? Did they expect the angels to take their souls? Did they expect God's command for resurrection? What will it be like at the time of their death? What will it be like on the Day of Resurrection? *"Do they (the ungodly) wait until the angels come to them, or there comes the command of your Lord (for their doom)? So did those who went before them. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves, but the evil results of their deeds overtook them, and that which they used to mock surrounded them."*

It is amazing how people continue to go along a path that had been trodden before them and proved to be futile. They see what happened to those before them but they somehow convince themselves that the consequences of their deeds will be different. God's laws are constant and consistent. The same deeds will always lead to the same results. God does not wrong anyone. They were given the freedom to reflect, think, and choose. God presented to them His signs and warned them of the consequences of going astray. They are the ones who wronged themselves by making the wrong choice. The punishment will commensurate with the crime.

*"And the idolaters say, 'Had God willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him, we and our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything without (a command from) Him.' So did those before them. Are the messengers charged with anything except plain conveyance (of the message)? We assuredly sent into every nation a messenger, (with the command), 'Serve God, and shun false gods.' Then some of them were among those whom God guided, and some of them were upon whom error was (deservedly) decreed. Do travel in the land and see what the end for those who denied was."* The idolaters claim that it is God's will that made them commit

the sins of associating partners with God and made them prohibit the food which God had made lawful to please their false gods. This claim flies in the face of the true meaning of God's will. It takes away from humankind the most important characteristic, a characteristic that God bestowed upon humankind to use in their daily lives. It does not please God to have His servants practice idolatry or to deprive them from enjoying the good things that God had made lawful. This principle has been enunciated in the message that all God's Messengers brought to humanity. Each Messenger exhorted his people to "*Serve God, and shun false gods.*" This was God's command and will.

God created humankind with propensity to both goodness and evil. God gave humankind the freedom of will to choose between goodness and evil. God gave humankind the intellect to help him in making the decision to choose between goodness and evil. God also filled the universe with signs that lead humankind to the right path. God sent messengers with guidance which provides the standard of goodness to guide the human intellect to make the right decision. The Messengers' role was to deliver the message not to force people to believe. The Messengers delivered the message that only God is worthy of worship and that false gods should be shunned. Some people accepted the guidance and some rejected it. Each group used their intellect to choose thus, God's will has been fulfilled.

*"Even if you are keen on guiding them, God does not guide those whom He leaves to go astray, and there is none to help them."* Neither guidance nor misguidance is the responsibility of the messenger. His role is only to deliver the message.

*"They swear their strongest oaths by God that God will not raise up those who die. But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him, but most people do not know. (They must be raised up), in order that He may explain to them the truth of that wherein they differ, and that the rejecters of truth would know that they were liars. Indeed, to anything which We have willed, We but say the word, "Be", and it is."* One of the major problems that faced the messengers of God whenever they brought the Message to their people is that many people found the concept of the resurrection after death difficult to accept. The Prophet (PBUH) had the same problem with the idolaters of Quraish. Although they believed in God, but they refused to accept the idea of the resurrection after death. They disregarded the miracle of the creation in the first place and they did not understand the unlimited power of the Creator. They also did not comprehend the divine wisdom behind the necessity of the Hereafter. All disputes that were not resolved in this life will be resolved in the Hereafter. God had made a promise and He will fulfill it, "*But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him.*" On the Day of Judgement those who rejected the truth will know that they were telling a lie when they claimed that they will not be resurrected. Resurrection will happen whenever God wills. He only needs to say, "Be" and it is.

The verses then move to the opposite side, "*And those who emigrated for (the sake of) God after they had been oppressed, We verily shall give them goodly lodging in the world, and surely the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but know, those who persevered and put their trust in their Lord.*" Those who left behind their belongings, their families, and the things they loved and migrated for the sake of God, they will be compensated in the Hereafter for the sacrifices they made.

*“And We did not send (as messengers) before you other than men to whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the Message (former Scriptures) if you do not know. (We sent them) with clear proofs and written ordinances; and We have sent down to you (also) the Message; that you may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them, and that they may reflect.”* God sent only men with the Message. He did not send angels, nor did He send special creatures. God chose certain men and gave them revelations similar to the revelation that was given to Muhammad (PBUH). If the people of Quraish were in doubt they should ask those who received a Scripture before. God sent messengers before Muhammad (PBUH) with, *“clear proofs and written ordinances;”* and God gave Muhammad (PBUH) a Book that he, *“may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them.”* The Quran also invites them to think and reflect.

At the end of this group of verses, a reference is made to those who are arrogant and those who scheme against God’s way and a reminder of the limitless power of God, *“Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them up, or that the torment will not come on them from where they do not realize? Or that He will not seize them in their going to and fro so that there is no escape for them? Or that He will not seize them gradually? Your Lord is indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”*

*“Have they not observed all things that God has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration to God, and they are humble? And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth of creatures, and the angels (too) and they are not arrogant. They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded.”* It is amazing how some people choose to ignore God’s power when they see how God seizes people in their prime. They continue to scheme thinking that they are safe unaware that God’s wrath can seize them suddenly or gradually whenever God pleases. Should not they reflect on God’s signs in the universe and how every creature prostrates itself to God.

## **Verses 51 to 76:**

51. *And God said, "Do not take two deities; He is only one God; so fear only Me."*
52. *And to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, and everlasting obedience is His right. Do you then fear any other than God?*
53. *And whatever Blessings is (bestowed) on you it is from God; then when evil afflicts you, you call on Him for help.*
54. *Yet, when He removes the affliction from you, some of you associate partners with their Lord.*
55. *Let them show their ingratitude for the favours We have bestowed on them. Then enjoy yourselves, you will soon know.*
56. *And they assign a portion of that which We have given them to what they do not know. By God, you will indeed be asked about that which you used to falsify.*
57. *And they assign daughters to God - Glory be to Him - and for themselves what they desire.*



58. *When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he suppresses his grief.*
59. *He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which he was informed of. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now verily evil is what they decide.*
60. *The attribute of evil applies to all those who do not believe in the Hereafter but God has the most sublime attribute. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
61. *If God were to take the people to task for their wrongdoing, he would not have left on it (earth) a living creature, but He reprieves them to an appointed term, and when their term comes they will not be able to delay (it) an hour nor can they bring (it) on (before its time).*
62. *They attribute to God what they hate (for themselves), and their tongues assert the falsehood that all good things are for themselves. Certainly, for them is the Fire and they will be the first to be hastened to it.*
63. *By God, We verily sent messengers to nations before you, but the devil made their deeds fair-seeming to them. So he is their patron this day, and theirs will be a painful torment.*
64. *And We have revealed the Book to you only that you may explain to them that wherein they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.*
65. *And God sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death. Indeed, in this is a sign for those who listen.*
66. *And verily in the cattle (too) will you find a lesson. We give you drink, from what is in their bellies between excretions and blood - pure milk, agreeable to those who drink it.*
67. *And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out intoxicants and wholesome food. Indeed, in that is a sign for those who understand.*
68. *And your Lord inspired the bee to build its cells on the hills, on trees, and in what they construct.*
69. *Then eat of all the fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth (for you). There comes forth from their bellies a drink of different hues. In it there is healing for people. In this indeed is a sign for people who reflect.*
70. *It is God who created you, then puts you to death; and of you there are some who will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject state, so that they know nothing after having known (much). God is Omniscient, All-Powerful.*
71. *And God has favoured some of you above others in provision. Now those who are more favoured will by no means be able to hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal to them therein. Is it then the Blessing of God that they deny?*
72. *And God has made for you mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Is it then in falsehood that they believe and in the Blessing of God that they disbelieve?*
73. *And they worship beside God that which does not possess for them any provision from the heavens or the earth nor do they have any power.*
74. *Do not make up similarities to God. God knows, and you do not know.*
75. *God sets forth the parable (of two men, one) a slave under the dominion of another; he has no power of any sort; and (the other) a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favours from Ourselves, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly. Are the two equal? (By no means) praise be to God. But most of them do not know.*

76. *God sets forth (another) parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal to the one who commands justice, and is on a straight path?*  
(16: 51 -76)

*“And God said, ‘Do not take two deities, indeed He is only one God; so fear only Me.’ And to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, and everlasting obedience is His right. Do you then fear any other than God? And whatever Blessing is (bestowed) on you it is from God; then when evil afflicts you, you call on Him for help. Yet, when He removes the affliction from you, some of you associate partners with their Lord. Let them show their ingratitude for the favours we have bestowed on them. Then enjoy yourselves, you will soon know.”* God commanded people not to worship two deities. It is only one God that they should worship. The command is expressed in an unequivocal language. The dual form of the word “deity” is followed by the number two and the word “only” is added to the command to worship one God to emphasize the command. This command is followed by another specific command not to fear anything else other than God, *“fear only Me.”* This emphasis is necessary and appropriate because the belief in the Oneness of God is the corner stone of the doctrine of Islam. God is One, the owner of the heavens and earth is One, and only Him deserves to be obeyed. He is the one who bestows His blessings on His servants. In time of difficulty, the initial natural disposition of the human being seeks God’s help. Praise be to Him who is alone the God, the King, the Master, the Giver of blessings, and the Giver of help. At the time of difficulty, the initial natural disposition of the human being turns spontaneously to God alone. But once they are saved, some people turn away from the path of God seeking temporary enjoyment. They should wait and see, they will soon know.

The behavior of many people fits exactly the human model that has been described in the above mentioned verses. In the time of need, their hearts harken to God asking for help, but in the time of ease and prosperity the link becomes weak and they indulge in the pleasures of life.

*“And they assign a portion of that which We have given them to what they do not know. By God, you will indeed be asked about that which you used to falsify.”* The idolaters used to prohibit eating or riding certain cattle, as has been mentioned in Surat Al-Anaam, in the name of their false gods about which they have no knowledge. God, not the false gods, did provide them with the cattle. God is the provider. Instead of showing gratitude to the Provider, they disobey Him. Not only they associate partners with God but they assign a portion of the provision He provided them with to these false gods. They will be definitely asked about this on the Day of Judgement.

*“And they assign daughters to God - Glory be to Him - and for themselves what they desire.”* The doctrine is the basis of the way of the life. When the doctrine is corrupt, the way of life becomes crooked. The Arabs used to claim that the angels are God’s daughters but in the mean time they hated having daughters. The corrupt doctrine which they believed in provided them with excuse to practice infanticide against baby girls. Those daughters who survive would be subjected to bad treatment and humiliation. They thought that women are potential sources of disgrace and poverty for the tribe because they are not raised to fight or to earn their living. The true doctrine of Islam protects women from this inferior status. Islam states that it is God who

provides. He provides for men as well as women with no distinction on the basis of gender. Men and women complement each other and have the same worth in front of God.

The verses paint an ugly picture of one of the traditions adopted by the Arabs in Jahiliya (the pre-Islamic era), *“When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he suppresses his grief. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which he was informed of. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now verily evil is what they decide.”* The verse describes the reaction of a father when he would receive the news that his wife delivered a baby girl; his face would turn black reflecting how much anger and sadness he felt. A baby girl is like a baby boy they are both gifts from God. God is He who forms the human being in the womb. Creation is a miracle. The process through which a sperm-drop grows to become a human being is a miraculous process. We have to celebrate the birth of a new baby whether a boy or a girl. It is the Divine wisdom that willed that procreation can only occur through the meeting of a male and a female. The female and the male are essential partners in the process of procreation.

*“The attribute of evil applies to all those who do not believe in the Hereafter but God has the most sublime attribute. He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* The rejection of the concept of the Hereafter is closely related to the principle of belief in the Oneness of God. They start from the same premise and they lead to the same consequence. Those who do not believe in the Day of Judgement are an example of all evil attributes in life. God gives the highest example for the best attributes. He controls everything wisely.

God could punish people any time He wills but His divine wisdom willed that the wrongdoers are given a reprieve, *“If God were to take the people to task for their wrongdoing, he would not have left on it (earth) a living creature, but He reprieves them to an appointed term, and when their term comes they will not be able to delay (it) an hour nor can they bring (it) on (before its time).”*

The disbelievers assign that which they hate to God and they claim that they will be rewarded for doing this, *“They attribute to God what they hate (for themselves), and their tongues assert the falsehood that all good things are for themselves. Certainly, for them is the Fire and they will be the first to be hastened to it.”* The Arabic expression suggests that their tongues became a symbol of falsehood because they had a long history of uttering false statements. They will certainly get their punishment in Hellfire.

The idolaters of Mecca were not the first people to stray away from the straight path. There were people before them who succumbed to the temptation of Satan and they took him as their patron, *“By God, We verily sent messengers to nations before you, but the devil made their deeds fair-seeming to them. So he is their patron this day, and theirs will be a painful torment.”* God sent Muhammad (PBUH) to save the people and guide them to the truth. Muhammad (PBUH) was sent as a guide and a mercy for those who chose to believe, *“And We have revealed the Book to you only that you may explain to them that wherein they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.”* The main objective of the last Book and the last Message is to settle the disputes which had arisen among the people who were given Scriptures before and to state

clearly the principle of the belief in the Oneness of God. The Quran was revealed to remove any shred of doubt about this fundamental principle and to purify the religious practices from any form of idolatry.

The following verses present signs that we see around us which support the concept of the Oneness of God. The previous verse refers to the revelation of the Quran. It is the Book that sustains the spiritual life of people. The following verse refers to the water that God cause to descend from the sky and which sustains the physical life of people, *“And God sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death. Indeed, in this is a sign for those who listen.”* Water is the basis of life on earth. Life on earth can only be sustained by water. Only He who gives life after death is worthy of being God. There is a lesson in this for those who listen and reflect.

Another sign can be seen in the creation of cattle, *“And verily in cattle (too) will you find a lesson. We give you drink, from what is in their bellies between excretions and blood - pure milk, agreeable to those who drink it.”* The pure milk that the cattle produce is actually made from the food that has been digested by the animal and the blood that feeds the cells of the animal. Producing milk requires a very complex and delicate process which cannot be duplicated by any manmade machine. This scientific fact has been only recently discovered and it was certainly not known at the time of the revelation of the Quran.

*“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out intoxicants and wholesome food. Indeed, in that is a sign for those who understand.”* The fruits that was produced as a result of the water coming down from the sky can be used to make wine (wine had not been prohibited at the time of the revelation of this verse) and wholesome food. The verse suggests that wine is not considered as wholesome. This may have been a step towards making drinking wine unlawful. The verse was only describing the practice that was used at that time and should not be used as evidence that it is lawful to make and drink wine.

*“And your Lord inspired the bee to build its cells on the hills, on trees, and in what they construct. Then eat of all the fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth (for you). There comes forth from their bellies a drink of different hues. In it there is healing for people. In this indeed is a sign for people who reflect.”* The bee does its job instinctively. This can be considered a form of inspiration which directs the bee to perform such an intricate process to produce pure honey. Many researchers discussed the healing function of honey, however, as believers we believe in the absolute veracity of the Quranic verses.

Let us stop a moment to reflect on the blessings which, the water coming down from the sky, being us. What is the common feature between producing milk by cattle, and producing honey by the bee? One common feature is that these are all fluids which are produced for human consumption. That is why only the milk produced by cattle was mentioned in this passage. In a later passage other benefits derived from the cattle will be mentioned.

*“It is God who created you, then puts you to death; and of you there are some who will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject state, so that they know nothing after having known (much). God is Eminent, All-Powerful.”* Every mortal will enjoy life and will suffer death. Humankind by instinct love life, thinking about life may soften the hard heart and may make the individual reflect on God’s power and blessings. The fear of approaching the end of life may induce the human being to become conscious of God and may encourage him to seek God’s support. The image of old age and the helplessness associated with it may encourage the human being to reflect upon the phases of life and teaches him/her to be humbler. The verse ends with the statement, *“God is Omniscient, All-Powerful,”* which juxtaposes God’s infinite knowledge and power with the limited knowledge and power of the human being in terms of both magnitude and duration.

Human beings vary considerably in the amount of money they make. God favors some over others with more earnings for reasons known only to God. God’s provision is bestowed according to a plan. A person may be talented as a scholar or a scientist but his earnings are little while another may be less talented in these areas but is clever in earning and investing money. Different people have different talents and abilities. One may be inclined to think that there is no relationship between the earnings and the abilities. But this is a superficial look. If we look deeper we could discover a certain relationship between people’s abilities and their earnings. On the other hand, plentiful earnings may be a test from God, and low earnings may be as well a test from God, *“And God has favoured some of you above others in provision. Now those who are more favoured will by no means be able to hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal to them therein. Is it then the Blessing of God that they deny?”* The verse berated those who were giving a portion of the provision that God bestowed on them to the false gods which they adopted.

*“And God has made for you mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Is it then in falsehood that they believe and in the Blessing of God that they disbelieve?”* The verse states the similar nature of males and females. The human worth of both males and females is the same. God had willed that human beings procreate and produce children and the children produce grandchildren so that life on earth would continue. So, in a way, the children and grandchildren are an extension of the life of an individual. Should then people be ungrateful to God? *“And they worship beside God that which does not possess for them any provision from the heavens or the earth nor do they have any power.”* Not only they disbelieve in God who provides for them but they also make up equals to Him. God has no equal and He is unique, *“Do not make up similarities to God. God knows, and you do not know.”*

The following verses strike two parables for the master who owns a slave and provides for him and the slave who is incapable of owning or providing to illustrate the difference between the two and to emphasize that God is above everything and He is unique, *“God sets forth the parable (of two men, one) a slave under the dominion of another; he has no power of any sort; and (the other) a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favours from Ourselves, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly. Are the two equal? (By no means) praise be to God. But most of them do not know. God sets forth (another) parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no*

*power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal to the one who commands justice, and is on a straight path?"*

The first parable must have been easy to understand by the Arabs of Mecca. Many of them owned slaves and they would appreciate the boundaries that differentiated between a master and a slave. If they could not imagine that their slaves could be their equals, how dare they make equals to God the Master and Owner of everything? The second parable illustrates another concept: the comparison between a disabled person and a powerful person who uses his power in establishing justice on earth. The question that the verse raises is how can one equate God the Almighty, the Omniscient who commands justice to an idol made of stone.

### **Verses 77 to 89:**

- 77. To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker. God has power over all things.*
- 78. It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may give thanks (to God).*
- 79. Have they not seen the birds constrained in mid-air? None holds them save God. Verily, in this there are signs for a people who believe.*
- 80. And God has given you in your houses an abode, and has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household items and items for enjoyment for a time.*
- 81. It is God Who made out of the things He created, some things to give you shade; of the hills He made some for your shelter; He made you garments to protect you from heat, and coats (of armour) to protect you from your (mutual) violence. Thus, does He complete His blessings on you that you may submit (to Him).*
- 82. But if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the clear Message.*
- 83. They recognize the Blessings of God; then they deny them; and most of them are disbelievers.*
- 84. And one day We will raise up a witness from each nation, then the disbelievers will not be given a leave, nor are they allowed to make amends.*
- 85. When the wrongdoers will see the torment, then it will not be mitigated, nor will they receive respite.*
- 86. When those who associated partners with God will see their "partners," they will say, "Our Lord, these are our 'partners,' those whom we used to invoke besides You." But they will throw back their word at them (and say), "Indeed you are liars."*
- 87. That day they shall show (their) submission to God; and all that they used to invent will fail them.*
- 88. For those who disbelieve and debar (people) from the way of God, We will increase them in torment over torment for the corruption they caused.*
- 89. One day We shall raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, and We will bring you (Muhammad) as a witness against these. And We revealed the Book to you as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who submit. (16: 77 – 89)*

*“To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker. God has power over all things.”* The concept of resurrection after death is one of the issues in the doctrine which raised great objections, in each age and for every Messenger of God. This is part of the unseen whose knowledge belongs only to God. No mortal was able to break the barrier of the unseen. No mortal knows what the future will bring and when he/she will die. It could happen any moment. It is certainly a mercy of God that people do not know the future. This ignorance allows them to dream, aspire, work, and produce. They leave behind what they have accomplished in their lives for someone else to complete or to further develop. Had people known the time for the Hour of Judgement, life would have stopped. However, *“And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker,”* but this is not measured using the known human standard. God is able to bring it about any time He wills, *“God has power over all things.”*

*“It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may give thanks (to God).”* The verse gives an example using the development of the human fetus. This is also a part of the unseen although it happens right in front of our eyes. One can see the development of the fetus but no one knows exactly how the process develops. This is the secret of human life which cannot be discovered no matter how knowledgeable we become. The Quran uses the words heart and brain interchangeably. The heart is considered the center of all discriminatory faculties of the human being at the levels of the conscious and the subconscious. One should express gratitude to God by worshipping Him alone.

Another amazing example of God’s power, *“Have they not seen the birds constrained in mid-air? None holds them save God. Verily, in this there are signs for a people who believe.”* The scene of birds flying in the sky is a familiar scene. One can only sense the beauty and appreciates the miracle when the curtain is lifted off one’s heart to realize that it is God who allows birds to fly and maintains their balance in the sky.

*“And God has given you in your houses an abode, and has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household stuff and a provision for a time. It is God who made out of the things He created, some things to give you shade; of the hills He made some for your shelter; He made you garments to protect you from heat, and coats (of armour) to protect you from your (mutual) violence. Thus does He complete His blessings on you that you may submit (to Him).”* Safety and security which a person finds within the confines of his/her own home are great blessings from God. No one can appreciate the value of these blessings except a person who has no shelter in which he/she finds the security and safety that come with one’s own home. It is interesting to note that the talk about houses came after the unseen was mentioned. The common element between the two is that both provide cover to their contents.

The verse also sheds light on the concept of a home in Islam, *“God has given you in your houses an abode.”* The home in Islam is a place where a person finds psychological as well as physical

comfort and security. The home should provide an environment of love and compassion between the members of the family. It is not a place for bickering and turmoil but it is a place for comfort, peace, and security. Islam protects the privacy of people inside their homes. No one is allowed to break in forcibly – except by the power of law. No one is allowed to spy on people while they are in the privacy of their homes. Visitors should seek permission from the owner of the house before they are allowed in.

The verse continued to enumerate the benefits that human beings derive from the cattle, *“has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household items and items for enjoyment for a time.”* The verse did not stress only the aspects that can be considered necessities of life *“household items,”* but also the uses from which people derive enjoyment. Shade brings comfort, shelter brings security, and garments bring safety and comfort. Hopefully, then people would appreciate the blessings of God and submit to Him. Submission to God also brings peace and tranquillity. However, *“if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the clear Message. They recognize the favours of God; then they deny them; and most of them are disbelievers.”* The messenger’s task is only to deliver the message.

The verses then go back to the scene of the Hour, *“And one day We will raise up a witness from each nation, then the disbelievers will not be given a leave, nor are they allowed to make amends. When the wrongdoers will see the torment, then it will not be mitigated, nor will they receive respite. When those who associated partners with God will see their ‘partners,’ they will say, ‘Our Lord, these are our ‘partners,’ those whom we used to invoke besides You.’ But they will throw back their word at them (and say), ‘Indeed you are liars.’ That day they shall show (their) submission to God; and all that they used to invent will fail them. For those who disbelieve and debar (people) from the way of God, We will increase them in torment over torment for the corruption they caused.”* The scene starts with the prophets reporting about what they experienced when they took the message to their people. The disbelievers will be standing there watching but will not be given the chance to seek forgiveness because it will be too late for seeking forgiveness. This is the time for reckoning. When they will see those whom they used to associate with God, they will point to them and say to God, *“Our Lord, these are our ‘partners,’ those whom we used to invoke besides You.”* Note that at that moment they will admit that God is their Lord, they will say, *“Our Lord.”* They will also say, *“these are our ‘partners,”* rather than say these are God’s partners. Their partners will deny any responsibility and will call them liars, *“Indeed you are liars.”* Those who fabricated lies in their lives will find no support, *“that they used to invent will fail them.”* All those who are guilty will be punished.

The verses then move to the Prophet’s (PBUH) situation, *“One day We shall raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, and We will bring you (Muhammad) as a witness against these. And We revealed the Book to you as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who submit.”* To end the scene of the Day of Reckoning, the Prophet (PBUH) is promised the status of being a witness over his people. The verse emphasizes that the Book that has been revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) explains all things. Thus, none has an excuse. It is also guidance and mercy for those who chose to believe in it.



## Verses 90 to 111:

90. *God commands justice, the doing of good, and giving (help for) relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you, that you may take heed.*
91. *And fulfill the covenant of God when you have made a covenant, and do not break oaths after you have confirmed them; indeed, you have made God surety over you; for God knows all that you do.*
92. *And be not like (the woman) who unravels her yarn, after she has spun it strongly. You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because (one) nation is more numerous than (another) nation. God only tries you by this; and He will most certainly make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that in which you differed.*
93. *If God so willed, He could have made you all one nation. But He sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills, and you will indeed be asked about what you used to do.*
94. *And do not use your oaths as a means of deceit between yourselves, lest a foot should slip after being firmly planted and you taste evil because you debarred (people) from the way of God, and you would suffer an awful torment.*
95. *And do not sell the covenant of God for a miserable price; that which God has is better for you, if you did but know.*
96. *What you have will run out, but what God has is ever lasting. And We will certainly reward those who persevere according to the best of their deeds.*
97. *We will give, whoever does right whether a man or a woman and is a believer, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their deeds.*
98. *And when you recite the Quran, seek refuge in God from Satan, the outcast.*
99. *He has no power over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord.*
100. *He has power only over those who take him as an ally, and those who associate partners with God.*
101. *When We substitute one verse in place of another - and God knows best what He reveals - they say, "You (Muhammad) are but a forger," but most of them do not understand.*
102. *Say, "The Holy Spirit has delivered it from your Lord with the truth, that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who have surrendered (to God).*
103. *We know indeed that they say, "It is a man that teaches him." The tongue of him they wickedly refer to is notably foreign, while the language of this Book is Arabic, pure and clear.*
104. *Those who do not believe in God's revelations God will not guide them, and theirs will be a painful torment.*
105. *It is those who do not believe in God's revelations who forge falsehood. It is they who lie.*
106. *With the exception of those who are forced to deny God under duress while their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous torment is waiting for them.*

107. *This is because they love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, and God does not guide those who disbelieve.*
108. *Those are they whose hearts, ears, and eyes God has sealed up, and they are heedless.*
109. *Without doubt, in the Hereafter they will be the losers.*
110. *Verily your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy to those who leave their homes after having been persecuted then they strive and persevere.*
111. *On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, and every soul will be repaid what it did, and they will not be wronged. (16: 90 – 111)*

*“God commands justice, the doing of good, and giving relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and bad conduct and oppression. He admonishes you, that you may take heed.”* The Book came to establish a nation and organize a community. This nation and this community act as a model for the whole human race. The Book introduces a universal system for all humanity. The Message is not exclusive for a tribe, a nation, or a race. It introduced a system which brings people together around one faith irrespective of their race, nationality, or tribal affiliation. It brought principles which guarantee the coherence of the community and the security of people and nations. These principles came to establish a system for daily dealings that people can trust.

One of these basic principles is justice. Establishing justice ensures the use of a single standard for the judiciary system. All people are equal in front of the law. The law is not governed by the whims of people or the type of government. There is no place for nepotism or favouritism in such system.

The second principle is doing good. Doing good is a comprehensive term that includes each and every deed and behavior performed by human beings as part of their daily activities. These activities encompass the relationship between the individual and his/her creator, family, community, and the whole human race. Implicit in doing good is being generous in helping one's relatives. This has been singled out in the verse to emphasize its importance for protecting the integrity of the family and to emphasize the principle of collective responsibility of the members of the community. The verse also states the command to refrain from committing indecencies, obscenities, and oppression.

*“And fulfill the covenant of God when you have made a covenant, and do not break oaths after you have confirmed them; indeed, you have made God surety over you; for God knows all that you do.”* God's covenant includes all types of agreements and pledges that a Muslim makes. This principle builds up the trust between people. The verse admonishes people not to break these pledges reminding them that they made God a witness over their pledges. God knows what they do. Islam is very strict about the application of the principle of the fulfilment of pledges and promises. The following verse strikes a parable for those who break their oaths and pledges, *“And be not like (the woman) who unravels her yarn, after she has spun it strongly. You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because (one) nation is more numerous than (another) nation. God only tries you by this; and He will most certainly make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that in which you differed.”* Those who break their promise are similar to a

stupid woman who spins her yarn and once she had completed it she unravels it again. Her life is completely wasted because she continues to unravel what she had spun before.

The verse also refers to some Arabs who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) but later changed their minds and broke up their pledge for fear of the revenge of mighty tribe of Quraish. They thought that Quraish had an advantage in numbers over the believers. This was a test for them, so that God would know who of them would persevere.

*“If God so willed, He could have made you all one nation. But He sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills, and you will indeed be asked about what you used to do.”* Diversity is a deliberate plan. God created people with different aptitudes and established laws for guidance and misguidance. Everyone will be held accountable for what he/she had done. Thus, Muslims should honor their promises whether they were made to other Muslims or to non Muslims.

*“And do not use your oaths as a means of deceit between yourselves, lest a foot should slip after being firmly planted and you taste evil because you debarred (people) from the way of God, and you would suffer an awful torment.”* A person who takes an oath knowing that he/she does not intend to keep but using it as a means to cheat and deceive people is a person whose faith is shaky. His/her trickery not only inflicts harm on him/her but also destroys the image of true believers in the sight of people. Trickery puts the person on a precarious footing and implants distrust in the minds of people who have been tricked. He/she gives the worst example of a believer thus debars people from seeking the path of the God.

Many groups and nations reverted to Islam because of their positive experience in dealing with Muslims. Muslims were honest in conducting business and they were always true to their word. Dishonesty is a short sighted strategy in business and in life in general. Honesty and keeping one's promise are very fruitful in the long run.

Islam inculcated the principle of keeping one's promise in Muslims, individuals and nations. It is narrated that Mo'awiah bin Abi Sufian (RA) entered in an armistice agreement with the Roman emperor. When the term of the agreement was about to expire Mo'awiah (RA) led his army and took the Romans by surprise. Omar bin 'Otbbah (RA) said to him, *“God is Great, you should not have taken them by surprise. You should have fulfilled your agreement. I heard the Messenger of God (PBUH) say, ‘whoever entered in an armistice agreement with a people, he should not attack before the expiry of the term of the agreement.’”* Mo'awiah (RA) withdrew his army and evacuated the place he had conquered. The Quran emphasized this principle, telling people that the price one gets for breaking promises is cheap, *“And do not sell the covenant of God for a miserable price; that which God has is better for you, if you did but know.”* The fulfillment of the promise will have a great reward from God. This reward is everlasting while the benefit that one gets from breaking promises is only transient, *“What you have will run out, but what God has is ever lasting. And We will certainly reward those who persevere according to the best of their deeds.”*

The verses then state a fundamental principle, *“We will give, whoever does right whether a man or a woman and is a believer, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their deeds.”* Both males and females are equal in the sight of God. Both are required to do good deeds and both will be rewarded equally. Good deeds are grounded in the belief in God. A strong faith in God inculcates in the believer the attribute of doing good. Good deeds are then transformed from being sporadic events in the life of the believer to become an integral part of the character of the believer. It becomes one of the values of the way of life of the believers.

God promised good-doers who believe in Him a good life in this world and a great reward in the Hereafter. The goodness of the worldly life that the good-doers are promised is not measured in terms of material gains only. There is more to a good life than money. Good life is not achieved without security, health, contentment, and God’s blessings. Good life is a life where the individual is continuously connected to God. Good life is a life where the individual lives in harmony with his/her family. This is the best reward a believer can hope for.

The narrative moves to a discussion of the etiquette which should be followed when a believer reads the Quran, *“And when you recite the Quran seeks refuge in God from Satan, the outcast. He has no power over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. He has power only over those who take him as an ally, and those who associate partners with God.”* Seeking refuge in God from Satan prepares the individual to the experience of reciting Quran. It creates an atmosphere free from delusions and focuses the attention of the reader on what he/she is about to read. Satan has no control over the believers, those who sincerely dedicate their hearts to God. Their connection with God protects them from the temptation of Satan. Only those who chose to follow Satan are controlled by him.

*“When We substitute one verse in place of another - and God knows best what He reveals - they say, ‘You (Muhammad) are but a forger,’ but most of them do not understand. Say, ‘The Holy Spirit has delivered it from your Lord with the truth, that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who have surrendered (to God).’”* The idolaters did not understand the purpose of this Book. They did not understand that the Book was revealed to provide the basis for establishing a universal human society and to train a nation to play a leadership role in guiding this society. This Book contained the last Message that God has revealed for the benefit of the human race. Some verses were revealed to provide a temporary solution. God may replace the outdated verse with another which would provide a lasting solution. The idolaters did not appreciate the logic behind replacing a verse by another, so they thought that the Prophet (PBUH) is forging the verses. How can the Prophet (PBUH) forge it? It was brought down with the truth by the Holy Spirit. It included guidance which guides the believers to the straight path and glad tidings of victory.

*“We know indeed that they say, ‘It is a man that teaches him.’ The tongue of him they wickedly refer to is notably foreign, while the language of this Book is Arabic, pure, and clear.”* This was another lie that the idolaters told. They claimed that a man who was not an Arab was the one

who taught the Prophet (PBUH) the Quran. The rebuttal of this claim is simple and straight forward. How can a person who does not speak Arabic teaches a Book that is written in a pure and clear Arabic language?

*“Those who do not believe in God’s revelations God will not guide them, and theirs will be a painful torment. It is those who do not believe in God’s revelations who forge falsehood. It is they who lie.”* Those who did not believe in God’s verses were not guided by God to the truth; they will not be guided to the truth in any other matter because they turned away from the way that leads to the truth. Forging falsehood about God is a capital sin. No believer would ever try to commit such a sin.

*“With the exception of those who are forced to deny God under duress while their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous torment is waiting for them. This is because they love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, and God does not guide those who disbelieve. Those are they whose hearts, ears, and eyes God has sealed up, and they are heedless. Without doubt, in the Hereafter they will be the losers.”* The verse indicates that those who reject faith after they had become Muslims will suffer a grievous punishment. Except those who were forced to do so under duress. The early Muslims were persecuted by the idolaters of Mecca. The torture that some Muslims were subjected to was beyond any human endurance. The idolaters would continue torturing a Muslim until he/she declares that they were no longer Muslims. The verse made an exception for these Muslims. They declared their rejection of Islam verbally but their hearts were full of faith. Their declaration was only a means to stop the torture they were subjected to.

It is narrated that this verse was revealed to address the situation of ‘Ammar bin Yaser (RA). ‘Ammar was a slave who was subjected to extreme forms of torture. At one time he capitulated to the demands of those who were torturing him and said that he was no longer a believer. He went to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him about this. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him how he felt in his heart. ‘Ammar (RA) told the Prophet (PBUH) that his heart was full of faith. The Prophet (PBUH) approved what he did. Some Muslims did not follow ‘Ammar’s (RA) example and preferred to die rather than to capitulate to the idolater’s demands. ‘Ammar’s (RA) parents died during one of the sessions of torture. The idolaters used to lay Bilal (RA) down on the hot ground in the desert and place a huge rock on his chest and leave him to suffer in the hot summer’s sun but he never gave in. Others suffered the same fate without giving in. A believer’s faith is a trust. A true believer sacrifices everything to protect this trust even if that would cost him/her their lives.

*“Verily your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy to those who leave their homes after having been persecuted then they strive and persevere. On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, and every soul will be repaid what it did, and they will not be wronged.”* Some Muslims were weakened by the persecution they suffered and gave in but they migrated as soon as they got the chance to do so. God promised to forgive them. On the Day of Judgement everyone will be for him/herself. However, no one will be wronged.

## Verses 112 to 128:

112. *God sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and safety, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place, but it denied the favours of God. So God made it taste hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of what they used to do.*
113. *And there came to them a messenger from among themselves, but they rejected him; so the torment seized them while they were wrongdoers.*
114. *So eat of the sustenance which God has provided for you, lawful and good; and be grateful for the blessings of God, if it is He whom you serve.*
115. *He has forbidden for you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which has been immolated in the name of any other than God; but he who is forced by hunger, neither craving nor transgressing, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
116. *And do not say falsely, "This is lawful, and this is forbidden," to invent a lie against God. Those who invent a lie against God will not succeed.*
117. *A brief enjoyment (will be theirs); and theirs is a painful torment.*
118. *To the Jews We prohibited such things as We have mentioned to you before. We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.*
119. *But verily your Lord - to those who do wrong in ignorance, but who thereafter repent and make amends - your Lord, after all this, is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
120. *Abraham was indeed a (comprehensive) model, devoutly obedient to God, true in faith, and he was not of the idolaters.*
121. *He showed his gratitude for the blessings of God, who chose him and guided him to a straight path.*
122. *And We gave him good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, in the ranks of the righteous.*
123. *Then We revealed to you (Muhammad), to follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters.*
124. *The Sabbath was only made (strict) for those who disagreed (as to its observance); but God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, as to their differences.*
125. *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord knows best who strayed from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided.*
126. *If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted. But if you persevere, verily it is better for the perseverant.*
127. *Persevere (Muhammad). Your perseverance is only by (the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they scheme.*
128. *For God is with those who remain conscious of Him and those who do good. (16: 112 – 128)*

*“God sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and safety, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place, but it denied the favours of God. So God made it taste hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of what they used to do.”* Mecca could be a perfect example for the city that the verse is referring to. God established the Sacred House in Mecca and He made the city itself an inviolable place. Whoever

enters this city enjoys safety and security; no one can harm any of its inhabitants even if they were murderers or criminals. This safety and security are lost once an individual steps outside the boundaries of the city. Mecca itself was situated in a barren valley but it was a thriving city because of the wealth and provisions that the pilgrims brought during the season of pilgrimage.

*“And there came to them a Messenger from among themselves, but they rejected him; so the torment seized them while they were wrongdoers.”* The people of Mecca knew Muhammad (PBUH) all his life. He was known among them as the truthful, the honest. However, when he became a messenger bringing them God’s mercy, they rejected him and called him a liar. They wronged him and persecuted his followers. The verse threatened the idolaters of Mecca with a punishment that would replace the safety, security, and affluence which they were enjoying with fear and hunger. The metaphorical description of the punishment as a garment and the use of the word “taste,” imply that the effect of the punishment will not be only felt superficially but it will also be felt inside their bodies.

*“So eat of the sustenance which God has provided for you, lawful and good; and be grateful for the blessings of God, if it is He whom you serve.”* God commanded them to eat of that which He made lawful. If they truly worship God, then they should follow His rules not the rules made in the name of false gods. The command is then followed by a list of the foods that were prohibited, *“He has forbidden for you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which has been immolated in the name of any other than God; but he who is forced by hunger, neither craving nor transgressing, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* These foods were prohibited either for the physical or for the spiritual harm they inflict on the human being. Islam does allow exceptions when it is necessary to break the rule. If the individual could suffer a greater harm as a result of obeying the rule, then the person is allowed a measure of exception that would alleviate the potential danger.

These were the limits that God has decreed for what is lawful and what is forbidden. The verses commanded not to reject them in favor of idolatry myth. People should not take the law in their hands to determine what is lawful and what is forbidden. No one has the right to determine what is lawful and what is forbidden except God. Those who usurp the right to state what is lawful and what is forbidden are fabricating a lie against God. Those who fabricate lies against God will never succeed, *“And do not say falsely this is lawful and this is forbidden,” to invent a lie against God. Those who invent a lie against God will not succeed. A brief enjoyment (will be theirs); and theirs is a painful torment.”* They will have a brief enjoyment in this life but they will meet their doom in the Hereafter.

The things that God made unlawful for the Jews, which have been mentioned in Surat Al-An’am, are lawful for the Muslims, *“To the Jews We prohibited such things as We have mentioned to you before. We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.”* These were made unlawful to the Jews as a punishment for their transgression. God did not wrong them but they wronged themselves. Those Jews who repented and sought forgiveness from God before they died, they will be forgiven, *“But verily your Lord - to those who do wrong in ignorance, but who thereafter repent and make amends - your Lord, after all this, is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This is a

general ruling that applies to whomsoever sins but later repents and seeks God's forgiveness.

The claim of the Arabs that they were following the religion that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought is addressed in the following verse, *“Abraham was indeed a (comprehensive) model, devoutly obedient to God, true in faith, and he was not of the idolaters. He showed his gratitude for the blessings of God, who chose him and guided him to a straight path. And We gave him good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, in the ranks of the righteous. Then We revealed to you (Muhammad), to follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters.”* The Quran's rendering of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) portrays him as a model for guidance, obedience, gratitude, and repentance to God. The use of the Arabic word “Ummah” to describe Prophet Abraham (PBUH) can be interpreted in different ways. It may mean that the attributes that the Quran used to describe Prophet Abraham (PBUH) are equivalent to the attributes that a whole nation would possess. It may also convey the meaning of the comprehensive leadership that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) had. A comprehensive leader guides his nation to goodness and God will reward him for the goodness that each and everyone in the nation does.

Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was fully dedicated to God, obedient and upright. He was not one of the idolaters. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) showed his gratitude for the blessings that God bestowed upon him. His gratitude was both reflected on his deeds as well as on his words. God has chosen him and guided him to the straight path, the path of the belief in the Oneness of God. This is the same path that God revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) and commanded him to follow.

The prohibitions that God has prescribed during the Sabbath were not part of Abraham's (PBUH) religion. They were made specifically for those who differed about it, *“The Sabbath was only made (strict) for those who disagreed (as to its observance); but God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, as to their differences.”*

Having clarified the nature of the new religion; stating the fact that it is an extension to the religion that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought before; and expounding the differences between it and the distorted beliefs that were adopted by the idolaters and the Jews; God commanded His Messenger to use wisdom and good admonition to call to the doctrine of the belief in the Oneness of God, *“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord knows best who strayed from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided.”* But if the Muslims were attacked, then they should respond in a fair way. However, perseverance is better, knowing that God will reward everyone fairly, *“If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted. But if you persevere, verily it is better for the perseverant. Persevere (Muhammad). Your perseverance is only by (the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they scheme. For God is with those who remain conscious of Him and those who do good.”* These verses establish a strategy and a methodology for calling people to Islam. People calling to Islam should not harbor feelings of superiority over others and should only expect their reward from God.



Wisdom requires knowing one's audience and understanding their needs and their circumstances. One should be brief and respect the human limits on the length of the span of attention. Fair exhortation indicates that one should use an amiable approach that touches the hearts in a kind way. Reasoning in the best manner indicates that one should use an approach which both articulates and elucidates the tenets of the religion.

## **Sura 17: Al-Israa (The Night Journey, Children of Israel)**

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

This Sura is a Meccan Sura. It starts by glorifying God and ends by praising Him. It deals with a number of topics, most of them are related to the doctrine. It also deals with topics related to the code of ethics for the individuals and the communities. It narrates some of the stories about the Children of Israel and Adam (PBUH).

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) figures prominently in the Sura. The Sura narrates the story of his night journey to heaven and meeting God. The Sura deals with the interactions between the Prophet (PBUH) and the people of Mecca. It talks about the Quran, its nature and its contents. It also considers the unique characteristic of Muhammad's (PBUH) message.

Hawwa suggested that the Sura consists of an introduction and five sections. The introduction consists of the first three verses. The first section consists of the verses 4 to 40. The second section consists of verses 41 to 69. The third section consists of verses 70 to 88. The fourth section consists of the verses 89 to 100. The fifth section consists of the verses 101 to 111.

### **Verses 1 to 21:**

1. *Glorified be He who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the far distant Mosque whose neighbourhood We have blessed, that We might show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.*
2. *We gave Moses the Scripture, and made it guidance for the Children of Israel, saying, "Choose no guardian beside Me."*
3. *(They were) the seed of those whom We carried (in the ship) along with Noah. He was a grateful servant.*
4. *And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Scripture, "Most certainly you will spread corruption in the earth twice, and you will become great tyrants."*
5. *So when the time for the first of the two came, We sent against you servants of Ours of great might who ravaged (your) country, and it was a promise fulfilled.*
6. *Then we allowed you to prevail against your enemy, and We aided you with wealth and children and made you more numerous.*
7. *(Saying), "If you do good, you do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it is for them (in like manner). So, when the time for the second (of the judgments) came (We sent against you others of Our slaves) to shame your faces, and to enter the Temple as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they conquered.*
8. *It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, but if you repeat (the crime) We shall repeat (the punishment), and We have appointed Hell a prison for the disbelievers.*
9. *Verily this Quran does guide to that which is most upright, and gives the glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds, that they shall have a magnificent reward;*
10. *And to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have prepared for them a grievous torment.*
11. *And humankind prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and humankind is ever hasty.*

12. *We have made the night and the day as two (of Our) signs. Then We have made the sign of night to pass away and We have made the sign of the day manifest, so that you may seek a bounty from your Lord, and that you might know the numbering of years and the reckoning; and We have explained everything with distinctness.*
13. *Every person's fate We have fastened to his own neck and on the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will find wide open.*
14. *(It will be said to him), "Read your (own) record. Your soul suffices as a reckoner against you this day."*
15. *Whosoever is guided, it is only for (the good of) his own soul; and whosoever goes astray it is only to its detriment. Nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another, nor do We torment until We have sent a messenger.*
16. *When We decide to destroy a township, We (first) send a definite command to its affluent folk but they transgress therein, so the word (of doom) comes into effect against them, and we destroy it (with complete) destruction.*
17. *How many generations have We destroyed since Noah? And God suffices as Totally-Aware and All-Seeing with regard to His servants' sins.*
18. *Whoso desires this present life, We hasten for him therein what We will for whom We please. And afterward We assign him to Hell; he will enter it to burn, despised and banished.*
19. *Those who desire the Hereafter, and strive for it with the necessary effort, being believers; for such, their striving shall surely be accepted.*
20. *Of the bounties of your Lord We bestow freely on all - these as well as those. The bounties of your Lord are never restricted.*
21. *See how We have bestowed more on some than on others; but verily the Hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in distinction. (17: 1 – 21)*

*"Glorified be He who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the far distant Mosque whose neighbourhood We have blessed, that We might show him of Our sign. Indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."* The Sura opens by glorifying God, an appropriate opening that is befitting the topic of the miracle of carrying the Prophet (PBUH) from the Sacred Mosque to the far distant Mosque. The opening emphasized the fact that even though the Prophet (PBUH) has reached a rank with God that has not been achieved by any other mortal, he is still God's servant. The rationale behind this is to clarify any doubt regarding the human nature of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Arabic word "Israa," is derived from the word "Sra," meaning walking by night. The location of the beginning and end of the trip which was taken by the Prophet (PBUH) has been decided by God. The path of the trip brings together the monotheistic messages which embodied the doctrine of the Oneness of God. These are the messages which were brought by the messengers of God starting by Abraham and Ishmael (PBUT) and ending by Muhammad (PBUH). It is intended as a statement of the progression of the chain of prophet-hood from Abraham (PBUH) to Muhammad (PBUH). The precinct of the far distant Mosque has been blessed by God. The use of the expression, *"the far distant Mosque whose neighbourhood We have blessed,"* indicates that God not only blessed the mosque but His blessings also flooded the mosque and overflowed onto its surroundings. The miracle of carrying the Prophet (PBUH) from

the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to the far distant Mosque in Jerusalem was not the only miracle that the Prophet (PBUH) experienced during this trip.

This trip was one of God's miracles. It started at the Sacred Mosque in Mecca and ended at the far distant Mosque in Jerusalem. The far distant Mosque is located in the middle of the Sacred Land in which God settled the Children of Israel for some time. It was then appropriate to mention Prophet Moses (PBUH), "*We gave Moses the Scripture, and made it guidance for the Children of Israel, saying, 'Choose no guardian beside Me.'*" This verse and the subsequent ones narrate a part of the history of the Children of Israel. This part was not told in any other Sura in the Quran. The verses reminded the Jewish people of the Scripture that has been revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH) and which included God's warning. A reminder of their relationship to Prophet Noah (PBUH) is also mentioned, "*(They were) the seed of those whom We carried (in the ship) along with Noah. He was a grateful servant.*" This was a reminder and a warning of God's promise that will be stated later, "*nor do We torment until We send a messenger.*"

The verse stated that the first objective of giving Moses (PBUH) the Scripture was to command the Children of Israel not to choose a guardian other than God. They should put their trust in God alone. This is the guidance and this is the true faith. The verse addressed the Children of Israel as the descendants of Noah (PBUH) to remind them that their ancestors were among those who believed in God and were saved by Him in the ship with Prophet Noah (PBUH). Prophet Noah (PBUH) was described as the "*grateful servant of God.*" Being a servant of God puts Prophet Noah (PBUH) among the group of people who were chosen by God. Earlier in the Sura, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was given the same attribute.

The Scripture that was given to Moses (PBUH) as a guidance to the Children of Israel foretold of God's punishment that would be inflicted on them because of the mischief they committed twice, therefore they deserved to be punished twice, "*And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Scripture, 'Most certainly you will spread corruption in the earth twice, and you will become great tyrants.'*" This does not mean that God has prescribed on the Children of Israel to commit mischief. God does not command people to commit sinful acts, "*God, verily, does not enjoin lewdness.*" (7: 28). The verse foretold what they will do because God knows what will happen. They deserved to be punished because they chose to commit sinful behavior.

*"So when the time for the first of the two came, We sent against you servants of Ours of great might who ravaged (your) country, and it was a promise fulfilled."* The verse describes the first of these episodes. The Children of Israel became powerful in the Holy land. Their power tempted them to become tyrants and spread mischief in the land. God sent some of His servants who were more powerful who conquered the land and destroyed everything with impunity. This was a promise fulfilled.

When the Children of Israel tasted defeat and humility they regretted their previous behavior, sought repentance, and did good deeds God rewarded them and allowed them to defeat their enemy, "*Then we allowed you to prevail against your enemy, and We aided you with wealth and children and made you more numerous.*"

But the story was repeated again. Before the narrative of the second episode was completed a statement of a fundamental rule of the commensuration of deed and reward is interjected, “(Saying), *‘If you do good, you do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it is for them (in like manner).’*” This is a fundamental rule that does not change. The reward is proportionate to the deed. One thus reaps which he had sown. The narrative then continued to describe the second episode, “*So, when the time for the second (of the judgments) came (We send against you others of Our slaves) to shame your faces, and to enter the Temple as they entered it the first time, and to lay waste all that they conquered.*” The narrative did not tell what happened in the period between the two episodes but continued to describe the second episode directly. Their enemy entered and shamed their faces and destroyed everything. The prophecy was realized and the promised was fulfilled. The Quran does not mention any details about the enemy of the Children of Israel. This is in accordance with the style of the Quran; it does not mention details which do not contribute to the lesson to be learnt. However, this punishment may have been a way for receiving God’s mercy, “*It may be that your Lord will have mercy on you, but if you repeat (the crime) We shall repeat (the punishment), and We have appointed Hell a prison for the disbelievers.*”

*“Verily this Quran does guide to that which is most upright, and gives the glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds, that they shall have a magnificent reward;”* This is a comprehensive statement. This Quran guides all people, in all places and at all times. The Quran guides to that which is upright in the cognitive as well as the psychological domains. The Quran offers a simple and a clear doctrine as a vehicle for this guidance, a doctrine which frees the human soul of the shackles of myth and superstition. It frees human energy so that a civilization that benefits humankind can be established, a civilisation that is based on the harmony between the laws of nature and the laws of the initial natural disposition of the humankind.

The Quran guides to a way of life that is based on maintaining a harmony between emotions and behavior; and between faith and deeds. It provides a connection between the humankind and God through the link that does not break. It transforms all human endeavors that have been dedicated to God into acts of worship even if these endeavors involved entertainment and seeking pleasure.

The Quran guides to what is upright in the area of performing acts of worship. It guides to the maintenance of a balance between ability and duty, preventing human tendencies to go to the extreme.

The Quran guides to what is upright in the relationships among members of the same community, between the state and people, and among different states. It guides to relationships that are based on objective and rational principles and not based on the whims and desires of mortals. These are the principles that God has established. He knows best what benefits His creatures. The Quran provides principles which organize the political, economic, social, and international relations systems that befit a human society.

The Quran guides to a way which accepts and reconciles all divinely revealed religions; respects their holy traditions; and protects their sanctuaries. This will establish peace between all.

The Quran brings glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds that they will have a great reward. But those who chose to reject faith will be recompensed accordingly, *“And to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have prepared for them a grievous torment.”* It is the same principle that the deeds and the recompense are commensurate. Those who reject the guidance of the Quran will fall prey to the whims of humankind; this is the humankind who cannot find the way to achieve his best interest. He is ever hasty and often follows unsubstantiated gut feelings to his detriment, *“And humankind prays for evil as he ought to pray for good, and humankind is ever hasty.”* His actions are irrational and they are usually motivated by urges which he cannot control. He does not appreciate the consequences of his deeds. Thus ends up committing mistakes.

The phenomenon of the ever sequential day and night is controlled by a universal law. This phenomenon organises people’s activities, allows us to perform computations, and helps us to determine the elapsed time. It is a phenomenon which reflects the perfection of God’s law, *“We have made the night and the day as two (of Our) signs. Then We have made the sign of night to pass away and We have made the sign of the day manifest, so that you may seek a bounty from your Lord, and that you might know the numbering of years and the reckoning; and We have explained everything with distinctness.”* The verse describes the night as if it were an eraser which erases the light and the activities of the day so only darkness and quiet remain. Daylight allows people to see what is happening. This sequence allows people to pursue their normal activities during the day and they can rest during the night. Humankind can design a calendar to show the passing of time on the basis of the alternation of day and night. God has provided clear explanations for everything. God controls the universe and everything in the universe runs according to God’s plan. The perfect execution of the plan attests to the power of the Creator.

It is God’s plan that everyone in this universe will be rewarded according to his deeds, *“Every person's fate We have fastened to his own neck and on the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will find wide open.”* The actions of a person are allegorically referred to in this verse as his/her fate. The actions are inseparable from the person. One cannot escape what he /she had done during life on earth. All these actions will be presented to the individual on the Day of Judgement in an open scroll. One cannot hide or ignore it, *“It will be said to him), ‘Read your (own) record. Your soul suffices as a reckoner against you this day.’”*

Thus, accepting guidance is a personal responsibility, *“Whosoever is guided, it is only for (the good of) his own soul; and whosoever goes astray it is only to its detriment. Nor can the bearer of a burden bear the burden of another, nor do We punish until We send a messenger.”* Each person will be held accountable for his/her own deeds. No one can carry the burden of another. In addition to God’s signs in the universe and the initial natural disposition of the human being which guide to the existence of the Creator, God sent His messengers to guide people to the straight path. This is God’s mercy.

*“When We decide to destroy a township, We (first) send a definite command to its affluent folk but they transgress therein, so the word (of doom) comes into effect against them, and we destruct it (with complete) destruction.”* When a community allows its affluent people, who lost their lives completely to the pursuit of pleasures and immersed themselves in carnal desires; to

continue in spreading mischief with impunity, God's punishment seizes it. It is the community's responsibility to stop its affluent people from spreading corruption in the land and if it does not, then the community deserves to be punished. The verse stresses the importance of the collective responsibility of the community as a whole in following the straight path. Many communities were destroyed because they did not heed God's law, *"How many generations have We destroyed since Noah? And God suffices as Totally-Aware and All-Seeing with regard to His servants' sins."*

Those whose mere interest is the enjoyment of this life, do not need to concern themselves with the pursuit of a higher goal. God will give them what they worked for in this life, but Hellfire will be waiting for them in the Hereafter. Those who are merely interested in pursuing the satisfaction of their lusts and carnal desires will be certainly rewarded for their sins with the proper punishment, *"Whoso desires this present life, We hasten for him therein what We will for whom We please. And afterward We assign him to Hell; he will enter it to burn, despised and banished."* But those who are more interested in a better life in the Hereafter must work hard to achieve their goal. Strong faith can only be achieved by hard work. A strong faith cannot be achieved merely by wishing for it. A strong faith rests deep in one's heart and is reflected in the deeds of the person, *"Those who desire the Hereafter, and strive for it with the necessary effort, being believers; for such, their striving shall surely be accepted."* Pursuing a better life in the Hereafter does not mean that a person should be deprived of the good pleasures of this world. But pursuing the worldly pleasures should not be the ultimate goal of the person. People who seek a better life in the Hereafter should not be enslaved by the pleasures of this worldly life.

*"Of the bounties of your Lord We bestow freely on all - these as well as those. The bounties of your Lord are never restricted."* Everyone will get his/her share from the bounty of God. Those who seek this worldly life will get their share and those who seek a better life in the Hereafter will get their share.

It is obvious that people in this life have different means, different goals, and different lives. The real difference in status will be seen in the Hereafter, *"See how We have bestowed more on some than on others; but verily the Hereafter will be greater in degrees and greater in distinction."*

### **Verses 22 to 39:**

22. *Do not associate with God any other god, lest you sit down despised, forsaken.*
23. *Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour.*
24. *And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say, "My Lord, bestow on them Your mercy as they cared for me in childhood."*
25. *Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, then He was ever Forgiving to those who turn often (to Him).*
26. *Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and do not squander (your wealth) wastefully.*
27. *Verily the squanderers were ever brothers of the devil, and the devil was ever ungrateful to his Lord.*

28. *And even if you had to turn away from them in pursuit of mercy from your Lord, which you hope for, speak to them a gentle word.*
29. *And do not let your hand be chained to your neck nor open it widely, lest you sit down rebuked and overwhelmed with regret.*
30. *Verily your Lord does provide sustenance in abundance for whom He pleases and He provides in a just measure. He was Totally-Aware, All- Seeing of His servants.*
31. *Do not kill your children for fear of want. We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.*
32. *Nor come near adultery, for it is an abomination and an evil way.*
33. *And do not take the life which God has made sacred except for a just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed the bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the Law).*
34. *Come not near the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfill (every) pledge, for you will be asked about (every) pledge (on the Day of Reckoning).*
35. *Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with an even balance. This is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination.*
36. *And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge. You will be asked about every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart (on the Day of Reckoning).*
37. *And do not walk on earth with insolence, for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor will you reach the mountains in height; the evil of all that is hateful in the sight of your Lord. This is part of the (precepts of) wisdom, which your Lord has revealed to you. Do not associate any other god with God lest you should be thrown into Hell, blamed, banished. (17: 22 – 39)*

*“Do not associate with God any other god, lest you sit down despised, forsaken.”* The verse states a basic principle: do not associate partners with God. It is a general command but it is given in the singular form to indicate that it is a command for each and every human being. The belief in the Oneness God is a personal responsibility. The consequence for anyone who commits this sin is to remain despised and forsaken. Those whom God does not support will find no support. The use of the word, *“sit down,”* casts a shadow of weakness and debilitation on the person, *“Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour.”* The command to worship no one but God followed the command not to associate partners with Him. It came as a decree. God’s decrees could not be disputed. This is the basic foundation of this doctrine. Laws dealing with personal and communal responsibilities are built upon the basic foundation of the doctrine. The first of these responsibilities is to be kind to one’s parents. This command places family bond next to the faith bond, emphasizing its importance in the sight of God. The language of the verse evokes emotions of mercy, love, and kindness in the hearts of the children towards their parents. Human beings by nature focus their attention on their children. The children are a symbol of hope in the future. The initial natural disposition of human beings drives parents to care for their children. Parents are happy to make sacrifices and to work hard to provide a good life for their children. In the process of raising their children, people forget the older generations. The Quran reminds people that the older generations need their attention and need to be treated kindly. The command has been constructed in the form of a decree to emphasize its unequivocal certainty.



The mention of old age alludes to the vulnerability of old people and their need for help. That requires that children not only be careful in addressing them and never to scold them or talk to them harshly, but also to speak to them respectfully. *“And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say, ‘My Lord, bestow on them Your Mercy as they cared for me in childhood.’”* The children should be humble when they treat their parent. Furthermore, they should pray God to bestow His mercy on them.

*“Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, then He was ever Forgiving to those who turn often (to Him).”* The verse is interjected here to remind people that God knows their intentions and their emotions. It also opens the door for the sinner to repent.

*“Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and do not squander (your wealth) wastefully.”* The Quran gave family members, the needy, and the wayfarer rights that need to be fulfilled. Helping family members, the needy, and the wayfarer financially is a duty upon those who are able. It is a debt that one has to pay to those named. This serves two purposes. It spreads love among people and it fulfills one’s duty towards God. Helping these people is an integral part of worshipping God. The verse commands people not to squander their wealth. Ibn Mass’oud (RA) and Ibn Abbas (RA) define squandering as the act of spending money wastefully. Megahed (RA) said that those who spend their wealth for a legitimate cause are not considered squanderers even if they spend all what they have got, but those who spend even a small portion of their wealth wastefully are considered squanderers. The squanderers are the brothers of the devil because they spend their money in evil sinful deeds, *“Verily the squanderers were ever brothers of the devil, and the devil was ever ungrateful to his Lord.”*

If the person is unable to help those in need, he/she should explain their reasons in kind words and ask them to be patient until such time he/she have the means to help, *“And even if you had to turn away from them in pursuit of mercy from your Lord, which you hope for, speak to them a gentle word.”*

In general, we are commanded to spend money moderately, *“And do not let your hand be chained to your neck nor open it widely, lest you sit down rebuked and overwhelmed with regret.”* Moderation is a cardinal rule in Islam. Islam is against extremism in everything including spending money. One should neither be extravagant nor spendthrift; both extremes are unwise. God provides according to His wisdom, *“Verily your Lord does provide sustenance in abundance for whom He pleases and He provides in a just measure. He was Totally-Aware, All-Seeing of His servants.”* God knows best what is appropriate.

*“Do not kill your children for fear of want. We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.”* A corrupted doctrine has a negative impact not only on the practice of rituals but also on the daily life of the members of the community. A sound doctrine helps develop human beings with healthy feelings and emotions which is necessary for the sound and healthy social life in the community. The practice of infanticide was a direct import of the crooked doctrine of the idolater Arabs. There is a verse in Surat Al-An’am which addresses the same issue. It is interesting to note the subtle difference in the composition

of the two verses. Here it says, *“We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you,”* while in Surat Al-An’am it says, *“We shall provide sustenance for you as well as for them.”* The verse in this Sura addresses those who kill their children because they are afraid that getting more children will make the parents poor. God says He will provide for the newborn and in addition He will also provide for you. In Surat Al-An’am, God addresses the parents who kill their children because they are already poor. The verse stresses that God will provide for the parents and in addition He will also provide for the newborn.

*“Nor come near adultery, for it is an abomination and an evil way.”* There is a connection between infanticide and adultery. Adultery involves killing in different forms. The sperms which form the material of life are wasted. Adultery usually results in undesirable consequences which may be eliminated by performing abortion. If the child is born, he/she becomes a bastard and consequently will lead a miserable life. This is one life lost to the community. Adultery weakens family ties. Consequently, it weakens community bonds. It obscures the lineage and it reduces marriage rates and increases divorce rates. Reading history shows that nations in which adultery became pervasive were doomed to destruction. Because of these dire consequences Quran takes a preventive approach by commanding people to avoid the means that lead to adultery.

*“And do not take the life which God has made sacred except for a just cause. And if anyone is slain wrongfully, we have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed the bounds in the matter of taking life; for he is helped (by the Law).”* Islam is a religion of peace it protects the sanctity of life. Killing people is a capital crime. It is an abhorrent sin second only to the sin of associating partners with God. God gives life; no one else has the right to take it back. The right of life is sacred and is protected. Killing can only be executed according to the law for a just cause. The just causes which allow killing were made clear by God. It was not left to whims of people to decide which cause is just. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“The law allows the execution of a Muslim as a punishment for three sins only: taking the life of another person, committing adultery by who is married or have been married, and apostasy and abandoning the community.”* The first just cause for executing a person is as a retribution for a murder crime that has been committed. This is a fair retribution. It prevents the possibility of the vicious cycle of revenge. This harsh punishment is a deterrent for those who contemplate killing others. It actually provides a protection and security for members of the society. The second just cause for executing a person is a deterrent against spreading immorality. The third just cause is a deterrent for those who want to spread chaos and mischief in the community. Apostates who cause harm to the community are punished by execution.

If someone was murdered for a reason other than the three just causes mentioned above, then his nearest of kin is given an authority either to exact retribution or to forgive with or without a ransom. The government should support the family’s victim in exercising their right. Having given the next of kin this power to exact retribution or to forgive, Islam warns against taking an unnecessary revenge. The approach that Islam has taken to deal with this crime addresses the needs of the victim’s family and it brings closure and peace to the family. It closes the door in the way of the possibility of the eruption of a vicious circle of revenge. It also opens up the door

for the chance that they may forgive the culprit thus bringing peace to the community and spreading tolerance. The verse warns the victim's family against exacting extreme measures of retribution.

*“Come not near the orphan's property except to improve it, until he attains the age of full strength; and fulfill (every) pledge, for you will be asked about (every) pledge (on the Day of Reckoning).”* The verse addresses the issue of the sanctity of the Muslim's wealth. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Muslim's blood, honor, and wealth have been sanctified. No Muslim should violate the sanctity of these three for another Muslim.”* This verse stresses the abhorrence of defrauding an orphan of his/her wealth. Orphans are usually helpless and vulnerable. The guardians should look after their trust. It is the duty of the Muslim community to make sure that the guardians are doing their job.

It is interesting to note that the commands regarding matters which are considered personal responsibilities were issued in the singular form. These included the commands regarding being kind to parents; helping family members, the needy, and the wayfarer; avoiding extravagance; exercising moderation in spending; shunning arrogance. Commands dealing with matters which are considered communal responsibilities were issued in the plural form. These included the commands to shun infanticide, adultery, murder, defrauding orphans, and breaking promises.

Islam emphasized the importance of honoring a promise. The verse stated that people will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement for the promises that they broke. Honoring promises is the backbone of the integrity of the individual and the society.

*“Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with an even balance. This is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination.”* Conducting fair business dealings is in a way a form of honoring a promise. Fair business dealings create an atmosphere of trust and bring blessings to life. It brings goodness to this life and in the Hereafter there will be a good reward. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“If a person is able to defraud another but he/she chose not to only because he/she fears God, then God will give him/her a better gain in this life and a better reward in the Hereafter.”* Fraudulent business transactions may bring short term gains but in the end they will cause great loss to the individual and to the community. This is a fact that many business people realized. Islam espoused this principle as part of its doctrine which brings material success in line with spiritual fulfillment. This adds more dimensions to life and broadens its horizon.

The Islamic doctrine is a clear and straight doctrine. It is not based on conjectures but it is based on clear proofs, *“And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge. You will be asked about every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart (on the Day of Reckoning).”* These few words establish a comprehensive plan for the heart and the mind. This plan comprises the scientific approach, the purity of the heart, and the consciousness of God. This plan is far more superior over the abstract scientific approach alone.

The verse tells us that in order to be able to make a sound determination regarding a news item, a phenomenon, or a suggestion one should be absolutely sure of their meaning, veracity, and

reliability. People should not make a decision on the basis of a conjecture. If we apply this principle, then objectivity will prevail in all aspects of life. The banner of scientific integrity which has been raised recently is only a component of the intellectual and spiritual integrity which has been commanded by Islam. The verse indicated the consequence of violating this integrity. It is a trust for which everyone will be held accountable on the Day of Judgement. It is a trust that needs to be observed by all the senses that a human owns: the hearing, the sight, and the intellect. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Avoid conjecture. A conjecture is the most severe act of lying.”* Prophetic traditions as well as Quranic verses point to the importance of making sure that the available information in a certain situation are authentic and reliable before making a decision. Thus, the verses establish a methodology which is based on the certainty of information and the objectivity of the person.

The last of these commands which constitute a component of the belief in the Oneness of God is to abandon arrogance, *“And do not walk on earth with insolence, for you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height.”* When a heart becomes void of the belief in God, it becomes an easy prey to the temptation to be boastful of what its owner has of wealth, power, or beauty. A person who realizes that whatever he/she has of wealth, power, or beauty is a blessing from God relinquishes any desire to be boastful of these material acquisitions. The verse brings the boastful face to face with human weaknesses and limitations, *“you cannot rend the earth asunder, nor will you reach the mountains in height.”* Islam commands modesty to combat the sin of arrogance. Modesty is a necessary attribute necessary for the individual to maintain sound relationships with God and with people. An arrogant person is hated by God because of his ingratitude and is hated by people because of his boastful attitude.

The commands are then followed by a statement that expresses God’s abhorrence of the bad attributes that the commands shunned, *“The evil of all that is hateful in the sight of your Lord.”* It is a reminder that these bad attributes have been shunned because God hates them. Finally, a reminder of the relationship between the content of these commands and the belief in the Oneness of God is made, *“This is part of the (precepts of) wisdom, which your Lord has revealed to you. Do not associate any other god with God lest you should be thrown into Hell, blamed, banished.”*

### **Verses 40 to 57:**

40. *Has then your Lord chosen you (to have) sons, and (for Himself) taken daughters from among the angels? Most surely you utter a grievous saying.*
41. *We verily have explained things in various ways in this Quran that they may take heed, but it only added to their aversion.*
42. *Say, “If there had been (other) gods with Him, as they say, they would certainly have sought out a way against the Lord of the Throne.”*
43. *Glory be to Him. Exalted is He above what they say by great sublimity.*
44. *The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein praise Him. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise and yet you understand not their praise. Verily He is Forbearing, All-Forgiving.*

45. *When you recite the Quran, We place, between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, an invisible veil.*
46. *And We placed veils upon their hearts lest they should understand it, and in their ears a deafness; and when you mention your Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion.*
47. *We know best what they wish to hear when they give you an ear and when they take secret counsel, when the evil-doers say, "You follow but a man bewitched."*
48. *See what similes they strike for you, but they have gone astray, and never can they find a way.*
49. *They say, "What, when we are reduced to bones and dust, should we really be raised up as a new creation?"*
50. *Say, "Be you stones or iron;*
51. *Or some created thing that is yet greater in your thoughts." Then they will say, "Who shall bring us back (to life)." Say, "He who created you in the first instance." They will shake their heads at you, and say, "When will it be?" Say, "Perhaps, it will be soon.*
52. *It will be on a day when He will call you, and you will answer (His call) with (words of) His praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little while."*
53. *Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best, for Satan does sow dissensions among them. Satan is indeed humankind's avowed enemy.*
54. *It is your Lord who knows you best. If He pleases, He grants you mercy, or if He pleases, He will torment you. We have not sent you (Muhammad) as a guardian over them.*
55. *And your Lord knows best all who are in the heavens and the earth. And we preferred some of the prophets above others, and We gave David the Psalms.*
56. *Say, "Call on those whom you claim beside Him, they have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them."*
57. *Those whom they call upon seek a way of approach to their Lord, which of them shall be the nearest; they hope for His mercy and they fear His torment. The torment of your Lord is to be cautious of. (17: 40 – 57)*

*"Has then your Lord chosen you (to have) sons, and (for Himself) taken daughters from among the angels? Most surely you utter a grievous saying."* This question is posed in such a way to express God's sarcasm and denunciation of what the disbelievers say. The question rejects the claim they make that the angels are females and they are God's daughter. If they believe that God gives both males and females, then how come, and He is the Creator, that he chooses females while they themselves reject females? This is a horrible saying.

*"We verily have explained things in various ways in this Quran that they may take heed, but it only added to their aversion."* The Quran came with the message that is based on the fact that God is One. The Quran explained and clarified the doctrine of Islam in many ways so that they would heed the message. But whenever they heard these clarifications they became more averse to the message. They did not want to leave the superficial security that they find in their false beliefs. The Quran refutes their claim that there are other gods with God, *"Say, 'If there had been (other) gods with Him, as they say, they would certainly have sought out a way against the Lord of the Throne.'"* This claim is not true. All those whom they took as gods besides God, are things which God created. God is Glorified above all these claims, *"Glory be to Him. Exalted is He*

*above what they say by great sublimity.”*

Everything in the heavens and earth praise His glory, *“The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein praise Him. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise and yet you understand not their praise. Verily He is Forbearing, All-Forgiving.”* Reading this verse, an image comes to mind in which one sees each atom in this universe as if it were a living being praising the glory of God. The whole universe becomes alive singing in unison the praise of God. Each thing in the universe sings the praise of God in its own way and using its own language. Your mortality hinders your understanding of these languages. One needs to listen to the praise with one’s heart not ears. As the soul becomes sublimated it will be able to listen to the praise of the creatures of God, it will be ready to connect with the sublime host, and it will be able to comprehend the secrets of the universe. God is truly Forbearing and All-Forgiving. He is forbearing towards the those who are ungrateful and associate partners with God; He reprieves them, reminds them, and admonishes them. He forgives the heedlessness of the mortals who do not praise His glory while the rest of the universe is singing His praise.

The chiefs of Quraish used to listen to the Quran but they resisted their initial natural disposition to be touched by its beauty. Thus, God placed a barrier between them and Muhammad (PBUH). They listened but did not hear or understand, *“When you recite the Quran, We place, between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, an invisible veil. And We placed veils upon their hearts lest they should understand it, and in their ears a deafness; and when you mention your Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion. We know best what they wish to hear when they give you an ear and when they take secret counsel, when the evil-doers say, “You follow but a man bewitched. See what similes they strike for you, but they have gone astray, and never can they find a way.”* Ibn Ishaq narrated that one night three of the chiefs of Quraish - Abu Sufian ibn Harb, Abu Jahl ibn Hesham, and Al-Akhnas ibn Shuraiq – went separately and discreetly to listen to the Prophet (PBUH) reciting Quran. Each one of them was unaware of what the others were doing. Each one of them hid in a place close to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house. They spent the whole night listening to him reciting the Quran. At dawn when they were about to leave to go home, they bumped into each other. They started rebuking each other. They admonished each other not do this again. They reminded each other that they should not do this otherwise they would be setting a bad example for the people of Quraish. However, the same story was repeated for three nights. On the third night when they met as they were heading home, they said we have to make a pledge to each other not to listen again to Muhammad (PBUH) reciting Quran. The next day when Al-Akhnas met Abu Sufian, he asked him what he thought of what he heard from Muhammad (PBUH). Abu Sufian said, *“I heard things that I knew about and I know what it means, and I heard things which I did not know before and I do not understand what they mean.”* Al-Akhnas said to him, *“This is exactly my experience.”* Al-Akhnas then went to see Abu Jahl and asked him the same question. Abu Jahl said, *“We were in a competition with Banu Abd Manaf, which of the two tribes gets higher status among the other tribes; they fed people and we matched them, they provided rides for people and we matched them, they helped people financially and we matched them; but when we were about to be equal in status they came up with the idea that one of them is a prophet who receives revelation from heaven. How can we compete with this? We will never believe in Muhammad (PBUH) nor will we follow him.”*

The Quran touched the hearts and souls of the chiefs of Quraish, however, they forced themselves to disbelieve. Their initial natural disposition was to accept the Message but they worked hard to suppress this natural feeling in their hearts. This is why God placed a barrier between them and the Quran. The barrier prevented the guidance to reach them. They were averse to the message because it posed a threat to their status among the other Arabs. Islam threatened the chiefs' power and authority. They finally found a plausible excuse not to follow Muhammad (PBUH), "*You follow but a man bewitched.*" This statement in itself reflects the magnitude of the Quran's impact on them. They realized that this could not have been composed by a mortal. They thought that there must have been a supernatural power behind it; because they did not want to admit that it is a God's revelation, they said it must be magic.

The idolaters of Mecca found the concept of resurrection after death difficult to accept. They argued at length with the Prophet (PBUH) about it and these arguments were documented in the Quran. The Quran explained the concept in great detail. Those who understood the nature of life, death, and resurrection found it easy to accept, "*They say, 'What, when we are reduced to bones and dust, should we really be raised up as a new creation?'*" did they not realize that they were not alive before they were born? And that resurrecting a dead person is not much different from creating this person in the first instance. God who has the power to create humankind is able to resurrect them. The response came to challenge them, "*Say, 'Be you stones or iron; or some created thing that is yet greater in your thoughts.'* Then they will say, '*Who shall bring us back (to life).'*' Say, '*He who created you in the first instance.'* They will shake their heads at you, and say, '*When will it be?'*' Say, '*Perhaps, it will be soon.*'" Even if you were a stone or a piece of iron God is able to put life back into you. Stone and iron are farther from life than bones and dust. Then they will ask who will resurrect us. The answer is simple, God who created you the first time is able to bring you back to life another time. They will ask again when this will take place. The Prophet (PBUH) did not know when, but he was commanded to say, "*Perhaps, it will be soon.*"

The verses continued to construct the scene when this will happen, "*It will be on a day when He will call you, and you will answer (His call) with (words of) His praise, and you will think that you tarried but a little while.*" The scene depicts those who rejected faith before rising to sing the praise of God.

The narrative then moves to deal with another theme. The verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to direct the believers to always say a good word, "*Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best, for Satan does sow dissensions among them. Satan is indeed humankind's avowed enemy.*" This is a comprehensive statement. God's servants should always say only good things. They should always choose the best speech to address each other. A good word spreads love and brotherhood and eliminates hate and animosity. This is the way to circumvent Satan's efforts who will try always to sow the seeds of discord among them. Satan is humankind's avowed enemy.

God has the absolute knowledge of what will happen and what people will do. He will bestow His mercy on whoever He pleases and He will punish whoever He pleases, *“It is your Lord who knows you best. If He pleases, He grants you mercy, or if He pleases, He will torment you. We have not sent you (Muhammad) as a guardian over them.”* The Prophet’s (PBUH) task is only to deliver the message not to act as a warden over people.

*“And your Lord knows best all who are in the heavens and the earth. And we preferred some of the prophets above others, and We gave David the Psalms.”* God in His divine knowledge chose to prefer some prophets over others. Only God knows the criteria for this categorization. One of the signs of preference is that some got books as in the case of David (PBUH).

This group of verses deals with the denunciation of the concept of God’s having daughters or partners. The verses emphasize God’s uniqueness and oneness and His comprehensive and absolute knowledge. The verses conclude by a challenge to the disbelievers, *“Say, ‘Call on those whom you claim beside Him, they have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them.’”* Those whom the disbelievers call upon are only part of the creation of God. They cannot offer their followers any help. God is the only one who can offer help to His creatures. Those whom the disbelievers call upon besides God they themselves race to please God and they fear His torment, *“Those whom they call upon seek a way of approach to their Lord, which of them shall be the nearest; they hope for His mercy and they fear His torment. The torment of your Lord is to be cautious of.”*

### **Verses 58 to 72:**

58. *There is not a township but We shall destroy before the Day of Resurrection, or torment it a dire torment. That has been written in the Divine ordinance.*
59. *And We refrain from sending the signs, only because the people of former generations denied them. And We gave Thamud the she camel as a clear sign but they wronged it, and We do not send signs but as a warning.*
60. *We told you that your Lord does know all about humankind. We gave you the vision which We showed you, as a test for people, as also the cursed tree (mentioned) in the Quran. We threaten them, but it only increases their inordinate transgression.*
61. *And when We said to the angels, “Prostrate before Adam and they fell prostrate all save Iblis, he said, “Shall I fall prostrate before that which You created out of clay?”*
62. *He (Iblis) said, “Do You see the one whom You honoured above me, if You give me respite till the Day of Judgment, I will surely bring all his descendants under my sway except for a few.”*
63. *(God) said, “Go, and whosoever of them follows you, then certainly Hell is your recompense, an ample recompense.*
64. *And incite whomsoever of them you can with your voice, and use against them what you can muster of forces riding and on foot, and share with them their wealth and children, and hold out promises to them; and Satan’s promises are only a deception.*
65. *Indeed, you have no authority over My servants. Your Lord suffices as (their) Guardian.*



66. *Your Lord is He who makes the ships go smoothly for you through the sea, in order that you may seek of His bounty, for He is most Merciful toward you.*
67. *And when distress touches you at sea, those whom you call upon desert you except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn away; and humankind is ever ungrateful.*
68. *Do you then feel secure that He will not cause you to be swallowed up beneath the earth when you are on land, or that He will not send a sand-storm upon you, and then you will find that you have no guardian?*
69. *Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back a second time to sea and send against you a heavy gale to drown you because of your ingratitude, so that you find no helper against Us?*
70. *Verily We have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on land and sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have favoured them far above many of those whom We created.*
71. *On the Day when We shall summon all people along with their leaders, those who are given their books in their right hands will read their books and they will not be wronged a shred.*
72. *But those who were blind in this world, will be blind in the Hereafter, and will be further away from the path. (17: 58 – 72)*

The previous verses established the fact that only God controls people's fate. He can either forgive them or punish them as He pleases. The following verse describes the fate that awaits all people, *"There is not a township but We shall destroy before the Day of Resurrection, or torment it a dire torment. That has been written in the Divine ordinance."* God willed that all human beings would perish before the Day of Resurrection. God also decreed that the people who sinned should be punished.

God sent messengers to guide people and gave them miraculous signs to convince people of the veracity of the message. Those whose hearts were open to receive guidance believed but many rejected guidance. The last messenger was not supported with such material miraculous evidence, *"And We refrain from sending the signs, only because the people of former generations denied them. And We gave Thamud the she camel as a clear sign but they wronged it, and We do not send signs but as a warning."* The Quran is the miracle of Islam. It is a Book that presents a complete way of life. It addresses both the intellect and the emotions of humankind. It appeals to the initial natural disposition of humankind. It is an everlasting Book that will remain available for all future generations. Physical miracles benefit only those who experience it firsthand. Many of the people who witnessed God's miracles did not believe in their messengers. An example of that is the she camel that was sent to the tribe of Thamud who asked their prophet to bring about a sign but when the sign came they rejected it.

These human experiences indicated that the last Message should not be accompanied by a physical miracle but it should be supported by an everlasting miracle which can benefit all future generations. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was given physical miracles as well but these miracles were not meant to be a proof of his prophet hood. These miracles were meant to be a test for his followers, *"We told you that your Lord does know all about humankind. We gave you the vision*

which We showed you, as a test for people, as also the cursed tree (mentioned) in the Quran. We threaten them, but it only increases their inordinate transgression.” Some people became apostates after the miracle of Israa and Mi’raj but the same event strengthened the faith of others. The statement, “We told you that your Lord does know all about humankind,” was a promise from God to His Messenger that God will protect him and grant him victory over his enemies.

The subsequent verses disclose the real reasons behind rejecting guidance. They also illustrate the reasons behind the traditional animosity between Iblis and humankind, “And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ and they fell prostrate all save Iblis, he said, ‘Shall I fall prostrate before that which You created out of clay?’” Iblis envied Adam (PBUH) for the honor that God bestowed on him. Iblis looked down upon this creature whom God created from mud. He forgot that God breathed of His breath in this creature. Iblis then expressed his disdain for the weakness of humankind, “He (Iblis) said, ‘Do You see the one whom You honoured above me, if You give me respite till the Day of Judgment, I will surely bring all his descendants under my sway except for a few.’” Iblis forgot that humankind has equal propensity for guidance and misguidance. Iblis forgot that humankind has the will to reach for God and become guided. Humankind was given the will to choose. That is why God allowed Iblis to try, “(God) said, ‘Go, and whosoever of them follows you, then certainly Hell is your recompense, an ample recompense.’”

“And incite whomsoever of them you can with your voice, and use against them what you can muster of forces riding and on foot, and share with them their wealth and children, and hold out promises to them; and Satan’s promises are only a deception.” It is a battle between humankind and Satan. He will amass his power and will use different strategies to conquer his enemies and tempt them to deviate from the straight path. He will share their wealth and their children as they used to do in the name of the idols. This also refers to the wealth which is obtained through illegitimate means and the children who are conceived outside wedlock. The partnership between the disbelievers and Iblis is about sharing wealth and children which are the main sources for pleasure and enjoyment for the human world. Iblis will try to use all means to achieve his objectives. Perhaps one of the most tempting promises is the promise that the sinner will be forgiven.

“Indeed you have no authority over My servants. Your Lord suffices as (their) Guardian.” Iblis has no authority on those whose hearts are connected to God, who nurture that link through acts of worship, and who hold tight to the most trustworthy handhold.

Iblis tries to sway people away from the straight path and God bestows His mercy on people and He saves them from difficult situations, “Your Lord is He who makes the ships go smoothly for you through the sea, in order that you may seek of his bounty, for He is most Merciful toward you. And when distress touches you at sea, those whom you call upon desert you except He; but when He brings you safe to the land, you turn away; and humankind is ever ungrateful.” The verses use the scene of a ship at sea as an example for difficult situations when there is no one to save those aboard the ship except God. The verses juxtapose the comfortable scene in which a ship sails safely on a quiet sea with the promise of a profit that will be gained at the completion

of the trip with the difficult scene of a ship being tossed around by huge waves no one is able to control; and no one knows what the end will be. The first scene reflects God's mercy on people. In the second scene people pray to God to save them. But once they feel secure upon reaching the shore they forget their savior.

Is there real security except with God? *“Do you then feel secure that He will not cause you to be swallowed up beneath the earth when you are on land, or that He will not send a sand-storm upon you, and then you will find that you have no guardian? Or do you feel secure that He will not send you back a second time to sea and send against you a heavy gale to drown you because of your ingratitude, so that you find no helper against Us?”* People are in God's hands whether they are at sea or on land. No one can provide protection against the dangers that one faces on land like tornados and volcanos or at sea like giant waves and stormy winds except God.

God honored humankind over many of His creatures. God honored humankind when He bestowed on him a straight posture and an initial natural disposition that combines mud and God's breath. This is the initial natural disposition which joins the heavens and the earth. God honored humankind when He bestowed on him the aptitude that makes him eligible for the position of vicegerency on earth. He gave him the ability to develop the earth and make it a habitable place. God honored humankind when He subjected the forces of the universe to make him live a better life. God honored humankind when He prepared for him a huge reception during which the angels bowed to him, *“Verily we have honored the Children of Adam. We carry them on land and sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have favoured them far above many of those whom We created.”*

God also honored humankind by giving him the responsibility to conduct himself. Humankind is responsible for his actions and has the free will to choose, consequently he will be held accountable for his actions and choices, *“On the Day when We shall summon all people along with their leaders, those who are given their books in their right hands will read their books and they will not be wronged a shred. But those who were blind in this world, will be blind in the Hereafter, and will be further away from the path.”* The verse describes the scene on the Day of Resurrection when all human beings will be gathered together. Each nation will be called by its name, whether it is the name of its ideology, its messenger, or its leader. Every nation will receive its record and its reward. Those who will be given their record in their right hands will be happy with their record. They will get a full reward. But those who were blind in their daily life and missed the guidance, they also be blind in the Hereafter. They will miss the good reward.

### **Verses 73 to 111:**

*73. And their purpose was to tempt you away from that which We had revealed to you, to substitute in our name something quite different; and then they would have accepted you as a friend.*

*74. And had We not given you strength, you would nearly have inclined to them a little.*

75. *Then We would have made you taste double (of punishment) in this life, and double after death, and moreover you would have found none to help you against Us.*
76. *Their purpose was to scare you off the land, in order to expel you; but in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after you, except for a little while.*
77. *(This was Our) way with the messengers We sent before you. You will not find a change in Our ways.*
78. *Establish regular prayers at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and (the recital of) the Quran at dawn. (the recital of) the Quran at dawn is ever witnessed.*
79. *And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own. So that your Lord may raise you to a praised estate.*
80. *And say, "My Lord, make me enter a sound entrance and exit a sound exit. And give me from Yourself a sustaining Power.*
81. *And say, "Truth has arrived, and falsehood perished. Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish."*
82. *And We reveal of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the wrongdoers.*
83. *And when We bestow Our blessings on humankind, he turns away and becomes averse; and when ill touches him he is in despair.*
84. *Say, "Everyone acts according to his own disposition. But your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the way."*
85. *They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is of the affair of my Lord. And you have not been given of knowledge except a little."*
86. *If We had willed, We could take away that which We have revealed to you, then you would find no guardian for you against Us.*
87. *Except (We have left it with you) as mercy from your Lord. Indeed, the bounty He bestowed on you is great.*
88. *Say, "If the whole of humankind and jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support."*
89. *And We have explained to the people, in this Quran, every kind of similitude, but most people persist in disbelieving.*
90. *They say, "We shall not believe in you, until you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the ground,*
91. *Or (until) you have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water;*
92. *Or you cause the sky to fall in pieces on us, as you claimed will happen; or you bring God and the angels before (us) face to face;*
93. *Or you have a house adorned with gold; or you ascend into the skies. No, we shall not even believe in your ascension until you send down to us a book that we could read."*  
*Say, "Glory to my Lord, was I ever but a human messenger."*
94. *What prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them save that they said, "Has God sent a mortal as (His) messenger?"*
95. *Say, "If there were on the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down for them from heaven an angel as a messenger."*
96. *Say, "God suffices as a witness between me and you. Indeed, He is Totally-Aware and All-Seeing of His servants.*

97. *It is he whom God guides, that is on true guidance; but he whom He leaves to go astray, you will find no protecting guardians besides Him. On the Day of Judgment, We shall gather them together, on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf; their habitation will be Hell. Whenever it subsides, We increase its flame for them.*
98. *That is their recompense, because they rejected Our signs, and said, "When we are reduced to bones and broken dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new creation?"*
99. *Have they not seen that God who created the heavens and the earth is able to create the like of them, and has appointed for them a term about which there is no doubt? But the wrongdoers persist in disbelieving.*
100. *Say, "If you had control of the treasures of the mercy of my Lord, you would have kept them back, for fear of spending them. Humankind is indeed stingy."*
101. *And verily We gave Moses nine clear signs. Do ask the Children of Israel when he came to them, then Pharaoh said to him, "Moses, I think you are bewitched."*
102. *Moses said, "You know well that these things have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth as eye-opening evidence. Pharaoh, I believe you are indeed doomed to destruction."*
103. *And he wished to scare them from the land, but We drowned him and those with him, all together.*
104. *And We said to the Children of Israel after him, "Dwell in the land; but when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass We shall bring you as a crowd gathered out of various nations."*
105. *We sent down the (Quran) in truth, and in truth has it descended. And We did not send you except as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner.*
106. *(It is) a Quran which We have divided in parts, in order that you recite it to the people over a long period of time. We have revealed it in stages.*
107. *Say, "Whether you believe in it or not, it is true that those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them, fall down prostrate on their faces."*
108. *And they say, "Glory to our Lord, verily the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled."*
109. *They fall down on their faces in tears, and it increases their humility.*
110. *Say, "Call upon God, or call upon Al-Rahman. By whatever name you call upon Him, for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Do not raise your voice in your prayer, nor say it in a low voice, but seek a middle course in between."*
111. *Say, "Praise be to God, who begat no son, and has no associate in (His) dominion. He did not need any to protect Him from humiliation. Magnify Him for His greatness and glory." (17: 73 – 111)*

*"And their purpose was to tempt you away from that which We had revealed to you, to substitute in our name something quite different; and then they would have accepted you as a friend. And had We not given you strength, you would nearly have inclined to them a little. Then We would have made you taste double (of punishment) in this life, and double after death, and moreover you would have found none to help you against Us. Their purpose was to scare you off the land, in order to expel you; but in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after you, except for a little while. (This was Our) way with the messengers We sent before you. You will not find a change in Our ways." The verses refer to the attempts that the idolaters of Mecca tried with the*

Prophet (PBUH) to sway him from performing his task. They tried to reach a compromise with him. At one time they offered to worship his God and in return he should stop criticizing their gods. Another time some of them wanted to make their land sacred land like the land around the Sacred Mosque. A third time the chiefs wanted exclusive audience with Muhammad (PBUH), no one except them would be allowed to attend. The verses do not give details of such attempts but simply remind the Prophet (PBUH) that it is by the grace of God that he was able to stay the course according to the revelation he received.

The attempts that the idolaters of Mecca tried are a classic example of the way people in authority deal with people of principles. They try to get them to compromise their principles. Initial compromises may be minor but as time passes the compromise increases and soon the initial message would be replaced by a completely different thing.

When the idolaters of Mecca failed to sway the Prophet (PBUH) from his path, they tried to drive him out of Mecca. However, God commanded him to migrate to Medina. The verse states that had the idolaters of Mecca been successful in forcing the Prophet (PBUH) out of Mecca they would have been destroyed, *“Their purpose was to scare you off the land, in order to expel you; but in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after you, except for a little while. (This was Our) way with the messengers We sent before you. You will not find a change in Our ways.”* This is God’s law that does not change.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to connect with God and seek His help and support, *“Establish regular prayers at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and (the recital of) the Quran at dawn. (The recital of) the Quran at dawn is ever witnessed.”* This command was specific to the Prophet (PBUH). He was commanded to pray during the time between sunset till the beginning of the night. Times for regular prayers are known and were given in authentic prophetic traditions. The expression, *“the sun's decline till the darkness of the night,”* alludes to the time of the vanishing day light; while the expression, *“and (the recital of) the Quran at dawn,”* alludes to the beginning of the day. These two times have their impact on the believer. They evoke feelings of complete dedication to God. They inspire the believer to reflect on the signs of God in the universe. The dawn announces the beginning of life at the start of the day as is the prayer which fills the believer’s heart with life.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to perform extra prayer during the night. The voluntary prayers and the recitation of the Quran will strengthen the connection with God which will lead to a high status, *“And during the night wake up and pray, as an extra offering of your own. So that your Lord may raise you to a praised estate.”* Muslims are in great need to follow this advice.

*“And say, ‘My Lord, make me enter a sound entrance and exit a sound exit. And give me from Yourself a sustaining Power.’”* God taught His Prophet (PBUH) this supplication so that he can teach his nation to say it. It is a supplication that requests God to make Muslims truthful from the entrance to the exit, from the beginning to the end. Truthfulness promotes security, purity, and fidelity. The supplication implies that one should seek support and help only from God.

*“And say, ‘Truth has arrived, and falsehood perished. Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish.’”* Falsehood is bound to disappear. History teaches us that no matter how long a kingdom built on falsehood lasted it was bound to be destroyed. Falsehood is bound to perish. Falsehood may be supported by human power and it is certainly supported by Satan but God’s promise is the truth and His power is stronger and everlasting. Whoever tasted the sweetness of faith also tasted the sweetness of God’s promise. Who is more truthful in His promise than God?

*“And We reveal of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers, and it adds only to the perdition of the wrongdoers.”* The Quran brings healing to the believers in so many ways. It is a remedy for confusion, insecurity, and scepticism. It purifies the heart and removes any traces of greed, envy, and immorality. It supports the believer against the temptation of Satan and the whims and desires of the self. The Quran brings stability to the human soul. It supports the intellect with the objectivity of thought. It frees the mind to seek productive ways. The Quran brings remedy to the social illnesses that afflict communities. It provides a theme for the unity of the community, thus bringing peace and security to the life of people. The wrongdoers will not benefit from the mercy and healing that the Quran brings. This fills their hearts with envy and hate. However, they continue in their obstinacy thus become losers.

Those who are left out of the mercy of God suffer the tribulations of life, *“And when We bestow Our blessings on humankind, he turns away and becomes averse; and when ill touches him he is in despair.”* When they receive a bounty they become arrogant forgetting that it is God who bestowed His bounty on them and when they are faced with adversity they despair because they lost their contact with God so they have no hope in His mercy. The believers on the other hand are grateful to God when they receive His bounty; and they seek His mercy when they face adversity. Each behaves according to his own disposition, *“Say, ‘Everyone acts according to his own disposition. But your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the way.’”*

The Quran provided direct and simple answers to the questions people asked the Prophet (PBUH). However, some questions were beyond the level of human understanding, *“They ask you concerning the Spirit. Say, ‘The Spirit is of the affairs of my Lord. And you have not been given of knowledge except a little.’”* This answer did not place a ban on the curiosity of human mind but simply indicated that there are areas of knowledge that are beyond human understanding.

*“If We had willed, We could take away that which We have revealed to you, then you would find no guardian for you against Us. Except (We have left it with you) as mercy from your Lord. Indeed, the bounty He bestowed on you is great.”* The revelation which the Prophet (PBUH) has received is a bounty from God. God could continue His revelation or could stop it anytime He wants.

God composed this Quran. No one can compose a similar book. Even if the humans and jinn collaborated together, they cannot compose a similar book, *“If the whole of humankind and jinn*

were to gather together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.” The jinn and the humans represent the unseen and seen creatures of God. Only God knows the secrets of the Quran and the Spirit.

In addition to its miraculous linguistic composition, the Quran presents a complete, comprehensive, and consistent way of life; a way of life that addresses the needs of the individual as well as the community. It provides for all contingencies that can be encountered in the life of the individual and the community. Its rules and injunctions show deep understanding of the human initial natural dispositions and the community dynamics.

*“And We have explained to the people, in this Quran, every kind of similitude, but most people persist in disbelieving. They say, ‘We shall not believe in you, until you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the ground, or (until) you have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water; or you cause the sky to fall in pieces on us, as you claimed will happen; or you bring God and the angels before (us) face to face; or you have a house adorned with gold; or you ascend into the skies. No, we shall not even believe in your ascension until you send down to us a book that we could read.’ Say, ‘Glory to my Lord, was I ever but a human messenger.’”* They failed to appreciate the miracle of the Quran, so they requested a number of physical miracles. They requested the Prophet (PBUH) to cause a spring to gush out from the ground, to produce a garden with rivers flowing through it, to make pieces from the sky to fall down on them, to ask God and the angels to come face to face with them, to have a house adorned with gold, or to ascend into the sky; even then they will not believe unless he brings them a book that they can read. These were requests that reflected their immaturity and obstinacy. They failed to appreciate the real challenge that was posed to them in the Quran. They were challenged to compose a book similar to the Quran.

*“What prevented people from believing when the guidance came to them save that they said, ‘Has God sent a mortal as (His) messenger?’”* People thought that God should send an angel to deliver His message. They thought it is farfetched that God would send a human being as a messenger. They underestimated the value of their humanity. They did not understand that God has honored humankind and gave him a status higher than many of His creation. They also did not understand the nature of the angels. The angels were not created to live on earth, *“Say, ‘If there were on the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down for them from heaven an angel as a messenger.’”* Had God willed the angels to live on earth, He would have given them the form of human beings, because this is the form that is suitable for life on earth, *“And if We had made him an angel, We would certainly have made him a man.”* (6: 9) God has the power to do what He pleases but He created laws to govern His creation. These laws do not change. At this point, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to end the argument by referring the whole matter to God, *“Say, ‘God suffices as a witness between me and you. Indeed, He is Totally-Aware and All-Seeing of His servants.’”* The statement embodies an implicit warning. The consequences of the actions of those who reject faith is explained, *“It is he whom God guides, that is on true guidance; but he whom He leaves to go astray, you will find no protecting guardians besides Him. On the Day of Judgment, We shall gather them together, on their faces, blind, dumb and deaf; their habitation will be Hell. Whenever it subsides, We increase its flame for them. That is their recompense, because they rejected Our signs, and said, ‘When we are reduced to bones and broken dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new creation?’ Have*



*they not seen that God who created the heavens and the earth is able to create the like of them, and has appointed for them a term about which there is no doubt? But the wrongdoers persist in disbelieving.*” God has decreed that those who seek guidance should follow a specified route. Those who do not follow the route that God has specified for achieving guidance will be misguided. Humankind was created with equal propensity for good and evil and they were given the freedom to choose the route they want to take. Those who seek guidance and embark on the route that God has specified for guidance will be helped in their endeavor by God. Those are the truly guided. Those who chose to turn their back to the route of guidance will have no one to support them and on the Day of Judgment they will be ushered to Hell fire in a humiliating way. This is a bad ending but that was their choice. They found it hard to believe that there will be resurrection after death. Did they not realize that God who created the heavens and earth is able to raise them after death?

Those who asked the Prophet (PBUH) to bring them physical miracles were in actual fact stingy. Even if God were to give them His treasures, they would not have entertained the desire to spend out of their wealth, *“Say, ‘If you had control of the treasures of the mercy of my Lord, you would have kept them back, for fear of spending them. Humankind is indeed stingy.’”* In spite of the fact that the treasures of the mercy of God are limitless, they would still be unable to spend.

The Sura started with a reference to Prophet Moses (PBUH) and the Children of Israel and ends with a reference to their story and the story of the demise of Pharaoh, *“And verily We gave Moses nine clear signs. Do ask the Children of Israel when he came to them, then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Moses, I think you are bewitched.’”* The nine signs that were given to Moses’ (PBUH) included the miracles of turning his hand to become illuminated without a disease, and transforming his staff to become a serpent. They also included the punishments which God inflicted on the Egyptians. These were the draught, the scarcity of crops, the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, and the blood. Pharaoh, the tyrant accused Moses (PBUH) of sorcery because he did not tolerate Moses (PBUH) call to the truth and the worship of God. Moses (PBUH) stood in the face of the tyrant because he was assured of God’s help, *“Moses said, ‘You know well that these things have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth as eye-opening evidence. Pharaoh, I believe you are indeed doomed to destruction.’”*

Pharaoh tried to use his material power to punish Moses (PBUH) and his people but God was ever watching, *“And he wished to scare them from the land, but We drowned him and those with him, all together.”* The tyrant was drowned and the meek inherited the land, *“And We said to the Children of Israel after him, ‘Dwell in the land; but when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass We shall bring you as a crowd gathered out of various nations.’”* Everyone will be called upon on the Day of Judgment to account for their deeds.

The Quran was revealed with the truth; it is an everlasting sign for people to heed the truth. It has been revealed in parts so it can be recited over a long period of time, *“We sent down the (Quran) in truth, and in truth has it descended. And We did not send you except as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner. (It is) a Quran which We have divided in parts, in order that you recite it*

*to the people over a long period of time. We have revealed it in stages.*” The Quran embodied the details of a way of life to be followed by a nation of believers. This nation was commanded to present this way of life to the whole humanity. The Quran was revealed over a long period of time to use practical life situations to teach the nation God’s way of life. It provided a meticulously designed program to be implemented over a specified time plan. The first generation of Muslims listened to the Quran as it was revealed, they understood it, and they implemented it in their daily life. Ibn Mas’ood (RA) said, *“We used to read ten verses at a time, we do not move to the next ten verses until we have understood the first ten and implemented them in our daily life.”*

This Quran was revealed with the truth to establish the truth; its contents are the truth and its objective is to establish the truth. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to call the people to submit to the truth but to leave to them the choice whether they believe in it or not. They should be willing to face the consequences of their choice, *“Say, ‘Whether you believe in it or not, it is true that those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them, fall down prostrate on their faces. And they say, ‘Glory to our Lord, verily the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled.’ They fall down on their faces in tears, and it increases their humility.”* Verses paint a scene that moves the inner self of the human being, the scene of those who were given the knowledge before the revelation of the Quran. When they listened to the Quran they could not control their feelings; they fell down prostrating, their eyes flowing with tears. They recognized the truth of the Quran and they realized that the promise of God has been fulfilled.

The verses turn again to the idolaters of Mecca telling them to call upon God using any of His beautiful names. They should not follow the myth of the idol worship which prohibited them from calling God Al-Rahman, *“Say, ‘Call upon God, or call upon Al-Rahman. By whatever name you call upon Him, for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Do not raise your voice in your prayer, nor say it in a low voice, but seek a middle course in between.’”* The rules regarding the level of voice which Muslims should use during the prayer were set.

The Sura is concluded as it was started, by praising God and stating His uniqueness and His independence. *Say, “Praise be to God, who begat no son, and has no associate in (His) dominion. He did not need any to protect Him from humiliation. Magnify Him for His greatness and glory.”*

## **Sura18: Al-Kahf (The Cave)**

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

A major part of this Sura is dedicated to the narration of a number of stories. The rest of the Sura provides a commentary on these stories, in addition to a description of a scene from the Day of Judgment. The stories narrated include the story of the companions of the cave, the story of the two gardens, the story of Moses (PBUH) and the righteous man, and the story of Zulqarnain. In addition, there is a brief reference to the story of Adam (PBUH) and Iblis. The stories are used to emphasize the main topical theme of the Sura. The main topical theme of the Sura discusses the use of true faith as a standard to define the foundation of the sound way of life and its values.

Hawwa mentions that the stories of the companions of the cave and Zulqarnain were narrated in response to the questions posed by the pagans of Mecca. He quotes al-Souoti in narrating the following story.

The pagans of Mecca consulted with the Jews of Medina about how to ascertain the prophet-hood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Jews suggested that they should ask him about three things: What is the spirit, what is the story of the companions of the cave, and what is the story of Zulqarnain. They said that if he answered these questions correctly, this would prove that he is a true prophet. The answer to the first question was given in Surat al-Israa, while the answers to the other two questions was mentioned in this Sura.

Hawwa also mentions the great benefits and blessings that accrue as a result of reciting Surat al-Kahf especially on Fridays.

### **Verses 1 to 27:**

- 1. Praise be to God who sent down the Book upon His servant, and did not place any crookedness in it.*
- 2. (He has made it) Straight (and clear) in order that He may warn (the godless) of a terrible punishment from Him, and that He may give glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds, that they shall have a goodly reward.*
- 3. In which they shall remain forever.*
- 4. And to warn those who say, "God has taken a son."*
- 5. They have no knowledge of such a thing, nor had their fathers. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths. They speak nothing but a lie.*
- 6. Perchance you would fret yourself to death, in grief, over them if they do not believe in this message.*
- 7. We have made whatever is on the earth an embellishment for it, so that We may try them (as to) which of them is best in deeds.*
- 8. Verily, We shall make what is on earth a barren ground.*
- 9. Or did you think that the Companions of the Cave and of the Inscription were some of Our wonderful signs?*
- 10. When the young men fled to the cave seeking refuge and said, "Our Lord, grant us mercy from Your presence, and provide for us a right course in our affair.*

11. *Then We sealed up their hearing in the Cave for a number of years.*
12. *Then We roused them, in order to test which of the two parties was best at calculating the time they had remained.*
13. *We narrate to you their story with truth. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance.*
14. *We strengthened their hearts when they stood up and said, "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We call upon no god beside Him, for then we would be uttering a transgression.*
15. *These, our people, have taken gods other than Him though they bring no clear proof. Who is in greater wrong than he who invents a lie against God?*
16. *And when you abandon them and that which they worship except God, then seek refuge in the cave; your Lord will spread for you of His mercy and will prepare for you an easy way out from your ordeal."*
17. *And (had you been present) you would have seen the sun, when it rose, declining to the right from their cave, and when it set, turning away from them to the left, while they lay in the open space in the midst of the cave. Such are among the signs of God. He whom God guides is rightly guided; but he whom God leaves to go astray, for him you will not find a protecting guardian to guide him.*
18. *(Had you seen them) You would have thought they were awake, while they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides, their dog stretching his two fore-legs on the threshold. Had you seen them, you would have certainly turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with terror of them.*
19. *And thus We awakened them that they might question one another. A speaker from among them said, "How long have you remained?" They said, "We remained a day or some part of a day." (Others) said, "Your Lord knows best how long you remained. Now send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city, and let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply thereof. Let him be courteous and let no one know of you.*
20. *For if they should come upon you, they would stone you or force you to return to their cult, and in that case you would never succeed."*
21. *Thus did We make their case known to the people, that they might know that the promise of God is true, and that there can be no doubt about the Hour of Judgment. They disputed among themselves as to their affair. (Some) said, "Construct a building over them," Their Lord knows best about them. Those who prevailed over their affair said, "Let us surely build a place of worship over them."*
22. *(Some) will say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; and (some) say they were five, the dog being the sixth, doubtfully guessing at the unknown; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog being the eighth. Say, "My Lord knows best their number." It is but few that know their (real case). Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about (the affair of) them (the sleepers).*
23. *And never say of anything, "Indeed I shall do that tomorrow,"*
24. *Except if God wills. And remember your Lord when you forget, and say, "It may be that my Lord guides me to a way nearer to the truth than this."*
25. *And (it is said) they remained in their cave three hundred years plus nine.*

26. Say, "God knows best how long they stayed." With Him is (the knowledge of) the secrets of the heavens and the earth. How clearly He sees, how finely He hears (everything.) They have no protecting guardian other than Him; nor does He share His command with any person whatsoever.
27. And recite that which has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. None can change His words, and you will not a refuge other than Him. (18: 1 - 27)

*"Praise be to God who sent down the Book upon His servant, and did not place any crookedness in it. (He has made it) Straight (and Clear) in order that He may warn (the godless) of a terrible punishment from Him, and that He may give glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds, that they shall have a goodly reward, In which they shall remain forever. And to warn those who say, "God has taken a son." They have no knowledge of such a thing, nor had their fathers. Grave is the word that comes out of their mouths. They speak nothing but a lie. Perchance you would fret yourself to death, in grief, over them if they do not believe in this Message. We have made whatever is on the earth an embellishment for it, so that We may try them (as to) which of them is best in deeds. Verily, We shall make what is on earth a barren ground."* From the outset the verses set a clear framework for the doctrine. God is the One who revealed the Book, we should be grateful to God, Muhammad (PBUH) is God's servant, and God did not beget a son. The verses emphasize the clarity and authenticity of the Book. Its meanings are forthright and there is no deviation or ambiguity in them. The goal of the Book is clear; it brings a warning and a glad tidings. The language used to issue the warning is stern. First a general warning is issued followed by a specific warning to those who claim that God has begotten a son. They have no knowledge to support their claim. This is a major sin since it deals with the essence of the faith. The way the verse was worded magnifies the gravity of the sin by suggesting that their uttering is like a bullet coming out of their mouths. Then it emphasizes the falsity of their claim.

One can detect a note of disapproval, *"Perchance you would fret yourself to death, in grief, over them if they do not believe in this message."* The verse addresses the Prophet (PBUH) telling him that he should not feel bad about those people who rejected guidance. God created the earth and its ornaments as a testing ground for people. God knows what each and every one will do but He will only hold people accountable for their actions not according to His knowledge. This is out of God's immense mercy and fairness. In the end the earth will lose all its ornaments and become a barren ground.

The following verses tell the story of the companions of the cave. The story portrays an example of how faith brings security to the believing soul. The companions of the cave preferred to flee with their faith seeking refuge in an abandoned cave rather than enjoy the pleasures of life living in a faithless atmosphere. God rewarded them for their deeds and made them an example for humanity. The verses present a summary for the story first then it delves into the details of the story.

*"Or did you think that the Companions of the Cave and of the Inscription were some of Our wonderful signs? When the young men fled to the cave seeking refuge and said, 'Our Lord, grant us mercy from Your presence, and provide for us a right course in our affair.' Then We sealed up their hearing in the Cave for a number of years. Then We roused them, in order to test which of*

*the two parties was best at calculating the time they had remained.*” This is a summary of the story from which we know that the companions of the cave were young people – of unknown number – who were believers and they sought refuge in a cave. God put them to sleep for a number of years then He aroused them after their long sleep. Although this is an amazing story, but God’s signs in the universe around us are more amazing.

This was the summary, now we come to the details, *“We narrate to you their story with truth. They were young men who believed in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance. We strengthened their hearts when they stood up and said, “Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We call upon no god beside Him, for then we would be uttering a transgression. These, our people, have taken gods other than Him though they bring no clear proof. Who is in greater wrong than he who invents a lie against God?”* This is the first scene in the story. Because they were young believers they received more guidance from God which enabled them to make the right decision. God strengthened their hearts and filled them with security and pride in their faith. They stood up against their people who were idol worshipers and acknowledged their own monotheistic faith. They were steadfast in rejecting any form of associating partners with God. They had no recourse but to part ways with their people because their ways became irreconcilable. They decided to flee with their faith. They were not messengers of God so they were not responsible for guiding their people to the right path. They were simply a group of young men who believed in God and could not live in this disbelieving environment. They made their belief known. They must have been persecuted by their people. Their only course of action which was available for them to escape the persecution was to flee to a cave. .

*“And when you abandon them and that which they worship except God, then seek refuge in the cave; your Lord will spread for you of His mercy and will prepare for you an easy way out from your ordeal.”* It is amazing how the mercy of God fills the hearts of the believers who abandoned their people and left the comfortable life of the city to the rugged life of the cave. God’s mercy filled their hearts with tranquility and strength so they felt comfortable in the cave.

*“And (had you been present) you would have seen the sun, when it rose, declining to the right from their cave, and when it set, turning away from them to the left, while they lay in the open space in the midst of the cave. Such are among the signs of God. He whom God guides is rightly guided; but he whom God leaves to go astray, for him you will not find a protecting guardian to guide him. (Had you seen them) You would have thought they were awake, while they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides, their dog stretching his two fore-legs on the threshold. Had you seen them, you would have certainly turned back from them in flight, and would certainly have been filled with terror of them.”* The verses paint a dynamic scene as if it were a movie showing how the young men slept and how the sun moved away from the cave so that it would not disturb their sleep. These are signs of God. They stayed alive all this time. God’s guidance is controlled by His law. There are means for seeking and receiving guidance. Those who seek guidance and use the means that God has decreed will be guided by God. Those who reject guidance will never find anyone to guide them. The depiction of the scene continues. God moved them around in their sleep and the dog was sitting at the entrance of the cave as if it was providing protection. Anyone who saw them would run away in fear. This

was God's plan.

Then they got up, *“And thus We awakened them that they might question one another. A speaker from among them said, ‘How long have you remained?’ They said, ‘We remained a day or some part of a day.’ (Others) said, ‘Your Lord knows best how long you remained. Now send one of you with this silver coin of yours to the city, and let him see what food is purest there and bring you a supply thereof. Let him be courteous and let no one know of you. For if they should come upon you, they would stone you or force you to return to their cult, and in that case you would never succeed.’”* The verses describe the scene when they woke up. They did not know how long they had slept. Since they had no way of knowing how long they slept, they continued to discuss how they were going to get food from the town without being detected. They were afraid that if they were detected they would be captured and tortured or executed; and if they were forced to abandon their faith then this would be the greatest loss.

We understand from the narrative that while the young men were sleeping in the cave the people of the town had become believers. The people of the town celebrated the return of the young people. One can imagine the enormity of the surprise the young men must have experienced when they realized how long the period they spent sleeping. Their return was a miracle and people treated them as celebrities. But they have lost all ties to the community. The people they knew and cared for were all long gone. It was the mercy of God that now they would actually die. We can imagine all these intermediate scenes, but the Quran moves directly to the scene when they died. People were arguing how they should celebrate their story to keep their memory alive, *“Thus did We make their case known to the people, that they might know that the promise of God is true, and that there can be no doubt about the Hour of Judgment. They disputed among themselves as to their affair. (Some) said, ‘Construct a building over them,’ their Lord knows best about them. Those who prevailed over their affair said, ‘Let us surely build a place of worship over them.’”* The main lesson to be learned from this story is the fact that God is able to resurrect people after death. There is no doubt that God's promise will be fulfilled and that the Day of Judgement will come.

There were several stories about the number of these young people, *“(Some) will say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; and (some) say they were five, the dog being the sixth, doubtfully guessing at the unknown; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog being the eighth. Say, ‘My Lord knows best their number.’ It is but few that know their (real case). Enter not, therefore, into controversies concerning them, except on a matter that is clear, nor consult any of them about (the affair of) them (the sleepers).”* It is really not important to know how many they were. God knows their exact count. The objective of the story has been achieved whether they were many or few. So the Quran commands the Prophet (PBUH) not to get into an argument with anyone about their number.

*“And never say of anything, ‘Indeed I shall do that tomorrow,’”* Every move one makes and every breath one inhales is controlled by God's will. Humankind is unable to see beyond the present moment. So do not say that you will do this tomorrow, because tomorrow is unseen as far as mortals are concerned. This does not mean that we stop thinking and planning about the

future, but what it means is that we need to enlist God's help for the success of our plans. Humankind must think and plan but he should realize that his thoughts and his planning are a blessing from God. One has to do one's best to achieve his/her goal but should realize that the results are in the hand of God. One has to accept the results that God has decreed and submit to His will, *"Except if God wills. And remember your Lord when you forget, and say, 'It may be that my Lord guides me to a nearer way of truth than this.'"*

The narrative comes back to the story of the companions of the cave, *"And (it is said) they remained in their cave three hundred years plus nine. Say, 'God knows best how long they stayed.' With Him is (the knowledge of) the secrets of the heavens and the earth. How clearly He sees, how finely He hears (everything.) They have no protecting guardian other than Him; nor does He share His Command with any person whatsoever."* The verse states the principle of the oneness of God which is the underlying theme of the story.

A command was then issued to the Prophet (PBUH), *"And recites that which has been revealed to you of the Book of your Lord. None can change His words, and you will not a refuge other than Him."*

## Verses 28 to 46

28. *And persevere with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who follows his own whim and whose affair is ever in neglect.*
29. *And Say, "The truth is from your Lord." Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve. We have prepared for the disbelievers Fire. They will be surrounded by it from all sides. If they ask for relief, they will be showered with water like molten lead which burns the faces, evil the drink and ill the resting-place.*
30. *As to those who believe and do good deeds, verily We shall not waste the reward of any who does a good deed.*
31. *For them will be Gardens of Eden; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade. They will recline therein on raised couches. Excellent is the recompense and good is the resting place.*
32. *Set forth to them the parable of two men. For one of them We provided two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date palms; in between the two We placed corn-fields.*
33. *Each of those gardens brought forth its produce, and failed not in the least therein. In the midst of them We caused a river to flow.*
34. *(Abundant) was the produce this man had. He said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument, "I have more wealth, honour, and power than you."*
35. *And he went into his garden, while he (thus) wronged himself. He said, "I think not that all this will ever perish."*



36. *I do not think that the Hour will ever come, and if indeed I am brought back to my Lord I will most certainly find better than this as a resort.*
37. *His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him, "Did you reject Him who created you out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned you into a man?"*
38. *But He is God, my Lord, and I do not associate anyone with my Lord.*
39. *If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, "That which God wills (will come to pass.) There is no strength save that given by God. Though you see me as less than you in wealth and children,*
40. *Yet it may be that my Lord will give me better than your garden, and will send on it a bolt from the sky, and some morning it will be a smooth ground without plants;*
41. *Or the water of the garden will run off underground so that you will never be able to find it."*
42. *So his fruits were destroyed, and he remained twisting and turning his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very foundations, and he could only say, "I wish I had not associated partners with my Lord."*
43. *And he had no one to help him against God, nor could he save himself.*
44. *Protection comes only from the True God, He provides the best reward, and guarantees the best outcome.*
45. *Set forth to them the similitude of the life of this world. It is like the rain which we send down from the skies. The earth's vegetation absorbs it, but soon it becomes dry stubble, which the winds do scatter. It is (only) God who has power over all things.*
46. *Wealth and children are the ornament of the life of this world. But good deeds which endure are better in your Lord's sight for reward, and better grounds for hope. (18: 28 – 46)*

The following verses establish the values which are entrenched in the Islamic faith. Wealth, authority, power, and material pleasures are not the true values of human life. These are all transient commodities. Islam allows its adherents to enjoy these pleasures when they are obtained through legitimate means. One should be grateful to God that allowed the enjoyment of such pleasures. However, these pleasures should not be an end in themselves and the good deeds that endure are better than the transient pleasures. The Quran commands the Prophet (PBUH) to choose the company of those who remember God over the company of those who are heedless, *"And persevere with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face; and let not your eyes pass beyond them, seeking the pomp and glitter of this Life; nor obey any whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who follows his own whim and whose affair is ever in neglect. And Say, "The truth is from your Lord." Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve. We have prepared for the disbelievers Fire. They will be surrounded by it from all sides. If they ask for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten lead which burns the faces, evil the drink and ill the resting-place."*

It is narrated that this verse was revealed when some of the chiefs of Quraish wanted a private audience with the Prophet (PBUH) that does not include the poverty stricken Muslims like Bilal (RA), Suhaib (RA), 'Ammar (RA) and others. The Prophet (PBUH) thought that may be if he granted the chiefs their request they would adopt Islam. This verse came down to establish a fundamental principle and to outline the correct values of life. The Prophet (PBUH) should be

perseverant and continue with those who continuously seek God's blessings. These are the people who will be willing to support the message wholeheartedly. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to keep their company and not to listen to a person, "*whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who follows his own whim and whose affair is ever in neglect.*" A heart that is full of love for the transient worldly pleasures has no room for God's remembrance, it is a heedless heart.

Islam came to make all people equal. The status of people should neither be decided on the basis of wealth nor on the basis of power. The status of people is decided on the basis of their dedication and devotion to God.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to, "*Say, 'The truth is from your Lord.'* Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve." This is an unequivocal statement that establishes a firm rule. There is no compromise regarding matters of doctrine. The doctrine has been established by God, no one else has the power to change it.

The end of the disbelievers is presented through a depiction of one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, "*We have prepared for disbelievers Fire. They will be surrounded by it from all sides. If they ask for relief, they will be relieved with water like molten lead which burns the faces, evil is the drink and ill is the resting-place.*" But the believers will enjoy their reward, "*As to those who believe and do good deeds, verily We shall not waste the reward of any who does a good deed. For them will be Gardens of Eden; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade. They will recline therein on raised couches. Excellent is the recompense and good is the resting place.*"

The subsequent verses narrate the story of two men one of them had two gardens while the other did not have any. The story depicts two kinds of people, the rich man who embraced the worldly life and the poor man who finds his pride in his faith. The rich man whose indulgence in the worldly pleasures made him forget about God and the Hereafter; and the believing man who continuously remembers God realizing that whatever he has is a blessing from God for which he should express his gratitude. The first scene is the scene of two blooming gardens, "*Set forth to them the parable of two men. For one of them We provided two gardens of grape-vines and surrounded them with date palms; in between the two We placed corn-fields. Each of those gardens brought forth its produce, and failed not in the least therein. In the midst of them We caused a river to flow. (Abundant) was the produce this man had.*" The two gardens were blooming with grapes, the palm trees produced dates, and there are plenty of crops in between. It is a beautiful scene that reflects vivid life and richness. The gardens gave their produce in full, nothing was lost. When the owner of the gardens looked at them he became arrogant, "*He said to his companion, in the course of a mutual argument, 'I have more wealth, honour, and power than you.'*" He forgot that it is God who bestows His bounty on people. His arrogance made him reject the truth of the Day of Judgement, "*And he went into his garden, while he (thus) wronged himself. He said, 'I think not that all this will ever perish. I do not think that the Hour will ever come, and if indeed I am brought back to my Lord I will most certainly find better than this as a*

*resort.”*

The other man did not have gardens and he was poor but he was proud to espouse the everlasting values of this life. He was proud of his faith and proud of the blessings of God. He warned his companion of the evil consequences of his attitude; he advised him to remember God’s bounty and to show gratitude to God, *“His companion said to him, in the course of the argument with him, ‘Did you reject Him who created you out of dust, then out of a sperm-drop, then fashioned you into a man? But He is God, my Lord, and I do not associate anyone with my Lord. If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, “That which God wills (will come to pass.) There is no strength save that given by God.” Though you see me as less than you in wealth and children, Yet it may be that my Lord will give me better than your garden, and will send on it a bolt from the sky, and some morning it will be a smooth ground without plants; or the water of the garden will run off underground so that you will never be able to find it.’”*

The narrative suddenly moved from the scene of the blooming gardens to the scene of destruction and devastation. The arrogant man became sorry for what he had done. What the believing man had expected happened, *“So his fruits were destroyed, and he remained twisting and turning his hands over what he had spent on his property, which had (now) tumbled to pieces to its very foundations, and he could only say, ‘I wish I had not associated partners with my Lord.’”* The two gardens were completely destroyed and no produce was left.

Only God has the absolute power, *“And he had no one to help him against God, nor could he save himself. Protection comes only from the True God, He provides the best reward, and guarantees the best outcome.”*

The example of the life of this world is like the example of the two gardens. It will not last long, *“Set forth to them the similitude of the life of this world. It is like the rain which we send down from the skies. The earth's vegetation absorbs it, but soon it becomes dry stubble, which the winds do scatter. It is (only) God who has power over all things.”* This is a very short scene appropriate for the example being struck for the short duration of the life of this world. But the real value of this life is given, *“Wealth and children are the ornament of the life of this world. But good deeds which endure are better in your Lord's sight for reward, and better grounds for hope.”* Wealth and children are the ornaments of this worldly life but they should not be used as criteria for determining the eminence of people. The real value is gained by doing good deeds which endure.

### **Verses 47 to 59:**

- 47. And (warn of) the day on which We will cause the mountains to pass away and you will see the earth exposed and We will gather them and leave not any one of them behind.*
- 48. And they will be marshalled before your Lord in ranks, (and it will be said to them), “Now you have come to Us as We created you the first time and you thought We shall not fulfill the appointment made to you to meet (Us).”*

49. *And the record will be placed, and you will see the guilty fearful of that which is therein, and they will say, "What kind of record is this that does leave out neither a small thing nor a great thing but counted it." And they will find all that they did present (before them), and your Lord wrongs no one.*
50. *And (remember) when We said to the angels, "Fall prostrate before Adam," and they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He was of the jinn, so he rebelled against his Lord's command. Will you take him and his seed as your protecting guardians instead of Me, when they are your enemy? Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange.*
51. *I did not make them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation; I would not have taken those who lead (others) astray as helpers.*
52. *And (be mindful of) the Day when He will say, "Call those whom you claimed as partners of Mine." Then they will call them, but they will not respond to their call, and We shall set a gulf of doom between them.*
53. *And the guilty will see the Fire and will know that they are about to fall therein, and they will find no way of escape from it.*
54. *Verily, We have explained in detail in this Quran, for the benefit of humankind, every kind of similitude; but humankind is more contentious than any other 'thing.'*
55. *And what prevented people from believing now that guidance has come to them, and from asking the forgiveness of their Lord, except that what happened to the ancients should overtake them, or (that) they should be confronted with the torment.*
56. *We only send the messengers to give glad tidings and to give warnings. But the disbelievers dispute with vain argument, in order therewith to weaken the truth; and they treat My revelation and the warning that had been issued to them as a jest.*
57. *And who does greater wrong than one who is reminded of the revelations of his Lord, but turns away from them, forgetting the (deeds) which his hands have sent forth? Verily We have set veils over their hearts lest they should understand this, and deafness over their ears. If you call them to guidance, they will never follow the right course.*
58. *Your Lord is All-Forgiving, Full of Mercy. If He took them to task (now) for what they earned, He would hasten on the torment for them; but theirs is an appointed term from which they will find no escape.*
59. *And (all) those townships, We destroyed them when they acted unjustly, and We have appointed a time for their destruction. (18: 47 – 59)*

*"And (warn of) the day on which We will cause the mountains to pass away and you will see the earth exposed and We will gather them and leave not any one of them behind. And they will be marshalled before your Lord in ranks, (and it will be said to them), "Now you have come to Us as We created you the first time and you thought We shall not fulfill the appointment made to you to meet (Us)." The verses paint a scene using elements from the nature to emphasize the horror on the Day of Judgment. The panic on that day will move the heavy stable mountains. The earth will be exposed as an open flat page; similarly, the secrets of the hearts will be exposed. Everyone will be gathered, from the time of Adam (PBUH) to the end of time, and they will be standing in rows in front of their Lord. The narrative changes from the mode of description to the mode of addressing people who will be gathered on that day. They thought that this day will never come but here it is and you are standing in front of your Lord feeling humiliated.*

Then the narrative continues, *“And the record will be placed, and you will see the guilty fearful of that which is therein, and they will say, ‘What kind of record is this that does leave out neither a small thing nor a great thing but counted it.’ And they will find all that they did present (before them), and your Lord wrongs no one.”* They will get their records, very meticulous records that do not leave anything out. They will be held accountable for what they did and they will get their fair recompense. God does not wrong anyone.

Those who will be regretting their actions on the Day of Judgement were forewarned about Satan and how he was determined to lead them astray, in spite of that they followed him, *“And (remember) when We said to the angels, ‘Fall prostrate before Adam,’ and they fell prostrate, all save Iblis. He was of the jinn, so he rebelled against his Lord's command. Will you take him and his seed as your protecting friends instead of Me, when they are your enemy? Wretched it is for the wrongdoers as an exchange.”* The reference to the story of Adam (PBUH) and Iblis is made to express how amazing it is that the descendants of Adam (PBUH) still fall for the temptation of the descendants of Iblis after they had realized that they were their enemies. They have taken the descendants of Satan as their protecting friends when they fell for their temptation and disobeyed God. Why did the criminals take the descendants of Satan as protecting friends while they had no extraordinary knowledge or power, *“I did not make them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation; I would not have taken those who lead (others) astray as helpers.”* God is independent, He does not need helpers but the verse exposes the myth that the idolaters were propagating. They thought that Satan and his descendants have extraordinary knowledge and power.

On the Day of Judgement God will address the guilty, *“And (be mindful of) the Day when He will say, ‘Call those whom you claimed as partners of Mine.’ Then they will call them, but they will not respond to their call, and We shall set a gulf of doom between them. And the guilty will see the Fire and will know that they are about to fall therein, and they will find no way of escape from it.”* The disbelievers will be placed in a difficult position. They will be asked to produce those whom they associated with God but they will not find them. They will look up and see the Fire and will realize that this is their end.

*“Verily, We have explained in detail in this Quran, for the benefit of humankind, every kind of similitude; but humankind is more contentious than any other ‘thing.’”* The verse refers to humankind as a *“thing,”* and as *“contentious,”* to induce humankind to moderate his arrogance and make him realize that God has created so many other creatures. Humankind was more contentious than any of the other creatures of God.

*“And what prevented people from believing now that guidance has come to them, and from asking the forgiveness of their Lord, except that what happened to the ancients should overtake them, or (that) they should be confronted with the torment.”* Many earlier generations received guidance from God but they always challenged the messengers to bring about the punishment that they were threatened with. The messengers’ role was only to deliver the message not to exact punishment, *“We only send the messengers to give glad tidings and to give warnings. But*

*the disbelievers dispute with vain argument, in order therewith to weaken the truth; and they treat My revelation and the warning that had been issued to them as a jest.” The truth was obvious to them but they argued falsely against it, “And who does greater wrong than one who is reminded of the revelations of his Lord, but turns away from them, forgetting the (deeds) which his hands have sent forth? Verily We have set veils over their hearts lest they should understand this, and deafness over their ears. If you call them to guidance, they will never follow the right course.” There is no hope that those who were mocking the Prophet (PBUH), and the verses of the Quran, will ever find guidance. God gave them respite to a specified term, “Your Lord is the All-Forgiving, Full of Mercy. If He took them to task (now) for what they earned, He would hasten on the torment for them; but theirs is an appointed term from which they will find no escape.” They should not misunderstand God’s reprieve because the term will end and they will meet the promised destiny, “And (all) those townships, We destroyed them when they acted unjustly, and We have appointed a time for their destruction.*

## **Verses 60 to 82:**

60. *And when Moses said to his servant, “I will not give up until I reach the point where the two seas meet, or will continue on for ages.”*
61. *But when they reached the junction, they forgot (about) their fish, which took its course into the sea, slipping away.*
62. *And when they had gone further, he said to his servant, “Bring us our midday meal. Verily we have become tired in our journey.”*
63. *He said, “Did you see, when we took refuge on the rock, I forgot the fish - and none but Satan caused me to forget to mention it - it took its way into the sea amazingly.”*
64. *He (Moses) said, “This was what we were seeking.” So they retraced their steps again.*
65. *Then they found one of Our servants, to whom We had given mercy from Us, and had taught him knowledge from Our presence.*
66. *Moses said to him, “May I follow you; that you may teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgment?”*
67. *(The other) said, “Verily you will not be able to have patience with me;*
68. *And how can you have patience about things about which you did not get a comprehensive knowledge?”*
69. *Moses said, “You will find me, if God so wills, perseverant; nor shall I disobey you in any matter.”*
70. *He said, “If you go with me, ask me not concerning anything till I myself make mention of it to you.”*
71. *So they both proceeded until, when they were in the boat, he made a hole therein. (Moses) said, “Did you make a hole therein to drown its people?” You verily did a dreadful thing.”*
72. *He answered, “Did I not say that you will not be able to have patience with me?”*
73. *Moses said, “Do not rebuke me for forgetting, nor be hard upon me for my fault.”*
74. *Then they proceeded until, when they met a young man, he slew him. Moses said, “Did you slew an innocent person who had slain none? Truly you have done a horrid thing.”*
75. *He answered, “Did I not tell you that you will not be able to have patience with me?”*

76. *(Moses) said, "If I ever ask you about anything after this, keep me not in your company. You have received an excuse from me."*
77. *Then they proceeded until, when they came to the inhabitants of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused them hospitality. They found there a wall on the point of falling down, but he set it up straight. (Moses) said, "If you had wished, you could have taken some payment for it."*
78. *He answered, "This is the parting between you and me. Now I will tell you the interpretation of (those things) over which you were unable to hold patience."*
79. *As for the boat, it belonged to poor people working at sea. I wanted to mar it, for there was after them a king who used to seize every boat by force.*
80. *And as for the lad, his parents were believers and we feared that he would oppress them by rebellion and disbelief.*
81. *So we desired that their Lord would give them in exchange (a son) better in purity (of conduct) and closer in affection.*
82. *As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town; and there was a treasure buried beneath it, to which they were entitled. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they should attain their age of full strength and get out their treasure - a mercy (and favour) from your Lord. I did it not of my own accord. Such is the interpretation of (those things) over which you were unable to hold patience." (18: 60 - 82)*

This episode from the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH) appears in this Sura only. The Quran does not specify the location in which it took place. The location is only referred to as, "*the point where the two seas meet.*" The Quran also did not fix the date of this episode. No information was given about the righteous servant of God whom Moses (PBUH) was looking for.

We understand from the narrative that Moses (PBUH) was determined to reach the point at which the two seas meet no matter how difficult it was or how long it would take him to get there, "*And when Moses said to his servant, 'I will not give up until I reach the point where the two seas meet, or will continue on for ages.'*"

*"But when they reached the junction, they forgot (about) their fish, which took its course into the sea, slipping away. And when they had gone further, he said to his servant, 'Bring us our midday meal. Verily we have become tired in our journey.' He said, 'Did you see, when we took refuge on the rock, I forgot the fish - and none but Satan caused me to forget to mention it - it took its way into the sea amazingly.'"* Moses (PBUH) realized that he missed the place where he was supposed to meet the righteous servant of God. So Moses (PBUH) and his servant went back and he found the righteous man at the rock, "*He (Moses) said, 'This was what we were seeking.' So they retraced their steps again. Then they found one of Our servants, to whom We had given mercy from Us, and had taught him knowledge from Our presence."*

It seems that the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and the righteous man was meant to be a confidential meeting. So there is no mention of Moses' (PBUH) servant in the following verses,

“Moses said to him, ‘May I follow you, that you may teach me from what you have been taught of sound judgment?’” Moses (PBUH) requested the righteous man’s company in a very polite way, a way that is befitting of a prophet. He wanted to learn from the righteous man. The knowledge that this man had was not normal human knowledge but it was a special kind of knowledge which the man had received from his Lord. The man realized that Moses (PBUH), being not privy to such knowledge, will not be able to put up with the strange things that they will encounter. So he warned Moses (PBUH), “*(The other) said, ‘Verily you will not be able to have patience with me; and how can you have patience about things about which you did not get comprehensive knowledge?’*” But Moses (PBUH) was determined to accompany the man; he enlisted the help of God to give him patience, “*Moses said, ‘You will find me, if God so wills, perseverant; nor shall I disobey you in any matter.’*” The man then outlined his conditions to allow Moses (PBUH) to accompany him, “*He said, ‘If you go with me, ask me not concerning anything till I myself make mention of it to you.’*” Moses (PBUH) agreed. They proceeded together. The following verse describes the first scene of the trip, “*So they both proceeded until, when they were in the boat, he made a hole therein. (Moses) said, ‘Did you make a hole therein to drown its people? You verily did a dreadful thing.’*” Moses (PBUH) was surprised by what the righteous man did when they boarded the ship among others. The ship was at sea and the righteous man drilled a hole in the ship. It was apparent that this action will cause the ship to sink and subject the people to drowning. Why would the man do this? Moses (PBUH) forgot what the man told him and forgot his promise to the man. Sometimes one agrees to do something in principle but gets to appreciate the gravity of the consequences of the deed when one actually has to perform what he had agreed upon. Moses (PBUH) was told that he would not be able to be patient, seeing surprising things which are happening without an apparent justification. Nevertheless, Moses (PBUH) was determined to accompany the righteous man. Moses asked God for help and made up his mind to be patient but when he saw the man drilling a hole in the ship he could not stand by and watch silently. This behavior was in conformity with Moses (PBUH) personality. It appears that Moses (PBUH) was an emotional and impulsive man. This nature was apparent when he tried to support his fellow Jew and pushed the Egyptian who was fighting with the Jew and the Egyptian fell dead. Moses (PBUH) asked God for forgiveness and God forgave him, but the next day the same story was about to be repeated again.

The righteous man responded to Moses’ (PBUH) objection calmly and nicely, “*He answered, ‘Did I not say that you will not be able to have patience with me?’*” Moses (PBUH) remembered the promise he made so he apologized, “*Moses said, ‘Do not rebuke me for forgetting, nor be hard upon me for my fault.’*” The righteous man accepted his apology and they continued on their trip, “*Then they proceeded until, when they met a young man, he slew him. Moses said, ‘Did you slew an innocent person who had slain none? Truly you have done a horrid thing.’*” Moses (PBUH) could not have stood silent seeing an innocent young man being killed. He objected strenuously. The righteous man responded, “*He answered, ‘Did I not tell you that you will not be able to have patience with me?’*” One can notice the emphasis in the righteous man’s second response, “*Did I not tell you.*” Moses (PBUH) asked the righteous man to give him one last chance, “*(Moses) said, ‘If I ever ask you about anything after this, keep me not in your company. You have received an excuse from me.’*”



They proceeded, *“until, when they came to the inhabitants of a town, they asked them for food, but they refused them hospitality. They found there a wall on the point of falling down, but he set it up straight. (Moses) said, ‘If you had wished, you could have taken some payment for it.’”* They were hungry, the people of the town refused to feed them but the man saw a wall that was about to collapse so he volunteered to repair it. That looked contradictory to Moses (PBUH), again he could not keep himself from sounding his objection. This was his last chance, *“He answered, ‘This is the parting between you and me. Now I will tell you the interpretation of (those things) over which you were unable to hold patience.’”*

So far we are in the same boat as Moses (PBUH). We are facing these surprising acts that the righteous man performed without having any inkling of what was behind them. We do not even know the name of the righteous man. However, what do we gain had we known his name? The lesson that we learn is that the divine wisdom may allow things, which seems unreasonable to us, to happen because they will result in the achievement of beneficial goals in the long term. The fact that the identity of the righteous man was kept hidden is befitting to a story that deals with the knowledge of the unseen.

The righteous man started to explain the reasons behind his actions, *“As for the boat, it belonged to poor people working at sea. I wanted to mar it, for there was after them a king who used to seize every boat by force.”* The hole that the righteous man drilled would render the boat undesirable in the sight of the king and its owners will be able to keep it.

*“And as for the lad, his parents were believers and we feared that he would oppress them by rebellion and disbelief. So we desired that their Lord would give them in exchange (a son) better in purity (of conduct) and closer in affection.”* The young man may have been innocent but he was going to be a tyrant and had he been allowed to live he would have caused his parents a great deal of agony and harm. The decision to kill the young man was based on divine knowledge revealed to the righteous man. Such a decision is not a human prerogative. Human judgement should only be based on known facts. According to Islamic law since the young man did not commit a crime so far he should not have been killed. But here we are dealing with the knowledge of the unseen.

Finally, the matter of the wall is explained, *“As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the town; and there was a treasure buried beneath it, to which they were entitled. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord desired that they should attain their age of full strength and get out their treasure - a mercy (and favour) from your Lord. I did it not of my own accord. Such is the interpretation of (those things) over which you were unable to hold patience.”* God wanted the two orphans to grow up and reclaim the treasure which their father left for them. The treasure was buried under the wall and had the man not repaired the wall the treasure would have been exposed and the two boys would have lost their treasure. Their father was a righteous man so God wanted to reward them for their father’s deeds.

The story of the righteous man and the story of the companions of the cave share the common theme of trusting the unseen to God. He manages the affairs according to His divine wisdom and

comprehensive and absolute knowledge. Such knowledge is kept hidden from people to be revealed only to whom God wills and at the right time.

### **Verses 83 to 110:**

83. *And they ask you about Zulqarnain. Say, "I will recite to you an account of him."*
84. *Verily We established him on earth, and We gave him the ways and the means to all ends.*
85. *And he followed a road;*
86. *Till, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring, and found a people thereabout. We said, "Zulqarnain, either you torment or show them kindness."*
87. *He said, "We will torment whoever does wrong, then he will be sent back to his Lord; and He will punish him an awful torment.*
88. *But whoever believes, and does good deeds, he shall have a goodly reward, and easy will be his task as we order it by our command."*
89. *Then he followed a road;*
90. *Till, when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had given no shelter therefrom.*
91. *So (it was). And We knew all about him.*
92. *Then he followed a road;*
93. *Till, when he reached (a pass) between the two mountains, he found beside them a people who could hardly understand a word.*
94. *They said, "Zulqarnain, verily Gog and Magog make mischief in the land. Shall we then pay you a tribute on condition that you erect a barrier between us and them?"*
95. *He said, "That which the Lord empowered me with is better (than your tribute). Help me therefore with strength (labour), I will erect a strong barrier between you and them.*
96. *Bring me blocks of iron." At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, He said, "Blow (with your bellows.)" Then, when he had made it (red) as fire, he said, "Bring me molten copper to pour upon it."*
97. *And (Gog and Magog) were not able to surmount, nor could they pierce (it).*
98. *He said, "This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it into dust; and the promise of my Lord is true."*
99. *On that Day We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another. The trumpet will be blown, and We shall gather them all together.*
100. *And We shall present Hell that Day for disbelievers to see, all spread out.*
101. *Those whose eyes were blind to My reminder, and who could not even hear.*
102. *Did the disbelievers think that they can take My servants as protecting guardians besides Me? Verily We have prepared Hell as a lodge for the disbelievers.*
103. *Say, "Shall we tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds?"*
104. *Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were doing good deeds?*
105. *Those are they who disbelieved in the revelations of their Lord and in the meeting with Him. Therefor their deeds are in vain, and on the Day of Resurrection We assign no weight to them.*
106. *That is their reward, Hell, because they disbelieved, and made a jest of Our revelations and Our messengers.*

107. *As to those who believed and did good deeds, they have, for their lodging, the gardens of paradise,*
108. *Wherein they shall dwell for ever with no desire to be removed from them.”*
109. *Say, “If the sea became ink for the words of my Lord, verily the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it as a supplement.”*
110. *Say, “I am only a mortal like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is only One God. And whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him do good deeds, and do not associate partners with his Lord.” (18: 83 – 110)*

“*And they ask you about Zulqarnain. Say, ‘I will recite to you an account of him.’*” Muhammad bin Ishaq narrated (through a chain of narration that quoted Ibn Abbas (RA)) that this Sura was revealed to answer questions that the idolater Arabs asked the Prophet (PBUH). Quraish sent Al-Nadar bin Al-Hareth and ‘Oquobah bin Abi Ma’et to ask the Jews of Medina about Muhammad (PBUH). The Jews of Medina came up with three questions for Quraish to ask Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They said to them only a prophet would be able to give the correct answers to these questions. The questions were about the companions of the cave, a man who travelled from one end of the earth to the other end, and the nature of the spirit. Al-Nadar and ‘Oquobah came back from Medina and told their people the three questions. The chiefs of Quraish went to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him to give them answers to the three questions. The Prophet (PBUH) told them that he will give them the answers the following day. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) waited for a revelation from God to give him the answers however; his waiting period went on for two weeks. The chiefs of Quraish started to be critical of the Prophet (PBUH). He was saddened by what the chiefs of Quraish were saying. At the end of the two weeks the angel Gabriel came to him and gave him Surat Al-Kahf, telling him not to be saddened by what the chiefs of Quraish were saying and giving him the answers to the three questions.

There are other narrations which deal with the reasons behind the revelation of this Sura. It is better not to dwell on them. It is better to focus on the Quranic text which indicates that the questions were posed to the Prophet (PBUH). However, the Quran does not indicate who asked the questions, “*And they ask you about Zulqarnain.*” The answer to this question indicated that God gave Zulqarnain great power which enabled him to establish a vast kingdom, “*Verily We established him on earth, and We gave him the ways and the means to all ends.*” Zulqarnain travelled westward, “*And he followed a road; till, when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring, and found a people thereabout. We said, ‘Zulqarnain, either you torment or show them kindness.’*” It is difficult to determine the place that he reached in his travel but it seems that he was able to reach a place from which he saw that the sun was setting into a lake. He found a people there. God gave him the choice to either punish them or to treat them kindly. This may had been either a revelation or an inspiration. Zulqarnain announced his policy regarding treating the people whom he conquered, “*He said, ‘We will torment whoever does wrong, then he will be sent back to his Lord; and He will punish him an awful torment. But whoever believes, and does good deeds, he shall have a goodly reward, and easy will be his task as we order it by our command.’*” He announced that the wrongdoers will be punished in this life; then they will get their just recompense in the Hereafter. The believers who do good deeds will be treated kindly and God will reward them nicely on the Day of Judgment.

Then he travelled eastward, *“Till, when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had given no shelter therefrom. So (it was). And We knew all about him.”* Again we have no certain knowledge where his travel took him eastward, but it seems that he reached a place where the land was flat with no mountains or trees. Most likely this was a desert where a person would have no place to hide from the sun’s heat. One can draw a likeness between the open flat land and the psyche of Zulqarnain. Like the open flat land, Zulqarnain had no hidden agenda. His plans and policies were declared and made known.

He continued until he reached a place where he found a people who had great difficulty understanding him, *“Then he followed a road; till, when he reached (a pass) between the two mountains, he found beside them a people who could hardly understand a word.”* However, somehow they communicated to him their needs. They wanted a barrier to protect them from the attacks of Gog and Magog, *“They said, ‘Zulqarnain, verily Gog and Magog make mischief in the land. Shall we then pay you a tribute on condition that you erect a barrier between us and them?’”* According to his policies which supported the righteous and fought the wrongdoers, Zulqarnain agreed to offer his help without compensation. He wanted to build a dam that extended from one mountain to the other. Instead of compensation, he asked them to help him with their manual labor, *“He said, ‘That which the Lord empowered me with is better (than your tribute). Help me therefore with strength (labour), I will erect a strong barrier between you and them. Bring me blocks of iron.’”* He blocked the passage between the two mountains with blocks of iron. Then he asked them to heat the iron, *“At length, when he had filled up the space between the two steep mountain-sides, He said, ‘Blow (with your bellows.)’ Then, when he had made it (red) as fire, he said, ‘Bring me molten copper to pour upon it.’”* When the iron melted and looked as if it were a fire, he poured over it molten copper. Thus the dam was made from an iron alloy. The dam was very strong so, *“Gog and Magog were not able to surmount, nor could they pierce (it).”*

The concept of the alloys was only discovered recently, but Zulqarnain was far ahead of his time. When Zulqarnain saw the great barrier he built; he remembered that the power and the knowledge that he had were a gift from God. He expressed his gratitude to God. He also reminded the people that all these great buildings will be destroyed on the Day of Judgment, *“He said, ‘This is a mercy from my Lord. But when the promise of my Lord comes to pass, He will make it into dust; and the promise of my Lord is true.’”*

This is the story of a righteous king; God gave him power and knowledge that helped him establish a vast kingdom and was able to travel the earth from one end to the other but never became conceited or arrogant. He acknowledged the bounty of God and expressed his gratitude to Him.

The Sura ends with a scene from the Day of Judgment, *“On that day We shall leave them to surge like waves on one another. The trumpet will be blown, and We shall gather them all together. And We shall present Hell that day for the disbelievers to see, all spread out. Those whose eyes were blind to My reminder, and who could not even hear.”* It is a scene that depicts a multitude of people of different races, colors, places, and ages gathered together moving randomly shoving and pushing each other in a chaotic way like sea waves. When the trumpet is

blown they will all stand in lines and Hellfire will be presented to them. The disbelievers will not be able to turn away from it as they used to turn away from God's revelations before. Did they think that they could find support in God's creatures against Him, *"Did the disbelievers think that they can take My servants as protecting guardians besides Me? Verily We have prepared Hell as a lodge for the disbelievers."* The disbelievers will find their resting place in Hellfire.

The Sura ends with three short statements. The first statement juxtaposes the values of the disbelievers versus those of the believers, *"Say, 'Shall we tell you of those who lose most in respect of their deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were doing good deeds? Those are they who disbelieved in the revelations of their Lord and in the meeting with Him. Therefore their deeds are in vain, and on the Day of Resurrection We assign no weight to them.'"* These are the values of the disbelievers who lost their way in the worldly life. They thought that they were doing good deeds but they were heedless and their heedlessness rendered all their deeds in vain. Their deeds will be worthless on the Day of Judgement and they will end up in Hell fire, *"That is their reward, Hell, because they disbelieved, and made a jest of Our revelations and Our messengers."* But those who believed, *"As to those who believed and did good deeds, they have, for their lodging, the gardens of paradise, wherein they shall dwell for ever with no desire to be removed from them."* One may reflect on the expression, *"with no desire to be removed from them."* The nature of the human being rejects monotony. People like change even when they are living in paradise. The need for change is appropriate for the worldly life because it fosters curiosity, creativity and discovery which are needed for the progression of life on earth. However, in heaven the nature of people will be different and they will not be looking for any change in their comfortable and beautiful abode.

The second statement compares the extent of divine knowledge with the extent of human knowledge. God's knowledge is limitless and His words are infinite, *"Say, 'If the sea became ink for the words of my Lord, verily the sea would be used up before the words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it as a supplement.'"* This is an example which helps people appreciate the extent of God's knowledge.

Finally, the third statement is presented. It is a statement which puts in perspective the difference between God's power and the power of mortals; even if these mortals were messengers sent by God, *"Say, 'I am only a mortal like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is only One God. And whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him do good deeds, and do not associate partners with his Lord.'"* This is the way to obtain the permit to meet God. Those who hope to meet God should do good deeds and never associate partners with Him.

## Sura19: Maryam (Mary)

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

### **Verses 1 to 40:**

1. *Kaf. Ha. Ya. 'Ain. Sad.*
2. *(This is) A mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zachariah.*
3. *When he called upon his Lord in private.*
4. *He said, "My Lord, indeed my bones became feeble and my head is shining with grey hair, and I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to You.*
5. *I fear the successors after me, since my wife is barren. Give me from Your presence an heir.*
6. *Who shall inherit me and inherit (also) the house of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, acceptable (to You).*
7. *(It was said to him), "Zachariah, We bring you tidings of a son whose name is John; We have given the same name to none before (him).*
8. *He said, "My Lord, how will I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have reached infirm old age?"*
9. *He said, "So (it will be) your Lord said, 'It is easy for Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing.'"*
10. *He said, "My Lord, give me a sign. He (God) said, "Your sign is that you will not be able to speak to the people three nights while in sound health."*
11. *Then he came out from the sanctuary to his people, and signaled to them that they should glorify God at the break of day and the fall of night.*
12. *(And it was said), "John, hold fast to the Scripture." And we gave him wisdom while he was still a boy.*
13. *And compassion from Our presence, and purity; and he was devout,*
14. *And kind to his parents, and he was not disobedient or rebellious.*
15. *Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies and the day he shall be raised to life.*
16. *And mention Mary in the Book, when she had withdrawn from her people to a chamber looking east,*
17. *And she had chosen to go into seclusion from them. Then We sent to her Our Spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man.*
18. *She said, "I seek refuge in the Lord of Mercy from you, if you are God conscious.*
19. *He said, "I am only a messenger of your Lord, that I may bestow on you a pure son."*
20. *She said, "How can I have a son when no mortal has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?"*
21. *He said, "So (it will be). Your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me. And We will make him a sign for humankind and a mercy from Us, and this is a matter which has been ordained.'"*
22. *And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place.*
23. *And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said, "I wish, I had died before this. I wish I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight."*
24. *But (a voice) called to her from below saying, "Grieve not, for your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you;*

25. *And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward you; it will drop on you fresh ripe dates.*
26. *So eat and drink and be consoled. And if you meet any mortal, say, "I have vowed a fast to the Lord of Mercy, and I will not speak this day to any mortal."*
27. *Then she came to her own people, carrying him. They said, "Mary, you have certainly done an unprecedented thing.*
28. *Sister of Aaron, your father was not a wicked man nor was your mother a harlot.*
29. *She pointed to him. They said, "How can we talk to a young boy in the cradle?"*
30. *He said, "I am indeed a servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet;*
31. *And He made me blessed wherever I may be, and enjoined upon me prayers and almsgiving so long as I remain alive;*
32. *(He) made me kind to my mother, and He did not make me a tyrant nor miserable;*
33. *Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised to life."*
34. *That is Jesus, son of Mary. (This is) a statement of the truth concerning which they dispute.*
35. *It is not befitting to God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be", and it is.*
36. *Verily God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve (worship) Him. That is the right path.*
37. *But parties from among them disagreed with each other, so woe to those who disbelieved – from the scene of a tremendous Day.*
38. *How clear will they see and hear on the Day they will appear before Us, but the wrongdoers today are in manifest error.*
39. *And warn them of the Day of anguish when the case has been decided. Now they are in a state of heedlessness, and they do not believe.*
40. *It is We who will inherit the earth, and all those who are on it, and to Us they shall be returned. (19: 1 - 40)*

The main theme of this Sura is the Oneness of God and the refutation of the myth that God has a son or a partner. The concept of resurrection after death is discussed as a corroborating evidence for the concept of the Oneness of God. The Sura narrates a number of stories. It starts with the story of Zachariah and John; the story of Mariam and the birth of Jesus; and the story of Abraham and the dialogue he had with his father. There is also mention of a number of prophets. These include Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Ishmael, Idris, Adam, and Noah (PBUH).

The Sura can be divided into three parts. The first deals with the story of Zachariah and John, and the story of Mariam and the birth of Jesus. The second part deals with the story of Abraham and his father. This part also includes a reference to a number of prophets. It ends with the unequivocal proclamation of the Oneness of God. The third part deals with the concept of the resurrection after death. This part describes some of the scenes of the Day of Judgement.

*"Kaf. Ha. Ya. 'Ain. Sad."* The Sura starts with letters from the Arabic alphabet, the common language of the Arabs. This was meant to be a challenge, daring the Arabs to compose a book similar to the Quran using the language that they were familiar with. The subsequent verses narrate the story of Zachariah (PBUH). The story starts with a mention of God's mercy, *"A mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zachariah."* This is quite appropriate since the main theme of the story of Zachariah (PBUH) revolves around God's mercy. He called upon his

lord, *“When he called upon his Lord in private. He said, ‘My Lord, indeed my bones became feeble and my head is shining with grey hair, and I have never been unsuccessful in my prayer to You. I fear the successors after me, since my wife is barren. Give me from Your presence an heir;*

*who shall inherit me and inherit (also) the house of Jacob. And make him, my Lord, acceptable (to You).’”* He called upon his Lord in solitude, beseeching God to comfort his sorrow. He was old, his body became weak and his hair became gray. He confessed to God that he never was disappointed when he called upon Him before. He explained his problem. He was nearing the end of his life; he could not entrust the legacy of prophet-hood to any of his apparent successors. He had no sons to entrust his legacy to one of them because his wife was barren. He asked God to give him a successor who can carry the responsibility of prophet-hood and continue the legacy of Zachariah and Jacob (PBUT). Zachariah (PBUH) defined the trait that he wished his successor to have, *“And make him, my Lord, acceptable (to You).”* God responded favorably to Zachariah’s (PBUH) prayer, *“(It was said to him), ‘Zachariah, We bring you tidings of a son whose name is John; we have given the same name to none before (him).’”* This was a response that embodied the divine generosity. Not only he will be given a son but the son will be unique.

Zachariah (PBUH) must have been overwhelmed with the response. He could not but ask, *“My Lord, how will I have a son, when my wife is barren and I have reached infirm old age?”* He knew that God’s promise will be fulfilled but the question was how will this happen. The answer to the question was delivered, *“So (it will be) your Lord said, ‘It is easy for Me, and indeed I created you before, when you were nothing.’”* It is not difficult for God to create. God made a barren woman unable to conceive and an old man unable to have children. He is able to reverse the process and allow the barren woman to conceive and the old man to have children. Zachariah (PBUH) was anxious, he wanted a sign. God told him that the sign is that he will not be able to speak for three days. There was nothing wrong with him; there was no physical reason to prevent him from speaking but nevertheless he will not be able to speak. This was the sign he asked for, *“He said, ‘My Lord, give me a sign.’ He (God) said, ‘Your sign is that you will not be able to speak to the people three nights while in sound health.’”* He wanted his people to join him in expressing gratitude to God, *“Then he came out from the sanctuary to his people, and signaled to them that they should glorify God at the break of day and the fall of night.”*

The narrative now turns to address John who grew up and became a young man, *“John, hold fast to the Scripture.”* It is a divine address that shows John’s (PBUH) status in the sight of God. This is a confirmation for Zachariah’s (PBUH) request that his successor would be worthy of carrying the legacy of Prophets Zachariah and Jacob (PBUT). John’s (PBUH) first task was the preservation of the Scripture (the Torah), the implementation of its teachings, and the conveyance of its message. He was commanded to be steadfast and to carry out his duty relentlessly. God prepared him to fulfill this trust, *“And we gave him wisdom while he was still a boy.”* This was the training that John (PBUH) received from God to be able to undertake the responsibility. Not only he was given the wisdom at an early age but he was also given, *“And compassion from Our presence, and purity; and he was devout, and kind to his parents, and he was not disobedient or rebellious. Peace on him the day he was born, and the day he dies and the day he shall be raised to life.”* Compassion is not an acquired trait but it is a gift from God. It is a necessary trait for a prophet to enable him to guide the people to goodness. He was pure in heart and in body, such purity opened up a channel of communication with God. This made him



devout and always conscious of his Lord.

The narrative then moves to the story of a birth which was more miraculous than the birth of John (PBUH), the story of the birth of Jesus (PBUH). John's (PBUH) mother was barren but Jesus' (PBUH) mother was a virgin. The creation of Adam (PBUH) was a miracle that was not witnessed by humans. But people did witness the birth of Jesus (PBUH). This makes it the most miraculous event in the history of humanity. Having been unable to witness the first miracle of creation, the divine wisdom willed that the normal law of procreation be broken to provide humanity with an evidence of the power of the Creator.

The verses narrate the story of the conception of Jesus (PBUH), *“And mention Mary in the Book, when she had withdrawn from her people to a chamber looking east, and she had chosen to go into seclusion from them. Then We sent to her Our Spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said, ‘I seek refuge in the Lord of Mercy from you, if you are God conscious.’ He said, ‘I am only a messenger of your Lord, that I may bestow on you a pure son.’ She said, ‘How can I have a son when no mortal has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?’ He said, ‘So (it will be). Your Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me. And We will make him a sign for humankind and a mercy from Us, and this is a matter which has been ordained.’”* The verses describe the scene of a young virgin, a saint who was dedicated by her mother - while she was still a fetus in the womb - to the service of God. She was known for her purity and piety. She was in seclusion when she suddenly saw a perfect man standing in front of her. She was frightened. It was natural for her to seek the help of God. In addition, she tried to implore the man standing in front of her to be conscious of God. The fear gave way to surprise when she heard the man saying, *“I am only a messenger of your Lord; that I may bestow on you a pure son.”* One can only imagine the thoughts that went through her mind at that time. Could she trust this man? Was he really God's messenger? And how can she become pregnant while she had not been touched by a man before? She expressed her doubts, *“How can I have a son when no mortal has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?”* Her question indicates that she was not able to think outside the box. She never thought that the law of normal human procreation could be broken. But there are other ways that this could be achieved, *“Your Lord says, ‘It is easy for Me. And We will make him a sign for humankind and a mercy from Us, and this is a matter which has been ordained.’”* This was the miracle that Mary did not expect to happen. God wanted this miracle to be a sign for people, a sign showing the power of God. Jesus (PBUH) was sent as a mercy to the Children of Israel and to the whole humanity.

The narrative continues to describe what happened to Mary, *“And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said, ‘I wish, I had died before this. I wish I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight.’”* The narrative did not explain how the conception occurred; or how long it took. Did the fetus go through the normal growth process? Or was the process completed in a miraculous way? However, these questions are not relevant to the objective of the story. One can imagine Mary alone thinking about the consequences of this situation. How will she face her people? What kind of scandal will she face? Her thoughts were diverted by the pains of delivery. She rested her back to the trunk of a palm tree. She wished that she was dead before this had happened. She was yet in for another surprise, a voice that addressed her, *“Grieve not, for your Lord has made a stream*

*to flow beneath you; and shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward you; it will drop on you fresh ripe dates. So eat and drink and be consoled. And if you meet any mortal, say, 'I have vowed a fast to the Lord of Mercy, and I will not speak this day to any mortal.'"* How much amazed must have she been to hear the voice of her newly born baby to speak to her, consoling her, reminding her of God's mercy, and directing her to the food and water which God provided for her survival and the survival of the baby. The voice also gave her an advice, how to deal with her people. One can imagine how bewildered must have she been when she heard this voice. It must have taken her a while before the advice had sunk in. Having seen God's provision, she must have felt reassured of God's support. She must have realized that she had the proof of her chastity, a newly born baby who speaks, *"Then she came to her own people, carrying him. They said, 'Mary, you have certainly done an unprecedented thing. Sister of Aaron, your father was not a wicked man nor was your mother a harlot. She pointed to him. They said, 'How can we talk to a young boy in the cradle?' He said, 'I am indeed a servant of God. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet; and He made me blessed wherever I may be, and enjoined upon me prayers and almsgiving so long as I remain alive; (He) made me kind to my mother, and He did not make me rebellious or miserable. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised to life.'"* When she brought her baby to her people, they chastised her for having had a baby out of wedlock. They did not imagine how a virgin who was dedicated to the service the temple can do a thing like that. She came from a good home and she was chaste. Then they were surprised by her request to speak to the baby, but their surprise must have been greater when they heard him actually speak. Jesus (PBUH) made it clear that he was neither a God nor a son of God as claimed by some, but he was a prophet and a servant of God. He was blessed by God who commanded him to be kind to his mother and to establish prayer and almsgiving as long as he lived. So he was a human being with a limited span of life. He was born, he will die, and he will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment. The verses do not report the people's response to Jesus' (PBUH) statement. However, the episode ends by a statement of the lesson to be learnt from the event, *"That is Jesus, son of Mary. (This is) a statement of the truth concerning which they dispute. It is not befitting to God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is. Verily God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve (worship) Him. That is the right path."* It is not befitting to the majesty of God that He would have a son. Mortals need children for their lineage to continue and weak people need children to support them in their fights. God is infinite and is powerful. If He says to a thing "Be" it will happen. Jesus (PBUH) made a clear and unequivocal statement, *"Verily God is my Lord and your Lord. So serve (worship) Him. That is the right path."*

*"But parties from among them disagreed with each other,"* The emperor Constantine convened the first ecumenical Council of Nicaea. The first item on the agenda was a discussion of the nature of Jesus (PBUH). The attendees had different points of view regarding the nature of Jesus (PBUH) and they argued vehemently among themselves about this issue. Those who adopted a view that deviated from the doctrine of the Oneness of God were warned, *"Woe to those who disbelieved – from the scene of a tremendous Day."* During their lives they neither listened to nor used their eyes to see the truth when the listening and seeing would have been beneficial. On the Day of Judgment their listening and their sight will be very sharp but they will be listening and hearing humiliating things, *"How clear will they see and hear on the Day they will appear*

*before Us, but the wrongdoers today are in manifest error.”*

*“And warn them of the Day of anguish when the case has been decided. Now they are in a state of heedlessness, and they do not believe. It is We who will inherit the earth, and all those who are on it, and to Us they shall be returned.”* Warn them that on the Day of Judgment, the day that will be full of anguish, there anguish will be of little avail. On that Day they will see the consequence of their heedlessness. Everything will return to God, the only Heir.

### **Verses 41 to 65:**

- 41. And mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham. He was a man of truth, a prophet.*
- 42. When he said to his father, “My father, why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and will not benefit you in the least;*
- 43. My father, indeed there has come to me knowledge which has not come to you, therefore follow me, I will guide you to an even path;*
- 44. My father, do not worship Satan. Indeed, Satan is a rebel against (God) the Lord of Mercy.*
- 45. My father, I fear that a torment from the Lord of Mercy should afflict you and you become a companion of Satan.”*
- 46. He (the father) said, “Abraham, do you reject my gods? If you do not desist, I shall certainly stone you. Leave me for a long while.”*
- 47. Abraham said, “Peace be on you, I will pray to my Lord for your forgiveness. He is to me Most Gracious.*
- 48. And I will leave you and those whom you invoke besides God. I will call on my Lord and trust that my prayer is not in vain.”*
- 49. When he left them and those whom they worshipped besides God, We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and each one of them We made a prophet.*
- 50. And We bestowed of Our mercy on them, and We granted them a high and true renown.*
- 51. And mention in the Book Moses. He was indeed chosen, and he was a messenger (and) a prophet.*
- 52. And we called him from the right side of Mount (Sinai), and brought him near to Us.*
- 53. And, out of Our mercy, We gave him his brother Aaron, (also) a prophet.*
- 54. And mention in the Book Ishmael. He was a keeper of his promise, and he was a messenger (of God), a prophet.*
- 55. He enjoined on his people prayers and almsgiving. He was most acceptable in the sight of his Lord.*
- 56. And mention in the Book Idris. He was a man of truth, (and) a prophet.*
- 57. And We raised him to a lofty station.*
- 58. Those were some of the prophets on whom God did bestow His Blessing, of the posterity of Adam, and of those whom We carried (in the Ark) with Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel of those whom We guided and chose. Whenever the revelations of (God) Lord of Mercy were rehearsed to them, they would fall down in prostration, adoring and weeping.*

59. *Now a later generation has succeeded them. They ruined worship and followed sensual desires, so they going to meet perdition.*
60. *Except those who repent and believe, and do good deeds, these will enter the garden and will not be wronged in the least;*
61. *Gardens of Eden, which the Lord of Mercy promised his servants in the unseen. His promise is ever sure of fulfilment.*
62. *They will hear therein no idle talk, but only peace; and therein they have sustenance both mornings and evenings.*
63. *Such is the garden which We give as an inheritance to those of Our servants who are God conscious.*
64. *(The angels say), "We do not descend except by the command of your Lord. To Him belong what is before us and what is behind us, and what is in between. Your Lord never forgets.*
65. *The Lord of the heavens and of the earth, and of all that is in between them; so worship Him, and persevere in His worship. Do you know of any who is worthy of the same Name as He?" (19: 41 – 65)*

In the previous section the story of Jesus (PBUH) was narrated in which the myth of God's son has been refuted. Now we move to the story of another prophet, Prophet Abraham (PBUH) which also deals with the myth of associating partners with God. The following verses describe Prophet Abraham's (PBUH) character, emphasizing the trait of contentment and his gentle nature. The dialogue with his stubborn father reflects his gentle nature. The Quran describes him as a man of truth and a prophet. This description is a true depiction of his character, "*And mention in the Book (the story of) Abraham. He was a man of truth, a prophet. When he said to his father, 'My father, why do you worship that which neither hears nor sees, and will not benefit you in the least;'*" He spoke to his father in a very gentle tone trying to guide him to the goodness of guidance. He addressed his father in an endearing way, "*My father.*" He questioned his father religious practices, pointing to the fact that idols which do not hear nor see are not worthy of being worshipped. He then followed his question with a statement about the knowledge that he received but his father did not have, "*My father, indeed there has come to me knowledge which has not come to you, therefore follow me, I will guide you to an even path;*" This knowledge which came from God made the young Abraham (PBUH) see the truth. It is not unheard of that an older man would follow the guidance of a more knowledgeable but younger man. Abraham continued to explain the risk of following Satan, "*My father, do not worship Satan. Indeed, Satan is a rebel against (God) the Lord of Mercy. My father, I fear that a torment from the Lord of Mercy should afflict you and you become a companion of Satan.*" Satan seduces people to worship idols. The worship of idols is tantamount to the worship of Satan. Satan disobeyed God. Abraham (PBUH) warned his father that his religious practices will incur the wrath of God. God will punish him by making him a follower and supporter of Satan. God's guidance is a blessing; following and supporting Satan will deprive a person of this blessing. These kind and gentle words did not reach the hard hearted father. Kindness is countered by a threat, "*He (the father) said, 'Abraham, do you reject my gods? If you do not desist, I shall certainly stone you. Leave me for a long while.'*" His father expressed his amazement that Abraham (PBUH) had the audacity to request him to abandon idol worship. He even threatened that he would stone him if he persisted. But Abraham (PBUH), being the gentle and kind son,

does not lose his patience and his kindness, *“Abraham said, ‘Peace be on you, I will pray to my Lord for your forgiveness. He is to me Most Gracious. And I will leave you and those whom you invoke besides God. I will call on my Lord and trust that my prayer is not in vain.’”* Abraham’s (PBUH) response was quite peaceful, he did not blame his father nor did he argue with him. He even told him that he will pray God to forgive him and to guide him to the straight path. Abraham (PBUH) promised to stay away from his people and their bad religious practices and to continue to worship God alone. All what Abraham (PBUH) was asking from God was to bestow His blessings on him.

God did not leave Abraham (PBUH) alone when he abandoned his people, *“When he left them and those whom they worshipped besides God, We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and each one of them We made a prophet. And We bestowed of Our mercy on them, and We granted them a high and true renown.”* Isaac (PBUH) was Abraham’s (PBUH) son and Jacob (PBUH) was his grandson. Abraham (PBUH) raised the two of them according to his religious practices. This gift from God was a mercy that He bestowed on Abraham (PBUH) and his progeny. They were respected by their people.

From among Abraham’s (PBUH) progeny Moses is mentioned, *“And mention in the Book Moses. He was indeed chosen, and he was a messenger (and) a prophet. And we called him from the right side of Mount (Sinai), and brought him near to Us. And, out of Our mercy, We gave him his brother Aaron, (also) a prophet.”* The Quran states that Moses (PBUH) was chosen by God. He was also a prophet and a messenger of God. A prophet is a person who receives a revelation from God but is not assigned the task to call people to his religion, while a messenger is assigned the task of delivering the message to his people. God assigned a number of prophets from the Children of Israel after the time of Moses (PBUH) and entrusted them with the task of applying the laws of the Torah.

God spoke to Moses (PBUH) when he was on the Mount of Sinai. This was an honor that was exclusive to Moses (PBUH). We believe in the truth of the statement that God spoke to Moses (PBUH) but we have no way of knowing how this communication took place. God bestowed His mercy on Moses (PBUH) by responding favourably to his request to appoint his brother Aaron (PBUH) a prophet to support Moses (PBUH) in his mission.

The second branch of Abraham’s (PBUH) progeny was then mentioned, *“And mention in the Book Ishmael. He was a keeper of his promise, and he was a messenger (of God), a prophet. He enjoined on his people prayers and almsgiving. He was most acceptable in the sight of his Lord.”* Ishmael (PBUH) was reputed for honoring his promises.

Finally, Prophet Idris (PBUH) is mentioned, *“And mention in the Book Idris. He was a man of truth, (and) a prophet. And We raised him to a lofty station.”* It is not known what time period Prophet Idris (PBUH) lived in. The Quran simply described him as a man of truth and a prophet.

*“Those were some of the prophets on whom God did bestow His Blessing, of the posterity of Adam, and of those whom We carried (in the Ark) with Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel of those whom We guided and chose. Whenever the revelations of (God) Lord of Mercy were rehearsed to them, they would fall down in prostration, adoring and weeping. Now a later generation has succeeded them. They ruined worship and followed sensual desires, so they going to meet perdition.”* The narrative stops at milestones in the history of the prophets that God sent to guide the humanity. They were Adam’s (PBUH) progeny, some were the progeny of those who believed with Noah (PBUH), some were from the progeny of Abraham and Jacob (PBUT). These prophets together with those who followed them had this unique trait that, *“Whenever the revelations of (God) Lord of Mercy were rehearsed to them, they would fall down in prostration, adoring and weeping.”* But after these people who were extremely conscious of their Lord came other generations of people who went astray. They will be punished. However, the door of repentance will always be open for those who wish to repent, *“Except those who repent and believe, and do good deeds, these will enter the garden and will not be wronged in the least; Gardens of Eden, which the Lord of Mercy promised his servants in the unseen. His promise is ever sure of fulfilment. They will hear therein no idle talk, but only peace; and therein they have sustenance both mornings and evenings. Such is the garden which We give as an inheritance to those of Our servants who are God conscious.”* True repentance is the basis for the renewal of faith and performing good deeds. God promised those who repent the Garden of Eden. God’s promise is always fulfilled. In the gardens of Eden there will be neither idle talk nor arguments. An atmosphere of peace and comfort will prevail. Provisions will be given in abundance. This will be the reward for those who remain conscious of God.

*“(The angels say), ‘We do not descend except by the command of your Lord. To Him belong what is before us and what is behind us, and what is in between. Your Lord never forgets. The Lord of the heavens and of the earth, and of all that is in between them; so worship Him, and persevere in His worship. Do you know of any who is worthy of the same Name as He?’”* Several stories mentioned that this verse was revealed in connection with Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) impatience when Gabriel (PBUH) was late in coming. God commanded Gabriel (PBUH) to tell the Prophet (PBUH) that the angels move according to the command of God. God has sole control over them. God does not forget. He sends His revelation according to His plan. He is the Lord of heavens and earth so the Prophet should persevere in worshipping Him. God’s worship in Islam does not only consist of the rituals but it goes beyond this to encompass all human activities. Islam is a way of life that requires the human being to be continuously conscious of God. Each and every thought, feeling, emotion, movement, and activity should be made while being conscious of God.

## **Verses 66 to 98:**

66. *Humankind says, “When I am dead, shall I then be raised up alive?”*
67. *Does not humankind call to mind that We created him before, when he was nothing?*
68. *So, by your Lord, without doubt, We shall gather them together, and the devils, then We shall bring them, crouching, around hell.*
69. *Then We will certainly drag out from every sect all those who were most stubborn in rebellion to the Lord of Mercy.*

70. *And We certainly know best those who are most worthy of being burned therein.*
71. *There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is an unavoidable decree of your Lord.*
72. *Then We shall save those who were God conscious, and We shall leave the wrongdoers therein, crouching.*
73. *When Our clear revelations are recited to them, the disbelievers say to those who believe, "Which of the two groups is better in position? And best in association?"*
74. *How many generations before them have we destroyed, who were more imposing in respect of gear and outward appearance.*
75. *Say, "As for him who is in error, the Lord of Mercy will verily prolong his span of life until, when they see that which they were promised, whether it be torment (in the world), or the Hour (of doom), they will know who is worse in position and who is weaker as an army.*
76. *And God increases in guidance those who seek guidance. The good deeds which endure are better in your Lord's sight for reward, and better for resort.*
77. *Have you then seen the (sort of) human being who rejects Our revelations, yet says, "I shall certainly be given wealth and children?"*
78. *Has he gained knowledge of the unseen, or made a covenant with the Lord of Mercy?*
79. *Nay, We shall record what he says, and We shall add and add to his torment.*
80. *To Us shall return all that he talks of and he shall appear, single and alone, before Us.*
81. *And they have taken (for worship) gods other than God, to give them power and glory.*
82. *Instead, they shall reject their worship, and become adversaries against them.*
83. *Do you not see that We sent the devils against the disbelievers, to incite them with fury?*
84. *Therefore, do not be in haste against them; We only countdown to them the number (of days).*
85. *On the day when We shall gather the God conscious to the Lord of Mercy, as a goodly company.*
86. *And We shall drive the sinners to Hell, like thirsty cattle driven down to water.*
87. *None shall have the power of intercession, except him who has made a covenant with his Lord.*
88. *They say, "The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son."*
89. *Certainly you have made an abominable assertion.*
90. *Whereby the heavens are almost torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins,*
91. *That they ascribed a son to the Lord of Mercy.*
92. *For it is not befitting to the majesty of the Lord of Mercy that He should beget a son.*
93. *Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to the Lord of Mercy as a servant.*
94. *Verily, He took an account of them (all), and has numbered them (all) exactly.*
95. *And each one of them will come, single and alone, to Him on the Day of Judgment.*
96. *On those who believe and do good deeds, the Lord of Mercy will bestow love.*
97. *So have We made the (Quran) easy in your own tongue, that with it you may give glad tidings to the God conscious, and warnings to people given to contention.*
98. *And how many generations before them have We destroyed? Can you find a single one of them (now) or hear (so much as) a whisper of them? (19: 66 – 98)*

The verses describe a scene of a human being wondering about the concept of resurrection, *“Humankind says, ‘When I am dead, shall I then be raised up alive?’”* This was a question that was raised by many people over the span of many generations of humanity. The question expresses a rejection of the concept of resurrection. The rejection shows that humankind is oblivious to how he was brought to being. Where was he? What was he? He was not there but he came to being. Resurrection is easier to imagine than the first creation, *“Does not humankind call to mind that We created him before, when he was nothing?”* God is certainly able to resurrect not only all human beings but also those devils who used to whisper to them and to tempt them, *“So, by your Lord, without doubt, We shall gather them together, and the devils, then We shall bring them, crouching, around hell.”* They will be gathered and will be made to kneel around Hell fire in a humiliating posture. Their leaders in tyranny will be pulled and dragged out, *“Then We will certainly drag out from every sect all those who were most stubborn in rebellion to the Lord of Mercy.”* God knows who is the most deserving of His punishment, *“And We certainly know best those who are worthiest of being burned therein.”* The believers will witness this terrifying scene, *“There is not one of you but shall approach it. That is an unavoidable decree of your Lord.”* Then those who were God conscious will be saved and the wrongdoers will be left kneeling there, *“Then We shall save those who were God conscious, and We shall leave the wrongdoers therein, crouching.”*

The verses move from the scene of the Day of Judgement to a scene in this worldly life. This is a scene where the disbelievers look upon the believers in disdain and brag about their wealth and power, *“When Our clear revelations are recited to them, the disbelievers say to those who believe, ‘Which of the two groups is better in position? And best in association?’”* The rich and powerful gather together to celebrate and boast their worldly possessions; posing the greatest temptation for others. On the other side the believers are modest and steadfast. They call people to join the procession of the belief in God. They do not have money to tempt people with nor do they have glamour to dazzle them; they only have their faith to offer. Their route entails hard work which leads to God.

The same scene repeated itself at the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) when the chiefs of Quraish looked upon the poor believers in disdain. They used their worldly material standards to determine who is better among people. They posed the question, *“Which of the two groups is better in position? And best in association?”* Who is better in position, the rich and powerful disbelievers or the poor and weak believers? God reminded the idolaters Arabs of those who posed that question before them. Their wealth and power did not avail them anything, *“How many generations before them have we destroyed, who were more imposing in respect of gear and outward appearance.”*

God then commanded His prophet to challenge the disbelievers, *“Say, ‘As for him who is in error, the Lord of Mercy will verily prolong his span of life until, when they see that which they were promised, whether it be torment (in the world), or the Hour (of doom), they will know who is worse in position and who is weaker as an army.’”* Let them claim that they are more guided than those who followed you (Muhammad). God will certainly let those who chose misguidance to indulge in their lost way and He will increase the guidance for those who believe, *“And God increases in guidance those who seek guidance. The good deeds which endure are better in your*



*Lord's sight for reward, and better for resort.”*

*“Have you then seen the (sort of) human being who rejects Our revelations, yet says, ‘I shall certainly be given wealth and children?’”* The verse portrays an example of the audacity of the disbelievers. It has been narrated that this verse was revealed in relation to a specific event, which involved one of the believers by the name of Khabab bin Al-Arrat (RA). He said, *“I was a blacksmith. A man by the name of Al-‘Ass bin Wael owed me a sum of money. I came to him to ask for my money, he said that he would not repay his debt to me until I denounce Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and reject his faith. I replied that I would never reject Muhammad’s (PBUH) faith even after you die and you are resurrected again. Al-‘Ass answered sarcastically that I should wait until he dies and is resurrected, then he would pay his debt to me.”* The verse addressed such people sarcastically, wondering if they truly knew the unseen, or did they have a covenant with God, *“Has he gained knowledge of the unseen, or made a covenant with the Lord of Mercy?”* A firm answer to the disbelievers’ claim is given. It is an answer full of rebuke, *“Nay, We shall record what he says, and We shall add and add to his torment.”* Everything will be recorded no one will be able to dispute the record. God will take their wealth and children and on the Day of Judgement they will come alone without wealth, children, or support of any kind, *“To Us shall return all that he talks of and he shall appear before Us bare and alone.”*

*“And they have taken (for worship) gods other than God, to give them power and glory. Instead, they shall reject their worship, and become adversaries against them. Do you not see that We sent the devils against the disbelievers, to incite them with fury? Therefore, do not be in haste against them; We only countdown to them the number (of days). On the day when We shall gather the God conscious to the Lord of mercy, as a goodly company. And We shall drive the sinners to Hell, like thirsty cattle driven down to water, none shall have the power of intercession, except him who has made a covenant with his Lord.”* The disbelievers worshipped idols, the angels, or jinn thinking that their gods will give them honor and will support them in life. However, on the Day of Judgement these gods will denounce the disbelievers. Then the verse addresses the Prophet (PBUH) asking him to be patient. God is giving them a short reprieve. All their deeds are recorded and counted accurately. They will be held responsible for what they committed during their lives on earth. On the other hand, the believers will be honored. The believers will be led in a procession to meet their Lord, while the disbelievers will be driven like cattle to Hell fire. Only those who did good deeds will have the power of intercession. Those who did good deeds will receive what God promised them. They will get their reward in full; God never breaks His promise.

The verses move to another false claim, *“They say, ‘The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son.’”* This is truly, *“an abominable assertion.”* The whole universe abhors this false claim; it erupts expressing its anger, *“Whereby the heavens are almost torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins, that they ascribed a son to the Lord of Mercy. For it is not consonant with the majesty of the Lord of Mercy that He should beget a son.”*

An unequivocal statement is made in response, *“Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to the Lord of Mercy as a servant. Verily, He took an account of them (all), and has numbered them (all) exactly. And each one of them will come, single and alone, to Him on the Day of Judgment.”* All beings in the heavens and earth are God’s servants. They will come to their Lord in submission. He neither has an associate nor a son. None of the beings of the heaven and earth will be able to escape this gathering. There is an accurate account of all of them. They will all come to the gathering individually bare of any help or support. Each one has his/her deeds to account for personally.

But those who believed and did good deeds will receive God’s blessings, *“On those who believe and do good deeds, the Lord of Mercy will bestow love.”* The Love of God will touch their souls and will fill their hearts with tranquility. God’s love will over flow and fill the whole universe.

It has been narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“When God loves one of His servants, He would say to Gabriel, ‘Gabriel, I love this person.’ Gabriel will also love this person and will call those in heaven saying, ‘God loves this person, so you should also love him/her.’ Those in heaven will then love that person. And the people on the earth will accept him/her. However, when God hates one of His servants, He would say to Gabriel, ‘Gabriel I hate this person.’ Gabriel will also hate this person and will call those in heaven saying, ‘God hates this person, so you should also hate him/her.’ Those in heaven will then hate that person. And the people on the earth will also hate him/her.”*

The previous verses brought glad tidings to the believers and a warning to the disbelievers. This is the objective of this Quran. God has made this Quran easy to understand, *“So have We made the (Quran) easy in your own tongue, that with it you may give glad tidings to the God conscious, and warnings to people given to contention.”*

The Sura ends with a scene that exhorts the heart to reflect and the inner conscious to tremble, *“And how many generations before them have We destroyed? Can you find a single one of them (now) or hear (so much as) a whisper of them?”*

## Sura 20: Ta-Ha (Ta-Ha)

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

### **Verses 1 to 98:**

1. *Ta-Ha.*
2. *We have not sent down the Quran that you should be distressed,*
3. *But as a reminder to him who fears.*
4. *A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens.*
5. *The Lord of Mercy is firmly established on the Throne.*
6. *To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all that is between them, and all that is beneath the ground.*
7. *If you utter the words aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden.*
8. *God, there is no god but Him. To Him belong the most beautiful names.*
9. *Has the story of Moses reached you?*
10. *When he saw a fire. He said to his family, "Wait, I see a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire."*
11. *And when he came to the fire, he was called by name, "Moses,*
12. *Verily I am your Lord. So take off your shoes, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa.*
13. *And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed.*
14. *Verily, I am God. There is no god but I. So worship Me, and establish regular prayer for celebrating My remembrance.*
15. *Verily, the Hour is surely coming. But I will to keep it hidden, that every soul may be rewarded for that which it strives (to achieve).*
16. *Therefore, let not him who does not believe in it and follows his whims turns you away from it lest you perish;*
17. *And what is that in your right hand, Moses?"*
18. *He said, "It is my rod. I lean on it; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and I have other uses for it."*
19. *He (God) said, "Cast it down, Moses."*
20. *So he cast it down, and it was a serpent, running.*
21. *He said, "Take hold of it and fear not; We will restore it to its former state.*
22. *And thrust your hand within your armpit, it will come forth white without any harm. (This is) another sign.*
23. *In order that We may show you some of our greater signs.*
24. *Go you to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds."*
25. *(Moses) said, "My Lord, expand my breast;*
26. *And make my task easy;*
27. *And remove the impediment from my speech,*
28. *So that they may understand what I say;*
29. *And appoint for me a minister from my family;*
30. *Aaron, my brother,*
31. *To strengthen my back by him,*
32. *And let him share my task;*
33. *That we may celebrate Your praise much,*

34. *And remember You often.*
35. *Indeed, You are ever seeing us.”*
36. *(God) said, “Your prayer has been granted, Moses.*
37. *And indeed We conferred a favour on you another time (before).*
38. *When We inspired your mother that which is inspired,*
39. *‘Throw him into the ark, and throw (the ark) into the river. The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.’ And I endued you with love from Me, that you may be raised according to My will.*
40. *When your sister went and said, ‘Shall I tell you of one who will nurse him?’ and we restored you to your mother that her eyes might be refreshed and might not grieve. And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses,*
41. *And I have chosen you for Myself.*
42. *Go, you and your brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in remembering Me;*
43. *Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds;*
44. *And speak to him a gentle word, that perchance he may heed or fear.”*
45. *They (Moses and Aaron) said, “Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.”*
46. *He said, “Fear not, for I am with you. I hear and see (everything).*
47. *So go you both to him, and say, ‘Verily we are messengers sent by your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not. We bring you a sign from your Lord. And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance.*
48. *Verily it has been revealed to us that the torment will be for him who rejects the truth and turns his back to it.”*
49. *(Pharaoh) said, “Who then is your Lord, Moses?”*
50. *He said, “Our Lord is He who gave everything its nature, then guided it aright.”*
51. *(Pharaoh) said, “What then is the state of the former generations?”*
52. *He replied, “The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded. My Lord never errs, nor forgets.”*
53. *It is He who has made the earth as a bed and has threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky and thereby We have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation.*
54. *Eat and pasture your cattle. Verily, in this are signs for those who are endowed with understanding.*
55. *From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.*
56. *And We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he did reject and refuse.*
57. *He said, “Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?*
58. *But we surely can produce for you, magic like yours; so make an appointment between us and you, which neither we nor you shall fail to keep, at a place convenient (to us both).”*
59. *Moses said, “Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon.”*
60. *Then Pharaoh went and gathered his strength, then came.*

61. *Moses said to them, "Beware, do not forge a lie against God, lest He destroys you utterly by a torment; the forger will never succeed."*
62. *Then they debated their affair among themselves, and they kept their counsel secret.*
63. *They said, "These two are certainly (expert) magicians, their objective is to drive you out from your land with their magic, and to do away with your best traditions.*
64. *Therefore, concert your efforts, and come in battle line. Whoso is uppermost this day will be indeed successful."*
65. *They said, "Moses, will you cast first or we will be the first to cast?"*
66. *He said, "You cast first." Then their ropes and their rods - so it seemed to him on account of their magic - began to move.*
67. *Moses conceived a fear in his mind.*
68. *We said, "Fear not, for you have indeed, the upper hand;*
69. *And cast that which is in your right hand, it will quickly swallow up that which they have faked. What they have faked is but a magician's trick; and the magician will never succeed (no matter) where he goes."*
70. *The magicians were thrown down in prostration. They said, "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."*
71. *(Pharaoh) said, "Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Surely, this must be your leader, who has taught you magic. I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees, so you will know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting torment."*
72. *They said, "We will never choose you above the clear proofs that have come to us, and above Him who created us. So decree what you will decree. You can decide only matters in this life of the world.*
73. *We have indeed believed in our Lord, so that He may forgive us our sins, and the magic to which you forced us to do. God is Best and Ever Lasting.*
74. *Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner - for him is Hell - therein shall he neither die nor live.*
75. *But whoso comes to Him a believer, having done good deeds, for such are the high stations;*
76. *Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow, they will dwell therein forever. That is the reward for those who purify themselves."*
77. *We revealed to Moses, "Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, nor being afraid (of drowning).*
78. *Then Pharaoh followed them with his hosts and there covered them that which did cover them of the sea.*
79. *And Pharaoh led his people astray instead of guiding them.*
80. *Children of Israel, We have delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai), and We sent down to you manna and quails.*
81. *(Saying), "Eat of the good things which We have provided you, and transgress not lest My wrath comes upon you. He on whom My wrath comes, he is lost indeed.*
82. *Verily I am All-Forgiving towards him who repents and believes and does good, and then continues to follow the right direction."*
83. *And (it was said), "What has made you hasten from your people, Moses?"*
84. *He said, "They are close upon my track. I hastened to You, my Lord, that You may be well pleased."*

85. (God) said, "We have tested your people in your absence. The Samiri has led them astray."
86. So Moses returned to his people in a state of indignation and sorrow. He said, "My people, did not your Lord make a fair promise to you? Did then the promise seem to you long (in coming)? Or did you desire that a wrath should descend from your Lord on you, and so you broke your promise to me?"
87. They said, "We did not break the promise to you of our own will, but we were burdened with the weight of the people's ornaments, and we threw them (into the fire), and similarly did the Samiri throw."
88. Then he produced for them a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a mooing sound. And they said, "This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot."
89. Did they not see that it could not return to them any speech (for answer), and that it had neither power to harm them nor to do them good?
90. Aaron had already, before this said to them, "My people, you are being tested in this, for verily your Lord is (God) the Lord of Mercy; so follow me and obey my command."
91. They had said, "We will never cease being devoted to it until Moses returns to us."
92. He (Moses) said, "Aaron, what held you back when you saw them going astray,
93. From following me? Have you then disobeyed my order?"
94. (Aaron) replied, "Son of my mother, do not seize me by my beard or by my head. Truly, I feared that you would say, 'You have caused a division among the Children of Israel, and you did not observe my word.'"
95. (Moses) said, "What then is your case, Samiri?"
96. He replied, "I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger, and threw it; thus did my soul entice me?"
97. (Moses) said, "Then go, you have been given (the right) in this life to say, 'Touch me not,' but indeed there is an appointment for you that you cannot break. Now look at your god which you were devoted to. Verily we will burn it and will scatter its dust over the sea.
98. Your god is the One God. There is no god other than Him. He embraces all things in His knowledge. (20: 1 – 98)

*"Ta-Ha. We have not sent down the Quran that you should be distressed, but as a reminder to him who fears."* A gentle opening which starts with two letters of the Alphabet, to emphasize that this Sura as well as the rest of the Quran have been composed using the Arabic Alphabet. The two letters used to begin the Sura has the same rhyme as the other verses in the Sura. The beginning is followed, as usual, with a reference to the Quran. The Prophet (PBUH) is told that the Quran was not revealed to cause him distress. It was not meant to burden him beyond his ability with its recitation. The Quran has been made so that people will find it easy to recite. The commandments that the Quran brought are within the power of people. God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. The Quran has been sent as a blessing, a way to connect with the high host. It is a source for tranquility and assurance. It is a source for happiness and a way to reach to God. It is also implied that, it should not annoy the Prophet (PBUH) to see some people who chose not to believe. It is not his task to force them to believe. The Quran has been sent as a reminder. Those who fear God will heed the reminder. They will then seek the forgiveness of their Lord.

The Quran has been revealed by God, *“A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens. The Lord of Mercy is firmly established on the Throne. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all that is between them, and all that is beneath the ground.”* God who created the heavens and earth is He who revealed the Quran. The Quran is a cosmic phenomenon like the heavens and earth. The verse connects the laws that control the universe with the laws that were revealed in the Quran. The Quran is a revelation from the Lord of Mercy. It came down as a mercy to humankind. The cosmic phenomena mentioned here explain the extent of God’s kingdom. God is the owner of all that exists. He knows the seen and the unseen, *“If you utter the words aloud, verily He knows what is secret and what is yet more hidden. God, there is no god but Him. To Him belong the most beautiful names.”* These verses were revealed to assure the Prophet (PBUH) of God’s support. God hears the Prophet’s (PBUH) words and knows his thoughts and He is with him supporting him in his struggle against the disbelievers.

The verses then narrate Moses’ (PBUH) story as an example of God’s support for the people whom He chose to deliver His message. Moses’ (PBUH) story permeates the Quran; it is the most often mentioned story in the Quran. However, it is narrated in episodes, each episode blends well with the main theme of the sura in which it appears. *“Has the story of Moses reached you?”*

*When he saw a fire, he said to his family, ‘Wait, I see a fire; perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom, or find some guidance at the fire.’”* The verse tells the story of Moses’ (PBUH) when he was travelling with his family going back to Egypt from Midian. He saw a fire and wanted to get a burning brand so he can start a fire himself for his family. But when he got there he was faced with a great surprise, *“And when he came to the fire, he was called by name, ‘Moses, Verily I am your Lord. So take off your shoes, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa. And I have chosen you, so listen to what is revealed.’”* The heart dries out and the body trembles when one envisages the scene of Moses (PBUH) alone, in the dark night, in the middle of the desert and he hears the sound, *“Verily I am your Lord.”* The expression, *“he was called by name,”* intimates that Moses (PBUH) heard the voice but did not know from where it came from or who was calling him. Moses (PBUH) was asked to take off his shoes because he was in the scared valley in the presence of God. God bestowed on him the highest honor, *“I have chosen you.”* So he has to listen to what will be revealed. He was commanded to perform three tasks: to believe in the oneness of God, to worship God, and to believe in the Day of Judgement, *“Verily, I am God. There is no god but I. So worship Me, and establish regular prayer for celebrating My remembrance. Verily, the Hour is surely coming. But I will to keep it hidden, that every soul may be rewarded for that which it strives (to achieve). Therefore, let not him who does not believe in it and follows his whims turns you away from it lest you perish;”* The belief in the oneness of God is the cornerstone of the doctrine of Islam. The verse emphasizes the principle of the belief in the oneness of God. The command to worship God is given in the form of establishing prayers. Prayers are the perfect example of the worship of God. Prayers crystallize the remembrance of God. They are the connection between people and their God. The Hour refers to the Day of Judgement. On that Day everyone will be held accountable and everyone will be recompensed fairly. It is coming but no one knows when. Do not let those who follow their whims and desires bar you from preparing for it.

*“And what is that in your right hand, Moses?”* Moses (PBUH) may have realized that the question was about the usage of the rod, *“He said, ‘It is my rod. I lean on it; with it I beat down fodder for my flocks; and I have other uses for it.’”* Moses (PBUH) used his rod to lean on, to get fodder for his flock, and other things, but he never envisaged how will the divine power transform the rod into another tool to be used in the mission he will soon undertake, *“He (God) said, ‘Cast it down, Moses.’ So he cast it down, and it was a serpent, running.”* A miracle took place and Moses (PBUH) was taken by surprise. The fact that this surprise filled Moses’ (PBUH) heart with fear, which have been mentioned in details in another episode, is only lightly alluded to in this episode, *“He said, ‘Take hold of it and fear not; We will restore it to its former state.’”*

Moses (PBUH) was reassured and he picked up the serpent and it went back to its original form, a rod. Another command was then issued, *“And thrust your hand within your armpit, it will come forth white without any harm. (This is) another sign.”* Moses (PBUH) placed his hand under his armpit and it came out white with no trace of sickness or harm. This was another miracle. He was then promised that he will see the greatest miracle, *“In order that We may show you some of our greater signs.”* To prepare him for the big mission that he was to undertake, *“Go you to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds.”* This was another surprise. He knew who Pharaoh was, he was brought up in his palace; and he knew of his tyranny. But He is now in the presence of his Lord who honored him and chose him for this mission, so he asked his Lord, *“(Moses) said, ‘My Lord, expand my breast; And make my task easy; And remove the impediment from my speech, So that they may understand what I say; and appoint for me a minister from my family; Aaron, my brother, To strengthen my back by him, And let him share my task;’”* Moses (PBUH) asked God to expand his breast; this transforms hard work into pleasure, and provides motivation for completing the undertaking. Then he asked that God would make his task easy for him. This is an essential requirement for a task to be successful. Then he asked God to remove an impediment from his speech and to appoint his brother to help him.

Moses recognized that the new mission that he was asked to undertake will require a special spiritual preparation. So he explained that the things that he asked God for were tools to help him and his brother to celebrate God’s praise, *“That we may celebrate Your praise much, and remember You often. Indeed, You are ever seeing us.”* Moses’ (PBUH) made a long list of requests, he explained his vulnerability, and he requested God’s help; the answer was brief and prompt, *“(God) said, ‘Your prayer has been granted, Moses.’”* The requests have already been granted. The mention of Moses (PBUH) by name shows the blessings of God and His gentleness in treating His Messengers. The verses continued to remind Moses (PBUH) with the blessings that God had bestowed on him before, *“And indeed We conferred a favour on you another time (before). When We inspired your mother that which is inspired, ‘Throw him into the ark, and throw (the ark) into the river. The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him.’ And I endued you with love from Me that you may be raised according to My will. When your sister went and said, ‘Shall I tell you of one who will nurse him?’ and we restored you to your mother that her eyes might be refreshed and might not grieve.”* Moses (PBUH) was going to face a tyrant, the mightiest king on earth. He was going to fight for his faith and to deal with the problems that the Children of Israel were plagued with. They have been enslaved and persecuted for a long time. Even if he was successful with Pharaoh, it would not be easy to erase the effects of the long years of slavery and persecution which the Children of Israel suffered in Egypt. But God reminded him that he will not be alone



in his struggle. God has helped him and supported him before and will not let him down in his new mission. These verses mention the favours that God bestowed on Moses (PBUH). When he was born, God inspired his mother to put him in an ark and to throw the ark in the river. The ark was captured by an enemy of both God and Moses (PBUH). But God's love protected Moses (PBUH) from his enemy. Then Moses (PBUH) was raised in his enemy's house according to God's will. Then God brought him back to his mother to nurse him. When Pharaoh's wife convinced her husband to adopt the baby that came in the ark, they looked for someone to nurse him. But by God's will, Moses (PBUH) refused to be nursed by the women that were hired to nurse him. His sister went to the palace and suggested to the queen to give Moses (PBUH) to his biological mother to nurse without divulging her real identity. Thus, God brought Moses (PBUH) back to his mother to nurse him and raise him. God's protection saved Moses (PBUH) from drowning and then from being killed at the hands of the Pharaoh.

Then the verses reminded Moses (PBUH) of another of God's favours, *“And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses, and I have chosen you for Myself.”* Moses (PBUH) grew up in Pharaoh's palace. One day he went to the city where he found an Israeli fighting with an Egyptian. The Israeli called him for help. Moses (PBUH) pushed the Egyptian and the Egyptian fell down dead. Moses (PBUH) regretted this. He did not intend to kill the Egyptian he only wanted to push him, but the push was so hard that it killed the Egyptian. God inspired him to repent and to seek His forgiveness and God relented toward him and forgave him. Moses (PBUH) was tried several times by God. He had to flee Egypt and take refuge in a foreign land. Moses had to work for his living as a Sheppard after having been raised in the king's palace leading a comfortable life. When Moses (PBUH) was ready for his mission, God brought him back, *“And you did kill a man and We delivered you from great distress, and tried you with a heavy trial. And you did stay years among the folk of Midian. Then you came as ordained by Me, Moses, and I have chosen you for Myself.”*

*“Go, you and your brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in remembering Me; Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; And speak to him a gentle word, that perchance he may heed or fear.”* Having been supported by God's signs, the command was issued to Moses and Aaron (PBUT) to go to Pharaoh. They should continuously remember God because this was the tool God provided them with to be able to face the tyranny of Pharaoh. They were commanded to talk to Pharaoh gently. A provocative talk may incite stubbornness and arrogance. They should not give up on Pharaoh; he may still have a chance to repent and believe. God new how will Pharaoh react to their call; but God does not punish people on the basis of His knowledge. God punishes people on the basis of their actual deeds.

Moses and Aaron (PBUH) expressed their apprehension of speaking to Pharaoh, *“They (Moses and Aaron) said, ‘Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.’”* Aaron (PBUH) was certainly not present with Moses (PBUH) during this exchange between Moses (PBUH) and God but this is one of the features of the style of Quran. The narrative moves from one scene to another ignoring the details in between so that the message which moves people is emphasized. This part of the dialogue must have occurred when Moses (PBUH) returned back from the meeting with God. He must have told Aaron (PBUH)

about his dialogue with God and that resulted in this call to God, *“Our Lord, we fear that he may hasten with insolence against us, or he transgresses all bounds.”* God reassured them of His support in a prompt and firm statement, *“Fear not, for I am with you. I hear and see (everything).”* The reassurance is emphasized by the statement that God hears and sees everything. The verses continued to teach Moses and Aaron (PBUH) the approach they should use, *“So go you both to him, and say, ‘Verily, we are messengers sent by your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not. We bring you a sign from your Lord. And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance. Verily it has been revealed to us that the torment will be for him who rejects the truth and turns his back to it.’”* The approach consisted of four points. First they should start by stating the fundamental fact that they are speaking to him as God’s messengers. The phrasing of the expression expressed the fact that they were the messengers of Pharaoh’s Lord, to emphasize the principle of the Oneness of God. He is Moses’ (PBUH) God as well as Pharaoh’s God. He is the God of everyone and everything. The second step was to explain their objective, *“So let the Children of Israel go with us, and torment them not.”* The third point was to give the evidence that they were who they said they were, *“We bring you a sign from your Lord.”* Finally, they were to give an inducement followed by a warning, *“And peace will be for him who follows the right guidance. Verily it has been revealed to us that the doom will be for him who rejects the truth and turns his back to it.”*

They went to Pharaoh and they did what they were told to do. Pharaoh responded, *“Who then is your Lord, Moses?”* Pharaoh ignored Moses’ (PBUH) statement that his Lord is also Pharaoh’s Lord. Moses’ (PBUH) response gave the description of God as the Creator, *“He said, ‘Our Lord is He who gave to everything its nature, then guided it aright.’”* God gave each creature its nature and its existence. Then He guided each and every creature to the way which enables them to perform the task which they were created for. This verse outlines the perfect attributes of God: He gives the existence, the shape and form, and the ability to perform the assigned task. These principles apply to all created things. Pharaoh continued to question Moses (PBUH), *“(Pharaoh) said, ‘What then is the state of the former generations?’”* Moses (PBUH) responded wisely, *“The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded. My Lord never errs, nor forgets.”* Only God knows the unseen. He knows everything and He is not forgetful.

Moses (PBUH) continued to explain to Pharaoh the way God controls His creation, *“It is He who has made the earth as a bed and has threaded roads for you therein and has sent down water from the sky and thereby We have brought forth diverse kinds of vegetation.”* The earth is truly the cradle of humanity in each place and each time. It has been made easy for people to walk on, to till, to plant, and to live. God the Creator created the earth to be suitable for all these tasks. He also gave the human beings the ability to perform these tasks. This was a very appropriate example because it was an example which can be easily appreciated by an Egyptian; Egyptians lived in the fertile valley, tilling and planting. The Creator caused the rain to come down forming rivers like the river Nile. The Nile flew in the valley giving rise to many kinds of plants. The plants come out in pairs like most living things. Some plants carry the male and female cells together and sometimes they are carried separately in different plants like many mammals, *“Eat and pasture your cattle. Verily, in this are signs for those who are endowed with understanding.”*

The narrative continued to describe the earth but in the words of God, *“From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again.”* Human beings were created from the dust which covers this earth. Both humankind and the earth are made from the same elements. Humankind was created from the earth, will be buried in the earth, and will be resurrected from the earth. Not only humankind was created from the same elements which constitute the earth, but he continues to eat plants from the earth, drink water that runs through the earth, and breathe air that is produced by the earth. When he dies, he will be buried under its surface and his body will decompose and will become part of the earth. On the Day of Resurrection, he will be raised again as he was created in the first instance. It is appropriate to mention the beginning and end of humankind and his relationship to the earth in view of the fact that Pharaoh, the tyrant, never thought of himself as a human being, he considered himself god.

It is implicit that at this point, Moses (PBUH) must have shown Pharaoh the miracles that God gave him, but the Quran simply cites the conclusion, *“And We showed Pharaoh all Our signs, but he did reject and refuse.”* Pharaoh could not argue with Moses (PBUH) since he saw the miracles but still he rejected and accused Moses (PBUH) of using magic, *“He said, ‘Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?’”*

It seems that the persecution of the Children of Israel had political dimensions. Pharaoh, the tyrant, wanted to restrict their power base. So, he used to kill their males and enslave the females. So, when Moses (PBUH) requested that Pharaoh should let the Children of Israel leave Egypt he responded saying, *“Did you come to drive us out of our land with your magic, Moses?”* Pharaoh may have thought that freeing the Children of Israel will be a preamble for controlling the land and the government of Egypt. Pharaoh thought that Moses (PBUH) is after worldly gains because the like of Pharaoh only believes in material gains. The answer then was to challenge Moses (PBUH) with magic tricks, *“But we surely can produce for you magic like yours; so make an appointment between us and you, which neither we nor you shall fail to keep, at a place convenient (to us both).”* Pharaoh thought that Moses (PBUH) was simply trying to usurp his power. He challenged Moses (PBUH) to come to a magic competition that would be witnessed by all people. He warned him not to miss that competition. Moses (PBUH) accepted the challenge and named the time and place of the competition, *“Moses said, ‘Your appointment is the day of the Festival and let the people be gathered together in the early forenoon.’”*

The narrative continued to describe the scene on the day of the competition. The present episode does not mention the details of the dialogue between Pharaoh and the chiefs of his people nor does it mention the details of the dialogue between Pharaoh and the magicians in which he exhorted them to defeat Moses (PBUH) and promised them a great reward. These details were mentioned elsewhere but here the narrative summarized all of this in one verse, *“Then Pharaoh went and gathered his strength, then came.”* Moses (PBUH) advised and warned the magicians before the beginning of the contest, *“Moses said to them, ‘Beware, do not forge a lie against God, lest He destroys you utterly by torment; the forger will never succeed.’”* It seems that the truth in Moses’ (PBUH) words touched the hearts of some of the magicians. An argument between the magicians ensued when they heard Moses’ (PBUH) words, *“Then they debated their affair among themselves, and they kept their counsel secret.”* However, the group who were interested in Pharaoh’s reward tried to brush aside Moses’ (PBUH) warning and exhorted their

fellow magicians to unite against Moses (PBUH), *“They said, ‘These two are certainly (expert) magicians, their objective is to drive you out from your land with their magic, and to do away with your best traditions; therefore, concert your efforts, and come in battle line. Whoso is uppermost this day will be indeed successful.’”*

A word of truth has a magic power. It is like a bullet that shatters the ranks of falsehood and makes their false beliefs crumble. This explains why Pharaoh accepted to arrange a contest between Moses and Aaron (PBUT) on one side and the magicians on the other side. One wonders what power Moses (PBUH) had in the face of the power of the Pharaoh the tyrant to force Pharaoh to arrange such a public contest and to sit and watch. It must have been the aura that God bestowed on Moses and Aaron (PBUH) that made Pharaoh and the magicians feel intimidated.

The magicians wanted to show their confidence so they asked, *“Moses, will you cast first or we will be the first to cast?”* Moses (PBUH) showed his confidence by letting them start, *“He said, ‘You cast first.’ Then their ropes and their rods - so it seemed to him on account of their magic - began to move.”* The verse paints an image of the power of their magic, to the extent that even Moses (PBUH) became afraid, *“Moses conceived a fear in his mind.”* But God reassured him, *“We said, ‘Fear not, for you have indeed the upper hand; And cast that which is in your right hand, it will quickly swallow up that which they have faked. What they have faked is but a magician's trick; and the magician will never succeed (no matter) where he goes.’”* God reassured Moses (PBUH), He told him you have the truth on your side and they have nothing but falsehood; he had the truthful faith and they had the art of magic; he was fighting for the truth to prevail and they were fighting for the reward and the glory; and he was connected to the greatest power and they relied on the power of an immortal. God told him to cast what he had in his right hand and it will swallow what they cast. The magicians will never succeed because they create illusions that do not last and cannot stand in the face of the truth.

So, the greatest surprise happened when Moses (PBUH) cast his rod. The magicians were awed by the scene of Moses' (PBUH) rod swallowing their ropes and rods and they suddenly realized the truth in Moses' (PBUH) words. The change in their feelings was overwhelming, they did not find the words to describe their thoughts, they simply bowed in prostration to Moses (PBUH), *“The magicians were thrown down in prostration. They said, ‘We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.’”* However, the tyrant was oblivious to the meaning of what he just observed; he was blinded by his own arrogance and tyranny, *“(Pharaoh) said, ‘Did you believe in him before I give you permission? Surely, this must be your leader, who has taught you magic. I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees, so shall you know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting torment.’”* He had the audacity to blame them for submitting to God before asking for his permission. In his denial, he accused Moses (PBUH) to be their master who taught them magic. He did not appreciate the fact that their hearts were guided to the belief in God because God removed the veil that clouded their insight, so they saw the truth. He then continued to threaten them with the harsh punishment that he can inflict on them. He thought he can control the bodies since the hearts eluded him. But it was too late. The touch of faith connected the minute atom with its

huge source and gave it tremendous power. The worldly power became weak, the worldly life became worthless, and the believing hearts yearned for the new horizons of faith, *“They said, ‘We will never choose you above the clear proofs that have come to us, and above Him who created us. So decree what you will decree. You can decide only matters in this life of the world. We have indeed believed in our Lord, so that He may forgive us our sins, and the magic to which you forced us to do. God is Best and Ever Lasting.’”* The magicians simply told Pharaoh that they value their faith much higher than he could ever offer them. He could only control them in this short worldly life. They had hopes in the life of the Hereafter. The life of the Hereafter is better than anything he could offer them and it is everlasting.

God inspired the believing magicians to teach Pharaoh a lesson in faith, *“Verily, he who comes to his Lord as a sinner - for him is Hell - therein shall he neither die nor live. But whoso comes to Him a believer, having done good deeds, for such are the high stations; Gardens of Eternity, beneath which rivers flow, they will dwell therein forever. That is the reward for those who purify themselves.”* He could threaten them all he wanted in this life but the real threat is for those who come to their Lord as criminals. They will be in a state between life and death. They will neither be allowed to die and escape the torment nor will they be allowed to live and enjoy life.

The narrative moves to another scene when God inspired Moses (PBUH) to lead his people out of Egypt, *“We revealed to Moses, ‘Travel by night with My servants, and strike a dry path for them through the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, neither being afraid (of drowning).’”* The verse stated very briefly God’s command to Moses (PBUH) to travel towards the sea. He was again reassured of victory over Pharaoh.

The following verse mentions very briefly how Pharaoh went in their pursuit but he and his soldiers drowned in the sea, *“Then Pharaoh followed them with his hosts and there covered them that which did cover them of the sea. And Pharaoh led his people astray instead of guiding them.”* There is a lesson to be learnt here. This was a battle between the weak believers and Pharaoh’s powerful army. The believers were by far a negligible force compared to Pharaoh’s army. They had no chance to be saved except by a divine interference. When the believers dared the tyrant and were not afraid to die, God provided His support. When the Israelites were persecuted by Pharaoh and they gave in to the oppression there was no divine intervention; but when they revolted against the tyrant and proclaimed their faith, God provided His support.

Having saved them, the narrative continued to remind the Israelites of the bounty of God and to warn them lest they forget that victory is only attainable by the grace of God, *“Children of Israel, We have delivered you from your enemy, and We made a covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai), and We sent down to you Manna and quails. (Saying), ‘Eat of the good things which We have provided you, and transgress not lest My wrath comes upon you. He on whom My wrath comes, he is lost indeed. Verily I am All-Forgiving towards him who repents and believes and does good, and then continues to follow the right direction.’”* The verses tell of God’s decision to meet with Moses (PBUH) on the right side of the Mount and to give him the

Tablets which included the doctrine and the law that the Israelites should observe. God gave them Manna and quail to eat. This was a great bounty of God which allowed them to survive in the desert. God reminded them of His bounties and warned them against excesses. Over indulgence in material desires promotes heedlessness and laziness. God was preparing them to the serious undertaking that they were about to receive. The fate that Pharaoh met was still fresh in their minds and was used to emphasize the need to seek God's support by remembering Him often. They were also reminded of the availability of the path of repentance for those who forget and sin. Repentance is not merely words to be uttered but it is in the first place a strong intention of the heart, its effect is realized through belief and good deeds, and it should be reflected on the behavior of the believer. The right direction will be followed only when these three steps were completed.

The next few verses describe the scene of Moses' (PBUH) meeting with God. God decided to meet with Moses (PBUH) in forty days after the exodus. In this meeting, Moses (PBUH) was given the undertaking to lead the Israelites in the post victory era. Moses (PBUH) went up the mountain, leaving his people in the valley and appointed Aaron (PBUH) as his deputy. Moses (PBUH) aspired to the meeting with God. His strong yearning to the meeting made him hasten to the appointed place. There he had a surprise, *"And (it was said), 'What has made you hasten from your people, Moses?' He said, 'They are close upon my track. I hastened to You, my Lord, that You may be well pleased.'* (God) said, *'We have tested your people in your absence. The Samiri has led them astray.'*" It was a surprise for Moses (PBUH) to be told that his people fell for the seduction of the Samiri. The verses did not detail the nature of the sin that the Israelites committed, but Moses (PBUH) must have realized the gravity of the situation. Moses (PBUH) went back quickly to his people angry, *"So Moses returned to his people in a state of indignation and sorrow. He said, 'My people, did not your Lord make a fair promise to you? Did then the promise seem to you long (in coming)? Or did you desire that a wrath should descend from your Lord on you, and so you broke your promise to me?'"* These verses explain the details of the trial that the Israelites were subjected to and the sin which they committed. Moses found them worshipping a golden calf. Moses (PBUH) was saddened and hurt by what he saw. He reminded his people of God's promise, the promise to give them victory and to bring them back to the Holy Land. He rebuked them for their forgetfulness and impatience.

Their answer was, *"We did not break the promise to you of our own will, but we were burdened with the weight of the people's ornaments, and we threw them (into the fire), and similarly did the Samiri throw. Then he produced for them a calf, of saffron hue, which gave forth a mooing sound. And they said, 'This is your god and the god of Moses, but he forgot.'* Did they not see that it could not return to them any speech (for answer), and that it had neither power to harm them nor to do them good?" They explained to Moses (PBUH) that they brought with them from Egypt jewelry that was entrusted to them. They wanted to get rid of the jewelry because they realized that it was not allowable for them to keep it. The Samiri took the jewelry, melt it, and cast the molten metal into a calf. The calf was made in such a way that it produced a sound when the wind blew through it. The Israelites were awed by the golden calf which produced an amazing sound so they believed the Samiri when he told them that this was their god. It was an obvious trick that they fell for. The trick was naïve, however, they failed to realize that the calf neither spoke nor presented them with any benefit nor harm. They also ignored Aaron (PBUH)

when he tried to advise them of their mistake, *“Aaron had already, before this said to them, ‘My people, you are being tested in this, for verily your Lord is (God) the Lord of Mercy; so follow me and obey my command.’”* Instead of heeding Aaron’s (PBUH) advice they were adamant in pursuing their sinful attitude, *“They had said, ‘We will never cease being devoted to it until Moses returns to us.’”*

Moses (PBUH) came back and listened to what his people said and in his anger looked at his brother and grabbed him by the head, and said to him, *“Aaron, what held you back when you saw them going astray, from following me? Have you then disobeyed my order? (Aaron) replied, ‘Son of my mother, do not seize me by my beard or by my head. Truly I feared that you would say, ‘You have caused a division among the children of Israel, and you did not observe my word.’”*” One can glean from the verse that Aaron (PBUH) was well composed and he appealed to the brotherhood’s link between him and Moses (PBUH) to calm him down. He then explained the underlying rationale for his behavior. He told Moses (PBUH) that had he been forceful in dealing with them they would have had certainly split into divisions, some would have sided with him and some would have been against him. The way he chose to act was actually aligned with Moses’ (PBUH) advice to keep the people united.

Moses (PBUH) addressed his people first because they were the ones who committed the offence. They were not forced to worship the calf but they succumbed to the temptation which the Samiri subjected them to. Moses (PBUH) then turned to his brother because he was the leader and should have prevented the deviant behavior of his people. Moses (PBUH) then turned to the source of evil, the Samiri, *“(Moses) said, ‘What then is your case, Samiri?’”* The undertone of the question reflected Moses (PBUH) displeasure of what the Samiri did. The Samiri replied, *“I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the messenger, and threw it; thus did my soul entice me?”* There are different interpretations of the verse, but none of them is unequivocal. The verse states the reply of the Samiri without further elaboration. We think that the Samiri was evasive in his response, trying to deflect Moses (PBUH) blame. Moses (PBUH) decided to sever all ties between the Samiri and the Israelites until he dies then he would be held accountable by God. Moses (PBUH) spoke to the Samiri harshly to prove to his people that the calf could not protect the Samiri against Moses (PBUH), *“(Moses) said, ‘Then go, you have been given (the right) in this life to say, ‘Touch me not,’ but indeed there is an appointment for you that you cannot break. Now look at your god which you were devoted to. Verily we will burn it and will scatter its dust over the sea.’”* Then Moses (PBUH) stated the fundamental principle of the true faith, *“Your god is the One God. There is no god other than Him. He embraces all things in His knowledge.”*

### **Verses 99 to 135:**

99. *Thus, We narrate to you some stories of what happened before, and We have given you a message from Ourselves.*

100. *Whoso turns away from it, he verily will bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection,*

101. *Abiding under it - an evil burden for them to carry on the Day of Resurrection,*

102. *On the day when the trumpet is blown We will assemble the guilty blue-eyed (with terror),*
103. *Murmuring among themselves, "You remained only ten (days)."*
104. *We know best what they say, when their eminent leader will say, "You did not remain more than a day."*
105. *They ask you concerning the mountains. Say, "My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust;*
106. *He will leave them as plains smooth and level;*
107. *You shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness."*
108. *On that Day they will follow the caller with no deviation therefrom. All voices will be hushed in the presence of the Lord of Mercy and you will hear only a faint murmur.*
109. *On that day no intercession avails except for those for whom permission has been granted by the Lord of Mercy and whose word is acceptable to Him.*
110. *He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them, but they shall not encompass Him with their knowledge.*
111. *(All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) - the Living, the Self-Existing. He who bears iniquity will certainly be unsuccessful.*
112. *But he who does good deeds and has faith, will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.*
113. *Thus, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may be conscious of God, or that they may take heed.*
114. *High above all is God, the King, the Truth. And hasten not (Muhammad) with the Quran before its revelation to you is completed, but say, "My Lord, increase me in knowledge."*
115. *We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in firm resolve.*
116. *And when We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam," they prostrated themselves except Iblis; he refused.*
117. *Therefor We said, "Adam, this is an enemy to you and to your wife, so let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil.*
118. *Surely it is (promised) for you that you shall neither be hungry therein nor unclothed;*
119. *You will neither suffer thirst, nor will you be exposed to the sun's heat."*
120. *But Satan whispered evil to him, he said, "Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and a kingdom that never decays?"*
121. *They both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness became apparent to them. They began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.*
122. *Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.*
123. *He (God) said, "Go down from the Garden, all of you, one of you a foe to the other. But when there comes to you from Me a guidance, then whoso follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor come to grief.*
124. *But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him life will be hard, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."*



125. *He will say, "My Lord, why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?"*
126. *(God) will say, "Our Signs came to you and you disregarded them; thus will you this day, be disregarded."*
127. *And thus do We recompense him who was given to excesses and did not believe in the revelations of his Lord, and the torment of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more lasting.*
128. *Is it not a guidance for them (to know) how many a generation We destroyed before them, in whose dwelling-places they walk? Most surely there are signs in this for those endowed with understanding.*
129. *Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, and a term already fixed, the judgment would have been inevitable.*
130. *Therefor (Muhammad), persevere in enduring what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before sunset. And glorify Him some hours of the night and at the two ends of the day that you may be well pleased.*
131. *Do not stretch your eyes toward that which We have given for enjoyment to parties of them - the splendour of the life of this world - through which We test them; but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.*
132. *Enjoin prayer on your family and your people, and persevere in doing it. We do not ask you to provide sustenance, We provide for you. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for (those who remain) God conscious.*
133. *And they say, "If only he would bring us a sign from his Lord." Has not come to them a clear evidence of what is in the former Scriptures?*
134. *And if We had inflicted on them a torment before this, they would have said, "Our Lord, if only You sent us a messenger, we would have certainly followed Your revelations before we were humiliated and put to shame."*
135. *Say, "Each one (of us) is waiting. So you wait. You will come to know who the followers of the straight path are and who the guided are." (20: 99 – 135)*

*"Thus, We narrate to you some stories of what happened before, and We have given you a message from Ourselves. Whoso turns away from it, he verily will bear a burden on the Day of Resurrection; abiding under it - an evil burden for them to carry on the Day of Resurrection. On the day when the trumpet is blown, We will assemble the guilty blue-eyed (with terror), murmuring among themselves, 'You remained only ten (days).' We know best what they say, when their eminent leader will say, 'You did not remain more than a day.'" Like the story of Moses (PBUH), the Quran narrates to you other stories about events of the past. These stories are mentioned in the Quran which was revealed to you as a message to humankind. The verses paint a picture for those who turn away from this message, they are called criminals. The picture shows these criminals as if they were carrying weights. The criminals will be gathered together on the Day on which the trumpet will be blown. They will come whispering to each other and their faces will be darkened as if their guilt has covered their faces with a black veil. The fear will overwhelm them and they will not dare raise their voices. They will be wondering how long did they stay on earth. Their whole life on earth will seem very short. Some will think it lasted ten days, but a prominent leader among them will tell them, "You did not remain more than a*

day.” How trivial will then the pleasures which they were interested in during their worldly lives seem? How short the duration of life on earth is in comparison with the life of the Hereafter?

The scene will become horrific when they ask, “*you concerning the mountains.*” The answer will reflect the horrible scene, “*Say, ‘My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust; He will leave them as plains smooth and level; you shall not see therein any crookedness or unevenness.’*” They will follow the caller walking on the smooth plains that were left after the mountains were destroyed, “*On that Day they will follow the caller with no deviation therefrom.*”

Silence will wrap the place every one will be attentive in the presence of the Lord of Mercy, “*All voices will be hushed in the presence of the Lord of Mercy and you will hear only a faint murmur.*” No one will be able to intercede on behalf of another except by the permission of the Lord of Mercy, “*On that day no intercession avails except for those for whom permission has been granted by the Lord of Mercy and whose word is acceptable to Him. He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them, but they shall not encompass Him with their knowledge. (All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) - the Living, the Self-Existing. He who bears iniquity will certainly be unsuccessful. But he who does good deeds and has faith, will neither fear injustice nor deprivation.*” The wrongdoers will be punished and those who believed and did good deeds shall suffer neither injustice, nor fear.

The Quran contained various forms of warning to alert people to the consequences of heedlessness, “*Thus, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran and explained therein in detail some of the warnings, in order that they may be conscious of God, or that they may take heed.*”

The Prophet (PBUH) used to be anxious that he may forget the Quran as it was recited to him by Gabriel (PBUH), so the verse reassured him that he will not forget, “*High above all is God, the King, the Truth. And hasten not (Muhammad) with the Quran before its revelation to you is completed, but say, ‘My Lord, increase me in knowledge.’*” Muhammad (PBUH) was commanded to pray for knowledge from God.

The subsequent verses address a different theme. The verses narrate the story of Adam (PBUH). God tested Adam but he succumbed to the temptation of Satan and disobeyed God. However, God taught him how to seek God’s forgiveness and he was forgiven. There is an interesting connection between this story and the previous verse. In the previous verse, the Prophet (PBUH) was worried that he might forget the verses of the Quran which Gabriel (PBUH) was reciting to him while in the story of Adam (PBUH), Adam (PBUH) disobeyed God because he forgot God’s warning about Satan, “*We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in firm resolve.*” This was the covenant that Adam (PBUH) pledged to God. Adam (PBUH) pledged to obey God’s command not to eat the fruits of a specific tree. Adam (PBUH) was allowed to eat the fruits of all the trees in paradise except for this single tree. The covenant exemplified the concept of the lawful and forbidden. This was a necessary training course to build up the determination and the discipline which free humankind from the control of the carnal instincts and human desires. Self-discipline is a true measure of the ability of the soul to be free of the control of material desires. It is a valid measure for the progress of human civilisation. Animals have no self-discipline; their behavior is totally controlled by their instincts

and desires. The divine wisdom willed that Adam (PBUH) should be trained for his role on earth. His determination was tested to awaken his ability to resist Satan's temptation and to alert him to the never ending battle between him and Satan.

*“And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves to Adam,’ they prostrated themselves except Iblis; he refused.”* The details of the scene have been omitted here and mentioned in details in other Suras because the focus of the present verses is on God's blessings on Adam (PBUH), *“Therefor we said, ‘Adam, this is an enemy to you and to your wife, so let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil. Surely, it is (promised) for you that you shall neither be hungry therein nor unclothed; you will neither suffer thirst, nor will you be exposed to the sun's heat.’”* God warned Adam (PBUH) to beware of Satan. When Satan was commanded to prostrate to Adam (PBUH), he refused to obey and vowed to be the eternal enemy for humankind. God told Adam (PBUH) and his wife that Satan will do whatever he can to drive them out of Paradise, *“So, let him not drive you both out of the Garden so that you come to toil.”* God told Adam (PBUH) and his spouse that they will enjoy a life in Paradise that is free of toil, stress, uncertainty, pain, and loss. But Satan discovered the areas of human weakness in Adam (PBUH) and approached him, *“But Satan whispered evil to him, he said, ‘Adam, shall I show you the tree of immortality and a kingdom that never decays?’”* Two vulnerabilities that humankind has: love of immortality and power. Satan promised him that he will get both when he eats the fruits of the forbidden tree. Adam (PBUH) forgot God's warning and succumbed to the temptation. Their nakedness became apparent to them, *“They both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness became apparent to them. They began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden. And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.”* It may be understood that when they ate the fruits of the tree they suddenly became aware of their nakedness. Their private parts became apparent to them, so they became ashamed of their nakedness and started using the tree leaves to cover their private parts. It may also be understood that somehow eating the forbidden fruit awakened their sexual drives. Entertaining sexual desires and thoughts made them feel ashamed. The message that one gets from the verse is that there was a connection between eating the fruits of the tree and the awareness of being naked. The verse stated that, *“their nakedness became apparent to them,”* which implies that they were naked before but they were not aware of their nakedness. The awareness may have resulted from inner feelings that they entertained. The episode was mentioned in different ways in other places of the Quran, *“But Satan whispered to them to make apparent to them that was concealed from them of their private parts.”* (7: 20) and *“Children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts.”* (7: 27) The clothing that is referred to in this verse may have not been material but psychological. It may be a reference to innocence, purity, and being connected to God. However, these are all conjectures.

God then bestowed His mercy on Adam and his spouse and forgave them, *“Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him, and guided him.”* The details of them seeking forgiveness are not mentioned to leave the ambience for the mercy of God. The command was issued to the two enemies to go down to live on earth, the field of the long battle between the two, *“He (God) said, ‘Go down from the Garden, all of you, one of you a foe to the other.’”* The Children of Adam were thus forewarned of the enmity of Satan. God willed to bestow His mercy on the Children of Adam, so He sent His messengers to guide people to the straight path, *“But when there comes to*

*you from Me a guidance, then whoso follows My guidance, he will not go astray nor come to grief. But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him life will be hard, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment.*” Those who follow God’s guidance will be protected from going astray and they will never grieve. Grief is the fruit of going astray. Going astray may be accompanied with pleasure but it is a pleasure that will promote grief; grief in this life and in the Hereafter. Forbidden pleasure is always followed by pain and leads to bad consequences. Those who turn away from guidance will endure a life of hardship and will be raised blind in the Hereafter. When he asks, *“My Lord, why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?”* The answer will be, *“Our Signs came to you and you disregarded them; thus will you this day, be disregarded. And thus do We recompense him who was given to excesses and did not believe in the revelations of his Lord, and the torment of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more lasting.”* Those who reject God’s guidance have transgressed. They transgressed when they abandoned guidance and rejected the most valuable gift that God gave them. They transgressed when they refused to see God’s signs. They did not make good use of the gift of sight during their worldly lives, so they will be deprived of this gift in the Hereafter.

The following verses deal with a different theme, the stories of ancient generations. These stories may be more compelling to the disbelievers than the description of the Day of Judgment, since the stories are part of the recent history while the scenes of the Day of Judgment are part of the unseen, *“Is it not a guidance for them (to know) how many a generation We destroyed before them, in whose dwelling-places they walk? Most surely there are signs in this for those endowed with understanding.”* When we read the history of these ancient generations, we can close our eyes and imagine the scenes of their lives, their civilizations, their hopes, and their movements. However, when we open our eyes and we find that their homes have been destroyed and their civilizations have been destroyed, we will realize that we will have the same fate. This should be a lesson to those who are endowed with understanding. God in His wisdom has decreed that the people of this generation will not be tormented like the earlier generations, *“Had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from your Lord, and a term already fixed, the judgment would have been inevitable.”*

They are only reprieved until a certain time has been reached, so be patient and celebrate the praise of your Lord, *“Therefore (Muhammad), persevere in enduring what they say, and celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before sunset. And glorify Him some hours of the night and at the two ends of the day that you may be well pleased.”* Praising God is a link that connects the servant to God. This link provides the soul with security and contentment. The soul will revel in the feelings of being near to God. It will lose the interest in worldly pleasures, *“Do not stretch your eyes toward that which We have given for enjoyment to parties of them - the splendour of the life of this world - through which We test them; but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.”* These pleasures are not only transient pleasures but they are also a test. The provision of your Lord is better because it is a blessing from God. This was not a call to become ascetic, but it is a command to appreciate the true ethical values; God’s nearness is better than transient wealth and power.

*“Enjoin prayer on your family and your people, and persevere in doing it. We do not ask you to provide sustenance, We provide for you. But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for (those who remain) God conscious.”* The first duty of a Muslim is to raise a Muslim family, a family that is connected to God through prayer. Establishing prayers is a difficult task. It requires perseverance and steadfastness to produce its effects. Prayers and other rituals are of benefit to people; there is no benefit that will accrue to God. These rituals provide a way for people to become God conscious. God consciousness will be rewarded both in this life and in the Hereafter.

The narrative turns to another theme, an address to those who were asking the Prophet (PBUH) to bring a miracle, *“And they say, ‘If only he would bring us a sign from his Lord.’ Has not come to them a clear evidence of what is in the former Scriptures?”* Their request was motivated only by their arrogance and stubbornness. The Quran itself is a sign that connects Islam with the previous revelations.

God sent Muhammad (PBUH) so that they would have no excuse, *“And if We had inflicted on them a torment before this, they would have said, ‘Our Lord, if only You sent us a messenger, we would have certainly followed Your revelations before we were humiliated and put to shame.’”* They then should wait for their inevitable fate, *“Say, ‘Each one (of us) is waiting. So you wait. You will come to know who are the followers of the straight path and who is guided.’”*

## **Sura 21: Al-Anbiya (The Prophets)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 35:**

1. *Their reckoning has drawn near to people, while they turn away in heedlessness.*
2. *Never comes to them a new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it while they play,*
3. *With hearts preoccupied. And they confer in secret. The wrongdoers say, "Is this other than a mortal like you? Will you then yield to magic while you see (it)?"*
4. *He said, "My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."*
5. *Nay, they say, "(these are but) medleys of dreams. Nay, he forged it. Nay, he is a poet. Let him then bring us a sign like the ones that were sent to those (Prophets) of old."*
6. *Not a township before them believed, of those which We destroyed, would they then believe?*
7. *And We did not send before you other than men, whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the pervious Scriptures if you do not know?*
8. *And We neither made them bodies that did not eat food nor were they immortal.*
9. *Then, We fulfilled what they were promised, and We delivered them and those whom We willed, and We destroyed those who were given to excesses.*
10. *Indeed, We have revealed to you a Book in which there is a reminder for you. Have you then no understanding?*
11. *How many a community that committed wrongdoings have We shattered, and raised up after them another people.*
12. *And, when they felt Our might coming upon them, they fled.*
13. *Do not flee, but return back to the pleasures that you reveled in and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned.*
14. *They said, "Woe to us. We were indeed wrongdoers."*
15. *And that cry of theirs did not cease until We made them as reaped corn, lifeless.*
16. *And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in jest.*
17. *If We had wished to find a pastime, We would have surely taken it from the things nearest to Us, if We would do (such a thing).*
18. *Nay, We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and there upon the falsehood perishes. Woe is to you for the (false) things you ascribe (to Us).*
19. *To Him belong all (the creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth. Those who are in His (very) Presence are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they (ever) weary (of His service).*
20. *They celebrate His praise night and day, tirelessly.*
21. *Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise (the dead)?*
22. *If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both. Glorified be God, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (to Him).*
23. *He will not be questioned as to that which He does, but they will be questioned.*

24. *Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides him? Say, "Bring your proof; this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me." But most of them know not the truth, and so they turn away.*
25. *And We did not send a messenger before you but We reveal to him, (saying), "There is no God save Me, so worship Me."*
26. *And they say the Lord of Mercy has begotten a son; Glory to be Him. They are only honored servants.*
27. *They speak not until He has spoken, and they act by His command.*
28. *He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede except for him whom He accepts, and they tremble in awe of Him.*
29. *If any of them should say, "I am a god besides Him", such a one We do recompense with Hell; thus do, We recompense the wrongdoers.*
30. *Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), then We separated them? And We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?*
31. *And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shift with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through; that they may be guided.*
32. *And We have made the heavens as a canopy, well-guarded; yet they turn away from its signs.*
33. *It is He who created the night and the day; and the sun and the moon. All swim along, each in its own orbit.*
34. *We did not grant immortality to any one before you; so if you die, would they be immortal?*
35. *Every soul shall have a taste of death; and We try you with evil and with good, and to Us you will return. (21: 1 – 35)*

This is a Sura which was revealed in Mecca. It deals with the fundamental issue that has been dealt with in all other Meccan Suras, the doctrine. The Sura deals with the aspects of the belief in the Oneness of God, the Message and the concept of resurrection. The narrative uses the cosmic phenomena as a vehicle to discuss these aspects. The doctrine is part of this universe. It has been established on the truth which is the basis of the creation of the universe. God did not create His creation in jest. The Sura then takes the reader on a trip around the heavens and earth, pointing to the unity of the laws that govern both. The narrative links the unity of the creation to the Oneness of God. The Sura indicates that the lives of all living creatures start from water and end by death. All living things share the same beginning and end.

Hawwa stipulates that this Sura elaborate on verses 6 and 7 of Surat al-Baqarah, *"Surely, those who reject faith, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and a veil on their eyes; great torment is theirs."*

Since the doctrine is a part of the universal law, truth will prevail and falsehood will perish. God will destroy the wrongdoers and will support the believers. The Sura then explores the experience of a number of God's messengers. Accounts of some messengers were given in more details than others. Finally, some of the scenes of the Day of Judgment are explored. These different topics fit together to serve the presentation of the main theme of the Sura and to motivate people to seek the truth that the Message of Muhammad (PBUH) brought.

*"Their reckoning has drawn near to people, while they turn away in heedlessness. Never comes to them a new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it while they play, with hearts preoccupied."* A very strong commencement, it shakes the heedless and alerts them to the coming reckoning. It rebukes the disbelievers for being blind to God's signs which are portrayed in front of their eyes.

*"And they confer in secret"* The disbelievers used to meet secretly to discuss the nature of the Message which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought and ways of counteracting it, some of them would say, *"Is this other than a mortal like you? Will you then yield to magic while you see (it)?"* They were overwhelmed by the language of the Quran. They tried to explain why they were impressed by the Quran by making excuses. Some claimed that the Quran is a product of magic. They rebuked each other for being awed by this magic. The Prophet (PBUH) sought God help, saying, *"My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."* God is aware of all talks, whether made in the open or in secret. In their deliberations about the nature of the Quran, some said it was magic. Others said it is nothing but dreams, *"(these are but) medleys of dreams."* Yet a third group said, *"he forged it,"* and a fourth group said, *"he is a poet."* None of these explanations was convincing so, they took another course of action, *"Let him then bring us a sign like the ones that were sent to those (Prophets) of old."* They asked for a material miracle. They should have known that God's miracles usually herald catastrophic events which lead to the destruction of the communities, *"Not a township before them believed of those which We destroyed, would they then believe?"* This scenario happened several times in the past, why would it be different this time?

*"And We did not send before you other than men, whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the previous Scriptures if you do not know? And We neither made them bodies that did not eat food nor were they immortal."* It was the divine will that the Message is delivered by human messengers. The Messengers were ordinary human beings with physical bodies that need nourishment just like anyone else. It was logical to send human beings as Messengers. God's Messengers should be able to lead a life like normal human beings and feel the same emotions and pains like normal people so that they would be able to relate to the human beings whom they were sent to guide. Asking people to emulate a creature that is different than them is futile. How can an individual who does not feel like they feel; does not enjoy life like they enjoy it; and does not appreciate the failings of human beings be a role model for them.

God's choice of a human being to carry His Message to the people is an honor that God bestowed on the human race. This was God's will and it was also His will to deliver the righteous and to destroy the transgressors, *"Then, We fulfilled what they were promised, and We delivered them and those whom We willed, and We destroyed those who were given to excesses."*



*“Indeed, We have revealed to you a Book in which there is a reminder for you. Have you then no understanding?”* The Quran is an eternal miracle that will last for all future generations to see and experience. It is not like other material miracles which would have a real impact only on the generation that witnessed it. The Arabs were unknown before they received the Quran. The Quran was the only reason the world knew about the Arabs. The contribution of the Muslims to the world civilisation was a direct product of the way of life that the Quran preached. It was God’s mercy that He did not respond to the request of the Arabs to send a material miracle; instead He gave them this eternal miracle.

*“How many a community that committed wrongdoings have We shattered, and raised up after them another people.”* God completely demolished the habitations of those who transgressed in the past and brought about new generations who built their own towns on the remains of previous towns. When people sensed the threat of destruction they tried to flee, *“And, when they felt Our might coming upon them, they fled.”* They thought they could escape God’s punishment. They did not realize that God’s power can reach them anywhere. The verse describes sarcastically their futile effort, *“Do not flee, but return back to the pleasures that you reveled in and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned.”* Go back to your comfortable lodging and the pleasures in which you indulgent yourselves, so that you would be questioned about how you spent your lives? When they realized the perilous situation that surrounded them they tried to ask for forgiveness, *“They said, ‘Woe to us. We were indeed wrongdoers.’”* But it was too late. They could cry as much as they want; their fate has already been settled, *“And that cry of theirs did not cease until We made them as reaped corn, lifeless.”*

The playful attitude that the disbelievers expressed when they received the Quran is juxtaposed against the seriousness of the creation of the heavens and the earth, *“And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in jest. If We had wished to find a pastime, We would have surely taken it from the things nearest to Us, if We would do (such a thing).”* God created the universe for a reason and controlled its affairs wisely. God sent the Messengers to guide the people to the straight path. God promised to hold people to account on the Day of Judgement. This is a very serious process. The creation was not made in jest. Had God wanted to have fun (which is a rhetorical assumption) He could have had this in His own way. However, God would not do this anyway as is clear from the statement, *“if We would do (such a thing).”* But it is a reminder of the gravity of the playful attitude of the disbelievers. God’s law is to establish the truth and to abolish falsehood, *“Nay, We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and there upon the falsehood perishes. Woe is to you for the (false) things you ascribe (to Us).”*

A model for the obedient creatures of God is presented in the following verse, *“To Him belong all (the creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth. Those who are in His (very) Presence are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they (ever) weary (of His service).”* They continuously worship and serve tirelessly. Only God knows who His creatures in the heavens and the earth are. We are only sure about the existence of the human beings on earth. The believers know that there are angels and jinn because they believe in the Quran. However, we do

not know anything about them except for the information that was mentioned in the Quran. When we read, *“To Him belong all (creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth,”* we acknowledge our ability to know that the human beings exist and we leave alone those whom we have no knowledge of. Those are part of the unseen.

The verse, *“They celebrate His praise night and day, tirelessly.”* may be referring to the angels or other creatures of God, that only He knows. The angels continuously praise God. Human beings could also praise God continuously since each and every human activity can be considered an act of worship if the individual has the intention that these activities are done for the sake of God.

*“Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise (the dead)? If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, there would have been confusion in both. Glorified be God, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (to Him).”* This rhetorical question carries the tone of rebuke. Can these gods raise the dead? Obviously, they cannot. The first attribute of the true God is that He has the power to raise the dead. In addition, they should have known that confusion would have prevailed in the heaven and the earth had there been more than one God. There is one law that governs the whole universe. This law has been created by God and is maintained by Him. The different components of the universe work together in perfect harmony because they are all governed by the same law. Had there been more than one god, there would have been more than one will and more than one law. These wills would have contradicted each other and these laws would have contravened each other. God is above all what they ascribe to Him. *“He will not be questioned as to that which He does, but they will be questioned.”* Who can question the One who is in control of the whole universe? Who can question the Creator whose power is limitless? He is the one who created the standards and the measures that we know and He is exalted above all these standards and measures. Some people have the audacity to question why did God do specific things? Or what is the rationale behind these things? They cross the limits set for humans by God. These matters are beyond the understanding of mortals.

*“Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides him? Say, ‘Bring your proof; this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me.’”* Do they have any credible evidence that these idols are gods? Previous messages came with the doctrine of the Oneness of God. However, people turned away from guidance, *“most of them know not the truth, and so they turn away.”* All previous messengers preached the same doctrine, *“And We did not send a Messenger before you but We reveal to him, (saying), ‘There is no God save Me, so worship Me.’”* The Oneness of God is the fundamental truth that all previous messages were based upon.

*“And they say the Lord of Mercy has begotten a son. Glory be to Him. They are only honored servants. They speak not until He has spoken, and they act by His command. He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede except for him whom He accepts, and they tremble in awe of Him. If any of them should say, ‘I am a god besides Him’, such a one We do recompense with Hell; thus do, We recompense the wrongdoers.”* The claim that God has children came in different forms in different polytheistic religions. The idolaters of Mecca claimed that the angels were the daughters of God. The verses rebut this false claim. The

angels are honored servants of God. They follow His command and they do not intercede on behalf of anyone except by the leave of God. They are always in awe of God. They never claimed to be gods. The destination of anyone who dares to make such claim will be Hellfire.

The narrative then takes the human heart on a trip around the huge universe. The verses explore the signs that lead to the belief in the Oneness of God, many people see these signs but they turn away from them in disbelief, *“Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), then We separated them? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?”* This description of how the universe started may agree with present day scientific knowledge. However, scientific facts may change from one time to the other depending on the discovery of new evidence, but the Quran is unchangeable. This is why we do not try to use the Quran to prove or disprove scientific facts. We believe in the truth of the Quran. The Quran does not offer us a scientific treatise but it offers us a way of life. What we can state now is that the present day theories regarding the formation of heavens and earth do not contradict the text of the Quran. Another scientific fact that these verses state is that water is the origin of all living things.

The verses continue to explore other cosmic phenomena, *“And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shift with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through; that they may be guided.”* The mountains were created to maintain the earth’s equilibrium. Broad highways were made between these high mountains to guide people in their passage. There is also a subtle reference to the guidance that people should seek in their search for God.

*“And We have made the heavens as a canopy well-guarded, yet they turn away from its signs.”* The Arabic term for heavens refers to anything that is held high. People look at the sky and see a canopy. God maintains this canopy well guarded. It is kept flawless to maintain the integrity of the universe and it is kept pure as a place from which the revelation is brought down. But people turn away from these signs.

The day and night are two cosmic phenomena that are closely related to human life on earth, *“It is He who created the night and the day; and the sun and the moon. All swim along, each in its own orbit.”* The sun and the moon regulate human life on earth. They are set in perpetual motion that does not deviate from its set path. This is one of the signs of the Oneness of God.

At the end of this group of verses, the law that governs human life is enunciated, *“We did not grant immortality to any one before you; so if you die, would they be immortal?”* God did not grant immortality to any one before the Prophet (PBUH). Every life ends with death. Do they think that they will live forever? Since they will eventually die, why do not they heed this fact and work for the Hereafter? *“Every soul shall have a taste of death; and We try you with evil and with good, to Us you will return.”* Every human being will eventually die. Life on earth is only a trial. People are sometimes tested with evil and sometimes they are tested with good. People’s perseverance and trust in God is tested with adversity. One may also be tested with good things in life. This is a harder test than being tested with adversity. Many are able to persevere in adversity but only few are able to successfully pass the test when they are tested with abundance. Many succumb to their desires when they are given power, health, and wealth. People should be

alert to the dangers that good things in life bring. The believer is fully aware of these dangers and is able to deal with both kinds of testing. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“I wonder about the believer all his conditions are good and this is only true for the believer. If he is blessed with a bounty from God, he shows his gratitude and this is good. If he is faced with an adversity, he perseveres and this is good also.”*

### **Verses 36 to 47:**

36. *And when those who disbelieve see you, they mock you, (saying), “Is this he who mentions your gods? And they reject all mention of the Lord of Mercy.*
37. *Humankind is a creature of haste, soon I will show you My Signs; so do not ask Me to hasten them.*
38. *They say, “When will this promise come to pass, if you are telling the truth?”*
39. *If only the disbelievers knew when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and they will not be helped.*
40. *Nay, it may come to them all of a sudden. They will then be confounded and no power will they have then to avert it, nor will they be reprieved.*
41. *Messengers before you were indeed mocked, but those who mocked them were surrounded by what they used to ridicule.*
42. *Say, “Who guards you in the night or in the day from the Lord of Mercy? Nay, but they turn away from the mention of their Lord.”*
43. *Or do they have gods that can guard them from Us? They have no power to aid themselves, nor can they be defended from Us.*
44. *Nay, We gave the good things of this life to these (disbelievers) and their fathers until life grew long for them; do not they see that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders? Is it then they who will prevail?*
45. *Say, “I warn you only by the revelation.” But the deaf will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned.*
46. *And if a breath of your Lord's torment were to touch them, they assuredly would say, “Alas for us. We were wrongdoers.”*
47. *And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in the least. And even if there was the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And We suffice as reckoners. (21: 36 - 47)*

*“And when those who disbelieve see you, they mock you, (saying), “Is this he who mentions your gods? And they reject all mention of the Lord of Mercy.”* The disbelievers who rejected the belief in the Lord of Mercy, the Creator of the heavens and earth were angry at the Messenger of God (PBUH) when he denounced their idols. They did not have any qualms in rejecting the Lord of Mercy and they refused to let the Prophet (PBUH) denounce their gods. They mocked the Prophet (PBUH) and dared him to bring the promised punishment, *“Humankind is a creature of haste, soon I will show you My Signs; so do not ask Me to hasten them. They say, ‘When will this promise come to pass, if you are telling the truth?’”* Human beings are, by nature, always in haste; they are always looking to what is next. Quran warned them of the consequences of the

challenge they posed to the Prophet (PBUH), *“If only the disbelievers knew when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and they will not be helped. Nay, it may come to them all of a sudden. They will then be confounded and no power will they have then to avert it, nor will they be reprieved. Messengers before you were indeed mocked, but those who mocked them were surrounded by what they used to ridicule.”* Had they known what the consequences of their rejection will be, they would have been able to avoid the inevitable doom, and they would have not persisted in mocking the Messenger (PBUH). They were told that the promise will be fulfilled as it had been fulfilled before. The punishment will be sudden because they wanted God to hasten the punishment. The sudden occurrence of doom will stop them in their tracks, they will neither be able to think nor will they be able to act. In addition to the torment in the Hereafter, they will receive punishment in this life. They will meet the same end that other nations who mocked their messengers met before.

*“Say, ‘Who guards you in the night or in the day from the Lord of Mercy? Nay, but they turn away from the mention of their Lord.’”* Who can protect them other than the Lord of Mercy? This is a rhetorical question which has a tone of rebuke. Do they think that there is anyone else who can protect them other than the Lord of Mercy? The question is repeated in another way, *“Or do they have gods that can guard them from Us? They have no power to aid themselves, nor can they be defended from Us.”* How can these gods that they worship protect them when they are unable to protect themselves? These gods are not only helpless but they cannot even seek help from God.

*“Nay, We gave the good things of this life to these (disbelievers) and their fathers until life grew long for them; do not they see that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders? Is it then they who will prevail?”* In spite of their rejection, God gave them good things in this life. The indulgence in the pleasures of this life obliterated their spirituality, sealed their hearts, and weakened their insight. They lost touch with God. They should reflect on the history of huge empires before them which suffered decline and degeneration. Will they then be able to avoid the same end?

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to issue them an ultimatum, *“Say, ‘I warn you only by the revelation.’ But the deaf will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned. And if a breath of your Lord's torment were to touch them, they assuredly would say, ‘Alas for us. We were wrongdoers.’”* The word, “breath” is usually associated with mercy. Its usage here means that even the slightest punishment will be devastating and will make them cry out, *“Alas for us, we were wrong doers.”* However, the submission will be too late.

The following verse ends the scene of the Day of Judgement, *“And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in the least. And even if there was the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And We suffice as reckoners.”* A grain of mustard seed is a tiny seed that can be hardly seen with the naked eye. Its weight is negligible. However, it will not be lost on the Day of Judgment. It will be accounted for on the Day of Judgment.

## Verses 48 to 92:

48. *And We verily gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion (to differentiate between right and wrong) and a light and a reminder for those who remain conscious of God,*
49. *Those who fear their Lord in secret, and who dread the Hour (of Judgment).*
50. *And this is a blessed message which We have sent down, will you then reject it?*
51. *And We verily gave Abraham his sound judgment before, and We were aware of him,*
52. *When he said to his father and his people, "What are these idols to which you are devoted?"*
53. *They said, "We found our fathers worshipping them."*
54. *He said, "Verily, you and your fathers were in manifest error."*
55. *They said, "Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest?"*
56. *He said, "Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them (from nothing); and I bear witness to this.*
57. *And by God, I will plan against your idols, after you turn your backs and go away."*
58. *So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them that they may return to it.*
59. *They said, "Who did this to our gods? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers."*
60. *They said, "We heard a young man called Abraham speaks of them."*
61. *They said, "Then bring him before the people's eyes that they may testify."*
62. *They said, "Abraham, did you do this to our gods?"*
63. *He said, "Nay, this was done by this, their biggest one. Ask them, if they can speak."*
64. *So they turned to themselves and said, "Surely you are the wrongdoers."*
65. *Then they were utterly confounded. (They said), "You know full well that these (idols) do not speak."*
66. *(Abraham) said, "Do you then worship, besides God, things that can neither benefit nor harm you?"*
67. *Fie upon you, and upon the things that you worship besides God. Do you not have any understanding?*
68. *They said, "Burn him and protect your gods, if you do (anything at all)."*
69. *We (God) said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham."*
70. *Then, they planned to harm him, but We made them the greatest losers.*
71. *And We delivered him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for all peoples.*
72. *And We gave him Isaac and, as an additional gift, (a grandson) Jacob, and We made both of them righteous men.*
73. *And We made them leaders who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and establishing prayer and the giving of alms, and they worshipped Us (alone).*
74. *And to Lot, too, We gave wisdom and knowledge, and We saved him from the town which practised abominations. Truly, they were evil people and transgressors.*
75. *And We brought him into Our mercy. He was one of the righteous.*
76. *And (remember) Noah, when he cried to Us before, We listened to his (prayer) and delivered him and his family from the great distress.*
77. *And delivered him from the people who denied Our revelations. They were evil people, therefore We drowned them all.*

78. *And (remember) David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night, and We did witness their judgment.*
79. *And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and We gave wisdom and knowledge to both of them. And we subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof).*
80. *It was We who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful?*
81. *(It was Our power that made) the violent wind to flow (tamely) for Solomon according to his command, to the land which We had blessed, for We do know all things.*
82. *And of the devils (jinn) some dived for him and did other work, and We kept them under our guard.*
83. *And (remember) Job, when He cried to his Lord, "Truly I have been afflicted with adversity. You are the Most Merciful of those who are merciful."*
84. *So We heard his prayer and removed the adversity which he suffered, and We gave him his household (that he had lost) and the like thereof along with them, a mercy from Us, and a remembrance for the worshippers;*
85. *And (remember) Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl. All were perseverant.*
86. *And We brought them into Our mercy. They are among the righteous.*
87. *And remember Dha-nun (the one with the whale), when he went off in anger and deemed that We would not decree anything over him, but he cried out in the darkness, saying, "There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer."*
88. *So We heard his prayer and We delivered him from the anguish. Thus We save the believers.*
89. *And (remember) Zachariah, when he cried to his Lord, "My Lord, leave me not without offspring, You are the best of inheritors."*
90. *Then We heard his prayer, and bestowed upon him John, and adjusted his wife (to bear a child) for him. They used to vie one with the other in doing good deeds, and they cried to Us in longing and in fear, and were submissive to Us.*
91. *And (remember) her who guarded her chastity, We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.*
92. *Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord therefore worship Me (and no other). (21: 48 – 92)*

The previous verses mentioned the fact that the disbelievers used to discredit the Prophet (PBUH) because they did not imagine that God would send a mortal as His messenger. They called the revelation poetry, magic, or fables. The Quran responded by reminding them that God did indeed send messengers before Muhammad (PBUH), *"And We verily gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion (to differentiate between right and wrong) and a light and a reminder for those who remain conscious of God."* The verse describes the Scripture that was given to Moses (PBUH) *"The Criterion,"* the same name that was given to the Quran. All the divine revelations are called Criteria because they provide the criteria which differentiate between truth and falsehood. The verse labels the Torah as "light," because it lights the flame of faith in the hearts, and thus removes the darkness of falsehood that enshrouds the disbelieving hearts. The Torah, like the Quran, is a reminder for those who remain conscious of God. The Quran becomes their reminder.

It reminds them of God and in the process it raises their status among people. Those who remain conscious of God, they fear His anger and work hard for the Hereafter. They benefit from the flame of light and use it to guide them to the right path, *“Those who fear their Lord in secret, and who dread the Hour (of Judgment).”* This Quran embodies the blessed message, will you then reject it, *“And this is a blessed message which We have sent down, will you then reject it?”*

*“And We verily gave Abraham his sound judgment before, and We were aware of him,”* God gave Abraham (PBUH) the sound judgement and He was well aware of the ability of Abraham (PBUH) to carry the responsibility of the message. He said to his father and his people, *“What are these idols to which you are devoted?”* This was a sign of his sound judgment. He did not refer to the stone statues and the wooden carvings, which his people were worshipping, as gods. He called them idols, which exactly what they were. He rebuked them for being devoted to the worship of such unanimated things. The only excuse they had was that, *“We found our fathers worshipping them.”* This was a lame excuse that reflected a lack of independent thinking. It reflected a shaky faith. They did not have any reason to worship the idols except that they found their forefathers doing the same. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) explained to them the error they had committed both them and their forefathers, *“He said, ‘Verily you and your fathers were in manifest error.’”* They replied back by a question, *“Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest?”* This is a question which reflects their shaky state of mind. They asked Prophet Abraham (PBUH) whether he was serious. Contrast this with the confidence that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) exhibited in his unequivocal statement, *“He said, ‘Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them (from nothing); and I bear witness to this.’”* He was certain beyond any doubt of who created the heavens and earth to the extent that he can bear witness to the fact that God created them. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) did not actually see the creation of the heavens and earth but it was clear in his mind that God is the Creator. Everything in the universe testifies to that.

Prophet Abraham (PBUH) told them that he had a plan to deal with their idols, *“And by God, I will plan against your idols, after you turn your backs and go away.”* He did not mention the details of the plan. The Quran does not state the response of his people to his declaration. They may have been sure that he could not harm their idols, so his statement did not bother them. He broke them into pieces but he left the biggest idol intact, *“So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them that they may return to it.”* When they came back, they saw what the broken idols and they started wondering, who did this? They did not reflect on what happened or how it could have happened. Idol worship disabled their ability to think rationally. So they started wondering who was the culprit, *“Who did this to our gods? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers.”* Those who were aware of Abraham’s (PBUH) argument against their idols remembered his threat, *“They said, ‘We heard a young man called Abraham speaks of them.’”* It is obvious from the verse that Abraham (PBUH) was a young man when God bestowed on him the ability of sound judgement. We do not know whether at this time he was given God’s revelation or not. God may have inspired him to reject idol worship and to criticise his father and his people for committing this sin. This seems to be the case. They may have called him a “young man” to belittle his influence.



*“They said, ‘then bring him before the people's eyes that they may testify.’”* They wanted to question him in front of everyone. When he was brought in front of them, *“They said, ‘Abraham, did you do this to our gods?’”* They still insisted that these were gods, even after they saw them broken into pieces. Abraham (PBUH) responded sarcastically, *“Nay, this was done by this, their biggest one. Ask them, if they can speak.”* It seems that this sarcastic answer brought them back to their senses, *“So they turned to themselves and said, ‘Surely you are wrongdoers.’”* But this short awakening did not last long, they quickly lapsed into their previous state of ignorance, they said, *“You know full well that these (idols) do not speak.”* Abraham (PBUH) lost his patience and rebuked them for their nonsensical behaviour, he said, *“Do you then worship, besides God, things that can neither benefit nor harm you? Fie upon you, and upon the things that you worship besides God. Do you not have any understanding?”* They were confounded and could not give him a rational answer. Their exit from this embarrassing situation was to say, *“Burn him and protect your gods, if you do (anything at all).”* God said to the fire, *“Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.”* How did this happen? It is God’s will, He says be and it is. But look at the precise language of the Quran. God commanded the fire to be, “cool and safe.” Had the command been for the fire to be cool, it could have been unsafe for Abraham (PBUH). God foiled their plans and saved Abraham (PBUH), *“Then they planned to harm him, but We made them the greatest losers.”* God made them the losers. God saved Abraham and his nephew, Lot (PBUH) and brought them to Syria, *“And We delivered him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for all peoples.”* The reference here is to the Greater Syria which became the land of prophet-hood for a long time. This is the area which was blessed by having the second holy Mosque (the Aqsa Mosque) and the Holy Land. God’s blessings made its land fertile and made it the place where His messengers received His revelations, generation after generation.

Abraham (PBUH) left his homeland, his people, and his family and migrated to the Greater Syria, so God replaced his loss, *“And We gave him Isaac and, as an additional gift, (a grandson) Jacob, and We made both of them righteous men.”* He gave him a son and a grandson who were both righteous and from them came a huge nation. They carried the flame of guidance to guide people to goodness, establishing prayers, and paying the poor-dues. Abraham (PBUH) persevered in face of adversity, so God rewarded him the best reward, *“And We made them leaders who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and establishing prayer and the giving of alms, and they worshipped Us (alone).”*

*“And to Lot, too, We gave wisdom and knowledge, and We saved him from the town which practised abominations. Truly, they were evil people and transgressors. And We brought him into Our mercy. He was one of the righteous.”* This is a quick reference to Lot (PBUH). His story was detailed elsewhere. God saved him from the evil people and admitted him into His mercy. God’s mercy is a refuge for people where they can find security and safety.

Noah (PBUH) was also referenced quickly, *“And (remember) Noah, when he cried to Us before, We listened to his (prayer) and delivered him and his family from the great distress. And delivered him from the people who denied Our revelations. They were evil people, therefore We drowned them all.”*

The following verses mention Prophets Solomon and David (PBUT) in some detail, “*And (remember) David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night, and We did witness their judgment. And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and We gave wisdom and knowledge to each of them. And We subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof). It was We who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful?*” The verses narrate a story about two men who came to Prophet David (PBUH) to resolve a dispute which arose between them. The first man had a planted field and the second man had a flock of sheep. The sheep entered the field by night and ate whatever plants they found. David (PBUH) decided that the owner of the flock should give his flock to the owner of the field as a replacement for the loss that the sheep caused. The Sheppard went to Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and told him about the dispute and David’s (PBUH) decision. Solomon (PBUH) had a better way for resolving the dispute. He told his father that it would be better if the Sheppard worked in the field to bring it back to its condition before the sheep entered it. In the meantime, the owner of the field would keep the flock of sheep to benefit from its milk; once his field was reclaimed he should give back the flock of sheep to the Sheppard and he would take back his field. David (PBUH) accepted this decision. Both David and Solomon (PBUT) did their best to arrive at a just resolution. David’s (PBUH) aimed at replacing the loss of the owner of the field, while Solomon’s (PBUH) resolution, which came as an inspiration from God, aimed not only at replacing the loss but also at reclaiming the field. Not only justice was served but also the field was reclaimed. God bestowed wisdom and knowledge on both of them. Each one of them was given special traits as a bounty from God. God subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David (PBUH) and taught him how to make coats of mail to guard against violence. The Psalms of David (PBUH) were his way of singing God’s praise with hills and the birds. God subjected the wind to flow under Solomon’s (PBUH) command, “*(It was Our power that made) the violent wind to flow (tamely) for Solomon according to his command, to the land which We had blessed, for We do know all things. And of the devils (jinn) some dived for him and did other work, and We kept them under our guard.*” God also subjected the jinn to work under Solomon’s command.

The next verse touches upon the trials of Prophet Job (PBUH), “*And (remember) Job, when He cried to his Lord, ‘Truly I have been afflicted with adversity. You are the Most Merciful of those that are merciful.’*” This is one of the most moving stories. The Quran only gave the highlights of the story, no details were given. The verses in this Sura only outline Job’s (PBUH) prayer and God’s response to his prayer. Job’s (PBUH) prayer was brief, simply stating his general condition. He did not even ask for a relief from his condition trusting in God’s mercy. He gave the highest example of the perseverant servant of God. God responded, “*So We heard his prayer and removed the adversity which he suffered, and We gave him his household (that he had lost) and the like thereof along with them, a mercy from Us, and a remembrance for the worshippers;*” God gave him health and replaced the family he had lost. In addition, God gave him more children and grandchildren. This was a mercy from God. The story is a reminder for the worshippers because they are the most likely to suffer such trials. The believers carry a grave responsibility; they are more likely to be tested in the course of fulfilling their responsibility.

The trait of perseverance is again highlighted in connection with three prophets: Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl (PBUT), *“And (remember) Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl. All were perseverant. And We brought them into Our mercy. They are among the righteous.”* The Quran narrated the story of Ishmael (PBUH) elsewhere, but no details were mentioned about the other two prophets. The message is that they persevered so God brought them into His mercy.

Prophet Yunus' (PBUH) experience with the whale is then narrated, *“And remember Dha-nun, when he went off in anger and deemed that We would not decree anything over him, but he cried out in the darkness, saying, ‘There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer.’”* He was labelled the *“companion of the whale,”* because the whale swallowed him then spat him out. He was sent as a messenger of God to a town. The people of the town rejected him and he did not exercise patience and became angry with them; so he decided to abandon them. He did not wait to be told by God what to do. He thought that he can travel in the land and his travel will not be restricted. This is the interpretation of the phrase, *“We would not decree anything over him.”* He left the town and went to the seashore where he boarded a ship. The ship was overloaded and the people onboard decided that they should throw someone overboard to lighten the ship's weight. They made a toss and he was chosen to be thrown overboard. He was then swallowed by the whale. When he was in the darkness of the whale's belly he called upon his Lord saying, *“There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer.”* God heard his prayer and responded to it and delivered him from his predicament, *“So We heard his prayer and We delivered him from the anguish. Thus we save the believers.”*

We need to stop at this point and reflect on Yunus' (PBUH) experience. It is clear from the verses that Yunus (PBUH) was impatient with his people. When he was faced by rejection, he simply relinquished his task and left the town. Consequently, he was faced with a much harder affliction. When he realized his mistake he repented. God relieved him of his adversity and delivered him from the anguish. The lesson is that those who are calling people to the straight path will always face difficulties. They will be rejected. They may even be subjected to torture and persecution. They must persevere and they must remain steadfast in face of these adverse conditions. Perseverance is a condition for success. God's promise will be fulfilled, *“Thus we save the believers.”*

The next prophet to be discussed is Prophet Zachariah (PBUH), *“And (remember) Zachariah, when he cried to his Lord, ‘My Lord, leave me not without offspring, You are the best of inheritors.’”* The story of the birth of John (PBUH) was narrated before in Surat Al-Imran (Chapter 3) and in Surat Mariam (Chapter 19). Here a brief mention is made. The story starts with Zachariah's (PBUH) prayer, *“My Lord, leave me not without offspring.”* Zachariah (PBUH) was entrusted with the upkeep of the temple before the birth of Jesus (PBUH). Zachariah (PBUH) did not lose sight of the fact that God will ultimately inherit everything, *“You are the best of inheritors.”* However, he wanted someone to carry the responsibility of his family, his faith and his wealth after him. God's response was quick and to the point, *“Then We heard his prayer, and bestowed upon him John, and adjusted his wife (to bear a child) for him.”* Zachariah's (PBUH) wife was barren but the verses simply ignored the details and addressed the request directly. The response was fast because Zachariah (PBUH) and his family used to, *“vie one with the other in good deeds, and they cried to Us in longing and in fear, and were*

*submissive to Us.*” Zachariah (PBUH) and his wife deserved the blessing of God who bestowed on them a righteous son because they had such high traits.

The final prophet to be mentioned is Jesus (PBUH) and his story started with a reference to his mother, *“And (remember) her who guarded her chastity, We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.”* The verse did not mention Mariam by name because the Sura is about God’s prophets. The mention of Mariam came in relation to her son. The verse emphasized the fact that she guarded her chastity which indicates that she did not engage, at any time, in any intimate relationship with a man whether legitimate or illegitimate. She was a pure virgin. She and her son were a sign for all people. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Having presented examples of the messengers of God, the tests that they met, and the bounties of God which were bestowed upon them; the narration comes to the ultimate goal of the discourse, *“Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord therefore worship Me (and no other).”* Your nation is a single nation. The brotherhood of the messengers is a single brotherhood. They belong to the same faith and they believe in the same doctrine, the doctrine of the belief in the Oneness of God; one nation on earth and one God in heaven. There is no deity but He.

### **Verses 93 to 112:**

93. *And they have divided their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) all are returning to Us.*
94. *Whosoever does good deeds and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his effort. We will record (it) for him.*
95. *And it is prohibited for any community, which We have destroyed, to return,*
96. *Until the Gog and Magog are let loose, and they will descend from every high land.*
97. *And the true promise draws near; then, the disbelievers will be staring with their eyes wide open in terror. (They say), “Alas for us, we did not heed this during our lives. Nay, we were wrongdoers.”*
98. *Verily you, (idolaters) and that which you worship beside God are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come.*
99. *If these had been gods, they would not have gotten there, but each one will abide therein.*
100. *There, sobbing will be their lot, and therein they will not hear.*
101. *Those for whom Our kindness has been decreed before, will be removed far therefrom.*
102. *They will not hear the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in that which their souls desire.*
103. *The great terror will bring them no grief, and the angels will welcome them saying, “This is your Day which you were promised;”*
104. *The Day when We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed). As We began the first creation, so shall We repeat it, a promise We have undertaken. Truly shall We fulfil it.*
105. *And verily we have written in the Scripture, after the reminder, My righteous servants will inherit the earth.*

106. *Verily in this (Quran) is a Message for people who are devout.*
107. *We sent you not, but as a mercy to the worlds.*
108. *Say, "It is only revealed to me that your God is One God. Will you therefore submit?"*
109. *But if they turn away, Say, "I have proclaimed the Message to you all alike and in truth; but I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far.*
110. *It is He who knows what is said openly and what you hide (in your hearts).*
111. *I do not know; may be it is a trial for you and enjoyment for a while."*
112. *He said, "My Lord, judge You in truth. Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy the One whose help should be sought against the blasphemies you utter." (21: 93 – 112)*

*"And they have divided their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) all are returning to Us. Whosoever does good deeds and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his effort. We will record (it) for him."* The brotherhood of the Messengers is a single brotherhood. They all belong to one faith, a faith that is founded on the belief in the Oneness of God. All God's messages came to call people to worship the One God. The different messages came with different ways of life. Each message was appropriate to the time, place, and the people to whom it was revealed. However, in spite of the fact that all these messages had the same fundamental foundation their adherents went in different ways. Each group took a piece of the original message for themselves. Arguments and differences erupted among the adherents of the different messages. Even the adherents of one message were divided among themselves. They used these differences as a reason to kill each other. They will return to God in the Hereafter and He will judge among them. The good deeds will be accepted and recorded and their owners will be rewarded. Good deeds are grounded in the belief in God. The belief in God is the basis of life. It is the true link between the human being and the universe and the link between the universe and God. Good deeds are like a building and the belief in God is the foundation of that building. Good deeds are the fruits of the belief in God. Good deeds are the manifestation of the true faith. This is why good deeds are always mentioned in conjunction with the belief in God in the Quran.

The accountability of people will be in the Hereafter, even if a part of it was manifested during this life. Thus, the nations which were punished in their lives will receive their ultimate punishment in the Hereafter, *"And it is prohibited for any community, which We have destroyed, to return."*

The following verses describe a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgement. The verses start with a mention of one of the signs of the approach of the Day of Judgement, *"Until the Gog and Magog are let loose, and they will descend from every high land."* This will signal the approach of the Day of Judgement. However, there is no mention of the timing but the focus is on the surprise that will overwhelm people, *"And the true promise draws near; then the disbelievers will be staring with their eyes wide open in terror. (They say), 'Alas for us, we did not heed this during our lives. Nay, we were wrongdoers.'"* The horror will overtake the wrongdoers and their eyes will remain wide open. They will regret what they have done in their life time. The judgement will be announced, *"Verily you, (idolaters) and that which you worship beside God are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come."* They will be shown the evidence which proves

that their claims were false, *“If these had been gods, they would not have got there, but each one will abide therein. There, sobbing will be their lot, and therein they will not hear.”* The verse also describes their lot in Hell.

The verses then turn to the other side, the side of the believers, *“Those for whom Our kindness has been decreed before, will be removed far therefrom. They will not hear the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in that which their souls desire.”* They will be saved by the grace of God; they will not hear even the slightest sound of Hellfire. They will be saved from the great terror that will be inflicted upon the wrongdoers. The angels will welcome them into heaven and they will live forever getting what their hearts desire, *“The great terror will bring them no grief, and the angels will welcome them saying, ‘This is your Day which you were promised;’”*

*“The Day when We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed). As We began the first creation, so shall We repeat it, a promise We have undertaken. Truly shall We fulfil it.”* This is another scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment. The heavens will be rolled up signalling the end. God will then restart the creation as He did the first time.

The narrative then turns to a new theme, the theme of God’s established rules regarding the believers, *“And verily we have written in the Scripture, after the reminder, My righteous servants will inherit the earth.”* The Scripture may be referring to the Psalms of David (PBUH); in this case the reminder would be the Torah. The Scripture may be also a reference to every one of God’s revealed Books. In this case the reminder would be the Sacred Tablets kept by God which embodies all the revelations. At any rate, God’s established rule is that, *“My righteous servants will inherit the earth.”* What is meant by the term, *“inherit the earth,”* and who are God’s righteous servants?

God created Adam to establish a civilization on earth. God established a divine project for humanity to follow so that they are able to perform their task. The divine project is based on the belief in God and doing good deeds. The divine project was not meant only to enable the establishment of a material civilization but was concerned in the first place with nurturing the spirituality of humankind to raise him to the level of civility that God wanted for him and to protect him from succumbing to the material desires that are usually part of any material civilization. The divine project aims at balancing the material and the spiritual. As we go through the history of humankind we see nations which lost this balance. However, the nations which base their good deeds on a foundation of strong belief in God are the heirs of this earth. God’s promise will be fulfilled.

*“Verily in this (Quran) is a Message for people who are devout.”* The Quran brought a message that can be understood only by those who are devout, because they open their hearts to God’s words. God sent Muhammad (PBUH) as a mercy to humankind, *“We sent you not, but as a mercy to the worlds.”* The divine project that Muhammad (PBUH) brought from God guides people to the right path and to a happy way of life. The divine project helps humankind achieve the perfection that God wants them to have. This message was not sent to humankind until

humanity reached its maturity. The message included the fundamentals of a way of life befitting humans; it is a way of life that does not change with time. However, these fundamentals provide a methodology which allows people to cope with the ever changing needs of a human society. The divine project guaranteed the freedom of thought and it removed all obstacles that may hinder human creativity. Islam called for a human society in which all geographical and ethnic barriers are removed. It brings all people to one doctrine and one social structure.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to confront the disbelievers, “*Say, ‘It is only revealed to me that your God is One God. Will you therefore submit?’*” This is the true element of the mercy which frees the human society from the shackles of idol worship and the oppression of ignorance and myth. This is the road of mercy, will you then submit? However, if they turn away, “*Say, ‘I have proclaimed the Message to you all alike and in truth; but I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far. It is He who knows what is said openly and what you hide (in your hearts). I do not know; maybe it is a trial for you and enjoyment for a while.’*”

Finally, the Prophet (PBUH), having fulfilled his task, turns to his Lord asking for His help, “*My Lord, judge You in truth. Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy the One whose help should be sought against the blasphemies you utter.*”

## Sura 22: Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage)

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

### **Verses 1 to 24:**

1. *People, be conscious of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing.*
2. *On the Day when you see it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden, and you will think people are drunk, yet they will not be drunk, but the torment of God will be severe.*
3. *Yet there is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, and follow every rebellious Satan.*
4. *For him, it is decreed that whoso takes him for a friend, he will mislead him and will guide him to the torment of the blazing Fire.*
5. *People, if you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he will know nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).*
6. *That is because God is the Truth and because He brings back the dead to life; and because He has power over all things;*
7. *And because there is no doubt that the Hour will come; and because God will raise those who are in the graves.*
8. *Yet among people is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a book of enlightenment;*
9. *Turning away in pride to beguile (people) from the way of God. For him, in this world is ignominy, and on the Day of Resurrection We make him taste the torment of burning.*
10. *(It will be said), "This is because of the deeds which your hands sent forth, for verily God is not unjust to His servants."*
11. *And among humankind is he who worships God (sitting) on a verge so that if good befalls him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalls him, he falls away utterly. He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss.*
12. *They call on such deities, besides God, as can neither hurt nor profit them, that is straying far indeed (from the Way).*
13. *(Perhaps) they call on one whose hurt is nearer than his benefit; evil, indeed, is the patron, and evil is the associate.*
14. *Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to Gardens, beneath which rivers flow, for God does what He pleases.*
15. *If any think that God will not help him (His Messenger) in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the sky and climb all the way up; then let him see whether his plan will remove that which enrages (him).*



16. *Thus, have We sent down (the Quran) as plain revelation, and verily God guides whom He wills.*
17. *Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God is a Witness over all things.*
18. *Do you not see that all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among humankind do prostrate themselves to God? while there are many for whom the torment is justly deserved. He whom God scorns, there is none to give him honor. God does what He pleases.*
19. *These two antagonists disputed with each other about their Lord. But those who deny (their Lord), for them will be cut out garments of Fire and boiling water will be poured down on their heads.*
20. *Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted;*
21. *In addition, there will be maces of iron (to punish) them.*
22. *Every time they wish to get away therefrom, they will be forced back therein; and (it will be said), "Taste the torment of Fire."*
23. *God will admit those who believe and do good deeds into Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there, will be of silk.*
24. *For they have been guided (in this life) to the purest of speeches; they have been guided to the path of the Praised. (22: 1 – 24)*

Some of the verses of this Sura were revealed in Mecca while some were revealed in Medina. We know that Muslims were not granted permission to fight back until they migrated to Medina. We know that when the people of Medina pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH), they offered to fight the disbelievers of Menna he declined their offer saying, "I was not commanded to do so." When the Islamic state was established in Medina, Muslims were granted the permission to fight back to protect themselves against the attacks of the disbelievers and to provide an environment which guarantees the freedom of religion. However, the general atmosphere of the Sura reflects the Meccan themes. The Sura emphasizes the concepts of the Oneness of God, the Resurrection, the accountability, the horrifying scenes of the Day of Judgment, and God's signs in the universe. However, the Sura also includes the themes of the permission to fight back, the sanctity of God's rituals, and the promise of God's help to the believers. These themes appeared only in the Quran revealed after the migration to Medina.

*"People, be conscious of your Lord, for the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing. On the Day when you see it, every nursing mother will forget her nursling and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden, and you will think people are drunk, yet they will not be drunk, but the torment of God will be severe."* The Sura starts with a horrifying statement depicting a scene which makes the hearts tremble. The Sura starts with a call to all people to be conscious of their Lord and alerts them to the horror of the Day of Judgment. Some of the details of this terrifying scene are mentioned in the second verse. Nursing women will forget about their nursing babies and pregnant women will be delivered of their babies prematurely. The shock will make people appear as if they were drunk. They will not be drunk but the shock will be severe. These two verses are mentioned to warn those who argue about God without knowledge of the

consequences of their deeds, *“Yet among people is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, and follow every rebellious Satan. For him, it is decreed that whoso takes him for a friend, he will mislead him and will guide him to the torment of the blazing Fire.”* This includes people who argue about the existence of God, the Oneness of God, His power, His knowledge, or His attributes. These people argue without true knowledge. They argue because they were deluded by Satan, who tempted them to adopt such an attitude. God has decreed that the fate of these people is the torment of Fire. They will be led to it by Satan who seduced them in the first place. They may have thought that Satan was guiding them while in true fact they were being misled by Satan.

Are people in doubt that there will be Resurrection after death? They should then reflect on the beginning of life in the first place. They should look around for the signs of God which support the concept of Resurrection, *“People, if you have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, then out of a leech-like clot, then out of a lump of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he will know nothing. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).”* The concept of Resurrection may seem easier than the concept of starting the life of a human being from nothing. But both concepts are easy for God, because He only says, “Be,” and it is. However, the Quran uses arguments that appeal to the limited human imagination. The verse reminds people that they were created from the dust of this earth. The human body has the same elements that constitute the earthly dust. When God breathed His spirit into the dust it became a human being. It is a great leap from dust to a human being, a leap that attests to the power of God. The verses then continued to describe the process of the creation of the human being. First there is the sperm, then the leech-like clot, then a morsel of flesh. These transformations have been happening for millions of years, yet we are still unable to discover the secret behind them. The process starts with a sperm from the male which unites with an egg from the female to form a leech-like clot which attaches itself to the wall of the womb. The leech-like clot is transformed into a little lump of flesh. The lump is then transformed into a skeleton. The skeleton may then become covered with flesh or it may be discharged prematurely when a miscarriage occurs. The statement, *“in order that We may manifest (our power) to you,”* is interjected between the stages of the clot and the formation of the baby in the womb. It is a reminder of the miraculous transformation from a clot to a fully formed baby. The process of formation of the baby continues for a period of time, usually nine months. However, the changes that occur during this relatively short period are huge. Another huge period of development between the little baby and the mature human being, *“We bring you forth as infants, then (make you grow) until you attain your full strength.”* Some may die early, and some may grow to be old. Death is the ultimate end for each mortal. However, the aging process offers another opportunity for reflection on the miracle of creation. Aging brings the human being a full circle back to the state of early childhood. People lose the knowledge and the skills that they gained during their lives. The verse then moves from the miracle of human creation to the miracle of plant creation, *“And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it quivers*

*and swells and puts forth every lovely kind (of growth).*” A barren land is in a state between life and death. This is the state of a piece of land before it is being watered. Water brings life to a barren land. When the land is watered it quivers and swells. This is an observation that the Quran described more than fourteen hundreds years ago but became only known recently. The verse describes the miracles of human life and plant life in the same verse to indicate the relationship between the two. It is also an indication that there is only one power behind the two miracles.

*“That is because God is the Truth and because He brings back the dead to life; and because He has power over all things; and because there is no doubt that the Hour will come; and because God will raise those who are in the graves.”* Creating a human being from dust and changing the land from a barren state to a state capable of producing plants are rooted in the fact that God is the Truth. God created the laws that regulate the continuation of human life and plant production and growth. These laws function continuously without interruption. It is God who will raise the dead and He will resurrect those who died and are buried in their graves. The phases of the creation of the embryo, the development of the fetus, and the complete cycle of the development of the human being until he/she returns back to a state of childhood, indicate that there must be another life where the human being is allowed to reach perfection. This will only happen in the Hereafter. These phases give dual evidence that the Resurrection will happen. The phases show God’s power as a Creator and His ability to re-create since He was the One who created in the first instance. They also show the inevitability of the Resurrection because the perfection that the mortals are destined for cannot happen during their life on earth.

Yet, there are those who still argue about the power of God, *“Yet among people is he who still disputes about God, without knowledge, without guidance, and without a book of enlightenment; turning away in pride to beguile (people) from the way of God. For him in this world is ignominy, and on the Day of Resurrection We make him taste the torment of burning.”* The reflection on the issues of the creation renders disputing God’s power illogical. In addition, those who dispute God’s power have no knowledge, nor do they have a book that supports their claim. Their argument is baseless. The verse depicts an image of an arrogant person, *“turning away in pride,”* who uses his arrogance to mislead people away from the right path. His recompense will be ignominy in the life on earth and severe torment of fire in the Hereafter. This will be his well deserved recompense because God never treats any of His servants unjustly, *“(It will be said), ‘This is because of the deeds which your hands sent forth, for verily God is not unjust to His servants.’”*

*“And among humankind is he who worships God (sitting) on a verge so that if good befalls him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalls him, he falls away utterly. He loses both this world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss. They call on such deities, besides God, as can neither hurt nor profit them, that is straying far indeed (from the Way). (Perhaps) they call on one whose hurt is nearer than his benefit; evil, indeed, is the patron, and evil is the associate.”* This is another kind of people. People who consider faith as a business deal. They think that faith is only good as long as it leads them to material gain in this life. They do not understand that faith is the

strong foundation that holds the believers life firm in face of the turbulent events that impact human life. Faith should be the source of support in face of calamities and the source of light that guides the believers to the shore of security when the darkness of doubt surrounds them. Faith is the link between God and the believers. It is a two- way channel through which the believer seeks God's guidance and then receives God's support. The expression used in the verse, to describe those who are content with their faith as long as faith brings them material benefits and they turn away if life becomes difficult, reflects the doubts in their hearts and the hesitation in their intention as if they are sitting on the edge of an abyss. They only need a slight push to throw them off balance. This is a true loss. They suffer the material loss which caused them to lose their faith and in addition, they lose the security and the contentment which faith brings to the heart of the believer. They lose the way that can bring them salvation and they seek help from patrons or associates other than God. They do not know that those will cause them harm and will not benefit them.

But God has something better for the believers, even if they suffer a great material loss in this life, *"Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to Gardens, beneath which rivers flow, for God does what He pleases."* Believers should stand firm in the face of trials and adversity. They should rely on their faith in God to get them through these difficult times. Only God can remove the afflictions. Those who cannot stand this test will realize that there is no alternative, *"If any think that God will not help him (His Messenger) in this world and the Hereafter, let him stretch out a rope to the sky and climb all the way up; then let him see whether his plan will remove that which enrages (him)."* Believers should never despair of the mercy and help of God.

God revealed His Quran to guide people to the straight path, *"Thus, have We sent down (the Quran) as plain revelation, and verily God guides whom He wills."* God will guide those who want God's guidance and strive for it. Those who follow different ways will be judged by God on the Day of Judgment, *"Those who believe (in the Qur'an), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. God is a Witness over all things."*

Human beings were given the freedom to choose, but the universe has been created to worship God, *"Do you not see that all things that are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the hills, the trees, the animals, and a great number among humankind do prostrate themselves to God?; while there are many for whom the torment is justly deserved. He whom God scorns, there is none to give him honor. God does what He pleases."* Those who reject God's guidance will receive their share of ignominy.

The following verses describe one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment which depicts examples of those honored by God and those who will be disgraced by God, *"These two antagonists disputed with each other about their Lord. But those who deny (their Lord), for them will be cut out garments of Fire and boiling water will be poured down on their heads. Whereby that which is in their bellies, and their skins too, will be melted; in addition there will be maces of iron (to punish) them. Every time they wish to get away there from, they will be forced back therein; and*

*(it will be said), ‘Taste the torment of Fire.’” The verses describe a horrific scene: garments made out of fire, boiling water is poured over the heads, and rods of hot iron are used to strike people. The disbelievers will wish to leave, however they will only get rebuke, “Taste the torment of Fire.”*

On the other hand, those who believed will get a different treatment, *“God will admit those who believe and do good deeds into Gardens beneath which rivers flow. They shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments there will be of silk.”* They will be guided to say the purest of speech, *“For they have been guided (in this life) to the purest of speeches; they have been guided to the path of the Praised.”*

### **Verses 25 to 41:**

- 25. Those who disbelieve and bar (people) from the way of God and from the Sacred Mosque, which We have appointed for all people together, its residents and its visitors. Whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment.*
- 26. We showed the site of the (Sacred) House, to Abraham, (saying), “Do not associate anything with Me; and purify My House for those who circle around it, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer).*
- 27. And proclaim the pilgrimage to people. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine.*
- 28. That they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice). Then, eat of them and feed the distressed and the needy.*
- 29. Then, let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House.*
- 30. That (is the command). And whoso respects the sacred ordinances of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful to you save that which has been recited to you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false statements;*
- 31. Being true in faith to God, and never associating partners with Him. Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place.*
- 32. All this (is ordained by God); and whoever respects the rites of God, this is surely (the outcome) of the piety of the hearts.*
- 33. In them you have benefits for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice near the Ancient House.*
- 34. And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of God over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food; and your god is One God, therefore surrender to Him. And give glad tidings (Muhammad) to the humble;*
- 35. Whose hearts are filled with awe when God is mentioned; and who endure whatever may befall them; and those who establish worship; and who spend of that We have bestowed on them.*
- 36. And the camels We have designated to be part of God’s sacred rites. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of God over them as they are lined up for sacrifice.*

- Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus, We have subjected them to you, that haply you may give thanks.*
37. *It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him. He has thus subjected them to you, that you may glorify God for having guided you and to give glad tidings to all who do good.*
38. *Verily, God will defend those who believe; verily, God does not love the treacherous, the ungrateful.*
39. *Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is indeed able to give them victory;*
40. *Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, "Our Lord is God." If God did not repel some people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent.*
41. *Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity; and God controls the outcome of all events. (22: 25-41)*

*"Those who disbelieve and bar (people) from the way of God and from the Sacred Mosque, which We have appointed for all people together, its residents and its visitors, whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment."* This verse refers to what Quraish was doing; they barred the Muslims who wanted to visit the Sacred Mosque and did not allow them to perform the rites of pilgrimage and Umra. This incident took place during the 6<sup>th</sup> year (H). God made the Sacred Mosque a safe ground. No fight was allowed within the precinct of the Sacred Mosque. All people have the right to feel safe and are able to freely perform their worship without a threat or disturbance. All people whether they were residents of Mecca or visiting from outside have equal rights. The precinct of the Sacred Mosque remained an oasis for peace since it was established until now. The Quran threatens anyone who dares to violate its sanctity, *"whosoever tries to violate its sanctity with wrongdoing, We shall make him taste a painful torment."* The threat is directed to those who may want to "try," which indicates the seriousness of the crime.

*"We showed the site of the (Sacred) House, to Abraham, (saying), 'Do not associate anything with Me; and purify My House for those who circle around it, or stand up, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). And proclaim the pilgrimage to people. They will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every deep ravine, that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice). Then eat of them and feed the distressed and the needy. Then let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House.'" The Sacred House was established to be the symbol of the Oneness of God on earth. God guided Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to its place to rebuilt and take care of it, on one condition, "Do not associate anything with Me." God commanded Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to purify the House and prepare it for the rituals of pilgrimage. When he completed his task, God commanded him to proclaim pilgrimage to people.*

God promised Prophet Abraham (PBUH) that people will respond to his proclamation and will come to perform pilgrimage from far and wide. That promise was kept and people still come to the Sacred Mosque to perform pilgrimage to this day. Millions of people, rich and poor, come to perform pilgrimage every year. The verse mentions some of the objectives of pilgrimage, *“that they may witness the benefits (provided) for them, and celebrate the name of God, through the appointed Days, over the cattle which He has provided for them (for sacrifice).”* The benefits that people find in pilgrimage are many. Pilgrimage is an event which combines both spiritual and material benefits for Muslims. Pilgrimage is a conference for Muslims to meet, discuss common issues, and coordinate major initiatives. It is a business opportunity for people. It is a huge market place. Pilgrimage is a major religious event in the life of a believer. It is a time for purification of the soul. Believers experience their nearness to God in His Sacred Mosque. Believers circulate around the House and remember Prophet Abraham (PBUH) when he had to leave his spouse and his baby boy in this barren place, praying to God to protect them and to provide for them. They remember Lady Hajer running between the two hills of Safa and Marwah looking for water for her baby boy. They imagine her having went back and forth seven times then she saw the water gushing from under the tiny feet of her son. Then they remember Prophet Abraham (PBUH) ready to sacrifice his son in response to the command he received from God in his dream. They remember the submission and perseverance of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) in obeying God’s command. Many memories come back to the minds of the believers as they spend time seeking God’s nearness in His House. These memories remind them of their identity as Muslims having one God, raising one banner, and looking towards one Qibla.

*“That (is the command). And whoso respects the sacred ordinances of God, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful to you save that which has been recited to you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun false statements; being true in faith to God, and never associating partners with Him. Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place.”* Those who respect the things which have been decreed sacred by God, refrain from breaking God’s rules. This purifies their souls and creates a world that is safe for people to live in. The verse emphasizes that only God has the right to determine what is sacred. The Arabs used to sanctify certain animals claiming that these were God’s commands. The verse came to refute this claim explaining that only God has the right to determine what things are sacred. In addition, the verse stated that the filth of idols and false talk should be shunned. Associating partners with God is a filth that spoils the souls. Associating partners with God is a false statement but false statements are wider in scope than associating partners with God. The verse stated clearly that false statements in general are completely forbidden. Making a false statement is extremely abhorred in Islam, a fact that is portrayed by linking it to associating partners with God. This has been emphasized by prophetic traditions. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Making false statements is as bad as association partners with God.”* God wants people to avoid all forms of associating partners with God as well as making false statements. God wants people to follow the straight path to God. The verse paints a horrifying picture for those who wander away from the true path of God, *“Whoso associates partners with God is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place.”* It is a true depiction of those who associate partners with God. They fall from the heaven of faith to the abyss of disbelief. They lose the solid foundation of faith which provides security and balance in life, and fall into an unbounded space of insecurity and imbalance.

*“All this (is ordained by God); and whoever respects the rites of God, this is surely (the outcome) of the piety of hearts. In them you have benefits for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice near the Ancient House.”* The verse links piety of the hearts to the pilgrimage’s ritual of sacrifice. Attaining piety of the hearts is the ultimate goal of pilgrimage. The rituals are symbols of the believer’s obedience and submission to God. Thus, performing the rituals is an expression of the believer’s willingness to obey and submit to God’s commands following the example that has been set before by Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

The pilgrims are allowed to make use of the sacrificial animals on their way to the Sacred House, if there was a need. They can ride the animals and drink their milk until they reach the Sacred House. At the sacred House, the animals are slaughtered and their meat is distributed to the poor and needy.

*“And for every nation have We appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of God over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food; and your god is One God, therefore surrender to Him. And give glad tidings (Muhammad) to the humble, whose hearts are filled with awe when God is mentioned, and who endure whatever may befall them, and those who establish worship and who spend of that We have bestowed on them.”* The ritual of animal sacrifice has been known to various nations, Islam makes it clear that sacrifice has to be made with the intent that it is a symbol of obedience to God. Sacrificing animals for another cause is prohibited. The verse reiterates this fact again, *“your god is One God, therefore submit to Him.”* This is a voluntary submission to God. It is a submission of those who are seeking security in submitting to God, whose hearts tremble in awe when the name of God is mentioned. Those who endure with patience whatever befall them. They are content with whatever God decrees. They continue to establish prayer and spend in the way of God. Rituals and doctrine are intertwined together. The doctrine provides a foundation for the rituals and the rituals are symbols of the doctrine.

*“And the camels We have designated to be part of God’s sacred rites. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of God over them as they are lined up for sacrifice. Then when their flanks fall (dead), eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. Thus We have subjected them to you, that haply you may give thanks. It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God. It is your piety that reaches Him. He has thus subjected them to you, that you may glorify God for having guided you and to give glad tidings to all who do good.”* Among the animals to be sacrificed, camels are mentioned explicitly because they represent the greatest sacrifice. God created them to be used for riding, for their milk to be drunk, and for their meat to be eaten. God has no use for their meat but the sacrifice is a way for the attainment of piety of the hearts.

Believers should protect the sanctity of God’s rituals and places of worship. They should protect the freedom of faith and freedom of worship. That is why permission was granted to fight back those who try to oppress the believers, *“Verily God will defend those who believe; verily, God does not love the treacherous, the ungrateful. Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged; and God is indeed able to give them victory; those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said, ‘Our Lord is God.’ If God did not repel some*



*people by means of others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the name of God is oft mentioned, would assuredly have been pulled down. Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And God controls the outcome of all events.*” The battle between good and evil is an ever continuous battle. It started with the creation of Adam (PBUH) and will continue till the end of time. The forces of evil are always well equipped, they are ready to oppress and persecute the believers. The forces of evil have no scruples. They use whatever means available to seduce people and turn them away from the right path. God wanted the believers to be well equipped to be able to resist the forces of evil. Material preparation is important. Before granting the permission to fight back, the believers were reassured that God will protect them, *“Verily God will defend (from ill) those who believe.”* They were told that God does not like their enemies because they were treacherous. The believers had the right to defend themselves because they were wronged, *“Sanction is given to those who fight because they have been wronged;”* They should feel reassured because God will support and protect them, *“God is indeed able to give them victory.”* The believers were fighting for a noble cause: they were defending the principle of freedom of faith not only for themselves but also for all people. The verse then stated a fundamental principle, the principle of the need to defend freedom of faith. The example was given for the need to protect places of worship for Jews, Christians and Muslims. These places can be easily demolished by the forces of evil if the believers do not stand up to defend them. There are times when the truth needs to be protected and defended against the onslaught of falsehood. The believers were commanded to use whatever material means to defend these places of worship and to defend the freedom of faith against the oppression of falsehood.

One needs to reflect on the message that these verses state. God promised to protect and defend the believers against the onslaught of falsehood. So, why is He commanding the believers to fight back? Why should the believers fight, and suffer? The answer to this question is that this is God’s will. There is divine wisdom behind this course of action. Victory should be earned not granted. For the believers to earn victory they should satisfy two main requirements. The first requirement is the preparation of all material means available for them. The second requirement is the spiritual preparation through prayers, recitation of Quran, and praying for God’s victory. The believers should remain conscious of God.

The believers are entrusted to the task of carrying the banner of the divine project. Those who carry the banner should be willing to strive, work hard, and sacrifice for the sake of God. This is the way for people to mature and for human talents and skills to be discovered. It is also a training opportunity for the community to unite around a cause and to work together towards a goal.

Sometimes the believers feel that victory is slow in coming. It is important to understand that for victory to be effective it has to be well timed. Premature victory is as dangerous as losing the battle. Victory can be achieved only when the environment is suitable. The delay in achieving victory may be an indication that the community is lacking in one or more of the aspects needed to attain victory; or it may be that the community did not reach the required maturity to receive victory and to appreciate it. Premature victory can be easily lost and it may be difficult to regain victory after it has been lost. God’s promise will be fulfilled when all conditions for achieving

victory have been realized, “*Verily God helps those who help Him. God is Strong, Eminent. Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish worship and pay the poor-due and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. And God controls the outcome of all events.*” God will never let the believers down. But who are those who deserve God’s support? Those who will use God’s support to establish prayers, pay the poor-dues, and enjoin kindness and forbid iniquity. They will establish goodness and will fight evil and corruption. They will strive to fulfill the divine project on earth, the divine project which guarantees justice and freedom for people.

### **Verses 42 to 57:**

42. *If they reject you (Muhammad), so did the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) ‘Aad and Thamud, before you, reject (Our messengers);*
43. *And the people of Abraham and the people of Lot;*
44. *(and) The dwellers of Midian. And Moses was rejected; but I granted respite to the disbelievers for a long while, then I seized them, and how (terrible) was My reproach.*
45. *How many a township have We destroyed while it was sinful, so that it lies (to this day) in ruins, and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower.*
46. *Have they not travelled in the land, and do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind.*
47. *And they ask you to hasten on the torment, and God will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you count.*
48. *And how many a township did I give respite while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return.*
49. *Say, “People, I am only a plain warner to you.”*
50. *Those who believe and do good deeds, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable provision.*
51. *But those who strive to oppose Our revelations, they will be the rightful owners of the Fire.*
52. *And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he wished something Satan did insinuate something, into these wishes, but God removes that which the Satan insinuates then does God affirms His revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
53. *He makes Satan’s insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in profound discord.*
54. *And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so that they believe therein and their hearts submit humbly to Him. God will certainly guide those who believe to a straight path.*
55. *And those who disbelieve will not cease to be in doubt thereof until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes to them the torment of a disastrous day.*
56. *On that day the Dominion will be God’s. He will judge between them, so those who believe and do good deeds will be in Gardens of bliss.*
57. *While those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, for them will be a shameful torment. (22: 42 – 57)*

*“If they reject you (Muhammad), so did the people of Noah, and (the tribes of) ‘Aad and Thamud, before you, reject (Our messengers); and the people of Abraham and the people of Lot; (and) the dwellers of Midian. And Moses was rejected; but I granted respite to the disbelievers for a long while, then I seized them, and how (terrible) was My reproach.”* Muhammad (PBUH) was not the first messenger to be rejected by the people to whom he was sent, all the previous messengers were rejected by their people. God’s rule was applied to those who rejected guidance before, they were all destroyed. Note that Prophet Moses (PBUH) was mentioned separately because he was not rejected by his own people but it was Pharaoh who rejected Moses (PBUH). God gave them all respite then He seized them. How hard was God’s seizure? The following verse gives an indication of God’s seizure, *“How many a township have We destroyed while it was sinful, so that it lies (to this day) in ruins, and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower.”* The ruins of empty palaces, deserted wells, and demolished towers are testaments of God’s seizure. One does not need to travel very far to see these ruins, *“Have they not travelled in the land, and do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind.”* The fate that people who denied their messengers met before, whose traces could be clearly seen around, should have been a lesson for the idolaters of Mecca. The verse poses a rhetorical question, *“do they not have hearts to feel with and ears to hear with.”* Their ears did not listen and their hearts did not understand the lesson. Instead, they became stubborn in their rejection, *“And they ask you to hasten on the torment, and God will by no means fail in His promise, and surely a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you count.”* The wrongdoers do not benefit from the experience of the others. They always think that they are different. The idolaters of Mecca had the audacity to ridicule the Prophet (PBUH) and to dare him to hasten the punishment. God’s promise will never fail. However, God has a different scale for time other than that which is used by humans. So, never doubt God’s promise, *“And how many a township did I give respite while it was unjust, then I overtook it, and to Me is the return.”*

The following verse starts a new theme. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to, *“Say, ‘People, I am only a plain warner to you.’”* This statement outlines the task of the Prophet (PBUH). God sent him to warn people, telling them the alternative fates for those who believe and those who reject, *“Those who believe and do good deeds, they shall have forgiveness and an honorable provision. But those who strive to oppose Our revelations, they will be the rightful owners of the Fire.”* God will forgive those who believed and did good deeds and will give them honorable provision. But those who were stubborn and tried to prevent guidance to reach people will become the dwellers of Hell.

God protects the integrity of His Message; no one can change the message. Satan would like to change the Message. He tries to get to his objective through the wishes that the Messengers have as human beings. The messengers were human beings they had human feelings, anxieties, and ambitions; but God protected the messengers from Satan’s attacks. The messengers wanted to succeed in spreading the Message. They were anxious to remove the obstacles that kept the message from reaching people. They were eager to see all people become guided. Satan tried to penetrate these feelings and desires to change the message, but God protected the integrity of His message and destroyed Satan’s plans, *“And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he wished something Satan did insinuate something, into these wishes,*

*but God removes that which the Satan insinuates then does God affirms His revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise. He makes Satan's insinuations a temptation only for the sick at heart and those whose hearts are hardened. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in profound discord. And that those who have been given knowledge may know that it is the truth from your Lord, so that they may believe therein and their hearts may submit humbly to Him. God will certainly guide those who believe to a straight path.*" There are many narrations that explain the reason for the revelation of these verses. However, all these narrations lack authenticity, according to Ibn Katheer and the scholars of Hadeeth.

We can attempt to explain the words of God according to our limited understanding, God knows best what He meant by these verses. These verses provide a general statement that applies to all messengers of God, not only to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The verses may refer to incidents where the messenger may have wanted to take an action that he thought would be in the best interest of spreading the message, but his action could have created a doubt about the application of a certain fundamental principle of the message. God intervened and clarified the true application of the principle so that there would be no doubt. There are several examples in the life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) which may explain this. One of these examples is the incident which involved a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) by the name of Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) was a blind person. One day, while the Prophet (PBUH) was busy talking to the chiefs of Quraish, Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) approached the Prophet (PBUH) asking the Prophet (PBUH) to teach him some verses of the Quran. The Prophet (PBUH) was at a point in the discussion where he was hopeful that the chiefs of Quraish may be inclined to adopt Islam and he was worried about the interruption by Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Ibn Um Maktoom (RA), being unaware of the situation, kept insisting on his request. The Prophet (PBUH) was annoyed and turned away from Ibn Um Maktoom (RA). Verses from the Quran were revealed on this occasion which reproached the Prophet (PBUH) for turning away from Ibn Um Maktoom (RA), *"He frowned and turned away; because there came the blind man."* (80: 1 – 2). Ever since this incident, the Prophet (PBUH) used to greet Ibn Um Maktoom (RA) saying, *"Welcome to the man about whom God reproached me."*

*"And those who disbelieve will not cease to be in doubt thereof until the Hour overtakes them suddenly, or there comes to them the torment of a disastrous day. On that day the Dominion will be God's. He will judge between them, so those who believe and do good deeds will be in Gardens of bliss. While those who disbelieved and denied Our revelations, for them will be a shameful torment."* Those who disbelieve will always be in doubt of the Quran. They will never realize its beauty; until the Day of Judgment overtakes them suddenly. They will realize then that only God has the Dominion over everything. The believers will end up in paradise while the disbelievers will meet their doom.

### **Verses 58 to 78:**

58. *Those who fled their homes in God's cause, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow a goodly provision. Verily, God is the Best of the providers.*
59. *Verily He will admit them to a place with which they shall be well pleased; God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*

60. *That (is so). And whoso has retaliated with the like of that which he was made to suffer and then has (again) been wronged, God will support him; God is verily Effacer of Sins, All-Forgiving.*
61. *That is because God merges night into day, and He merges day into night, and verily God is All-Hearing, All- Seeing.*
62. *That is because God is the Truth, and that which they call upon instead of Him, is falsehood; God is the Most High, the Great.*
63. *Do you not see that that God sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.*
64. *To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; God is verily Independent, Praised.*
65. *Do you not see that God has subjected to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His Command? He withholds the sky from falling on the earth except by His leave; God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy to people.*
66. *It is He who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you life. Truly, humankind is a most ungrateful creature.*
67. *To every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but call to your Lord. You are indeed on the right guidance.*
68. *If they do wrangle with you, say, "God knows best what it is you are doing.*
69. *God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ."*
70. *Do you not know that God knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely, this is in a Record; surely, this is easy to God.*
71. *And they worship besides God that for which He did not send down authority and that whereof they have no knowledge. The wrongdoers have no helper.*
72. *And when Our revelations are recited to them, you recognize the denial in the faces of those who disbelieve; they would be on the verge of assaulting those who recite Our revelations to them. Say "Shall I proclaim to you worse than that? The Fire, God has promised it for those who disbelieve; a hapless journey's end."*
73. *People, a parable have been coined, so pay heed to it. Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose. And if the fly took something from them, they could not rescue it from it. So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.*
74. *They did not give God His rightful measure; God is Strong, Eminent.*
75. *God chooses messengers from angels and from people. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*
76. *He knows what is before them and what is behind them. To God go back all matters (for decision).*
77. *Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good, that haply you may succeed.*
78. *And strive for God with the endeavor which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Book) that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses against humankind. So establish prayer, pay the poor-dues, and hold fast to God. He is your Patron; a blessed Patron and*

*a blessed Helper. (22: 58 – 78)*

*“Those who fled their homes in God’s cause, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow a goodly provision. Verily, God is the Best of the providers. Verily, He will admit them to a place with which they shall be well pleased; God is Omniscient, Forbearing.”* Those who fled their homes in God’s cause left everything they own behind. They left behind their homes, their families, their homeland, and their property and migrated to a new place where they can practice their faith freely. They gave up their worldly possessions seeking God’s pleasure. God will reward them with a good provision, whether they die on a battleground or they die in their homes. God will give them the reward He kept for the martyrs because they left their homes in God’s cause. He will admit them to paradise through an entrance that they will be pleased with.

God promised to lend His support to those who were wronged and retaliated in a proper measure then they were again subjected to wrongdoings, *“That (is so). And whoso has retaliated with the like of that which he was made to suffer and then has (again) been wronged, God will support him; God is verily Effacer of Sins, All- Forgiving.”* The condition for obtaining God’s support is not to exceed the limit in retaliation. The verse ends by stating that God is, *“verily, Effacer of Sins, All-Forgiving.”* Mortals may choose not to forgive and may want to retaliate for any wrongdoing inflicted on them, but God is ever Forgiving. The verses then continue to describe the cosmic phenomena created by God. This may indicate that God’s promise to support those who suffered wrongdoing is one of the norms that God created in this universe, *“That is because God merges night into day, and He merges day into night, and verily God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”* The verse describes a phenomenon that happens every day. Everyone sees it and takes it for granted. The verse draws people’s attention to this regular phenomenon so that they recognize the limitless power of God which maintains these cosmic phenomena. Similarly, God’s support for those who suffer from the wrongdoings inflicted upon them by others is part of the phenomena of this universe. This is closely linked to the fact that God is the Truth. The Truth is the power that holds the equilibrium of the universe and maintains its discipline, *“That is because God is the Truth, and that which they call upon instead of Him, is falsehood; God is the Most High, the Great.”* This is enough reason for the eventual loss of falsehood and the victory of what is right and fair; God is Great.

The verses continue to explore other cosmic phenomena, *“Do you not see that that God sends down rain from the sky, and forthwith the earth becomes clothed with green? God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.”* Most people consider the phenomena of the fall of rain, the subsequent revival of the earth, and the growth of plants to be normal events. These phenomena are usually taken for granted. However, these phenomena can evoke strong emotions in the sensitive hearts. People who are sensitive to these cosmic phenomena may even see a similarity between the budding life of a small plant and the budding life of a small child. The process of the vegetation growth requires the right constituents of the soil and the right amount of water. The tiny trunk of the plant that penetrates the solid soil looking for air and sun is a sign of the power of God which works in a subtle way. God is the owner of the heavens and earth and He does not need anything and He most worthy of all praise, *“To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth; God*

*is verily Independent, Praised.”*

*“Do you not see that God has subjected to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea by His command? He withholds the sky from falling on the earth except by His leave; God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy to people.”* God subjected many things for the use of people on earth, but many of them are unaware of the blessings of God. God created the laws that allow ships to float on sea and travel through waves. God created the universe and maintains its equilibrium using laws He created. God is able to disable these laws if he wills.

*“It is He who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you life. Truly humankind is a most ungrateful creature.”* Originating life from nothing was a miracle. The miracle of life happens every day; its secrets are still a mystery. Death is another mystery that keeps us wondering. It can happen in a split second. It transfers the human being from the state of life to a state of death; two states which are separated by a split second, yet they are separated by a huge gulf. Life after death is part of the unseen however; it does not seem to be impossible on the basis of the first creation. All these phenomena provide points for reflection and thought. Unfortunately, humankind does not reflect, *“Truly humankind is a most ungrateful creature.”*

The following verses move to another theme, *“To every people have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but call to your Lord. You are indeed on the right guidance.”* The Prophet (PBUH) is commanded to continue on his mission and avoid the distractions that are created by the idolaters of Mecca. There is a project for each nation which involves its way of life, its beliefs, its behavior, and its thought. God controls these projects. God will guide a nation which seeks the road to guidance, while He will let go astray a nation that does not seek guidance. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) should realize that each nation has its own project and he should not get tempted into disputing the idolaters, because these disputes aim at distracting him from his major task. He should continue to call to his Lord on a straight path, *“You are indeed on the right guidance.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was told that if they insist on arguing with him, he should tell them, *“God knows best what it is you are doing.”* God will have the final say, *“God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ.”* No one can argue with God’s judgment, because it is a judgment which is based on full knowledge, *“Do you not know that God knows what is in the heaven and the earth? Surely this is in a Record; surely this is easy to God.”* God’s knowledge encompasses everything that happens in the heavens and the earth.

*“And they worship besides God that for which He did not send down authority and that whereof they have no knowledge. The wrongdoers have no helper.”* Having told His Prophet (PBUH) to stop arguing with the idolaters, God reveals the distorted doctrine of the idolaters. They worship idols. The doctrine they followed had no support or proof to substantiate it.

Because they had no proof to substantiate their falsehood they did not have any argument to uphold the credibility of their beliefs, *“And when Our revelations are recited to them, you recognize the denial in the faces of those who disbelieve; they would be on the verge of assaulting those who recite Our revelations to them. Say, ‘Shall I proclaim to you worse than that? The Fire, God has promised it for those who disbelieve; a hapless journey's end.’”*

An unequivocal statement has been proclaimed, *“People, a parable has been coined, so pay heed to it. Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose. And if the fly took something from them, they could not rescue it from it. So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.”* This is a proclamation for all people. It proclaims a general statement that cannot be disputed, *“Those on whom you call besides God will never create a fly even if they gather together for the purpose.”* Not only they are incapable of creating a fly, but also if a fly takes away something from them, they will not be able to rescue it from the fly. They are so weak, *“So weak are (both) the seeker and the sought.”* The weakness of the false gods is juxtaposed against the power of the true God, *“They did not give God His rightful measure; God is Strong, Eminent.”*

*“God chooses messengers from angels and from people. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. He knows what is before them and what is behind them. To God go back all matters (for decision).”* The Messengers were chosen by God alone. God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with the authority to call people to the right path. God oversees everything and hears everything. All matters are controlled by Him.

The following verses are commands issued to the believers to worship God, discharge their responsibility, and maintain a straight course, *“Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves, and worship your Lord, and do good, that haply you may succeed. And strive for God with the endeavor which is His right. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He has named you Muslims of old time and in this (Book) that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that you may be witnesses against humankind. So establish prayer, pay the poor-dues, and hold fast to God. He is your Patron; a blessed Patron and a blessed Helper.”* These two verses outline the divine project which God planned for this nation, summarize its responsibility, and determine the status that it can achieve if it lived according to the divine project and fulfilled its responsibility. The verses start with the command to bow and prostrate. The verse refers to the prayer using its two most conspicuous components. This representation animates the prayer.

The second command given in the verses refers to worshipping God in general. Worship encompasses all human activities which are carried out with the intention of pleasing God. Each and every activity that the believers perform during their daily life can be considered an act of worship if the believers have the intention that they are performing it to seek God's acceptance. This includes all regular tasks even those tasks that are used to satisfy human desires and pleasures. The verse then concludes by a command to do good. This is a general command to do good in all human transactions. Thus, the first two commands deal with the relationship between the individual and God, and the third command deals with relationship between the individual



and other people in general. These are the commands that lead to success. Worshipping God provides the strong foundation to a successful human life and treating people nicely and fairly provides the support for a successful community life. The community which fulfills these commands is ready to undertake the responsibility that God placed on the shoulders of the believer: to strive in the way of God. This is a huge undertaking, but God is Merciful, He does not want to lay any hardship on the believers. This divine project is an old project; it has its roots in the Message that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought to humanity. God called the nation of the believers: Muslims, those who submit to God. Islam is the complete and voluntary submission to God. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was sent to be a witness over the believers and the believers are made witnesses over the whole humanity. This task cannot be accomplished unless they continue to establish prayers, pay the poor dues, and hold tight to God. God is their Patron; a blessed Patron and a blessed Helper.

## Sura 23: Al-Muminun (The Believers)

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

### Verses 1 to 22:

1. *Successful indeed are the believers.*
2. *Those who are humble in their prayers;*
3. *And who shun vain talk;*
4. *Who are active in deeds of charity;*
5. *And who guard their modesty;*
6. *Except with their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess, for indeed they will not be blamed,*
7. *But those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors;*
8. *And those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants;*
9. *And who (strictly) guard their prayers;*
10. *These will be the heirs,*
11. *Who will inherit Paradise; they will dwell therein (forever).*
12. *Verily, We created humankind from a product of wet earth;*
13. *Then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a safe lodging;*
14. *Then We made the sperm into a leech-like clot;*
15. *Then We fashioned the clot into a little lump of flesh; then We fashioned the little lump into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be God, the best of creators.*
16. *Then after that you will surely die.*
17. *Then on the Day of Resurrection you will be raised (again).*
18. *And We have made, above you, seven layered heavens; and We are never unmindful of (Our) creation.*
19. *And We send down water from the sky according to a due measure, and We give it lodging in the earth, and We are able to take it away.*
20. *With it, We grow for you gardens of date-palms and vines, in them you have abundant fruits, and of them you eat;*
21. *And (We brought forth) a tree springing from Mount Sinai that produces oil and relish for the eaters.*
22. *And in the cattle there is verily a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, and many uses you have in them, and of them do you eat; and on them and on the ships you are carried. (23:1 – 22)*

*“Successful indeed are the believers. Those who are humble in their prayers; and who shun vain talk; who are active in deeds of charity; and who guard their modesty; except with their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess, for indeed they will not be blamed, but those whose desires exceed those limits are transgressors; and those who faithfully observe their trusts and*

*their covenants; and who (strictly) guard their prayers; these will be the heirs; Who will inherit Paradise; they will dwell therein (forever).*” This is a promise that God made to the believers. It is not only a true promise, but it is also a guarantee for the success of the believers. God does not renege on His promise and no one can change God’s decree. The promised success is a success in this life as well as in the Hereafter. It is a comprehensive success in all aspects of life. It includes the success that people know and that which is beyond their imagination.

But what are the characteristics of the believers to whom this promise was made? Those believers are humble in their prayers, they shun vain talk, they are active in deeds of charity, they guard their modesty, they faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants, and they strictly guard their prayers. What is the meaning of these characteristics? These characteristics define the Muslim character as practiced by the highest example, the example of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was raised and trained by his Lord, Who described him in His Book by the words, “*And indeed, you are of a great moral character.*” (68: 4). When A’isha (RA) was asked about the Prophet’s character, she said, “*His character was according to the Quran.*” She then recited the first eleven verses in this Sura.

Those who are humble in their prayers are awed by their Lord. While in prayer their senses submit to God and their souls are overwhelmed by His presence. Their thoughts are focused on the meeting with God and speaking to Him. There is no place in their minds for other worldly thoughts. The experience purifies their souls of all sins.

The believers shun vain talk. Vain talk usually leads to vain thoughts, vain feelings, and vain deeds. Vain thoughts distract the believers from the remembrance of God and from the practice of the true teachings of Islam. When the believers shun vain talk, deeds, and thoughts; their spirits are freed so that they can engage in the remembrance of God and reflect on His signs. Practicing the teachings of Islam motivates the believers to purify their thoughts, practice fairness in their dealings, persevere in resisting the temptation of corruption, observe the duty of enjoining good and forbidding evil, and contribute to the welfare of the community. These are never ending duties for the believers; it could be either individual or communal duties depending on the situation. This does not mean that the believers are deprived of any right to enjoy innocent entertainment. Innocent entertainment is different from finding enjoyment in vain talk and vain deeds.

The believers fulfill the financial obligations in terms of giving the poor-dues. The poor-dues purify the soul and the wealth of the believer. Paying charity provides the discipline of being generous; it rids the believer of the bad trait of being stingy. Paying charity is also a way for gaining the blessing of God. These purify the soul and the wealth. The poor-dues are a safeguard for the community members from ever becoming deprived.

Observing modesty purifies the soul, the family, and the community of the ills of indecency and illegitimate relationships. Communities whose members indulge in indecent and illegitimate sexual acts are open for corruption. These acts deprive the family of security, peace, and fidelity. The family is the fundamental building block of the community. When the family loses security, the community will eventually lose security as well. Human civilizations are a product of their

values. The ability of human beings to exercise control over their desires and lusts is one of these values. This value distinguishes human beings from animals.

The verse specifies the pure places where the male can implant the seeds of life, “*their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess.*” Having sexual relationship with spouses is the normal way for procreation. The issue of what is meant by the term, “what the right hand possesses,” needs to be discussed. The way Islam dealt with slavery has been discussed elsewhere in this book however; we will discuss it briefly here. At the time of inception of Islam, slavery was a well-established universal institution. The principle of enslaving prisoners of war was, at that time, an established component of the code of war. It was illogical and impractical for Islam to abolish the practice unilaterally. This would have given the enemies of Islam an unfair advantage over Muslims in war. Islam devised a system which would abolish all types of slavery except for the prisoners of war. However, the Islamic approach to the issue of slavery certainly leads to the abolishment of slavery, when the world was ready for it.

The term “those whom their right hands possess,” refers to non-Muslim women captured during wars. Islam legitimized sexual relationships between the slave women and their owners. Islam also instituted a multitude of ways to enable these women to gain their freedom. A slave woman could negotiate to pay a ransom for her freedom and a slave woman who gave birth was freed upon the death of her master. These are only two of several ways which Islam devised to free slave women captured in wars. In addition, slave owners were encouraged to free their slaves for the atonement of their sins or for gaining a reward from God. Allowing sexual relations between a master and a slave girl provided a practical way for dealing with the natural desires of both the male masters and the female slave. The verse admonished males not to go beyond the decreed limits.

The believers, “*faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants;*” This verse applies to individuals as well as communities. The first trust that a believer should observe is the trust that is embedded in the initial natural disposition of the human being, the sound disposition that God implanted in humankind to be able to live in harmony with the universe. This is the disposition that leads humankind to the belief in the oneness of the Creator. This is also the first covenant that a believer should fulfill; the covenant of the belief in one God. This covenant is the fundamental base upon which all other covenants are established because this covenant makes God a witness over all covenants that a believer subscribes to.

A Muslim community is required to fulfill all trusts and covenants that it subscribes to. The terminology indicates that the verse covers all aspects of trust and covenants. Fulfillment of trusts and covenants by the community as a whole is the only way to guarantee a secure and safe environment for people living in this community.

The believers, “*strictly guard their prayers.*” They are neither lazy nor negligent when it comes to performing their prayer. They perform it in the best way they can. They consider the prayer a link that connects them to God, so they guard it as they guard the most precious thing they have. It is interesting to note that the verses that described the believers started and ended by characters

related to establishing and guarding the prayers. This shows the important role that the prayers play in building the character of the believer.

The characters described in the previous verses define the characteristics of the believers both at the individual and community levels. These characteristics define the identity of Muslims and the style of life in the Muslim community. These characteristics enable the believers to lead an honorable and righteous life, the life that God wanted humankind to lead. However, life in the world can never be perfect; therefore, God wanted the believers who followed His way to continue on their way for the perfect life in the Hereafter, the eternal life. They will become, *“the heirs, who will inherit Paradise; they will dwell therein (forever).”* This is the ultimate success which God promised to bestow on the believers.

The following verses deal with phenomena that lead to the belief in God. The verses describe the beginning of humankind, *“Verily We created man from a product of wet earth; then We placed him as a drop of sperm in a safe lodging; then We made the sperm into a leech-like clot of; then We fashioned the clot into a little lump of flesh; then We fashioned the little lump into bones; then We clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be God, the best of creators. Then after that you will surely die. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will be raised (again).”* The development of human life is a tribute to the existence of the Creator who planned the process and controls its progress. The process unfolds into deliberate stages without faltering or deviation. The articulation of the process of creation and the elaborate description of the stages through which human life is developed is an indication that only those who have acquired the characteristics of the believers can reach the perfect life which God had intended for humankind.

The verse refers to the stages of the creation of humankind but does not specify how that happened. The stages of the creation started with a product of wet earth and ended up with a human being. God decreed that after the creation of the first couple, the human race should propagate through a process in which the female is fertilized by a drop from the sperm of the male. First, the sperm is lodged in a safe place inside the female’s uterus. The sperm is then used to fertilize the female’s egg and to form a clot of congealed blood which clings to the wall of the uterus and feeds on the female’s blood. The clot then becomes a lump of flesh which develops into a skeleton and the skeleton becomes covered with flesh. It is astounding that the verses describe a process that was only discovered recently. One should also note that the verse talks about the different times at which the skeleton and the flesh are formed. Anatomical studies confirm the stages of fetus development described in the Quran. This is the creation of the absolute best of the creators.

The stages that every human being goes through after birth until death have been also decreed by God. Similar to the process of creation, the process of growth and decay and eventual death of the human being has never changed since the creation of the first human being. The resurrection is another stage of the development of humankind.

*“And We have made, above you, seven layered heavens; and We are never unmindful of (Our) creation.”* It is not known exactly what is meant by the seven layered heavens. It could mean

seven astronomical paths or seven constellations. At any rate it is seven cosmic installations that are high above the earth. God created these installations with wisdom and controls it according to a divine law. God also sent water from the sky, *“And We send down water from the sky according to (due) measure, and We give it lodging in the earth, and We are able to take it away.”* The discovery that ground water has been formed from rain coming down from the sky is a fairly recent one. God decreed that rain water should come down according to a due measure; a moderate amount that is beneficial but harmless and only comes at the appropriate time. Rain water seeps into the ground until it reaches a secure place where it will be stored. God is capable to take it away any time He wills. Life springs out from water, *“With it We grow for you gardens of date-palms and vines, in them you have abundant fruits, and of them you eat (and have enjoyment);”* date-palms and vines are two examples of life that is generated by water. A third example is the olive tree, *“And (We brought forth) a tree springing from Mount Sinai that produces oil and relish for the eaters.”* The olive tree provides many benefits. People can eat its fruits and use its oil and wood. It grows in the holy valley near the Mount of Sinai feeding on ground water.

*“And in the cattle there is verily a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, and many uses you have in them, and of them do you eat; and on them and on the ships you are carried.”* God subjected the animals to serve people. There are many lessons to be learnt from their creation. They use the food they graze on to produce the milk we drink. In addition, animals help people to move around and their meat is edible. God made it lawful to people to eat the meat of camels, cows, sheep, and goats; but it is forbidden to torture these animals. Using their meat contributes to the welfare of the human race but torture is an act of cruelty that is useless. God has created the water, ships and air to allow ships to float and travel over water. These three elements have been created in perfect harmony with each other.

### **Verses 23 to 52:**

23. *And We verily sent Noah to his people, and he said, “My people, worship God. You have no other deity save Him. Will you not be conscious of Him?”*
24. *The chiefs of the disbelievers among his people said, “He is only a mortal like you who desires to make himself superior to you. Had God willed, He surely could have sent down angels. We never heard anything like this from our forefathers.*
25. *He is only a madman, so bear with him for a while.”*
26. *He (Noah) said, “My Lord, help me because they denied me.”*
27. *Then We inspired him, saying, “Make the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration. Then, when Our command comes and the water gushes out from the oven, carry onto it of every (species) two spouses, and your household save him thereof against whom the word has already gone forth. And plead not with Me on behalf of the wrongdoers. They will be drowned.*
28. *And when you are onboard the ship, you and whoso is with you, then say, ‘Praise be to God who has saved us from the wrongdoers.’”*
29. *And say, “My Lord, let me land at a blessed landing-place, for You are the best of all who bring to land.”*

30. *Verily in this there are signs (for people to understand); (thus) do We put (humankind) to the test.*
31. *Then, after them, We brought forth another generation;*
32. *And We sent them a messenger from among themselves, (saying), "Worship God, you have no other deity but Him. Will you be conscious of (Him)?"*
33. *And the chiefs of his people, who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the Hereafter, and on whom We had bestowed the good things of this life, said, "He is no more than a mortal like yourselves. He eats of that which you eat, and drinks of what you drink.*
34. *If you obey a mortal like yourselves, you will indeed be losers.*
35. *Does he promise you, that when you die and become dust and bones, you shall be brought forth (again)?*
36. *Far, very far is that which you are promised.*
37. *There is nothing but our life in this world. We shall die and we live, but we shall never be raised up again.*
38. *He is only a man who invents a lie against God, but we are not the ones to believe in him."*
39. *(The prophet) said, "My Lord, help me because they denied me."*
40. *(God) said, "In a little while, they will surely become regretful.*
41. *Then the blast overtook them rightly, and We made them debris; so away with the wrongdoers.*
42. *Then We raised after them other generations.*
43. *No people can hasten their term, nor can they postpone it.*
44. *Then We sent our messengers one after another. Whenever its messenger came to a nation they denied him; so We caused them to follow one another (to disaster) and We made them narrations; so away with a people who do not believe.*
45. *Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron, with Our signs and clear authority;*
46. *To Pharaoh and his Chiefs. But they behaved insolently and they were an arrogant people.*
47. *They said, "Shall we believe in two men like ourselves while their people serve us?"*
48. *So they denied them, and became of those who were destroyed.*
49. *And We gave Moses the Scripture in order that they might receive guidance.*
50. *And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign. We sheltered both of them on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs.*
51. *Messengers, eat of the good things, and do good. I am aware of what you do. And verily your religion is a one religion, and I am your Lord therefore be conscious of Me. (23: 23 – 52)*

*"And We verily sent Noah to his people, and he said, 'My people, worship God. You have no other deity save Him. Will you not be conscious of Him?'"* This is the call to the truth that never changes. It is the basis of the existence of everything and everything in the universe is a testament of its veracity. Shouldn't people be conscious of God? How can people deny the truth upon which the universe exists? But the chiefs did not contemplate Noah's (PBUH) call and they did not reflect on his argument, *"The chiefs of the disbelievers among his people said, "He is only a mortal like you who desires to make himself superior to you. Had God willed, He surely could have sent down angels. We never heard anything like this from our forefathers."* They

ignored the main issue and discussed Noah's (PBUH) personality. They did not focus on the major issue and were sidetracked into a meaningless discussion. They accused Noah (PBUH) of being an ambitious person who is seeking higher status through his call. They did not realize that by denying Prophet Noah (PBUH) they were in fact denying the whole human race the honor that God bestowed on them when He chose a man from among them to deliver His message. They wanted God to send an angel with the message because they did not consider humans to be worthy of being God's messengers. They followed in the footsteps of their forefathers, and never tried to think for themselves. They became rigid in their way of thinking accusing those having liberating thoughts of being crazy, *"He is only a madman, so bear with him for a while."*

When Noah (PBUH) despaired of being able to convince them to consider the message, he asked for God's help, *"He (Noah) said, 'My Lord, help me because they denied me.'" God has two ways to deal with a community when it becomes rigid in its thoughts to the extent that it becomes an impediment in the way of the progress of human life on earth. God can either destroy the community to allow life of the human race to continue in its development on earth; or God can sideline the community and leave them in a conclave of their own making and allow the rest of humanity to go on the path of development so that human life can flourish. God chose the first approach in dealing with Noah's (PBUH) people, *"Then We inspired him, saying, 'Make the ship under Our eyes and by Our inspiration. Then, when Our command comes and the water gushes out of the oven, carry onto it of every (species) two spouses, and your household save him thereof against whom the word has already gone forth. And plead not with Me on behalf of the wrongdoers. They will be drowned.'" God's decree was made and implemented to clear the path for humanity to flourish. God decreed that a flood will occur to punish the disbelievers. God gave the believers the tool for survival: a ship. God commanded Noah (PBUH) and the believers to build their way to survival. God wants people to employ all available means to build their civilization. Noah (PBUH) became the second father of the human race; God taught him how to build the ship. Noah (PBUH) was given a sign for the inception of the flood; he was told that the process will start when, *"the water gushes out of the oven."* He should then carry on the ship all the elements which will help human life to continue on earth, *"carry onto it of every (species) two spouses."* The believers were allowed to be carried on the ship but those who disbelieved, and were doomed by God's decree, were not allowed to be carried on the ship, *"And plead not with Me on behalf of the wrongdoers. They will be drowned."***

The verses did not give any more details but they moved on to the second phase, *"And when you are onboard the ship, you and whoso is with you, then say, 'Praise be to God who has saved us from the wrongdoers.'" Noah (PBUH) and the believers should praise God and express their gratitude for the blessings of God which saved them from drowning in the flood. They should also pray God to settle them in a blessed place, *"And say, 'My Lord, let me land at a blessed landing-place, for You are the best of all who bring to land.'" The lesson is then summarized, *"Verily in this there are signs (for people to understand); (thus) do We put (humankind) to the test."* Tests can take different forms. There are tests which are meant to test the perseverance of people and there are tests which are meant to test people's ability to show gratitude. There are tests which are designed to guide people to a certain path and others which are designed to allow people to gain rewards.**



*“Then, after them, We brought forth another generation; and We sent them a messenger from among themselves, (saying), ‘Worship God, you have no other deity but Him. Will you be conscious of (Him)?’ And the chiefs of his people, who disbelieved and denied the meeting of the Hereafter, and on whom We had bestowed the good things of this life, said, ‘He is no more than a mortal like yourselves. He eats of that which you eat, and drinks of what you drink. If you obey a mortal like yourselves, you will indeed be losers. Does he promise you that, when you die and become dust and bones, you shall be brought forth (again)? Far, very far is that which you are promised. There is nothing but our life in this world. We shall die and we live, but we shall never be raised up again. He is only a man who invents a lie against God, but we are not the ones to believe in him.’ (The prophet) said, ‘My Lord, help me because they denied me.’ (God) said, ‘In a little while, they will surely become regretful.’ Then the blast overtook them rightly, and We made them debris; so away with the wrongdoers.”* The narration of the stories that describe the difficulties that the messengers experienced when God sent them to deliver the message to their people was meant to establish the fact that God sent all messengers with the same message and to show that all messengers were rejected by their people. The narrative started with the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH) and ended with the story of Prophet Jesus (PBUH). Many of the names of the messengers who came in between these two were not mentioned. The reason being that irrespective of the personality of the messenger, they all had the same message and they all had the same experience.

The previous verses describe the experience of every prophet with his people. People objected to the fact that the messenger was a mere mortal; they said God could have sent an angel with the message. The concept of resurrection after death and the idea of accountability were difficult to understand and to accept. The same scenario was repeated for each messenger. Some people believed and the rest did not believe. When the messenger realized that he had done all what he could and lost hope that anyone else would believe in him, he would ask God for help, *“My Lord, help me because they denied me,”* and God responded, *“in a little while, they will surely become regretful.”* Then the blast overtook them, and they became debris. They and their belongings were destroyed.

*“Then, We raised after them other generations. No people can hasten their term, nor can they postpone it. Then, We sent our messengers one after another. Whenever its messenger came to a nation they denied him; so We caused them to follow one another (to disaster) and We made them narrations; so away with a people who do not believe.”* These verses summarize the stories of all messengers from Noah to Jesus (PBUT). Each generation completed its term. The messengers were denied and the disbelievers were punished and cursed.

The following verses give a general outline of the experience of Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron, with Our signs and clear authority; to Pharaoh and his chiefs. But they behaved insolently and they were an arrogant people. They said, ‘Shall we believe in two men like ourselves while their people serve us?’ So they denied them, and became of those who were destroyed. And We gave Moses the Scripture in order that they might receive guidance.”* Prophet Moses and his brother Aaron (PBUT) were rejected because they were human beings. In addition, they belonged to the Children of Israel who were subservient to the

Egyptians. The chiefs did not pay attention to the signs of God that Moses (PBUH) brought them.

The narrative then moves on to the story of Jesus (PBUH), *“And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign. We sheltered both of them on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs.”* There is no definite authentic evidence which specifies the location of the shelter that God gave them. The location of the shelter is irrelevant, what is important is that God provided them with a safe and secure shelter which had plants and pleasant springs.

All messengers are then addressed, *“Messengers, eat of the good things, and do good. I am aware of what you do. And verily your religion is a one religion, and I am your Lord therefore be conscious of Me.”* It is an address which portrays the human nature of the messengers, *“eat of the good things, and do good.”* Eating is part of the human necessities but eating of the good things purifies people and allows them to connect with God. They were commanded to do good deeds. Working is part of being human, but good work distinguishes the chosen people. It elevates them to become worthy of connecting with God. The universal fact is reiterated, *“And verily your religion is a one religion, and I am your Lord therefore be conscious of Me.”*

### **Verses 53 to 98:**

53. *But they (the people) have divided their religion among themselves into sects, each sect rejoicing in its own tenets.*
54. *So leave them in their error till a time.*
55. *Do they think that because We have granted them abundance of wealth and sons,*
56. *We would hasten for them every good thing? Nay, they do not realize.*
57. *Verily those who stand in awe of their Lord;*
58. *Those who believe in the revelations of their Lord;*
59. *Those who do not associate partners with their Lord;*
60. *And those who dispense their charity with hearts that tremble at the thought that they will return to their Lord;*
61. *It is those who hasten to do every good work, and they are foremost in (attaining) them.*
62. *And We do not task any soul beyond its ability, and with Us is a Record which speaks the truth, and they will not be wronged.*
63. *But their hearts are in confused ignorance of this; and there are, besides that, deeds of theirs, which they will (continue) to do;*
64. *Until when We seize in torment, the affluent among them, they will cry in supplication.*
65. *(It will be said), “Do not cry in supplication this day; for you shall certainly not be helped by Us.*
66. *My revelations were indeed recited to you, but you used to turn back on your heels;*
67. *In arrogance; saying evil about the (Qur'an), like one telling fables by night.”*

68. *Do they not reflect on the Word (of God), or has anything come to them that did not come to their forefathers?*
69. *Or do they not recognize their messenger so that they deny him?*
70. *Or do they say, "He is possessed"? Nay, he has brought them the truth, but most of them hate the truth.*
71. *If the truth had been in accord with their whims, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption. Nay, We brought them their message, but they turn away from their message.*
72. *Or do you ask them for recompense? But the recompense of your Lord is best. He is the Best of the providers.*
73. *But verily you call them to the straight path;*
74. *And verily those who do not believe in the Hereafter are deviating from that path.*
75. *And even if We bestowed mercy on them and relieved them of the harm afflicting them, they still would wander blindly on in their contumacy.*
76. *We have already seized them with torment, but they did not humble themselves to their Lord, nor did they pray.*
77. *Until We open to them a gate leading to a severe torment; then they will be plunged in despair therein.*
78. *It is He who has created for you the faculties of hearing, sight, and understanding (hearts); little thanks it is you give.*
79. *And He has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered back.*
80. *It is He who gives life and death, and to Him (is the control of) the alternation of night and day; will you not then understand?*
81. *On the contrary they say things similar to what the former people said.*
82. *They say, "What! when we die and become dust and bones, shall we then, be raised again?"*
83. *Such things have been promised to us and to our forefathers before; they are nothing but fables of old people."*
84. *Say, "To whom belong the earth and all beings therein? (say) if you know."*
85. *They will say, "To God;" say, "Will you not then remember?"*
86. *Say, "Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the Great Throne?"*
87. *They will say, "(They belong) to God." Say, "Will you not then be conscious of Him?"*
88. *Say, "In whose hand is the dominion over all things and He protects, while against Him there is no protection, if you know?"*
89. *They will say, "(It belongs) to God." Say, "Then how are you deluded?"*
90. *We have sent them the truth; but most surely they are liars.*
91. *God has not chosen any son, nor is there any deity along with Him; else each deity would have assuredly championed that which he created, and some of them would assuredly have overcome others. Glorified be God above all that they allege.*
92. *He knows what is hidden and what is visible; too exalted is He above the partners they attribute to Him.*
93. *Say, "My Lord, if You show me (in my lifetime) that which they are warned against;*
94. *Then, My Lord, do not put me among the wrongdoers."*
95. *And We are certainly able to show you that which We have promised them.*
96. *Repel evil with that which is best. We are well acquainted with the things they say.*
97. *And say, "My Lord, I seek refuge with You from the incitements of the evil ones.*

98. *And I seek refuge with You, My Lord, lest they should come near me.*" (23:53 – 98)

*"But they (the people) have divided their religion among themselves into sects, each sect rejoicing in its own tenets."* The messengers formed one community and brought one message; but the people, after receiving the message, divided the community and the message into sects. Every group was pleased with the piece that it took from the message. They were deluded by what they got and forgot the initial message. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to, *"leave them in their error till a time."* In their delusions, they did not realize that God gave them respite and bestowed on them wealth and children as a test for them. They thought that these good things which were bestowed upon them will remain forever. It was a test but they did not perceive it, *"Do they think that because We have granted them abundance of wealth and sons, We would hasten for them every good thing? Nay, they do not realize."*

The Quran juxtaposes the image of the believers against the image of the disbelievers, *"Verily those who stand in awe of their Lord; those who believe in the revelations of their Lord; those who do not associate partners with their Lord; and those who dispense their charity with hearts that tremble at the thought that they will return to their Lord; it is those who hasten to do every good work, and they are foremost in (attaining) them."* The verses present the effect that faith has on the hearts of the believers. The hearts of the believers are tender; they are always in awe of their Lord. They seek perfection in what they do. They believe in their Lord; they never associate partners with Him; and they perform their tasks in the best way they can. In addition, they give in charity never thinking that what they do is enough.

It was narrated that ‘Aisha (RA) asked Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about these verses. She asked if those who *"dispense their charity with hearts that tremble at the thought that they will return to their Lord;"* are they who steal, commit adultery, or drink alcohol while they fear God? The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"No. These are the people who pray, fast, and give charity while their hearts are full of fear of God."* The hearts of the believers are always in awe of God. They always appreciate the blessings that God bestowed on them and they belittle every good deed they make. They hasten to do more good deeds and they become the vanguard for those who do good deeds.

*"And We do not task any soul beyond its ability, and with Us is a Record which speaks the truth, and they will not be wronged."* God knows the endurance limit of each human being; and He does not over burden anyone beyond his capacity. He only asks people to perform tasks that are appropriate for their capabilities. People are only accountable for the tasks they are able to perform. All deeds are accurately recorded in a truthful record. God will not wrong people.

The hearts of those who do not see the truth are sealed, *"But their hearts are in confused ignorance of this; and there are, besides that, deeds of theirs, which they will (continue) to do; until when We seize in torment, the affluent among them, they will cry in supplication. (It will be said), 'Do not cry in supplication this day; for you shall certainly not be helped by Us. My revelations were indeed recited to you, but you used to turn back on your heels; in arrogance; saying evil about the (Qur'an), like one telling fables by night.'"* The disbelievers did not see the

truth because they were rushing on the road of falsehood. But they will suddenly realize the consequence of their actions when they are seized by God's punishment. At that moment, they will pray loudly asking for God's forgiveness. But it will be too late, they had their chance before but they were arrogant to heed the message of God.

*“Do they not reflect on the Word (of God), or has anything come to them that did not come to their forefathers? Or do they not recognize their messenger so that they deny him? Or do they say, ‘He is possessed?’ Nay, he has brought them the truth, but most of them hate the truth. If the truth had been in accord with their whims, truly the heavens and the earth, and all beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption. Nay, We brought them their message, but they turn away from their message. Or do you ask them for recompense? But the recompense of your Lord is best. He is the Best of the providers. But verily you call them to the straight path; and verily those who do not believe in the Hereafter are deviating from that path.”* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought a beautiful, perfect, and consistent message. It is a message that appeals to the initial natural disposition of the human being. Anyone who reflects on this message cannot but accept it. They did not accept the message simply because they did not reflect on it; or it may be that they thought that the belief in the Oneness of God is a new concept that is not deeply rooted in history; or it may be that they did not recognize their messenger. But they knew him very well. They knew his lineage and they knew his character. They knew him to the extent that they used to call him the honest, the trustworthy. Yet, some of them had the audacity to call him a mad person. They did not reject him because of the lies they made about him but because they refused to accept the truth.

They rejected the truth because they wanted to follow their whims and desires. The truth does not follow the whims of people. There is only one truth but there are many whims and desires. The universe can only be controlled by the truth.

Did they reject the message because they thought that the Prophet (PBUH) was asking for a recompense for his efforts? They should have known that the Prophet (PBUH) was not looking for their recompense because God provides the best recompense. The Prophet (PBUH) was only guiding them to the straight path, the straight path that connects them with God. They chose to deviate from the straight path, so they became disbelievers.

*“And even if We bestowed mercy on them and relieved them of the harm afflicting them, they still would wander blindly on in their contumacy.”* This is a general attribute of such disbelievers. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter are heedless whether they were tested by affliction or by blessings. When they are tested with blessings they indulge in their lusts and when they are tested with an affliction they do not seek forgiveness. Their hearts are hardened. The idolaters of Mecca who fought the Prophet (PBUH) were among these people, *“We have already seized them with torment, but they did not humble themselves to their Lord, nor did they pray, Until We open to them a gate leading to a severe torment; then they will be plunged in despair therein.”* Humbling oneself to God is an indication of soft heartedness. It is the road to connect with God. Tender hearted people learn from the tests they face in life; these lessons protect them against heedlessness and going astray. Those whose hearts are hardened are destined to follow the road

of falsehood until they suddenly face the punishment of their Lord. At that time there will be nothing but despair.

The following verses take us on another tour to explore the signs of God in His creation, *“It is He who has created for you (the faculties of) hearing, sight, and understanding (hearts); little thanks it is you give. And He has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered back. It is He who gives life and death, and to Him is the control of the alternation of night and day; will you not then understand?”* When people reflect on the way God created them and the faculties and abilities that God bestowed on them; they will surely realize that there is only one Creator. No one but God is able to create such a magnificent creature like the human being. The senses of hearing, sight, and understanding work in a miraculous way to allow the human beings to hear voices and to understand what they mean; to see things and to know what they are; and to think, understand, and value things around them. Discovering how the senses work is a miracle in itself. How about the creation of such senses in harmony with the bigger plan of creation of the universe? But people do not show gratitude.

God gave humankind the senses and faculties which allow them to live on earth and He multiplied their numbers and finally He will gather all people to the Day of Judgment. God creates life and death. These are two events that we witness every moment. Only God has the power to give life and only He knows its secret. No one can give life or take it except God. People may be able to become tools for killing but they do not cause death; God is the one who decrees when the life of a person should end. God controls the alternation of day and night according to a divine law. The concept of the alternating of day and night is similar to the concept of death coming after life for a human body. People need to reflect and understand these phenomena.

*“On the contrary they say things similar to what the former people said. They say, ‘What, when we die and become dust and bones, shall we then, be raised again? Such things have been promised to us and to our forefathers before; they are nothing but fables of old people.’”* Instead of reflecting on these phenomena, they dismiss them as ancient fables. It is strange for a person who reflects on these phenomena to dismiss it as fables. The idolatrous Arabs even ridiculed the assertion that there will be resurrection after death. Resurrection has been decreed by God, it will take place at the time that was determined by God.

The idolatrous Arabs were inconsistent in their beliefs. They did not deny the existence of God; and they did not dispute the fact that He is the Creator, the Controller, and the Owner of the heavens and earth. However, they associated partners with God, claiming that these partners can intercede on their behalf. The following verses refute this claim and emphasize the concept of the Oneness of God, *“Say, ‘To whom belong the earth and all beings therein? (say) if you know,’ They will say, ‘To God;’ say, ‘Will you not then remember?’”* This argument shows the inconsistent attitude of the idolaters. They knew that the heavens and earth belong to God, but they do not remember this when they associate partners with Him.

They knew that He is the Lord of heavens and earth, “Say, ‘Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the Great Throne?’ They will say, ‘(They belong) to God.’ Say, ‘Will you not then be conscious of Him?’” The verse poses a question about the Lordship of God and His divine will that controls the universe. There is no clear and definite statement about what is meant by “seven heavens.” However, the Throne could be a symbol of the majesty and control. They knew that God is the Lord of the universe but still they associated partners with Him. Why were they not conscious of God?

“Say, ‘In whose hand is the dominion over all things and He protects, while against Him there is no protection, if you do but know?’ They will say, ‘(It belongs) to God.’ Say, ‘Then how are you deluded?’” This is a question about who has dominion over the heavens and earth. They knew it is God who has the dominion, yet they associated partners with God as if they were struck by a spell of magic.

Finally, the correct analysis is laid down, “We have sent them the truth; but most surely they are liars. God has not chosen any son, nor is there any deity along with Him; else each deity would have assuredly championed that which he created, and some of them would assuredly have overcome others. Glorified be God above all that they allege.” Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought them the truth. All their claims were invented lies. God never had a son nor did He have other gods associated with Him. Had there been other gods, each of these little gods would have claimed his share of the creation and they would have fought together, each one trying to capture his share of power. God is the only deity, it is only He who knows the hidden and the seen, “Exalted is He above the partners they attribute to Him.”

“Say, ‘My Lord, if You show me (in my lifetime) that which they are warned against; then, My Lord, do not put me among the wrongdoers.’” God chose Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to be His messenger and He would not put him among the wrongdoers when they suffer God’s punishment. But this supplication is an extra precaution and a message for the followers of the Prophet (PBUH) to take extreme care in avoiding God’s wrath.

“And We are certainly able to show you that which We have promised them.” God showed His Prophet (PBUH) examples of this promise in the battles of Badr and the opening of Mecca. The following verse outlines the strategy of perseverance which the Muslims were commanded to follow in the Meccan stage, “Repel evil with that which is best. We are well acquainted with the things they say.”

“And say, ‘My Lord, I seek refuge with You from the incitements of the evil ones. And I seek refuge with You, My Lord, lest they should come near me.’” Although the Prophet (PBUH) was protected from the incitement of the evil ones but he was asked to seek God’s protection. This is also an example to be followed by his followers. The Prophet (PBUH) and his followers were asked to seek not only protection from the incitement of the evil ones but also to seek God’s protection which does not allow the evil ones to approach them.

## Verses 99 to 118:

99. *Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, "My Lord, send me back;*
100. *In order that I may do good in the things I neglected." But no, it is but a word he says. Before them is a partition till the day when they are raised.*
101. *Then when the trumpet is blown, there will be no kinship among them that day, nor will they ask one another.*
102. *Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy will be the successful.*
103. *But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls, in Hell will they abide.*
104. *The Fire will burn their faces, and they will therein have taut smiles.*
105. *(It will be said,) "Were not My revelations recited to you, but you used to reject them?"*
106. *They will say, "Our Lord, our misfortune overwhelmed us, and we went astray.*
107. *Our Lord, bring us out of this; if we ever return (to evil), then we shall be wrongdoers indeed."*
108. *He will say, "Remain despised into it and do not speak to Me.*
109. *There was a party of My servants who said, 'Our Lord, we believe, therefore forgive us and have mercy on us for You are the best of Merciful ones;'*
110. *But you treated them with ridicule, so much so that (ridiculing) them made you forget My message while you were laughing at them.*
111. *I have rewarded them this day for their perseverance; they are indeed the ones that have achieved success."*
112. *He (God) will say, "What is the number of years did you stay on earth?"*
113. *They will say, "We stayed a day or part of a day; but ask those who keep account."*
114. *He will say, "You stayed only a little, if you had only known.*
115. *Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?"*
116. *Therefore, Exalted be God, the King, the Truth. There is no deity but He, the Lord of the Throne of Honor.*
117. *If anyone invokes, besides God, any other god, he has no authority then his reckoning will be only with his Lord; and verily the disbelievers will not be successful.*
118. *So say, "My Lord, forgive and have mercy, for You are the Best of the Merciful ones." (23: 99 – 118)*

*"Until, when death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord, send me back; In order that I may do good in the things I neglected.'"* The verse describes the scene at the time of death of a disbeliever when he would request to be returned back to life to do good deeds; but it will be too late. In addition, he does not really mean it, *"But no, it is but a word he says. Before them is a partition till the day when they are raised."* The disbelievers are not sincere in this request. The narrative turns to the scene after death, when people will be in between the worldly life and the Hereafter. This is the Islamic version of the purgatory. Then the narrative continues to the scene in the Hereafter, *"Then when the trumpet is blown, there will be no kinship among them that day, nor will they ask one another."* On that day people will stand up separated from one another; the links, the connections, and the kinship which used to bring them together in their worldly lives



will no longer exist. The reckoning will start, *“Then those whose balance (of good deeds) is heavy will be the successful. But those whose balance is light, will be those who have lost their souls, in Hell will they abide. The Fire will burn their faces, and they will therein have taut smiles.”* People will be divided into two groups: the successful ones and the losers. The former came with heavy balance of deeds while the latter came with light balance.

The style of the verses turns from a narrative style to a direct address. The Quran speaks to the disbelievers in a direct way. It will be said, *“Were not My revelations recited to you, but you used to reject them?”* They may think that there is still a chance to be forgiven if they confess, *“They will say, ‘Our Lord, our misfortune overwhelmed us, and we went astray. Our Lord, bring us out of this; if we ever return (to evil), then we shall be wrongdoers indeed.’”* Their confession reflects the bitterness they feel and the misfortune that engulfs them. The response comes to reprimand them for their presumption, *“He will say, ‘Remain despised into it and do not speak to Me; there was a party of My servants who said, “Our Lord, we believe, therefore forgive us and have mercy on us for You are the best of Merciful ones;” but you treated them with ridicule, so much so that (ridiculing) them made you forget My message while you were laughing at them. I have rewarded them this day for their perseverance; they are indeed the ones that have achieved success.’”* Not only did you disbelieve but you had the audacity to ridicule My servants who believed. Your ridicule made you forget to remember Me and kept you away from reflecting on My signs. Today, I give those whom you ridiculed a great reward for their perseverance. They are truly the successful ones.

Another line of interrogation starts, *“He (God) will say, ‘What is the number of years did you stay on earth?’”* God knows how long they stayed on earth; but the question highlights the short span of the worldly life. There answer comes, *“We stayed a day or part of a day; but ask those who keep account.”* But you should know that the worldly life is very short compared to the Hereafter, *“He will say, ‘You stayed only a little, if you had only known.’”*

The verses turn to a mode of rebuke, *“Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be brought back to Us (for account)?”* The concept of resurrection is part of the divine plan of creation. It is a stage in the life of the human race; it is a necessary stage to complete this life. Only the heedless who are deprived of insight cannot realize this fact.

The Sura ends with the statement of the first rule of faith: the belief in the Oneness of God, *“Therefore Exalted be God, the King, the Truth. There is no deity but He, the Lord of the Throne of Honor. If anyone invokes, besides God, any other god, he has no authority then his reckoning will be only with his Lord; and verily the disbelievers will not be successful.”* The verses at the end of the Sura confirm the statement which was made in the beginning of the Sura that the belief in God is the road to success.

The Sura ends with a prayer requesting the forgiveness and mercy of God, *“So say, ‘My Lord, forgive and have mercy, for You are the Best of the Merciful ones.’”*

## **Sura 24: Al-Nur (The Light)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 26:**

1. *(Here is) a Sura which We have revealed and enjoined, and wherein We have revealed plain verses, that you may take heed.*
2. *The adulterer and the adulteress, flog each one of them a hundred stripes. And let not pity for them withhold you from obedience to God, if you believe in God and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their torment.*
3. *The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress shall not marry save an adulterer or an idolater, and all that is forbidden for the believers.*
4. *And those who accuse chaste women but do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony; they are indeed transgressors.*
5. *Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); verily, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *As for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves; let each one of them call God to witness, swearing four times by God, that he is telling the truth.*
7. *And the fifth (oath) (should be) that he solemnly invokes the curse of God on himself if he was lying.*
8. *But it would avert the torment for the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by God, that (her husband) is telling a lie;*
9. *And the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of God on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth.*
10. *If it were not for God's grace and mercy on you, and that God is Ever-Relenting, Wise, (You would be ruined indeed).*
11. *Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to you; on the contrary it is good for you. To every man among them (will come the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a grievous torment.*
12. *Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, "It is an evident falsehood?"*
13. *Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God.*
14. *Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you, in the world and the Hereafter, a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into.*
15. *When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God.*
16. *And why you did not, when you heard it, say, "It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God; this is a most serious slander?"*
17. *God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers.*
18. *And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise.*

19. *Those who love that slander should be spread concerning those who believe, theirs will be a painful torment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know.*
20. *Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
21. *Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
22. *And let not those who possess dignity and abundance of wealth among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to those who migrated in God's way. Let them pardon and forbear. Do you not yearn that God forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
23. *Those who slander the chaste, virtuous, believing women (who are) unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have a grievous torment.*
24. *On the day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do.*
25. *On that day, God will pay them their just due, and they will know that God is the evident Truth.*
26. *Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say. For them is pardon and a bountiful provision. (24: 1 – 26)*

This Sura is entitled the light. The word light is mentioned as an attribute of God. God is the light of the heavens and the earth. The impact of the light on the hearts and souls is described. It fills the hearts and souls with ethics and values both for the individual as well as the community. This shines the light on the hearts and on life. It connects the hearts to the comprehensive universal light.

The Sura starts with an unequivocal proclamation that it is announcing responsibilities and duties for the community of the believers. The Sura institutes certain ethical behaviors that the community of the believers should practice. It starts with a statement that clearly indicates the importance that Quran attaches to ethical behavior and describes how it is deeply rooted in the doctrine of Islam.

The main theme of the Sura is the ethical training which is the basis of criminal laws as well as spiritual preparations. These spiritual preparations connect the hearts of the believers with the light of God and allow this light to illuminate the values, norms, and principles that shape the Islamic way of life.

*“(Here is) a Sura which We have revealed and enjoined, and wherein We have revealed plain verses, that you may take heed.”* It is a unique beginning. The Sura starts with the word, “enjoined.” It emphasizes the importance of following all the injunctions that are given in the Sura, whether they describe norms of ethical behavior or punishment to be exacted in case of breaking the law. This is followed with a description of the punishment for the crime of adultery, *“The adulterer and the adulteress, flog each one of them a hundred stripes. And let not*

*pity for them withhold you from obedience to God, if you believe in God and the Last Day. And let a party of the believers witness their torment. The adulterer shall not marry save an adulteress or an idolatress, and the adulteress shall not marry save an adulterer or an idolater, and all that is forbidden to believers.”*

Verse 15 in Sura 4, outlined the punishment for adultery during the early days of Islam, “*Those who commit immorality (i.e. unlawful sexual intercourse) of your women – produce four witnesses from among you to testify against them. And if they testify, confine them (i.e. the guilty women) to houses until death takes them or God ordains for them (another) way.*” (4: 15) The punishment for women was to confine them to their houses and rebuke them, while the punishment for men was to rebuke them for committing such crime. Then the punishment was changed as expressed in this Sura. This was the “*way,*” referred to in the verse (4: 15). Flogging is the punishment for virgin men and women who commit adultery. But those who commit adultery after they had been married are punished by stoning. These punishments are applied to adult, free, and sane Muslim men and women. The punishment by stoning has been confirmed by the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH).

The punishment should be enacted once the conditions are satisfied and the witnesses have given their testimony. No pity should stop the enactment of the prescribed punishment. The punishment should be made in public to become a deterrent for others.

Those who commit adultery are not considered believers when they commit such crime. They are not allowed to marry believing men and women unless they offer sincere repentance and seek God’s forgiveness. The verses show how committing these crimes sever the ties between the culprit and the Muslim community.

The enactment of such severe punishment does not mean that Islam ignores the natural inclinations which drive people to engage in sexual interactions, nor does it want people to suppress their sexual desires. Islam wanted to organize the sexual interactions between men and women within a framework which guarantees healthy families and communities. Relations between men and women should not be solely based on sexual desires. These relations should involve a combination of love and compassion that strengthens the ties between the members of the family. A family should be based on the meeting of two hearts willing to share common aspirations and to struggle together to build a strong unit in the community, producing good citizens.

These severe punishments were enacted in Islam to protect the individual, the family and the community of the evil consequences of such crimes. There are clear consequences of the spread of such crimes. These include the confusion that would plague the lineages of individuals; and the bad psychological impact on the members of the family including the children.

It should be emphasized that the community should establish guarantees which would protect its members from falling into the web of temptation. In addition, these severe punishments can only be enacted after the culprit has been proven guilty without a shred of a doubt. The Sura mentions some of the measures that should be taken to avoid opportunities for temptation.

Punishment is waived whenever there is the slightest doubt regarding the testimony of the witnesses. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Waive the punishment as much as you can, if there is any doubt. It is better not to punish a criminal than to punish an innocent person.”* That is why the punishment can only be enacted if there were four eye witnesses who were present while the act was being committed; or if the culprit provides voluntary confession. The witnesses should be known for their integrity.

Some may think that these stringent requirements may render the punishment impractical. The strategy of Islam to deal with such crimes is both reactive and proactive. Islam provides preventative measures to minimize the occurrence of such acts. These include ethical upbringing of the individuals, means for the purification of the souls, and building a conscious willingness to follow the injunctions of Islam. Only those who have the audacity of committing such crimes in public would be punished, or those who voluntarily chose to receive the punishment as an act of purification from their sin.

*“And those who accuse chaste women but do not bring four witnesses, flog them eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony; they are indeed transgressors.”* Islam provides stringent measures to protect chaste Muslim women against false accusations that tarnish their reputations and destroy their lives. Islam has decreed a punishment approximately similar to the punishment for the crime of adultery as a deterrent for those who find it easy to attack chaste women without having concrete evidence that supports their accusations. The punishment for the crime of false accusations does not consist only of bodily punishment but it also includes psychological punishment. The accusers who are found to be lying are labeled, “transgressors,” in addition their testimony is not accepted in a court of law until they offer sincere repentance and seek God’s forgiveness, *“Unless they repent thereafter and mend (their conduct); verily, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

However, an accusation waged by a husband against his wife is dealt with in a different way, *“As for those who accuse their wives but have no witnesses except themselves; let each one of them call God to witness, swearing four times by God, that he is telling the truth; and the fifth (oath) (should be) that he solemnly invokes the curse of God on himself if he was lying. But it would avert the torment for the wife, if she bears witness four times (with an oath) by God that (her husband) is telling a lie; and the fifth (oath) should be that she solemnly invokes the wrath of God on herself if (her accuser) is telling the truth. If it were not for God’s grace and mercy on you, and that God is Ever-Relenting, Wise, (You would be ruined indeed).”* This process for resolving the conflict between two spouses is suitable for the special relationship between them. If a husband comes to know that his wife has committed adultery but is unable to produce four witnesses, he should then follow the process described in the above verses. The law gave the wife a way to address this accusation. If she chooses to follow the process, she would not be punished but she would be divorced. Her child would bear her name not her husband’s name. It is God’s grace that He provided equitable ways to resolve such conflicts.

The following verses describe a real event that involved the slander of the Prophet’s (PBUH) wife ‘Aisha (RA), *“Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing for you; on the contrary it is good for you. To every man among them (will come*

*the punishment) of the sin that he earned, and to him who took on himself the lead among them, will be a grievous torment. Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, 'It is an evident falsehood?' Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you in the world and the Hereafter a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into. When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge; you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God. And why you did not, when you heard it, say, 'It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God; this is a most serious slander?' God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers. And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise. Those who love that slander should be spread concerning those who believe, theirs will be a painful torment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know. Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy. Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."*

The incident of the slander of 'Aisha (RA) was a very painful experience for the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and the whole community. Doubts destroyed the serenity of the hearts of the Prophet (PBUH), his close friend and father in law, and the companion of the Prophet (PBUH) Safwan bin Al Mu'atal (RA) for a whole month. Let us listen to the description of the incident as it was narrated by 'Aisha (RA). Here is the story as narrated by 'Aisha (RA) herself:

Each time the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to go on a trip he used to choose one of his wives to accompany him. The process he followed was to draw a toss between his wives whoever wins the toss would accompany him. On one of these trips, after Hijab has been mandated, it was my turn to accompany the Prophet (PBUH). My camel had a tent for me to sit in. While I was visiting the toilet, the Prophet (PBUH) commanded his army to prepare for the return trip to Medina. On my way back to the place where I left my camel, I found out that I lost my rosary so I went back to fetch it. In the mean time the driver of my camel came and drove the camel never realizing that I was not inside my tent on top of the camel. When I came back to the place of the camp I found that the army had left. I decided to stay where I was, thinking that soon they will realize that I am not in my tent on top of the camel and they will come back for me. I was tired so I was overcome by sleep. While I was sleeping Safwan (RA) happened to be passing by and saw me. Safwan (RA) knew who I was. So he took me on his camel until we caught up with the army. When I reached Medina I became sick and continued to be sick for about a month. In the meantime Abdu Allah bin Salool made up the story slandering me and he circulated the slander among people. People were talking about the slander and all the time I was unaware of what was going on. I was a bit suspicious of the Prophet's (PBUH) behavior. The Prophet (PBUH) was always warm towards me, but during this month I sensed a change in his attitude, but he never mentioned anything. One day, after my recovery I was going to the toilet outside the house with Um Mustah (RA). While we were walking I heard Um Mustah (RA) cursing her son Mustah. I was deeply concerned that a man

who participated in the battle of Badr would be cursed by his mother. I asked her why she was doing this. She said, “Did you not know about the rumor being circulated?” I said, “No, what rumor.” She told me about the rumor accusing me of a relationship with Safwan (RA). This was extremely painful, I became ill again and I went home crying. I spent the whole night crying. The Prophet (PBUH) asked Ali bin Taleb (RA) and Usama bin Zaid (RA) for advice. Usama (RA) defended me and attested to my innocence. Ali (RA) on the other hand said to the Prophet (PBUH) that he can always marry another one if he wanted, but he also asked him to ask my servant of my behavior. My servant attested to my innocence.

The Prophet (PBUH) came to enquire about my health, so I asked him to let me go visit my mother, I wanted to ask my mother about the rumor. She confirmed what I heard from Um Mustah (RA). The next day my parents were with me and the Prophet (PBUH) came to see me. He sat on the bed and told me about what was going on, he said, “If you are innocent, God will announce your innocence, but if you were guilty then you should repent. God forgives all sins.” I did not know how to answer back. I asked my mother to respond but she did not say anything. I said, “By God, I know that you heard the rumor and believed it. If I say I am innocent, you will not believe me but if I confess my guilt, while God knows my innocence, you would believe me. I can only say what the father of Joseph said, ‘*Beautiful patience is most befitting, I seek God’s help regarding what you say.*’ (12: 18)”. I was certain of my innocence but I could not fathom the idea that God would send a revelation to declare my innocence. My best hope was that the Prophet (PBUH) would see in his dream that I am innocent. Suddenly, I realized that the Prophet (PBUH) was in the state of receiving a revelation. When he came around, he was smiling and he said, “‘Aisha, praise your Lord. He declared your innocence.” The Prophet (PBUH) then recited the ten verses in Surat Al-Noor which talked about the slander.

Mustah who spread the rumor about ‘Aisha (RA) was Abu Bakr’s (RA) cousin. Abu Bakr (RA) used to help Mustah (RA) financially as a form of charity. Abu Bakr (RA) decided that he will stop helping Mustah (RA) as he used to do before the incident. But then a verse was revealed which made Abu Bakr (RA) change his mind, “*And let not those who possess dignity and abundance among you swear not to give to the near of kin and to the needy, and to those who have fled in God’s way. Let them forgive and show indulgence. Do you not yearn that God forgive you? God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*” (24:22)

For a whole month the Prophet (PBUH) and his wife, Abu Bakr (RA) and his wife, Safwan (RA), and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered through this horrible experience. The young, pure, and innocent ‘Aisha (RA) was slandered and her reputation has been tarnished. Not only she felt the pain of being falsely accused, but she was horrified at the thought that the Prophet (PBUH) had doubts about her innocence. Her parents suffered with her. Safwan (RA) a companion of the Prophet (PBUH) was deeply pained by the accusations launched against him. The whole episode continued for a whole month before the decisive verses declaring ‘Aisha’s (RA) innocence were revealed. The slander was not meant to harm ‘Aisha (RA) only but was also meant to hurt the Prophet (PBUH). The rumors were meant to undermine the Prophet (PBUH), his message, and his leadership. It was planned and executed by a group of people, “*Those who brought forward the lie are a gang among you. Do not think it to be an evil thing to*

*you; on the contrary it is good for you.*” It was a gang of people led by Abdel Allah bin Saloul the leader of the hypocrites. The gang included few Muslims who were deceived by the hypocrites, e.g. Hamna bint Jahsh, Hassan bin Thabet, and Mustah bin Athatha. The verse indicated the enormity of the conspiracy but reassured the believers that it was not bad for them on the contrary it was good. It was good because it exposed those who were scheming against Islam; those who were bent on hurting the Prophet (PBUH) and his wives. It was also good because it alerted the believers to the dire consequences of slandering people. Slandering people has a grievous impact not only on the falsely accused but also on the whole community. This incident provided the opportunity to state the standards for the proper Islamic behavior in times of trials. The pains that the Prophet (PBUH), his wife, and indeed the whole Muslim community suffered were the price that had to be paid to pass safely through this trial. Those who fabricated and propagated the lie will be punished, each according to his/her share in the crime. Abdel Allah bin Saloul who twisted the facts, fabricated the lie, and worked hard to propagate it will have the greatest share of the punishment.

*“Why did not the believers - men and women - when you heard of the affair, think good of their own people, and say, ‘It is an evident falsehood?’”* The verse describes the proper Islamic behavior when faced with such trials. The believers should have consulted their hearts and listened to their gut feelings. They would have reached the conclusion that it was a lie. They should have known that the wife of their Prophet (PBUH), the chaste daughter of the Prophet’s (PBUH) close friend, could not have committed such indecency. There are stories that were narrated indicating that this was exactly the reaction of some Muslims e.g. Abu Ayoub Al-Ansari (RA).

This verse and the following one describe the proper process to handle rumors that slander people. The process consists of two steps. The first step requires the believers to reflect on the accusation and to give the accused the benefit of the doubt. The second step is to assume the innocence of the accused until proven guilty on the basis of hard and concrete evidence. A rigorous methodology in investigating the evidence should be followed, *“Why did they not produce four witnesses? Since they did not produce any witnesses, they verily are liars in the sight of God.”* A heinous accusation such as this should be proven beyond a shred of a doubt before a verdict is reached; four eyewitnesses should come forward to substantiate the accusation. If the person who has launched the accusation is unable to produce four eyewitnesses to substantiate his claim, then he is considered a liar. The believers did not follow this process when the accusation was launched against ‘Aisha (RA). The verses warn the believers not to commit such a mistake again, *“Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you in the world and the Hereafter a grievous torment would have certainly touched you on account of the discourse which you entered into.”*

The verses go on to describe the details of the believers’ disgraceful reaction to the accusations, *“When you welcomed it with your tongues, and uttered with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you thought it was a trifle but it is very great in the sight of God.”* The verse describes how the rumors take a life of their own when people repeat what they heard without verifying its veracity. People repeat false accusations not realizing the damage that they are causing. Their reaction should have been to shun those who were spreading the rumors, *“And why you did not, when you heard it, say, ‘It is not right of us to speak of this. Glory be to God,*



*this is a most serious slander?’” The verses end with an admonition and a warning, “God admonishes you, that you may never repeat such (conduct), if you are (true) believers. And God makes the verses plain to you; for God is Omniscient, Wise.”*

The verses continue to describe the impact of the reckless behavior of those who spread rumors which slander chaste women on the community. Such behavior promotes instability, desensitizes the community to indecent acts, and strips the community of its decent values. These people will be punished, *“Those who love that slander should be spread concerning those who believe; theirs will be a painful punishment in the world and in the Hereafter. God knows and you do not know.”* Then a reminder was issued to remind the believers of the mercy and grace of God, *“Had it not been for the grace of God and His mercy on you; and that God is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”*

*“Believers, do not follow in Satan's footsteps; whoever follows in the footsteps of Satan, he will indeed command what is shameful and wrong. Had it not been for the grace and mercy of God on you, not one of you would ever have been pure. But God purifies whom He pleases. And God is Hearer, Knower.”* The verse warns that the reckless behavior of those who spread rumors has been instigated by Satan. The believers were then warned not to succumb to the temptation of Satan.

*“Those who slander chaste, virtuous, believing women (who are) unaware (of the evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have a grievous torment. On the day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do. On that day God will pay them their just due, and they will know that God is the evident Truth.”* The verse points to the enormity of the sin committed by those who slander chaste believing women by juxtaposing their evil intent against the innocence of these virtuous women. They will be cursed. Their tongues, their hands, and their feet will testify against them on the Day of Judgment. They will then receive their due share of the punishment.

The story of the slander ends with a statement expressing the choices that people make on the basis of their various dispositions, *“Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women; such are innocent of that which people say. For them is pardon and a bountiful provision.”*

### **Verses 27 to 34:**

27. *Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you may be heedful.*
28. *And if you find no one in the house, do not enter until permission is given to you; and if you are asked to go back, go back. That makes for greater purity for yourselves; and God knows well all that you do.*
29. *It is not a sin that you enter uninhabited houses wherein there is benefit for you. God knows the things you do openly, and the things you conceal.*
30. *Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.*

31. *And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who do not know of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed.*
32. *And marry off those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, God will make them free from want out of His grace; and God is Vast, Omniscient.*
33. *And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste until God enriches them by His grace. And those of your slaves who seek a contract (of emancipation), contract them if you are aware of their goodness; and bestow upon them of the wealth of God which He has bestowed upon you. Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that you may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, when they themselves wish to remain chaste. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Merc.*
34. *And verily We have sent down to you clear revelations and examples of those who passed away before you. This is an admonition to those who are conscious of God. (24: 27 – 34)*

God made the home a sanctuary for its inhabitants to relax, enjoy their privacy, and feel secure. No one is allowed to intrude on people's homes without permission. This can only happen when the visitors respect the rule that it is the inhabitants' right to decide when to receive visitors. This rule was not respected by the Arabs before Islam. Such a practice constituted a violation of the privacy of people in their homes. It put the inhabitants of a house in awkward and embarrassing situations. The verses describe the measures stated by the Quran to guarantee the preservation of the home's sanctity and the respect for the privacy of people in their homes. Visitors should seek permission first and wait until permission has been granted before they enter. If the inhabitants are not home or they refuse to grant permission, then the visitor should turn back without any bad feeling for being refused, *"Believers, do not enter houses other than your own, until you have asked permission and saluted those in them. That is best for you, in order that you may heedful. And if you find no one in the house, do not enter until permission is given to you; and if you are asked to go back, go back. That makes for greater purity for yourselves; and God knows well all that you do."*

However, these restrictions do not apply to public places, *"It is not a sin that you enter uninhabited houses wherein there is benefit for you. God knows the things you do openly, and the things you conceal."*

The previous verses dealt with the etiquette of respecting people's privacy in their homes. The following verses address the etiquette of the encounters between males and females. Islam pays

special attention to maintaining the purity of the community. The etiquette aims at minimizing the opportunity for situations where sexual desires are excited. The society aims at creating a decorous environment for the encounter between the sexes. Islam uses preventive measures to ensure that such a decorous environment is maintained. The following verses state some of the measures that the Quran provided to achieve such a decorous environment *“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.”* Men should lower their gaze and be modest. This provides a framework for male behavior in the presence of women. The framework aims at minimizing the chances of temptation that may open the door to sin. Lowering the gaze and being modest require a degree of self discipline. This self discipline is motivated by the fact that, *“That is purer for them. God is aware of what they do.”*

Women are also directed to, *“lower their gaze and be modest.”* Women by nature like to display their beauty. Islam does not attempt to suppress this natural behavior. However, such behavior if left uncontrolled will produce a society in which chaotic sexual interactions predominate. Islam aims at channeling this behavior to be expressed in a family environment. Thus women are directed, *“to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who do not know of women's nakedness. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed.”* Women are allowed to show their faces and hands; but they should cover bosoms.

When this verse was revealed, believing women did not hesitate to conform to these norms immediately. It is narrated by ‘Aisha (RA) that as soon as this verse was revealed, the women of Medina hastened to adopt the dress code which the verse described. This etiquette elevated the standards for the appreciation of beauty for Muslims. It made them appreciate the difference between decency and the pure physical attraction to the other sex. However, the dress code can be relaxed when fear of temptation is unwarranted. Thus, the dress code can be relaxed in the presence of, *“fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who have no sexual desire, or children who do not know of women's nakedness.”* Women were also directed to avoid intentional gestures which may provoke men’s sexual desires, *“And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment.”* The verse ends with a reminder to the believers, *“And turn to God together, believers, in order that you may succeed.”*

Islam considers that marriage is the normal way for satisfying natural sexual needs for men and women. Thus, Islam urges those who can afford it to get married, *“And marry off those among you who are single and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves; if they are needy, God will make them free from want out of His grace; and God is Vast, Omniscient.”* Usually, financial means are an obstacle in the way of getting married for many people. Islam directs the Muslim community to come to the aid of those who would like to get married but are unable financially to get married. Most of the scholars have indicated that this is not an obligatory duty for the community to undertake but it is a recommendation. It should be pointed

out here that Islam mandates social justice. The Islamic economic and social systems are tailored so that a decent life is guaranteed for each and every citizen in the state. However, since there can still be people who cannot afford the financial burden of marriage, the verse directs the Muslim state to help those people in getting married. Poverty should not be an obstacle preventing people who want to get married to do so. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“God pledged to help three kinds of people: the person who strives in the way of God, a slave who needs money to buy his/her freedom, and a single man or woman who needs help to get married.”*

However, Muslims are directed to guard their chastity until they are able to get married, *“And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste until God enriches them by His grace.”* Islam inherited a universal slavery system. Islam could not have abolished this system unilaterally. In addition, Islam recognized that social changes cannot be achieved instantaneously. Thus, Islam adopted a gradual plan that led to the abolishment of slavery. One step in this plan was to allow a slave to buy his/her freedom, *“And those of your slaves who seek a contract (of emancipation), contract them if you are aware of their goodness; and bestow upon them of the wealth of God which He has bestowed upon you.”* Once the contract between the slave and his/her master has been signed, everything that the slave earned became his/her own money. The money that the slave earned would then be used to buy his/her freedom. The slave was also eligible for receiving poor-dues from the state. The word *“goodness”* in the verse means that the slave is a Muslim and he/she is able to earn their living once they became free persons.

In the pre-Islamic society masters used to act as pimps for their slave girls. Islam abolished this practice, *“Force not your slave-girls to whoredom that you may seek enjoyment of the life of the world, when they themselves wish to remain chaste. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* These were clear verses that have been revealed as an admonition, *“And verily We have sent down to you clear revelations and examples of those who passed away before you. This is an admonition to those who are conscious of God.”*

### **Verses 35 to 45:**

35. *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His light is as a niche wherein there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light. God guides to His light whom He pleases. And God sets forth parables for men, and God is Cognizant of all things.*
36. *In houses which God has permitted to be exalted and in which His name may be remembered and He is glorified in the mornings and the evenings,*
37. *By men whom neither commerce nor profit beguiles from the remembrance of God and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned;*

38. *That God may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace. God does provide for those whom He wills, without measure.*
39. *But the disbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water till he comes to it and finds it nothing, but finds God before him, Who will pay him his due; and God is swift in reckoning.*
40. *Or as darkness on a vast, abysmal sea; there covers it a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud, layer upon layer of darkness. When he holds out his hand he can barely see it. And he for whom God does not give light, for him there is no light.*
41. *Do you not see that God is glorified by all those who are in the heavens and the earth; and the birds with expanded wings? Each (of them) has known its (means of) prayer and glorifying (Him), and God is Cognizant of what they do.*
42. *And to God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and to God is the destination.*
43. *Did you not see how God drives along the clouds, then gathers them, then makes them layers, and you see the rain comes forth from between them; He sends down from the heaven mountains wherein is hail, and smites therewith whom He wills, and averts it from whom He wills. The flashing of His lightning almost takes away the eyesight.*
44. *God turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who can see.*
45. *And God has created every animal from water. Some creep on their bellies, some walk on two legs; and some walk on four. God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things. (24: 35 – 45)*

*“God is the Light of the heavens and the earth.”* This is a statement that one can almost see its effect in a light that engulfs the whole universe and creeps into the heart illuminating it. This is a light that removes the darkness thus rendering the hearts transparent and the souls free, floating in a sea of light. This is the light which forms the essence of the heavens and earth and from which they derive their existence. It is an overwhelming image beyond human imagination. The Quran tries to explain this using a parable that makes it easy for humans to understand, *“The likeness of His light is as a niche wherein there is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light.”* The parable uses the example of the niche, with which everyone is familiar, to describe the process of illuminating the limitless bounds of the heavens and the earth. The lamp which illuminates this niche is like a shining star it gets its oil from a blessed tree. The oil of the tree is unique, it has a glowing nature, it glitters even before it is lit. This light is the light of guidance, *“God guides to His light whom He pleases. And God sets forth parables for men, and God is Cognizant of all things.”*

Those who are guided by this light can be found in, *“In houses which God has permitted to be exalted and in which His name may be remembered and He is glorified in the mornings and the evenings.”* These are, *“Men whom neither commerce nor profit beguiles from the remembrance of God and constancy in prayer and paying to the poor their due; who fear a day when hearts and eyeballs will be overturned; that God may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace. God does provide for those whom He wills,*

*without measure.*” The verse suggests a correspondence between the lamp which spreads its light through the niche and the hearts that are illuminated by God’s light.

God has decreed that His name should be mentioned in these houses. This decree elevated these houses and made them exalted. These houses became exalted because in them are people who continuously raise their voices by the remembrance of God. Nothing of the activities of this worldly life can lure them away from praying to God. They fulfill the duties which God has mandated them to do. However, they are anxious; their hearts are filled with fear and hope, seeking God’s pleasure and reward. God will provide for them without measure.

On the other hand, *“the disbelievers, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty one thinks it to be water till he comes to it and finds it nothing, but finds God before him, and Who will pay him his due; and God is swift in reckoning. Or as darkness on a vast, abysmal sea; there covers him a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud, layer upon layer of darkness. When he holds out his hand he can barely see it. And he for whom God does not give light, for him there is no light.”* Two images are given to describe the hopelessness of the disbelievers. One image describes their deeds as a mirage in a desert. A thirsty person in a desert who sees a mirage runs towards it thinking that he will get a drink to quench his thirst but instead he finds God there waiting for him to give him his due recompense. What a horrifying experience? In the second image we see how darkness closes on a person. The verse paints an image of a person not only engulfed within waves one on the top of the other, but on top of all that there is a dark cloud that covers the waves. It is an image of complete darkness to the extent that a person would not be able to see his own hand. This is the darkness of disbelief. God’s light brings guidance to the heart and depth to the insight.

Humankind is not alone in this universe. God’s creatures fill the universe around the human race. God’s creatures have different forms, different shapes, and different natures but they all share one thing. They all praise God, *“Do you not see that God is glorified by all those who are in the heavens and the earth glorify; and the birds with expanded wings? Each (of them) has known its (means of) prayer and glorifying (Him), and God is Cognizant of what they do.”* God knows what they do. The verse points to the fact that each of God’s creatures has a way to sing the praise of God. God understands their languages. It is incumbent on humankind to join the rest of God’s creatures in singing the praise of God, because the ultimate abode is with God, *“And to God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and to God is the destination.”* God is the only refuge, no one can be protected from His wrath, to him is the final destination, and no one will be able to escape this destiny.

*“Did you not see how God drives along the clouds, then gathers them, then makes them layers, and you see the rain comes forth from between them; He sends down from the heaven mountains wherein is hail, and smites therewith whom He wills, and averts it from whom He wills. The flashing of His lightning almost takes away the eyesight.”* A detailed scene is being presented to alert the hearts to think and reflect on the creation of God. God’s hand moves the clouds and then gathers them together. When the clouds become heavy with water, the rain comes down. The

description of clouds as mountains can be clearly seen from a plane flying above the clouds. God controls the movement of the clouds and when and where rain will come down.

*“God turns over the night and the day; most surely there is a lesson in this for those who can see.”* The perpetual alternation of day and night reminds us of the perfect laws that govern the universe. Such a scene should awaken the heedless hearts to sense the beauty of God’s creation. The Quran tries to revive our ability to reflect on these phenomena which are signs of God’s power. It is a blessing of God to be able to appreciate these beautiful phenomena. This appreciation enhances our bond with the universe. This bond is part of God’s plan for us to live in harmony with the rest of His creation.

*“And God has created every animal from water. Some creep on their bellies, some walk on two legs; and some walk on four. God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things.”* The verse makes a very powerful assertion. It confirms the oneness of the origin of life for all living creatures. We will not argue about the scientific content of this statement. We simply agree with the Quranic statement that all the diverse creatures were created from water, *“God creates what He wills for verily God has power over all things.”*

### **Verses 46 to 57:**

46. *We have indeed sent down clear revelations. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.*
47. *And they say, “We believe in God and the Messenger, and we obey;” then after that a party of them turns away. Such are not believers;*
48. *When they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, a party of them turns aside.*
49. *But if the right is on their side, they come to him in prompt obedience.*
50. *Is there a disease in their hearts, or have they doubts, or do they fear that God and His Messenger should wrong them in judgment? No, such are the wrongdoers.*
51. *The answer of the believers, when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than to say, “We hear and we obey;” those are the successful.*
52. *Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, fears God, and remains conscious of Him is indeed the victorious.*
53. *They swear their strongest oaths by God that, if only you would command them, they would go forth. Say, “Do not swear; (such) obedience is known;” verily, God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
54. *Say, “Obey God, and obey the Messenger.” But if they turn away, he is only responsible for the duty with which he has been discharged, and upon you is that with which you have been discharged. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to convey the (Message) clearly.*
55. *God has promised, those among you who believe and do good deeds, that He will certainly make them to succeed (the present rulers) on the earth as He caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and will substitute their state of fear with a*

*sense of security. They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth, they are the transgressors.*

56. *So establish prayer and pay the poor-due and obey the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy.*

57. *Do not ever think that the disbelievers are going to frustrate (God's Plan) on earth. Their refuge is the Fire, and it is indeed an evil destination. (24: 46 – 57)*

*“We have indeed sent down clear revelations. God guides whom He wills to a straight path.”* God’s revelations are indeed clear. They open up the door for God’s light for His servants, and they lead the way to the springs of guidance. They identify what is good and what is bad. They delineate the Islamic way of life and they establish clearly God’s rulings concerning all the daily affairs of people. It is God who has the absolute control over who will be guided and who will be left to go astray, *“God guides whom He wills to a straight pat.”* However, God has established a way that leads to guidance. Those who follow that way will receive, by the will of God, guidance and those who refuse to follow the way, will be left to go astray.

The hypocrites say, *“We believe in God and the Messenger, and we obey;”* but these were merely words that were not reflected on their deeds. Their deeds gave them away and showed that they do not really believe in what they say; *“a party of them turns away. Such are not believers.”* True faith is what rests deep in one’s heart and is reflected on one’s deeds. The Islamic project aims at translating the deep feeling of faith in the believer’s heart into a plan of action that control’s one’s behavior. The plan of action which is rooted in the believer’s faith becomes the way of life that a Muslim leads. Those whose actions do not reflect their words are not true believers. The sign of their bad faith is that, *“When they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, a party of them turns aside. But if the right is on their side, they come to him in prompt obedience.”* They knew that God and His Messenger (PBUH) will always judge fairly, but they were not interested in justice. They were only interested in winning, lawfully or unlawfully. That is why they always avoided seeking the Messenger’s ruling to decide their affairs. However, when they were certain that the Messenger (PBUH) will rule in their favor, they would hasten to seek his judgment.

The verses illustrate a classical example of the behavior of the hypocrites. They do not believe, but they do not have the courage to state their position in public, however, their behavior betrays their disbelief. Certainly, accepting the decrees of God and His Messenger (PBUH) is a sign of true belief. Those who do not accept the decrees of God and His Messenger (PBUH) must have a disease in their hearts, *“Is there a disease in their hearts?”* The statement is posed in a question form. Indeed, only those who have a disease in their hearts would refuse the rulings of God and His Messenger (PBUH). The verse continues to wonder, *“or have they doubts?”* Do they really have doubts about God’s decrees? Are they not certain that these were God’s decrees? The verse continues to question their behavior using a third question, *“or do they fear that God and His Messenger should wrong them in judgment?”* Are they afraid that God would rule unfairly? Do they not know that God will only rule with justice?



God's rulings are examples of the absolute justice. God is the Creator of the whole human race. He will not take the side of one party of His creation against others. God's decrees are made to establish justice for all His creations. Manmade laws are always flawed. They tend to favor a group over another. Those who refuse God's law are certainly, "*wrongdoers.*"

The believers are never hesitant in their obedience to God and His Messenger (PBUH), "*The answer of the believers, when they are summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than to say, 'We hear and we obey.' Those are the successful.*" They have complete trust in God's justice and they submit fully to His rulings. Therefore, they will be successful. They have entrusted their affairs to God and He will not let them down. God knows best where their interests lie and He will judge among them according to His knowledge and with justice. Human knowledge is less than complete and human justice is less than perfect; very often human justice is blurred by human whims and desires.

The previous verse spoke of accepting God's rulings. The following verse speaks of being obedient to God in all matters, "*Whosoever obeys God and His Messenger, fears God, and remains conscious of Him is indeed the victorious.*" The verse indicates that those who obey God in all aspects of their lives are indeed the victorious. They do whatever God commands them to do and abstain from that which they are forbidden to do. They are continuously conscious of God in all their deeds. They will be victorious in this life as well as in the Hereafter. This is God's promise and God always keeps His promise.

Those who are obedient to God in all affairs have reached a higher status in their belief. Only those whose hearts have been illuminated by God's light can reach such state. Those who reach such a state are blessed by God's honor. They cannot force themselves to be obedient to mortals like them who command them to follow rules that have not been sanctioned by God and His Messenger (PBUH). They only obey what God's decreed.

After this short talk about obedience, the verses return to discuss the behavior of the hypocrites, "*They swear their strongest oaths by God that, if only you would command them, they would go forth. Say, 'Do not swear; (such) obedience is known;' verily, God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*" The hypocrites took the strongest oath to assure the Prophet (PBUH) that they would fight with him, if and when he commands them to do so. God knew that they were lying. The verse is telling them, there is no need to take an oath because God knows what kind of obedience they expressed to the Messenger (PBUH). This is not the kind of obedience that God desires, God desires sincere obedience. He commands His Messenger to convey this message, "*Say, 'Obey God, and obey the Messenger.' But if they turn away, he is only responsible for the duty with which he has been discharged, and upon you is that with which you have been discharged. If you obey him, you shall be rightly guided. The Messenger's duty is only to convey the (Message) clearly.*" The task of the Messenger (PBUH) is to deliver the message; their task is to offer sincere obedience. If they follow the Messenger's advice, then they will be rightly guided but if they turn away then they should suffer the consequences.

*“God has promised, those among you who believe and do good deeds, that He will certainly make them to succeed (the present rulers) on the earth as He caused those who were before them to succeed (others); and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them, and will substitute their state of fear with a sense of security. They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me. Those who disbelieve henceforth, they are the transgressors.”* This is God’s promise which He made to those who believe and do good deeds from among the followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). God promised to make them the heirs of power on earth and to establish their religion, the religion that He desired for them. What is the essence of this belief? And what is the meaning of being heirs? The essence of true belief is to completely submit to God in all matters of life. True belief controls and guides all human activities. It rests deep in the heart and is reflected on each and every human activity. It overcomes human whims and desires and aligns them to the guidance brought by the Messenger of God (PBUH). It is a state that permeates the whole being of the believer and controls his/her emotions, senses, movements, and behavior. This state defines a complete way of life. This way of life prepares the believers to undertake the great responsibility, the responsibility of being vicegerents on earth. What is the nature of this responsibility?

It is not only the responsibility to rule, control and govern but to use all of this for the benefit of humankind. It is the responsibility to build and reform not to destroy and abuse. It is the responsibility to implement the way of life that God has decreed for humankind. This is the promise that God made to those who believe and do good deeds. He promised to empower them to undertake this responsibility, establish justice on earth, and lead humanity to the perfection that God has ordained for them. This explanation of the meaning of the promise mentioned in the verse is confirmed by the statement, *“that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has approved for them.”* God promised to empower them so that they practice the religion which He approved for them. This religion promotes goodness and fairness; it demands that they rise above their carnal desires; it commands that they establish a good life on earth; and it commands them to make use of all the resources that God made available for them, all of this is carried out for the sole purpose of seeking God’s approval. And, *“will substitute their state of fear with a sense of security.”* It has been narrated by Al-Rabei’ bin Anas (RA) that, *“When the command came down to the believers to fight back those who fight them, the believers became apprehensive. They would keep their weapons close by day and night. One of the companions asked the Messenger (PBUH) how long will this state continue? He said, ‘Very soon, the one of you will enjoy sitting in a large gathering without having to carry weapons.’ Then God revealed this verse and Islam spread in the whole Arabian Peninsula and the Muslims enjoyed the safety that God promised in this verse.”* God promise will only be fulfilled if the Muslims fulfill the condition stipulated in the verse, *“They worship Me. They do not associate partners with Me.”* This condition has to be observed before God’s promise is fulfilled. The next verse reminds the believers of this condition, *“So establish prayer and pay the poor-due and obey the Messenger, that haply you may receive mercy. Do not ever think that the disbelievers are going to frustrate (God's Plan) on earth. Their refuge is the fire, and it is indeed an evil destination.”* These are the elements of the preparation: connecting with God through prayer, overcoming avarice through paying the poor-dues, obeying the Messenger by accepting his rulings, and implementing God’s law in each and every situation. Once these conditions have been fulfilled the believers need not worry about the might of the disbelievers because they will never be able to frustrate God’s plan.

## Verses 58 to 64:

58. *Believers, let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not reached puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): before the Dawn prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday, and after the evening prayer; these are three times of privacy for you. It is neither a sin for you nor for them, besides these times, that some of you go round about (waiting) upon others. Thus, does God make clear to you the revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
59. *But when the children among you reach puberty, let them (also) ask for permission, as those before them used to ask. Thus, God makes clear His revelations for you; God is Omniscient, Wise.*
60. *As for women, past child-bearing age who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
61. *No blame is there upon the blind, nor any blame upon the lame, nor any blame upon the sick, nor on yourselves, if you eat from your houses, or the houses of your fathers, or the houses of your mothers, or the houses of your brothers, or the houses of your sisters, or the houses of your fathers' brothers, or the houses of your fathers' sisters, or the houses of your mothers' brothers, or the houses of your mothers' sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold the keys, or (from the house) of a friend. No sin shall it be for you whether you eat together or separately. But when you enter houses, salute one another with a greeting from God, blessed and good. Thus God makes clear His revelations for you that haply you may understand.*
62. *The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission. Those who ask your permission, those are they who believe in God and His Messenger. So, if they ask your permission to attend to some of their affair, give permission to whom you will, and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
63. *Make not (your) calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. God knows those of you who slip away, hiding themselves. And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful torment befall them.*
64. *Verily, to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things. (24: 58 – 64)*

*“Believers, let those whom your right hands possess, and the (children) among you who have not reached puberty, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): before the Dawn prayer, and when you put off your clothes at midday, and after the evening prayer; these are three times of privacy for you. It is neither a sin for you nor for them, besides these times, that some of you go round about (waiting) upon others. Thus, does God make clear to you the revelations, and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* Earlier verses detailed the etiquette of entering the homes of others, and this verse delineates the etiquette for seeking permission inside the home. Those whom your right hands possess and the children who did not yet reach the age of

puberty are allowed to enter the private quarters at any time except for three periods during the day. These are the periods when people may be dressed in a way that reveals parts of their bodies which they do not want others to see. These periods are the times before Dawn prayer, during the noon naps, and after the evening prayer. These are times for privacy. Quran teaches us to respect the privacy of people. Seeing adult family members at these times of privacy may have adverse effects on the children or the servants. Outside these times children and servants are allowed to move around the house freely. This etiquette combines between the ease of living and the respect of privacy. When the children reach the age of puberty then they should ask for permission at all times according to the general rule which has been mentioned before, *“But when the children among you reach puberty, let them (also) ask for permission, as those before them used to ask. Thus God makes clear His revelations for you.”* God is Omniscient, Wise. He knows the inner feelings of people and knows what is best for them.

In previous verses, women were commanded to cover their adornment so that to avoid being seductive. The following verse provides an exemption from the general rule for women who are no longer interested in marriage. These women have more liberty in putting off their outer garments without revealing their private body parts, *“As for women past child-bearing age, who have no hope of marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their (outer) clothing in such a way as not to show adornment. But to refrain is better for them.”* However, it is better for them to be decently dressed all the time. *“God is All-Hearing, Omniscient;”* God hears everything and knows the inner thoughts of people.

The following verse deals with the etiquette of the relationships between family members and friends, *“No blame is there upon the blind nor any blame upon the lame nor any blame upon the sick nor on yourselves if you eat from your houses, or the houses of your fathers, or the houses of your mothers, or the houses of your brothers, or the houses of your sisters, or the houses of your fathers' brothers, or the houses of your fathers' sisters, or the houses of your mothers' brothers, or the houses of your mothers' sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold the keys, or (from the house) of a friend. No sin shall it be for you whether you eat together or separately. But when you enter houses, salute one another with a greeting from God, blessed and good. Thus God makes clear His revelations for you that haply you may understand.”* It has been narrated that before the revelation of this verse, people used to go visit and eat without seeking permission. Then the verse, *“Do not consume one another's wealth unjustly,”* (2: 188) was revealed which made the believers feel awkward about visiting each other and eating at each other's homes. The present verse was then revealed to explain the etiquette of visiting and eating at each other's homes.

This verse delineates a legal rule. We notice how the words were chosen carefully, precisely, and concisely to convey accurately the rules to be followed. It states that we are allowed to eat, *“from your houses,”* this includes the houses of the spouses and the sons and daughters. Then the allowed houses are mentioned in succession. The reason behind specifying that people can eat together or separately is that before Islam people used to refrain from eating separately. So the verse came down to remove that restriction. People should salute each other when they enter these houses. Salutation enhances the bond between people.

The verses move on to delineate the etiquette of dealing with the Messenger of God (PBUH), *“The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission. Those who ask your permission, those are they who believe in God and His Messenger. So, if they ask your permission to attend to some of their affair, give permission to whom you will, and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. Make not (your) calling of the Messenger among yourselves as the call of one of you to another. God knows those of you who slip away, hiding themselves. And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful punishment befall them. Verily to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things.”* It has been narrated that when the idolaters of Quraish mobilized the Arabian tribes to attack the Muslims in Medina, it was suggested that the best strategy for defense is to dig a trench around Medina. That is why this battle was called the battle of the Trench. While digging, the hypocrites would slip off without permission to avoid participating in the hard work. On the other hand, the believers would only go to attend to their most urgent errands after they had asked the permission of the Prophet (PBUH). These verses came to describe this situation and to delineate the etiquette of the relationship between the leader and the group. It starts by stating the conditions that a true believer must meet, *“The true believers are only those who believe in God and His Messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, they do not leave until they have asked his permission.”* They believe in God and His Messenger and that belief is reflected on their deeds. They only leave to attend to the most urgent need, and they ask the Messenger’s (PBUH) permission before they leave. The Quran gives the Messenger (PBUH) the liberty to give or withhold his approval of permission depending on the perceived need. The verse exhorts the believers to seek permission only for the most urgent need and commands the Prophet (PBUH) to seek God’s forgiveness for those who have to leave. The verse exhorts the believers to address their Prophet (PBUH) respectfully and to use a language different from that which they use to address each other.

The verses then turn to warn the hypocrites who sneak away in a stealthy way thinking that no one has seen them, but they should realize that God sees everything. It is a dire warning for those who do not follow the commands of the Prophet (PBUH), *“And let those who conspire to evade his orders beware lest grief or painful torment befall them.”* They will be afflicted by painful doom in this life and in the Hereafter.

The Sura ends on a note of reminding people that God knows everything, *“Verily, to God belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth. He knows your condition. And (He knows) the Day when they are returned to Him so that He may inform them of what they did. God is Cognizant of all things.”* The believers are reminded to remain conscious of God and to maintain strong links to Him. This is the only way to salvation.

## Sura 25: Al-Furqan (The Criterion)

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

### Verses 1 to 20:

1. *Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be an admonition to all peoples.*
2. *It is He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He did not have a son, nor has He a partner in His dominion. It is He who created all things, and ordered them in due measure.*
3. *Yet they have taken, besides him, gods that can create nothing but are themselves created; that have no control of hurt nor good to themselves; nor can they control death, nor life, nor resurrection.*
4. *But the disbelievers say, "This is nothing but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it." Indeed, it is they who have committed injustice and fabricated a lie.*
5. *And they say, "Fables of the ancient, which he has written down and they are dictated to him morning and evening."*
6. *Say, (to them, Muhammad), "He who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth revealed it. He is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
7. *And they say, "What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food, and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him?"*
8. *Or (why) has not a treasure thrown down to him, or why does he not have a garden from which to eat?" And the wrongdoers say, "You are following only a man who is bewitched."*
9. *See what kinds of comparisons they make for you. But they have gone astray, and they will never find a way.*
10. *Blessed is He who, if He had willed, could give you better (things) than those: gardens beneath which rivers flow; and He could give you palaces.*
11. *But they denied the Hour (of Judgment). Indeed, We have prepared a blazing Fire for those who deny the Hour.*
12. *When it sees them from a place afar, they will hear its fury and its roaring.*
13. *And when they are thrown, bound together, into a narrow place therein they will pray thereupon for destruction.*
14. *(They will be told) "This day, do not pray for a single destruction; pray for much destruction.*
15. *Say, "Is that (doom) better or the Garden of Immortality which is promised to those who remain conscious of God? It will be their reward and their final destination.*
16. *In it, they will have whatever they wish for. They will dwell (there) forever. This is a promise binding upon your Lord; and of Him to be requested."*
17. *And on the day when He will gather them and that which they worship apart from God and will say, "Was it you who misled my servants or did they (themselves) go astray from the path?"*
18. *They will say, "Glory to You, we should not have taken protecting guardians beside You. But You did bestow, on them and their fathers, good things (in life), until they forgot the message and became lost people."*

19. *Thus, they will give you the lie regarding what you say, then you can neither avert (the doom) nor obtain help. And whoso among you does wrong, We shall make him taste great torment.*
20. *And the messengers whom We sent before you were all (men) who ate food and walked through the streets. We have made some of you as a trial for others. Will you persevere? God is All-Seeing. (26: 1-20)*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. One can discern two main themes for this Sura. The objective of the first theme is to comfort, reassure, and support the Messenger of God (PBUH) in delivering the Message to the stubborn, insolent and abusive idolaters of Quraish. The second theme provides a description of the fierce battle that the Messenger (PBUH) had to engage in the course of delivering the Message to the idolaters of Quraish who used all types of false arguments to stem the tide of the Message. The two themes are intertwined together and can be hardly separated from one another. However, one can also discern four sections in this Sura. The first section starts with the glorification of God. It then describes the challenges posed by the idolaters and the doom they will face on the Day of Judgment as a result of their obstinacy. The first section ends with verses to comfort the Messenger (PBUH) and to reassure him in his struggle. The second section continues to describe some of the challenges that the idolaters posed and to contrast them against the challenges posed by previous nations who went astray before them. It laments the fact they did not learn from these examples, which puts them at the same level of brainless cattle that are unable to think. The third section takes us on a tour of the cosmos. The fourth section describes the characteristics of the servants of the Lord of Mercy and their reward.

*“Blessed is He who sent down the Criterion to His servant, that it may be an admonition to all peoples.”* The beginning of the Sura states its main message: The Quran is a divine revelation, the Message is a universal message, and God is One. The word “the Criterion” is used to refer to the Quran because it differentiates between the truth and falsehood and between guidance and going astray. The Quran describes a clear and unique lifestyle; and consequently it sets a demarcation between the ways of life before and after the advent of Islam. Quran brought a universal message that addresses all people, *“that it may be an admonition to all people.”*

The verse honored the Messenger (PBUH) by calling him “God’s servant.” This mode of address has been repeated in several places in the Quran; in Chapter 17, verse 1, *“Glorified be He who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the far distant Mosque;”* in Chapter 18, verse 1, *“Praise be to God who sent down the Book upon His servant;”* and Chapter 72, verse 19, *“Yet when the servant of God stood forth to invoke Him.”* This shows that being God’s servant is an honor that people should aspire to. It also indicates that human beings can never be more than God’s servants. God has no equal or partner. God is unique He is the Creator and everyone else is His creation. The Quran has been revealed to be, *“an admonition to all peoples.”* This statement emphasizes the fact that Islam was meant to be a universal message from the start. This refutes the claim by some that the universality of the message came as a later development in the growth of Islam.

*“It is He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth.”* God is the owner of the heavens and earth. He has absolute control over them. He has the absolute power to plan, to manage, to control, and to change the universe. He did not have a son nor did He have a partner, *“He did not have a son, nor has He a partner in His dominion.”* Procreation is needed to guarantee the existence of the human race, but God is eternal. Many signs in the universe affirm the Oneness of God. God created everything according to a measured order, *“It is He who created all things, and ordered them in due measure.”* The idolaters were heedless of these signs. They adopted deities who were themselves created and could neither help nor harm those who worshiped them, *“Yet they have taken, besides him, gods that can create nothing but are themselves created; that have no control of hurt or good to themselves; nor can they control death nor life nor resurrection.”* This is in itself a major transgression against God. It is one of the ugliest sins. The Messenger (PBUH) was asked, *“What is the most heinous sin?”* He said, *“To claim that God has a partner.”*

It is not surprising then that they would transgress against the Messenger (PBUH), *“But the disbelievers say, ‘This is nothing but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it.’ Indeed, it is they who have committed injustice and fabricated a lie.”* This was a major lie and what was surprising is that they knew that it was a lie. They acknowledged that the language and style of the Quran are different from the language and style that they were used to. They knew that Muhammad (PBUH) never lied or cheated before. They even used to call him, “the truthful, the trustworthy.” How can the “the truthful, the trustworthy” fabricate a lie about God?

But they were worried about losing their social status and religious leadership. They used these arguments to discourage the ordinary Arabs from joining the new religion. But, if the Messenger (PBUH) was able to compose such a Quran with the help of other mortals, why were the chiefs of Quraish unable to compose a similar Quran?

When the Quran narrated stories of previous nations, the chiefs of Quraish hastened to describe the Quran as, *“Fables of the ancient, which he has written down and they are dictated to him morning and evening.”* They claimed that others who knew these fables dictated them to Muhammad (PBUH), but God’s answer came immediately refuting their claims, *“Say, (to them, Muhammad), ‘He who knows the secret of the heavens and the earth has revealed it. He is ever Forgiving, Merciful.’”* It was revealed by God whose knowledge is unbounded; He knows all the secrets of the heaven and earth.

*“And they say, ‘What sort of a messenger is this, who eats food, and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him? Or (why) has not a treasure thrown down to him, or why does he not have a garden from which to eat?’ And the wrongdoers say, ‘You are following only a man who is bewitched.’”* They repeat the same objections that had been voiced by the disbelievers over the centuries. How can a mortal be a messenger? They knew him; they knew his family and his history. He was a normal human being, just like anyone of them; he ate like them and he walked like them. How could he be a messenger who receives a revelation from God? This may seem farfetched; but it is also plausible. God created human beings to live on earth. God breathed into them of His spirit and gave them the responsibility of managing the earth. The knowledge and experience that the



human beings had were limited. Therefore, God chose messengers from among this race to help guide them to the straight path. The spirit of God which He breathed in humankind gave him a higher status among the rest of God's creation and gave him the disposition to connect to God to receive His guidance and His revelation. God has honored humankind but the people begrudged the chosen ones from among themselves the blessings that God bestowed on them. They wondered why was not an angel sent down to help the messenger. They underestimated the value of humankind and they underestimated the honor that God bestowed on humankind; the honor that was symbolized by God's command to the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam.

It is the divine will that messengers were chosen from among the human race. A messenger who is one of the people feels their pains, understands their feelings, appreciates their needs, and recognizes their shortcomings. Such a messenger is able to lead his people to the straight path. A messenger chosen from among the people provides a natural example. It is more convincing for people to follow an example set by one of them rather than one set by a super natural creature like an angel.

The idolaters wondered at the fact why would God require His messenger to earn his living like anyone else? God did not want His messenger to be wealthy or to have a Garden. God wanted His messenger to be one of the people. God wanted His messenger to be a role model for his people. God wanted His Messenger to struggle patiently to bring guidance to his people and in the mean time to work hard to earn his living and support his family. Even when life became comfortable and wealth became abundant, the Messenger (PBUH) was not distracted by the wealth and he gave it all away to help the poor and the needy.

Then they called him bewitched, *"And the wrongdoers say, 'You are following only a man who is bewitched.'"* This type of transgression on their part was mentioned also in Chapter 17, and the Quran responded to this transgression in both places in the same way, *"See what kinds of comparisons they make for you. But they have gone astray, and they will never find a way."* They tried to belittle the Messenger (PBUH) accusing him of being a mad man that no one should pay attention to. The flip side of this accusation is that they were convinced in their mind that the Quran is a supernatural phenomenon. The Quran simply throws that in their faces, *"they have gone astray, and they will never find a way."*

The Quran then showed them how ridiculous their argument was and how trivial their request was, *"Blessed is He who, if He had willed, could give you better (things) than those: gardens beneath which rivers flow; and He could give you palaces."* God is able to give His Messenger (PBUH) more than they can imagine in wealth, gardens, and palaces. God gave His Messenger (PBUH) something better and more valuable than all the material things that they suggested. God gave His Messenger (PBUH) the sweetness of being near to God and the blessing of being connected to God.

*"But they denied the Hour (of Judgment). Indeed, We have prepared a blazing fire for those who deny the Hour."* They denied the Hour reaching the limit in their disbelief. As a result, they will be tormented in the blazing Fire. The Quran paints a dynamic image, as if the blazing Fire became a living creature that sees and roars, *"When it sees them from a place afar, they will hear*

*its fury and its roaring.*” This is a horrible scene that shakes the ground under the feet of the disbelievers and makes their hearts tremble. And when they reach it, they are thrown into it, helpless and their hands bound together, “*And when they are thrown, bound together, into a narrow place therein they will pray thereupon for destruction.*” Their agony motivates them to wish that they are dead. They pray for their own demise to escape this torment. But they will be mocked. They will be told that praying for their own demise will not be of any help even if they pray many prayers for their demise they will not be able to escape the torment, “*(They will be told) "This day, do not pray for a single destruction; pray for much destruction.*”

The Quran then describes the reward for the believers, those who were conscious of their Lord and believed in the inevitability of the Hour, “*Say, 'Is that (doom) better or the Garden of Immortality which is promised to those who remain conscious of God?' It will be their reward and their final destination. In it they will have whatever they wish for. They will dwell (there) forever. This is a promise binding upon your Lord; and of Him to be requested.*” The question is then posed; which end is better?

The verses continue to describe another scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, the scene of the idolaters when they are gathered together with their deities whom they worshipped besides God. They will all stand in front of God to be questioned, “*And on the day when He will gather them and that which they worship apart from God and will say, 'Was it you who misled my servants or did they (themselves) go astray from the path?'*” These deities may have been idols, jinn, angels, or any other deity that they worshipped beside God. God knows everything but He willed that they would be questioned in front of everyone so that they feel the gravity of their deeds. They will apologize expressing their regret for what they committed, “*They will say, 'Glory to You, we should not have taken protecting guardians beside You. But You did bestow, on them and their fathers, good things (in life), until they forgot the message and became lost people.'*” They inherited abundance of wealth and were heedless of the One who bestowed His blessings on them. Their hearts became dry and lifeless like a barren land that does not yield fruits.

The idolaters will then be told that they were deceived by their false deities, “*Thus they will give you the lie regarding what you say, then you can neither avert (the doom) nor obtain help. And whoso among you does wrong, We shall make him taste great torment.*” They will not escape the torment nor will they be able to get any help.

The address is now turned to the Messenger (PBUH), “*And the messengers whom We sent before you were all (men) who ate food and walked through the streets. We have made some of you as a trial for others. Will you persevere? God is All-Seeing.*” God used these words to comfort His Messenger (PBUH). The idolaters did not reject the Messenger (PBUH) as a person, but they rejected God’s plan. God decreed a plan to test people, “*We have made some of you as a trial for others.*” Those who heed God’s message will persevere when faced with afflictions. God is All-Seeing. He knows what are in the hearts and He knows the unseen.

## Verses 21 to 44:

21. *And those who do not look forward for Our meeting, say, "Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?" They indeed have become too arrogant within themselves and they have become excessively defiant.*
22. *On the day when they will see the angels, on that day there will be no good tidings for the guilty; and they shall say, "It is a forbidden thing totally prohibited."*
23. *And We shall turn to whatever deeds they did (in this life), and We shall make it a scattered dust.*
24. *The companions of the Garden will be well, that day, in their dwelling place; and they will have the fairest of places for rest.*
25. *And on the day when the heaven shall be split asunder with the clouds; and the angels shall be sent down descending (in ranks).*
26. *The Sovereignty on that day will be the True (Sovereignty) belonging to the Lord of Mercy, and it will be a hard day for the disbelievers.*
27. *On the day when the wrongdoer shall bite his hands, he will say, "I wish I had chosen a way together with the messenger (of God).*
28. *Alas for me, I wish I had never taken that one for a friend.*
29. *He verily led me astray from the reminder after it had reached me. Satan was ever man's deserter in the hour of need."*
30. *Then the Messenger will say, "My Lord, My people took this Quran as a forsaken thing."*
31. *Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy among the guilty but God suffices as a Guide and a Helper.*
32. *And those who disbelieve say, "Why is the Quran not revealed to him all at once?" (It is revealed) so that We may strengthen your heart therewith; and We have arranged it in the right order.*
33. *And they do not bring you a similitude but We bring you the truth, and a better argument.*
34. *Those who will be gathered on their faces to Hell; they are worse in place and further away from the right path.*
35. *We verily gave Moses the Scripture and appointed with him his brother Aaron as an assistant.*
36. *Then We said, "Go together to the folk who have denied Our revelations. Then We destroyed them utterly.*
37. *And the people of Noah, when they rejected the messengers, We drowned them; We made them a sign for humankind; and We have prepared for the wrongdoers a grievous torment.*
38. *And (We destroyed the tribes of) A'ad and Thamud, and the dwellers of Ar-Rass, and many generations in between.*
39. *Each (of them) We warned by examples, and each (of them) We brought to utter ruin.*
40. *And indeed they have passed by the town which was showered with an evil rain. Can it be that they have not seen it? No, but they do not expect resurrection.*
41. *And when they see you (Muhammad) they treat you only as a jest (saying), "Is this he whom God has sent as a messenger?"*
42. *He almost would have led us far away from our gods had we not persevered in worshipping them." But they will know, when they see the torment, who has strayed farther away from the path.*

43. *Have you seen him who takes his whims as his god? Will you then be a guardian over him?*
44. *Or do you think that most of them listen or understand? They are only like cattle. No, they are farther astray. (25: 21-44)*

The idolaters did not expect to meet God and they never believed it will happen. They planned their lives accordingly, and they did not prepare for such a meeting. Their questions reflected their doubts that God would send a mortal as a messenger to guide them, “*And those who do not look forward for Our meeting, say, ‘Why have not angels been sent down upon us, or (why) do we not see our Lord?’*” They expressed their defiance. They declared that they will not believe unless God sends down angels, or unless they see God. This defiance was rooted in their arrogance, “*They indeed have become too arrogant within themselves and they have become excessively defiant.*” Who are they to dictate their conditions to God? They deserved to be ridiculed and told that God will grant their request to see the angels but this will happen on a very difficult day, “*On the day when they will see the angels, on that day there will be no good tidings for the guilty; and they shall say, ‘It is a forbidden thing totally prohibited.’*” On that day they will see what they asked for and they will wish they never asked for it because the angels will bring them torment.

“*And We shall turn to whatever deeds they did (in this life), and We shall make it a scattered dust.*” All what they accomplished in their lives will be turned into dust that will be scattered around. Deeds are considered good deeds if they are rooted in the belief in God. These deeds connect the heart of the person with God. They are well planned and follow consistent pattern. They are not random deeds motivated by whims and desires. Deeds which do not satisfy these conditions will be turned to dust on the Day of Judgment.

On the other hand, the believers will be resting in Paradise, “*The companions of the Garden will be well, that day, in their dwelling place; and they will have the fairest of places for rest.*” They will be enjoying the tranquility, the security, and the shade in Paradise.

“*And on the day when the heaven shall be split asunder with the clouds; and the angels shall be sent down descending (in ranks).*” This verse and similar others suggest that major cosmic phenomena will occur on the Day of Judgment. The laws that govern the universe will cease to take effect signaling the end of the world as we know it. Some of the verses that talk about the changes that will happen are, “*When the sun is wrapped up (in darkness); and when the stars fall, dispersing; and when the mountains are removed.*” (81: 1-3) “*When the sky breaks apart; and when the stars fall, scattering; and when the seas are erupted.*” (83:1-3) “*When the sky has split (open); and has listened to its Lord and was obligated; and when the earth has been extended and has cast out that within it and relinquished.*” (84: 1-4)

All of these verses and others describe the horrendous end of our world. The earth will be shaken, the mountains will be blown up, and the seas will erupt. The stars will lose their luster, the sky will be split asunder, and the constellations will be destroyed. The sun and the moon will appear together and the smoke will engulf the burning sky. These verses paint a fearful picture of

the state of the world on the Day of Judgment. On that Day the true sovereignty will be only to God, *“The Sovereignty on that day will be the True (Sovereignty) belonging to the Lord of Mercy, and it will be a hard day for the disbelievers.”*

Those who lost their way and were misguided will regret their past behavior. They will bite their fingers in anguish, *“On the day when the wrongdoer shall bite his hands, he will say, ‘I wish I had chosen a way together with the messenger (of God). Alas for me, I wish I had never taken that one for a friend. He verily led me astray from the reminder after it had reached me. Satan was ever man’s deserter in the hour of need.’”* They will regret that they ever associated with those who deceived them and led them astray.

The verses then move on from the description of the events of the Day of Judgment to explore the idolaters’ response to the Messenger (pbu), *“Then the Messenger will say, ‘My Lord, My people took this Quran as a forsaken thing.’”* They shunned the Quran which God revealed to His Messenger (PBUH) to warn and guide them. They did not even want to listen to it for fear of being bewitched by its beauty. They never reflected on its verses to learn the truth and find the guidance. The Quran came to outline a way of life that leads to happiness but they never gave it a chance. The Messenger (PBUH) called upon his Lord to tell Him that he did his best, but God already knew this. God responded by comforting His Messenger (PBUH), *“Thus have We made for every prophet an enemy among the guilty but God suffices as a Guide and a Helper.”* All other messengers of God had enemies who refused to be guided and tried their best to sway the people away from guidance but God granted His messengers victory at the end.

It is the divine wisdom that allowed those enemies to fight the messengers and the Message because only through struggling with falsehood that the call to the truth will be strengthened and bloom. This struggle is the only way to discriminate between fake messages and the truth. This struggle will also discriminate between the true believers and those who join a call seeking worldly benefits.

An authentic call to the truth involves hard work and struggle against falsehood. People who undertake the responsibility to propagate these calls are required to make sacrifices and to endure persecution. Their struggle does not only strengthen their belief but it also brings maturity to the message allowing others to see the truth and to follow the message. That is why it was necessary to have enemies who fight the messengers thus providing the opportunities to fight back and allow the battle between the truth and falsehood to take place.

*“And those who disbelieve say, ‘Why is the Quran not revealed to him all at once?’ (It is revealed) so that We may strengthen your heart therewith; and We have arranged it in the right order.”* The Quran was revealed to establish the Islamic project which should be followed by the Muslim nation and to outline the way of life that God wants Muslims to lead. This required the implementation of major changes to the way of life people were used to. This feat could not be achieved overnight. The elements of the Islamic project had to be delivered gradually so that the changes it requires would be implemented gradually, making the changes as natural as possible. The Quran was also revealed gradually to address real needs of the Muslim society. These needs developed over time. The Quran was not meant to be a book which would be read and enjoyed as

an intellectual exercise but it was meant to be a book that outlines a realistic way of life that should be led by people living on earth. It is for these reasons that the Quran was revealed gradually to give the people the time to understand and absorb the new changes to their way of life. The gradual revelation of the Quran gave support to the Messenger (PBUH) during his struggle with the disbelievers. The strategy which was followed in the revelation of the Quran achieved tremendous results in preparing the Muslims to adopt the way of life suggested by the Quran. The downfall of the Muslims occurred when they forgot the main objective of the Quran and started to use the Quran as a book to be read but not to be implemented.

God continued to reassure His Messenger (PBUH), *“And they do not bring you a similitude but We bring you the truth, and a better argument.”* God will support His Messenger (PBUH). He will provide him with true evidence to refute their false arguments. He also reminded His Messenger (PBUH) of the horrible end that the disbelievers will meet. *“Those who will be gathered on their faces to Hell; they are worse in place and further away from the right path.”*

The following verses cite the examples of previous nations of disbelievers and their fateful doom. It starts with Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“We verily gave Moses the Scripture and appointed with him his brother Aaron as an assistant. Then We said, ‘Go together to the folk who have denied Our revelations.’ Then We destroyed them utterly.”* Then it mentions the people of Noah (PBUH), *“And the people of Noah, when they rejected the messengers, We drowned them; We made them a sign for humankind; and We have prepared for the wrongdoers a grievous torment.”* Although they rejected Noah (PBUH) only but the verse indicates that they, *“rejected the messengers,”* because all the messengers came with the same Message. Rejecting one messenger amounts to rejecting all messengers. The people of Noah (PBUH) were drowned in the flood which remains as a sign of God’s wrath. Similarly, *“And (We destroyed the tribes of) A’ad and Thamud, and the dwellers of Ar-Rass, and many generations in between. Each (of them) We warned by examples, and each (of them) We brought to utter ruin. And indeed they have passed by the town which was showered with an evil rain. Can it be that they have not seen it? No, but they do not expect resurrection.”* These are examples of the disbelieving communities over the ages. They all rejected the guidance and never believed that they will meet God and they were destroyed.

The narrative turns to the ridicule that the Messenger (PBUH) met at the hands of the idolaters. *And when they see you (Muhammad) they treat you only as a jest (saying), “Is this he whom God has sent as a messenger?”* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was well respected by his people before being sent as a messenger of God. He came from a well-respected family and tribe and he was known as the *“the truthful, the trustworthy.”* Quraish accepted his arbitration to settle the dispute which erupted regarding who would replace the Black Stone to its place in the Ka’ba. However, all this was forgotten once he told them that he was God’s messenger.

Their ridicule was one way to hide their feeling of insecurity. They were afraid of the consequences of believing in the Quran as can be seen clearly from this verse, *“He almost would have led us far away from our gods had we not persevered in worshipping them.”* The Quran

responds by pointing out that soon they will find out who was on the straight path and who was led astray. However, it will be too late, *“But they will know, when they see the torment, who has strayed farther away from the path.”*

The Quran continued to comfort and reassure the Messenger (PBUH), *“Have you seen him who takes his whims as his god? Will you then be a guardian over him?”* He who is controlled by his low desires will not listen to the voice of reason. The Messenger (PBUH) has done his best but what could he do with people who refuse to listen to the voice of reason. The Quran comforted the Messenger (PBUH) by telling him that it was not his shortcoming that they did not believe. They did not believe because they were unable to see the truth. They were just like animals who do not think and are unable to understand, *“Or do you think that most of them listen or understand? They are only like cattle. No, they are farther astray.”*

### **Verses 45 to 62:**

45. *Have you not seen how your Lord has spread the shade - and if He willed He could have made it stationary; then We have made the sun its indicator.*
46. *Then We withdrew it to Us, a gradual withdrawal?*
47. *And it is He who made the night as a covering for you, and the sleep a rest; and made the day a resurrection.*
48. *And it is He who sends the winds, glad tidings heralding His mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky,*
49. *That We may give life thereby to a dead land, and We give it as a drink, to Our numerous creatures: livestock and people.*
50. *And verily We have repeated it among them that they may take heed, but most of humankind are ungrateful.*
51. *Had it been Our Will, We could have sent a warner to every town.*
52. *Therefore, do not listen to the disbelievers, but strive against them with it (the Quran) strenuously.*
53. *It is He who has made the two seas to flow freely. One is fresh and sweet, and the other is salty and bitter; and He placed between the two a barrier and inviolable partition.*
54. *It is He who has created humankind from water; then He established for him blood relationships and marriage relationships. Your Lord is All-Powerful.*
55. *And they worship, besides God, things that can neither profit them nor harm them; and the disbeliever is a helper (of Evil), against his own Lord.*
56. *But We only sent you to give glad tidings and admonition.*
57. *Say, “I ask no reward of you for this, except that whoso wills may take a way to his Lord.”*
58. *And put your trust in Him who lives and never dies; and celebrate his praise. He suffices as the Totally-Aware of the sins of His servants.*
59. *It is He who created the heavens and the earth and all that in between, in six days, and firmly established Himself on the Throne (of Authority). He is God, the Lord of Mercy. Ask you, then, about Him one who is well informed.*

60. *When it is said to them, "Prostrate to the Lord of Mercy," they say, "And what is the Lord of Mercy? Shall we prostrate to that which you command us?" And it increases their aversion (to the Truth).*
61. *Blessed is He Who made constellations in the skies, and placed therein a lamp and a moon giving light;*
62. *And it is He who made the night and the day to follow each other, for him who desires to remember, or desires to be thankful. (25: 45 – 62)*

*"Have you not seen how your Lord has spread the shade - and if He willed He could have made it stationary; then We have made the sun its indicator. Then We withdrew it to Us, a gradual withdrawal?"* The sight of the shade evokes in the soul feelings of comfort, tranquility and security. With these words, God comforted His Messenger (PBUH) to support him during his struggle against the disbelievers. God created the cosmos with certain characteristic among which the characteristics of the shade. The verse provides an invitation to reflect on the phenomenon of the formation of the shade and how it changes and how it finally disappears in the darkness. The verse alludes to the movements of the earth and the sun; which makes one think of the power of the Creator.

*"And it is He who made the night as a covering for you, and the sleep a rest; and made the day a resurrection."* God created the night as a cover and as time for rest. People and other creatures sleep during the night. Sleep is a sort of death. The night is followed by daylight which brings life to the world, a kind of resurrection from the death of the sleep.

*"And it is He who sends the winds, glad tidings heralding His mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky, That We may give life thereby to a dead land, and We give it as a drink, to Our numerous creatures: livestock and people."* God sends the wind which brings glad tidings of rain. Water is essential for the continuation of life on earth. Some people depend directly on water for irrigation. Those people recognize God's blessings in sending these winds because their whole livelihood is dependent on rain water. Others benefit from rivers, springs and wells which are formed and replenished by rain. The verse emphasizes the purifying function of water, *"We send down purifying water,"* and the fact that water is the basis of life on earth, *"That We may give life thereby to a dead land."*

The following verse takes us from the water's role in physically cleansing life to the Quran's role in the purification of the soul, *"And verily We have repeated it among them that they may take heed, but most of humankind are ungrateful. Had it been Our Will, We could have sent a warner to every town. Therefore, do not listen to the disbelievers, but strive against them with it (the Quran) strenuously."* God explained the Quran to the disbelievers in many different ways so they may heed its meaning but most of them rejected it. The task of the Messenger (PBUH) was enormous. God could have sent others to help him in this task, but the divine wisdom willed that only one person was given this undertaking. He was the seal of the prophets. His task was universal. He brought one single message to the whole world. The Messenger (PBUH) was then commanded to endure, not to listen to the disbelievers and to strive against them with the Quran.



*“It is He who has made the two seas to flow freely. One is fresh and sweet, and the other is salty and bitter; and He placed between the two a barrier and inviolable partition.”* God made the two seas, one fresh and the other salty, to flow freely towards each other until their waters meet however, they never mix together as if there was a physical barrier between the two. Usually, fresh water rivers flow towards salt water seas. The opposite does not normally happen. Thus the freshness of the water river is not spoiled by the salt water from the sea. The fresh water necessary for sustaining human and animal life is protected.

The verses then move from sea and river waters to the water of life, *“It is He who has created humankind from water; then He established for him blood relationships and marriage relationships. Your Lord is All- Powerful.”* Human life springing from water is more miraculous than plant life springing from rain. A single sperm out of thousands of the male sperms unites with one female egg to begin the creation of a complicated creature. Similar eggs and sperms produce different creatures. No one knows how this is done. God is certainly All- Powerful.

Having explored the processes of creation from water coming down from the sky and water produced by the male sperm, it seems obnoxious to worship anyone but God. However, there are still people who do this, *“And they worship, besides God, things that can neither profit them nor harm them; and the disbeliever is a helper (of Evil), against his own Lord.”* The disbelievers support evil against God. They are too insignificant to wage war against God, but when they fight God’s message and messengers they are in effect fighting God. The message to the Messenger (PBUH) is not to worry; God will take care of them. The responsibility of the Messenger (PBUH) is only to deliver the message, *“But We only sent you to give glad tidings and admonition. Say, ‘I ask no reward of you for this, except that whoso wills may take a way to his Lord.’ And put your trust in Him who lives and never dies; and celebrate his praise. He suffices as the Totally-Aware of the sins of His servants.”* The Messenger (PBUH) did not expect compensation from people for his work. In doing his work, the Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to put his trust in God, the Eternal; and to celebrate His praise.

*“It is He who created the heavens and the earth and all that in between, in six days, and firmly established Himself on the Throne (of Authority). He is God the Lord of Mercy. Ask you, then, about Him One who is well informed.”* This verse presents different manifestations of God’s power, the Creator. The word, “days,” mentioned in the verse refers to time periods different from the days that we are familiar with. The earthly days are a product of the solar system which came to being after the heavens and earth were created. The days mentioned in the verse may refer to the phases that the heavens and earth went through to develop to their current form. Only God knows the true meaning of this term since He can only say and it is. The term, *“is firmly established on the Throne,”* is a reference to God’s control and authority. In spite of His absolute authority and total control He is the Lord of Mercy. You can only ask one who is well informed about God and who else is more informed about God except God Himself.

The disbelievers respond to the call to worship God insolently, *“When it is said to them, ‘Prostrate to (God) the Lord of Mercy,’ they say, ‘And what is the Lord of Mercy? Shall we prostrate to that which you command us?’ And it increases their aversion (to the Truth).”* This is an ugly picture for a people who are insolent towards God. It is not surprising then that these people would treat the Messenger (PBUH) insolently. They claim that they do not know who is the Lord of Mercy? But they only show their aversion to the name of God, the Lord of Mercy.

The Quran responds to their query by praising and exalting God, *“Blessed is He who made constellations in the skies, and placed therein a lamp and a moon giving light; and it is He who made the night and the day to follow each other, for him who desires to remember, or desires to be thankful.”* The response alludes to the power of the Creator who created the constellations, the sun, and the moon. He controls the sequence of the day and the night. Without this perpetual alternation of day and night life would not have possible on earth. These are signs for those who want to remember the blessings of God and be grateful to Him.

### **Verses 63 to 77:**

63. *And the servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk on earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace;"*
64. *Those who spend the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing;*
65. *Those who say, "Our Lord, avert from us the torment of Hell, for its torment is indeed a grievous affliction;*
66. *Evil indeed it is as a dwelling place, and as a place to rest in.”*
67. *Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between these (extremes);*
68. *Those who do not invoke with God, any other deity, nor take the life which God has made sacred except in (course of) justice, nor commit adultery; and he who does this shall pay the penalty.*
69. *On the Day of Judgment, he will receive double the torment, and he will dwell therein in ignominy;*
70. *Except for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds, God will change the evil of such persons into good, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
71. *And whosoever repents and does good he will certainly repent toward God with true repentance.*
72. *Those who do not offer false testimony, and if they pass by vain speech, they pass by it with dignity;*
73. *And those who, when they are reminded of the revelations of their Lord, do not fall upon them deaf and blind.*
74. *And those who say, "Our Lord, grant us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the God conscious."*
75. *Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their perseverance. They shall be met therein with salutations and peace,*
76. *Dwelling therein forever; how beautiful a dwelling place and a place of rest.*
77. *Say (to the disbelievers), “My Lord would not concern Himself with you but for your prayer. But now you have denied (the Truth), therefore there will be judgment.” (25: 63 -*

77)

The following verses describe the attributes of the servants of the Lord of Mercy. These traits are the fruits of a long battle between guidance and misguidance; a battle between the messengers of God and the ungrateful disbelievers. The name “servants of the Lord of Mercy” is an honor bestowed on those who have special characteristics detailed in these verses. The verses list the traits that a person worthy of the name, “a servant of God,” should have. The first trait is, “*And the servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk on earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, ‘Peace.’*” The servants of God walk in an easy manner showing no pride or arrogance. It is a walk that reflects tranquility, security, and confidence. It does not show submissiveness nor weakness. They do not pay attention to vain talk and if someone spoke to them in an inappropriate way they respond by saying, “Peace.”

*“Those who spend the night before their Lord, prostrating and standing; those who say, ‘Our Lord, avert from us the torment of Hell, for its torment is indeed a grievous affliction; evil indeed it is as a dwelling place, and as a place to rest in;’”* The verse uses the two components of prayers, “*prostrating and standing,*” as a representation of the of the movements that the servants of God busy themselves with during the night while the people are sleeping comfortably in their beds. The servants of God spend the night in sincere prayers to their Lord, they stand to Him alone, and they prostrate themselves to Him alone. In their prayer they call upon their Lord to save them from the torment of Hellfire. They did not see Hellfire but they read about it in the Quran and heard about from the Messenger (PBUH) and what they read and what they heard filled their hearts with fear. This fear is one of the fruits of their strong faith and belief in the truth of what they read and what they heard. They belittle their good deeds and recognize they are in desperate need of God’s mercy to save them from Hellfire.

*“Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between these (extremes).”* This is a trait that Islam instills in both Muslim individuals and communities. It is the trait of maintaining a well-balanced life in all aspects. Islam recognizes the right of personal ownership, however it does not allow individuals to spend their wealth freely without imposing limits. Muslims have to follow a well-balanced plan when it comes to spending money. This plan is balanced between extravagance and niggardliness.

The belief in the oneness of God and abstaining from committing capital sins are among the traits of the servants of God, “*Those who do not invoke with God, any other deity, nor take the life which God has made sacred except in (course of) justice, nor commit adultery; and he who does this shall pay the penalty; on the Day of Judgment he will receive double the torment, and he will dwell therein in ignominy;*” The belief in the oneness of God is the cornerstone of the religion of Islam. Islam maintains the sanctity of human life and no one is allowed to destroy a human life without a just cause. Adultery opens the door to a life full of social ills. These three traits form a crossroad between two ways of life: a way of life that humankind, who was honored by God, deserves to live and a cheap way of life based on satisfying the carnal desires of human beings. Those who chose the latter way of life will receive their punishment. Not only they will

receive double torment on the Day of Judgment but they will also be humiliated. But the door for repentance is always open, *“Except for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds, God will change the evil of such persons into good, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy, and whosoever repents and does good he will certainly repent toward God with true repentance.”* Not only the repentance of those who repent will be accepted, but God also promised to change their evil deeds into good deeds. This is a blessing and bounty from God that is available for those who repent and are sincere in their repentance. Sincere repentance is accomplished by fulfilling its conditions. These conditions consist of expressing regret for committing the sin, making a sincere intention not to return to the sin, and finally doing good deeds to show the serious intention of repentance.

The servants of God are those, *“who do not offer false testimony, and if they pass by vain speech, they pass by it with dignity.”* We may take the face value of the verse that they do not give a false testimony which may result in bringing harm to someone, or we may extend the verse to cover any involvement whether directly or indirectly in producing a false testament.

Some of their traits is that they do not only have open hearts and minds for receiving admonitions but they also reflect and contemplate these admonitions, *“And those who, when they are reminded of the revelations of their Lord, do not fall upon them deaf and blind.”* The verse contrasts them against the disbelievers who do not think, reflect or contemplate. They simply follow what their forefathers did.

*“And those who say, ‘Our Lord, grant us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the God conscious.’”* One of their traits is that they call upon God to provide them with good spouses and to guide their progeny to the straight path.

This passage then ends with a list of the rewards that God has kept for His servants, *“Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their perseverance. They shall be met therein with salutations and peace, Dwelling therein forever; how beautiful a dwelling place and a place of rest.”* They will be given the highest place in paradise in which they will reside forever.

*“Say (Muhammad to the disbelievers), ‘My Lord would not concern Himself with you but for your prayer. But now you have denied (the Truth), therefore there will be judgment.’”* This whole humanity and the earth they live on are not worth more than an atom in the universe which God created and controls. They are of no concern to God. This ending is in line with the theme of the chapter in comforting the Messenger (PBUH) and belittling the efforts of the disbelievers to ridicule him.

## Sura 26: Al-Shu'araa (The Poets)

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

### Verses 1 to 9:

1. *Ta. Sin. Mim.*
2. *These are verses of the Book that makes (things) clear.*
3. *It may be that you torment yourself with grief, that they do not become believers.*
4. *Had We wished, We could have sent down to them from the sky a sign, to which they would bend their necks in humility.*
5. *Whenever a newly-revealed message from the Lord of Mercy is brought to them, they turn away from it.*
6. *They have indeed rejected (the Message), so they will know soon the truth of what they mocked at.*
7. *Do they not look at the earth, how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein?*
8. *Verily, in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe.*
9. *And verily, your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 1 – 9)*

The main theme of this Sura revolves around the doctrine; as is the case with all the Meccan Suras of the Quran. The Sura discusses the different components of the doctrine: the belief in the Oneness of God, the fear of the Day of Judgment, and the belief in the revelation which the Messenger of God (PBUH) received. In addition, it elaborates on the consequences of disbelief and it provides comfort to the Messenger of God (PBUH) to support him in his struggle against the disbelievers.

“*Ta. Sin. Mi,*” The discursive letters of the Alphabet at the beginning of the Sura allude to the fact that the Quran has been composed using the letters of the Arabic Alphabet. The disbelievers knew the language but they were unable to compose a similar text. The subsequent verse connects the letters to the Book, “*These are verses of the Book that makes (things) clear.*” The narrative then turns to comforting the Messenger (PBUH), “*It may be that you torment yourself with grief, that they do not become believers.*” One senses a hint of rebuke in the wording of the verse for the Messenger’s (PBUH) sadness caused by the rejection of the Quran by the idolaters of Mecca. The verse comforted the Messenger (PBUH) telling him that it was not his fault that they denied him and rejected the Quran. Had God willed He would have forced them to believe, “*Had We wished, We could have sent down to them from the sky a sign, to which they would bend their necks in humility.*” But it is God’s will that the evidence of the truth of His last Message would be the Quran and not a physical miracle. The Quran is the miracle that testifies to the truth of this Message. The miracle of the Quran has been manifested in various ways. It is manifested in its consistent style, in the logical argument that it provides, and in its appeal to the human heart. It continues to provide the message to all people, at all places, and at all times.

*“Whenever a newly-revealed message from the Lord of Mercy is brought to them, they turn away from it.”* This Message is a mercy that the Lord of Mercy bestowed on His creatures. But they rejected it, therefore they have to suffer the consequences, *“They have indeed rejected (the Message), so they will know soon the truth of what they mocked at.”* The verse embodies a dire threat wrapped in a mocking style to address their mocking attitude.

*“Do they not look at the earth, how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein?”* They requested a physical miracle to support the Message, while they ignored all the signs around them which testify to the power of God. The verse refers to the miracle of growing plants from the earth. It alerts the human mind to reflect on the signs of God in the universe around us. These signs point to the unity of the creation and the role of the human being as part of this creation, *“Verily, in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe.”* Many people ignore these signs and refuse to believe. However, God is both Exalted in might and Most Merciful, *“And verily, your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”* God has the power to produce these signs but He also exercises His mercy and sends messengers to guide people to the right path before He holds them accountable.

### **Verses 10 to 69:**

10. *And when your Lord called to Moses, "Go to the wrongdoers,*
11. *The people of Pharaoh. Will they not be conscious of God?"*
12. *He said, "My Lord, I do fear that they will call me a liar,*
13. *And that my breast will tighten and my tongue will not be fluent, so send Aaron too.*
14. *And they have a charge of crime against me; and I fear they may slay me."*
15. *God said, "No (they will not). Go both of you, with Our signs; We are with you, and will be listening.*
16. *So go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh, and say, 'We have been sent by the Lord of the worlds;*
17. *Send the Children of Israel with us.'"*
18. *(Pharaoh) said, "Did we not raise you as a child among us? And did you not stay with us for many years of your life?*
19. *And you did your deed which you did, and you were of the ungrateful."*
20. *Moses said, "I did it then, I was misguided when I did it.*
21. *So I fled from you when I feared you; but my Lord has invested me with judgment (wisdom) and appointed me as one of the messengers.*
22. *And this is the favor which you remind me with - that you enslaved the Children of Israel."*
23. *Pharaoh said, "And what is the 'Lord of the worlds?'"*
24. *(Moses) said, "The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and everything in between, if you only have certitude."*
25. *(Pharaoh) said to those present, "Do you hear (what he says)?"*

26. *(Moses) said, "He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers."*
27. *(Pharaoh) said, "Indeed your messenger who has been sent to you is mad."*
28. *(Moses) said, "Lord of the East and the West, and everything between them, if you only have sense."*
29. *(Pharaoh) said, "If you take any god other than me, I will certainly put you in prison."*
30. *(Moses) said, "Even if I showed you a clear and convincing sign?"*
31. *(Pharaoh) said, "Show it then, if you are telling the truth."*
32. *So (Moses) threw his staff, and suddenly it became a serpent, plain (for all to see).*
33. *And he drew out his hand, and it was white for all the observers to see.*
34. *(Pharaoh) said to the Chiefs around him, "This is indeed a learned sorcerer.*
35. *His plan is to get you out of your land by his sorcery; what do you advise?"*
36. *They said, "Keep him and his brother for a while, and send messengers to the cities;*
37. *Who will bring you every accomplished sorcerer."*
38. *So the sorcerers were gathered together for the appointment on a specified day,*
39. *And the people were asked, "Will you congregate?*
40. *That we may follow the sorcerers if they win?"*
41. *So when the sorcerers arrived, they said to Pharaoh, "Shall we be rewarded if we win?"*
42. *He said, "Yes, and you shall be among those who are favored by me."*
43. *Moses said to them, "Throw whatever you will throw."*
44. *So they threw their ropes and their staffs, and said, "By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win."*
45. *Then Moses threw his rod, and at once it swallowed up all the falsehoods which they faked.*
46. *The sorcerers fell down in prostration,*
47. *They said, "We believe in the Lord of the Worlds,*
48. *The Lord of Moses and Aaron."*
49. *(Pharaoh) said, "Did you believe in him before I give you permission? He must be your leader, who has taught you sorcery. But soon you shall know. I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross."*
50. *They said, "That will do us no harm. We shall return to our Lord.*
51. *Our only desire is that our Lord will forgive us our faults, since we were the first to believe."*
52. *And We inspired Moses. "Travel by night with my servants; for surely you shall be pursued."*
53. *Then, Pharaoh sent messengers to (all) the cities,*
54. *(Saying), "These (Israelites) are but a small band,*
55. *And they are enraging us;*
56. *But we are all cautious of them."*
57. *So We drove them out of gardens, springs,*
58. *Treasures, and every kind of honorable position.*
59. *Thus it was, but We made the Children of Israel inheritors of such things.*
60. *Then they pursued them at sunrise.*

61. *And when the two groups saw each other, the people of Moses said, "We shall definitely be overtaken."*
62. *(Moses) said, "By no means, my Lord is with me. Soon will He guide me."*
63. *Then We inspired Moses, "Strike the sea with your staff." It parted, and each separate part became like a huge, firm mountain.*
64. *And We brought the other party near.*
65. *We delivered Moses and all who were with him;*
66. *And We drowned the others.*
67. *Verily in this is a Sign, but most of them do not believe.*
68. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 10 – 68)*

This episode of the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH) is narrated in a way consistent with the theme of the present Sura. The focus of the story is on aspects of the consequences of rejecting the Message and how God supports His messengers and the believers even when they do not have the material power needed for victory on earth. The Sura draws a parallel between the conditions of the Children of Israel in Egypt and the Muslims in Mecca.

Different episodes of the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH) have been narrated so far in several Suras of the Quran: Al-Baqara (Chapter 2), Al-Maidah (Chapter 5), Al-A'raf (Chapter 7), Yunus Chapter (10), Al-Israa (Chapter 17), Al-Kahf (Chapter 18), and Taha (Chapter 20). In addition, it has been also referred to in other Suras as well. Each of these episodes focused on an aspect of the story which is closely related to the theme of the Sura in which it was narrated, in addition to the episodes provided appropriate arguments which supported the theme of the Suras. This episode from the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH) consists of seven scenes. The first scene describes God's assignment to Moses (PBUH) to become a messenger of God. The second scene depicts the confrontation between Pharaoh and Moses (PBUH). The third scene describes Pharaoh's scheme to defeat Moses (PBUH). The fourth scene depicts the dialogue between Pharaoh and his magicians before the actual confrontation with Moses (PBUH). The fifth scene is the scene of the confrontation between Moses (PBUH) and the magicians which Pharaoh brought to defeat Moses (PBUH). The sixth scene consists of two parts: the first deals with God inspiration to Moses to flee with the Children of Israel and the second deals with Pharaoh's call to assemble an army to follow them. The last scene describes the problem that faced the Children of Israel when they reached the sea shore and the miracle of the parting sea.

*"And when your Lord called to Moses, 'Go to the wrongdoers, the people of Pharaoh. Will they not be conscious of God?'"* This is the first scene, the scene that narrates the details of the encounter between God and Moses (PBUH) during which Moses (PBUH) was given the responsibility of delivering the Message to Pharaoh and his people. The verse describes the people of Pharaoh as wrongdoers because they wronged themselves by rejecting guidance and they wronged the Children of Israel by persecuting them. They killed their baby boys and they enslaved the adults. How could any people do this? Did they not fear God's wrath which was certain to befall them as a result of their wrongdoing? Moses (PBUH) was familiar with the tyranny of Pharaoh, he therefore



appealed to God for help, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I do fear that they will call me a liar, and that my breast will tighten and my tongue will not be fluent, so send Aaron too. And they have a charge of crime against me; and I fear they may slay me.’”* He made a reference to the impediment in speech that he suffered from. He was worried that this impediment would not allow him to be eloquent enough to convince Pharaoh. This would also make his breast tightens. A reference to this condition was made in Chapter 20 (Taha), *“And remove the impediment from my speech.”* (20: 27). Moses (PBUH) asked God to appoint Aaron (PBUH) to help him in his mission because Aaron (PBUH) was more articulate than him. Aaron (PBUH) could also continue the mission in case the Egyptians tried to kill Moses (PBUH) in revenge for killing an Egyptian before. God accepted his request and assured him that He will be with them, *“God said, ‘No (they will not). Go both of you, with Our signs; We are with you, and will be listening. So go forth, both of you, to Pharaoh, and say, ‘We have been sent by the Lord of the worlds. Send the Children of Israel with us.’”* So they were commanded to go to Pharaoh and deliver the Message and show him God’s signs: the staff and the hand. God assured them of His support. He will be with them and He will be listening to what will transpire. God will be there providing His protection when they will confront Pharaoh. They should have no fear confronting Pharaoh because God is on their side. The Arabic text indicates that they were sent as “one messenger,” because they brought a single message to Pharaoh. It is obvious from these verses and others that Moses (PBUH) was not sent to call Pharaoh and his people to follow his religion. He was only sent to request Pharaoh to deliver the Children of Israel so that they can worship God according to the religion that Prophet Jacob (PBUH) brought before for them.

The narrative moves on to the second scene, where we see the confrontation between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh, *“(Pharaoh) said, ‘Did we not raise you as a child among us? And did you not stay with us for many years of your life? And you did your deed which you did, and you were of the ungrateful.’ Moses said, ‘I did it then, I was misguided when I did it. So I fled from you when I feared you; but my Lord has invested me with judgment (wisdom) and appointed me as one of the messengers. And this is the favor with which you remind me with - that you enslaved the Children of Israel.’”* Pharaoh was shocked when Moses (PBUH) told him that he and Aaron (PBUH) were messengers of the Lord of the Worlds and then asked him to set the children of Israel free. Pharaoh reminded Moses (PBUH) that he was a baby whom they picked up from the river. They adopted him and raised him in the palace. He killed an Egyptian and then fled. Pharaoh wondered how did he become a messenger of God? His surprise was reflected on his sarcastic words, *“Did we not raise you as a child among us?”* Pharaoh wanted to say to Moses (PBUH), *“Is this the reward for saving you and raising you in the palace? and how come you spent all these years in the palace and never said anything about being a messenger of God.”* Pharaoh reminded him with the killing of the Egyptian using euphemism, *“And you did your deed which you did, and you were of the ungrateful,”* to magnify the effect of the deed showing that it was so horrendous that he could not speak of it explicitly. Pharaoh thought that his answer would silence Moses (PBUH) but with God’s help the words came fluently from his mouth, *“I did it then, I was misguided when I did it. So I fled from you when I feared you; but my Lord has invested me with judgment (wisdom) and appointed me as one of the messengers.”* Moses

(PBUH) responded to Pharaoh's sarcasm with sarcasm, reminding him that he ended up in the palace only because the Children of Israel were enslaved and persecuted. His mother threw him in the sea to save him from the fate of being killed at the hands of Pharaoh's soldiers.

Pharaoh continued to question Moses (PBUH), *"And what is the 'Lord of the worlds?'"* The question reveals that Pharaoh found Moses' (PBUH) claim unbelievable. Moses (PBUH) responded, *"The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and everything between them, if you only have certitude."* He is the Lord of the huge universe; Pharaoh's kingdom is only an atom in this universe. Pharaoh's response reflected his amazement at Moses (PBUH) claim; he asked those who were around him *"Do you hear (what he says)?"* Moses continued to describe the attributes of God, *"He is your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers."* This was a blunt statement directed at Pharaoh's claim that he is god. At this point Pharaoh loses his patience and he becomes agitated, *"Indeed your messenger who has been sent to you is mad."* Pharaoh tried to belittle Moses (PBUH) message and described him as a mad man but Moses (PBUH) continued relentlessly, *"Lord of the East and the West, and everything between them, if you only have sense."*

When his argument with Moses (PBUH) failed, he started threatening Moses (PBUH), *"(Pharaoh) said, 'If you take any god other than me, I will certainly put you in prison.'"* This threat showed that Pharaoh could not respond to Moses' (PBUH) argument with a logical counter argument. However, the threat did not deter Moses (PBUH), he continued, *"Even if I showed you a clear and convincing sign?"* Would Pharaoh imprison Moses (PBUH) even if Moses (PBUH) brought him a convincing proof? This challenge put Pharaoh in a bind. He had to accept Moses' (PBUH) challenge, *"(Pharaoh) said, 'Show it then, if you are telling the truth.'"* Moses (PBUH) displayed his miracles, *"So (Moses) threw his staff, and suddenly it became a serpent, plain (for all to see). And he drew out his hand, and it was white for all the observers to see."* The narrative indicates that the staff actually became a living serpent and that his hand became actually white. This was not a trick of magic; these were actual miracles.

Pharaoh's reaction was quick, *"(Pharaoh) said to the Chiefs around him, 'This is indeed a learned sorcerer. His plan is to get you out of your land by his sorcery; what do you advise?'"* He was impressed by the miracles but he called it magic to attenuate its effect on those who were present. He tried to counter the effect of Moses' (PBUH) miracles by posing the threat that Moses' (PBUH) objective was to get them out of their country using his magic. Then he asked them for their advice. This was also part of the trick; he wanted to appease them by asking for their advice. This was a lip service on his part. Would a god ask his servants for advice? But they were his close followers. They stood to lose if Pharaoh was defeated, so they advised him, *"Keep him and his brother for a while, and send messengers to the cities; who will bring you every accomplished sorcerer."*

Then we move to the scene of the preparations for the meeting between the magicians and Moses (PBUH), *"So the sorcerers were gathered together for the appointment on a specified day, and the people were asked, 'Will you congregate? That we may follow the*

*sorcerers if they win?'"* The verses point to Pharaoh's efforts in mobilizing the people for the showdown between Moses (PBUH) and the magicians. The verse describing the meeting between Pharaoh and the magicians before the showdown portrays their greed. They negotiated their reward, *"So when the sorcerers arrived, they said to Pharaoh, 'Shall we be rewarded if we win?'"* He promised them more than they aspired for, he promised to make them part of his favored company, *"He said, 'Yes, and you shall be among those who are favored by me.'"*

Now we come to the scene for the great showdown, *"Moses said to them, 'Throw whatever you will throw.'"* This was a statement which reflected the confidence that Moses (PBUH) had in God. He was neither intimidated by the number of the magicians who came to challenge him nor by the people who came to witness the showdown. The magicians did their best, *"So they threw their ropes and their staffs, and said, 'By the might of Pharaoh, it is we who will certainly win.'"* The following verse jumps to the conclusion of the scene without giving any intermediate details, *"Then Moses threw his staff, and at once it swallowed up all the falsehoods which they faked."* The magicians prepared for this challenge; they did their best and were sure that they will win. But suddenly all their hopes collapsed. They realized that what they saw was not magic but it was a miracle. They saw the truth and they could not but submit to it, *"The sorcerers fell down in prostration, they said, 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Moses and Aaron.'"* The truth they saw changed them from being a hired hand selling their expertise to Pharaoh to believers in God.

This was a shocking experience for Pharaoh. He mobilized the people and prepared them to see his ultimate victory over the Children of Israel. But the magicians let him down and revolted against him in front of his people. His immediate reaction was to take recourse to threatening the magicians, *"(Pharaoh) said, 'Did you believe in him before I give you permission? He must be your leader, who has taught you sorcery. But soon you shall know.'"* How dare they believe before taking Pharaoh's permission? Then he accused them of being complicit in Moses' (PBUH) conspiracy. Then he escalated the tone of his threats, *"I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross."* However, it was too late for the magicians to be deterred by threats. They tasted the sweetness of faith which touched their hearts. Their faith gave them the strength to challenge the tyranny of Pharaoh, *"They said, 'That will do us no harm. We shall return to our Lord. Our only desire is that our Lord will forgive us our faults, since we were the first to believe.'"* The faith filled their hearts with confidence and security; faith made them rise above the material world that they lived; they yearned to be connected with God.

The narrative jumps over a number of years during which Moses (PBUH) continued to live in Egypt. The details of what happened during these years are mentioned in Surat Al-A'raf (Chapter 7). The following verses describe how Moses (PBUH) and his people fled Egypt, *"And We inspired Moses. 'Travel by night with my servants; for surely you shall be pursued.' Then Pharaoh sent messengers to (all) the cities, (Saying), 'These (Israelites) are but a small band, and they are enraging us; but we are all cautious of them.'"* God inspired Moses (PBUH) to travel by night with his people. The travel was

well planned before hand. Moses (PBUH) knew that Pharaoh and his soldiers will follow them. Pharaoh, on the other hand started mobilizing his army to pursue the Children of Israel.

The narrative then moves to describe the consequences of the tyranny of Pharaoh, “*So We drove them out of gardens, springs, treasures, and every kind of honorable position; thus it was, but We made the Children of Israel inheritors of such things.*” When they went out to pursue the Israelites they met their doom. They never returned back to their comfortable life in which they enjoyed gardens, springs, and the treasures they had. The verse mentioned that the Israelites inherited these treasures, but it is not known in history that the Israelites ever went back to Egypt. The scholars explain that the verse does not mean that the Israelites actually inherited what the Egyptians left behind but they inherited similar gardens, springs, and treasures.

After this short digression the verses turn back to the last scene in this episode, “*Then they pursued them at sunrise. And when the two groups saw each other, the people of Moses said, ‘We shall definitely be overtaken.’*” The Egyptians followed the Israelites at sunrise. The Israelites having reached the seashore and seeing that they were being followed, they panicked. They braced themselves to be overtaken, but Moses (PBUH) was confident of God’s promise, “*(Moses) said, ‘By no means, my Lord is with me. Soon will He guide me.’*” He was certain of God’s help. This help came in an inspiration, “*Then We inspired Moses, ‘Strike the sea with your staff.’ It parted, and each separate part became like a huge, firm mountain.*” The miracle happened and the sea parted. The Children of Israel crossed the sea walking. Pharaoh must have been shocked by the surprise. Then he and his soldiers continued to pursue the Israelites, “*And We brought the other party near. We delivered Moses and all who were with him; and We drowned the others.*” God’s plan was completed; the Israelites were saved and the Egyptians were drowned. This is certainly a sign, but not many people believe even when they see these signs, “*Verily in this is a Sign, but most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*”

## **Verses 69 to 104**

69. *And recite to them the story of Abraham.*
70. *When he said to his father and his people, “What do you worship?”*
71. *They said, “We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them.”*
72. *He said, “Do they listen to you when you call (on them);*
73. *Or do they benefit or harm you?”*
74. *They said, “No, but we found our fathers doing so.”*
75. *He said, “Do you then see whom you have been worshipping,*
76. *You and your fathers before you?*
77. *Indeed, they are enemies to me; except the Lord of the Worlds;*
78. *Who created me, and it is He who guides me.*
79. *And who gives me food and drink.*
80. *And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.*
81. *And who will cause me to die, and then bring me to life.*

82. *And who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgment.*
83. *My Lord, grant me wisdom, and join me with the righteous.*
84. *And grant me honorable mention on the tongue of truth among the later generations.*
85. *And make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss.*
86. *And forgive my father, for he was among those who have gone astray.*
87. *And do not disgrace me on the Day when people will be resurrected;*
88. *The Day on which neither wealth nor children will be of benefit;*
89. *Except those who come to God with a sound heart.*
90. *And the Garden will be brought near to those who are God conscious.*
91. *And the Hellfire will be placed in full view to those who had gone astray.*
92. *And it shall be said to them, "Where are the (gods) you worshipped,*
93. *Besides God. Can they help you or help themselves?"*
94. *Then they will be thrown headlong into the (Fire), they and those who had gone astray,*
95. *And the soldiers of Iblis all together.*
96. *They will say there in their mutual bickering,*
97. *"By God, we were truly in evident error,*
98. *When we held you as equals with the Lord of the Worlds.*
99. *And our seducers were only those who were steeped in guilt.*
100. *Now, we have none to intercede on our behalf.*
101. *Nor do we have a single friend.*
102. *If we only had another chance, we shall truly be of those who believe."*
103. *Verily, in this is a sign but most of them do not believe.*
104. *And verily, your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 69 – 104)*

The following verses narrate the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to narrate it to the idolaters of Mecca. They claimed that they were the descendants of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and that they were following his religion. The story showed them that the practices which they adopted were foreign to Abraham's (PBUH) religion. Different episodes of this story were mentioned in other Suras. Each episode focused on a theme which was congruent to the theme of the Sura.

*"And recite to them the story of Abraham."* The idolaters of Mecca claimed that they were followers of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to narrate to them the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) so that they would realize that their claim was far from the truth and so that they would recognize that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) disapproved of the worship of idols practiced by his father and his people, *"When he said to his father and his people, 'What do you worship?'"* They responded, *"We worship idols, and we remain constantly in attendance on them."* So they knew that those whom they worshipped were mere idols. Abraham (PBUH) tried to raise their awareness of the stupidity of what they were doing, *"He said, 'Do they listen to you when you call (on them); do they benefit or harm you?'"* How could these people worship an idol which did not hear them when they call upon it? His people did not attempt to refute his argument but simply ignored it saying, *"No, but we found our fathers doing so."* It is an embarrassing response, but they had the audacity to use it. They stated that the only

reason they were worshipping idols was that they saw their fathers do it. Abraham (PBUH) tried to respond strongly announcing that he hated these idols, *“He said, ‘Do you then see whom you have been worshipping, You and your fathers before you? Indeed, they are enemies to me; except the Lord of the Worlds;’”* He announced that he will not follow in the footsteps of his father. This verse established a principle that the obligation to the faith is more important than the obligation to kin relationship. Abraham (PBUH) realized that some of his people may have worshiped God, hence his statement, *“except the Lord of the Worlds.”*

Abraham (PBUH) continued to describe his Lord, *“Who created me, and it is He who guides me.”* The statement shows the close relationship between Abraham (PBUH) and his Lord. Abraham (PBUH) put his trust in his Lord, he loved Him, and he lived every moment of his life remembering Him. God created him; God knows everything about him. God guided him to the straight path. This is a statement which reflects Abraham’s (PBUH) absolute submission to God. He then explained how God takes good care of him, *“And who gives me food and drink. And when I am ill, it is He who cures me.”* Then he expressed his absolute faith in God who is the Creator of life and death; and who will resurrect people on the Day of Judgment, *“And who will cause me to die, and then bring me to life. And who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgment.”* Abraham’s (PBUH) ultimate hope is to be forgiven by God on the Day of Judgment. This is the ultimate hope of those who are God conscious. Abraham (PBUH) summarized in these statements the basic tenets of the true doctrine: the belief in the Oneness of God, the belief that God has complete control over His servants, the belief in the inevitability of resurrection, and the belief that people will be held accountable for what they have done during their lifetimes on earth. These were the tenets which his people rejected.

Abraham (PBUH) asked God in humility to accept his prayers, *“My Lord, grant me wisdom, and join me with the righteous. And grant me honorable mention on the tongue of truth among the later generations. And make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss; and forgive my father, for he was among those who have gone astray. And do not disgrace me on the Day when people will be resurrected; the Day on which neither wealth nor children will be of benefit; except those who come to God with a sound heart.”* In this long supplication, Abraham (PBUH) never asked for worldly gains, he did not even ask for good health. He asked for better and higher things. He asked for wisdom which will help him differentiate between true and false values, so he can remain on the straight path that leads to God. He asked to be one of righteous, a request which reflects Abraham’s (PBUH) humility and piety. He asked that God extends his call to the later generations. This may be the same prayer that he made in a different place when he prayed, *““Our Lord, accept (this service) from us. Indeed, You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient. Our Lord, make us bow to You in submission, and of our progeny a people who bow to You in submission; and show us our way of worship; and relent towards us. Verily, You are the Ever-Relenting, Giver Mercy. Our Lord, and raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your revelations, and shall instruct them in the Scripture and in wisdom and purify them. Verily, You are the Eminent, Wise.”* (2: 128-129) This was the prayer that God accepted; the prayer that was fulfilled thousands of years after it had been made.

He then asked that God make him of those who reside in Paradise, *“And make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss.”* He asked before to be one of the righteous and the righteous are destined to live in Paradise. Then He asked God to forgive his father in spite of the harsh treatment that he received from him. Abraham (PBUH) did promise his father to ask God to forgive him, and he fulfilled this promise. The Quran has explained later that it is not appropriate to ask God to forgive those who associate partners with Him and that the reason that Abraham (PBUH) made this request was that he had promised his father to do so. However, when Abraham (PBUH) realized that his father was God’s enemy he absolved himself from any relationship to his father. *“The prayer of Abraham for the forgiveness of his father was only because of a promise he had promised him, but when it had become clear to him that he (his father) was an enemy to God he (Abraham) disowned him.”* (9:114) This is one of the basic Islamic values. The most important bond that brings people together is the bond of the faith in God. This bond is the foundation of all other bonds that bring people together.

Abraham (PBUH) finished his prayer by asking God, *“And do not disgrace me on the Day when people will be resurrected; the Day on which neither wealth nor children will be of benefit; except those who come to God with a sound heart.”* This prayer reflected his sheer apprehension about the Day of Judgment. It reflected his appreciation of the importance of being sincere in faith to God, the importance of purifying the heart from all sinful feelings, and the importance of dedicating the heart completely to the belief in God.

The following verses describe some of the scenes of the Day of Judgment which Abraham (PBUH) prayed God to save him from, *“And the Hellfire will be placed in full view to those who had gone astray. And it shall be said to them, “Where are the (gods) you worshipped, besides God. Can they help you or help themselves?” Then they will be thrown headlong into the (Fire), they and those who had gone astray, and the soldiers of Iblis all together. They will say there in their mutual bickering, ‘By God, we were truly in evident error, when we held you as equals with the Lord of the Worlds.’”*

On the Day of Judgment, the Paradise will be brought near to those who were conscious of their Lord and who feared His punishment. Hellfire will be clear to be seen by those who lost their way and denied the Day of Judgment. A rhetorical question will be posed to them, *“Where are the (gods) you worshipped, besides God. Can they help you or help themselves?”* Then they will be, *“thrown headlong into the (Fire), they and those who had gone astray, and the soldiers of Iblis all together. They will say there in their mutual bickering,”* They will bicker with their idols, *“By God, we were truly in evident error, when we held you as equals with the Lord of the Worlds. And our seducers were only those who were steeped in guilt.”* They will have no friend or helper, *“Now, we have none to intercede on our behalf. Nor do we have a single friend.”* They will wish that they were given a second chance, *“If we only had another chance, we shall truly be of those who believe.”* But it will be too late. This group of verses ends with the same comments that usually come at the end of the stories which describe the fate of those who denied the messengers and went astray, *“Verily in this is a sign but most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”*

## Verses 105 to 122

105. *The people of Noah rejected the messengers.*  
106. *When their brother Noah said to them, "Will you not be conscious of God?"*  
107. *I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you.*  
108. *So be conscious of God, and obey me.*  
109. *I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.*  
110. *So be conscious of God, and obey me."*  
111. *They said, "Shall we believe in you when it is the meanest (of people) that followed you?"*  
112. *He said, "And what do I know as to what they do?"*  
113. *Their account is only with my Lord, if you could (but) realize.*  
114. *I am not going to drive away those who believe.*  
115. *I am sent only as a clear warner."*  
116. *They said, "Noah, if you do not desist, you shall be stoned."*  
117. *He said, "My Lord, my people have rejected me.*  
118. *Judge You, then, between me and them openly, and deliver me and the believers who are with me."*  
119. *So We delivered him and those with him, in the Ark filled (with all creatures).*  
120. *Thereafter, We drowned those who remained behind.*  
121. *Verily in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe.*  
122. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 106 – 122)*

The narrative in the Quran does not follow a chronological order. The next few verses address the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH). Different aspects of the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH) have been dealt with in several Suras of the Quran. The presentation in this Sura focuses on Noah's (PBUH) call to his people to become conscious of God telling them that he did not expect any reward from them. Those who were powerful among his people refused to associate themselves with the poor people who followed Noah (PBUH). His answer was clear; he was not going to abandon the poor believers who followed him because they were poor.

*"The people of Noah rejected the messengers."* The narrative started with an outline of the conclusion of the story then, the details followed. It is interesting to note that the verse wording indicated that Noah's (PBUH) people rejected the "messengers" while in fact they only rejected Noah (PBUH). This is a powerful indication that God sent all the messengers with the same message. So, when a people reject one messenger, it is as if they rejected all messengers.

*"When their brother Noah said to them, 'Will you not be conscious of God? I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of God, and obey me. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds. So be conscious of God, and obey me.'" This was Noah's (PBUH) message to his people. They should have*



trusted him because they knew him well but they did not give any weight to the relationship that he had with them. He invited them to be conscious of God assuring them that he is a trustworthy messenger of God and reminding them that he was not interested in a worldly reward, his reward is with God. In these few verses he reiterated the concept of God consciousness three times to emphasize its importance.

Their objection was, *“They said, ‘Shall we believe in you when it is the meanest (of people) that followed you?’”* They objected that his followers were the poorest among them. His answer established the basic principle that underlies the mission of the messenger, *“He said, ‘And what do I know as to what they do? Their account is only with my Lord, if you could (but) realize. I am not going to drive away those who believe. I am sent only as a clear warner.’”* All what Noah (PBUH) was commanded to do was to deliver the message. His only task was to warn people. It is God who holds people accountable for what they do; He rewards and He punishes.

They were stunned by his clear arguments so they took recourse to threats, *“They said, ‘Noah, if you do not desist, you shall be stoned.’”* Noah (PBUH) knew that there was no use in pursuing the argument, so he asked God to judge between him and his people, *“He said, ‘My Lord, my people have rejected me. Judge You, then, between me and them openly, and deliver me and the believers who are with me.’”* God responded favorably to His messenger and delivered him and the believers who followed him, *“So We delivered him and those with him, in the Ark filled (with all creatures).”* The disbelievers were drowned, *“Thereafter We drowned those who remained behind.”* This was God’s sign, *“Verily in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”*

## Verses 123 to 140

123. *The people of 'Ad rejected the messengers.*  
124. *When their brother Hud said to them, “Will you not be conscious of God?  
125. I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you.  
126. So be conscious of God and obey me.  
127. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the  
Worlds.  
128. Do you build a monument on every high place to amuse yourselves?  
129. And do you get for yourselves fine buildings in the hope of living therein  
(for ever)?  
130. And when you strike, you strike like tyrants?  
131. So be conscious of God, and obey me.  
132. Be conscious of Him who has bestowed on you freely all that you know.  
133. He bestowed on you cattle and children,  
134. And gardens and springs.  
135. I truly fear for you the torment of a grievous day.”  
136. They said, “It is the same to us whether you admonish us or do not  
admonish.  
137. We only do what our forefathers did.*

138. *And we will not be tormented.”*  
 139. *So they rejected him, and We destroyed them. Verily in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe.*  
 140. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 123 – 140)*

The people of Hud (PBUH) used to reside in a place called Al-Ahqaf. Al-Ahqaf were sand dunes near Hadramout near Yemen. They came after the people of Noah (PBUH) were drowned. However, they went astray. Their story was told in greater details in Surat Al-A'raf (Chapter 7) and also in Surat Hud (Chapter 11) and Surat Al-Muminun (Chapter 23). Only a brief account of this story is given this Sura, *“The people of 'Ad rejected the messengers. When their brother Hud said to them, “Will you not be conscious of God? I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of God and obey me. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.”* Their Prophet Hud (PBUH) came to them with the same message that other messengers brought from God. He asked them to be conscious of God assuring them that he is giving them a sincere advice and that he did not expect any reward from them.

Hud (PBUH) berated them for their extravagance, *“Do you build a monument on every high place to amuse yourselves? And do you get for yourselves fine buildings in the hope of living therein (for ever)?”* They spent their money and effort erecting great buildings, thinking that these buildings will provide them protection. He also berated them for their ferocity in vengeance, *“And when you strike, you strike like tyrants?”* and finally he advised them to heed his message, *“So be conscious of God, and obey me.”* He reminded them of God’s bounty which He bestowed on them. God gave them great knowledge and great resources, *“Be conscious of Him who has bestowed on you freely all that you know. He bestowed on you cattle and children, and gardens and springs.”* Then he warned them of the torment on the Day of Judgment, *“I truly fear for you the torment of a grievous day.”* However, his words fell on hard hearts. They expressed their rejection in an impertinent way, *“They said, ‘It is the same to us whether you admonish us or do not admonish. We only do what our forefathers did. And we will not be tormented.’”* They were following in the footsteps of their predecessors.

So, they rejected his message and they were punished, *“So they rejected him, and We destroyed them.”* In their story there is a sign but most people do not believe, *“Verily in this is a sign, but most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*

### **Verses 141 to 159:**

141. *The people of Thamud rejected the messengers.*  
 142. *When their brother Salih said to them, “Will you not be conscious of God?”*  
 143. *I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you.*  
 144. *So be conscious of God, and obey me.*  
 145. *I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.*  
 146. *(Do you think) you will be left secure forever in what you have,*

147. *Gardens and springs,*  
 148. *And fields of crops and palm trees with softened fruits?*  
 149. *And you carve houses out of (rocky) mountains with great skill.*  
 150. *So, be conscious of God and obey me;*  
 151. *And do not follow the bidding of those who are given to excesses.*  
 152. *Who make mischief in the land, and mend not (their ways)."*  
 153. *They said, "You are only one of those bewitched.*  
 154. *You are no more than a mortal like us. Bring us a sign, if you are telling*  
*the truth."*  
 155. *He said, "Here is a she-camel. She should have her turn to drink and so*  
*should you, each on a specified day.*  
 156. *Do not touch her with harm, lest the torment of a grievous day seizes*  
*you."*  
 157. *But they ham-strung her. Then they became full of regrets.*  
 158. *But the torment seized them. Verily in this is a sign. And most of them do*  
*not believe.*  
 159. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 141 – 159)*

Prophet Salih (PBUH) repeated to his people the same message, which each previous messenger brought before, but they rejected him, *"The people of Thamud rejected the messengers. When their brother Salih said to them, 'Will you not be conscious of God? I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of God, and obey me. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.'"* Then Prophet Salih (PBUH) continued to remind them of the bounties that God blessed them with. He tried to evoke in their hearts the feeling of gratitude to God for His blessings, *"(Do you think) you will be left secure forever in what you have, gardens and springs, and fields of crops and palm trees with softened fruits? And you carve houses out of (rocky) mountains with great skill."* Do you think that these blessings will last forever? Then he exhorted them to be conscious of God, *"So be conscious of God and obey me; and do not follow the bidding of those who are given to excesses, who make mischief in the land, and mend not (their ways)."* But his call fell on deaf ears and did not reach the solid hearts. They responded, *"You are only one of those bewitched. You are no more than a mortal like us. Bring us a sign, if you are telling the truth."* They thought he was crazy and they were astonished that a mere mortal like them brings them a message from God. They challenged him to bring them a sign. So, he brought them a sign, *"He said, 'Here is a she-camel. She should have her turn to drink and so should you, each on a specified day. Do not touch her with harm, lest the torment of a grievous day seizes you.'"* God sent them the she-camel as a sign. They will alternate their drinking with the she-camel: one day for her and one day for them. He warned them against harming the she-camel. But they did not heed the warning, *"But they ham-strung her. Then they became full of regrets. But the torment seized them. Verily in this is a sign. And most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy."* An evil group of people among them killed the she-camel but they were all responsible and they were all punished for that evil act.

## Verses 160 to 175:

160. *The people of Lut rejected the messengers.*  
161. *When their brother Lut said to them, "Will you not be conscious of God?"*  
162. *I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you.*  
163. *So, be conscious of God and obey me.*  
164. *I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the lord of the Worlds.*  
165. *Of all the creatures in the world, will you approach the males?*  
166. *And you leave those whom God has created for you to be your mates? You are exceeding all bounds."*  
167. *They said, "Lut, if you do not desist, you will assuredly be cast out."*  
168. *He said, "I do detest what you do.*  
169. *My Lord, deliver me and my family from what they do."*  
170. *So We delivered him and his family all,*  
171. *Except an old woman who lingered behind.*  
172. *And We destroyed the rest.*  
173. *And We rained down on them a shower (of brimstone). Evil was the shower on those who were admonished (but heeded not).*  
174. *Verily in this is a sign. But most of them do not believe.*  
175. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 160 – 175)*

The verses tell the story of Prophet Lut (PBUH) and it starts in a way similar to the other stories. Lut (PBUH) started by reassuring his people that he was God's messenger. He came to deliver a message for them to be conscious of God. He reassured them that he was not after a worldly reward. His interest is to guide them and this would start by being conscious of God, "*The people of Lut rejected the messengers. When their brother Lut said to them, 'Will you not be conscious of God? I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of God and obey me. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the lord of the Worlds. Of all the creatures in the world, will you approach the males? And you leave those whom God has created for you to be your mates? You are exceeding all bounds.'*" The people of Lut (PBUH) were practicing homosexuality. Lut (PBUH) called upon them to relinquish this practice but they rejected and threatened him, "*They said, 'Lut, if you do not desist, you will assuredly be cast out.'*" Lut (PBUH) was not originally of this country but he came to it with his uncle Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and he resided with them until God sent him as a messenger to these people. In response to their threat, he told them that he did not like what they were doing, "*He said, 'I do detest what you do.'*" He then continued to pray to God to save him from these people, "*My Lord, deliver me and my family from what they do.*" God delivered him and his family except his wife who approved her people's practices, "*So, We delivered him and his family, all except an old woman who lingered behind. And We destroyed the rest. And We rained down on them a shower (of brimstone). Evil was the shower on those who were admonished (but heeded not). Verily in this is a sign. But most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Merciful.*"

## Verses 176 to 191:

176. *The companions of the thicket rejected the messengers.*  
177. *When, Shu'aib said to them, "Will you not be conscious of God?"*  
178. *I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you.*  
179. *So, be conscious of God and obey me.*  
180. *I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.*  
181. *Give just measure, and do not be of those who cause loss (to others).*  
182. *And weigh using just scales.*  
183. *Do not deprive people of what is rightly theirs. And do not spread mischief in the land.*  
184. *And be conscious of Him who created you and (who created) the earlier generations."*  
185. *They said, "You are only one of those bewitched.*  
186. *You are no more than a mortal like us, and indeed we think you are a liar.*  
187. *Let a piece of the sky to fall on us, if you are truthful."*  
188. *He said, "My Lord knows best what you do."*  
189. *But they rejected him. Then, the torment of the Day of the Shadow seized them, and that was a torment of a grievous day.*  
190. *Verily, in that is a sign; But most of them do not believe.*  
191. *And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. (26: 176 – 191)*

This is the story of Prophet Shu'aib it occurred before Moses time but it comes here because it conveys the same lesson as the other stories narrated in this chapter. The people of the thicket were most probably the people of Median. The geographical position of Median is between Palestine and Hijaz around the Gulf of Aqaba. The first few verses are similar to the first few verses in the previous stories, "*The companions of the thicket rejected the messengers. When, Shu'aib said to them, 'Will you not be conscious of God? I am a trustworthy messenger sent to you. So be conscious of God and obey me. I do not ask you for a reward. My reward is only from the Lord of the Worlds.'*" Then he continued to berate them on the practice of unfair measure in their business, "*Give just measure, and do not be of those who cause loss (to others). And weigh using just scales. Do not deprive people of what is rightly theirs. And do not spread mischief in the land.*" They used to usurp people's rights and use unfair practices in their dealings. Shu'aib (PBUH) tried to dissuade them from these bad practices and remind them of God consciousness, "*And fear Him who created you and (who created) the earlier generations.*" They called him a mad man and a liar, "*They said, 'You are only one of those bewitched. You are no more than a mortal like us, and indeed we think you are a liar.'*" They challenged him to punish them for their transgression, "*Let a piece of the sky to fall on us, if you are truthful.*" He responded saying, "*My Lord knows best what you do.*" And the conclusion of the story came swiftly, "*But they rejected him. Then, the torment of the Day of the Shadow seized them, and that was a torment of a grievous day. Verily in that is a sign; But most of them do not believe. And verily your Lord is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*"

## Verses 192 to 227:

192. *Verily, this is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds.*  
193. *The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down,*  
194. *To your heart that you may be of the warners;*  
195. *In a clear Arabic tongue.*  
196. *And indeed it is mentioned in the Scriptures of previous peoples.*  
197. *Is it not a sign to them that it has been recognized by the scholars of the Children of Israel?*  
198. *Had We revealed it to any of the non-Arabs,*  
199. *And had he recited it to them, they would not have believed in it.*  
200. *So We make it pass straight through the hearts of the criminals.*  
201. *They will not believe in it until they see the grievous torment;*  
202. *But the (torment) will come to them suddenly, while they are unaware;*  
203. *Then they will say, "Shall we be reprieved?"*  
204. *Do they then ask for Our torment to be hastened on?*  
205. *Then have you considered if We do let them enjoy (this life) for a few years,*  
206. *Then there came to them the torment which they were promised?*  
207. *It will not benefit them that they enjoyed (this life).*  
208. *Never did We destroy a town, but it had its warners.*  
209. *As a reminder; and We are never unjust.*  
210. *And the devils did not bring down this (Revelation).*  
211. *It is not in their interest nor in their power.*  
212. *Indeed, they have been removed far from even (a chance of) hearing it.*  
213. *So call not on any other deity with God, or you will be among those who will be tormented.*  
214. *And admonish your nearest kinsfolk,*  
215. *And lower your wing to the believers who follow you.*  
216. *Then if they disobey you, say, "I bear no responsibility for what you do. "*  
217. *And put your trust in the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy,*  
218. *Who sees you when you stand up,*  
219. *And your movements among those who prostrate themselves,*  
220. *For He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*  
221. *Shall I inform you, on whom the devils descend?*  
222. *They descend on every lying, wicked person,*  
223. *(Into whose ears) they pour hearsay vanities, and most of them are liars.*  
224. *Only those who have gone astray follow the poets.*  
225. *Do you not see how they roam aimlessly in every valley?*  
226. *And that they say what they do not do?*  
227. *Except those who believe, and do righteous deeds, and remember God often, and defend themselves only after they have been unjustly attacked. And soon will the unjust know what vicissitudes their affairs will take. (26: 192 – 227)*

The conclusion of the Sura picks up the theme that the Sura started with: the rejection of the Quran by the idolaters of Quraish. This rejection annoyed the Messenger of God

(PBUH). The conclusion emphasizes the nature of the Quran. It is certainly a divine revelation. It was brought down by the angel Gabriel (PBUH) and delivered to the heart of the Messenger (PBUH). The Messenger (PBUH) kept it in his heart and delivered it as he received it in a sound Arabic tongue. The Arabs knew that the Quran was a literary miracle and they recognized the fact that such a text could not have been composed by a human being, *“Verily this is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down, to your heart that you may be of the warners; in a clear Arabic tongue.”*

In addition, it has been mentioned in the previous Scriptures, *“And indeed it is mentioned in the Scriptures of previous peoples. Is it not a sign to them that it has been recognized by the scholars of the Children of Israel?”* The idolaters rejected the Quran not for the lack of evidence that it was a divine revelation but because they were stubborn. Even if it were revealed to a non-Arab they would have still not believed, *“Had We revealed it to any of the non-Arabs, and had he recited it to them, they would not have believed in it.”*

*“So, We make it pass straight through the hearts of the criminals. They will not believe in it until they see the grievous torment; But the (torment) will come to them suddenly, while they are unaware; then they will say, ‘Shall we be reprieved?’”* They were stubborn in their disbelief to the extent that it passed through their hearts but left no impact on them. They will never change their minds until they see the torment, then they will beg for getting a second chance. They used to challenge the Messenger (PBUH) to hasten God’s torment, thinking it will never come, *“Do they then ask for Our torment to be hastened on? Then have you considered if We do let them enjoy (this life) for a few years, then there came to them the torment which they were promised? It will not benefit them that they enjoyed (this life).”*

God implanted the belief in Him in the initial natural disposition of humankind. That belief will grow in the human nature as long as it is kept sound and uncorrupt. God also placed many signs around us. When people forget about these signs or their nature deviate from the initial sound state, God sends His messengers to warn people and to bring them back to the straight path, *“Never did We destroy a town, but it had warners. As a reminder; and We are never unjust.”*

The following verses address a new theme, *“And the devils did not bring down this (Revelation). It is neither in their interest nor in their power. Indeed, they have been removed far from even (a chance of) hearing it.”* The previous verses ascertained that the Quran is a divine revelation. These verses reiterate the same fact by refuting the claim that it was brought down by the devil. It is not appropriate to say that the devils brought it down. The Quran preaches goodness and guidance and the devils preach misguidance, corruption and disbelief. They have been kept segregated from it, so they could not even listen to it.

The verses move to yet another theme, warning the Messenger of God (PBUH) from associating partners with God, even though he was so remote from committing such act, *“So call not on any other deity with God, or you will be among those who will be*

*tormented.*” The Messenger (PBUH) could not have committed this sin, however the verse is meant to magnify the consequences of associating partners with God.

Then the Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to warn the nearest of kin and to put his trust in God, *“And admonish your nearest kinsfolk.”* When this verse was revealed, the Messenger (PBUH) went to the top of mount Al-Safa and called upon his nearest of kin, they all came to listen to what he was going to say. He asked them first, “If I were to tell you that people on horses are gathered in the valley behind this mountain waiting for an opportune moment to attack you, would you believe me?” They said, “Yes.” He then said, “I was sent as a warner, to save you from the torment of Hellfire.” So, he did what he was commanded to do and fulfilled his responsibility towards his kinsfolk.

The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to treat his followers kindly, *“And lower your wing to the believers who follow you.”* The Messenger (PBUH) gave the highest example of humility and kindness in dealing with his followers all his life. His manners were a physical depiction of the commandments of the Quran. He was not responsible for those who deviate, *“Then if they disobey you, say, ‘I bear no responsibility for what you do.’”*

*“And put your trust in the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy, who sees you when you stand up, and your movements among those who prostrate themselves, for He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* He was told to put his trust in God, the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy. He sees you when you pray, and when you are alone. God is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.

Then, the narrative turns again to the topic of the Quran. First, it was ascertained that the Quran is a divine revelation. Then the verses refuted the claim that it has been brought down by the devils. The next few verses indicate that the Messenger of God (PBUH), who is an example of trustworthiness, honesty and credibility could not have been associated with devils. The devils are only associated with people who are liars and wicked, *“Shall I inform you, on whom the devils descend? They descend on every lying, wicked person, (Into whose ears) they pour hearsay vanities, and most of them are liars.”* There were priests among the Arabs who claimed that they were able to communicate with the devils. Through these communications they were able to predict future events. They were mostly lying. In any case, they were not in the business of guiding people to the right path, or commanding people to be conscious of God. The Messenger (PBUH) was definitely not one of these priests.

The idolaters of Mecca claimed that the Quran was a form of poetry. But the Quran was written using a style far different from poetry and the behavior of the Messenger (PBUH) was completely different from the behavior of the known poets. So the verses came to refute that claim, *“Only those who have gone astray follow the poets. Do you not see how they roam aimlessly in every valley? And that they say what they do not do.”*

The Quran provides a structured way of life for humankind. Poets create their own imaginary world and are creative about what they do and what they would like to do.



However, it should be stressed that Islam does not fight poetry and poets as such but it frowns upon the style which is motivated by whims, desires and emotions that are not guided by any principle or value.

There were Muslim poets whose style did conform to the Islamic values and principles and these were exempt from the criticism that the Quran leveled at the Arab poets of that time, *“Except those who believe, and do righteous deeds, and remember God often, and defend themselves only after they have been unjustly attacked.”*

The chapter concludes by waging a threat to the disbelievers, *“And soon will the unjust know what vicissitudes their affairs will take.”*

## Sura 27: Al-Naml (The Ants)

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

### **Verses 1 to 6:**

1. *Ta, Sin. These are verses of the Quran and the Book that makes (things) clear;*
2. *Guidance and glad tidings for the believers,*
3. *Those who establish regular prayers and pay the poor-due and who have certitude in the Hereafter.*
4. *Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have indeed made their deeds seem pleasing to them; and so they wander blindly.*
5. *Those are they, for whom is the worst of torment, and in the Hereafter they will be the greatest losers.*
6. *You certainly receive the Quran from the One who is Wise, Omniscient. (27: 1 - 6)*

This is a Meccan Sura, it was revealed after Surat Al-Shu'ara (Chapter 26). Both of them have the same style. The Sura starts with an introduction which outlines the theme of the Sura and ends with an appropriate conclusion. Between the introduction and the conclusion, stories are narrated which elaborate on the theme and explain the similarities between the people in the stories and the people of Mecca. The main theme of the Sura is the doctrine: the belief in the Oneness of God, the inevitability of the Hereafter, the belief in God's revelations, the belief in the unseen, and the belief in the unbounded power of God.

"*Ta, Sin.*" The Sura starts with letters of the Arabic alphabet to draw the attention to the fact that the Quran was composed using these letters. Then, the Quran is mentioned, "*These are verses of the Quran and the Book that makes (things) clear.*" The Book is itself the Quran. The Quran is described as guidance and glad tidings, "*Guidance and glad tidings for the believers.*" So the Quran itself is guidance, it provides guidance to the believers in all matters. It also brings glad tidings to the believers about this life and the Hereafter. This Quran is guidance to the believers because it addresses the heart. Hearts which are open to the belief in God will be able to benefit from the Quran and enjoy its beauty. But hard hearts which are not ready to receive faith will not be able to benefit from it. The Quran embodies great treasures of knowledge which can only be accessed by those who believe. Belief is the key which will open these treasures and allow people to benefit from it.

The verses go on to outline the characteristics of the believers, "*Those who establish regular prayers and pay the poor-due and who have certitude in the Hereafter.*" They establish prayers; they do it in the best way they can. When they pray they are fully devoted to God; feeling the sanctity of the moment when they are in the presence of God. They pay the poor-due. Paying the poor-due purifies their souls from stinginess. They help their brothers and they contribute to the welfare of their community. They are certain of the inevitability of the Hereafter. They are mindful of the Day of Reckoning and that deters them from committing evil deeds. On the other hand, there are those who do not fit this description, "*Those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have indeed made their deeds seem pleasing to them; and so they wander blindly. Those are*

*they for whom is the worst of torment, and in the Hereafter they will be the greatest losers.”* The belief in the Hereafter is the bridle which reins in the whims and desires of the human being; and allows the human being to live a well-balanced life. Those who do not believe in the Hereafter will not control their whims and desires. They will live a hedonistic life. They will find their pleasures in satisfying their physical desires. This is the course which will be followed by those who are not guided. God created humankind with equal propensity for good and evil. God will guide those whose senses are open for receiving guidance but those who block their senses and refuse to receive guidance are left to wander blindly in this life. The end for them is known, *“and in the Hereafter they will be the greatest losers.”*

The introduction to the Sura ends by stating the source of Quran, *“You certainly receive the Quran from the One who is Wise, Omniscient.”* The Arabic text implies that the Quran is a gift from God who is Wise and Omniscient. His wisdom and omniscience are clearly reflected on the Quran, its style, its commands, its guidance, and its methodology.

### **Verses 7 to 14:**

7. *(Remember) when Moses said to his family, “I see a fire; I will bring you from it some news, or I will bring to you from it a burning brand so that you may warm yourselves.*
8. *But when he came to the (fire), he was called, “Blessed is whoever in the fire and whoever is round about it. And Glory be to God, the Lord of the Worlds.*
9. *Moses, I am God, the Eminent, the Wise.*
10. *And throw your staff. But when he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it were a demon, he turned to flee headlong; (but it was said to him), “Moses, fear not. The Messengers shall not fear in My presence,*
11. *I am truly All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy to those who do wrong and then replace their evil with good.*
12. *And put your hand into the bosom of your robe, it will come forth white but unharmed. (This will be one) among nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. They were ever transgressing people.”*
13. *But when Our signs came to them, that should have opened their eyes, they said, “This is clear magic.”*
14. *And they rejected these signs in iniquity and arrogance, even though their souls were convinced of their truth. Then see the consequence for the mischief-makers. (27: 7-14)*

The following verses narrate an episode from the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“(Remember) when Moses said to his family, “I see a fire; I will bring you from it some news, or I will bring to you from it a burning brand so that you may warm yourselves.”* This verse tells about Moses’ (PBUH) trip to Egypt with his family. He lost his way in the desert in a dark cold night. He saw a fire near the mountain. People used to light fires to guide the travelers and to provide a place where they can rest. When Moses (PBUH) saw the fire he felt reassured. He was hopeful that he would get directions for the road at the fire, or he would get a burning stick to start a fire for his family in order that they become warm. Moses (PBUH) went towards the fire, *“But when he came to the (fire), he was called, ‘Blessed is whoever in the fire and whoever is round about it. And Glory be to God, the Lord of the Worlds. Moses, I am God, the Eminent, the Wise.’”* The

passive voice is used to add majesty to the situation, *“he was called.”* Then the voice said, *“Blessed is whoever is in the fire and whoever is round about it.”* So who was in the fire and who was round about it? Most probably that was not a fire like any fire that we are familiar with. It must have been a fire that emanated from the Higher Host, a fire that was lit by the pure spirits of God’s angels. This must have been the fire of guidance. The blessings of God were showered on the angels, *“Blessed is whoever is in the fire,”* and on Moses (PBUH), *“whoever is round about it.”* The universe echoed the rest of the verse, *“I am God, the Eminent, the Wise.”* God declared Himself to His servant as the Eminent the Wise. Moses (PBUH) found the, “news” he was looking for; and what kind of news? And he got the warmth he was looking for, but it was the warmth of guidance to the straight path. The call was made to announce that Moses (PBUH) was chosen to carry the responsibility of the message to the worst tyrant on earth.

Moses (PBUH) had to be trained for the task, *“And throw your staff. But when he saw it moving (of its own accord) as if it were a demon, he turned to flee headlong;”* When Moses (PBUH) threw his staff it became a serpent, full of life. Moses (PBUH) was taken by surprise and he became apprehensive and started running away from the serpent. God called him back, *“Moses, fear not. The Messengers shall not fear in My presence,”* God told him that you are a Messenger and Messengers should not experience fear in the presence of their Lord. Only those who commit wrong should experience fear. But even for those who do wrong but repent and replace the wrong they did with good deeds, God is certainly All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy, *“I am truly All-Forgiving and Giver of Mercy to those who do wrong and then replace their evil with good.”*

God then revealed to Moses (PBUH) the second miracle, *“And put your hand into the bosom of your robe, it will come forth white but unharmed.”* Moses (PBUH) placed his hand into the bosom of his robe and when he took it out he saw that it became white. The hand did not suffer any ailment, so the change did not happen as a result of sickness but it was one of the miracles that God gave him to support his message to Pharaoh and his people, *“(This will be one) among nine signs to Pharaoh and his people. They were ever transgressing people.”* The narrative here does not mention the other seven miracles. They are mentioned in Surat Al- ‘Araf (Chapter 7). These were the years of famine, the diminishing harvest, the flood, the locusts, the lice, the frogs, and the blood. The focus here is on the strength and clarity of the miracles not on their description. One of the objectives of these verses is to stress the absurdity of the denial of Pharaoh and his people to the clear signs of God, *“But when Our signs came to them, that should have opened their eyes, they said, ‘This is clear magic.’”* They dismissed these miracles as magic.

They recognized the strength of the proof but they chose not to believe. They denied the truth, in spite of the fact that they were certain of the veracity of the message, *“And they rejected these signs in iniquity and arrogance, even though their souls were convinced of their truth. Then see the consequence for the mischief-makers.”* This was exactly the response of the chiefs of Quraish. They knew that the Quran is the truth but they rejected it because they were arrogant. They were afraid that submitting to God will deprive them of the status, the interests, and the pleasures they were enjoying.

## Verses 15 to 44:

15. *And We verily gave David and Solomon knowledge and they said, "Praise be to God, who has favored us above many of His believing servants."*
16. *And Solomon became David's heir. He said, "People, we have been taught the language of the birds, and we have been given (abundance) of all things. This surely is an evident blessing."*
17. *And Solomon's armies of the jinn and humankind, and of the birds, were marshaled in ordered ranks before him;*
18. *Till, when they reached the valley of the ants, an ant said, "Ants, enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies unwittingly crush you."*
19. *And (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her speech, and said, "My Lord, enable me to be thankful for Your blessing which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing to You, and include me by Your mercy among Your righteous servants."*
20. *And he took a muster of the birds; and he said, "Why do not I see the hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees?"*
21. *I will certainly punish him with a severe torment, or I will execute him, unless he brings me a valid excuse."*
22. *But the hoopoe tarried not far. He (came up and) said, "I have learnt something that you do not know, and I have come to you from Sheba with confirmed information."*
23. *I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne."*
24. *I found her and her people worshipping the sun besides God. Satan has made their deeds seem pleasing to them, and has kept them away from the straight path, so they became misguided."*
25. *So that they do not worship God, who brings forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth, and who knows what you hide and what you declare."*
26. *God, there is no deity save Him, the Lord of the great Throne."*
27. *(Solomon) said, "Soon we shall see whether you are telling the truth or you are lying."*
28. *Go with this letter of mine and throw it down to them; then turn away and see what (answer) they return."*
29. *The Queen of Sheba (when she received the letter) said, "Chiefs, a noble letter has been delivered to me."*
30. *It is from Solomon, and it is (as follows), 'In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy the Giver of Mercy;*
31. *Do not be haughty with me but come to me in submission (to God).''*
32. *She said, "Chiefs, advise me in my affair; I would not make a decision except in your presence."*
33. *They said, "We are people of might and great power, but the decision is yours, so consider what you will command."*
34. *She said, "Indeed kings, when they enter a country, they ruin it, and subjugate its dignified people. And thus do they behave."*
35. *But I am going to send them a present, and (wait) to see with what (answer) the messengers will return."*

36. *So when (the messengers) came to Solomon, (the King) said, "What! Are you offering me wealth? What God has given me is better than that which He has given you. It is you (and not I) who rejoice in your gift.*
37. *Return to them. We shall verily come upon them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from their land in disgrace, and they will be abased."*
38. *He said (to his own men), "Chiefs, which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?"*
39. *A powerful one from among the jinn said, "I will bring it to you before you rise from your place; indeed, I am strong and trustworthy."*
40. *The one who had knowledge of the Book said, "I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye." Then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, he said, "This is by the Grace of my Lord to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful - and if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly my God is Rich, Generous."*
41. *He said, "Disguise her throne for her that we may see whether she will be guided or remains one of the misguided."*
42. *So when she arrived, she was asked, "Is this your throne?" She said, "It is as though it were the very one." And (Solomon said), "We were given the knowledge before her and we had submitted (to God)."*
43. *And what she worshipped besides God prevented her, surely she was of one of people who disbelieve.*
44. *It was said to her, "Enter the hall." And when she saw it she thought it was a pool and bared her legs. (Solomon) said, "It is a hall, paved with smooth glass." She said, "My Lord, I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, the Lord of the Worlds." (27: 15 - 44)*

The following verses talk about Prophets David and Solomon (PBUT). They were both prophets who were sent to the Children of Israel. The verses narrate a story about Prophet Solomon (PBUH) in detail. The story is about his encounter with the Queen of Sheba. The story starts with a verse about the most important blessing that God showered on his Prophets David and Solomon (PBUT), *"And We verily gave David and Solomon knowledge and they said, 'Praise be to God, Who has favored us above many of His believing servants.'"* They recognized God's blessings and expressed their gratitude to God. The verse does not detail which kind of knowledge God gave David and Solomon (PBUT) to emphasize the value of knowledge as a whole and that it is a blessing from God. All knowledge comes from God. Those whom God bless with knowledge should recognize that God is the source of all knowledge and they should express gratitude to Him. They should use this knowledge in a way that pleases God, for the benefit of humanity. Knowledge should lead its owner to God.

The following verses focus on the story of Solomon (PBUH), *"And Solomon became David's heir. He said, 'People, we have been taught the language of the birds, and we have been given (abundance) of all things. This surely is an evident blessing.'" Solomon (PBUH) expressed his gratitude to God that he gave him the knowledge and the ability to understand the language of the other creatures of God. The Quran tells us, "And there is no animal that walks on the ground nor a bird that flies with its two wings but (they are) communities like yourselves;" (6: 38)*

Members of a community need a language so that they can communicate with each other. Each one of the communities of birds, animals and insects has its own language; which they use in communicating with each other. God gave Solomon (PBUH) the ability to understand these languages. This was one of the miracles that God bestowed on Solomon (PBUH). Another miracle that was bestowed on Solomon (PBUH) was the ability to control and use the jinn and the birds and to perform certain tasks.

*“And Solomon’s armies of the jinn and humankind, and of the birds, were marshaled in ordered ranks before him.”* The Solomon’s (PBUH) army consisted of jinn, humankind, and birds. We do not know much about jinn. The Quran told us that jinn were created from fire. They are able to see human beings but human beings cannot see them. The army went forward until they reached the valley of the ants, *“Till, when they reached the valley of the ants, an ant said, ‘Ants, enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies unwittingly crush you.’”* Solomon (PBUH) heard, understood what the ant said, and smiled. He remembered the grace of God and he expressed his gratitude. He prayed that God would give him the power to continually express his gratitude with all his body and all his senses. He also prayed that God directs him to do good deeds and admits him among the righteous of His servants, *“And (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her speech, and said, ‘My Lord, enable me to be thankful for Your blessing which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing to You, and include me by Your mercy among Your righteous servants.’”*

There are two miracles that need to be noted here. The first is Solomon’s (PBUH) ability to understand what the ant said. The second is the fact that the ant recognized that it was Solomon’s (PBUH) army that was marching towards them.

The following verses narrate the story of Solomon (PBUH), his hoopoe, and the Queen of Sheba, *“And he took a muster of the birds; and he said, ‘Why do not I see the hoopoe? Or is he among the absentees?’”* This is the first scene in the story, Solomon (PBUH) inspecting his army and finding the hoopoe missing. It must have been a special hoopoe that is why his absence was conspicuous. The verse also illustrates one of Solomon’s (PBUH) traits. He was very observant and firm with his soldiers. The hoopoe was missing and he left without permission, it should be punished. But Solomon (PBUH) was a prophet and he was not a tyrant so he deferred his final judgment until he had heard from the hoopoe itself, *“I will certainly punish him with a severe torment, or I will execute him, unless he brings me a valid excuse.”* But the hoopoe came back with surprising news, *“But the hoopoe tarried not far. He (came up and) said, ‘I have learnt something that you do not know, and I have come to you from Sheba with confirmed information. I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun besides God. Satan has made their deeds seem pleasing to them, and has kept them away from the straight path, so they became misguided. So that they do not worship God, who brings forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth, and who knows what you hide and what you declare. God, there is no deity save Him, the Lord of the great throne.”* The hoopoe responded to the king with a bold statement, *“I have learnt something that you do not know.”* This bold statement must have been intended to capture the king’s attention. The hoopoe then continued to tell the details of its discovery. The

hoopoe told the king about the woman who reigns over a people in South Yemen in a kingdom with the name of Sheba. She was given an abundance of everything and she had a great throne. But they were worshipping the sun. The hoopoe deduced that the devil must have lured them away from the straight path. We find ourselves in front of an astonishing bird. The verses not only depict an intelligent bird who understands and expresses itself in an eloquent way but also a bird who believes in God and knew what is right and what is wrong.

Solomon (PBUH) did not hasten to make a decision regarding what he had heard, but wanted first to ascertain the truth, *“(Solomon) said, ‘Soon we shall see whether you are telling the truth or you are lying. Go with this letter of mine and throw it down to them; then turn away and see what (answer) they return.’”* The contents of the letter were not disclosed at this point. The following verse depicts another scene, the scene of the Queen’s court. The Queen was asking her counselors, *“(The Queen of Sheba, when she received the letter) said, ‘Chiefs, a noble letter has been delivered to me. It is from Solomon, and it is (as follows), ‘In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy; do not be haughty with me but come to me in submission (to God).’”* She told them that she received a letter, however she did not know how was the letter delivered. But she described the letter as, *“a noble letter.”* There must have been something about the letter that made her make this statement. In addition, Solomon (PBUH) must have been well known to her and her people. The letter itself was a simple letter. It had only one request, *“Do not be haughty with me but come to me in submission (to God).”* They should not behave arrogantly and they should go to him in submission to God, whose name was at the top of the letter.

Having told them about the contents, she continued to seek their advice, *“She said, ‘Chiefs, advise me in my affair; I would not make a decision except in your presence.’”* This showed her wisdom in handling the situation. Her counselors responded, *“We are people of might and great power, but the decision is yours, so consider what you will command.”* Her response reflected her aversion to violence, *“Indeed kings, when they enter a country, they ruin it, and subjugate its dignified people. And thus do they behave. But I am going to send them a present, and (wait) to see with what (answer) will messengers return.”* She knew the devastation that a country would suffer as a result of war and wanted to avoid this. Furthermore, she wanted to extend a hand for peace. She decided to send Solomon (PBUH) a gift. It was also a way to test what kind of a man Solomon (PBUH) is. Is he after wealth, or is he a man of principle?

The narrative moves to describe the scene when the messengers brought Solomon (PBUH) the queen’s gift, *“(the King) said, ‘What! Are you offering me wealth? What God has given me is better than that which He has given you. It is you (and not I) who rejoice in your gift.’”* Solomon (PBUH) expressed his dismay that the queen did not understand the intent of his call. He declared it loud and clear that he is not after money. His main interest was to guide them to the worship of God alone. He then followed by issuing a dire threat, *“Return to them. We shall verily come upon them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from their land in disgrace, and they will be abased.”*

The verses do not detail what happened after that, what was her response and how it was relayed to Solomon (PBUH). But we understand from the text that Solomon (PBUH) knew that the



queen and her entourage accepted his invitation and were on their way to meet him. He may have also anticipated this from the way she handled the situation and guessed at her intention to avoid war. The following verses describe the deliberations between Solomon (PBUH) and his soldiers about the way to bring her throne to him before she arrives, *“He said (to his own men), ‘Chiefs, which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?’ A powerful one from among the jinn said, ‘I will bring it to you before you rise from your place; indeed, I am strong and trustworthy.’ The one who had knowledge of the Book said, ‘I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye.’”* Why did Solomon (PBUH) want to bring her throne before she arrived? Most probably that was his way of impressing her with his power and resources. One of the jinn offered to bring the throne to him before he had finished his meeting, but the one who had knowledge of the Book said that he could bring it in a twinkling of an eye. The verses do not explain who was that who had the knowledge, nor did they specify which Book that had this knowledge. But we understand that he was a believer and that was given extraordinary powers as a gift from God.

When Solomon (PBUH) saw the throne in front of him, he expressed his gratitude to God, *“Then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, he said, ‘This is by the Grace of my Lord to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful - and if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly my Lord is Rich, Generous’”* Solomon (PBUH) realized the responsibility of being blessed by God and responded by expressing his gratitude. It is a great trial when God bestows His blessings on people. They should recognize the source of the blessings and they should be grateful to Him. God does not need their gratitude but it is for the benefit of the people themselves.

Solomon (PBUH) wanted to surprise the queen, *“He said, ‘Disguise her throne for her that we may see whether she will be guided or remains one of the misguided.’”* It may have been also a way to test the perspicacity of the queen when she was faced with such a surprise. She was quite witty in her response, *“So when she arrived, she was asked, ‘Is this your throne?’ She said, ‘It is as though it were the very one.’ And (Solomon said), ‘We were given the knowledge before her and we had submitted (to God).’”*

The verses explain why she did not believe before this encounter with Solomon (PBUH), *“And what she worshipped besides God prevented her, surely she was of one of people who disbelieve.”*

Yet, there was another surprise that Solomon (PBUH) had for her, *“It was said to her, ‘Enter the hall.’ And when she saw it she thought it was a pool and bared her legs. (Solomon) said, ‘It is a hall, paved with smooth glass.’ She said, ‘My Lord, I have wronged myself, and I submit with Solomon to God, the Lord of the Worlds.’”* When she saw the water through the crystal floor of the hall she thought that she is entering into a shallow pool. She raised her dress so that it would not get wet. Solomon (PBUH) then explained to her that the hall had a crystal floor. She then realized that Solomon (PBUH) was given extraordinary powers and she submitted herself to God. She understood that submission is to God alone and that whatever powers Solomon (PBUH) had were bestowed by God on him; so she submitted with him to the Lord of the

Worlds.

### Verses 45 to 53:

45. *And We verily sent to Thamud their brother Salih, saying, "Worship God." And they then became two parties quarrelling.*
46. *He said, "My people, why do you hasten on the evil rather than the good? Why do not you ask pardon of God, that you may receive mercy."*
47. *They said, "We consider you and those who are with you a bad omen." He said, "Your omen is with God; you are a people who are being tested."*
48. *There were nine men in the city who made mischief in the land, and would not reform.*
49. *They said, "Swear one to another by God, that we will attack him and his family by night, and afterward we will surely say to his next of kin, 'We did not witness the destruction of his family. And we are indeed telling the truth.'"*
50. *So they plotted a plot; and We plotted a plot, while they realized it not.*
51. *Then see the consequence of their plotting - We destroyed them and their people, every one.*
52. *Here are their homes in ruin because they practiced wrongdoing. Verily in this is a sign for people who have knowledge.*
53. *And We saved those who believed and were conscious of God. (27: 45 – 53)*

*"And We verily sent to Thamud their brother Salih, saying, 'Worship God.' And they then became two parties quarrelling.* The verse summarized the Message that Salih (PBUH) brought his people; it has one objective, *"Worship God."* This is the fundamental principle on which the divine message is based. His people became divided, one group believed in him while the other rejected him. Those who believed were in the minority. Those who disbelieved challenged Salih (PBUH) to bring about the punishment he promised them if they do not believe. His response was, *"He said, 'My people, why do you hasten on the evil rather than the good? Why do not you ask pardon of God, that you may receive mercy.'"* Rather than seeking guidance and appreciating the message they said to Salih (PBUH), *"We consider you and those who are with you a bad omen."* The belief in bad and good omens is an old tradition and a superstition. This particular expression described a practice that people in old communities used to follow. Whenever someone wanted to embark on a new venture, a person would hold a bird in his hand, then would let it go, allowing it to fly. If the bird flew to the right, then this would be considered to be a good omen. They would then go ahead with their venture. But if the bird flew to the left, they would consider this a bad omen and quit that venture. Salih (PBUH) tried to point out to them that birds do not know the unseen. Depending on the bird to tell them the future is sheer stupidity. Their future is in the hands of God, *"He said, 'Your omen is with God; you are a people who are being tested.'"* God decides the future. This was a test from God to give them the choice between guidance and misguidance.

*"There were nine men in the city who made mischief in the land, and would not reform. They said, 'Swear one to another by God that we will attack him and his family by night, and afterward we will surely say to his friend, 'We did not witness the destruction of his family. And*

*we are indeed telling the truth.”””* These nine people were bent on destruction, corruption, and violence. They decided to kill Salih (PBUH). It is amazing as they were deliberating how to kill Salih (PBUH) they would swear by God whom Salih (PBUH) is inviting them to worship. They decided to lie to his next of kin (the one who is responsible for executing his will and avenging his death) saying that they did not see him when he perished, thinking that since they will kill him in the dark they can say we did not see him being killed. This plot reflects a twisted superficial way of thinking. But they can plot all they want because God’s plot is perfect, *“So they plotted a plot; and We plotted a plot, while they realized it not. Then see the consequence of their plotting- We destroyed them and their people, every one. Here are their homes in ruin because they practiced wrongdoing.”* They were destroyed in a blink of an eye. They perished and their houses became empty.

There is indeed a sign in this, *“Verily in this is a sign for people who have knowledge.”* Knowledge is one of the themes of this Sura. God saved the believers, *“And We saved those who believed and were conscious of God.”*

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

- 54. *(We also sent) Lut (as a messenger), He said to his people, "Will you commit abomination knowingly?*
- 55. *Do you lust after men instead of women? You are truly ignorant people.*
- 56. *The only answer his people gave was, “Drive out the followers of Lut from your city; these are indeed people who want to be clean and pure.”*
- 57. *But We saved him and his family, except his wife; We destined her to be of those who stayed behind.*
- 58. *And We rained down on them a shower (of brimstone); and evil was the shower on those who have been warned. (27: 54 – 58)*

Lut (PBUH) lived in a community in which homosexuality was prevalent. It was an acceptable practice for people. The following verses expressed Lut’s (PBUH) criticism of such practice, *“He said to his people, ‘Will you commit abomination knowingly? Do you lust after men instead of women? You are truly ignorant people.’”* Their response was to expel Lut (PBUH) and those who believed in him (his family) from their city, *“The only answer his people gave was, ‘Drive out the followers of Lut from your city; these are indeed people who want to be clean and pure.’”* It may be that they wanted to be sarcastic when they described Lut (PBUH) and his people as, *“people who want to be clean and pure.”* But God saved Lut (PBUH) and his family except his wife, *“But We saved him and his family, except his wife; We destined her to be of those who stayed behind. And We rained down on them a shower (of brimstone); and evil was the shower on those who have been warned.”*

### **Verses 59 to 93:**

- 59. *Say, “Praise be to God, and peace on his servants whom He has chosen. Who is better? God or the false gods they associate (with Him)?*
- 60. *Is not He (best) who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water from the sky? With it We produce gardens of joyful beauty, whose trees you could not*

- have grown yourselves. Is there a deity beside God? No, but they are people who ascribe equals (to Him).*
61. *Is not He (best) who made the earth a stable abode, and made rivers flow through it, and set firm mountains on it, and has set a barrier between the two seas? Is there any deity beside God? No, but most of them do not know.*
  62. *Is not He (best) who answers the one in need when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and has made you viceroys on the earth? Is there a deity beside God? Little do you remember?*
  63. *Is not He (best) who guides you in the darkness of the land and the sea, He who sends the winds as heralds of His mercy? Is there a deity beside God? High exalted be God above all that they associate (with Him).*
  64. *Is not He (best) who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and who provides for you from the heaven and the earth? Is there a deity beside God? Say, "Bring your proof, if you are truthful."*
  65. *Say (Muhammad), "None in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen save God; and they do not realize when they will be raised (again)."*
  66. *Their knowledge cannot comprehend the Hereafter. They are in doubt concerning it. They are quite blind to it.*
  67. *Yet those who disbelieve say, "When we have become dust like our fathers, shall we verily be brought to life again?"*
  68. *We were promised this, we and our fathers. These are only ancient fables.*
  69. *Say (to them, Muhammad), "Travel in the land and see how was the end of the guilty."*
  70. *And grieve you not for them, nor be in distress because of what they plot (against you).*
  71. *And they say, "When (will) this promise (be fulfilled), if you are truthful?"*
  72. *Say, "It may be that a part of which you seek to hasten is close behind you."*
  73. *And indeed, your Lord's bounty for people is limitless, but most of them are not grateful.*
  74. *And indeed, your Lord knows all that their bosoms do hide, and all that they proclaim.*
  75. *And there is nothing hidden in the heaven or the earth but it is in a clear Record.*
  76. *Indeed, this Quran narrates to the Children of Israel most of that which they differ about.*
  77. *And it certainly is guidance and a mercy to those who believe.*
  78. *Verily your Lord will judge between them in His wisdom, and He is the Eminent, the Omniscient.*
  79. *So put your trust in God, indeed you are on (the path of) the manifest truth.*
  80. *You cannot make the dead to hear; nor can you make the deaf to hear the call if they turn to flee.*
  81. *Nor can you lead the blind out of their error. You can make none to hear, save those who believe in Our revelations and they have submitted.*
  82. *And when the word (i.e. the decree) is fulfilled concerning them, We shall bring forth a beast from the earth to speak to them about how the people did not have certitude in Our signs.*
  83. *One day We shall gather together from every people a group of those who rejected our revelations, and they shall be kept in ranks.*
  84. *Until, when they come (before their Lord), He will say, "Did you reject My revelations when you could not encompass them in knowledge, or what was it that you did?"*
  85. *And the Word will be fulfilled concerning them because they have done wrong, and they will not speak.*

86. *Have they not seen, how We have made the night that they may rest therein, and the day a time for them to see? Indeed, in that are signs for a people who believe.*
87. *On the Day, when the Trumpet will be blown and all who are in the heavens and the earth will be terrified, save him whom God wills. And all will come to Him in humility.*
88. *You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away. This is the work of God, who disposes of all things in perfect order; for he is Totally- Aware of all that you do.*
89. *Whoso brings a good deed will have better than its worth; and they are safe from the fear of that Day.*
90. *And whoso brings an ill-deed, they will be flung down on their faces in the Fire. Are you recompensed except for what you used to do?*
91. *I (Muhammad) am commanded only to serve the Lord of this land which He has hallowed, and to whom belong all things. And I am commanded to be of those who submit (to Him),*
92. *And to recite the Quran. And whoso becomes guided, becomes guided only for (the good of) his own soul; and as for him who goes astray - (to him) say, "I am only a warner."*
93. *And say, "Praise be to God who will show you His signs so that you shall know them. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do." (27: 59 – 93)*

“Say, ‘Praise be to God, and peace on his servants whom He has chosen.’” God commanded His Messenger to say the word with which all believers should start and end their talk, dialogue, or discourse. God is worthy of all praise from His servants for all His blessings. The first of these blessings is His guidance. This verse is followed by a number of rhetorical questions. All these questions have only one answer. It starts with a question, “*Who is better? God or the false gods they associate (with Him)?*” There is no comparison between God and these false gods. This is a sarcastic question that was meant to rebuke those who associate partners with God. Then the questions continue, “*Is not He (best) who created the heavens and the earth, and sends down for you water from the sky? With it We produce gardens of joyful beauty, whose trees you could not have grown yourselves. Is there a deity beside God? No, but they are people who ascribe equals (to Him).*” The existence of the heavens and the earth are facts that cannot be disputed by anyone. No one can claim that they were created by the idols, the angels, the devils, the moon, or the sun. The rain that comes down from the sky is a fact that could not be explained except by the existence of God who created the laws that allow the rain to fall down. The rain is the reason for the growth of beautiful gardens with trees and flowers. No one knows how these plants spring to life. There can only be One God.

Then comes another question, “*Is not He (best) who made the earth a stable abode, and made rivers flow through it, and set firm mountains on it, and has set a barrier between the two seas? Is there any God beside God? No, but most of them do not know.*” The verse talks about the way the earth had been fashioned by God. God made the earth a suitable place for people to live on. The existence of the earth and its ability to provide a “*stable abode*” for humanity is controlled with a number of delicate laws which were created by God. Any disturbance that happens to these laws could render life on earth impossible. God created rivers. Rivers are the veins of life for earth. They run in different directions to carry irrigation water to different places for plants to grow and crops to be reaped. The mountains are essential for the stability of the earth. Usually,

moving rivers start at the feet of a fixed mountain. God made a natural barrier between the salty sea and fresh water river so that their waters do not mix. This is the work of God but many people do not know.

*“Is not He (best) who answers the one in need when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and has made you viceroys of the earth? Is there a deity beside God? Little do you remember?”* This verse touches upon the people’s hearts when they are reminded with their inner feelings. A person in distress has no one to call upon except God. When all powers fail and all help is useless and all support is lost; the only One left to turn to is God. When we call upon Him He responds and removes our distress and saves us from evil. We tend to forget this when we are enjoying good times so we seek help and support from mortals like us. We forget that the support, the help, and the power of mortals are transient. They all disappear when an adversity strikes. Only God is eternal. He made humankind a viceroy on earth. God created humankind in such a way that they are able to carry this responsibility. God created the cosmic laws that enabled humankind to live on earth and to fulfill their obligations which they were entrusted with. God created life and death and decreed succession of generations so that human life continues to flourish on earth. One generation replaces another so that the struggle between generations does not hamper the growth of life on earth. Each generation pushes the wheel of progress forward. But humankind forgets these facts.

*“Is not He (best) who guides you in the darkness of the land and the sea, He who sends the winds as heralds of His mercy? Is there a deity beside God? High exalted be God above all that they associate (with Him).”* Sailors (of them were some who were present at the time of the revelation of the Quran) learn the secrets of navigation through the sea and earn the experience of handling ships at sea. Who enabled them to gain this knowledge? Who enabled their initial natural disposition to discover the natural laws of the universe and discover its secrets? Is not God who taught them? Who created the laws that control the movements of the wind? Is not God who created the laws which control the wind?

*“Is not He (best) who originates the creation, then reproduces it, and who provides for you from the heaven and the earth? Is there a deity beside God? Say, ‘Bring your proof, if you are truthful.’”* The beginning of the creation is a fact that no one can deny. No one can explain how the creation could have begun without the existence of God. People may argue about resurrection, but having accepted the fact that God is the One who started the creation then it is easy to accept the fact that He can also resurrect people after death. The creation and maintenance of the universe require an enormous amount of planning, management, and control. It makes sense that part of the plan is for people to be resurrected to be held accountable for what they have done during their lives. God provides for people from the heaven and earth. God’s provision for people on earth takes different forms: the plants, the animals, air, water, and the mineral resources whether underground or under the sea. The provision from heaven has many forms: light, heat, rain, and other sources of energy and power. In addition, there is the provision in the Hereafter, which only God knows. The provision is closely related to the creation and the recreation. The provision from the earth is necessary for the beginning and continuation of life. The provision from the heaven is also necessary for the continuation of life on earth and it is closely related to the recompense in the Hereafter. In the Hereafter people will be held

accountable for the way they spent the provision that God gave them.

*“Say (Muhammad), ‘None in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen save God; and they do not realize when they will be raised (again).’”* The belief in the resurrection; the belief in the gathering on the Day of Judgment; and the belief in the accountability of human beings are integral components of the doctrine. The belief in the Day of Judgment is an incentive for people to do good deeds in this life because on that Day people will be recompensed for their deeds. The different generations of the human race have always had difficulty in the belief in resurrection after death. The miracle of the beginning of a new life should have been proof enough for them to believe in the inevitability of resurrection. The verse states that the unseen is only known to God. People knowledge stops at the realm of what can they see or touch. Humankind were not the only creatures who were deprived of the knowledge of the unseen but also the jinn and the angels are equally deprived of this knowledge, *“None in the heavens and the earth knows the unseen save God,”* a clear and unequivocal statement. They also do not know when they will be resurrected. Not only their knowledge is limited and cannot encompass the Hereafter, but they also harbor doubts regarding it. They are quite blind to it, *“Their knowledge cannot comprehend the Hereafter. They are in doubt concerning it. They are quite blind to it.”*

So the disbelievers ask, *“When we have become dust like our fathers, shall we verily be brought to life again?”* people always wondered about resurrection, how can they be brought back to life after their bodies became dust? They forget that they were created before from nothing. No one knows how the cells that formed their original bodies came from. They remember that previous messengers came with the same promise before, *“We were promised this, we and our fathers. These are only ancient fables.”* But they never thought that these promises will materialize one day. They should take a lesson from the fate of previous generations, *“Say (to them, Muhammad), ‘Travel in the land and see how was the end of the guilty.’”* Travel and see what happened to those who disbelieved before. Natural laws never change.

The Messenger (PBUH) is then commanded to leave them to their fate; he has done his duty and should not be annoyed with what will happen to them, *“And grieve you not for them, nor be in distress because of what they plot (against you).”*

The disbelievers continued to challenge the Messenger (PBUH), *“And they say, ‘When (will) this promise (be fulfilled), if you are truthful?’”* The response came to settle their doubts and to throw fear in their hearts. The fulfillment of the promise may be nearer than what they thought, *“Say, ‘It may be that a part of which you seek to hasten is close behind you.’”* God’s bounty is abundant. He delayed the punishment to give them a chance to repent but they continued to be ungrateful, *“And indeed, your Lord’s bounty for people is limitless, but most of them are not grateful.”* God gave them respite in spite of the fact that He knows what they harbor in their hearts, *“And indeed, your Lord knows all that their bosoms do hide, and all that they proclaim. And there is nothing hidden in the heaven or the earth but it is in a clear Record.”*

*“Indeed, this Quran narrates to the Children of Israel most of that which they differ about.”* The Quran came with clear verses which established the truth about many of the issues that the Children of Israel differed about. It is also a guidance and mercy for the believers, *“And it certainly is guidance and a mercy to those who believe.”* The Quran unites the believers around the Islamic project and protects them from going astray. It is a mercy that clears their doubts and provides a link to God. The Islamic project is a unique program that trains the spirits to live in harmony with the natural laws that controls this universe. This fills the spirits with peace and security. The Messenger was reassured that God will settle the dispute between him and his people, *“Verily your Lord will judge between them in His wisdom, and He is the Eminent, the Omniscient.”* The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to put his trust in God. God has decreed that the truth will prevail, *“So put your trust in God, indeed you are on (the path of) the manifest truth.”*

The verses continued to comfort the Messenger (PBUH) telling him that he did his best but he could not let the dead hear his call, *“You cannot make the dead to hear; nor can you make the deaf to hear the call if they turn to flee. Nor can you lead the blind out of their error. You can make none to hear, save those who believe Our revelations and they have submitted.”* The Quran paints a lively dynamic image for the psyche of the disbeliever. The image portrays their rigid hearts, their numb spirits, and their lack of feelings. These are all characteristics of the dead. Those who listen to God’s words are the truly living, *“save those who believe in Our revelations and they have submitted.”* Only those whose hearts are open to receive guidance can hear the Messenger (PBUH). They are alive so they can hear and feel.

The following verses take us on a tour of the signs of the approaching Day of Judgment, *“And when the word (i.e. the decree) is fulfilled concerning them, We shall bring forth a beast from the earth to speak to them about how the people did not have certitude in Our signs.”* The story of this beast was mentioned in several prophetic traditions some of them are sound and others are weak. The sound traditions do not mention the characteristics of the beast. So, we will not discuss the shape and form of this beast. The things that are important and relevant is the fact that the coming of the beast is one of the signs that will herald the approaching Day of Judgment. At that time the opportunity for repentance will have passed. The beast will be one of God’s miracles because it will be able to communicate with people and they will be able to understand what it will say.

A description of some of the images on the Day of Judgment follows, *“One day We shall gather together from every people a group of those who rejected our revelations, and they shall be kept in ranks.”* The verse depicts the disbelievers as a powerless flock being herded, they will not have a say as to where they will be driven. They will then be questioned, *“Until, when they come (before their Lord), He will say, ‘Did you reject My revelations when you could not encompass them in knowledge, or what was it that you did?’”* They will be rebuked in a sarcastic way. They will be speechless and will have no answers to the questions being asked, *“And the Word will be fulfilled concerning them because they have done wrong, and they will not speak.”* They will receive their judgment for the wrong they did before and they will be speechless.



The narrative then moves to another theme, scenes from the worldly life, *“Have they not seen how We have made the night that they may rest therein, and the day a time for them to see? Indeed, in that are signs for a people who believe.”* The day and night are cosmic phenomena which evoke religious feelings in the hearts of people, feelings which entice those with open hearts to guidance to seek the pleasure of being close to God who moves the night and day around. Without a day and a night no life would be able to continue on earth. The day and night were created in just balance to maintain life on earth. The heat of a longer day would burn plants and animals. The cold of a longer night would cause everything to freeze. Then the scene moves rapidly to the Day of Judgment again, *“On the Day when the Trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and the earth will be terrified, save him whom God wills. And all will come to Him in humility.”* The trumpet will be blown once, and fear will fill all those who are in the heaven and the earth except those whom God chose not be frightened; it is said that those are the martyrs. Everyone will perish. Then the trumpet will be blown again and people will be resurrected. The third blow will gather people together in humility.

God’s creation is wonderful, *“You see the mountains and think them firmly fixed but they shall pass away as the clouds pass away. This is the work of God, who disposes of all things in perfect order; for He is Totally- Aware of all that you do.”*

*“Whoso brings a good deed will have better than its worth; and they are safe from the fear of that Day.”* The believers will be rewarded. What better reward than being safe from the fear of the Day of Judgment? Those who disbelieved will have their recompense as well, *“And whoso brings an ill-deed, they will be flung down on their faces in the Fire. Are you recompensed except for what you used to do?”*

In the conclusion, the Messenger (PBUH) summarizes his Message and his approach in calling people to the Message, *“I (Muhammad) am commanded only to serve the Lord of this land which He has hallowed, and to whom belong all things. And I am commanded to be of those who submit (to Him), and to recite the Quran.”* The idolaters of Mecca recognized the sanctity of their city and the holiness of the House of God. However, they did not believe in the Oneness of God who made this place holy. The verses state the fundamental components of faith. He was commanded to worship God alone; the Lord of this city is the Lord of the universe. He was commanded to submit to God alone. These are the fundamentals of the faith. The methodology of maintaining this faith is then outlined. First, He was commanded to recite the Quran. The Quran is the Book of this faith and its constitution. It is the tool that the believers should use in their struggle against the disbelievers. It is the tool that the believers should use in their struggle against temptation.

The verses state the individual responsibility in the belief in the Oneness of God, *“And whoso becomes guided, becomes guided only for (the good of) his own soul; and as for him who goes astray - (to him) say, ‘I am only a warner.’”* Everyone is responsible for his own deeds. The way to guidance is only through the Quran. The task of the Messenger (PBUH) is only to warn.

*And say, 'Praise be to God who will show you His signs so that you shall know them. And your Lord is not unaware of what you do.'* God's signs are all around us. Every day a new sign is revealed. The Sura ends with the unequivocal statement. God is Totally-Aware of all what we do.

## Sura 28: Al-Qasas (The Stories)

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

### **Verses 1 to 43:**

1. *Ta. Sin. Mim.*
2. *These are Verses of the Book that makes (things) clear.*
3. *We narrate to you part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in truth, for people who believe.*
4. *Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into factions. He persecuted a group of them, killing their sons and sparing their women. He was, indeed, of those who spread corruption.*
5. *And We desired to confer favor on those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors,*
6. *And to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts that which they feared from them.*
7. *And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying, "Suckle him and, when you fear for his safety, then cast him into the river and fear not nor grieve. We shall bring him back to you and shall make him (one) of Our messengers.*
8. *And the family of Pharaoh picked him up, that he might become for them an enemy and a source of grief; indeed, Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were deliberate sinners.*
9. *The wife of Pharaoh said, "(Here is) joy of the eye, for me and for you. Do not slay him. It may be that he will be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son." And they realized not (what they were doing).*
10. *And the heart of the mother of Moses became void, and she would have betrayed him if We had not fortified her heart, that she might be of the believers.*
11. *And she said to his sister, "Follow him." So she observed him from afar, and they were unaware.*
12. *And We ordained that he would refuse to be suckled by any of the wet nurses, so she (his sister) said, "Shall I tell you about a household who will take care of him for you?"*
13. *So We returned him to his mother that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of God is true. But most of them do not know.*
14. *When he reached maturity, and became firmly established, We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward the doers of good.*
15. *And he entered the city unnoticed, and he found there two men fighting, one of his own people, and the other, of his foes. The man who was of his own people asked for help against his foe. Moses struck him with his fist and (unintentionally) killed him. He said, "This is the work of Satan, for he is an enemy that openly misleads."*
16. *He said, "My Lord, I have wronged myself, so forgive me." Then He forgave him. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.*
17. *He said, "My Lord, in as much as you have bestowed Your Blessing on me, I shall never be a supporter of the criminals."*

18. *The next morning, he was walking in the city, fearful, vigilant; when the one who sought his help the day before cried out to him for help. Moses said to him, "You are clearly a mischief-maker."*
19. *As he was about to strike the man who was their enemy, he said, "Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday. You want to be a tyrant in the land, and you do not want to be a peacemaker."*
20. *And a man came hurriedly from the farthest part of the city. He said, "Moses, the chiefs are conspiring to kill you; therefore, escape. I am giving you good advice."*
21. *So he escaped from the city, fearful, vigilant. He said "My Lord, deliver me from the wrongdoers."*
22. *Then, when he turned his face towards (the land of) Madyan, he said, "I do hope that my Lord will show me the straight path."*
23. *And when he arrived at the watering (place) in Madyan, he found there, a group of men watering (their flocks), and besides them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said, "What is the matter with you?" They said, "We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take back (their flocks). And our father is a very old man."*
24. *So, he watered (their flocks) for them; then he turned back to the shade, and said, "My Lord, truly I am in (desperate) need of any good that You send down for me."*
25. *Then one of the two women came to him, walking shyly. She said, "My father invites you, that he may reward you having watered (the flock) for us. Then, when he came to him and told him the (whole) story, he said, "Fear not, you escaped from the wrongdoers."*
26. *One of the two women said, "My father, hire him. Indeed, the best (man) that you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy."*
27. *He said, "I desire to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten years, it will be (a grace) from you. But I intend not to place you under any difficulty. You will find me, indeed, God willing, one of the righteous."*
28. *He said, "That (is settled) between you and me. Whichever of the two terms I fulfill, there will be no injustice to me, and God is a witness over what we say."*
29. *Then, when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his family, he saw in the distance a fire. He said to his family, "Wait, I see in the distance a fire; maybe I shall bring you some news, or a burning brand from the fire that you may warm yourselves."*
30. *But when he came to the (fire), a voice was heard from the right bank of the valley at the blessed spot from the tree, "Moses, I, am God, the Lord of the Worlds."*
31. *Throw down your staff, and when he saw it wiggling as it had been a demon, he turned to flee headlong, (and it was said to him), "Moses, draw near and fear not. You are of those who are secure."*
32. *Thrust your hand into the bosom of your robe it will come forth white without being harmed. And draw in your arm close to you (to guard) from fear. Then, these shall be two proofs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs. They are indeed transgressors."*
33. *He said, "My Lord, I killed one of them and I fear that they will kill me."*
34. *And my brother Aaron is more eloquent than me in speech. Therefore, send him with me as a helper to confirm my words. I fear that they will reject me."*

35. *He (God) said, "We will certainly strengthen your arm with your brother, and invest you both with authority, so they shall not be able to touch you. With Our signs, you two as well as those who follow you will be triumphant."*
36. *When Moses came to them with Our clear signs, they said," this is nothing but invented magic. We never heard of this from our forefathers."*
37. *Moses said, "My Lord knows best who brings guidance from Him and whose end will be best in the Hereafter. Certainly, the wrongdoers will not succeed."*
38. *Pharaoh said, "Chiefs, I know not of any deity for you but myself. Therefore, Haman, light me a (kiln to bake bricks) out of clay, and build me a lofty tower, that I may mount up to the god of Moses. But I think he (Moses) is a liar."*
39. *And he was unjustly proud in the land, he and his hosts, and they deemed that they would not be brought back to Us.*
40. *So, We seized him and his hosts, and We cast them into the sea, see what was the end of the wrongdoers.*
41. *And we made them leaders who invite to the Fire; and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped.*
42. *And We made a curse to follow them in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the hateful.*
43. *We did reveal to Moses the Scripture after We had destroyed the earlier generations, (to give) insight to people, and guidance and mercy, that they might remember. (28: 1 - 43)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. The Muslims were few in number at the time. They were persecuted and humiliated by the idolaters who had the power, the wealth, and the numbers. The Sura establishes the true measure for power and values. The Sura states that there is one power in this universe: the power of God. It states that there is only one value in this universe: the value of faith. Those who are aligned with God should not have any worry even if they were few in number and even if they lacked the material strength. Those who are against God have neither security nor assurance, even if they are able to muster a mighty material power. To the faithful belongs all goodness.

The Sura starts with three letters of the Alphabet, "*Ta. Sin. Mim,*" to emphasize the fact that the Quran has been composed using the letters of the Arabic Alphabet. The Quran is a revealed Book, "*These are Verses of the Book that makes (things) clear.*" God addresses the believers using this Quran. God's words provide training to the believers and outline the fundamentals of the Islamic project, "*We narrate to you part of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in truth, for people who believe.*" God honors the believers by addressing them using the verses of the Quran.

The following verses describe the conditions in Egypt at the time when Moses (PBUH) was born. Only in this Sura the story of Moses (PBUH) starts with mention of Moses (PBUH) birth. This brings into focus the contrast between Pharaoh's might and Moses' (PBUH) helplessness, "*Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into factions. He persecuted a group*

*of them, killing their sons and sparing their women. He was, indeed, of those who spread corruption.”* The verses do not specify which Pharaoh was the subject of this story. The verses focus on the characteristics of Pharaoh not his name. He was a tyrant and he persecuted the Children of Israel who came to Egypt with their father Israel (PBUH) at the time of Joseph (PBUH). They resided in Egypt and multiplied. They had their own religion, the religion of Israel (PBUH) and did not share the Egyptians their beliefs. Pharaoh was concerned about the perceived threat which the Israelis posed to his kingdom and his person. He needed them to complement his labor force. So, he could not expel them from Egypt; instead, he devised the evil scheme of slaying the males among the newborn and letting the females live. In addition, he persecuted the adults. Pharaoh thought that this will save him and he forgot that safety and security are decreed by God alone. God’s will always overpower the will of His creatures no matter how powerful they are. The verses then declare what God willed, *“And We desired to confer favor on those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them the inheritors, and to establish them in the land, and to show Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts that which they feared from them.”* God wanted those who were persecuted and humiliated to take their place of honor in the land. God promised to bestow His grace on them and will make them leaders and inheritors of the land. This was God’s reward for them, they earned it by being believers and righteous. Let Pharaoh, Haman and their hosts scheme and persecute, but God’s plan will prevail without they even realizing it.

Having set the stage, the verses continue to narrate the details of Moses’ (PBUH) birth story. The next verse describes the first scene of the story, the scene of the perplexed mother who was fearful for the life of her newborn and how God comforted her and inspired her, *“And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying, ‘Suckle him and, when you fear for his safety, then cast him into the river and fear not nor grieve. We shall bring him back to you and shall make him (one) of Our messengers.’”* Moses’ (PBUH) mother was apprehensive when she gave birth to Moses (PBUH), she was afraid that the news will reach Pharaoh’s soldiers. So, God inspired her to cast him in the river. The inspiration brought comfort and security to Moses’ (PBUH) mother: do not fear nor grieve, God will take care of him. The promise was made that not only God will return him safe and sound to her but He will also make him one of God’s messengers.

The second scene of the story depicts the events at Pharaoh’s place when they picked up the newborn baby in his cradle, *“And the family of Pharaoh picked him up, that he might become for them an enemy and a source of grief, indeed, Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were deliberate sinners.”* Pharaoh’s soldiers were looking everywhere for the newborn male babies to slay them, and here is one that would float right into Pharaoh’s palace. The verse indicates clearly the intention of bringing the harmless, helpless Moses’ (PBUH) into the hands of Pharaoh. He will become for them, *“an enemy and a source of grief.”* God made Pharaoh’s wife tender towards the baby. She pleaded with her husband, *“The wife of Pharaoh said, ‘(Here is) joy of the eye, for me and for you. Do not slay him. It may be that he will be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.’ And they realized not (what they were doing).”* Moses (PBUH) was protected from Pharaoh’s persecution, not by force but by love. God filled Pharaoh’s wife with

overwhelming love for this baby whom they just picked up from the river. She argued that he may be of use to them or they may want to adopt him as a son so they spared his life. Little they knew what the future will bring, *“And they realized not (what they were doing).”*

Then we come to the third scene, the scene of Moses’ (PBUH) mother, the worried mother who acted according to the inspiration but now became apprehensive and fearful of what might happen to her baby, *“And the heart of the mother of Moses became void, and she would have betrayed him if We had not fortified her heart, that she might be of the believers.”* The Quran uses an extremely expressive word to describe the mother’s feelings, *“And the heart of the mother of Moses became void.”* Her heart became void of all means of rationalization or power to think. She was about to give her secret away, *“would have betrayed him,”* but God gave her the strength to trust in His promise and to remain steadfast, *“if We had not fortified her heart.”*

However, she wanted to know her son’s fate, *“And she said to his sister, ‘Follow him.’ So she observed him from afar, and they were unaware.”* She must have seen him in the hands of Pharaoh’s servants while they were looking for a woman to nurse him. It was part of the divine plan that Moses (PBUH) would refuse to suckle from any of the women that were ready to suckle him, *“And We ordained that he would refuse to be suckled by any of the wet nurses,”* His sister then came forward suggesting a solution to save the baby, *“so she (his sister) said, ‘Shall I tell you about a household who will take care of him for you?’”* This suggestion was happily embraced by the people of Pharaoh. So, he was brought back to his mother, *“So We returned him to his mother that she might be comforted and not grieve, and that she might know that the promise of God is true. But most of them do not know.”* The baby was returned safe and sound back to his mother, protected by Pharaoh, and loved by Pharaoh’s wife.

Moses’ (PBUH) years of growing up are missing from the narrative. The verses move to the time when Moses’ (PBUH) reached maturity, *“When he reached maturity, and became firmly established, We bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge. Thus, do We reward the doers of good.”* The age of maturity is around thirty years of age. Many questions arise, did Moses (PBUH) live in Pharaoh’s palace all this time? Or did he move out at some point in time? He must have known who he was and what his faith was. How did he feel about the way the Israelis were treated in Egypt? These questions have no answers, but the verse states that he was a doer of good and God rewarded him by bestowing on him wisdom and knowledge.

*“And he entered the city unnoticed, and he found there two men fighting, one of his own people, and the other, of his foes. The man who was of his own people asked for help against his foe. Moses struck him with his fist and (unintentionally) killed him. He said, ‘This is the work of Satan, for he is an enemy that openly misleads.’”* He entered the city and found two men fighting, one of them was an Israeli and the other was an Egyptian. The Israeli asked him for help. Moses (PBUH) struck the Egyptian with his fist and killed him. It took one strike from his fist to kill the man which indicates the physical strength of Moses (PBUH). Moses (PBUH) did

not intend to kill the Egyptian and when he saw him lying on the ground dead, he regretted ever striking him. He asked God for forgiveness, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I have wronged myself, so forgive me.’ Then He forgave him. He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.”* It seems that the high level of spirituality that Moses (PBUH) had achieved made him feel that God has forgiven him, so he made a pledge to God, *“He said, ‘My Lord, in as much as you have bestowed Your Blessing on me, I shall never be a supporter of the criminals.”*” It is a clear pledge that affirmed his intention not to side with the guilty. This represented an unequivocal denunciation of all types of crimes and criminals, even if it were in response to persecution or humiliation.

The verses move to describe the following scene, *“The next morning, he was walking in the city, fearful, vigilant; when the one who sought his help the day before cried out to him for help. Moses said to him, ‘You are clearly a mischief-maker.’”* The first encounter ended with the death of an Egyptian. Moses (PBUH) regretted what he had done and sought God’s forgiveness which he received. He then pledged not to support the wrongdoers in any way. He woke up in the morning fearing that the authorities would discover what he had done and punish him for it. The Arabic text describes Moses (PBUH) to be in a state of anticipation and apprehension. One may also assume that Moses (PBUH) was no longer attached to Pharaoh’s court in any way at that time. Why would he be afraid if he was still part of that court? While he was in this situation, Moses (PBUH) heard a cry for help from the same Israeli who sought his help the previous day. He was again involved in a fight with another Egyptian. Moses (PBUH) realized that this person was indeed a mischief-maker. Moses’ (PBUH) volatile nature overcame him and he was about to strike the Egyptian. His actions may have been also motivated by the feelings of injustice and persecution practiced for many years by the Pharaoh against his people. The Egyptian reminded Moses (PBUH) of what had happened the day before, *“As he was about to strike the man who was their enemy, he said, ‘Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday. You want to be a tyrant in the land, and you do not want to be a peacemaker.’”* One also may deduce from the way that the Egyptian used in addressing Moses (PBUH) that Moses (PBUH) had a reputation for being a peacemaker. It also confirms the idea that Moses (PBUH) was not connected to Pharaoh’s court at that time. Had he been, the Egyptian would not have dared to rebuke him in such a strong language. It is important to notice how the Quran described Moses’ (PBUH) actions in these two episodes. While it does not justify the assault on the Egyptians, it describes clearly the context of the conflicts and how Moses’ (PBUH) reactions were motivated in part by his resentment of the way the Egyptians treated the Israelis. The remarks of the Egyptian stopped Moses (PBUH) in his tracks and the Egyptian fled safely.

The verses then move to another scene, *“And a man came hurriedly from the farthest part of the city. He said, ‘Moses, the chiefs are conspiring to kill you; therefore, escape. I am giving you good advice.’”* The chiefs in the Pharaoh’s court knew about the incidents and they must have feared that these incidents would precipitate a revolt against the authorities. So, they schemed to kill Moses (PBUH). They must have thought that it is better to be proactive in quelling the revolt before it erupts. Moses (PBUH) reacted quickly, *“So he escaped from the city, fearful, vigilant. He said ‘My Lord, deliver me from the wrongdoers.’”* The verse describes Moses’ (PBUH) mindset. He was afraid, apprehensive, and feeling lonely in the vast desert. His only recourse



was to God. So he prayed God for safety, security, and guidance, *“Then, when he turned his face towards (the land of) Madyan, he said, ‘I do hope that my Lord will show me the straight path.’”*

*“And when he arrived at the watering (place) in Madyan, he found there a group of men watering (their flocks), and besides them he found two women who were keeping back (their flocks). He said, ‘What is the matter with you?’ They said, ‘We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take back (their flocks). And our father is a very old man.’”* His long journey ended up at a watering place in Madyan. He arrived tired and exhausted. He saw a crowd of shepherds watering their sheep and he noticed these two ladies who were keeping their sheep away from the watering place. His gallant nature revolted against this lack of etiquette. He asked them, *“What is the matter with you?”* They said, *“We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds take back (their flocks). And our father is a very old man.”* So he watered their sheep for them. One cannot but notice the nobility of Moses’ (PBUH) character. A fleeing man, tired and exhausted after this long journey thinks of only one thing: to help the weak. He was not worried about his safety; he was only worried about helping whoever is in need, *“So he watered (their flocks) for them;”*

He then sought to rest in the shade, which indicates that it was a hot sunny morning. Moses (PBUH) sat in the shade and prayed God, *“Then he turned back to the shade, and said, ‘My Lord, truly I am in (desperate) need of any good that You send down for me.’”* Moses (PBUH) pleaded with God saying he was in desperate need for help. The response was quick, *“Then one of the two women came to him, walking shyly. She said, ‘My father invites you, that he may reward you having watered (the flock) for us.’”* One of the two ladies came walking shyly to him. The verse stresses her decent approach to Moses (PBUH) inviting him to meet her father. Although she was shy but her speech was clear and the message was precise. The following verse takes us to the meeting between Moses (PBUH) and the old man. The Quran does not reveal the identity of the old man, but only narrates the dialogue between him and Moses (PBUH), *“Then, when he came to him and told him the (whole) story, he said, ‘Fear not, you escaped from the wrongdoers.’”* The old man reassured Moses (PBUH) that he was safe in Madyan.

*“One of the two women said, ‘My father, hire him. Indeed the best (man) that you can hire is the strong, the trustworthy.’”* The two women worked hard to take care of the sheep, feed them, and water them. The previous verses described the difficulty they were facing in watering the sheep and how they had to compete with strong men to be able to do it. The two ladies were reluctant to engage in such a competition with the other shepherds. One of them saw an opportunity for a solution that would benefit them and in the same time benefit the stranger. She advised her father to hire him. She described him as *“strong and trustworthy,”* a conclusion that shows the woman’s intuition. The old man accepted the idea and approached Moses (PBUH) in a straight forward way, *“He said, ‘I desire to wed one of these two daughters of mine to you, on condition that you serve me for eight years; but if you complete ten years, it will be (a grace) from you. But I intend not to place you under any difficulty. You will find me, indeed, God willing, one of the righteous.’”* This was a simple and straight forward offer combined with a promise of fair

working conditions. The old man did not promote himself but expressed his hope that Moses (PBUH) would find him a righteous person which reflects his modesty and good character. Moses accepted, *“He said, ‘That (is settled) between you and me. Whichever of the two terms I fulfill, there will be no injustice to me, and God is a witness over what we say.’”* The conditions for the contract were clearly stated and accepted by both men. It was narrated that Moses (PBUH) completed the longer term although it was his choice to stop after the eight years as agreed upon in the contract.

Before continuing with the story let us stop for minute to reflect on the different experiences that Moses (PBUH) went through. These experiences were part of his training to become a messenger of God. His responsibility was difficult, that is why his training took a long time and a number of experiences so that he would be ready to undertake the difficult task that would be entrusted to him. His task was difficult because he was sent to the worst tyrant on earth. He was sent to liberate a people who lived for a long time under persecution and humiliation and who lost their faith in the process. His task was not only to liberate his people but to retrain them and to reshape them into a new confident nation on the basis of a strong foundation of faith.

*“Then, when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was travelling with his family, he saw in the distance a fire. He said to his family, ‘Wait, I see in the distance a fire; maybe I shall bring you some news, or a burning brand from the fire that you may warm yourselves.’”* Moses (PBUH) completed his term according to the contract and embarked with his family on a trip to return back to Egypt. On his way, in the darkness of the desert and not knowing where he was, he saw a fire. He told his family to stay in their place while he would go to seek directions and bring back a burning brand of fire to give them warmth in this cold night. When he got there he heard a voice, *“But when he came to the (fire), a voice was heard from the right bank of the valley at the blessed spot from the tree, ‘Moses, I, am God, the Lord of the Worlds.’”* Moses (PBUH) heard the voice while he was standing alone in the vast desert; a voice that resonated in the universe around him. This was a blessed place; here is God talking to Moses (PBUH). The voice continued, *“Throw down your staff.”* He obeyed the command and threw his staff. The staff was no longer a staff but it turned into a serpent, *“he saw it wiggling as it had been a demon.”* This was a surprise which he was not prepared for, so he turned around and started running, *“he turned to flee headlong, (and it was said to him).”* But the voice reassured him, *“Moses, draw near and fear not. You are of those who are secure.”* God gave him an assurance of safety and security.

*“Thrust your hand into the bosom of your robe it will come forth white without being harmed.”* Moses (PBUH) obeyed the command. He put his hand inside the opening of his shirt then he took it out; he saw that the color of the skin on his hand became glittering white. His natural skin color was dark. But his hand felt healthy and there was nothing wrong with it. This was a sign for the bright white color of the truth. Once again, Moses (PBUH) was frightened, so God calmed him down, *“draw in your arm close to you (to guard) from fear.”* As if his hands were

wings that he could use to cover his chest, and thus bring security to his heart similar to what a bird would do.

Having been shown the miracles and being reassured; it was the time to give him the undertaking which he was being prepared for since childhood, *“Then these shall be two proofs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his chiefs. They are indeed transgressors.”* This was a fulfillment of the promise that God made to his mother, *“We shall bring him back to you and shall make him (one) of Our messengers.”* But Moses (PBUH) recalled the circumstances surrounding his escape from Egypt, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I killed one of them and I fear that they will kill me.’”* It was not his unwillingness to accept the undertaking that made him say this, but it was his eagerness to fulfill his responsibility successfully. He also needed his brother’s assistance, *“And my brother Aaron is more eloquent than me in speech. Therefore send him with me as a helper to confirm my words. I fear that they will reject me.”* God accepted his request and provided further reassurance of safety, *“He (God) said, ‘We will certainly strengthen your arm with your brother, and invest you both with authority, so they shall not be able to touch you.’”* Not only God answered his request and reassured him regarding his and his brother’s safety but God also promised him victory, *“With Our signs, you two as well as those who follow you will be triumphant.”*

The narrative moves fast forward to describe the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh and his chiefs, *“When Moses came to them with Our clear signs, they said, ‘This is nothing but invented magic.’”* This is the same argument that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) heard from the people of Quraish. It is a lame argument that is made to support falsehood against the truth. They claimed that the miracles that Moses (PBUH) showed them were merely the work of magic, although they had no real evidence to support their claim. The only evidence they had was that, *“We never heard of this from our forefathers.”* They did not provide a proof that Moses (PBUH) could refute logically, so he sought God’s judgment, *“Moses said, ‘My Lord knows best who brings guidance from Him and whose end will be best in the Hereafter. Certainly, the wrongdoers will not succeed.’”* It is a clear and honest answer but it is also a diplomatic answer that does not pose a direct accusation or threat. On the contrary to that, Pharaoh’s answer was rude and sarcastic, *“Pharaoh said, ‘Chiefs, I know not of any deity for you but myself.’”* This was an audacious statement from Pharaoh, *“I know not of any deity for you but myself,”* which was accepted readily by his court. His tyranny subdued them, they could not think for themselves. He made the ridiculous assertion and they accepted it without any argument. Then he continued in his sarcasm, *“Therefore, Haman, light me a (kiln to bake bricks) out of clay, and build me a lofty tower, that I may mount up to the god of Moses. But I think he (Moses) is a liar.”*

The narrative again jumps to the conclusion of the story, *“And he was unjustly proud in the land, he and his hosts, and they deemed that they would not be brought back to Us.”* Because they never believed that they will be returning to God, they became arrogant and rejected the warning. God seized them, *“So We seized him and his hosts, and We cast them into the sea, see what was the end of the wrongdoers.”* This was the end of the wrongdoers.

The narrative then jumps to a scene of the scenes of the Hereafter, *“And we made them leaders who invite to the Fire; and on the Day of Resurrection they will not be helped.”* They lost both the worldly life and the Hereafter. Not only they lost but they were also cursed, *“And We made a curse to follow them in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the hateful.”* After being arrogant in the worldly life they will become ugly in the Hereafter. This brings us to the end of the Pharaoh’s story but the verses continue to discuss the fate of Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“We did reveal to Moses the Scripture after We had destroyed the earlier generations, (to give) insight to people, and guidance and mercy, that they might remember.”* It is an honored fate and great reward.

### **Verses 44 to 75:**

44. *And you (Muhammad) were not on the western side (of the Mount) when We decreed the command to Moses, and you were not among those present;*
45. *But We brought forth generations, who lived long lives. And you were not living among the people of Madyan reciting to them Our revelations, but We kept sending (messengers to people).*
46. *Nor were you at the side of (the Mountain of) Tur when we called (to Moses). Yet (you are sent) as mercy from your Lord, to give warning to a people to whom no warner had come before you; in order that they may be reminded.*
47. *Otherwise, if a disaster should afflict them because of that which their own hands have earned, they might say, “Our Lord, if only You had sent a messenger to us, that we might have followed Your revelations and been of the believers?”*
48. *But when the truth came to them from Ourselves, they said, "If only he was given the like of what Moses was given." Did they not reject what was formerly sent to Moses? They said, "Two kinds of magic that support each other." And they said, "Indeed, we disbelieve in both."*
49. *Say (Muhammad), “Then bring a Book from God, which is a better guide than either of them, that I may follow; if you are truthful.”*
50. *But if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their own whims and who is more astray than one who follows his own whims, devoid of guidance from God? God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
51. *We have delivered the word to them, in order that they may be reminded.*
52. *Those to whom We sent the Scripture before this, they do believe in this (revelation).*
53. *And when it is recited to them, they say, "We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, we have submitted before this.”*
54. *These will be given their reward twice over, because they persevered and they used to repel evil with good, and spend of that which We have provided them,*
55. *And when they hear vain talk, they turn away from it and say, "To us our deeds, and to you yours; peace be with you; we do not seek the ignorant."*
56. *You (Muhammad) will not guide whom you love, but God guides whom He wills. And He is fully aware of those who are guided.*

57. *They say, "If we were to follow the guidance with you, we would be snatched away from our land." Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary, to which are brought the fruits of all kinds- a provision from Ourselves? But most of them do not know.*
58. *And how many a town, which exulted in its means of subsistence, have We destroyed; these are their abodes, they have not been dwelt in after them except a little, and We are the inheritors,*
59. *Nor was your Lord the one to destroy a population until He had sent to its centre a messenger, reciting to them Our revelations; nor are We going to destroy a population except when its members were wrongdoers.*
60. *And whatsoever you have been given is a comfort of the life of the world and an ornament thereof; and that which God has is better and more lasting. Will you not use reason?*
61. *Is he whom We have promised a fair promise which he will find (true) like him whom We have provided with the provisions of this world's life, then on the Day of Resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up (for punishment)?*
62. *On the day when He will call them and say, "Where are those whom you used to allege as My partners?"*
63. *Those against whom the sentence has become confirmed will say, "Our Lord, these are they whom we caused to err; we caused them to err as we ourselves did err; to You we declare ourselves to be disassociated (of them); they never worshiped us."*
64. *It will be said (to them), "Call upon your (so-called) partners (for help)." They will call upon them, but they will not respond to them; and they will see the torment (before them); (how they will wish) if only they had followed guidance.*
65. *That Day (God) will call to them, and say, "What was the answer you gave to the messengers?"*
66. *On that Day all news will seem obscure to them and they will not be able to question each other.*
67. *But whoever had repented, believed, and did good deeds maybe he will be among the successful.*
68. *Your Lord creates and chooses as He pleases. No one had any choice. Glory be to God. He is far above the partners they associate with Him.*
69. *And your Lord knows all that their hearts conceal and all that they reveal.*
70. *And He is God; there is no deity but He. All praise is due to Him, in this life and in the next. His is the Arbitration, and to Him shall you (all) be brought back.*
71. *Say, "Have you considered, if God were to make the night everlasting over you to the Day of Resurrection, what god is there other than God, who can give you light? Will you not then listen?"*
72. *Say, "Have you considered? If God were to make the day everlasting over you to the Day of Resurrection, what god is there other than God, who can give you a night in which you can rest? Will you not then see?"*
73. *It is out of His Mercy that He has made for you night and day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of his bounty; and in order that you may be grateful.*
74. *The Day that He will call on them, He will say, "Where are those whom you used to allege as My partners?"*

75. *And from each nation, We will draw a witness; and We shall say, "Produce your proof." They shall then know that God alone has the truth, and the (lies) which they invented will leave them in lurch. (28: 44 – 75)*

A new theme is dealt with in the following verses. The theme revolves around the issue of the truth of the revelation. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was narrating to them events that happened long before he existed. The only way he would have known these details is through a divine revelation, *"And you (Muhammad) were not on the western side (of the Mount) when We decreed the command to Moses, and you were not among those present."* Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not present when Moses (PBUH) met with his Lord at the western side of the mount of Tur. This was the meeting during which Prophet Moses (PBUH) received the Tablets from God. This happened long before the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *"But We brought forth generations, who lived long lives. And you were not living among the people of Madyan reciting to them Our revelations, but We kept sending (messengers to people). Nor were you at the side of (the Mountain of) Tur when we called (to Moses). Yet (you are sent) as mercy from your Lord, to give warning to a people to whom no warner had come before you; in order that they may be reminded."* The only way that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would have known the details of these events is from the divine revelation that he received. This revelation came as a mercy for people so that they may be reminded.

*"Otherwise, if a disaster should afflict them because of that which their own hands have earned, they might say, 'Our Lord, if only You had sent a messenger to us, that we might have followed Your revelations and been of the believers?'"* This is what they would have said, had not God sent a messenger to warn them. But, when the messenger came to them, they found another excuse, *"But when the truth came to them from Ourselves, they said, 'If only he was given the like of what Moses was given.' Did they not reject what was formerly sent to Moses? They said, 'Two kinds of magic that support each other.' And they said, 'Indeed, we disbelieve in both.'"* They were not true to their word; they were simply making excuses to justify their disbelief.

But the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to go along with them, *"Say (Muhammad), 'Then bring a Book from God, which is a better guide than either of them, that I may follow; if you are truthful.' But if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their own whims and who is more astray than one who follows his own whims, devoid of guidance from God? God does not guide the wrongdoers."* The Quran came with the clear truth. Those who rejected the Quran are simply following their whims and desires. The people are one of two kinds: those who are sincerely interested in the truth and those who follow their own whims. People in the first group will find their way to guidance and belief, but people in the second group will produce false arguments and will reject guidance. Those who follow their whims without seeking guidance from God are truly lost. They are wrongdoers and that is why God did not guide them.

The people who sought and found the truth are depicted in the following verses, *“We have delivered the word to them, in order that they may be reminded. Those to whom We sent the Scripture before this, they do believe in this (revelation). And when it is recited to them, they say, ‘We believe in it, it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, we have submitted before this.’ These will be given their reward twice over, because they persevered and they used to repel evil with good, and spend of that which We have provided them.”* It has been narrated that these verses detail an actual event that occurred. A group of Christians met with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They discussed Islam with him and listened to him reciting the Quran. At the end of their meeting they declared their submission to God and they became Muslims. There are different narrations about where these Christians came from. One narration stated that they came from Ethiopia, but another narration stated that they came from Yemen. Either way, the point here is that the Quran mentioned this incident which the Arabs of Quraish were privy to. No one came out to deny the authenticity of the story. These people accepted the Quran because it agreed with their Scripture and they realized that it brought the truth from God. They will be rewarded double the reward for their steadfastness in the face of disbelief and the disparaging remarks and humiliation which were inflicted upon them by the idolaters of Quraish. Not only they exercised patience but they also, *“repel evil with good.”* And they spend in the way of God of that which He provided them with. These two attributes manifest their tolerance and their willingness to suppress their ego and desires. A third attribute that distinguishes these people is the control they exercised in distancing themselves from those who indulge in vain talk, *“and when they hear vain talk, they turn away from it and say, ‘To us our deeds, and to you yours; peace be with you; we do not seek the ignorant.’”* They do not waste their time in dealing with people who enjoy vain talk. They realize that faith places on them serious obligations. Their focus is to fulfil these obligations successfully.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did not spend much effort in convincing the above mentioned group of Christians, who adopted Islam after they had listened to the Quran, while he tried very hard to convince some of the Arab idolaters but they were very determined to reject him. The following verse explains this phenomenon, *“You (Muhammad) will not guide whom you love, but God guides whom He wills. And He is fully aware of those who are guided.”* This verse was revealed to explain why the uncle of the Prophet (PBUH), Abu Taleb, insisted on rejecting his nephew’s call to Islam. Abu Taleb used to support and protect the Prophet (PBUH) against the persecution of Quraish. He endured the boycott that Quraish imposed on the clan of Bani Hashem as a punishment for supporting Muhammad (PBUH). Abu Taleb supported the Prophet (PBUH) for two reasons. The first is that Abu Taleb loved his nephew dearly. The second is that Abu Taleb believed in the tribal values which dictated that he should support his nephew, even though he did not accept his call. Abu Taleb died without accepting Islam, even though the Messenger (PBUH) asked him to submit to God before he died.

God kept the power to guide people to His religion to himself. Even the Messenger (PBUH) could not guide whom he wanted. The Messenger’s (PBUH) duty is only to deliver the message.

The following reveals the fears that the idolaters had; the fears which prevented them from accepting the call to Islam, *“They say, ‘If we were to follow the guidance with you, we would be snatched away from our land.’”* They submitted that the Messenger (PBUH) brought them guidance, but they were afraid that they would lose their power over the other tribes that lived nearby. They forgot that only God can offer them the true security. They forgot that no power on earth could harm them if they were under God’s protection. Guidance is the path to true power and real honor and dignity. God’s guidance provides a project for establishing the correct lifestyle on earth. It is a realistic lifestyle that provides happiness not only in this life but also in the Hereafter. This project aligns human activities to serve the purposes of people’s lives both in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

God refuted their false claims, *“Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary, to which are brought the fruits of all kinds- a provision from Ourselves? But most of them do not know.”* They forgot that the safety and security that they enjoyed were God’s gift. God sanctified this place since the time Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Most of them did not recognize who is the one who provides genuine safety and security. The real danger is to be destroyed by God in a way similar to what happened to peoples before them, *“And how many a town, which exulted in its means of subsistence, have We destroyed; they have not been dwelt in after them except a little, and We are the inheritors.”* The sure way to destruction is to show ingratitude towards God. Idolaters should be careful that their fate would be similar to those who were destroyed before. They knew where these people lived before and they saw the destruction that happened to their houses.

It is God’s law that He sends a messenger to the people before punishing them for their wrongdoing, *“Nor was your Lord the one to destroy a population until He had sent to its centre a messenger, reciting to them Our revelations; nor are We going to destroy a population except when its members were wrongdoers.”* The messenger would be sent to a central place to be accessible to all those who live around that place. Mecca was the central point to the lands of Arabia.

They should also remember that whatever was bestowed on them is a transient pleasure, that what is with God is the everlasting and will provide the true enjoyment, *“And whatsoever you have been given is a comfort of the life of the world and an ornament thereof; and that which God has is better and more lasting. Will you not use reason?”* The following verse makes a comparison between the transient pleasures of this life and the everlasting comfort of the Hereafter. Each one is free to choose, *“Is he whom We have promised a fair promise which he will find (true) like him whom We have provided with the provisions of this world’s life, then on the Day of Resurrection he shall be of those who are brought up (for punishment)?”*

The following verses describe some of the scenes on the Day of Resurrection, *“On the Day when He will call them and say, ‘Where are those whom you used to allege as My partners?’”* This is a rhetorical question posed as a rebuke for the disbelievers. God knows that those partners do not exist and He knows that the disbelievers will not be able to answer the question. The question will be posed in public to disgrace the disbelievers. The disbelievers will try to disassociate



themselves from the crime, *“Those against whom the sentence has become confirmed will say, ‘Our Lord, these are they whom we caused to err; we caused them to err as we ourselves did err; to You we declare ourselves to be disassociated (of them); they never worshiped us.’”*

They will be asked to call upon those whom they took as partners with God, *“It will be said (to them), ‘Call upon your (so-called) partners (for help).’ They will call upon them, but they will not respond to them; and they will see the torment (before them); (how they will wish) if only they had followed guidance.”* It will become evident to them that there is no use of calling upon anyone for help. They will wish in vain that they had heeded the guidance before.

They will be further asked about their response to God’s messengers who came to them, *“That Day (God) will call to them, and say, ‘What was the answer you gave to the messengers?’”* They will be dumbfounded and unable to answer, *“On that Day all news will seem obscure to them and they will not be able to question each other.”* On the other hand, those who repented will get their reward, *“But whoever had repented, believed, and did good deeds maybe he will be among the successful.”*

All matters are in the hands of God. He created everything, He knows everything, and He is in control of everything, *“Your Lord creates and chooses as He pleases. No one had any choice. Glory be to God. He is far above the partners they associate with Him.”* God also knows what they reveal and what they conceal. God will decide the reward for each one. He will decide who will be guided and who will be misguided according to what they deserve, *“And your Lord knows all that their hearts conceal and all that they reveal.”* He is God, there is no other deity except Him, *“And He is God. There is no deity but He. All praise is due to Him, in this life and in the next. His is the Arbitration, and to Him shall you (all) be brought back.”* We praise Him for His decisions, His blessings, His wisdom, His justice, and His mercy. He is the only Arbitrator who decides the fate of each one of His servants. To Him we will all return.

Another theme is dealt with in the next few verses. The verses take us on a tour in the universe considering different cosmic phenomena, *“Say, ‘Have you considered, if God were to make the night everlasting over you to the Day of Resurrection, what god is there other than God, who can give you light? Will you not then listen?’”* Say, *“Have you considered? If God were to make the day everlasting over you to the Day of Resurrection, what god is there other than God, who can give you a night in which you can rest? Will you not then see?”* It is out of His Mercy that He has made for you night and day, that you may rest therein, and that you may seek of his bounty; and in order that you may be grateful.” People are used to the perpetual occurrence of the night and day. They rarely pay attention to the phenomenon. Few people observe in awe the scenes of sunrise and sunset. They never pay attention to the miracles associated with these cosmic phenomena. The Quran poses questions to alert people to these miracles so that they reflect on them. People yearn to the breaking daylight after the long hours of night in the winter months. Imagine if the night was to continue forever and there would be no daylight. What would people feel about that, provided that life is able to continue? People like to have a period of rest during

the long hours of the day in the summer months. How would they feel if there was no night and the day continued forever, assuming that life can continue without nights? The night is usually a time for people to rest and rejuvenate. God determined the appropriate lengths of the day and the night so that life on earth continues and people would have time for rest and time for work. This is a blessing and a mercy from God for which we should be grateful.

The verses go back to the scenes on the Day of Resurrection, *“The Day that He will call on them, He will say, ‘Where are those whom you used to allege as My partners?’”* The same question that was posed earlier is reiterated here to emphasize its importance and to introduce the following verse, *“And from each nation We will draw a witness, and We shall say, ‘Produce your proof.’ They shall then know that God alone has the truth, and the (lies) which they invented will leave them in lurch.* The messenger that was sent to each nation will be brought forward to give his testimony and tell how his nation responded to his message. People will then be asked to produce an evidence to support the decisions which they implemented in response to the messenger who came to them, but they will have no evidence and they will know, *“that God alone has the truth,”* and they will lose track of those whom they worshipped beside God before.

### **Verses 76 to 84:**

76. *Certainly Qaroun (Korah) was of Moses' people, but he oppressed them; and We gave him so much treasure that the keys thereof would verily have been a burden for a troop of mighty men. When his own people said to him, “Exult not; God does not love the exultant;*
77. *But seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, do not neglect your share in this world. Do good as God has been good to you, and do not seek corruption in the land, God does not love the corruptors.”*
78. *He said, “I have been given it only on account of knowledge I possess.” Did he not know that God had destroyed, before him, generations which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected? Certainly, the guilty will not be called (immediately) to account for their sins.*
79. *So he came out before his people in the (pride of his worldly) glitter. Those whose aim is the life of this world said, “If only we had been given like what was given to Qaroun. Indeed, he is very fortunate.”*
80. *But those who had been given knowledge said, “Woe to you! The reward of God is better for those who believe and do good deeds, and only the perseverant will get it.”*
81. *Then We caused the earth to swallow him and his house; and he had no one to help him against God, nor could he defend himself.*
82. *And those who had coveted him the day before began to say on the morrow, “It is indeed God who gives what He wills, abundantly or sparingly, to whomever He pleases of His servants. Had it not been that God was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up. The disbelievers will never succeed.*

83. *That Home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who do not seek superiority on earth, nor corruption. The happy end is for those who are conscious of God.*
84. *Whoso brings a good deed, he will have better than the same; while those who do evil-deeds will be recompensed only according to what they did. (28: 76 – 84)*

The following verses narrate the story of Qaroun, stating that he was from the people of Moses (PBUH); he was very rich; and he oppressed his people, *“Certainly Qaroun (Korah) was of Moses' people, but he oppressed them; and We gave him so much treasure that the keys thereof would verily have been a burden for a troop of mighty men.”* He was so rich that the keys to his treasures were so heavy to the extent that it was difficult for a group of strong men to carry them. His wealth made him a tyrant and he treated his people badly. The verse described his behavior in a general way and did not dwell on the details of this behavior. Some of his people tried to give him a sincere advice. They explained to him that God gave him this wealth to spend it in ways that please God, *“When his own people said to him, ‘Exult not; God does not love the exultant; but seek, with the (wealth) which God has bestowed on you, the Home of the Hereafter, do not neglect your share in this world. Do good as God has been good to you, and do not seek corruption in the land, God does not love the corruptors.’”* They pointed out that the divine project aims at striking a balance between the enjoyment of this life and the requirements of the Hereafter. God created good things on earth for humankind to enjoy and for life on earth to flourish. This is how the vicegerency of humankind can be achieved. However, one should not forget that every good activity in this life should lead to happiness in the Hereafter. This way a balance is struck between the spiritual life and the material life of the human being, allowing the human being to enjoy this life while keeping an eye on the Hereafter. Wealthy people should remember that wealth is a blessing from God so they should use it to do good to people, *“Do good as God has been good to you.”* The wealth should not be used to spread corruption and oppression on earth because certainly God does not love those who spread corruption on earth.

His answer embodied every meaning of corruption and arrogance, *“He said, ‘I have been given it only on account of knowledge I possess.’”* This is a statement that only an ignorant arrogant man would make. The answer to his statement came in the form of a threat, *“Did he not know that God had destroyed, before him, generations which were superior to him in strength and greater in the amount (of riches) they had collected? Certainly, the guilty will not be called (immediately) to account for their sins.”* God destroyed many a people who were mightier and wealthier than him. God is capable of destroying him as well.

The second scene of the story depicts Qaroun parading proudly in front of his people in his worldly glitter. Some of his people looked at him in awe and wished that they would be in his place, *“So he came out before his people in the (pride of his worldly) glitter. Those whose aim is the life of this world said, ‘If only we had been given like what was given to Qaroun. Indeed, he is very fortunate.’”* The same scene rekindled the flame of faith in the hearts of others who recognized that what they were given was much more precious than what was given to Qaroun.

They reminded their brothers who envied Qaraoun, *“But those who had been given knowledge said, ‘Woe to you! The reward of God is better for those who believe and do good deeds, and only the perseverant will get it.’”* God’s verdict came swiftly to settle the dispute between the two groups, *“Then We caused the earth to swallow him and his house; and he had no one to help him against God, nor could he defend himself.”* The great test was settled and those who were impressed by the worldly pleasures woke up and realized the ultimate truth, *“And those who had coveted him the day before began to say on the morrow, ‘It is indeed God who gives what He wills, abundantly or sparingly, to whomever He pleases of His servants. Had it not been that God was gracious to us, He could have caused the earth to swallow us up. The disbelievers will never succeed.’”* They stood there praising God that they did not share Qaroun his wealth and his destiny. They realized that wealth is not the true measure for God’s favor. God provides for some abundantly and for some sparingly for reasons that only He knows. Quaroun was tested with wealth; he failed the test; and he received his due punishment. The disbelievers will never succeed. It is true that Qaroun never expressed his disbelief but his actions caused him to join the ranks of the disbelievers. The following verse is an appropriate conclusion for the scene, *“That Home of the Hereafter We shall give to those who do not seek superiority on earth, nor corruption. The good end is for those who are conscious of God.”* In the Hereafter, people will be recompensed for their deeds according to God’s promise, *“Whoso brings a good deed, he will have better than the same; while those who do evil-deeds will be recompensed only according to what they did.”*

### **Verses 85 to 88:**

- 85. *Verily He Who prescribed the Quran for you, will bring you back home again. Say, “My Lord knows best who it is who brings true guidance, and who is in manifest error.”*
- 86. *And you did not expect that the Book would be sent to you except as a mercy from your Lord. Therefore, do not support in any way the disbelievers.*
- 87. *And let nothing keep you back from the revelations of God after they have been given to you; and invite to your Lord; and do not be one of those who associate partners with God.*
- 88. *And do not invoke any other god beside God. There is no god but He. Everything will perish except His Face. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will you (all) be brought back. (28: 85 – 88)*

In the following verses, God addresses the Messenger (PBUH) and the believers. These verses were revealed to the Messenger (PBUH) on the route to Medina after he escaped from Mecca, *“Verily He Who prescribed the Quran for you, will bring you back home again.”* The Quran has been revealed by God. He will give His Messenger (PBUH) victory at the time He had decreed. This was a promise to the Messenger (PBUH) and the Muslims that God will not abandon His Messenger (PBUH). God reassured His Messenger that one day, known only to God, God will bring the Messenger (PBUH) back to his home from which he was evicted. The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to repeat that statement that Moses (PBUH) made when he was

rejected by Pharaoh and his people, *“Say, ‘My Lord knows best who it is who brings true guidance, and who is in manifest error.’”* God will judge between people.

*“And you did not expect that the Book would be sent to you except as a mercy from your Lord. Therefore, do not support, in any way, the disbelievers.”* Muhammad (PBUH) never expected that he will be chosen to be a messenger of God, but God chose him and gave him the Quran as an act of mercy from Him. Therefore, never support the disbelievers because they will try to make you deviate away from the straight path, *“And let nothing keep you back from the revelations of God after they have been given to you;”* Call to the way of your Lord, *“and invite to your Lord; and do not be one of those who associate partners with God.”* The Sura ends by stressing and emphasizing the concept of the Oneness of God, *“And do not invoke any other god beside God. There is no god but He. Everything will perish except His Face. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will you (all) be brought back.”* Everything will perish and vanish except God. His is the kingdom and the judgment and to Him all will return.

## **Sura 29: Al-‘Ankabut (The Spider)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 13:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *Do people think that they will be left (at ease) because they say, “We believe,” and will not be tested with affliction?*
3. *We tested those who were before them. Thus, God knows those who are sincere, and knows those who are liars.*
4. *Or do the evil-doers think that they will escape Us? Evil is that what they judge.*
5. *Whoever hopes to meet with God, God's appointed time is bound to come. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
6. *And whosoever strives, strives only for himself. God is altogether Independent of (His) creatures.*
7. *Those who believe and do good deeds, We will certainly efface all their evil deeds, and We shall reward them according to the best of their deeds.*
8. *We have enjoined on the humankind to be kind to his parents, but if they (either of them) strive (to force) you to associate with Me (in worship) anything of which you have no knowledge, obey them not. You will (all) return to Me, and I will tell you all that you did.*
9. *And those who believe and do good deeds, We shall admit them into the ranks of the righteous.*
10. *Then, there are those people who say, “We believe in God”; but when they suffer affliction in (the cause of) God, they treat people's oppression as if it were the torment of God. And if help comes (to you) from your Lord, they are sure to say, "We have (always) been with you." Does not God know best all that is in the hearts of (His) creatures?*
11. *And God most certainly knows those who believe, and those who are hypocrites.*
12. *And the disbelievers say to those who believe, “Follow our path, and we will bear (the consequences) of your sins.” Never in the least will they bear their sins. In fact, they are liars.*
13. *They will bear their own burdens, and (other) burdens along with their own, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be called to account for their falsehoods. (29: 1 -13)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It has been narrated that the first eleven verses were revealed in Medina, because they refer to the issues of Jihad (strive) and the hypocrites. However, it was narrated that the eighth verse refers to the adoption of Islam by S’ad bin Abi Waqas (RA) and this certainly took place in Mecca. The verses refer to the need to strive against human weakness during times of affliction and adversity. Its reference to the hypocrites is in the context of exploring different types of human beings.

The Sura has one theme from the beginning to the end: the essence of faith and the tests that human beings are subjected to in life. Faith is not mere words to be uttered but it involves perseverance in times of adversity and hardships.

The Sura starts with three letters from the Alphabet to point out that this Book has been composed using the letters of the Alphabet, “*Alif. Lam. Mim.*” We have mentioned before that the Suras that start with these letters include a reference to the Quran either in the verses immediately following the first verse or later in the Sura as is the case with this Sura (verses 45, 47, and 48).

The following verse discusses the essence of faith and the trials that people will be subjected to test the strength of their faith, “*Do people think that they will be left (at ease) because they say, ‘We believe,’ and will not be tested with affliction?*” Faith is not mere words to be uttered but it is an endeavor that requires hard work and involves undertaking responsibilities. It requires striving and perseverance. All believers have to be tested, “*We tested those who were before them. Thus, God knows those who are sincere, and knows those who are liars.*” God knows beforehand what people will do when they are put to the test but God will not hold anyone accountable until they have committed the act. This is God’s mercy and God’s justice. It is out of God’s mercy, that He has decreed that He will not judge people according to His knowledge; He will judge people on the basis of their actions.

Faith is an undertaking that the believer pledges to fulfill. It is a covenant between the believer and God. Only those who are qualified and are able to assume the responsibility are allowed to carry this responsibility. It requires patience, perseverance, devotion, and hard work.

Trials take different forms. Believers may become victims to mistreatment or oppression because of their faith and find no helper or supporter. Friends and relatives of believers may be mistreated or oppressed because of their faith. Family and friends may appeal to the believers to spare them the difficult conditions by abandoning the struggle for their faith. Believers may find it difficult to suffer while disbelievers enjoy the pleasures and comfort of this life. Believers may find themselves isolated and abandoned in their own country. Believers may be tested when they see whole societies completely engrossed in the lowly worldly pleasures, with no place for God in their lives, yet they provide environments where human dignity is preserved and human beings are respected. The believer is a human being who is continuously tested by the temptation to satisfy lowly human lusts, the lust for sex, greed, power, or even the desire to feel secure and safe. These are elements of the everlasting battle between the believer and Satan.

The time for trials may be long. God does not want to torture the believers, nor for them to suffer unnecessarily, but trials are important tools for preparing the believers for their major undertaking: being God’s true vicegerents on earth. These trials are necessary to purify the souls and to strengthen the will of the believers. God promised that the truth will prevail at the end. No believer should doubt the fulfillment of God’s promise even if the waiting period for God’s victory became longer than expected. God knows best the best timing for His victory. The believers should understand that they were chosen by God for their mission. These trials are part of the training they need to help them accomplish their mission. The Messenger (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “*Prophets are subjected to the most sever trials in life, and the severity of the trials to which the believers are subjected to is commensurate with their degree of righteousness, (the more righteous is tested more).*”

Those who oppress the believers and commit evil deeds will not escape God's punishment. If they really think that they can get away with their evil deeds, then they have truly made a bad judgment, *"Or do the evil-doers think that they will escape Us? Evil is that what they judge."* The message embodied in the earlier verses is that trials are part of the divine project to prepare the believers for their role in life. This verse embodies another message; it is also a component of the divine project that the evildoers get their punishment in due time. The third message is a message of comfort and security to the believers, *"Whoever hopes to meet with God, God's appointed time is bound to come. He is the All-Hearing, Omniscient."* The believers whose hearts yearn to God's mercy should be reassured of God's victory. He hears their prayers and knows their conditions. The fourth message is for the striving believers, reassuring them that they will reap the benefits of their hard work, *"And whosoever strives, strives only for himself. God is altogether Independent of (His) creatures."* The believers should be reassured of God's blessings which will be bestowed on them, *"Those who believe and do good deeds, We will certainly efface out all their evil deeds, and We shall reward them according to the best of their deeds."*

It was mentioned before that one of the types of trials that the believers may be subjected to is related to their family and friends. The following verse sets the limits on how far believers can go in accommodating their parents, *"We have enjoined on the humankind to be kind to his parents, but if they (either of them) strive (to force) you to associate with Me (in worship) anything of which you have no knowledge, obey them not. You will (all) return to Me, and I will tell you all that you did."* The parents are the most deserving of one's love, mercy, and respect. It is the duty of the person to take good care of his/her parents. However, when a choice has to be made between worshipping God and obeying one's parents, one should choose to obey God. Relationships based on faith are more important than blood relationships. Relationships based on faith represent the firmest ring. Even parents who associate partners with God deserve to be looked after and treated kindly. However, when it comes to the issue of associating partners with God, they should not be obeyed. At the end, everyone will return to God to find out what have they done. Those who believed and did good deeds will join the ranks of the righteous, *"And those who believe and do good deeds, We shall admit them into the ranks of the righteous."*

It has been narrated by Al-Tirmidhi that this verse dealt with a situation which S'ad bin Abi Waqass (RA) found himself in. When S'ad (RA) adopted Islam, his mother threatened to fast until he had relinquished his newly adopted religion and returned back to idolatry. Although S'ad (RA) loved his mother dearly, but he did not obey her and persisted on his faith. Eventually she came back to her senses and quit fasting. Faith claimed victory over blood relationship.

*"Then there are those people who say, 'We believe in God'; but when they suffer affliction in (the cause of) God, they treat people's oppression as if it were the torment of God."* The verse describes a kind of people who claim they are believers when times are good, but whenever they face the slightest persecution because of their faith they become terror-stricken. They think that their suffering is beyond their ability to persevere. However, the same people seem to forget their behavior at the time of adversity when help from God is received and the conditions of life became agreeable again, *"And if help comes (to you) from your Lord, they are sure to say, 'We*



*have (always) been with you. ' Does not God know best all that is in the hearts of (His) creatures?' These trials are part of the plan to discriminate between the true believers and the hypocrites, "And God most certainly knows those who believe, and those who are hypocrites."*

The following verse establishes a fundamental principle: faith is a personal responsibility. People will be recompensed according to their own individual deeds. Every human being is accountable for his/her own deeds, "*And the disbelievers say to those who believe, 'Follow our path, and we will bear (the consequences) of your sins.' Never in the least will they bear their sins. In fact, they are liars.*" No one is responsible for another's deeds. Those who disbelieved they carry the burden of their sins and the sin of leading others astray, "*They will bear their own burdens, and (other) burdens along with their own, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be called to account for their falsehoods.*"

### **Verses 14 to 45:**

14. *And verily we sent Noah (as Our messenger) to his people, and he remained among them for a thousand years save fifty years; and the flood engulfed them, while they were wrongdoers.*
15. *And We saved him and those with him in the ship, and made it a sign for all peoples.*
16. *And (We sent) Abraham; and he said to his people, "Serve God and be conscious of Him; this is best for you, if you did but know.*
17. *You only worship idols besides God; and you invent falsehood. The things that you worship besides God have no power to give you sustenance. Seek sustenance from God, worship Him, and be grateful to Him. To Him will be your return."*
18. *And if you reject (the Message), so did generations before you; and the duty of the messenger is only to deliver the message clearly.*
19. *Do they not see how God originates creation, then repeats it? Verily that is easy for God.*
20. *Say, "Travel in the land and see how did God originated creation; so will God produce a later creation; for God has power over all things."*
21. *He torments whom He pleases, and He grants mercy to whom He pleases, and to Him you will be returned.*
22. *You cannot escape Him on earth or in heaven; and you have no protecting guardian beside God.*
23. *Those who disbelieve in the revelations of God and in (their) meeting with Him, have no hope of My mercy; and they will have painful torment.*
24. *But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Kill him, or burn him." Then God saved him from the fire. In this, there are indeed signs for people who believe.*
25. *He (Abraham) said, "You have chosen only idols instead of God. The affection between you is only in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will deny each other and curse each other, and your refuge will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers."*
26. *And Lut believed him, and said, "I am fleeing to my Lord, surely He is the Eminent, the Wise."*

27. *And We gave (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and ordained among his progeny Prophet-hood and the Scripture. We granted him his reward in this life; and in the Hereafter he will verily be among the righteous.*
28. *And (remember) Lut when he said to his people, "You commit lewdness, which none of the peoples has ever done before you."*
29. *How can you lust after men, you cut off the way, and you commit abominations in your meetings? But the answer of his people was only that they said, "Bring God's torment upon us if you are truthful."*
30. *He said, "My Lord, help me against the people who spread corruption."*
31. *When Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said, "We are indeed going to destroy the people of this township, for truly they are wrongdoers."*
32. *He said, "But Lut is there." They said, "We are well aware who is there. We will certainly save him and his family, except his wife. She is of those who will remain behind."*
33. *And when Our messengers came to Lut, he was troubled on their account, for he could not protect them; but they said, "Fear not, nor grieve; we are to deliver you and your family, except your wife, who is of those who will remain behind."*
34. *We are about to bring down upon the people of this town a scourge from heaven, because they transgressed."*
35. *And verily We left behind a clear sign (from it) for people who understand.*
36. *To the people of Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'aib. He said, "My people, worship God, and look forward to the Last Day, and do not spread corruption in the land."*
37. *But they rejected him, so the tremor overtook them, and they became motionless bodies in their homes.*
38. *And (the tribes of) 'Ad and Thamud. (Their fate) is clear to you from their (ruined and deserted) dwellings. Satan made their deeds seem fair to them and so debarred them from the path, though they were keen observers.*
39. *(Remember also) Qaroun, Pharaoh, and Haman. Moses came to them with clear signs, but they behaved arrogantly in the land; yet they could not escape (Our punishment).*
40. *Each one of them We seized for his crime. On some, We sent a violent tornado; others were caught by a (mighty) blast; some We caused the earth to swallow up; and some We drowned. It was not God who wronged them, but they wronged themselves.*
41. *The example of those who take protecting guardians other than God is that like the spider, who builds (to itself) a house; but truly the flimsiest of houses is the spider's house; if they but knew.*
42. *Verily God knows whatever they invoke besides Him. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
43. *And such similitudes We coin for people, but only those who have knowledge understand them.*
44. *God created the heavens and the earth with truth. Therein is indeed a sign for the believers.*
45. *Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and establish regular prayer. Prayer prohibits indecencies and evil. And remembrance of God is greater. And God knows what you do. (29: 14 – 45)*

The following verses describe the trials that different Prophets were subjected to. Starting with Noah (PBUH), *“And verily we sent Noah (as Our messenger) to his people, and he remained among them for a thousand years save fifty years; and the flood engulfed them, while they were wrongdoers.”* Noah (PBUH) spent nine hundred and fifty years of his life, calling people to the belief in the Oneness of God. Noah (PBUH) must have lived longer than the time he spent in calling his people to believe in God. Noah’s (PBUH) life seems to be longer than normal lives that we are accustomed to. However, we believe in the truthful account of the Quran. Maybe the earlier generations of humanity lived longer than we live these days. In spite of this long career only few people believed in Noah (PBUH) who tried hard to convince his people of the truth. Those who rejected him were drowned while those who believed in him were saved in the ship, *“And We saved him and those with him in the ship, and made it a sign for all peoples.”*

The second story is the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) methodology was well thought of. It started with a simple and clear invitation, *“And (We sent) Abraham; and he said to his people, ‘Serve God and be conscious of Him;’”* The second step was to stress that this call is beneficial to them, *“this is best for you, if you did but know,”* This might have been an incentive for them to show that they knew what was good for themselves and to accept his call. It was also the truth. The third step of his methodology was to show them the futility of their belief in idols made out of wood. He also pointed out that they have no evidence that these idols deserved to be worshipped, *“You only worship idols besides God; and you invent falsehood.”* He explained that the idols had no control over their sustenance, *“The things that you worship besides God have no power to give you sustenance.”* The fourth step in his strategy was to point out to them that it is God that they should seek their sustenance from, *“Seek sustenance from God, worship Him, and be grateful to Him. To Him will be your return.”* Finally, he pointed out that there was no escape for them and that they will return to God; if they reject faith then it would be their loss, *“And if you reject (the Message), so did generations before you; and the duty of the messenger is only to deliver the message clearly.”*

*“Do they not see how God originates creation; then repeats it. Verily that is easy for God.”* Those who disbelieve in God see every day how God starts the creation. They see it in the growing seeding; they see it in the laid egg; and they see it in the developing fetus. If all people came together to create life they would not be able to create life, only God creates life. He who starts the creation can repeat it. This is easy for God. The verse then invites people to walk in the land, *“Say, ‘Travel in the land and see how did God originate creation; so will God produce a later creation; for God has power over all things.’”* Traveling in the land opens the eyes to new facts that they have not seen before. When people stay in one place they get used to it and they do not pay attention to the beauty or the remarkable features of the scenes around them. Travel opens the eyes and the hearts to discover the remarkable things in life. God is capable of starting life and repeating the creation. He has power over everything. He can only say, “Be,” and it is.

He also has the power to punish whomsoever He wills and forgives whomsoever He wills, *“He torments whom He pleases, and He grants Mercy to whom He pleases, and to Him you will be returned. You cannot escape Him on earth or in heaven; and you have no protecting guardian beside God.”* Punishment and forgiveness are decreed by God’s will. He gave humankind the

ability to choose between guidance and misguidance and He showed him the two paths of guidance and misguidance. Humankind was created with equal propensity to the two ways. God has decreed that He will help those who choose to follow the path of guidance. Those who refuse to follow the path of guidance have chosen to sever their ties with God and will end up on the path to falsehood. Every group will have earned their share of God's mercy or punishment. No one will be able to escape. There is no power on earth that will be able to provide protection against God.

Those who chose the path of misguidance have lost all hope in God's mercy, *"Those who disbelieve in the revelations of God and in (their) meeting with Him, have no hope of My mercy; and they will have painful torment."*

After this brief digression, the verses go back to the story of Abraham (PBUH). Their response to his call was, *"But the answer of his people was only that they said, 'Kill him, or burn him.' Then God saved him from the fire. In this there are indeed signs for people who believe."* He argued with them in a rational way and their answer was to use their power and might to silence them. Abraham (PBUH) stood as a single man, unarmed facing tyranny. But God saved him. This was in itself a miracle that should have convinced his people of his truthfulness, but they refused to heed the lesson. There were signs in this for the believers. The first sign is the fact that Abraham (PBUH) was not harmed by the fire. The second sign is the fact that his people with all their might were unable to inflict harm on him. The third sign is the fact that the people did not reflect on the scene of Abraham (PBUH) walking out of the fire unharmed. Their hearts were sealed, and they were not able to perceive the meaning of the miracle.

*"He (Abraham) said, 'You have chosen only idols instead of God. The affection between you is only in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection you will deny each other and curse each other, and your refuge will be the Fire, and you will have no helpers.'" Prophet Abraham (PBUH) confronted them with the reality that they only worshiped these idols because of peer pressure. They were not really convinced that these idols deserve to be worshipped. They cared about each other more than they cared about finding the truth. But on the Day of Resurrection all these values will vanish. The ties of friendship among them will no longer exist; nor will they care about each other; on the contrary they will curse each other for what they have done to themselves. They will all end up in Hell and there will be no one to save them.*

Only one person, in addition to his wife, believed in Abraham (PBUH), *"And Lut believed him, and said, 'I am fleeing to my Lord, surely He is the Eminent, the Wise.'" Let us stop for a second to reflect on Lut's (PBUH) words, "I am fleeing to my Lord."* He did not flee to save himself or to make a worldly gain, but he left his home land to reach for God. He migrated from his country to be able to freely and sincerely serve his Lord.

God compensated Abraham (PBUH) for the loss of his country, his people, and his family. God gave him a progeny that will carry God's message till the end of time. All God's prophets who came after Abraham (PBUH) were his progeny, *"And We gave (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and*

*ordained among his progeny Prophet-hood and the Scripture. We granted him his reward in this life; and in the Hereafter he will verily be among the righteous.”* God bestowed his great bounty on the man who represents the epitome of submission to God.

The following verses tell the story of Prophet Lut (PBUH). Prophet Lut (PBUH) moved with Prophet Abraham (PBUH) to the valley of Jordan. Lut (PBUH) moved to live with a tribe that lived in the town of Sodom on the coast of the Dead Sea. Lut (PBUH) became a member of this tribe by virtue of marriage. Then homosexuality spread in the tribe. The Quran mentions that they were the first human beings to practice homosexuality, *“And (remember) Lut when he said to his people, ‘You commit lewdness, which none of the peoples has ever done before you. How can you lust after men, you cut off the way, and you commit abominations in your meetings?’”* Quran considers homosexuality to be a deviation from the initial natural disposition of human beings. The sexual desire between males and females is aligned with the requirement for the continuation of the human race. God created males and females to enjoy this relationship as an incentive for the continuation of the process of procreation. Lut’s (PBUH) people were also bandits. They assaulted people passing by and engaged in armed robbery. They performed evil deeds in public without shame. They had the audacity to respond to Lut’s (PBUH) advice with a challenge, *“Bring God's torment upon us if you are truthful.”*

Lut’s (PBUH) only recourse was to pray to God, *“He said, ‘My Lord, help me against the people who spread corruption.’”* God answered his prayer, *“When Our messengers came to Abraham with the good news, they said, ‘We are indeed going to destroy the people of this township, for truly they are wrongdoers.’”* The verse describes very briefly the encounter between Abraham (PBUH) and the angels. This same scene has been described in more details elsewhere. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was concerned about the welfare of Lut’s (PBUH), so he reminded the angels, *“He said, ‘But Lut is there.’”* But the angels reassured him of Lut’s (PBUH) safety, *“They said, ‘We are well aware who is there. We will certainly save him and his family, except his wife. She is of those who will remain behind.’”* It was decided that Lut’s (PBUH) wife would be punished with the others because she did approve of their behavior.

The following verses describe the scene when the angels came to visit Lut (PBUH). They came in the form of young, handsome men. He was worried that his people would attack his guests, *“And when Our messengers came to Lut, he was troubled on their account, for he could not protect them;”* But they reassured him, revealed their identity to him, and told him the purpose of their visit, *“but they said, ‘Fear not, nor grieve; we are to deliver you and your family, except your wife, who is of those who will remain behind. We are about to bring down upon the people of this town a scourge from heaven, because they transgressed.’”* The verse describes the scene of destruction that has been inflicted on the town and its population except Lut (PBUH) and those who believed with him. The remains of the town were left as a sign for those who can understand, *“And verily We left behind a clear sign for people who understand.”*

The next story is the story of Prophet Shu’aib (PBUH), *“To the people of Madyan (We sent) their brother Shu'aib. He said, ‘My people, worship God, and look forward to the Last Day, and do*

*not spread corruption in the land.’”* The verse confirms the oneness of the message and its essence, *“Worship God, and look forward to the Last Day.”* Serving God alone is the corner stone of the doctrine of Islam and looking forward to the Last Day is an incentive for them to become honest business people and to abandon fraudulent business practices. But they rejected the message and earned the decreed punishment, *“But they rejected him, so the tremor overtook them, and they became motionless bodies in their homes.”*

Then a brief reference to the punishment of ‘Ad and Thamud, *“And (the tribes of) ‘Ad and Thamud. (Their fate) is clear to you from their (ruined and deserted) dwellings. Satan made their deeds seem fair to them and so debarred them from the path, though they were keen observers.”* The dwellings of ‘Ad used to be in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula near Hadhramout while Thamud used to live in the northern part of the peninsula. ‘Ad was destroyed by a wave of strong cold wind while Thamud was destroyed by the mighty blast. The yearly summer caravans going from Mecca to Syria in the north and the yearly winter caravans going from Mecca to Yemen in the south used to pass by the remains of their houses. The Arabs knew that these were the remains of the dwellings of ‘Ad and Thamud. Although ‘Ad and Thamud were bright, *“keen observers,”* and had many achievements; but Satan found a way to delude them and drive them away from the straight path.

The next reference was made to Qaroun, Pharaoh, and Haman, *“(Remember also) Qaroun, Pharaoh, and Haman. Moses came to them with clear signs, but they behaved arrogantly in the land; yet they could not escape (Our punishment).”* Qaroun was a very rich and knowledgeable person from the people of Moses (PBUH). He oppressed his people. He did not heed the advice which some of his people gave to him: do not behave arrogantly and do good. Pharaoh was a tyrant. He committed heinous crimes. He enslaved people and created divisions among them. Haman was Pharaoh’s minister who helped him in making and executing his evil plans. They rejected Moses’ (PBUH) message so they were doomed.

God seized all the tyrants who spread corruption in the land, *“Each one of them We seized for his crime. On some, We sent a violent tornado; others were caught by a (mighty) blast; some We caused the earth to swallow up; and some We drowned. It was not God who wronged them, but they wronged themselves.”*

The similitude between those tyrants and the spider is given, *“The example of those who take protecting guardians other than God is that like the spider, who builds (to itself) a house; but truly the flimsiest of houses is the spider's house; if they but knew.”* It is an amazing example which reflects the real truth. The example of the people who are impressed by the wealthy and powerful, thinking that they can help them, is like a spider seeking security in its nest. The spider’s nest is so flimsy it does not provide any security for the spider. Similarly, the rich and powerful in this life do not have real power and cannot provide any real support for the people who seek their help. People should realize that the only real support is the support of God. God knows the truth about the limitations of those who are being invoked beside Him, *“Verily God knows whatever they invoke besides Him. He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* God cites these similitudes to help those who understand become aware of the truth, *“And such similitudes We*

*coin for people, but only those who have knowledge understand them.”*

The following verse is a reminder of the Creator of heavens and earth, “*God created the heavens and the earth with truth. Therein is indeed a sign for the believers.*” The believers’ hearts are open to sense the beauty and the miracle of the creation. This is followed by a reminder of connection between the truth of the creation and the Quran, “*Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book, and establish regular prayer. Prayer prohibits indecencies and evil. And remembrance of God is greater. And God knows what you do.*”

### **Verses 46 to 69:**

46. *And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in the best manner, except those who are wrongdoers among them. And say, “We believe in that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.”*
47. *And thus We have revealed to you the Book. Those to whom We gave the Scripture before will believe in it; and some of those believe in it. And none reject Our revelations except the disbelievers.*
48. *And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand; otherwise those who utter falsehood may have had a reason for doubt.*
49. *But it is clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge, and none reject Our revelations except the wrongdoers.*
50. *And they say, “Why no signs were sent down on him from his Lord?” Say, “Indeed the signs are with God, and I am only a plain warner.”*
51. *Is it not enough for them that we have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them? Verily, in it is mercy and a reminder to those who believe.*
52. *Say (Muhammad), “God is sufficient as a witness between me and you. He knows whatever is in the heavens and the earth. And those who believe in falsehood and disbelieve in God, they are the losers.*
53. *They ask you to hasten on the torment. Had not a term been appointed, the torment would certainly have come to them; but it will certainly come to them suddenly, while they are unaware.*
54. *They ask you to hasten on the torment; but certainly Hell will encompass the disbelievers.*
55. *On the day when the torment shall cover them from above them and from below them, and it will be said, “Taste (the fruits) of what you used to do.”*
56. *My servants who believe, truly My earth is spacious. Therefore, worship Me alone.*
57. *Every soul shall have a taste of death. Then to Us you shall be brought back.*
58. *And those who believe and do good deeds, We shall house them in lofty dwellings in heaven, under which rivers will flow. They will remain there forever, an excellent reward for those who toil;*
59. *Those who persevere and put their trust in their Lord.*
60. *How many an animal who does not carry its provision, but God provides for it and for you. He is the All- Hearing, the Omniscient.*

61. *If indeed you ask them who has created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and the moon (to his Law), they will certainly reply, "God". How are they then deluded away (from the truth)?*
62. *God makes the provision wide for whom He wills of His servants, and straitens it for whom (He wills). Indeed, God is Cognizant of all things.*
63. *And if indeed you ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, they will certainly reply, "God." Say, "Praise be to God." But most of them do not understand.*
64. *The life of this world is only diversion and amusement? But verily the home in the Hereafter is indeed the life, if they only knew.*
65. *And when they embark on a ship, they call on God, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him; but when He has delivered them safely to land, behold, they associate others (with Him);*
66. *Let them disbelieve in that which We have given them, and let them take their enjoyment. But they will come to know.*
67. *Have they not seen that We have made a secure sanctuary, while people are being snatched away all around them? Do they then believe in falsehood and reject the blessings of God?*
68. *And who does greater wrong than he who invents a lie concerning God, or denies the truth when it comes to him? Is not there an abode in Hell for the disbelievers?*
69. *And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our paths. Verily God is with those who do good. (29: 46 – 69)*

*“And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in the best manner, except those who are wrongdoers among them. And say, ‘We believe in that which has been revealed to us and that which has been revealed to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.’”*

The verse emphasizes that all the messengers of God starting with Noah (PBUH) and ending with Muhammad (PBUH) came with a single message. The message came from One God and had one objective: to guide all people to the path of God. The believers who received the message through different messengers belong to one brotherhood. The human race was divided over the centuries into two groups: those who believe in God and those who followed Satan and rejected faith. The statement that this verse reiterates is the single major truth that forms the foundation of Islam. The belief in the one single message brings the believers under one family. The relationships between the members of this family is stronger than blood, tribal, race, or national relationships. They all hold tight to the secure knot that binds them together in the belief in One God. Muslims are commanded to communicate the new message to the people of the Scripture in the best way they can; and to explain the rationale behind the revelation of the last stage in God’s message. Muslims are also commanded to explain the points of agreements between this stage of the message and the previous stages, saying, *“our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit.”* However, there are always those who wrong themselves and adamantly refuse to accept any argument.

*“And thus We have revealed to you the Book. Those to whom We gave the Scripture before will believe in it; and some of those believe in it. And none reject Our revelations except the disbelievers.”* The Book which was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) followed the same pattern



and the same method of revelation that the previous Scriptures followed. People will be divided in two groups, those who believe in it and those who will reject it. Those who reject the Book are indeed disbelievers. The signs that were given to them are clear and logical. Only those whose souls are covered will not be able to see these signs. The word, “*disbelief*” in Arabic means to cover. Thus, the disbelievers are those who cover their eyes and hearts so that their eyes cannot see the truth and their hearts cannot be touched by it.

*“And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand; otherwise those who utter falsehood may have had a reason for doubt.”* This verse refutes the claim of the idolaters of Mecca that Muhammad (PBUH) concocted this Quran. It is a naïve claim, nevertheless the Quran addresses it, explaining that they have known the Prophet (PBUH) all his life and they never have seen him write a book before. We label their claim as “naïve,” because even if the Prophet (PBUH) was known to have written books before the Quran, the Quran embodies the proof that it could not have been written by a human being. It is beyond the ability of a human being to compose such a text because, *“But it is clear revelations in the hearts of those who have been given knowledge, and none reject Our revelations except the wrongdoers.”* Those whom God bestowed knowledge upon can see the clear signs in the Quran, but those who do not see the signs are indeed wrongdoers.

*“And they say, ‘Why no signs were sent down on him from his Lord?’ Say, ‘Indeed the signs are with God, and I am only a plain warner.’”* The idolaters wanted the Prophet (PBUH) to perform physical miracles similar to the miracles that were performed by previous messengers. But physical miracles are only good for those who see them. But the Quran is the eternal miracle. It is the everlasting miracle for every generation to see, touch, and read. However, God’s miracles are performed at His command and according to His timing. The Prophet (PBUH) could not suggest to God which miracle to reveal and when He should reveal it. The Prophet’s (PBUH) only task is to warn people. The verse outlines the role and limitations of God’s messengers. Those who request physical miracles ignore the blessings of God embodied in the Quranic revelations, *“Is it not enough for them that we have sent down to you the Book which is recited to them?”* Their request only reflects their ingratitude for God’s blessings. But the hearts of those who believe are touched by God’s mercy. They appreciate God’s bounty and generosity which invite them to God’s presence. The Quran opens up for them new horizons of knowledge that fill their hearts with mercy and light, *“Verily, in it is mercy and a reminder to those who believe.”*

Those who are unable to open their hearts to the treasures of the Quran, *“Say (Muhammad), ‘God is sufficient as a witness between me and you. He knows whatever is in the heavens and the earth. And those who believe in falsehood and disbelieve in God, they are the losers.’”* God is the ultimate witness in this dispute and those who believe in falsehood are the losers. They are losers in this life and they will be losers in the Hereafter. They have lost themselves; they have lost guidance; and they have lost security. Faith is itself a gain for the believers. It provides security for the hearts knowing that God is their protector. It provides support for the believers to stay on the path and to persevere in face of adversity. These are the things that the disbelievers will lose.

*“They ask you to hasten on the torment. Had not a term been appointed, the torment would certainly have come to them; but it will certainly come to them suddenly, while they are unaware. They ask you to hasten on the torment; but certainly Hell will encompass the disbelievers. On the day when the torment shall cover them from above them and from below them, and it will be said, ‘Taste (the fruits) of what you used to do.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) warned the idolaters of Mecca, but they did not understand why the warning did not materialize. They challenged the Prophet (PBUH) to bring about this punishment which he promised. God may delay punishment because He wants to give the disbelievers time to confirm their guilt. He may delay the punishment because He wants to test the believers so that they persevere and mature; and those who fail the test can be eliminated. God may delay the punishment to give those who failed a second chance to join the ranks of the believers. But the disbelievers were oblivious to the divine will. They used to challenge the Prophet (PBUH) to hasten the punishment. But God had decreed a specific time for the promised punishment. They will get it when they least expect it. Not only they will be punished in this life but they will also be destined to Hell in the Hereafter. The torment in Hell will overwhelm them; it will come to them from all sides.

The narrative moves to another group of people: the believers, those who were persecuted and harassed by the disbelievers to force them to abandon their faith. God addresses them in an endearing way, commanding them to flee the persecution and to escape with their faith, *“My servants who believe, truly My earth is spacious. Therefore, worship Me alone.”* God calls the believers, *“My servants,”* so that they feel the honor of belonging to God. Then He tells them that, *“My earth is spacious,”* wherever they go they are travelling in God’s land. Here is a wide opportunity for you to escape from the persecution, be near God through your faith, and enjoy the bounty of God, which He placed in His wide land. Two fears are usually lurking in the minds of those who contemplate the migration away from their homeland. The first is the fear of loneliness and the second is the fear of the loss of the means of sustenance. The verse addresses these two fears. First, it assures the believers that they are God’s servants and He will not abandon them. Then, it tells them that God’s land is everywhere and He is the One who guarantees and controls the means of sustenance. Another fear that faced the believers who were contemplating to migrate from Mecca was the fear of being discovered and executed. God reassured them by stating the ultimate fact of life: death is inevitable. Everyone will die eventually and will return to God, *“Every soul shall have a taste of death. Then to Us you shall be brought back.”* Not only they will return to God, but they were also promised a great reward, *“But those who believe and do good deeds, We shall house them in lofty dwellings in heaven, under which rivers will flow. They will remain there forever, an excellent reward for those who toil, those who persevere and put their trust in their Lord.”*

The narrative returns again to address the fear of losing the means of sustenance, *“How many an animal who does not carry its provision? But God provides for it and for you. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* God is He who provides for every one of His creatures. So there is no need to fear losing one’s means of sustenance.

The following verses point out to the contradiction in the logic of the idolaters of Mecca. They

believe that God is the Creator. He created the universe, the heaven and the earth. They seek the help of God when they are facing a dire situation but in the mean time they associate partners with Him and they persecute the believers, *“If indeed you ask them who has created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and the moon (to his Law), they will certainly reply, ‘God.’ How are they then deluded away (from the truth)? God makes the provision wide for whom He wills of His servants, and straitens it for whom (He wills). Indeed, God is Cognizant of all things.*

*And if indeed you ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, they will certainly reply, ‘God.’ Say, ‘Praise be to God.’ But most of them do not understand.”* These verses describe the doctrine of the religion that the Arabs believed in at that time. It was rooted in the belief of Oneness of God because it came initially from the message that Prophets Abraham (PBUH) and Ishmael (PBUH) brought to Arabia. But it was later distorted and corrupted by idolatry and associating partners with God. The Quran uses the cosmic signs of God as a proof for God’s Oneness and exhorts people to contemplate and reflect on these signs.

The life of this world is merely a diversion and amusement when you compare it with the Hereafter, *“The life of this world is only diversion and amusement? But verily the home in the Hereafter is indeed the life, if they only knew.”* One should not consider the life of this world as the ultimate abode. The real life is the life in the Hereafter. That does not mean that one should live an ascetic life in this world but a balance should be maintained between the enjoyment of this life and the work for the Hereafter. People should not live a hedonistic life enslaved by their lusts and desires.

Another evidence of their contradictory attitude is displayed by their behavior when facing dangers, *“And when they embark on a ship, they call on God, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him; but when He has delivered them safely to land, behold, they associate others (with Him).”* They will realize the consequences of their deeds, *“Let them disbelieve in that which We have given them, and let them take their enjoyment. But they will come to know.”*

God then reminded them of the bounties that He bestowed on them, *“Have they not seen that We have made a secure sanctuary, while people are being snatched away all around them? Do they then believe in falsehood and reject the blessings of God?”* The people of Mecca used to live a secure and safe life while the tribes around them were engaged in fights and disputes. They did not appreciate God’s blessings and they used this secure and sacred place to worship idols, *“And who does greater wrong than he who invents a lie concerning God, or denies the truth when it comes to him? Is not there a home in Hell for the disbelievers?”*

The Sura ends by commending the believers and assuring them of God’s rewards, *“And those who strive in Our (cause), We will certainly guide them to our paths. Verily God is with those who do good.”*

## **Sura 30: Al-Rum (The Romans, The Byzantines)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 32:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *The Romans have been defeated*
3. *In a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious*
4. *Within a few years. God's is the command in the former case and in the latter, and on that day the believers will rejoice*
5. *In the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*
6. *It is God's promise. God never breaks His promise, but most of people do not know.*
7. *They know what is apparent of the worldly life, but they are heedless of the Hereafter.*
8. *Have they not pondered upon themselves? God did not create the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, except with truth and for an appointed term. But truly many of the people do not believe that they will meet with their Lord.*
9. *Have they not travelled in the land and seen the nature of the consequence for those who were before them? They were stronger than them in power, and they dug the earth and built upon it more than they have built. Messengers of their own came to them with clear proofs. Certainly, God did not wrong them but they wronged themselves.*
10. *Then evil was the consequence for those who dealt in evil, because they denied the revelations of God and used to mock them.*
11. *It is God who begins the creation; then repeats it; then to Him you will be brought back.*
12. *On the Day that the Hour will take place the guilty will be struck dumb with despair.*
13. *They will have no intercessor among their "partners" and they will (themselves) reject their "partners".*
14. *On the Day that the Hour will take place, that Day people will be sorted out.*
15. *Then those who have believed and did good deeds will be happy in a garden.*
16. *And those who disbelieved and falsely denied our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter, they will be brought to the torment.*
17. *So glorify God, when you retire at night and when you rise in the morning;*
18. *Praise is due to Him, in the heavens and on earth; and in the evening and at midday.*
19. *It is He who brings out the living from the dead, and brings out the dead from the living, and who gives life to the earth after it is dead; and thus shall you be brought out (from the dead).*
20. *And among His signs is that He created you from dust; and then you are human beings scattered (far and wide).*
21. *And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He planted affection and mercy between you. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect.*
22. *And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. Verily in that are signs for those who know.*
23. *And among His signs is your sleep by night and by day, and the quest that you (make for livelihood) out of His bounty. Verily in that are signs for those who listen.*

24. *And among His signs is that He shows you the lightning, that terrifies and inspires hope, and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after its death. Verily in that are signs for those who understand.*
25. *And among His signs is that the heavens and earth stand by His command; then when He calls you, with a (single) call from the earth, you will immediately come forth.*
26. *To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth; all are devoutly obedient to Him.*
27. *It is He who begins the creation; then repeats it; and for Him it is easiest. His is the Sublime similitude in the heavens and the earth. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
28. *He gives you an example from yourselves. Do you have, among those whom your right hands possess, partners in what We have provided for you so that you are equal therein (and) would fear them as you fear each other? Thus, we explain the verses in detail for a people who understand.*
29. *Yet the wrongdoers follow their own whims without knowledge. Who will guide those whom God leaves astray? And they will have no helpers.*
30. *So, as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the initial natural disposition which God instilled in people. There is no altering of God's creation. That is the right religion, but most people do not know.*
31. *Turning towards Him in repentance, and be conscious of Him. Establish regular prayers, and do not be of those who associate partners with God.*
32. *Those who split up their religion and became sects, each party rejoicing in what it has.*  
(30: 1 – 32)

The first few verses of this Sura were revealed when the army of the Persian Empire defeated the Roman's army. The idolaters of Mecca saw in this military victory a victory of the ideology of idolatry over Christendom and the belief in God. They hoped that this victory would be a prelude for their victory over the Muslims. The first few verses of this Sura brought glad tidings to the believers in Mecca that the balance will soon tilt in favor of the Christian Romans and they will defeat the Persian idolaters.

The Sura started with the Alphabetical letters, "*Alif. Lam. Mim.*" This emphasizes the fact that the Quran has been composed using the Alphabetical letters of the language that the Arabs have mastered. Yet they were unable to compose a similar book. Then the future is foretold, "*The Romans have been defeated in a land close by, and they, after their defeat will be victorious within a few years.*" Ibn Jareer narrated on the authority of Ibn Mass'oud (RA) that the idolaters of Mecca supported the Persian Empire while the Muslims supported the Roman Empire. When the Persians defeated the Romans the idolaters of Mecca were elated; they boasted the supremacy of the Persian idolaters over the Roman Christian. When these verses were revealed some of the idolaters of Mecca challenged Abu Bakr (RA) into a bet that this prophecy will not take place. However, Abu Bakr (RA) won the bet when the Romans defeated the Persians after nine years. The word "few" meant a number less than ten for the Arabs.

One can glean two lessons from these verses. The first lesson is the way that non-believing groups, in spite of the differences in their ethnicity, language, and cultural traditions, form alliances against believing groups. The second lesson is the absolute trust of the Muslims in God's promise. This trust gave Abu Bakr (RA) the confidence to accept the challenge of the

idolaters of Mecca. A third lesson is learnt from the subsequent verse, *“God's is the command in the former case and in the latter,”* which emphasizes the fact that all decisions belong to God. God controls all affairs. When God ordains victory for the Romans, the believers will rejoice, *“and in that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of God. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”*

God promised victory and God never breaks His promise, *“It is God's promise. God never breaks His promise, but most of people do not know.”* However, people's knowledge is limited. They may acquire a great deal of knowledge but it is limited to their experience in this worldly life, but they do not know much beyond this superficial knowledge, *“They know what is apparent of the worldly life, but they are heedless of the Hereafter.”*

The verses continue to explore the creation of God, *“Have they not pondered upon themselves? God did not create the heavens and the earth, and that which is between them, except with truth and for an appointed term. But truly many of the people do not believe that they will meet with their Lord.”* The nature of the human body and the cosmic phenomena around us all lead to the conclusion that they were created according to a very meticulous and accurate set of laws. This is the truth that supports the existence of the universe. Everything runs according to a prescribed law until a predetermined term has been reached.

Another rhetorical question is posed, *“Have they not travelled in the land and seen the nature of the consequence for those who were before them? They were stronger than them in power, and they dug the earth and built upon it more than they have built. Messengers of their own came to them with clear proofs. Certainly, God did not wrong them but they wronged themselves.”* This is a call to the disbelievers to ponder about previous nations. They had more power and they established civilization on earth but they rejected guidance which God sent to them through His messengers. What was their end? *“Then evil was the consequence for those who dealt in evil, because they denied the revelations of God and used to mock them.”* They met their doom as a result of what they had done. God did not wrong them but they wronged themselves. The verse invites people to travel and reflect on the history previous nations.

The following verses present another theme. The verses deal with the inevitability of resurrection after death, *“It is God who begins the creation; then repeats it; then to Him you will be brought back.”* It is a simple and clear truth. He who started the creation is able to repeat the same process again. On the Day of the Resurrection the fate of people will be determined, *“On the Day that the Hour will take place, the guilty will be struck dumb with despair.”* The guilty will be punished. They were heedless of the truth of the resurrection; and here they are with all ties, to their previous partners and those they thought will intercede on their behalf, severed, *“No intercessor will they have among their 'partners' and they will (themselves) reject their 'partners'.”* They will be separated from the believers, *“On the Day that the Hour will take place, that Day people will be sorted out.”* The believers will get their reward, *“Then those who have believed and did good deeds will be happy in a garden.”* While those who rejected God's guidance will be punished, *“And those who disbelieved and falsely denied our revelations and the meeting of the Hereafter, they will be brought to the torment.”*

The following verses brings us back to the world that we live in and to the cosmic phenomena, the miracles, and the secrets of the human soul, *“So glorify God, when you retire at night and when you rise in the morning; praise is due to Him, in the heavens and on earth; and in the evening and at midday.”* The command to glorify and praise God comes after the mention of the scenes of the Day of Resurrection, the happy ending of the believers in secure gardens, and the evil ending of the disbelievers. It is also an appropriate introduction to the verses reminding people of the miracles of the creation. Times and places for glorifying and praising God are mentioned. This covers all the dimensions of time and space and links the heart of the believer to God at all times and in all places.

*“It is He who brings out the living from the dead, and brings out the dead from the living, and who gives life to the earth after it is dead; and thus shall you be brought out (from the dead).”* The verse describes the perpetual processes of life and death which continuously occur everywhere. The narrative then describes the creation of the human being, *“And among His signs is that He created you from dust; and then you are human beings scattered (far and wide).”* The dust from which human beings were created is a dead material. Changing a dead substance into a living being is a miracle. It also points to the close relationship between humans and the earth they live on and are affected by the laws that control it. One should ponder the miracle of creation, appreciate the process of creation and glorify and praise God for His favors. Not only humans were created from dust but they were also created in pairs, *“And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He planted affection and mercy between you. Verily in that are signs for those who reflect.”* God created humans in pairs and instilled in them the natural attraction to each other and the ability to harbor and express emotions towards each other. Each one of the spouses finds a safe haven with the other. Affection and compassion necessary for the development of new lives are instilled in the hearts of the spouses.

*“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors. Verily in that are signs for those who know.”* The creation of heavens and earth has been mentioned in several verses of the Quran. We pass quickly by it, but it is a huge miracle that we need to reflect upon. How was this huge universe created? Human beings do not even know the extent of the universe with all these constellations and the colossal number of stars they include. Every star moves in its own orbit in perpetual well controlled motion, they never collide with each other. Another miracle is the diversity in the human race. People see these facts but do not reflect on it much, little they know.

*“And among His signs is your sleep by night and by day, and the quest that you (make for livelihood) out of His bounty. Verily in that are signs for those who listen.”* This verse points to the harmony between the cosmic phenomena and the needs of the human being. Human beings need a night to rest and a day to work which are provided by the meticulous design of the universe.

*“And among His signs is that He shows you the lightning, that terrifies and inspires hope, and He sends down rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after its death. Verily in that are signs for those who understand.”* Another miracle is the lightening. The verse does not dwell on the scientific description of the phenomenon but mentions its effect on the human beings. Lightening evokes feelings of fear and hope, fear of the harm that is caused by lightening and hope in the growth caused by rain. The verse refers to life and death in connection to earth as if it were a living creature and it is. It is part of the creation of God that glorifies and praises Him. In addition, the earth is the source of life for plants and vegetations and life that is brought about by the rain which comes from the sky.

*“And among His signs is that the heavens and earth stand by His command; then when He calls you, with a (single) call from the earth, you will immediately come forth.”* This is another miracle that can only happen by the command of God. Everything belongs to Him and all His creatures are devoutly obedient to Him, *“To Him belongs every being that is in the heavens and on earth; all are devoutly obedient to Him.”* We see many people who are not obedient to God but nevertheless they are controlled by God’s laws.

*“It is He who begins the creation; then repeats it; and for Him it is most easy. His is the Sublime similitude in the heavens and the earth. He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* God’s ability to start and repeat the creation has been mentioned before, but this verse adds that starting and repeating the creation is easy for God because He is unique, Eminent, and Wise.

*“He gives you an example from yourselves. Do you have, among those whom your right hands possess, partners in what We have provided for you so that you are equal therein (and) would fear them as you fear each other? Thus we explain the verses in detail for a people who understand.”* This example is given for those who used to associate partners with God, yet they refused to share their wealth with their servants or to consider them equal. They forgot that the wealth they had was not of their own creation but was a bounty from God. They used double standard. They ignored God’s right to be worshipped alone because He is the Creator and in the mean time they asked to have exclusive rights regarding their slaves. This corrupt logic is a product of following their whims and desires in making decisions rather than using rationale thinking, *“Yet the wrongdoers follow their own whims without knowledge. Who will guide those whom God leaves astray? And they will have no helpers.”*

*“So, as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the initial natural disposition which God instilled in people. There is no altering of God's creation. That is the right religion, but most people do not know.”* Follow the straight path and be devout to God. Following the straight path will save people from following the crooked ways which are controlled by their whims and desires. Following the straight path is part of the initial natural disposition which God instilled in the psyche of the human being. Although this command was addressed to the Prophet (PBUH) but it was meant for all believers. The attributes of the believers are further detailed, *“Turning towards Him in repentance, and be conscious of Him. Establish regular prayers, and do not be of those who associate partners with God.”* The



believers turn towards God in repentance, continuously worshipping and being conscious of Him, and they refrain from associating partners with Him. The disbelievers on the other hand divided themselves into sects, *“Those who split up their religion and became sects, each party rejoicing in what it has.”* Each sect is rejoicing in what they have. God’s religion is one and it is the only way that leads to Him.

### **Verses 33 to 60:**

33. *When adversity touches people, they call upon their Lord, turning back to Him in repentance. Then when He gives them a taste of mercy from Himself, some of them immediately associate partners with their Lord;*
34. *Showing ingratitude for the (favours) We have bestowed on them. Then enjoy yourselves, for soon you will know.*
35. *Or have We sent down an authority to them, which speaks of that which they associate with Him?*
36. *When We give people a taste of mercy, they rejoice in it; but when some evil afflicts them, because of what their (own) hands have sent forth, they are in despair.*
37. *Did they not see that God enlarges the provision and restricts it, to whomsoever He pleases? Verily in that are signs for those who believe.*
38. *So give the close relatives their due, as well as the needy and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the countenance of God, and it is they who will be successful.*
39. *That which you give in usury in order that it may increase within people's wealth does not increase in the sight of God; but that which you give in charity, seeking God's countenance, will increase manifold.*
40. *God is He who created you, then provided for you, then will cause you to die, and will give you life again. Is there any of those whom you associate with God who does any of that? Praised and Exalted Be He above what they associate (with Him).*
41. *Corruption has appeared on land and at sea because of (the evil) which people's hands have earned, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return.*
42. *Say, “Travel through the land and see what was the end of those before. Most of them associated partners with God.”*
43. *Stand firm and true in your devotion to the upright religion, before there comes from God a day which cannot be averted; on that day they shall become separated.*
44. *Those who disbelieved – they will bear the consequence of their disbelief. And those who did good deeds were preparing for themselves.*
45. *That He may reward those who believe and do good deeds, out of his bounty. Indeed, He does not like the disbelievers.*
46. *And among His signs is that He sends the winds, as heralds of glad tidings, giving you a taste of His mercy, so that the ships may sail at His command, and that you may seek of His bounty in order that you may be grateful.*
47. *We did indeed send, before you, messengers to their peoples, and they came to them with clear evidences; then We exacted revenge on those who were guilty, and it is incumbent on Us to support the believers.*

48. *God is He who sends the winds so that they raise clouds, and spreads them along the sky as pleases Him, and causes them to break and you see the rain down pouring from within them. And when He makes it to fall on whom He wills of His servants, they rejoice;*
49. *Although they were, before it was sent down upon them – before that, in despair.*
50. *So observe the effects of the mercy of God, how He gives life to the earth after its death. Certainly He will raise the dead to life; and He has power over all things.*
51. *And even if We send a wind and they see it to be yellow, they would after that certainly continue to disbelieve.*
52. *So verily you cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear the call, when they have turned to flee.*
53. *Nor can you guide the blind out of their error. You can make none to hear save those who believe in Our revelations and they have submitted.*
54. *God is He who created you weak then gave you, after weakness, strength, then made after strength weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills. He is the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.*
55. *On the Day that the Hour (of Reckoning) will take place the guilty will swear that they had stayed but an hour. Thus, they were deluded.*
56. *But those endued with knowledge and faith will say, "Indeed you did stay, within God's book, to the Day of Resurrection, and this is the Day of Resurrection; but you did not know.*
57. *On that Day the excuses, which the wrongdoers will make, will not be of benefit to them; nor will they be allowed to make amends.*
58. *We have cited in this Quran for the people every sort of parable. But if you bring them any sign, the disbelievers are sure to say, "You are but a falsifier."*
59. *Thus, does God seal up the hearts of those who do not know.*
60. *So persevere. God's promise is the very truth, and let not those who do not have certitude discourage you. (30: 33 – 60)*

*“When adversity touches people, they call upon their Lord, turning back to Him in repentance. Then when He gives them a taste of mercy from Himself, some of them immediately associate partners with their Lord; showing ingratitude for the (favours) We have bestowed on them.”* This verse describes the behavior of people who keep changing their minds because they adopted confused values. Their decisions are erratic; they fluctuate with their mood swings. When they face a difficulty, they remember God; but once the difficult time passes they forget God’s bounty and associate partners with Him. They do not subscribe to a constant faith which would guide them to a steady behavior. These people need to be reminded of their imprudence. Thus, a threat is issued, *“Then enjoy yourselves, for soon you will know.”* This is a frightful threat from God. Following the threat, a rhetorical question is posed expressing the renunciation of their shameful deeds, *“Or have We sent down an authority to them, which speaks of that which they associate with Him?”* The articles of faith can only be dictated by God. Did they then receive a revelation from God which decreed their corrupt faith?

This is followed by a verse which describes human behavior, *“When We give people a taste of mercy, they rejoice in it; but when some evil afflicts them, because of what their (own) hands have sent forth, they are in despair.”* The verse describes the case of people who are completely

occupied with their own interests. They love to enjoy good things without bothering to wonder about the source of these good things. Because they do not think of God, they despair when they are faced with an affliction. Had they thought of God and remembered Him in good as well as bad times, they would have reached the conclusion that, *“God enlarges the provision and restricts it, to whomsoever He pleases? Verily in that are signs for those who believe.”* One should remember God during difficult and good times, because these are normal phases of human life decreed by God. The believer should not overly celebrate good times nor despairs in difficult times. These conditions should be accepted as part of human life.

Since God is the Provider, then it is His right to guide people to the best way to spend their money, *“So give the close relatives their due, as well as the needy and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the countenance of God, and it is they who will be successful.”* God the Provider, decided in His wisdom that certain categories of people are entitled to a portion of the provision that God bestows on His servants. The verse lists some of these categories: the close relatives, the needy, and the wayfarer. The poor-dues were not yet prescribed at the time when this verse was revealed. But this verse establishes the basic principle on which the financial theory of Islam has been established. God is the owner of all wealth; He assigns it to whomever He wills and He decreed that there are categories of people who are entitled to certain shares of this assignment. Spending the money according to God’s commands guarantees success in this life and in the Hereafter. Some people used to give gifts to rich people hoping that they will receive better gifts in return, *“That which you give in usury in order that it may increase within people’s wealth does not increase in the sight of God.”* Quran guided them to a better way to receive a better return on their investment, *“but that which you give in charity, seeking God’s countenance, will increase manifold.”* This is a guaranteed investment plan: donate money without expecting a return from people but get your return from God. He will give you multiples of the wealth you spent according to His command.

The following verses deal with the issue of associating partners with God from the point of view of earning one’s livelihood, *“God is He who created you, then provided for you, then will cause you to die, and will give you life again.”* The verse challenged the idolaters by stating that God is the Creator, He is the Provider, He puts them to death, and He is the one who will resurrect them. The Arabs did not dispute the fact that God is the Creator. They could not claim that the idols provided them with their livelihood, and they could not argue about the fact that it is God who puts them to death. However, many of them were doubtful of the resurrection. A rhetorical question was posed, *“Is there any of those whom you associate with God who does any of that?”* The answer was given immediately, *“Praised and Exalted be He above what they associate (with Him).”*

*“Corruption has appeared on land and at sea because of (the evil) which people’s hands have earned, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return. Say, ‘Travel through the land and see what was the end of those before. Most of them associated partners with God.’”* The spread of corruption is not a coincidence. It happens as a result of people’s behavior and attitudes. This is part of the divine project to alert people to the

consequences of their actions, so that they may amend their behavior. The dire consequences for the spread of corruption can be easily seen from the remains of ancient cities and civilizations.

The road to success is then outlined, *“Stand firm and true in your devotion to the upright religion, before there comes from God a day which cannot be averted; on that day they shall become separated.”* This command was given earlier in connection with the people who follow their worldly desires. Here it comes in connection with the concept of associating partners with God and its effect on the outlook of people regarding earning their living. The two separate ways that the believers and the disbelievers go through and their consequences are explained, *“Those who disbelieved – they will bear the consequence of their disbelief. And those who did good deeds were preparing for themselves.”* The Arabic word for *“preparing for themselves,”* gives the impression of a process where a person exerts hard and consistent work which will result in a comfortable life at the end. This hard and consistent work makes them eligible to receive the bounty of God, *“That He may reward those who believe and do good deeds, out of his bounty. Indeed, He does not like the disbelievers.”*

The following verses describe some of the signs of God that people should reflect upon, *“And among His signs is that He sends the winds, as heralds of glad tidings, giving you a taste of His mercy, so that the ships may sail at His command, and that you may seek of His bounty in order that you may be grateful.”* The wind herald the coming of rain and rain causes the plants to grow. Wind also propel ships making trading easier. These are all bounties of God which require our gratitude. But people did not appreciate God’s mercy and rejected the messengers who were sent to guide them, *“We did indeed send, before you, messengers to their peoples, and they came to them with clear evidences; then We exacted revenge on those who were guilty, and it is incumbent on Us to support the believers.”* Glory be to God who promised to grant victory to the believers. Sometimes victory is delayed according to human measures but God has His own measure which is based on His total awareness and wisdom. The cycle of rain is then described, *“God is He who sends the winds so that they raise clouds, and spreads them along the sky as pleases Him, and causes them to break and you see the rain down pouring from within them. And when He makes it to fall on whom He wills of His servants, they rejoice; although they were, before it was sent down upon them – before that, in despair.”* The Arabs appreciated the importance of the rain because their livelihood was directly dependent on rain water. When rain is delayed their hearts would be filled with despair.

These phenomena are all signs of God’s mercy and power, *“So observe the effects of the mercy of God, how He gives life to the earth after its death. Certainly He will raise the dead to life; and He has power over all things.”* They are full of despair when the wind does not bring rain. In their despair they forget to remember God and instead they become entrenched in their disbelief, *“And if We sent a wind and they see it to be yellow, they would after that certainly continue to disbelieve.”*

*“So verily you cannot make the dead to hear, nor can you make the deaf to hear the call, when they have turned to flee. Nor can you guide the blind out of their error. You can make none to*

*hear save those who believe in Our revelations and they have submitted.*” These verses were meant to comfort the Prophet (PBUH) and to assure him that it is their mistake not his that made them obstinate in their disbelief. He could not make the dead to hear. They were described as dead, deaf, and blind because they were unable to reflect and comprehend the truth around them.

*“God is He who created you from weakness then gave you, after weakness, strength, then made after strength weakness and grey hair. He creates what He wills. He is the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.”* God did not say created you weak but He said, *“He created you from weakness,”* as if weakness was the material that human beings were created from. This weakness has many dimensions. It is the physical weakness of the minute cell from which the fetus emanated; the weakness of the fetus as it develops; and the weakness of the baby when it is born and until the body reaches maturity. It is also the weakness of the material from which humankind was created. Humankind was created from mud. It is only the spirit of God which has been blown into him that differentiates him from other animals. Then it is the weakness of the human being in resisting the temptation of the physical desires and lusts. The spirit of God blown into him is the only force that supports him in resisting these lowly desires. Then God gave humankind the strength: the physical, the psychological, and the spiritual strength. Then comes the phase of decline when humankind loses all the strength of maturity and returns back to a weak state similar to the state of childhood. Every human being, given that he/she lives long enough, will experience these phases of development. No one can escape this progression of events. The lifetime story has been planned meticulously by God, *“the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.”*

Life then ends and later on people will be resurrected, *“On the Day that the Hour (of Reckoning) will take place the guilty will swear that they had stayed but an hour. Thus, they were deluded.”* The sense of time will be lost. The guilty will suffer a delusion similar to the one they suffered in their life when they were misguided. But the believers who were given knowledge will explain, *“But those endowed with knowledge and faith will say, ‘Indeed you did stay, within God's book, to the Day of Resurrection, and this is the Day of Resurrection; but you did not know.’”* Then the final conclusion is made, *“On that Day the excuses, which the wrongdoers will make, will not be of benefit to them; nor will they be allowed to make amends.”*

The narrative then turns to the scene of the idolaters in their obstinate disbelief, *“We have cited in this Quran for the people every sort of parable. But if you bring them any sign, the disbelievers are sure to say, ‘You are but a falsifier.’ Thus does God seal up the hearts of those who do not know.”* It is a big jump in space and time but it comes as a natural development in the narrative. This is the Quran addressing and challenging the idolaters and describing their adamant obstinacy in their misguidance. This brings us to the last punch line of the Sura, *“So persevere. God's promise is the very truth, and let not those who do not have certitude discourage you.”* Perseverance is the tool that will support the believers in their long and hard

struggle against falsehood. The trust in God's promise will make the travel along this thorny road easy and will bring security and confidence to the hearts of the believers.

## Sura 31: Luqman (Luqman)

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

### **Verses 1 to 19:**

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *These are verses of the wise Book,*
3. *A guide and a mercy to the doers of good;*
4. *Those who establish regular prayer, and pay the poor-due and who have certitude in the Hereafter.*
5. *These are truly guided by their Lord and these are the successful.*
6. *But there are, among people those who take instead frivolous discourse to lead astray from God's path without knowledge, and to take it for a mockery; these shall suffer an abasing torment.*
7. *And when Our revelations are recited to him he turns away in arrogance as if he did not hear them, as if there were a deafness in his ears. So give him tidings of a painful torment.*
8. *For those who believe and do good deeds, there will be gardens of bliss,*
9. *Wherein they will abide. It is a promise of God in truth. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
10. *He created the heavens without any supports that you can see; He set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and He scattered through it beasts of all kinds. We sent down rain from the sky, and produced on the earth every kind of noble kind, in pairs.*
11. *This is the creation of God. Now show me what those (you worship) beside Him have created. Indeed, the wrongdoers are in manifest error.*
12. *And verily We gave Luqman wisdom, saying, "Give thanks to God; whosoever gives thanks, he gives thanks for (the good of) his own soul. And whosoever is ungrateful, then surely God is Rich, Praised."*
13. *And (remember) when Luqman said to his son, when he was admonishing him, "My son, do not associate partners with God. Associating partners (with God) is a tremendous wrong."*
14. *And We have enjoined on humankind (to be good) to his parents. His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the final destination.*
15. *But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them; yet keep their company in this life with kindness, and follow the way of those who turn to me (in repentance). In the end you will return to Me, and I will tell you about all that you did.*
16. *"My son," (said Luqman), "Even if it were the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, God will bring it forth. God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.*
17. *My son, establish regular prayer, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and persevere whatever may befall you. Indeed, these acts require resolve.*

18. *And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor walk proudly on earth. God does not love the arrogant, the boastful;*
19. *Be modest in your bearing and lower your voice. The most repulsive of all voices is the voice of the ass.” (31: 1 -19)*

The Quran came to address the initial natural disposition of the human being in a way that is appropriate to that disposition. It is God who revealed the Quran and it is He who instilled this natural disposition in the human being. God instilled in the initial natural disposition of the human being the basic truth of the Oneness of God, the Creator. So, human beings should recognize this truth by instinct. It was essential that God should reveal the Quran to remind people with the basic truth because physical desires and worldly lusts may cloud the initial natural disposition instilled in people and prevents them from realizing the basic truth.

This Sura which was revealed in Mecca is a model of the Quranic style in addressing the human heart aiming at uncovering the basic truth that God had implanted in the psyche of the human being at the time of its creation. The focus of all the Suras of the Quran revealed in Mecca was the belief in the oneness of God the Creator. This concept was dealt with using different approaches in the various Suras of the Meccan Quran.

The Sura starts with three letter of the Arabic Alphabet, “*Alif. Lam. Mim,*” to emphasize the fact that the Quran was composed using letters of the Arabic Alphabet. The Quran is described as a Book of wisdom, “*These are verses of the wise Book,*” which is appropriate and in congruence with the theme of the Sura. In addition, such a description gives the impression that it is a living Book that means what it says and uses, full of wisdom, and it provides guidance and mercy, “*A Guide and a Mercy to the doers of good.*” The verse defines the doers of good, “*Those who establish regular prayer, and pay the poor-due and who have certitude in the Hereafter.*” They perform prayers in the best way they can and at the prescribed times. This way prayer provides a strong link between the heart of the believer and God, allowing the believer to enjoy the sweetness of being close to God. Paying the poor-due supports the believer’s soul in its struggle against the natural human tendency to be stingy. It provides the foundation for a society that looks after its members who are less fortunate and enhances the feeling of mutual responsibility among its members. The certainty of the inevitability of the Day of the Resurrection is the guarantee that the human heart will be ever vigilant in its struggle against temptation and will always remain conscious of God, in secret and in public. It helps the believer to reach the status of excellence. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “*Excellence is to serve God as if He were visible to you, because even if you are not able to see God, He most definitely sees you.*” The Quran becomes a source of guidance and mercy for the doers of good, “*These are truly guided by their Lord and these are the successful.*” Those who are guided are indeed the successful ones because God will make their path to success clear and easy. They will be protected against any temptation to deviate from this straight path.

On the other hand, there are those who are not guided, “*But there are, among people those who take instead frivolous discourse to lead astray from God's path without knowledge, and to take it for a mockery; these shall suffer an abasing torment. And when Our revelations are recited to him he turns away in arrogance as if he did not hear them, as if there were a deafness in his*



*ears. So give him tidings of a painful torment.*” The verses speak of people who spend their precious time and their wealth to compose false and baseless arguments to mislead people away from the straight path. These people do not base their arguments in wisdom or knowledge but they are motivated by their bad intentions. They simply want to lead people astray. They use mockery to attract people to their side. Those will suffer a humiliating torment. They behave arrogantly when they are reminded of God’s revelations; they turn away as if they were deaf. Quran responds to their mockery with a mockery of its own: they are given the tidings of painful torment.

The reward for the believers is detailed, *“For those who believe and do good deeds, there will be gardens of bliss, wherein they will abide. It is a promise of God in truth. He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* The Quran always links the reward to the belief and good deeds. Islam does not consider belief to be a truth that resides in the heart without practical consequences. Belief is the foundation for the actions, deeds, and behavior of the believer. Those who believed and their actions and deeds reflected their belief will have a great reward: infinite life in the gardens of bliss. This is God’s promise and God never breaks His promise. God’s promise is an expression of His bounty that He bestows on His servants. God does not need His servants because He is the Eminent, the Wise.

This tremendous universe is a witness of the Eminence and Wisdom of God. There is no doubt that God is the Creator of this amazing universe, *“He created the heavens without any supports that you can see; He set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and He scattered through it beasts of all kinds. We sent down rain from the sky, and produced on the earth every kind of noble kind, in pairs.”* We look at the sky and see the stars and the huge planets floating in space without any visible supports. This is an amazing scene. No one can see this scene without being filled with awe. The verse then moves from the huge universe to the tiny earth where we see the mountains. These mountains keep the earth well balanced. God’s creatures which live on earth represent one of the amazing miracles. The existence of life on earth is a secret that no one has been able to fathom till now, even in its most primitive and simple forms, let alone the huge intricate forms of life. Sending down rain from the sky is another cosmic phenomenon that we watch every day but we don’t stop and reflect upon it. The cycle of water in the universe and on earth is a well controlled phenomenon which is necessary for the maintenance of life on earth. Another miracle that the verse states is the fact that plants were created in pairs which has been proven as a scientific fact.

This is God’s creation, *“This is the creation of God. Now show me what those (you worship) beside Him have created. Indeed the wrongdoers are in manifest error.”* The verse poses a challenge to the disbelievers, a challenge that they were unable to meet. Hence they deserve the description, *“Indeed the wrongdoers are in manifest error.”*

The following verses deal with a new theme. Using a story telling style the Quran discusses the principles of expressing gratitude to God and the accountability of humankind, *“And verily We gave Luqman wisdom, saying, ‘Give thanks to God; whosoever gives thanks, he gives thanks for*

*(the good of) his own soul. And whosoever is ungrateful, then surely God is Rich, Praised.*’ The verse indirectly exhorts the believers to follow Luqman’s suit and express their gratitude to God, stating that expressing gratitude to God is beneficial to the human being in the first place. This is followed by a statement of the belief in the Oneness of God, *“And (remember) when Luqman said to his son, when he was admonishing him, ‘My son, do not associate partners with God. Associating partners (with God) is a tremendous wrong.’”* This is a fair advice because a father is always interested in the welfare of his son. Luqman also describes associating partners with God as the worst kind of wrongdoing. This is the same message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought to his people.

The verses then address the relationship between the children and their parents, *“And We have enjoined on humankind (to be good) to his parents. His mother bears him in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me is the final destination.”* The Quran has repeatedly commanded the children to treat their parents with kindness, but it rarely reminded the parents of being kind to their children. The only cases that this was done was in the context of denouncing the pre-Islamic habit of infanticide. It shows that the kindness of parents towards their children is implanted in the initial natural disposition which God instilled in the human beings. There is no need to advice parents to be kind to their children because they work hard to raise their children. They willingly and happily sacrifice to bring up their children. It is the children who should express their gratitude to God first then to their parents. This is followed by a reminder that everyone will ultimately return to God to be accountable for their deeds. However, the relationship between the believers and God is more important than the relationship between the believers and their parents. So, if the parents try to sway the believer away from the straight path, then they should not be obeyed, *“But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them.”* But that does not mean that the believers would treat their parents unkindly, even in this case, *“Yet keep their company in this life with kindness, and follow the way of those who turn to me (in repentance). In the end you will return to Me, and I will tell you about all that you did.”*

The principle of accountability is dealt with in the next verse, *“My son,” (said Luqman), “Even if it were the weight of a mustard-seed and it were (hidden) in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or on earth, God will bring it forth. God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.”* The verse illustrates the power of God and His vast knowledge. Even a tiny seed of mustard that is lodged somewhere in a rock which may be in heaven or on earth is accounted for in God’s knowledge. Then the advice continues, *“My son, establish regular prayer, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and persevere whatever may befall you. Indeed, these acts require resolve.”* These are the planned steps: the belief in God, the consciousness of God, the confidence in His fairness, and the fear of His punishment; then comes the commands to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, to establish prayer, and to persevere when adversity strikes. These steps require great resolve. The advice continues, *“And do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor walk proudly on earth. God does not love the arrogant, the boastful; be modest in your bearing and lower your voice. The most repulsive of all voices is the voice of the ass.”* The advice condemns boasting and behaving arrogantly and encourages walking and speaking with modesty and confidence.

## Verses 20 to 34:

20. *Do you not see that God has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has bestowed His, seen and unseen, bounties generously on you? Yet there are among people those who dispute about God, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a book to enlighten them.*
21. *When they are told to follow the revelation that God has sent down, they say, "We shall follow the ways that we found our fathers following." Even if Satan was inviting them to the torment of the (blazing) Fire?*
22. *And whoever submits himself wholly to God and he is a doer of good, he indeed has taken hold of the most trustworthy handhold. With God rests the outcome of all events.*
23. *And whosoever disbelieves let not his disbelief sadden you (Muhammad). To Us is their return, and We shall tell them what they did. God is aware of what is in the breasts (of people).*
24. *We grant them pleasure for a little while, then We will drive them to severe torment.*
25. *If you ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth? They will certainly say, "God". Say, "Praise be to God." But most of them do not know.*
26. *To God belong all things in heaven and earth. Verily God is the Rich, the Praised.*
27. *And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet the words of God would not be exhausted (in the writing). God is indeed Eminent, Wise.*
28. *And your creation and your resurrection are only as (the creation and the resurrection of) a single soul. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*
29. *Do you not see that God merges the night into the day, and He merges the day into the night, and He has made the sun and the moon subservient (to you); each pursues its course till an appointed time; and that God is Totally-Aware of what you do?*
30. *That is because God is the (only) truth, and because whatever else they invoke besides Him is falsehood; and because God is the Most High, the Great.*
31. *Do you not see how the ships glide on the sea by God's Blessing, that He may show you of His signs? Most surely there are signs in this for every steadfast, grateful (heart).*
32. *When a wave covers them like the canopy, they call to God, offering Him sincere devotion. But when He has delivered them safely to land, there are among them those who follow a middle course. None reject Our revelations except those who are deceitful ungrateful.*
33. *People, be conscious of your Lord, and fear (the coming of) a day when a parent will not avail his/her child, nor a child will avail the parent. God's promise is the very truth. Let not the life of this world beguile you, nor let the deceiver beguile you, in regard to God.*
34. *Indeed, with God is knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain, and knows that what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware. (31: 20 -34)*

The following verses start a new theme, presenting a proof for the Oneness of God from the cosmic phenomena that are related directly to people's life on earth, "*Do you not see that God has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties*

*flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen?”* This argument has been repeated often in the Quran using different approaches to evoke the feelings of awe in the hearts of people. The presentation here focuses on the harmony between people’s life on earth and these phenomena. This harmony could not have been the result of a random sequence of events. God created the universe to provide an appropriate environment for the life of human beings on earth. The earth is a small planet in this vast universe and the human being is a tiny creature who lives on earth. It is a blessing from God who created this vast universe to cater for the needs of the life of this tiny creature who lives on this small planet. God bestowed on humankind qualities and traits which enable him to use the resources available in this vast universe. The bounties of God are unlimited. They include the creation of the human being, breathing into him of the spirit of God, and providing him with the energy, tools and ability to benefit from the resources that God made available to him. Yet there are people who do not see these bounties, *“Yet there are among people those who dispute about God, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a book to enlighten them.”* This is a strange response that reflects the ingratitude that some people express. Their only excuse is that they follow in the footsteps of their forefathers, *“When they are told to follow the revelation that God has sent down, they say, ‘We shall follow the ways that we found our fathers following.’”* They wanted to follow old rigid traditions without thinking or reflecting on what this means. Islam came to free them from the shackles of these old meaningless traditions. Islam brought them new values but they were obstinate in following old traditions, even though these traditions would lead them to Hellfire, *“Even if Satan was inviting them to the torment of the (blazing) Fire?”*

On the other hand, there are those who fully submit to God and do good deeds; those are the ones who hold tight to the trustworthy handhold, *“And whoever submits himself wholly to God and he is a doer of good, he indeed has taken hold of the most trustworthy handhold. With God rests the outcome of all events.”* This handhold is a strong link between the believer’s heart and his Lord. It provides trust in God and acceptance of His decrees. It fills the believer’s heart with security and tranquility. It supports the believers in facing the tests and trials of life. The trustworthy handhold is the handhold of Islam, the absolute submission to God, and the excellence in behavior.

The following verse was meant to comfort the Prophet (PBUH). It describes the end result of those who disbelieve, *“And whosoever disbelieves let not his disbelief sadden you (Muhammad). To Us is their return, and We shall tell them what they did. God is aware of what is in the breasts (of people). We grant them pleasure for a little while, then We will drive them to severe torment.”* They will be driven forcefully to severe torment from which they have no escape.

The initial natural disposition guides the human being to the truth of the creation, *“If you ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth. They will certainly say, ‘God’. Say, ‘Praise be to God.’ But most of them do not know. To God belong all things in heaven and earth. Verily God is the Rich, the Praised.”* Even though they rejected the message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought them, they could not but answer the question truthfully. They knew that God is the Creator. So praise God for the truth that He instilled in the initial natural disposition of the human being.

*“And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet the words of God would not be exhausted (in the writing). God is indeed Eminent and Wise.”* Had they been entrusted with writing down God’s words they would not have been able to exhaust God’s words even if they used all the trees in the world to make pens and an amount of ink that fills the oceans of the earth and seven like them. God is truly Eminent and Wise.

*“And your creation and your resurrection are only as (the creation and the resurrection of) a single soul. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.”* Whether God wants to create a single person or many, the process of creation is achieved by a single word, “Be.” The process of creation does not require any effort on the part of God, when He wills something it happens.

*“Do you not see that God merges the night into the day, and He merges the day into the night, and He has made the sun and the moon subservient (to you); each pursues its course till an appointed time; and that God is Totally-Aware of what you do?”* The alternating scenes of the day and the night are familiar yet they are wonderful scenes. It is a repetitive phenomenon that occurs regularly without any disturbance or change. Only God can create and maintain this system. This phenomenon is related to the cycles of the sun and the moon, another amazing phenomenon. These phenomena testify that, *“God is the (only) truth, and because whatever else they invoke besides Him is falsehood; and because God is the Most High, the Great.”* This universal cosmic system has been created and is maintained by the only truth, God. Everything in the universe is transient except God; He is the Everlasting and He is the Most High, the Great.

The following verses take us on a journey to discover the inner feelings of the human being when faced with danger, *“Do you not see how the ships glide on the sea by God's Blessing, that He may show you of His signs? Most surely there are signs in this for every steadfast, grateful (heart). When a wave covers them like the canopy, they call to God, offering Him sincere devotion. But when He has delivered them safely to land, there are among them those who follow a middle course. None rejects Our revelations except those who are deceitful ungrateful.”* God created the laws that allow ships to float on water and to navigate seas. Sea travelers should appreciate these signs of God. When they are faced with a dangerous situation, there is no one to call upon except God. But when He saves them, some of them are lukewarm in their service to God while others are outright ungrateful.

One should remember that the dangers in life are quite tiny when compared with the danger of coming unprepared to the Day of Judgment, *“People, be conscious of your Lord, and fear (the coming of) a day when a parent will not avail his/her child, nor a child will avail the parent. God's promise is the very truth. Let not the life of this world beguile you, nor let the deceiver beguile you, in regard to God.”* No one will be able to help another, all relationships will be useless, even a child-parent relationship. Nothing will benefit people except their deeds. So prepare for that day and let not the pleasures of this world deceive you and make you go astray.

The following verses illustrate the limited knowledge of the human being and the unlimited knowledge of God, *“Indeed with God is knowledge of the Hour. He sends down the rain, and knows that what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die. God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.”* No mortal has knowledge of when the Day of Judgment will happen. People should be always on the alert, expecting it to happen any time. Rain descends by the will of God according to the laws that God decreed. People could make predictions for rain fall but they cannot create the environmental conditions which are required for rain to fall. God is He who sends down rain because it is He who can create the environmental conditions needed for the rain to fall. Only God knows what are in the wombs. In addition, no one knows what he/she will earn tomorrow. This knowledge is not only about financial earnings but it also includes health, happiness, ease, or difficulty. And finally, no soul knows in which place it will die. No one is certain where he/she will die.

## Sura 32: Al-Sajda (The Prostration)

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

Verses 1 to 30:

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *The revelation of the Book, there is no doubt in it, is from the Lord of the worlds.*
3. *Or do they say, "He has forged it"? It is the truth from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you, in order that they may be guided.*
4. *It is God who created the heavens and the earth, and which is between them, in six days. Then He established Himself on the Throne. You do not have, besides Him, any protecting guardian or anyone to intercede on your behalf. Will you not then remember?*
5. *He manages (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth. Then it ascends to Him on a Day, the length of which will be a thousand years of your reckoning.*
6. *Such is He, the Knower of all things, unseen and seen, the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*
7. *He who perfected everything He created. And He began the creation of humankind from clay.*
8. *Then He made his progeny from an extract of insignificant fluid.*
9. *Then He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and minds, little thanks you give.*
10. *And they say, "When we are lost in the earth, shall we then be re-created?" In fact, they deny the meeting with their Lord.*
11. *Say, "The angel of death, put in charge of you, will take your souls. Then you shall be brought back to your Lord."*
12. *If only you could see when the guilty ones, bowing their heads before their Lord, (saying) "Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard, so send us back; we will do good deeds; for indeed we are now certain."*
13. *If We had so willed, We could have certainly given every soul its guidance, but the word from Me has come true, "I will fill Hell with jinn and people all together."*
14. *So taste (the evil of your deeds). Forasmuch as you forgot the meeting of this day of yours, We forget you. Taste the eternal torment for what you used to do.*
15. *Only those believe in Our revelations who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate and celebrate the praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant.*
16. *They forsake their beds to call upon their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend of that We have bestowed on them.*
17. *No soul knows what is kept hidden for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do.*
18. *Is he who is a believer like him who is a transgressor? They are not equal.*
19. *For those who believe and do good deeds are Gardens of Refuge as hospitable homes, for what they used to do.*
20. *And as for those who transgressed, their refuge is the fire; whenever they desire to go forth from it they shall be brought back into it, and it will be said to them, "Taste the torment of the fire which you used to deny."*

21. *And indeed We will make them taste of the torment of this (life) prior to the supreme torment, that haply they may return.*
22. *And who does greater wrong than he who is reminded of the revelations of his Lord, then turns away from them. We shall exact revenge on the guilty.*
23. *We did indeed give Moses the Scripture. So do not be in doubt regarding his encounter. And We made it guidance to the Children of Israel.*
24. *And We appointed, from among them, leaders, giving guidance under Our command, so long as they persevered and continued to have certitude in Our revelations.*
25. *Verily, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ.*
26. *Is it not a lesson for them (to observe) how many generations We destroyed before them, amid whose dwelling places they do walk? Therein verily are signs. Will they not then hear?*
27. *And do they not see that We do drive rain to barren land, and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Will they not then see?*
28. *They say, "When will this victory be, if you are telling the truth?"*
29. *Say, "On the day of the victory, the faith of those who disbelieve (and who then will believe) will not avail them, neither will they be reprieved."*
30. *So turn away from them, and wait; they too are waiting. (32: 1 – 30)*

*“Alif. Lam. Mim.”* These letters of the Alphabet were known to the Arab and they excelled in using it to compose prose and poetry. However, they realized the vast difference between what they were able to compose and this Quran. There is no doubt that this Quran has been revealed by God, *“The revelation of the Book, there is no doubt in it, is from the Lord of the worlds.”* The statement of certainty was inserted in the middle of the sentence, between the noun and the predicate, because this is the main theme of the Sura. The idolaters of Mecca claimed that Muhammad (PBUH) was the one who composed the Quran. The Quran emphasizes that this claim is not true, *“Or do they say, ‘He has forged it?’ It is the truth from your Lord that you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you, in order that they may be guided.”* It is the truth from your Lord. It is the truth because it confirms the truth implanted in the initial natural disposition of humankind, it enunciates the truth about the universe and its laws, it provides the believers with the means to live in harmony with the rest of the universe, and it is the truth that establishes justice and removes any form of injustice. It is the truth from your Lord not from you, Muhammad. You were given this truth to warn the Arabs whose generations after Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) did not receive any warning before you were sent to them, perhaps they may heed this warning.

The Arabs used to associate partners with God. This verse establishes the right of God to be worshipped alone, *“It is God who created the heavens and the earth, and which is between them, in six days. Then He established Himself on the Throne. You do not have, besides Him, any protecting guardian or anyone to intercede on your behalf. Will you not then remember?”* God created this vast universe in six time periods. Only God knows how long these periods were.



They may have been six phases or six stages of development but they are certainly not six days like our days. Then He established Himself on the Throne. This is a symbolic way to express God's exaltation above His creation. We have no idea about the nature of the Throne. This is a matter that only God knows. No one can protect us nor intercede on our behalf besides Him. This is a fact that people need to remember and heed.

God is the Most High and He also manages all the affairs and He will settle all the affairs on the Day of the Resurrection, *"He manages (all) affairs from the heavens to the earth. Then it ascends to Him on a Day, the length of which will be a thousand years of your reckoning."* He is, *"the Knower of all things, unseen and seen, the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy."* And He, *"who perfected everything He created."* God has perfected everything He created. Every creature was made to perform a specific function from the single cell to the human being to the planets floating in the sky. The universe was made in harmony. Not only the creation was made functional but was also made beautiful. Beauty in the creation was deliberate because perfection yields beauty.

A sign of His perfection is the creation of the human being, *"And He began the creation of humankind from clay."* It may be understood from the Arabic text that the human being was created in stages. However, there is information about the number or the extent of the stages of development. This is still the secret of life which no one has been able to discover. The development of creation which is referred to here is different from the development stipulated by Darwin's theory.

*"Then He made his progeny from an extract of insignificant fluid."* The fertilized egg is the first stage of development of the embryo. The process of the development of the embryo is summarized, *"Then He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and minds, little thanks you give."* It is tremendous process of development that only God is capable of completing. But not many people appreciate it. They even dispute the idea of resurrection, *"And they say, 'When we are lost in the earth, shall we then be re-created?' In fact, they deny the meeting with their Lord."* They dismissed the fact that God who created them is able to resurrect them again. But did they not begin initially from clay? How difficult it is for God to resurrect them from clay a second time? They only reject the idea of meeting with God. However, they will die and they will be resurrected, and they will be brought to God once more, *"Say, 'The angel of death, put in charge of you, will take your souls. Then you shall be brought back to your Lord.'"*

Having mentioned the Day of Resurrection, the following verse describes a scene of the scenes on that Day, *"If only you could see when the guilty ones, bowing their heads before their Lord, (saying) 'Our Lord, we have seen and we have heard, so send us back; we will do good deeds; for indeed we are now certain.'"* The verse describes the disbelievers bowing their heads in humiliation in front of God. They will admit their sin, regret their rejection of the truth, confess their certitude of the truth, and ask for another chance. Before stating their fate, God will declare the truth which controls the situation and decides the fate of people, *"If We had so willed, We could have certainly given every soul its guidance, but the word from Me has come true, 'I will*

*fill Hell with jinn and people all together. ”* Had God willed He would have made one choice available to humankind: to follow the way of guidance similar to the angels. But God willed that humankind would be given the ability to choose between two roads: the road of guidance and the road of misguidance. God has decreed that He will fill the Hellfire of those who chose the road of misguidance. They have forgotten God and on that Day God will forget them. They will be punished according to their deeds, *“So taste (the evil of your deeds). Forasmuch as you forgot the meeting of this day of yours, We forget you. Taste the eternal torment for what you used to do.”*

Another scene is depicted, the scene of the believers. It is the scene of those who worship God in humility and devotion, they call upon their Lord with trembling hearts hoping in His mercy and fearing His punishment, *“Only those believe in Our revelations who, when they are reminded of them, fall down prostrate and celebrate the praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant.”* It is a bright picture of the guided souls. Those who, when reminded of their Lord, fall prostrate. They spend the night praying, they perform the night prayer and the Dawn prayer and extra voluntary prayers in between. They prefer their Lord’s company over the night rest that their beds are offering, *“They forsake their beds to call upon their Lord in fear and hope, and spend of that We have bestowed on them.”* Not only they pray but they also spend in the sake of God of that which He had bestowed on them. Only God knows the reward that is hidden for them, *“No soul knows what is kept hidden for them of joy, as a reward for what they used to do.”*

The principle of justice is stated, *“Is he who is a believer like him who is a transgressor? They are not equal.”* Believers and disbelievers are not equal in many respects. Their nature, their emotions, and their behavior are different. Consequently, their reward will be different. People will be rewarded according to their deeds with absolute justice. Those who believe and do good deeds will be awarded, *“Gardens of Refuge as hospitable homes, for what they used to do.”* But the transgressor will end up in Hellfire, *“And as for those who transgressed, their refuge is the fire; whenever they desire to go forth from it they shall be brought back into it, and it will be said to them, ‘Taste the torment of the fire which you used to deny.’”* Not only they will be punished in the Hereafter but they will be tormented also in this life, *“And indeed We will make them taste of the torment of this (life) prior to the supreme torment.”* It is a sign of God’s mercy that He provides opportunities for people to learn and repent, *“that haply they may return.”* This is a chance for people to return back to the straight path. If they do, then they will be forgiven and will be spared the torment promised for the transgressors. However, if they persist on their ways of falsehood, then there is a dire warning for them, *“And who does greater wrong than he who is reminded of the revelations of his Lord, then turns away from them. We shall exact revenge on the guilty.”* This is a horrifying threat.

*“We did indeed give Moses the Scripture. So do not be in doubt regarding his encounter. And We made it guidance to the Children of Israel. And We appointed, from among them, leaders, giving guidance under Our command, so long as they persevered and continued to have certitude in Our revelations. Verily your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they used to differ.”* The verse refers briefly to Prophet Moses (PBUH). The phrase, *“So do not be in doubt regarding his encounter,”* refers to the

oneness of the message that both Moses (PBUH) and Muhammad (PBUH) brought to people. This message is the truth. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is being assured that the message that he was sent with is the truth from God. It coincides with the message that Moses (PBUH) brought from God. This is the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Muhammad (PBUH). The verse exhorts the Muslims to persevere in their struggle against falsehood as did the chosen people from the Children of Israel before. The verse hints to the reward that awaits them if they do persevere. God promised to appoint those who persevere as leaders to guide humanity to the straight path. God will settle the dispute between those who differed among them on the Day of Judgment.

The ruins of previous nations, who were destroyed and perished before, were still there to be seen by the Arabs so they may learn a lesson from it, *“Is it not a lesson for them (to observe) how many generations We destroyed before them, amid whose dwelling places they do walk? Therein verily are signs.”* These were the ruins of the tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud which the Arabs used to see when they travel on their caravans. The scenes of these ruins should have made them reflect on their destiny and should have reminded them to mend their ways and reach to God. They used to listen to the stories of these tribes being told, *“Will they not then hear?”* Will they not hear the warning?

From the story of death, ruins, and destruction to the story of life, and growth, *“And do they not see that We do drive rain to barren land, and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Will they not then see?”* God sends water on the barren land and it becomes green full of plants. This is a scene which opens the hearts to feel the mercy of God, to fill these hearts with hope, and to make them enjoy the beauty of the creation of God.

The conclusion of the Sura deals with the challenge that the disbelievers used to pose to the Prophet (PBUH) daring him to hasten the torment that he promised, *“They say, ‘When will this victory be, if you are telling the truth?’”* The Prophet (PBUH) was assured of God’s victory and was commanded to ignore them, *“Say, ‘On the day of the victory, the faith of those who disbelieve (and who then will believe) will not avail them, neither will they be reprieved.’ So turn away from them, and wait; they too are waiting.”*

## Sura 33: Al- Ahzab (The Confederates)

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

### Verses 1 to 8:

1. *Prophet, be conscious of God and do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
2. *And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
3. *And put your trust in God, for God is sufficient as a Guardian.*
4. *God has not made for any man two hearts within him, nor has He made your wives whom you divorce by saying, "Be as my mother's back," your mothers, nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. These are only words you utter. God speaks the truth, and He guides people to the (right) Way.*
5. *Call them by (the names of) their fathers. That is more equitable in the sight of God. And if you do not know their fathers - then they are still your brothers in faith and those entrusted to you. And there is no blame on you for the mistakes that you make unintentionally, but (you will only be blamed for) that which your hearts do purposely, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. Blood-relations among each other have closer personal ties, in the decree of God than (the brotherhood of) the believers and the emigrants. Nevertheless, you should be kind to your friends. This has been written in the Book.*
7. *And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, as (We did) from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant.*
8. *That He may ask the truthful about their truth. And He has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers. (33: 1 – 8)*

This Sura establishes certain etiquettes regarding the social life in the nascent Muslim society. It reveals some of the salient features of the Islamic way of life and its foundations. Islam is not a code of ethics, a book of admonitions, a collection of laws, nor sacred traditions. It is all of this; in addition, Islam is a way of life that is based on the absolute submission to God. Muslims submit to God's decrees and commands. Thus, the first verse in the Sura which organizes the society embodies the command to be conscious of God, "*Prophet, be conscious of God,*" Consciousness of God is the only guarantee that a Muslim will fulfill God's commands. The second command forbade obeying the disbelievers and the hypocrites, "*and do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites. God is Omniscient, Wise.*" The verse also indicates the great pressure that the disbelievers and the hypocrites of Medina did exert on the believers to abandon God's commands in favor of following the disbelievers' and the hypocrites' suggestions and directives. However, the rule remains a standing order valid at all times and in all places. The believers should not be impressed by the seemingly convincing knowledge that the disbelievers may have to the extent that they abandon God's command in favor of this seemingly new and

convincing knowledge. God should remain the only source of knowledge for the believers, because He is Omniscient and Wise. Only He knows what is best for the believers.

The third command, *“And follow that which is revealed to you from your Lord. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* God is the only truthful source of commands that are worthy of following. The verse specifically refers to the revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from his Lord. God is Totally-Aware of everything we do. The final command was to, *“put your trust in God, for God is sufficient as a Guardian.”* Do not worry whether the disbelievers and the hypocrites agree or disagree with what you do; do not worry about what they scheme; just put your trust in God and He will manage your affairs according to His knowledge and wisdom.

These are the tools that those who actively call to the path of God need: Consciousness of God, following God’s revelation, and putting one’s trust in God (keeping in mind not to obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites.) These commands are concluded by an unequivocal statement, *“God has not made for any man two hearts within him,”* Human beings were created each with a single heart. Therefore, human beings should follow one program, one set of standards, and one understanding of life. Otherwise people will be confused; and they will not be able to maintain a balanced life. This program is the divine project that God commanded that people should adopt as a way of life on earth.

Consequently, *“nor has He made your wives whom you divorce by saying, ‘Be as my mother’s back,’ your mothers, nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. These are only words you utter. God speaks the truth; and He guides people to the (right) Way.”* The verse refers to an abusive practice that the Arabs before Islam used to follow. According to this practice a man can declare his wife to be to him as his, *“mother’s back.”* These words render the wife unlawful for the man. However, the woman would not be considered divorced and would not be able to marry another man. Thus, the woman loses her status as a wife but would not be able to get a complete divorce from her husband. This Quranic verse abolished this abusive practice stating that these words do not have the power to change the true natural relationship between a man and his wife.

Another relationship which people cannot invent is the relationship between a man and his adopted son. Adoption does not change the lineage of a person. Men in Arabia before Islam used to adopt sons and treat them as if they were their biological sons. Adoption replaces the blood relationship. An adopted son assumed the family name of his adopting father and would have the same inheritance rights as the biological sons of the father. Islam abolished this practice and commanded that the lineage of people be respected, *“Call them by (the names of) their fathers. That is more equitable in the sight of God.”* This is the only guarantee against the confusion that would occur if these sons do not know their biological parents. It is also equitable to preserve the inheritance rights of the biological sons. But if these children do not know their biological parents then, *“they are still your brothers in faith and those entrusted to you. And there is no blame on you for the mistakes that you make unintentionally, but (you will only be blamed for) that which your hearts do purposely, and God is All Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* God does not hold people accountable if they make unintentional mistakes.

The next verses abolished the system of brotherhood which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) established when the Muslims migrated from Mecca to Medina. The purpose of the system was to provide the necessary social and financial support for the migrants. The verse also states that the relationship between the believers and the Prophet (PBUH) supersedes any other relationship, *“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers. Blood-relations among each other have closer personal ties, in the decree of God than (the brotherhood of) the believers and the emigrants. Nevertheless, you should be kind to your friends. This has been written in the Book.”* The Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina left behind their homes, their families, their belongings, their friends, and their memories. They preferred to flee with their newly adopted faith rather than enjoy life in their home town. They gave the true example of the unified Muslim personality which aspires to one value and one value only: the submission to God alone. The expression given in the verse, *“God has not made for any man two hearts within him,”* refers to this personality whose only aspiration is the total submission to God. A similar situation arose in Medina when families were split because some family members became Muslims; while others remained polytheists. The fledgling Muslim society was still in its early stages of development. It was more of a concept than a reality. The common faith became the only recognizable bond between the members of the Muslim society. This bond replaced all other known bonds at that time; including blood and tribal relationships. The Muslims of Medina welcomed their migrant brothers into their hearts, their homes, and shared with them their wealth. The number of migrants was far less than the number of the Muslims of Medina who were willing to host them. The Muslims of Medina competed with each other in hosting the migrants from Mecca. The Prophet (PBUH) established an institution of brotherhood between the Muslims from Mecca (Al-Muhajeroon) and the Muslims from Medina (Al-Ansar). This newly established brotherhood gave the same rights that the blood brotherhood gave; to the extent that those who became brothers according to this pact were allowed to inherit each other. Such a pact was essential in the early days of the Muslim society to help establish the Islamic state which would then have the laws that provide the support for its citizens. Having reached a reasonable stage of development, after the battle of Badr, the Quran revoked this arrangement. Only biological relationships define members of a family.

However, the relationship between the believers and the Prophet (PBUH) remained the strong relationship envisaged in the statement, *“The Prophet is closer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers.”* The verse reiterated the status of the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) in the society. The closeness of the Prophet (PBUH) to the believers covers all aspects of life. Muslims should love the Prophet (PBUH) more than anything in the world, including themselves. They should obey his commands. In return, the Prophet (PBUH) is the guardian of all believers. If a Muslim dies while in debt, the Prophet (PBUH) had pledged to pay his debt and if a Muslim dies and leaves behind children with no financial support the Prophet (PBUH) had pledged to support his children. These laws have been established long ago in God’s Book, *“This has been written in the Book.”*

The following verses refer to other things that were written in the Book, *“And remember when We took from the prophets their covenant, as (We did) from you and from Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant. That He may ask the loyal of their loyalty. And He has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers.”* It the same covenant that God took from all His Messengers, starting with Noah (PBUH) and ending with

Muhammad (PBUH). The verse started by emphasizing the universality of the covenant, “*We took from the prophets their covenant.*” Then it mentioned by name Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) followed by the four messengers who brought the major messages before Islam, “*Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary.*” The Quran calls these messengers, “those who have resolve.” The verse reiterated the strength of the covenant.

### **Verses 9 to 27:**

9. *Believers, remember the blessings of God, (bestowed) on you, when armies came (to attack) you. We sent against them a great wind and armies (of angels) which you could not see. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.*
10. *When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats, and you harbored doubts about God.*
11. *In that situation the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously.*
12. *And when the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, were saying, “God and His messenger promised us nothing but a delusion.”*
13. *And when a party of them said, “People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back. And a party of them (even) sought permission of the Prophet, saying, “Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).” But they were not exposed, they only wanted to flee.*
14. *If the enemy had entered from all sides and they had been exhorted to treachery, they would have committed it, and would not have hesitated except a little.*
15. *And verily they had made a covenant with God before that they would not turn their backs (to the foe). An oath to God must be answered for.*
16. *Say, “Running away will not benefit you if you are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (you do escape), you will be given only a brief enjoyment.”*
17. *Say, “Who is it that can protect you from God if He intends harm for you or intends mercy for you.” They will not find for themselves besides God any protecting guardian or any helper.*
18. *Verily God knows those among you who hinder and those who say to their brothers, “Come along to us”, and they do not come to the battle to fight except for a little.*
19. *They begrudge you any help. And when the fear comes, then you (Muhammad) will see them looking at you with rolling eyes like one being overcome by death. Then, when the fear departs, they scald you with sharp tongues. They resent you any good. These have not believed. Therefore, God rendered their deeds fruitless. And that is easy for God.*
20. *They think that the confederates have not withdrawn; and if the confederates should come (again), they would wish they were in the desert (wandering) among the Bedouins, and seeking news about you (from a safe distance); and if they were in your midst, they would fight but little.*
21. *You have indeed an excellent example in the Messenger of God for any who looks to God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.*
22. *When the believers saw the confederate forces, they said, “This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true.” And it only added to their faith and submission.*

23. *Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some are still waiting' and they have never changed (their determination) in the least.*
24. *That God may reward the truthful for their truthfulness, and torment the hypocrites if that be His Will, or pardon them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
25. *And God repelled the disbelievers in their rage; they did not gain any advantage. God spared the believers the combat. And God is Strong, Eminent.*
26. *And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds, and cast panic into their hearts. Some you slew and you made captive some.*
27. *And He made you heirs of their lands, of their houses, of their goods, and of a land which you had not trodden (before). And God has power over all things. (33: 9 – 27)*

This group of verses analyzes the events that accompanied the battle of the Trench. The battle of the Trench took place around the fifth year of Hijra. It was an extremely difficult experience for the Muslims. Before we discuss the text, we would like to explore briefly the events as they have been narrated in the books of Seerah. This way one may be able to realize the differences between the styles of the Quran and the people in narrating the same events.

Only a brief summary of the narration that Muhammad Ibn Ishaq has communicated is given here. A group of men representing the Jewish tribes of Bani Al Nadeer and Bani Wael went to the chiefs of the tribe of Quraish. They exhorted them to fight the Muslims in Medina. They promised that they would support them. The chiefs of Quraish asked if the Jews believe that Quraish's faith is better than Islam. The Jews answered affirmatively. This confirmation made the chiefs of Quraish happy. The chiefs of Quraish pledged to wage a war against the Muslims in Medina. In addition to Quraish, the Jewish people were able to recruit the tribes of Ghatffan, Bani Fazzarah, Bani Murrah, and Ashga'.

When the Prophet (PBUH) heard about this he commanded the Muslims to dig a trench around the city of Medina. Muslims worked hard with the Prophet (PBUH) to dig the trench however, the hypocrites dragged their feet in helping them. They would make excuses in order to abstain from participating in the hard work. Muslims who were dedicated took leave from the Messenger of God (PBUH) whenever they needed to run errands for their households, then came back to work hard seeking God's reward. Quraish and its allies arrived at the outskirts of Medina as the Muslims were just about to finish digging the trench. There were about ten thousand fighters in the forces of the Confederates. The Muslims camped behind the trench; there were about three thousand of them. In the meantime, Hayy bin Akhtab Al-Nadari, one of the people who enticed Quraish against the Muslims, went to K'ab bin Assad, the chief of Bani Quraizah, and convinced him to join the Confederates plot against the Muslims. K'ab then reneged on the agreement with the Messenger of God (PBUH). This put the Muslims in a very difficult position, because now they were besieged. It was a difficult time. The siege continued for almost a month. The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to break the siege by convincing the chiefs of the tribe of Ghatffan to break their agreement with the Confederates and in return they would get a share in the crops of Medina. The Prophet (PBUH) consulted the chiefs of the tribes of Al-Aws and Al-Khazraj, Sa'ad ibn Moaz (RA) and Sa'ad ibn Ubadah (RA). They asked the Prophet (PBUH) whether this was God's command. The Prophet (PBUH) told them that it was not God's command; it was his idea



to break the siege because he felt that the situation is becoming very difficult for the people of Medina. They then both refused this solution. They indicated to the Prophet (PBUH) that the people of Medina are willing to fight to win a victory. God sent a very strong wind and His soldiers and planted fear in the hearts of the Confederates so they left.

One notices that the Quranic style in the narrative ignores irrelevant details like names of people and focuses instead on their characters and modes of behavior. The narrative ignores the minute details of the events and focuses on lessons and values to be gleaned from the events; such lessons and values that should continue to be a source of inspiration for Muslims one generation after another. The beauty of the Quranic narrative and its ability to present the event in a dynamic form makes it suitable for all times. It becomes an effective tool in teaching one generation after another.

The verses telling the story of the battle of the Trench start by reminding the believers of God's blessings. It is God who repelled the army of the Confederates. The following verse summarizes the whole story, "*Believers, remember the blessings of God, (bestowed) on you, when armies came (to attack) you. We sent against them a great wind and armies (of angels) which you could not see. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.*" The subsequent verses give a detailed account of the events, "*When they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats, and you harbored doubts about God. In that situation the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously. And when the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, were saying, 'God and His messenger promised us nothing but a delusion.' And when a party of them said, 'People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back.' And a party of them (even) sought permission of the Prophet, saying, 'Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).' But they were not exposed, they only wanted to flee.*" The verses detail the panic that engulfed the Muslims. They were besieged from all sides. The verses describe the danger that surrounded the Muslims, "*When they came upon you from above you and from below you.*" Then they describe the fear in the hearts of people, "*when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached the throats.*" Then they describe the mindset of people when they started to entertain doubts about God. The situation is summed in one sentence, "*the believers were tried. They were shaken tremendously.*" The Muslims were not only worried about the armies of Quraish and its allies but they realized that their back was exposed. They expected the Jewish tribes to attack them at any minute from behind. The test uncovered the hypocrites and they started throwing doubts in the hearts of others and enticing them into abandoning the ranks of the Muslim army, "*People of Yathrib, you will not be able to stand (against the enemy), therefore go back.*" They wanted to flee the battle asking the Prophet (PBUH) to excuse them saying, "*Our homes are exposed (to the enemy).*" But the Quran exposed them stating that their homes were not exposed, they simply wanted to flee.

Their mindset was described by the following verse which indicated their vulnerability and their readiness to defect from the ranks of the Muslims. They only needed the slightest push to turn them against the Muslims, "*If the enemy had entered from all sides and they had been exhorted to treachery, they would have committed it, and would not have hesitated except a little.*" This is in spite of the fact that they were tested before and they made a solemn oath to God they will not falter again, "*And verily they had made a covenant with God before that they would not turn their backs (to the foe). An oath to God must be answered for.*" This verse refers to the people of

Bani Harethah who were about to fail the test before the battle of Uhud and they pledged a solemn pledge to God they would not renege on their pledge again but they forgot their pledge.

The Quran then reminded them of a basic fact: no one can escape death, *“Say, ‘Running away will not benefit you if you are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (you do escape), you will be given only a brief enjoyment.’ Say, ‘Who is it that can protect you from God if He intends harm for you or intends mercy for you.’ They will not find for themselves besides God any protecting guardian or any helper.”* God controls all events in the life of His creatures. Death is an inevitable fact of life. People will meet their death at prescribed times that no one can change. It is then more befitting for believers to submit to God, obey Him, and fulfill their covenant with Him.

The verses continue to reiterate the fact that God knew about those who were trying to frustrate the believers. They did not want to fight and they wanted the believers to join them, *“Verily God knows those among you who hinder and those who say to their brothers, ‘Come along to us’, and they do not come to the battle to fight except for a little.”* Not only they did not want to fight and prevented others from fighting, but they also were reluctant to offer support in any form whether financial or moral, *“They begrudge you any help.”* The signs of panic became obvious on their faces when they encountered a difficult situation, *“And when the fear comes, then you (Muhammad) will see them looking at you with rolling eyes like one being overcome by death.”* But when they feel secure they become vocal, *“Then, when the fear departs, they scald you with sharp tongues.”* They were stingy. They never offered any help, *“They resent you any good.”* These were all signs of disbelief, *“These have not believed. Therefore, God rendered their deeds fruitless. And that is easy for God.”* God will render their deeds worthless.

They thought that the Confederates were still there, so they trembled of fear and they refused to believe that the Confederates have gone already, *“They think that the confederates have not withdrawn;”* But if the Confederates come back then they wish they were not among the Medina dwellers, *“and if the confederates should come (again), they would wish they were in the desert (wandering) among the Bedouins, and seeking news about you (from a safe distance); and if they were in your midst, they would fight but little.”*

The theme changes to deal with the bright picture of the believers. The verses start with the bright picture of the Prophet (PBUH), *“You have indeed an excellent example in the Messenger of God for any who looks to God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.”* The Prophet (PBUH) gave the best example of a leader during the battle. He gave lessons in effective leadership that the believers should learn from and use him as their role model. The Prophet (PBUH) was working side by side with the believers, using his axe and hauling dust. He joined the believers in their simple songs that they used to sing to make the work easy for themselves. He was there to help when the task was difficult for the rest of them. Salman Al Farsi (RA) said, *“I was digging the trench one day and I came across a very hard rock. I was not able to break it. The Prophet (PBUH) saw me and came to help. He raised his axe and struck the rock three times. Each time he struck the rock, a light came from the place at which the axe hit the rock.”*

*Then the hard rock was broken into pieces. I asked the Prophet (PBUH) about the light that I saw. He said, 'The first light showed me that God will give me control over Yemen, the second showed me that God will give me control over Syria and Maghreb, and the last light showed me that God will give me control over the orient.'"*

The verses then describe the behavior of the confident believers in the face of danger, *"When the believers saw the confederate forces, they said, 'This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true.' And it only added to their faith and submission."* These were ordinary human beings facing a severe test. The experience that they have been through shook them but they did not panic because they had a strong link with God. They were fully aware of the laws of God that manage the events of life. They were confident in the promise that God made of an eminent victory. They understood and believed in God's words, *"Or do you think that you shall enter paradise without such trials as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity, and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and the believers with him cried, 'When will the help of God come?' Verily, the help of God is always near."* (2:214) They have been tested and shaken so God's victory must be near. Therefore, their response was, *"This is what God and his Messenger had promised us, and God and His Messenger told us what was true."* They were ordinary human beings. There are limits for the endurance of human beings. They felt, they suffered, they feared, and they panicked. However, they held tight to the most trustworthy bond with God. This kept them safe and secure. The bond with God nurtured the hope in their hearts and prevented any feeling of despair to creep into their hearts. We too are human beings like them. We may have met difficult situations where we felt that we were being tested. We may have felt weak or became impatient. This is normal. There is no need to despair and think we have failed the test. But we then have to remember that we should hold tight to the most trustworthy bond with God, because this bond is the only assurance and the only security against failure. This bond will enable us to stand up, face the difficulty, and move forward. This bond is what shaped the first generation of Muslims and kept them true to their covenant with God, *"Of the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Of them some have completed their vow (to the extreme), and some are still waiting and they have never changed (their determination) in the least."*

The following verse explains the rationale behind the tests to which the believers will be subjected to, *"That God may reward the truthful for their truthfulness, and torment the hypocrites if that be His Will, or pardon them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* These trials are not random events. They follow a well devised plan that leads to predetermined outputs. They represent a magnificent expression of God's mercy, *"God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*

Then came the final ending which the believers were waiting for, *"And God repelled the disbelievers in their rage; they did not gain any advantage. God spared the believers the combat. And God is Strong, Eminent."* God's punishment was not inflected only on the Confederates from Quraish, but it was also extended to the Jewish tribe which sided with them, *"And He brought those of the People of the Scripture who supported them down from their strongholds,*

*and cast panic into their hearts. Some you slew and you made captive some. And He made you heirs of their lands, of their houses, of their goods, and of a land which you had not trodden (before). And God has power over all things.”*

It is appropriate to describe briefly the history of the Muslim- Jewish relationship in Medina. One of the first tasks that the Prophet (PBUH) completed upon his arrival to Medina was to conclude an agreement between the Muslims and Jews. One of the main stipulations of the agreement was that the Muslims will provide protection for the Jews and in return the Jews would not enter into alliances with the enemies of Muslims nor harm the Muslims in any way. But soon after that the Jewish tribes felt that the spread of the new religion will diminish their status in Medina. They always maintained a higher status over the polytheists by virtue of the fact that they were the followers of a monotheistic religion. They also felt threatened by the unification of the Arabs of Medina under the leadership of the Messenger of God (PBUH). Another fear that they entertained was the threat posed by the increasing number of Jews who chose to convert to Islam. They received a major blow when a prominent rabbi and scholar by the name of Abdullah bin Sallam chose to adopt Islam. This incident signaled the start of an undeclared war by the Jews on Muslims. Several incidents of treacherous behavior by the tribes resulted in their expulsion from Medina. The last incident was when Banu Quraizah entered in an alliance with the Confederates against the Muslims.

### **Verses 28 to 35:**

28. *Prophet, say to your wives, “If you desire this worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will make provision for you and I will give you a kindly release.*
29. *But if you seek God and His Messenger, and the home of the Hereafter, verily God has prepared for the doers of good among you an immense reward.*
30. *Wives of the Prophet, whosoever of you commits manifest indecency, she will get double the torment; and this is easy for God.*
31. *And whosoever of you remains obedient to God and His Messenger and does good, We shall give her reward twice over; and We have prepared for her an honorable provision.*
32. *Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you remain conscious of God, then do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease should aspire (to you), but speak in an appropriate manner.*
33. *And stay in your homes. Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance. Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His Messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly.*
34. *And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom. Indeed, God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.*
35. *For Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, perseverant men and perseverant women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God's praise- God has prepared forgiveness and great reward. (33:*

The following verses, except for the last verse, outline a framework for the code of conduct to be followed by the wives of the Prophet (PBUH). The last verse addresses all Muslims. Early in this Sura, the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were given the title of, *“the mothers of the believers.”* This is a highly respected status which entailed certain responsibilities. The following verses outline some of these responsibilities, *“Prophet, say to your wives, ‘If you desire this worldly life and its adornment, then come, I will make provision for you and I will give release kindly. But if you seek God and His Messenger, and the home of the Hereafter, verily God has prepared for the doers of good among you an immense reward.”* It was the Prophet’s (PBUH) conscious choice to live an austere life. This did not change even after the state became wealthy. It has been said that a month would pass without having a fire lit in his house, a euphemism for not having a cooked meal. He used to give away his share of the spoils of war in charity. His faith did not compel him to do that but it was his choice. He did not ask anyone else of his companions to follow his example. He also pointed out that Islam does not prohibit reasonable enjoyment. However, his wives did not share this conviction. They had, as any normal human being would have, interest in a more comfortable life. They suggested that the Prophet (PBUH) should increase their monthly allowance so that they would be able to enjoy a more comfortable life. The Prophet (PBUH) was not pleased with their request. He wanted his wives to seek the reward of the Hereafter rather than to busy themselves with the pleasures of this life.

The Prophet (PBUH) was saddened by his wives’ request to the extent that he went into seclusion and did not want to meet any of his companions. One-day Abu Bakr (RA) came to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house, he found people sitting by the door because no one was given permission to see the Prophet (PBUH). He asked for permission but he was denied. He sat there waiting. Then Umar (RA) came and sought permission and likewise he was denied. Later both Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) were given permission. They came into the house and saw that the Prophet (PBUH) was in the company of his wives. The Prophet (PBUH) looked sad. Umar (RA) wanted to cheer him up so he said to the Prophet (PBUH), *“If my wife came asking for more money, I would kill her.”* The Prophet (PBUH) then laughed and said, *“My wives are asking for a bigger allowance.”* Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) wanted to rebuke and discipline their daughters ‘Aisha (RA) and Hafssah (RA) respectively, but the Prophet (PBUH) commanded them to leave his wives alone. The Prophet’s (PBUH) wives then said that they would not ask the Prophet (PBUH) for that which he does not have. The above mentioned verses were then revealed. The Prophet (PBUH) started with ‘Aisha (RA) and asked her to decide what she wanted. He asked her to consult with her parents, but she refused to consult with her parents, she said that she had reached a decision already: she had chosen the life with the Prophet (PBUH). ‘Aisha (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) not tell his other wives with her decision before he had heard their choices, but he said, *“I was sent as a teacher, to treat people kindly, and not to treat them harshly. I will tell anyone of them if they asked about the choice you made.”*

The Quran came to establish the true values that people should adopt in their lives. The behavior of the Prophet (PBUH) and his family should exemplify these values. The wives of the Prophet

(PBUH) vowed not to request the Prophet (PBUH) for anything that was not within his means. However, the Quran came down to establish a much more basic principle for the Muslim society. This is the principle of valuing the reward of the Hereafter over the pleasure of this worldly life. The wives chose the nearness of God and His Messenger (PBUH) over the pleasures of this life.

This event clarifies in the Muslim mind the correct priorities of Islam. It removes any hesitation that may confuse the choice of Muslims when asked to choose between God and His Messenger (PBUH), on one side, and the pleasures of the worldly life on the other side. The event also helps us to understand the personalities of the Prophet (PBUH), his wives, and his companions. They were all human beings; they had feelings, emotions, and desires but they were able to purify these feelings and desires from their lowly aspects. They trained their feelings and desires to seek God's pleasures. The Prophet (PBUH) understood the natural inclinations in his wives' request. He was not happy about it but he refused to suppress it by force as Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA) wanted to do. He wanted his wives to learn how to control their desires so he waited until the ultimate lesson came from God.

*“Wives of the Prophet, whosoever of you commits manifest indecency, she will get double the torment; and this is easy for God. And whosoever of you remains obedient to God and His messenger and does good, We shall give her reward twice over; and We have prepared for her an honorable provision.”* The wives of the Prophet (PBUH) were given an esteemed status. The status came with its responsibilities and with its reward. As “mothers of the believers,” they should be careful in dealing with people, *“Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women. If you remain conscious of God, then do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease should aspire (to you), but speak in appropriate manner. And stay in your homes. Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance. Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His messenger. God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly. And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom. Indeed, God is Subtle, Totally-Aware.”* The status of women in the Arabian society at the time of the advent of Islam, like in many of the contemporaneous societies, was quite low. Women were treated as a tool for pleasure. The loose family structure and the chaos that shaped the sexual relations in the society contributed even more to the degradation of women. Islam came to change this and to raise the status of women. The relationship between the two sexes is a way to provide tranquility and affection between them. Islam provided rules to organize the society and to strengthen the family institution, hence the address to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) regarding their personal behavior. These instructions were meant to purify the wives. So what are the steps that they should follow to achieve purity?

To start with, the Quran makes the wives aware of their distinct status among the believing women, *“Wives of the Prophet, you are not like any other women, if you remain conscious of God,”* The verse states that the supreme honor given to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) is granted on the condition that they remain conscious of God. This honor was not granted only because of their relationship to the Prophet (PBUH) but because they have fulfilled the responsibility attached to that status. This is a distinguishing feature of Islam. There is no room for nepotism in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) declared this principle when he addressed his clan saying, *“I cannot protect you against God.”*

Then it follows by outlining the proper etiquette for speaking with people, *“do not be soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease should aspire (to you), but speak in appropriate manner.”* This verse was addressed to the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) who enjoyed a distinct status which would provide them immunity against any form of temptation or assault. However, this verse outlines the etiquette that should be followed by all believing women at all times and places. It is an etiquette which eliminates beyond doubt the chances for any form of temptation.

Then the verse provided a kind reminder for the wives, *“And stay in your homes.”* The Arabic word which has been translated here as “stay,” actually gives the connotation of stability. The verse was a reminder that they should consider the house as their base of operation. It is the norm to remain at home and the exception is to go outside to run errands. Islam made it obligatory on the husband to provide for his family, so that the wife can focus on providing a comfortable, stable, and safe environment for her children at home.

The following verse deals with the way women should be dressed when they go out, *“Do not display your finery as they used to do in the time of ignorance.”* The verse commands women to dress modestly; they should also look modest. It describes immodesty as a remnant of the time of ignorance to emphasize its bad consequences.

Then a command is issued to perform the acts of worship, *“Establish prayer, and pay the poor-due, and obey God and His Messenger.”* Rituals are a means for elevating the spirituality, purifying the heart, and strengthening the connection with God. Islam brings together the rituals, the behavior, the ethics, and the laws that govern life under the umbrella of faith. This serves to provide a consistent and harmonious way of life. Rituals also provide a basis and support for the behavior of the believer. The recipe described above is the recipe to achieve the prescribed goal, *“God only wishes to remove uncleanness far from you, people of the household, and cleanse you thoroughly.”*

The verse does not specify which household giving the impression that there is a single household that is worthy of these commands and this goal. The verse also refers to the special status that the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) had by stating that it is God’s desire that they would be cleansed and purified. The last part of the verse gives them an undertaking that they should fulfill, *“And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the revelations of God and His Wisdom.”*

The verses continued to elaborate on the means to achieve cleanliness and purification for all the believers, *“For Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, perseverant men and perseverant women, humble men and humble women, charitable men and charitable women, fasting men and fasting women, men and women who guard their chastity, and men and women who engage much in God’s praise- God has prepared forgiveness and great reward.”*

The word Muslim means the one who submits. A believer is a person who believes in the truthfulness of the faith. The two words are closely linked together. They are two faces for a single coin. Submission is the epitome of accepting the faith because true belief leads to submission. Devotion is the voluntary obedience that comes with submission and belief.

Devotion emanates from an inner feeling not from an external influence. Truthfulness is an intrinsic trait of Muslims. The Quran says, *“It is those who do not believe in God’s revelations that forge falsehood.”* (16: 105) Those who lie are not members of the nation of Islam. Perseverance is an essential trait for each Muslim, to be able to fight back the temptation and to fulfill the undertakings of faith. A Muslim should persevere in adversity and when calamities strike. Humility in religion softens the heart and is obtained through standing in awe in front of God. Those who give charity have been successful in purifying their inner self of greed and stinginess. Giving charity is an expression of gratitude to God and awareness of the collective responsibility of the members of the society. The verse implies that fasting is a trait which indicates that the reference here is to fasting which has become a habit for the believer. It teaches the believer self-discipline. Guarding one’s chastity is a testimony for the strong control over the person’s lowly desires. Remembrance of God is the link that connects the human being to God. It allows the heart to shine with the light of guidance and reminds the believer to hold tight to the most trustworthy link.

Those who enjoy these traits are promised a great reward, *“God has prepared forgiveness and great reward.”*

The verse intentionally mentions women and men side by side in this verse to highlight their equal worth in the sight of God.

### **Verses 36 to 48:**

36. *It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision. Indeed, whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he is indeed has gone far astray.*
37. *And when you said to him on whom God has conferred blessings and you have conferred blessings, “Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God.” And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has a better right that you should fear Him. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of God must be fulfilled.*
38. *There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God makes his due. That was God's way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree.*
39. *(It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God. And sufficient is God as a Reckoner.*
40. *Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things.*
41. *Believers, remember God often,*
42. *And glorify Him morning and evening.*
43. *It is He who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.*



44. *Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be "Peace." And He has prepared for them a generous reward.*
45. *Prophet, truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.*
46. *And as one who invites to God's (grace) by His leave, and as a lamp spreading light.*
47. *Give the glad tidings to the believers that they shall have from God a great bounty.*
48. *And do not obey (the behests) of the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Disregard their annoyances, and put your trust in God. God is sufficient as a Guardian. (33: 36 – 48)*

*"It is not fitting for a believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by God and His Messenger to have any option about their decision. Indeed, whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, he is indeed has gone far astray."* It has been narrated that this verse was revealed to deal with circumstances surrounding the marriage of Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) to Zayd bin Harethah (RA). Zayd (RA) was the Prophet's (PBUH) slave. The Prophet (PBUH) set him free and adopted him to be his son. The Arabian society at that time looked down upon freed slaves and did not give them the same status as free people. The Prophet (PBUH) wanted to remove this stigma from the freed slaves so he requested his cousin Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) to marry Zayd (RA). Zainab (RA) did not want to marry Zayd (RA) but when this verse was revealed she obeyed the Prophet's request and agreed to be wedded to Zayd (RA). However, the verse stated a fundamental principle that the believers should pay heed to. The principle is that the believers have no choice but to obey the commands of God and His Messenger (PBUH). This is the meaning of true submission to God. God's choice for the believer is the most appropriate choice; He knows what is best for His servants. In the meantime, true submission to God does not mean we should not be active in our lives. Believers should work hard and try to exploit all the means under their control to achieve their goals. The early Muslims were able to achieve a remarkable balance between hard work and submission to God. This was one of the main ingredients of success that the early Muslims were able to achieve.

*"And when you said to him on whom God has conferred blessings and you have conferred blessings, "Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God." And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has a better right that you should fear Him. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them. The commandment of God must be fulfilled. There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God makes his due. That was God's way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree. (It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God. And sufficient is God as a Reckoner. Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things."* The Quranic decree which nullified the system of adoption that was being practiced by the Arabs before Islam was mentioned earlier. However, this was an old tradition that was deeply entrenched in the psyche of the Arabs; its consequences could not be easily removed by a single verse. God gave His Messenger (PBUH) the responsibility to remove these consequences by marrying the divorcee of Zayd (RA) whom he adopted as a son before. God inspired His Messenger (PBUH) with the plan. Zayd will eventually divorce his wife and then the Prophet (PBUH) will marry her

in order to remove the remnants of the old system of adoption. However, the Prophet (PBUH) felt awkward about telling Zayd (RA) about the plan; he knew that God will make it known sooner or later so he wanted to delay telling Zayd as much as he could. When Zayd (RA) came to complain about the difficulties that his marriage was facing; and he expressed his desire to end the marriage; the Prophet (PBUH) response was, *“Keep your wife to yourself, and remain conscious of God.”* God then revealed the verse, *“And you concealed in your mind that which God was to bring to light, and you feared people whereas God has a better right that you should fear Him. So when Zayd had performed that necessary formality (of divorce) from her, We gave her to you in marriage, so that (henceforth) there may be no blame on the believers with respect to the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have performed the necessary formality (of release) from them.”* That was the command for the Prophet (PBUH) to marry his cousin, Zainab (RA). This was God’s decree and God’s decree is absolute. He made this decree so that, *“There is no reproach for the Prophet in that which God makes his due.”* This is God’s way which does not change, *“That was God’s way with those who have gone before; and the command of God is an absolute decree.”* It is the same way that was followed by those who were sent before Muhammad (PBUH), *“(It is the practice of those) who delivered the messages of God, and fear Him, and fear none but God.”* No messenger should worry about what the people will say. They should deliver God’s message as He wanted it to be delivered. God will hold them accountable, *“And sufficient is God as a Reckoner.”* Then the fact that Zayd (RA) should not be treated as the Prophet (PBUH) biological son is reiterated, *“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of God, and the seal of the prophets. And God has full knowledge of all things.”* God knows well what is best for people.

*“Believers, remember God often,”* This is a reminder for the believers to remember God often. Remembrance of God is not merely uttering words but it is a tool to connect the heart with God. Many traditions indicate that remembrance of God means establishing prayers. However, remembrance of God is a more comprehensive term than performing prayers. It encompasses every way that the servants of God use to keep their hearts connected to God. Times for remembrance are then mentioned, *“And glorify Him morning and evening.”* Then the verses remind the servants of God of the bounties He bestowed on them, *“He it is who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light. And He is ever Merciful to the believers.”* They will be safe and secure when they meet Him and, *“Their salutation on the day they meet Him will be, ‘Peace.’ And He has prepared for them a generous reward.”*

The verses then describe the Prophet’s (PBUH) task, *“Prophet, truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner.”* The Prophet (PBUH) is a witness who will testify for the deeds of the believers. He was also asked to bring the believers glad tidings of the generous reward that awaits them; and to warn those who did not heed God’s guidance of the punishment that awaits them. He also has been given the responsibility to invite people to God’s path, *“And as one who invites to God’s (grace) by His leave,”* Because he was calling people to guidance he was, *“a lamp spreading light.”* The verses reiterate his duty to bring glad tidings to the believers, *“Give the glad tidings to the believers that they shall have from God a great bounty,”* as an expression of the bounty of God that He bestowed on the believers. This part of the Sura ends by reiterating the command that was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) early in the Sura, *“And do not obey (the behests) of the disbelievers and the hypocrites. Disregard their*

*annoyances, and put your trust in God. God is sufficient as a Guardian.”*

## **Verses 49 to 62:**

- 49. Believers, when you marry believing women, and then divorce them before you have touched them, there is no waiting period that you should reckon. So provide for them and release them honorably.*
- 50. Prophet, We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have paid their dowers; and those whom your right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to you; and the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with you; and any believing woman who dedicates herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet wishes to wed her; this is only for you, and not for the believers (at large). We know what We ordained for them regarding their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess. This is that you may be free from blame, for God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
- 51. You can defer whom you will of them and receive whom you will, and whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside (temporarily), there is no blame for you (to receive her again); that is better; that they may be comforted and not grieve, and may all be pleased with what you give them. God knows what is in your hearts; and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.*
- 52. It is not lawful for you (to marry any more) women after this, nor to exchange them for (other) wives, even if their beauty were to please you, except any your right hand should possess. God is All-Observant over everything.*
- 53. Believers, do not enter the Prophet's houses, unless you have been granted permission for a meal; and do not wait for its preparation. And if you were invited then enter; and when you have taken your meal, disperse and do not linger for conversation. Such (behavior) used to annoy the Prophet and He would shy away from (asking) you (to leave), but God does not shy away from the truth. And when you ask (his wives), for anything you want, you should ask them from behind a screen. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him, ever. That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God.*
- 54. Whether you reveal a thing or conceal it, verily God is Omniscient.*
- 55. There is no blame on them (if they appear) before their fathers or their sons, their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the (slaves) whom their right hands possess. Women, be conscious of God; for God is ever Witness over all things.*
- 56. God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. Believers, send your blessings on him, and salute him with the greeting of peace.*
- 57. Those who malign God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in the world and in the Hereafter, and prepared for them a humiliating torment.*
- 58. And those who malign the believing men and the believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin.*
- 59. Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons; so that they may be recognized and they would not be annoyed. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

60. *If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, and those who spread rumors in the city do not desist, We shall verily incite you against them, then they will be your neighbors in it only for a short while.*
61. *They will be cursed, wherever they were found, they will be seized and massacred completely.*
62. *That was the way of God in the case of those who passed away before. You will not find any change in God's way. (33: 49 – 62)*

*“Believers, when you marry believing women, and then divorce them before you have touched them, there is no waiting period that you should reckon. So provide for them and release them honorably.”* This is a ruling which complements the ruling given in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2) regarding women who are divorced before the marriage has been consummated. In Surat Al-Baqarah it was stated that they deserve to keep half the wedding gift which was agreed upon in the marriage contract. If the wedding gift was not specified, then the husband should give an appropriate gift according to his means. The present verse states the ruling regarding the waiting period that the wife should wait for before she can get married to another man. The ruling is that there is no waiting period in case the marriage has not been consummated. Then the husbands should provide for them as was mentioned in Surat Al-Baqarah and they should release them honorably.

The following verse explains the special license given to the Prophet (PBUH) in regard to marriage. It specifies the women that the Prophet (PBUH) was allowed to wed, even if they were more than four wives, *“Prophet, We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have paid their dowers; and those whom your right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to you; and the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and the daughters of your maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Mecca) with you; and any believing woman who dedicates herself to the Prophet if the Prophet wishes to wed her; this is only for you, and not for the believers (at large). We know what We ordained for them regarding their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess. This is that you may be free from blame, for God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Those included the wives that he married according to the marriage rules of Islam, the slave girls which he received from the spoils of war, any of his paternal or maternal cousins who immigrated with him to Medina, and women who would give themselves to him without a marriage gift. There are contradictory narrations about whether the Prophet (PBUH) married any of those who had given themselves to him. The most probable narration indicates that he did not marry any of them but asked his companions to marry them.

At that time the Prophet (PBUH) had nine wives. There was a special circumstance regarding how he married each one. ‘Aisha and Hafsa (RA) were the daughters of the Prophet’s (PBUH) companions, Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA). Um Habibah bint Abi Sufian (RA), Um Salamah (RA), Saudah bint Zom’ah (RA), and Zainab bint Khazimah (RA) were elderly women who had lost their husbands and the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to honor them. Zainab bint Jahsh (RA) whose marriage story was told earlier. Juwairiah bint Al-Hareth (RA) and Saffiyah bint Hayy (RA) were captives of war and the Prophet (PBUH) freed them and took them as wives to honor the two tribes that they belonged to. The verse came down to give the Prophet (PBUH) an

exception after the number of allowable wives was limited to four wives in Surat Al-Nisaa (Chapter 4).

The Prophet (PBUH) was given the choice, *“You can defer whom you will of them and receive whom you will, and whomsoever you desire of those whom you have set aside (temporarily), there is no blame for you (to receive her again); that is better; that they may be comforted and not grieve, and may all be pleased with what you give them. God knows what is in your hearts; and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.”*

Then came down the decree that prohibited him to marry anyone else other than those who were married to him at that time, *“It is not lawful for you (to marry any more) women after this, nor to exchange them for (other) wives, even if their beauty were to please you, except any your right hand should possess. God is All-Observant over everything.”* ‘Aisha (RA) suggested that this prohibition was lifted before the death of the Prophet (PBUH) but he chose not to avail himself of the license given to him.

The following verse established the etiquette that the Muslims should follow when they visited the Prophet’s (PBUH) house; it also outlined the way they should treat the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives, *“Believers, do not enter the Prophet’s houses, unless you have been granted permission for a meal; and do not wait for its preparation. And if you were invited then enter; and when you have taken your meal, disperse and do not linger for conversation. Such (behavior) used to annoy the Prophet and He would shy away from (asking) you (to leave), but God does not shy away from the truth. And when you ask (his wives), for anything you want, you should ask them from behind a screen. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him, ever. That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God.”* The Arabs before Islam were not accustomed to seeking permission before they enter a house. Some people used to go to the Prophet’s (PBUH) house and when they notice that there was a meal being cooked they would wait until the meal was done so that they share the meal, even if they were not invited. They also used to stay late after they have eaten to talk to the Prophet (PBUH). This used to annoy the Prophet (PBUH) but he did not want to hurt the people’s feelings. This verse came to set the rules for these visits. People should seek permission before they go into the Prophet’s (PBUH) house. If they find a meal being cooked they should not wait around for the meal to be done. If they were invited to the meal, then they should leave soon after they have finished their meal. If they want to ask one of the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives a question, the wife should answer the question while she is behind a screen. This is purer for the hearts of the believers and the hearts of the wives. In addition, the believers should not hurt the Prophet (PBUH) in any way; and they were not allowed to marry the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives after his death. Those who contemplated breaking these rules have committed a grievous sin, *“That would be a grievous thing in the sight of God.”* People should realize that they cannot hide anything from God, *“Whether you reveal a thing or conceal it, verily God is Omniscient.”*

Then the text details who can speak to the wives face to face, *“There is no blame on them (if they appear) before their fathers or their sons, their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the (slaves) whom their right hands possess. Women, be conscious of God; for God is ever Witness over all things.”* These are the relatives who are allowed to see the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) without a veil. This verse was specific to the Prophet's (PBUH) wives but was later generalized to include all believing women in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24). The command is strengthened by the command to remain conscious of God and then reminding them that God is, *“Witness over all things.”*

The next verse outlines the special status that the Prophet (PBUH) had, *“God and His angels send blessings on the Prophet. Believers, send your blessings on him, and salute him with the greeting of peace.”* God's blessings are accrued when God praises His Messenger among the Higher Host. The blessing of the angels is accrued when they pray God for the Messenger (PBUH). God honors the believers by including them with Him and the angels in sending the blessings on the Prophet (PBUH). Then a warning is issued to those who try to hurt the Prophet (PBUH), *“Those who malign God and His Messenger, God has cursed them in the world and in the Hereafter, and prepared for them a humiliating torment.”* The verses continue to warn against hurting the believers, *“And those who malign the believing men and the believing women undeservedly, they bear the guilt of slander and manifest sin.”* This indicates that there were people in Medina at that time who were hurting the believers, scheming against them, and spreading rumors about them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was told to command his wives and the rest of the believing women to cover their bodies, their heads, and to close the opening of the dress at the chest, *“Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons; so that they may be recognized and they would not be annoyed. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This dress code was specific for Muslim women and would differentiate them from other women. This worked as a deterrent so that Muslim women would not be annoyed.

The following verses warned the hypocrites who were scheming against the believers. The warning promised a punishment for the hypocrites if they do not desist, *“If the hypocrites, and those in whose hearts is a disease, and those who spread rumors in the city do not desist, We shall verily incite you against them, then they will be your neighbors in it only for a short while. They will be cursed, wherever they were found, they will be seized and massacred completely. That was the way of God in the case of those who passed away before. You will not find any change in God's way. (33: 49 – 62)*

### **Verses 63 to 73:**

*63. People ask you about the Hour. Say, "God alone has knowledge of it." How could you know about it? Perhaps the Hour is near.*

64. *Verily God has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a blazing Fire.*
65. *Abiding therein forever and they will find no protecting guardian or a helper.*
66. *The Day that their faces will be turned upside down in the Fire; they will say, "If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger."*
67. *And they would say, "Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our dignitaries, and they led us away from the path.*
68. *Lord, give them double torment and curse them with a very great curse."*
69. *Believers, do not be like those who maligned Moses, but God cleared him of the (calumnies) they had uttered; and he was well esteemed in God's sight.*
70. *Believers, be conscious of God, and (always) say words straight to the point.*
71. *He will make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins. He that obeys God and His Messenger has already attained the highest achievement.*
72. *We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof; but humankind undertook it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant.*
73. *So God will torment the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and idolatrous men and idolatrous women. But God will pardon the believing men and the believing women, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. (33: 63 – 73)*

*"People ask you about the Hour. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of it.' How could you know about it? Perhaps the Hour is near."* The Quran discussed extensively the coming of the Last Day and the horrifying scenes that will accompany it. It was natural that the Prophet (PBUH) would be often asked about when the Last Day will occur. The Hour is part of the unseen that only God knows about. God kept the time of the Hour hidden from people for a reason. Those who are conscious of God will endeavor to be always ready for it whenever it comes. Those who are heedless of God's guidance are simply deceiving themselves.

Since they were asking about the Hour, it is then appropriate to describe some of its scenes, *"Verily God has cursed the disbelievers and prepared for them a blazing Fire. Abiding therein forever and they will find no protecting guardian or a helper."* The disbelievers will remain in the blazing Fire for a long time; only God knows how long it will be. There will be neither a protector nor a helper. They will suffer in this blazing Fire, *"The Day that their faces will be turned upside down in the Fire."* They will regret missing the opportunity that was given to them in life, *"they will say, 'If only we had obeyed God and obeyed the Messenger.'* Then they will curse those who led them astray, *"And they would say, 'Lord, we obeyed our chiefs and our dignitaries, and they led us away from the path. Lord, give them double torment and curse them with a very great curse.'"*

It seems that the marriage of the Prophet (PBUH) to Zainab (RA), which was meant to change one of the well-established traditions of the pre Islamic Arabia, created a great deal of controversy. The hypocrites took advantage of the event to attack Islam by surreptitiously criticizing Islamic practices, maligning the Prophet (PBUH), and spreading sedition. It seems that some of the believers lent an ear to the rumors that the hypocrites were spreading. The following verse warned these believers not to engage in talks that malign the Prophet (PBUH),

*“Believers, do not be like those who maligned Moses, but God cleared him of the (calumnies) they had uttered; and he was well esteemed in God's sight.”* The verse does not give any detail about how Moses (PBUH) was maligned, but the main focus of the verse was to warn the believers not to fall in the trap that was set by the hypocrites to malign the Prophet (PBUH). The example of Moses (PBUH) was given to show that God will support His messengers and clear them from any false accusations. The verse then commanded the believers to be critical of what they hear, *“Believers, be conscious of God, and (always) say words straight to the point.”* They should think carefully of the words they utter; and only speak a good word that leads to a good deed. Those who heed this command will be rewarded, *“He will make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins. He that obeys God and His Messenger has already attained the highest achievement.”* The reward will be the achievement of great success. Obeying God in itself is a great achievement. It puts the believer on the straight path which leads to the ultimate happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

It is a great bounty from God that He considers the human weakness and the gravity of the responsibility that humankind pledged to undertake, *“We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof; but humankind undertook it; he was indeed unjust and ignorant.”* The tiny, weak creature has accepted the undertaking that the mighty heavens, earth, and mountains declined to undertake. It is a great responsibility and it is a great risk. That is why humankind is described as, *“unjust and ignorant.”* Humankind was given the determination and the awareness, and he accepted the challenge. This is the honor that God bestowed on humankind. Humankind will be tested and the reward will be given according to the deeds. However, God’s mercy is boundless because He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy, *“So God will torment the hypocritical men and the hypocritical women, and idolatrous men and idolatrous women. But God will pardon the believing men and the believing women, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*



## Sura 34: Saba (Sheba)

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

This is a Meccan Sura. It deals with the fundamentals of the doctrine: the belief in the oneness of God, the belief in God's revelation, and the belief in the resurrection. In addition, it establishes some of the basic values which emanate from the doctrine, indicating that the belief in God and doing good deeds, and not wealth and children, are the ways for salvation. It also stresses the fact that none could provide protection against God's wrath.

#### Verses 1 to 9:

1. *Praise be to God, to whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth; and praise be to Him in the Hereafter. He is the Wise, the Totally-Aware.*
2. *He knows that which goes into the earth and that which comes forth from it and that which descends from the heaven and that which ascends into it. He is the Giver of Mercy, the All-Forgiving.*
3. *The disbelievers say, "The Hour will never come upon us." Say, "Yes indeed, by my Lord, it will come upon you. (He is) the Knower of the unseen. Not an atom's weight or less than that or greater, escape His knowledge in the heavens or in the earth. All are in a clear Record.*
4. *That He may reward those who believe and do good deeds; those will have forgiveness and a generous provision.*
5. *But those who strive against Our revelations, seeking to undermine them, for them will be a torment of painful suffering.*
6. *And those who were given knowledge see that the (Revelation) sent down to you from your Lord is the truth, and that it guides to the path of the Eminent, the Praised.*
7. *The disbelievers say, "Shall we show you a man who will tell you that when you are all scattered to pieces in disintegration, that you shall (then be raised) in a new creation?"*
8. *Has he invented a falsehood against God, or is he mad?" Indeed, those who do not believe in the Hereafter are in torment and great error.*
9. *Did they not see that which is before them and that which is behind them of the sky and the earth? If We will, We can make the earth swallow them, or cause pieces of the sky to fall on them. In that surely is a sign for every servant who turns back to God in repentance. (34: 1 – 9)*

The Sura starts by singing God's praise. God is praised even if His servants do not praise Him. The universe and all His creation sing His praise. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and the earth. None can claim a share in His kingdom, and this is the cornerstone of the belief in the Oneness of God, "*Praise be to God, to whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth.*"

"*Praise be to Him in the Hereafter.*" He is praised in the Hereafter, this is an intrinsic praise. Those who disbelieved in life will see the truth in the Hereafter and will sing His praise as well. He is Totally-Aware of everything, "*He is the Wise, the Totally aware.*" He is the Wise who does everything wisely. He manages the affairs of this life as well as the Hereafter wisely, and

He controls the universe wisely. His knowledge encompasses everything.

A glimpse of the extent of God's knowledge is then given, "*He knows that which goes into the earth and that which comes forth from it and that which descends from the heaven and that which ascends into it.*" When a person stands in front of these few words, one sees a vast collection of things, movements, shapes, images, and meanings which are beyond our imagination. How many things come out from the earth in one moment? How many things go into it? How many things come down from the sky? And how many things go into the sky? Can we count the number of seeds, the worms, and the insects that go into the earth each second? It is only God the Giver of Mercy, the All-Forgiving who can encompass these things, "*He is the Giver of Mercy, the All-Forgiving.*"

"*The disbelievers say, 'The Hour will never come upon us.' Say, 'Yes indeed, by my Lord, it will come upon you. (He is) the Knower of the unseen.'*" The disbelievers reject faith because they are unable to understand God's wisdom and to appreciate God's power. God has not created humankind in jest. They will be tested, some will do good deeds and some will do evil deeds. They will not receive their recompense immediately, but some or all of the reward and punishment will be deferred to the Hereafter. It is thus essential that there will be a Hereafter to fulfill God's promise. The disbelievers do not appreciate this and therefore they say, "*The Hour will never come upon us.*" The response was immediate and unequivocal, "*Yes indeed, by my Lord, it will come upon you.*" There is no doubt because the One who confirms the coming of the Hour is, "*the Knower of the unseen.*" Then the extent of God's knowledge is described in a profound way, "*Not an atom's weight or less than that or greater, escape His knowledge in the heavens or in the earth. All are in a clear Record.*" Nothing will escape His knowledge. The expression, "*clear Record,*" may mean God's knowledge which encompasses everything.

We may comment on the expression, "*an atom's weight or less than that or greater.*" It is only recently that we came to know that the atom is not the smallest body in the universes and there are bodies which are smaller than the atom. This certainly shows that the Quran could have not been written by a human being.

The Hour will definitely come so that, "*He may reward those who believe and do good deeds; those will have forgiveness and a generous provision.*" There is a rationale behind the coming of the Hour. God will forgive the sins of those who believed and did good deeds; in addition He will award them a generous provision. But those who, "*strive against Our revelations, seeking to undermine them,*" they will be held accountable for what they committed and, "*for them will be a torment of painful suffering.*"

"*And those who were given knowledge see that the (Revelation) sent down to you from your Lord is the truth, and that it guides to the path of the Eminent, the Praised.*" It has been reported that the term, "*those who were given knowledge,*" refers to the people who were given the Scripture before. They recognized the truth of the Quran from the knowledge they were given in their Scripture. However, the verse apply to all those who were given knowledge at all times and in

every place. Their knowledge should guide them to the truth. The Quran indeed provides guidance; the Quran “*guides to the path of the Eminent, the Praised.*” The path of the Eminent, the Praised is the path that God has chosen for people living on earth. It guides humankind to the correct perspective for his relationship with the rest of God’s creation and his role in this universe. It guides humankind to the correct way of thinking to discover the nature, the properties, and the laws of the universe so that people can live in harmony with the universe. It guides humankind to an optimum training program so that people can live together in peace and harmony. It guides people to the laws that best organize their lives on earth. This is the path that Quran leads to.

The disbelievers were astonished by the mere suggestion that human beings will be resurrected after death. They even joked about it, “*The disbelievers say, ‘Shall we show you a man who will tell you that when you are all scattered to pieces in disintegration, that you shall (then be raised) in a new creation?’*” They even wondered about why the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned it, “*Has he invented a falsehood against God, or is he mad?*” Had they reflected a little on their creation in the first place, they would not have found the notion of resurrection to be difficult to accept, but they were lost, “*Indeed those who do not believe in the Hereafter are in torment and great error.*” The verse may be referring to the torment in the Hereafter. But, it may also be referring to torment in this life. Those who are misguided suffer. Those who have no faith have no hope in God’s mercy or justice. People face trials and adverse situations in life and the only support one can get in facing these difficulties is through faith. The belief in the Hereafter is a bounty from God. God bestows this bounty only on those who deserve it, those who are devout, and those who strive hard to find the truth.

May be a reminder of a tremendous cosmic scene would evoke in the disbelievers the interest in finding the truth, “*Did they not see that which is before them and that which is behind them of the sky and the earth? If We will, We can make the earth swallow them, or cause pieces of the sky to fall on them. In that surely is a sign for every servant who turns back to God in repentance.*” These events occurred in the past to earlier generations; later generations must have read or heard about them. The verse reminds people that this could also happen to them. But only those whose hearts make them turn back to God in repentance will heed such warning.

### **Verses 10 to 21:**

10. *And We certainly bestowed on David from Our grace. We said, "Mountains and birds, echo his psalms of praise." And We made the iron pliable for him.*
11. *Saying, "Make coats of armor, and measure the links well; and do good deeds. I see everything you do."*
12. *And (We subjected) the wind for Solomon. Its outward journey was one month, and its return journey was one month; and We made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him; and some of the jinn worked under his control with the leave of his Lord, and if any of them deviated from our command, We made him taste the torment of the blazing Fire.*

13. *They made for him what he desired: sanctuaries, statues, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places). "House of David, work in gratitude." A few of My servants are grateful.*
14. *Then, when We decreed death for him, nothing showed them the sign of his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his staff. And when he fell down, the jinn saw plainly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have remained in the humiliating torment.*
15. *There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place: two gardens on the right hand and the left hand. Eat of the provision of your Lord and give thanks to Him, a fair land and an All-Forgiving Lord.*
16. *But they turned away (from God), and We sent against them the flood from the dams, and We converted their two gardens into "gardens" producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few Lote-trees.*
17. *We punished them for their ingratitude. Do We punish except the ungrateful?*
18. *And We set, between them and the towns which We had blessed, towns easy to be seen, and We made the travel between them easy, (saying), "Travel in them safely both by night and day."*
19. *But they said, "Our Lord, lengthen the distances of our journeys." And they wronged themselves, so We made them history and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments. Verily in this are signs for each steadfast, grateful one.*
20. *And Satan indeed found his conjecture true concerning them, for they followed him, all save a group of the believers.*
21. *But he had no authority over them, except that We might discriminate between those who believe in the Hereafter from those who are in doubt concerning it. And your Lord is the All Preserver of all things. (34: 10 – 21)*

*"And We certainly bestowed on David from Our grace. We said, 'Mountains and birds, echo his psalms of praise.' And We made the iron pliable for him. Saying, 'Make coats of armor, and measure the links well; and do good deeds. I see everything you do.'"* David (PBUH) was a servant who turned back often to God in repentance. God bestowed on him of His bounty, *"Mountains and birds, echo his psalms of praise."* It was narrated that David (PBUH) had an extremely beautiful voice. He used to praise God and sing his psalms. The verse indicates that God gave David (PBUH) such a pure spirit that he was able to communicate with other creatures of God and made the mountains and the birds join him in singing the praise of God. God also gave him the ability to fashion iron into shapes without taking recourse to the conventional methods for shaping iron. He used iron to make innovative armors. It is said that before this, the armors used to be made from solid steel plate which were very heavy and hampered the fighter's ability to maneuver his body. God inspired David (PBUH) to make the armor from closely connected links. The armors that David (PBUH) made were light in weight and allowed better movement for the fighters. This is what is implied by, *"measure the links well."* David (PBUH) was commanded to do good deeds and to remember that God sees everything.

God also bestowed His bounties on Solomon (PBUH), *"And (We subjected) the wind for Solomon. Its outward journey was one month, and its return journey was one month."* This was one of the miracles that God bestowed on Solomon (PBUH). However, there are no more

authentic details given about it, except that the wind journey was to the Holy Land as was mentioned in Surat Al-Anbyaa (Chapter 21). Another miracle that was given to Solomon (PBUH) was, “*and We made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him.*” A third one was, “*and some of the jinn worked under his control with the leave of his Lord, and if any of them deviated from our command, We made him taste the torment of the blazing Fire. They made for him what he desired: sanctuaries, statues, basins as large as reservoirs, and (cooking) cauldrons fixed (in their places).*” Jinn is one of the creation of God. They cannot be seen and we have no knowledge of their nature. Some of them were subjugated to work for Prophet Solomon (PBUH). It is interesting to note that some of the Arab idolaters used to worship jinn. They will be treated the same way the jinn who deviate from God’s commands will be treated, “*and if any of them deviated from our command, We made him taste the torment of the blazing Fire.*” They used to work for Prophet Solomon (PBUH) making whatever he wanted them to make. This verse ends with a command to the House of David (PBUH), “*House of David, work in gratitude.*” God has bestowed all these bounties on them, so they should show their gratitude. But, “*A few of My servants are grateful.*”

The favors of God are limitless. How can a human being with a limited power thank God enough for His favors? “*And if you should count the favor of God, you could not enumerate it.*” (14: 34)

The following verse describes the scene of Solomon’s (PBUH) death. The jinn did not realize that he died and they continued working hard at the tasks that he commanded them to do until a worm ate his staff, “*Then, when We decreed death for him, nothing showed them the sign of his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his staff. And when he fell down, the jinn saw plainly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have remained in the humiliating torment.*” It was narrated that he was standing up leaning on his staff when he died. He remained in that position until a worm ate at his staff. The weakened staff gave way under Solomon’s (PBUH) weight, so he fell. The jinn did not realize that he was dead until he fell down and all this time they were working very hard performing the tasks that they were given. People who seek the jinn’s help in knowing the unseen should know that the jinn are incapable of helping them.

The previous verses narrated the story the House of David as an example of human beings who show their gratitude to God. The following verses give an example of human ingratitude, the story of the people of Sheba. The narration starts with a description of the favors which God bestowed on them, “*There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling-place: two gardens on the right hand and the left hand. Eat of the provision of your Lord and give thanks to Him, a fair land and an All Forgiving Lord.*” The people of Sheba used to live south of Yemen. Their land was fertile and they used to get an abundance of rain. They had the knowledge and skill to control their water resources. They established a natural water reservoir enclosed between two mountains and they erected a dam which can be opened and closed to allow the amount of water they need to pass through. This dam was known as the “Maarib’s Dam.” They had gardens bearing fruits and providing them with abundant food. The verse reminded them to eat of what God provided and be grateful to Him. But they were ungrateful and they were punished, “*But they turned away (from God), and We sent against them the flood from the dams, and We*

*converted their two gardens into "gardens" producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few Lote-trees." They were ungrateful and they refused to do good deeds and behave kindly, so God took away the favor that brought them His generous provision. God sent a tremendous flood that destroyed the dam and rendered the land barren. Instead of their fertile gardens the land produced only thorny trees. They were punished for their ingratitude, "We punished them for their ingratitude. Do We punish except the ungrateful?"*

While they lost most of their food resources but they were still living in their homes. They had villages around them and the roads from Yemen to Mecca and Jerusalem were safe and populated routes. The travel was easy and safe, *"And We set, between them and the towns which We had blessed, towns easy to be seen, and We made the travel between them easy, (saying), 'Travel in them safely both by night and day.'"* They did not appreciate this blessing and asked God to change this. God accepted their prayer and destroyed them for their ingratitude, *"But they said, 'Our Lord, lengthen the distances of our journeys.' And they wronged themselves so We made them history and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments. Verily in this are signs for each steadfast, grateful one."*

The following verses present the rationale behind the divine plan and the lessons to be learnt from these stories, *"And Satan indeed found his conjecture true concerning them, for they followed him, all save a group of the believers."* In each community there are those who fall an easy prey to Satan's temptation. Satan has no power over them but it is they who choose to turn away from the truth and follow Satan. There is also another group of people whose strong faith will help them to resist Satan's temptation. Falling prey to Satan provides a mechanism to discriminate between the two groups so that each group gets its due recompense from God, *"But he had no authority over them, except that We might discriminate between those who believe in the Hereafter from those who are in doubt concerning it. And your Lord is the All Preserver of all things."*

### **Verses 22 to 27:**

22. Say, *"Call upon those whom you set beside God." They do not possess even the weight of an atom either in the heavens or in the earth, nor do they have any share in either, nor does He have an assistant among them.*
23. *No intercession can avail in His Presence, except for those for whom He has granted permission. Yet, when fear is banished from their hearts, they say, "What was it that your Lord said?" They say, "The Truth." And He is the Most High, the Great.*
24. Say, *"Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth?" Say, "God. And indeed, we or you are either rightly guided or in manifest error."*
25. Say, *"You shall not be asked about our sins, nor shall we be asked about what you do."*
26. Say, *"Our Lord will gather us together and will in the end decide the matter between us with truth and justice. And He is the one to decide, the Omniscient."*
27. Say, *"Show me those whom you associated with Him as partners. By no means (can you); He is God, the Eminent, the Wise." (34: 22 – 27)*

The following verse presents a challenge to the disbelievers, “*Say, ‘Call upon those whom you set beside God.’ They do not possess even the weight of an atom either in the heavens or in the earth, nor do they have any share in either, nor does He have an assistant among them.*” The challenge is posed to the disbelievers to call upon those whom they associate with God. Do they claim ownership of anything, even as minute as an atom, in the heavens or in the earth? Nor do they share in the ownership of either. God does not need any help from them. This seems to be an answer to those who claimed that the angels were God’s daughters. The disbelievers said that they worshiped idols because they will intercede on their behalf. This claim is refuted as well, “*No intercession can avail in His Presence, except for those for whom He has granted permission.*” No one will be able to intercede on their behalf except by God’s permission. The scene in which people will need the intercession is then depicted. It is a scene of a difficult day, fear will fill the hearts, “*Yet, when fear is banished from their hearts, they say, ‘What was it that your Lord said?’ They say, ‘The Truth.’ And He is the Most High, the Great.*” They will ask each other what did God say? It is not clear who will answer this question. It may be that they were able themselves to answer each other; or it may come from the angels. Either way, the answer is that God said the truth. This is the absolute and ever existing truth which comes only from God.

The question is asked, “*Say, ‘Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth?’” Say, ‘God. And indeed, we or you are either rightly guided or in manifest error.’*” Provision is something that everyone recognizes. It is part of our lives. Provision comes from the sky in the form of rain, heat, light. Provision comes from the earth in the form of plants, animals, springs, minerals, and metals. This is what people are used to see but everyday a new type of provision is discovered. They could not argue about who provides. It is God who provides. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to tell the disbelievers that one of them is wrong and the other is right. It is a prudent way to engage them into thinking.

A fundamental principle regarding the personal responsibility of human beings is stated, “*Say, ‘You shall not be asked about our sins, nor shall we be asked about what you do.’*” This may have been a response to the disbelievers’ accusation that those who believed in Muhammad (PBUH) left the religion of their forefathers. Each one is responsible for his/her deeds. God will judge, “*Say, ‘Our Lord will gather us together and will in the end decide the matter between us with truth and justice. And He is the one to decide, the Omniscient.’*” God will gather the two groups and then He will judge between them.

The challenge is posed again, “*Say, ‘Show me those whom you associated with Him as partners. By no means (can you); He is God, the Eminent, the Wise.’*” The challenge which is posed in the form of a rhetorical question is meant to rebuke them for their folly. The response came swift and unequivocal: they will not be able to produce those whom they claimed to be partners of God. God has no partners. He is, “*the Eminent, the Wise.*”

## Verses 28 to 42:

28. *We indeed have sent you to all humankind, to give them glad tidings, and to warn them, but most people do not know.*
29. *They say, "When will this promise (fulfilled) if you are telling the truth?"*
30. *Say, "For you is the appointment of a Day (which) you cannot postpone nor hasten by an hour."*
31. *The disbelievers say, "We shall neither believe in this Book nor in (any) that (came) before it;" but if you could see, when the wrongdoers are brought before their Lord, how they cast the blame one to another; those who were oppressed (in the earth) will say to those who were arrogant, "If it were not for you, We would have been believers."*
32. *The arrogant ones will say to those who had been oppressed, "Was it we who kept you back from guidance after it had reached you? No, it was you who were guilty."*
33. *Those who had been oppressed will say to the arrogant ones, "No, it was your scheme which you schemed day and night. You ordered us to disbelieve in God and to associate partners with Him." They will confide (their) regret when they see the torment. We shall put yokes on the necks of the disbelievers. Why should they be rewarded for anything other than what they have done?*
34. *And We never sent a warner to a population, but to have the wealthy ones among them say, "We do not believe in that which you have been sent with."*
35. *They said, "We have more wealth and children, and we will not be tormented."*
36. *Say, "Verily my Lord expands and restricts the provision to whom He pleases, but most people do not know."*
37. *It is neither your wealth nor your children that will bring you nearer to Us, but it is (being one of) those who believe and do good deeds. They will be given twice the reward and they will be secure in their dwellings in the highest places.*
38. *Those who strive against Our revelations seeking to undermine them, they will be brought to the torment.*
39. *Say, "Verily my Lord expands and restricts the provision to whom He pleases, and He will replace whatever you spend. He is the best of the Providers."*
40. *On the day when He will gather them all together, and He will say to the angels, "Was it you that these people used to worship?"*
41. *They will say, "Glory be to You, You are our Guardian, not them. No, they worshipped the jinn; most of them were believers in them.*
42. *So on that day none of you will have the power to benefit or harm each other. We will say to the wrongdoers, "Taste the torment of Fire which you used to deny." (34: 28 – 42)*

The following verse outlines the Prophet's (PBUH) task, "*We indeed have sent you to all humankind, to give them glad tidings, and to warn them, but most people do not know.*" He was sent to all people. His duty is limited only to two tasks: to deliver the glad tidings and to warn. Most people do not understand the limits of the Prophet's (PBUH) function. They challenged the Prophet (PBUH) to bring about the promised punishment, "*They say, 'When will this promise (fulfilled) if you are telling the truth?'*" They did not understand the nature of the Prophet's (PBUH) role. His role is only to deliver the message. He could not bring about the threats that are mentioned in the message nor does he know when it will happen. So, the Prophet (PBUH)



was commanded to respond, “Say, *‘For you is the appointment of a Day (which) you cannot postpone nor hasten by an hour.’*” God has decreed an appointed time for each thing, and when it comes no one will be able to change it.

The disbelievers were stubborn in their rejection of the message, “*The disbelievers say, ‘We shall neither believe in this Book nor in (any) that (came) before it.’*” They insisted that they will not believe in the Quran nor will they believe in the previously revealed Scriptures which supported the Quran. This was what they said in their life. What if they can see what will happen to them on the Day of Judgment, “*but if you could see, when the wrongdoers are brought before their Lord, how they cast the blame one to another; those who were oppressed (in the earth) will say to those who were arrogant, ‘If it were not for you, We would have been believers.’*” On that Day they will exchange the blame among themselves. The followers will accuse their leaders who led them astray, but in the mean time, the leaders will lay the blame on their followers, “*The arrogant ones will say to those who had been oppressed, ‘Was it we who kept you back from guidance after it had reached you? No, it was you who were guilty.’ Those who had been oppressed will say to the arrogant ones, ‘No, it was your scheme which you schemed day and night. You ordered us to disbelieve in God and to associate partners with Him.’*” They will soon realize that they will gain nothing by blaming each other. They were all guilty and each will taste his/her share of the torment. This realization will fill their hearts with painful sorrow, “*They will confide (their) regret when they see the torment.*” They will be tied, “*We shall put yokes on the necks of the disbelievers.*” But did they expect that they would be recompensed any differently, “*Why should they be rewarded for anything other than what they have done?*” They were all wrongdoers. The arrogant were guilty of oppressing their followers and the followers were guilty when they followed those who led them astray blindly. They gave up their freedom, the ability to choose, and the integrity that God bestowed on them.

The response of the chiefs of Quraish to the Prophet (PBUH) when he called them to Islam was exactly the same response that each of God’s messengers received from the chiefs of his people, “*And We never sent a warner to a population, but to have the wealthy ones among them say, ‘We do not believe in that which you have been sent with.’*” The power and the wealth that the chiefs had spoiled them and corrupted their initial natural disposition which God placed in the psyche of each and every human being to guide them to the right path. They thought that their wealth and power will be reasons for exemption from God’s punishment, “*They said, ‘We have more wealth and children, and we will not be tormented.’*” The Quran then sets the record straight and corrects their misunderstanding. God’s provision is not a measure of God’s approval of a person’s action. Expanding or restricting provision follows God’s law, “*Say, ‘Verily my Lord expands and restricts the provision to whom He pleases, but most people do not know.’*” Some people may get deluded by this misunderstanding. They get confused when they see evil people enjoying great wealth while the believers who are doing good deeds are suffering from lack of provision. This verse explains that expanding or restricting provision follows God’s law. He distributes His provision as He wishes and according to His Wisdom, “*It is neither your wealth nor your children that will bring you nearer to Us, but it is (being one of) those who believe and do good deeds. They will be given twice the reward and they will be secure in their dwellings in the highest places.*” Expanding or restricting provision may be a test for people to see how they will behave. The test has to do with how one accepts the decreed provision and how one spends

his/her provision. Those who spend their provision in the sake of God will be rewarded greatly. But those who challenged God's revelations will be brought to justice on the Day of Judgment, *"Those who strive against Our revelations seeking to undermine them, they will be brought to the torment."* The criterion for expanding and restricting provision is reiterated again, *"Say, 'Verily my Lord expands and restricts the provision to whom He pleases, and He will replace whatever you spend. He is the best of the Providers.'"* God promised to replace whatever is spent in His way.

*"On the day when He will gather them all together, and He will say to the angels, 'Was it you that these people used to worship?'"* On the Day of Judgment, the angels will be asked about those who worshipped them. The angels will express their innocence of the disbelievers, they will sing God's praise to emphasize their rejection of this evil deed, *"They will say, 'Glory be to You, You are our Guardian, not them. No, they worshipped the jinn; most of them were believers in them.'"* The fundamental truth is then expressed, *"So on that day none of you will have the power to benefit or harm each other."* No one will have the power to benefit or harm anyone else and the wrongdoers will be doomed, *"We will say to the wrongdoers, 'Taste the torment of Fire which you used to deny.'"*

### **Verses 43 to 54:**

43. *When Our clear revelations are recited to them, they say, "This is only a man who wishes to hinder you from the (worship) which your fathers practiced." And they say, "This is only an invented lie." Those who disbelieve say of the truth when it comes to them, "This is nothing but evident magic."*
44. *But We had not given them scriptures which they could study, nor did We send any warner to them before you.*
45. *And their predecessors rejected (the truth) - these people have not attained a tenth of what We had granted their predecessors yet they rejected My messengers, so how terrible was My disapproval?*
46. *Say, "I do admonish you on one point: that you do stand up before God in pairs, or individually and reflect. Your companion is not possessed. He only came to warn you before the advent of severe torment."*
47. *Say, "No reward do I ask of you. It is (all) in your interest. My reward is only due from God. He is Witness to all things."*
48. *Say, "Verily my Lord projects the truth. He has full knowledge of the unseen."*
49. *Say, "The Truth has arrived, and falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything."*
50. *Say, "If I err, I only err to my own loss; but if I am guided, it is because of what my Lord inspires me. He is the All-Hearing, and He is (ever) near."*
51. *If you could only see when they are terrified with no escape, and they are seized from a nearby place.*

52. *And they will say, "We do believe (now) in the (Truth);" but how could they receive (Faith) from a distant place?*
53. *They rejected faith (entirely) before, and they made conjectures about the unseen from a distant place.*
54. *And they were barred from what they desire, as was done to people of their kind before. They were deep in doubt. (34: 43 – 54)*

The true message which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought posed a threat to the old traditions that the disbelievers were entrenched in. They tried to refute the clear and simple truth that the Quran embodied but their arguments were weak and shaky. All they could come up with is to say, *"This is only a man who wishes to hinder you from the (worship) which your fathers practiced."* This was not a convincing argument, so they added an accusation, *"And they say, 'This is only an invented lie.'"* But those who listened to the Quran were impressed with the way Quran addressed and evoked deep feelings in the hearts. So the disbelievers tried to counteract the effect of the Quran by saying, *"This is nothing but evident magic."* They launched a series of baseless accusations against the Quran. They tried very hard to deter people from listening and believing in it. The Quran exposed their ignorance and bias, *"But We had not given them scriptures which they could study, nor did We send any warner to them before you."* The Quran continued to remind them of the fate of those who rejected guidance before them. They had more power and wealth than them but could not escape God's punishment, *"And their predecessors rejected (the truth) - these people have not attained a tenth of what We had granted their predecessors yet they rejected My messengers, so how terrible was My disapproval?"*

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to extend a sincere invitation to the disbelievers, an invitation to examine the message with the sole intention of reaching the truth, *"Say, 'I do admonish you on one point: that you do stand up before God in pairs, or individually and reflect. Your companion is not possessed. He only came to warn you before the advent of severe torment.'"* He asked them to stand up in front of God, after they had freed their hearts of their biases, their desires, and their worldly interests. This was an invitation to rid themselves of the influence of their useless traditions and to examine the message in an objective way. The verse defines a methodology which if followed sincerely would lead directly to the straight path. It also reminded them that they have known the Prophet (PBUH) for a long time and they never suspected his sanity and wisdom before. They better heed what he told them because he came to warn them of the dire consequences of disobeying God.

After outlining a rationale approach for conducting their investigation, the Prophet (PBUH) reminded them that he did not expect any worldly compensation from them, adding sarcastically that they can keep whatever they thought he was after, *"Say, 'No reward do I ask of you. It is (all) in your interest. My reward is only due from God. He is Witness to all things.'"* God has given me the task and He will reward me. God is a Witness over everything.

*"Say, 'Verily my Lord projects the truth. He has full knowledge of the unseen.'"* This was the third message that Prophet (PBUH) delivered: what I brought you is the truth from God. Who could stand against God's truth? The truth came to erase the falsehood, *"Say, 'The Truth has*

*arrived, and falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything.*” Falsehood will be completely eliminated by the truth. It could no longer survive nor will it be resurrected again.

*“Say, ‘If I err, I only err to my own loss; but if I am guided, it is because of what my Lord inspires me. He is the All-Hearing, and He is (ever) near.’”* This is again a reminder of the individual responsibility for guidance. God is He who guides and He is All-Hearing and ever near.

The final verses describe dynamic scenes from the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“If you could only see when they are terrified with no escape, and they are seized from a nearby place. And they will say, ‘We do believe (now) in the (Truth);’ but how could they receive (Faith) from a distant place? They rejected faith (entirely) before, and they made conjectures about the unseen from a distant place. And they were barred from what they desire, as was done to people of their kind before. They were deep in doubt.”* If only you could see them when they will be terrified by the horror of that Day, they will not be able to escape. They will then try to avoid the torment by declaring, *“We do believe (now) in the (Truth),”* but it will be too late. How could they believe now? They should have done that in their life on earth. They rejected faith before on the basis of conjectures, but now they are certain of the result of their deeds. So, their request will be denied.

## Sura 35: Fatir (Orignator)

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

#### Verses 1 to 3:

1. *Praise be to God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who made the angels messengers having wings two, three and four. He increases in the creation what He wills. God is All-Powerful over everything.*
2. *Whatever God grants to people of mercy none can withhold it; and that which He withholds none can release thereafter. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
3. *People, remember God's Blessing upon you. Is there any creator other than God who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no deity except Him. How can you be deluded? (35: 1 – 3)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca, its style is very much similar to the style of Surat Al-Ra'd (Chapter 13). Its words have harmonious sounds which send tremors in the heart to awaken it from its heedlessness. It induces the heart to reflect on the enormity of the creation and the signs of God in the universe.

The main theme of the Sura revolves around alerting the heart to the favors of God, so it starts appropriately with the praise of God, "*Praise be to God*. The statement of God's creative power follows, "*the Creator of the heavens and the earth*." It is He who is the sole Creator of the heavens and the earth. All of the planets that we observe in the sky and which we know very little about have been created by God.

The Sura discusses God's revelation and His messengers; the angels are among the messengers of God. The angels serve as communicators between the heaven and the earth, "*Who made the angels messengers having wings two, three and four*." This is the first statement in the Quran which describes the form of the angels. This description does not allow us to speculate about how the angels look like. This is part of the unseen. This is also emphasized in this verse by stating that God's creation is beyond our human imagination, "*He increases in the creation what He wills. God is All-Powerful over everything*."

Another form of God's unlimited power is explained in the following verse, "*Whatever God grants to people of mercy none can withhold it; and that which He withholds none can release thereafter. He is the Eminent, the Wise*." When people grasp the full meaning of this verse, they understand that there is only one power in this universe: the power of God. There is only one source for true mercy in this universe: God. God's mercy is limitless and is present in so many forms. People can see God's mercy in their own selves as well as in things that surround them. The mercy of God is reflected on the things that He allowed us to do as well as in the things that He prevented us from doing. One of the aspects of the mercy of God is its availability for God's servants. The hope, the expectation, and the realization of the mercy fill the heart with security and contentment. No one controls God's mercy except Him. This verse, if fully understood, changes the life of the human being and establishes new set of standards and values. The servant

of God should not expect hope from any other than God and should not fear anyone else except Him.

The lessons learnt from the previous two verses are reiterated, *“People, remember God's Blessing upon you.”* It reminds people of the Oneness of the Creator and the Oneness of the Provider. A rhetorical question is posed to express the astonishment at those who do not understand these facts, *“Is there any creator other than God who provides for you from the sky and the earth? There is no deity except Him. How can you be deluded?”* The blessings of God are all around us. How can we forget?

### **Verses 4 to 8:**

4. *And if they reject you, messengers before you were also rejected. All matters are returned to God.*
5. *People, certainly the promise of God is true. Do not let this present life deceive you, nor let the deceiver deceive you about God.*
6. *Verily Satan is an enemy to you; so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his followers so that they may become companions of the blazing Fire.*
7. *Those who disbelieve, theirs will be an awful torment; and those who believe and do good deeds, theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward.*
8. *Is he, the evil of whose deeds is made attractive to him so that he deems it good (like a believer)? God verily sends whom He wills astray, and guides whom He wills; so let not your soul expire in sorrow over them. God knows what they do. (35: 4 – 8)*

*“And if they reject you, messengers before you were also rejected. All matters are returned to God.”* In this verse, God comforts His Messenger (PBUH) by stating several facts. People rejection of God’s messengers is not a new phenomenon; previous messengers were rejected as well. All matters and affairs will return back to God. Only He will decide the consequences. Then a warning is addressed to all people, *“People, certainly the promise of God is true. Do not let this present life deceive you, nor let the deceiver deceive you about God.”* God’s promise is the truth. God never breaks His promise. So, let not the temptations of life deceive you. Satan is your enemy; he will always try to tempt you, *“Verily Satan is an enemy to you; so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his followers so that they may become companions of the blazing Fire.”* Make him your enemy. Those who follow Satan will end up in the blazing Fire. Can a sane person accept an invitation to Hell Fire? Consider the consequences of belonging to one of the two groups, *“Those who disbelieve, theirs will be an awful torment; and those who believe and do good deeds, theirs will be forgiveness and a great reward.”*

*“Is he, the evil of whose deeds is made attractive to him so that he deems it good (like a believer)? God verily sends whom He wills astray, and guides whom He wills; so let not your soul expire in sorrow over them. God knows what they do.”* The door to sin is opened by Satan who makes it seem right. People who think that they are always right and they never doubt the goodness of their decisions are an easy prey for Satan. Satan leads them to sin easily because they never stop to think about their actions and they do not accept any criticism. Those who

follow Satan are bound to go astray and those who resist the temptation of Satan are bound to be guided. So, you (Muhammad) do not feel sorry for those who are not guided. It is not your task to make people guided. This is a matter that only God controls.

### **Verses 9 to 14:**

9. *It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they stir the clouds, and We drive them to a dead land, and revive the earth therewith after its death. Such is the resurrection.*
10. *Whoso desires eminence, all eminence belongs to God. To Him good words ascend, and the good deed lifts them up, and (as for) those who plan evil deeds, they shall have a severe torment; and their plan shall perish.*
11. *And God created you from dust; then from a sperm-drop; then He made you in pairs. And no female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge. And no aged person is granted (additional) years, nor is his life span shortened but it is in a record. Indeed, this is easy for God.*
12. *And the two seas are not alike – one is fresh, sweet, and good to drink from; and the other is bitter and salty. And from them both you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments that you wear. And you see the ship plowing through them that you may seek of His bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.*
13. *He merges the night into the day, and he merges the day into the night. And he subjected the sun and the moon: each one runs its course for an appointed term. This is God your Lord; to Him belong all the Sovereignty; and those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own so much as the white spot on a date-stone.*
14. *If you invoke them, they will not hear to your call, and if they were to hear, they cannot answer your (prayer). On the Day of Resurrection, they will reject your "partnership". And none can tell you (the truth) like the One who is Totally-Aware. (35: 9 -14)*

*“It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they stir the clouds, and We drive them to a dead land, and revive the earth therewith after its death. Such is the resurrection.”* The scene of the clouds being formed by the action of the wind is one of the cosmic signs of God. God moves the clouds wherever He wills and causes the rain to come down to revive a barren land. This is an example of the resurrection that happens in front of our eyes on earth. It is a concrete example for people who reject the concept of resurrection to observe.

The narrative then moves to explain the meaning of dignity and eminence and relates it to the doing of good deeds, *“Whoso desires eminence, all eminence belongs to God. To Him good words ascend, and the good deed lifts them up, and (as for) those who plan evil deeds, they shall have a severe torment; and their plan shall perish.”* It may be that good life is the common factor in the two separate issues of land revival and good words and deeds. Land revival is necessary for people to have a good life and similarly good words and deeds are necessary for people to lead a good life. This has been alluded to before in Surat Abraham (Chapter 14, verses

24-26), where the analogy between a good word and a good tree was given. Both a good word and a good tree embody the meaning of the growth of good life.

The idolaters of Mecca fought to preserve their polytheistic tradition because they wanted to maintain their status among the Arabs. The verse tells them that they should seek dignity and eminence with God. It is only God that can grant dignity and eminence. Those whom God will dignify will never bow their heads to any of His creatures. This is true dignity. The way to dignity is through good words and good deeds. True dignity is an inner feeling that rests deeply in the hearts of the people. It raises people above their whims and desires. Following one's whims and desires usually opens the chances for being humiliated. Observing God and remaining conscious of Him helps people control their whims and desires. This is how good words and deeds are linked to eminence and dignity. Those who plot evil plots thinking that they can achieve eminence through their plots are doomed. Not only they will have a severe punishment but their plans will never succeed.

*“And God created you from dust; then from a sperm-drop; then He made you in pairs.”* The verse first mentions the first creation of humankind from dust then it refers to the first stage of pregnancy. Dust is a lifeless matter while the sperm-drop is full of life. The creation of humankind is a miracle and its secrets are not known yet. The development of a human being from a sperm-drop is also a mystery whose secrets are still hidden. From a sperm-drop cells grow and come together to form the different parts of the human body. Each body is unique in its characteristics. Two human beings then come together to repeat the whole process again. The miraculous creation of the human being is mentioned repeatedly in the Quran so that people may reflect on it. The verse then refers to the absolute and comprehensive knowledge of God. God knows His creation, *“And no female conceives or delivers except with His knowledge.”* This statement indicates that the word, “female,” means all types of females: human, animals, birds, and all other creatures of God. God's knowledge encompasses each and every living being as they are being created. Similarly, God knows how each one of His creatures will live, *“And no aged person is granted (additional) years, nor is his life span shortened but it is in a record. Indeed, this is easy for God.”* This tremendous amount of knowledge is in a record, a record that is easy for God to maintain.

The verses continue to describe another of the cosmic signs of God, *“And the two seas are not alike – one is fresh, sweet, and good to drink from; and the other is bitter and salty. And from them both you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments that you wear. And you see the ship plowing through them that you may seek of His bounty, and that haply you may give thanks.”* The divine will has created different types of water, some sweet and some salty. Both are of benefit and essential for the continuation of life on earth; from each we eat fish and we obtain stones that can be used in making jewelry. The ships go through them both carrying people and commodities. People should appreciate the blessings of God.

The perpetuity of the succession of night and day and the motion of the sun and moon is another of the cosmic signs of God, *“He merges the night into the day, and he merges the day into the night. And he subjected the sun and the moon: each one runs its course for an appointed term.”*



*“This is God your Lord; to Him belong all the Sovereignty; and those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own so much as the white spot on a date-stone. If you invoke them, they will not hear to your call, and if they were to hear, they cannot answer your (prayer). On the Day of Resurrection, they will reject your "partnership". And none can tell you (the truth) like the One who is Totally-Aware.”* It is God who sends the winds, created the clouds, brings the barren land to life, created you from dust, and created you into pairs. It is He who knows what each female carries and what she delivers. He knows how long each one will live. He created the two types of seas. He merges the day and the night, and He subjected the sun and the moon to run around, until a prescribed term has been reached. He is the Sovereign. Those whom you invoke beside Him do not know anything. They will not hear you when you call upon them; and if they hear you they will not respond to your call. On the Day of the Resurrection they will disown you. This is the truth because only He who is Totally-Aware of everything can tell you the truth.

### **Verses 15 to 26:**

15. *People, it is you that are in need of God. And God is the Rich, the Praised.*
16. *If He wills; He can get rid of you and bring (instead of you) a new creation.*
17. *And that is not difficult for God.*
18. *And no burdened soul can bear the burden of another, and if one heavily laden soul should cry for help, none of its load will be carried, even by a close relative. You warn only those who fear their Lord without seeing Him, and have established prayers. He who purifies his soul purifies his soul for his own benefit. To God is the final destination.*
19. *The blind and the seeing are not alike;*
20. *Nor are the darkness and the light;*
21. *Nor are the shade and the heat;*
22. *Nor are the living and the dead. God makes whom He wills to hear. You cannot make those who are in the graves to hear.*
23. *You are only a warner.*
24. *Verily We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner. And there was never a people to whom We did not send a warner.*
25. *And if they reject you, so did their predecessors, to whom came their messengers with clear signs, Scriptures, and the book of enlightenment.*
26. *Then I seized those who disbelieved, and how intense was My punishment. (35: 15 -26)*

*“People, it is you that are in need of God. And God is the Rich, the Praised.”* People always need to be reminded of this fact. They need to be reminded that God does not need their devotion. They are the ones who need God. If God wills, He could replace them easily by a new creation, *“If He wills, He can get rid of you and bring (instead of you) a new creation. And that is not difficult for God.”* God has bestowed His favors on this minute creature, the human being. God created humankind, fashioned him, gave him the skills, prepared him, and made him a vicegerent on earth. God subjected the universe for the service of this minute creature. God sent His messengers to guide people to the straight path. All these favors should have been

appreciated and gratitude should have been expressed.

The following verse states a fundamental principle: the personal responsibility of each individual, *“And no burdened soul can bear the burden of another, and if one heavily laden soul should cry for help, none of its load will be carried, even by a close relative.”* Each individual is responsible for his/her own deeds and actions. Each one will be held accountable for him/herself. No one will assume the responsibility of someone else. The fact that each individual is responsible for his/her actions enhances the feeling of self-accountability. Then the verse addresses the Prophet (PBUH), *“You warn only those who fear their Lord without seeing Him, and have established prayers. He who purifies his soul purifies his soul for his own benefit. To God is the final destination.”* Only those who are conscious of God will heed the warning. Those who chose to purify themselves will benefit from their actions.

In the sight of God, belief and disbelief are not equal; nor are truth and falsehood; nor goodness and evil are equal, *“The blind and the seeing are not alike; nor are the darkness and the light; nor are the shade and the heat; nor are the living and the dead.”* The analogy between disbelief, blindness, darkness, and heat is implied. Similarly, the analogy between belief, the ability to see, light, and shade is implied. Belief is a light that fills the heart, the body, and the senses. It is a light that illuminates the way and uncovers the truth. Belief gives the believer the ability to see the truth. A believer can see where he/she is heading. Belief is a shade under which the soul can find comfort from the heat. Belief gives the soul its life.

Disbelief on the other hand is blindness, darkness, heat, and death. It blinds the heart and the soul from seeing the truth. It is darkness because it extinguishes the light of belief. It fills the heart with the fire of doubt and leaves the soul in the misery of this fire. It is death because it severs the ties between the individual and the rest of humanity.

The Quran then comforted the Prophet (PBUH), *“God makes whom He wills to hear. You cannot make those who are in the graves to hear. You are only a warner.”* The Prophet (PBUH) was only a warner. He was a human being. He could not have made those who were dead, physically or spiritually, hear his warning. Only God can make whomsoever He wills hear.

*“Verily We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner.”* God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with the truth as all the other messengers who were sent before him. God did not neglect any one, each nation received their guidance, *“And there was never a people to whom We did not send a warner.”* But many messengers were rejected, *“And if they reject you, so did their predecessors, to whom came their messengers with clear signs, Scriptures, and the book of enlightenment.”* Messengers were sent with clear proofs; either books, miracles, or other signs but people did not heed the warning. God punished those who rejected the messengers before, *“Then I seized those who disbelieved, and how intense was My punishment.”*

## Verses 27 to 38:

27. *Have you not seen that God sends down rain from the sky? With it, We then bring out fruits of various colors. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of color, and extremely black.*
28. *Likewise, people, moving creatures, and cattle, are of various colors. Indeed, those who have knowledge among His servants fear God the most. God is Eminent, All-Forgiving.*
29. *Those who recite the Book of God, establish regular prayer, and spend (in Charity) out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a trade that will never fail.*
30. *He will pay them their dues in full, and will give them (even) more out of His bounty. He is All-Forgiving, Grateful.*
31. *Indeed, what We have revealed to you of the Book is the Truth, confirming what was (revealed) before it. God is assuredly Totally-Aware and All-Seeing of His servants.*
32. *Then We bequeathed the Book on Our servants whom We have chosen; but some of them wronged themselves; some followed the middle course; and some are foremost, by God's leave, in good deeds. That is the great bounty.*
33. *Gardens of Eden will they enter. Therein will they be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments therein will be of silk.*
34. *And they will say, "Praise be to God, who has removed from us (all) sorrow. Our Lord is indeed All-Forgiving, Grateful.*
35. *Who has, out of His bounty, settled us in a home that will last; toil shall not touch us, nor shall fatigue afflict us therein.*
36. *But those who disbelieve, for them will be the fire of Hell, wherein they will never be finished off and die, nor will its torment be lightened for them. Thus, do We reward the ungrateful.*
37. *Therein will they scream, "Our Lord, let us out; we shall do good deeds, not like the (deeds) we used to do." Did We not give you a life long enough to heed the admonition? And the warner came to you. So taste the torment. There is no helper for the wrongdoers.*
38. *Verily, God knows (all) the hidden things of the heavens and the earth. Verily, He has full knowledge of all that is in the hearts. (35: 27 – 38)*

*"Have you not seen that God sends down rain from the sky? With it We then bring out fruits of various colors. And in the mountains are tracts white and red, of various shades of color, and extremely black."* The verse takes us on a tour of the whole earth. It starts with rain coming down from the sky which produces plants and fruits with different colors. Each fruit is unique. Similarly, the mountains exhibit different colors. Then the different colors of people are mentioned, *"Likewise, people."* Not only people have different colors but also other creatures, *"moving creatures and cattle are of various colors."* The verse stresses the uniqueness of each creature, a fact that can be only appreciated by those who study such a phenomenon, *"Indeed, those who have knowledge among His servants fear God the most. God is Eminent, All-Forgiving."* The different colors mentioned in the verse are a sign of the miracle of the creation. They show the unlimited ability of God in creating unique creatures even among the same

species. On the other hand, the verse is a testament of the deliberate beauty of the creation of God. It teaches us to look for and appreciate beauty in the creation.

*“Those who recite the Book of God, establish regular prayer, and spend (in Charity) out of what We have provided for them, secretly and openly, hope for a trade that will never fail. He will pay them their dues in full, and will give them (even) more out of His bounty. He is All-Forgiving, Grateful.”* Reciting the Book means reading and reflecting on the text. This should then be followed by acting according to the text. This meaning is confirmed by citing establishing prayers and spending in the way of God. Those who fulfill these steps have entered into a very profitable deal. They know that what God has is more than they will ever be spending. God will not only repay them their dues but will also multiply their reward many times because, He is *All-Forgiving, Grateful*. He will forgive their shortcomings and He will reward them as a sign of His gratitude. If God is showing His gratitude for the good performance of His servants, should we not show Him our gratitude for all the bounties that He bestowed on us?

*“Indeed what We have revealed to you of the Book is the Truth, confirming what was (revealed) before it. God is assuredly Totally-Aware and All-Seeing of His servants.”* The evidence of the truth in this Book is abundantly displayed by its verses. This Book presents the true nature of the universe in a written form. It confirms the previous revelations from God because they all embody the same single truth. This Book has been revealed by the Creator who knows what is good for His creatures.

*“Then We bequeathed the Book on Our servants whom We have chosen; but some of them wronged themselves; some followed the middle course; and some are foremost, by God's leave, in good deeds. That is the great bounty.”* The Book was given as a legacy to this nation. This is a great honor that God bestowed on this nation; and it is a great responsibility that they should undertake. The nation is divided into three categories.

Those who wronged themselves, they were mentioned first. It may be because they constitute the majority of people. The sins of the people in this group outweigh their good deeds. The second group is the middle group. The sins and good deeds of the people in this group balance each other. The third group consists of those people whose good deeds outweigh their sins. God will bestow His favor on the members of the three groups. They will all end up in paradise, even though in different categories, *“Gardens of Eden will they enter. Therein will they be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls; and their garments therein will be of silk. And they will say, ‘Praise be to God, who has removed from us (all) sorrow. Our Lord is indeed All-Forgiving, Grateful. Who has, out of His bounty, settled us in a home that will last; toil shall not touch us, nor shall fatigue afflict us therein.’”* These are the material and spiritual pleasures that God will bestow on the members of the three groups. It involves physical comfort as well as security and contentment. No more sadness or worry will they suffer. These blessings are all out of the God's bounty.

But those who disbelieved will have a different ending, *“But those who disbelieve, for them will be the fire of Hell, wherein they will never be finished off and die, nor will its torment be*

*lightened for them. Thus, do We reward the ungrateful.” Their suffering will continue neither death nor mercy will save them from the torment. They will cry for help, “Therein will they scream, ‘Our Lord, let us out; we shall do good deeds, not like the (deeds) we used to do.’” Having realized their guilt, they will express their sorrow and they will ask for a second chance. But it will be too late, “Did We not give you a life long enough to heed the admonition? And the warner came to you. So taste the torment. There is no helper for the wrongdoers.”*

This paragraph ends with a clear statement of God’s absolute knowledge, *“Verily, God knows (all) the hidden things of the heavens and the earth. Verily, He has full knowledge of all that is in the hearts.”*

### **Verses 39 to 45:**

39. *It is He who made you successors in the earth. Whoever disbelieves in God, his disbelief will be to his detriment. Their disbelief will only make them more detestable in the sight of their Lord, and will only add to their loss.*
40. *Say, “Have you seen those partners of yours whom you invoke besides God? Show Me what it is they have created in the earth. Or have they a share in the heavens? Or have We given them a scripture from which they can derive clear evidence?” Indeed, the wrongdoers promise each other nothing but delusions.*
41. *It is God who upholds the heavens and the earth, lest they fall apart; and if they should fall apart, there is none to hold them together except He. Verily He is the Forbearing, the All-Forgiving.*
42. *They swore their most binding oath by God that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any other people. Yet when a warner came to them, it has only increased their aversion.*
43. *Behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting of evil, but the plotting of evil will harm only the authors thereof. Now, they should expect nothing but the way the former people were dealt with. You will find no change in God's way (of dealing); and you will not find a turning off in God's way (of dealing).*
44. *Did they not travel through the land, and see what the end of those before them was, although they were superior to them in strength? Nothing, in the heavens or on earth, frustrates God. He is the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.*
45. *If God were to punish people according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the (earth) a single living creature. He gives them respite for a stated term whenever their term expires verily God is All-Seeing of His servants. (35: 39 – 45)*

*“It is He who made you successors in the earth. Whoever disbelieves in God, his disbelief will be to his detriment. Their disbelief will only make them more detestable in the sight of their Lord, and will only add to their loss.”* We should learn a lesson from the succession of generations one after the other and the rise and fall of civilizations and states. Nothing will last forever. One day we will go and other people will succeed us. They will remember us as we remember those who

have gone before us. We are going through life as if we are travelling on a trip except that at the end of this trip one has to stand to account for what he/she had done during the trip. We need to pay heed to the concept of accountability. The verse also highlights another important principle, the principle of the individual responsibility. No one will carry the burden of sin of another.

The narrative then moves to explore the concept of associating partners with God, “*Say, ‘Have you seen those partners of yours whom you invoke besides God? Show Me what it is they have created in the earth. Or have they a share in the heavens? Or have We given them a scripture from which they can derive clear evidence?’ Indeed, the wrongdoers promise each other nothing but delusions.*” The question is posed to those who associate partners with God: do you have a proof to support your claim? Can anyone claim that anyone other than God created a part of the earth? Or can anyone claim that he/she was created by anyone other than God? Can these partners claim that they own a part of heaven or earth? Can anyone claim that he received a book from God that supports their claims? They are only deluded.

“*It is God who upholds the heavens and the earth, lest they fall apart; and if they should fall apart, there is none to hold them together except He. Verily He is the Forbearing, the All-Forgiving.*” It is God who maintains the equilibrium of all these stars, comets, and galaxies that constitute the universe. They rotate in their orbits according to a precise plan. If this balance is disrupted, who else other than God can hold the components of the universe together?

God is Forbearing; He gave people respite to a pre-determined term. He is also All-Forgiving; He will forgive many of the sins people committed.

People pledge to obey God then they break their pledge, “*They swore their most binding oath by God that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any other people. Yet when a warner came to them, it has only increased their aversion.*”

They behaved arrogantly in the land and plotted evil schemes. But evil schemes come around and afflict those who planned them in the first place, “*Behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting of evil, but the plotting of evil will hem in only the authors thereof. Now they should expect nothing but the way the former people were dealt with? You will find no change in God's way (of dealing); and you will not find a turning off in God's way (of dealing).*”

“*Did they not travel through the land, and see what the end of those before them was, although they were superior to them in strength? Nothing, in the heavens or on earth, frustrates God. He is the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.*” One should learn lessons from the history of previous civilizations. History shows that life follows a set of laws that do not change. These laws were created by God, the Omniscient, the All-Powerful.

God gives people respite; however, this delay in punishment will not change the fact that everyone will be held accountable, *“If God were to punish people according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the (earth) a single living creature. He gives them respite for a stated term whenever their term expires verily God is All-Seeing of His servants.”* When the time comes people will be held accountable and they will be either rewarded or punished.

## Sura 36: Ya-Seen (Ya-Seen)

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

### **Verses 1 to 29:**

1. *Ya-Seen.*
2. *By the Quran, full of Wisdom,*
3. *You are indeed one of the messengers,*
4. *On a straight path.*
5. *A revelation from the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy,*
6. *In order that you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they are unaware.*
7. *The verdict has been passed against the most of them, for they do not believe.*
8. *We have put yokes round their necks right up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up (and they cannot see).*
9. *And We have put a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them, and further, We have covered them up; so that they cannot see.*
10. *It is the same for them, whether you warn them or you do not warn them - they will not believe.*
11. *You warn only those who follow the message and fear the Lord of Mercy while they do not see Him. Give them good tidings, of Forgiveness and a generous reward.*
12. *We shall certainly bring the dead back to life, and We record what they have put forth, and that which they leave behind, and We have recorded everything in a clear Register.*
13. *And cite for them the parable of the people of the city when the messengers came to them.*
14. *We (first) sent two messengers to them, they rejected them. Then We strengthened them with a third. They said, "Indeed, we have been sent to you."*
15. *The (people) said, "You are only mortals like us; and the Lord of Mercy did not send anything, you are only telling lies."*
16. *They said, "Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you.*
17. *And our duty is only to deliver the message clearly."*
18. *The (people) said, "We see an evil omen in you. If you do not desist, we will certainly stone you. And a painful torment indeed will be inflicted on you by us."*
19. *They said, "Your evil omen is within yourselves. Is it because you are reminded (of the truth)? Surely, you are a people who are given to excesses."*
20. *Then a man came running, from the farthest part of the city, saying, "My people, follow the messengers."*
21. *Follow those who do not ask you for a reward, and who are rightly guided.*
22. *Why should I not worship the One who created me? It is to Him that you will be returned.*
23. *How could I take beside Him any other gods, whose intercession will not help me and who would not be able to save me if the Lord of Mercy wishes to harm me?*
24. *I would indeed, if I were to do so, be in clear error.*
25. *I have believed in your Lord, so hear me."*
26. *It was said, "Enter Paradise." He said, "If only my people knew;*
27. *How my Lord has forgiven me and made me of the honored ones?"*



28. *And We did not send down against his people, after him, any hosts from heaven, nor do We ever send down.*
29. *It was no more than a single mighty blast, and they perished. (36: 1 – 29)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. Its verses are short and they have a fast rhythm. The subject matter that the Sura deals with is the same as other Meccan Suras. The main objective of the Sura is to establish the fundamentals of the doctrine. The verses of the Sura discuss the truth of the revelation, the Oneness of God, and the concept of the resurrection.

*“Ya-Seen. By the Quran, full of Wisdom.”* God makes an oath by the two letters, *“Ya-Seen,”* and the Quran full of wisdom. Linking the Alphabetical letters and the Quran supports the view that the purpose of starting the Suras with some of the Arabic Alphabetical letters was to challenge the Arabs of Mecca to compose a book similar to the Quran which has been composed using the Alphabetical letters of the language that they spoke and they were familiar with. The verse also describes the Quran as a *“wise book,”* which implies that it is a living document that has an objective and a will. Although this is a metaphorical expression but it is very close to reality. This Quran has a spirit and it is a living document in the sense that it conducts a discourse with those whose spirits are pure and their hearts are open to receive the truth. It allows these hearts to understand the meaning and secrets of life. These hearts yearn to listen to the Quran, just like the Prophet (PBUH) used to yearn to listen to the Quran. The Quran is a book full of wisdom because it addresses people at the different levels of understanding in way appropriate for each of them. The Quran is a book full of wisdom because it approaches people in a wise way to prepare them to lead a life that follows the divine project.

Then the object of the oath is mentioned, *“You are indeed one of the messengers.”* God does not need to take an oath to support His word but it is an indication of the importance of the message which is being conveyed. The verse emphasized that Muhammad (PBUH) is a messenger of God. He was sent according to God’s tradition of sending messengers to guide people to God’s way. The nature of this message was also stated, *“On a straight path.”* The message is straight and does not suffer any crookedness. It is simple and does not involve any complex dialectical discourses. It portrays the truth in a straight forward way. The message is aligned with the universal laws, the laws of existence, and the nature of things and living creatures. Thus, allowing the human being to live in harmony with the universe and the other creations of God. It is a straight message because it leads to God, whoever follows it will not go astray. It is a divine revelation from God, *“the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”* The verse introduces some of God’s attributes; He is Eminent and He has the power to do anything He wills. But He is also the Giver of Mercy who showers His servants with mercy.

The objective of the revelation is to warn people, *“In order that you may warn a people whose fathers were not warned, so they are unaware.”* Being unaware is the most serious cause for the corruption of the hearts. The heart that is unaware is a heart which cannot perform its intended function. The heart’s functions are to receive, to interact, and to respond. A corrupt heart does not receive the signals of guidance and therefore it does not interact nor respond to them. The

Arabs of Mecca at that time were the descendants of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH). Generations passed, since the time of Prophet Ishmael (PBUH), without receiving any guidance. This was the time to make them aware, *“The verdict has been passed against the most of them, for they do not believe.”* God has already decreed what will be their fate according to His knowledge and His wisdom. An image is painted for these people depicting their mental condition, *“We have put yokes round their necks right up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up (and they cannot see). And We have put a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them, and further, We have covered them up; so that they cannot see.”* The verse describes their condition as if they were prevented by force from receiving guidance. Thus, the decree has been issued, *“It is the same for them, whether you warn them or you do not warn them - they will not believe.”* Their hearts were sealed in enclosures that prevented them from receiving guidance, so they will not listen to any warning. Warning does not create the hearts anew. Warning only awakens a living heart that is ready to receive guidance, *“You warn only those who follow the message and fear the Lord of Mercy while they do not see Him. Give them good tidings, of Forgiveness and a generous reward.”* The verse, most probably, refers to the Quran as the message. Those who worship God while they have not seen Him are given the glad tidings that God will forgive their sins and will give them a generous reward. These people not only read the Quran, but they also act according to it.

The inevitability of the resurrection after death and the meticulous accountability of all deeds are stressed, *“We shall certainly bring the dead back to life, and We record what they have put forth, and that which they leave behind, and We have recorded everything in a clear Register.”* The concept of resurrection has been the subject of great many arguments, examples of this will be mentioned later in this Sura. The verse also stresses the fact that all deeds will be recorded meticulously in the Register. The nearest interpretation for the word, “Register,” is that it refers to the limitless, most comprehensive body of knowledge that God has.

The same issues are dealt with in a story-telling style, *“And cite for them the parable of the people of the city when the messengers came to them. We (first) sent two messengers to them, they rejected them. Then We strengthened them with a third. They said, ‘Indeed, we have been sent to you.’”* The Quran does not give details of who were the people of the city and what city is the verse talking about. This is an indication that this information is irrelevant. Instead, the verse focuses on the lessons to be learnt. Two messengers were sent to a city. The people of the city rejected them. So, God sent a third messenger to support the other two and to emphasize that they were truly messengers of God. The people of the city offered a lame objection, *“The (people) said, ‘You are only mortals like us; and the Lord of Mercy did not send anything, you are only telling lies.’”* The objection that the messenger is a mortal is naïve. It also reflects the ignorance of the role of a messenger. The people may have expected that the messenger would come to them in the form of a mythical individual whose life is shrouded in mystery. They did not expect a simple mortal with no mystery surrounding him to be a messenger. The life of the messenger does not need to be wrapped in mystery. The only mystery that surrounds the messenger is their aptitude to receive the revelation. This is a characteristic that God created in those whom who chose to be messengers. The message is a divine project which outlines the way of life that people should lead. The messenger is a living example of how to lead a life that

follows the divine project. It is therefore, necessary for the messenger to be a human being just like the people to whom the message is brought.

The messengers reiterated the objective of their mission, *“They said, ‘Our Lord knows that we have been sent to you. And our duty is only to deliver the message clearly.’”* God knows that they were messengers and that should have been sufficient. The task of the messenger is to deliver the message and they have delivered it. The disbelievers were not satisfied with this answer. They continued to badger the messengers, *“The (people) said, ‘We see an evil omen in you. If you do not desist, we will certainly stone you. And a painful torment indeed will be inflicted on you by us.’”* They did not only reject the message but they threatened and harassed the messengers. But the messengers stood their grounds, *“They said, ‘Your evil omen is within yourselves.’”* They tried to explain to their people that the concept of an evil omen is a myth. People are responsible for whatever happens to them, whether good or bad. It is a result of their intentions and their deeds. Then they rebuked them for their threat, *“Is it because you are reminded (of the truth)? Surely, you are a people who are given to excesses.”*

This story presents an example of the response, of those who have sealed hearts, to guidance. The verses continue to give another example of those whose hearts are open and ready to receive guidance, *“Then a man came running, from the farthest part of the city, saying, ‘My people, follow the messengers. Follow those who do not ask you for a reward, and who are rightly guided.’”* This is the response of a man who has a sound initial natural disposition which led him to recognize the truth and to believe in it. He tried to convince his people that they were rejecting the truth. He pointed out that these messenger were not seeking a material recompense for their work. Their only objective was to convey the message. Then he explained his logic in accepting the guidance that the messengers brought, *“Why should I not worship the One who created me? It is to Him that you will be returned. How could I take beside Him any other gods, whose intercession will not help me and who would not be able to save me if the Lord of Mercy wishes to harm me? I would indeed, if I were to do so, be in clear error.”* His immediate response was an expression of the natural attachment that links the heart of humankind to his Creator. This natural attachment was instilled in the initial natural disposition which God created in each and every human being. He then explained the logic behind his response. Who is worthy of his worship? Is it God who created him, or is it a deity that could not help him? He then came to the conclusion that if he ignored the reaction of the initial natural disposition or the logical analysis that lead to him to worship God alone, he would be indeed in clear error. He then announced his decision, *“I have believed in your Lord, so hear me.”*

One can deduce from the narrative that his people killed him, although this was not stated explicitly, but the narrative follows him in the Hereafter where he got his reward, *“It was said, ‘Enter Paradise.’ He said, ‘If only my people knew; how my Lord has forgiven me and made me of the honored ones.’”* When he found out what was hidden for him in paradise, he wished that his people would see the reward which he received so that they would know the truth. This was the fate of the believer. The fate of the disbelievers was easily decided and it did not take long for them to meet their doom, *“And We did not send down against his people, after him, any hosts from heaven, nor do We ever send down. It was no more than a single mighty blast, and they perished.”*

## Verses 30 to 68:

30. *How regretful for My Servants, whenever a messenger comes to them they ridicule him.*
31. *Did not they see how many generations We destroyed before them? None of whom will ever come back to them.*
32. *But each one of them all will be brought before Us.*
33. *A sign for them is the dead earth, We revive it, and produce grain from it, of which you do eat.*
34. *And We placed therein gardens of the date-palm and grapes, and We have caused springs of water to gush forth therein.*
35. *That they may eat of the fruits thereof, which their hands did not make. Will they not, then, give thanks?*
36. *Glory be to Him who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge.*
37. *And a sign for them is the night; We strip the daylight from it, so they are left in darkness;*
38. *And the sun runs its course to its stopping point. That is the decree of the Eminent, the Omniscient.*
39. *And We have determined phases for the moon, until it returns like an old date-stalk.*
40. *It is not permitted for the sun to catch up with the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. They float each in an orbit.*
41. *And a sign for them is that We carried their seed in the loaded Ark.*
42. *And We have created for them the like of it, what they will ride on.*
43. *And if We will, We drown them, and there is no help for them, neither can they be saved;*
44. *Except as a mercy from Us and a provision for a time.*
45. *When it is said to them, "Beware of what lies before you, and what lies behind you, that you may receive mercy."*
46. *Never came a sign of the signs of their Lord to them, but they did turn away from it.*
47. *And when they are told, "Spend from that which God has provided for you." The disbelievers say to the believers, "Shall we feed those whom God, if He willed, would feed? You are deeply misguided."*
48. *And they say, "When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?"*
49. *They will only wait for a single blast. It will seize them while they are yet disputing among themselves.*
50. *They shall not be able to make a bequest, nor shall they return to their families.*
51. *And the trumpet is blown and they will hasten to their Lord from the graves.*
52. *They will say, "Woe to us. Who raised us up from our sleeping-place? This is what the Lord of Mercy promised and the messengers told the truth."*
53. *It will be no more than a single blast, when they will all be brought up before Us.*
54. *This day no soul is wronged in the least; nor will you be recompensed except according to what you used to do.*
55. *Verily the companions of the Garden shall, this day, have joy in all that they do.*
56. *They and their associates will be in groves of (cool) shade, reclining on couches.*
57. *They shall have fruits therein, and they shall have whatever they desire.*
58. *Peace, a word from a Merciful Lord.*
59. *And step aside today, you guilty ones.*

60. *“Did I not enjoin on you, children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an avowed enemy?”*
61. *And that you should worship Me. That is the straight path.*
62. *But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did you not use your reason?*
63. *So, this is Hell of which you were threatened.*
64. *Burn therein this day because you disbelieved.*
65. *This day We seal up their mouths, and their hands will speak out to Us and their feet will bear witness as to what they used to earn.*
66. *And had We willed, We verily could have quenched their eyesight so that they should struggle for the way. Then how could they have seen?*
67. *And had We willed, We verily could have fixed them in their place, making them powerless to go forward or turn back.*
68. *If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature. Will they not then use reason? (36: 30 -68)*

*“How regretful for My Servants, whenever a messenger comes to them they ridicule him.”* Regret is a painful emotion which people experience when they face a difficult situation which they cannot deal with. The verse implies that one cannot but feel sorry for those people who ridicule God’s messenger. They were given a chance for salvation but they refused it. They have seen the fate of those who rejected their messengers before, but they did not learn the lesson, *“Did not they see how many generations We destroyed before them? None of whom will ever come back to them.”* They will be brought to account for their deeds, *“But each one of them all will be brought before Us.”*

*“A sign for them is the dead earth, We revive it, and produce grain from it, of which you do eat. And We placed therein gardens of the date-palm and grapes, and We have caused springs of water to gush forth therein, that they may eat of the fruits thereof, which their hands did not make. Will they not, then, give thanks? Glory be to Him who created in pairs all things that the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kind and (other) things of which they have no knowledge.”* Not only they rejected the messenger who came to them with guidance and did not reflect on the fate of previous nations that were destroyed, but they also do not reflect on the signs around them. One of the signs is how the plants are produced. When the barren land is watered, plants are produced. Life is a miracle beyond the power of mortals. Only God is able to bring about miracles. He is the one who created everything in pairs. The plants were created in pairs; human beings were created in pairs; and there are other creations, which we do not know about, that were also created in pairs.

Another of God’s sign is the perpetual motion of the day and the night, *“And a sign for them is the night; We strip the daylight from it, so they are left in darkness; and the sun runs its course to its stopping point. That is the decree of the Eminent, the Omniscient.”* The scene of the end of the day and the coming of the night is a daily scene, in most parts of the world. People see it every day, but it is an amazing scene that deserves to be reflected upon. The verse describes the scene of the sequence of day and night in a manner which agrees with the astronomical facts. It

was thought previously that the sun is fixed in space. But later it was discovered that the sun moves in an orbit. The sun runs until its final destination is reached. The moon has phases that people are able to watch, *“And We have determined phases for the moon, until it returns like an old date-stalk.”* It is interesting to note the expression, *“it returns like an old date-stalk.”* The moon takes the shape of a crescent in the beginning and end of the lunar month. But while the crescent looks young and strong in the beginning of the month, it looks “old,” at the end of the month. The system has been created with a meticulous measure, *“It is not permitted for the sun to catch up with the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day. They float each in an orbit.”* Every planet moves in a well calculated orbit that does not change. These planets will continue to move in their orbits until the time that God has ordained.

*“And a sign for them is that We carried their seed in the loaded Ark. And We have created for them the like of it, what they will ride on. And if We will, We drown them, and there is no help for them, neither can they be saved; except as a mercy from Us and a provision for a time.”* It is interesting to note that the narrative changed from the scene of planets which float along their orbits to the scene of ships which float on the ocean. This is a miracle that the people see in front of their eyes. The Ark may be a reference to Noah’s (PBUH) Ark which was used to save Adam’s (PBUH) offspring at the time of the flood. God enabled people to understand the laws of floatation and navigation so they used similar ships in their travel. But these ships can easily capsize, if God wills it to capsize.

People see all these signs but they remain heedless, *“When it is said to them, ‘Beware of what lies before you, and what lies behind you, that you may receive mercy.’ Never came a sign of the signs of their Lord to them, but they did turn away from it.”* The universe is full of signs that deserve to be pondered upon and which when heeded, would alert people to the magnificence of the creation and the Power of the Creator. But the disbelievers turn away from guidance. If they were asked to feed the poor, they respond by saying, *“Shall we feed those whom God, if He willed, would feed? You are deeply misguided.”* This shows how ignorant they are of God’s laws which govern peoples’ lives. People do not create their provision but it is God who provide for them. It is God’s will that people would earn their provision through work. They farm, they manufacture, they build, and they trade. People differ in their skills and their abilities, so they also differ in their earning ability. In order that these differences do not cause disruption and chaos in society, it is the collective duty of the rich to look after the poor. This is the rationale behind the institution of the poor-dues in Islam.

The disbelievers not only rejected guidance but they challenged the messengers, *“And they say, ‘When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?’”* The time for God’s promise to be fulfilled has been fixed. It could not be changed according to peoples’ wish or request. They will get the answer to their question on the Day of Resurrection. The following verse describes the scene but does not address the issue of the time, *“They will only wait for a single blast. It will seize them while they are yet disputing among themselves. They shall not be able to make a bequest, nor shall they return to their families.”* A blast will overtake them suddenly and unexpectedly. Then the trumpet will be blown and they will be resurrected, *“And the trumpet is blown and they will hasten to their Lord from the graves.”* They will ask in astonishment, *“They will say, ‘Woe to us. Who raised us up from our sleeping-place? This is what the Lord of Mercy*

*promised and the messengers told the truth.’” Then the last blast will sound and they will be standing in rows waiting for the accountability, “It will be no more than a single blast, when they will all be brought up before Us.” On this Day everyone will be treated fairly and each person will receive their recompense, “This day no soul is wronged in the least; nor will you be recompensed except according to what you used to do.”*

The narrative does not detail the process of accountability for the believers, but it describes the scene in paradise where the believers are enjoying their rewards, *“Verily the companions of the Garden shall this day have joy in all that they do. They and their associates will be in groves of (cool) shade, reclining on couches. They shall have fruits therein, and they shall have whatever they desire. Peace, a word from a Merciful Lord.”* They will be busy enjoying the blessings, reclining on couches feeling secure, and they will be honored by the word of peace from their Lord.

Then the process of the accountability through which the disbelievers will go through is described, *“And step aside today, you guilty ones.”* First, they will be told to step aside away from the believers. Then they will be rebuked for their behavior during their worldly life, *“Did I not enjoin on you, children of Adam, that you should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an avowed enemy?”* They will be addressed as, *“children of Adam,”* to remind them that they followed their enemy, Satan, who caused their father Adam (PBUH) to leave paradise before. They should have heeded the warning and worshipped God instead, *“And that you should worship Me.”* Worshipping God makes the person follow the straight path which leads to salvation, *“That is the straight path.”* Instead, they followed Satan who lead many generations astray, *“But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did you not use your reason?”* The painful punishment is then announced, *“So, this is Hell of which you were threatened. Burn therein this day because you disbelieved.”* The description of the scene continues, *“This day We seal up their mouths, and their hands will speak out to Us and their feet will bear witness as to what they used to earn.”* They will not be able to speak but their body parts will testify against them.

Two alternatives are then described; either one could have been inflicted on them had God willed, *“And had We willed, We verily could have quenched their eyesight so that they should struggle for the way. Then how could they have seen? And had We willed, We verily could have fixed them in their place, making them powerless to go forward or turn back.”*

Those who reach old age before they die, God will, *“cause him to be reversed in nature. Will they not then use reason?”*

### **Verses 69 to 83:**

69. *And We have not taught him (Muhammad) poetry, nor it is befitting for him. This is only a reminder and a clear Quran.*
70. *To warn whosoever is alive, and that the word may be fulfilled against the disbelievers.*

71. *Have they not seen how We have created for them of Our handiwork the cattle, so that they are their owners?*
72. *And that We have subjected them to their (use)? Some of them they have for riding, some for food?*
73. *And they have (other) benefits from them, and they get (milk) to drink. Will they not then be grateful?*
74. *Yet they take (for worship) gods besides God to help them.*
75. *They do not have the power to help them; even if they called a whole army together.*
76. *Do not let their talk distress you. Verily We know what they hide as well as what they disclose.*
77. *Does not humankind consider that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet, he is an open opponent.*
78. *And he coined for Us a similitude, and has forgotten the fact of his creation, saying, "Who will revive these bones when they have rotted away?"*
79. *Say, "He will revive them Who produced them in the first instance, for He has full knowledge of all the creation.*
80. *He who has made for you fire (to burn) from the green tree, so that with it you kindle (fire).*
81. *Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yes, and He is the Creator, the Omniscient.*
82. *His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it, "Be," and it is.*
83. *So glory be to Him in whose hands is the dominion of all things; and to Him you will all be brought back. (36: 69 – 83)*

*"And We have not taught him (Muhammad) poetry, nor is it befitting for him. This is only a reminder and a clear Quran."* This verse addressed those who made the claim that the Prophet (PBUH) was a poet and he composed the Quran as poetry. The chiefs of Quraish knew that this was not true. They knew their language well and they were able to recognize that the Quran was not poetry but this was part of the propaganda war that they launched against Islam and the Prophet (PBUH). This strategy was directed towards ordinary Arabs who could not recognize the difference between Quran and poetry. The verse stated unequivocally that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not taught to be a poet and he did not need to be a poet. He was the Messenger of God. Poetry expresses the emotions, the mood, and feelings of the poet. A prophet on the other hand conveys the message. The message is a divine revelation. It is not affected by the mood or the emotions of the messenger. Poetry is a human endeavor while the message is a divine revelation.

The Messenger's (PBUH) task was, *"To warn whosoever is alive, and that the word may be fulfilled against the disbelievers."* The Quran makes belief synonymous to life and disbelief synonymous to death. People whose hearts are open to receive guidance are alive while people whose hearts are sealed and are unable to receive guidance are dead.

The following verses approach the issue of the oneness of the Creator by exploring His blessings, *"Have they not seen how We have created for them of Our handiwork the cattle, so that they are*



*their owners? And that We have subjected them to their (use)? Some of them they have for riding, some for food? And they have (other) benefits from them, and they get (milk) to drink. Will they not then be grateful? Yet they take (for worship) gods besides God to help them. They do not have the power to help them; even if they called a whole army together. Do not let their talk distress you. Verily We know what they hide as well as what they disclose.*” This group of verses starts with the question, *“Have they not seen?”* The signs of God that are cited in these verses are all visible signs that can be seen by people. People see the cattle that God created and which they can use for their food, their drink, and some of them use it for riding. Should they not be grateful? They even associate partners with God hoping that these partners would support and help them. But even if they enlisted the help of a whole army they would not get the support they were looking for. This group of verses closes with comforting words to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Do not let their talk distress you.”* God certainly knows all what they hide and all what they disclose.

The following group of verses deals with the concept of resurrection, *“Does not humankind consider that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet, he is an open opponent. And he coined for Us a similitude, and has forgotten the fact of his creation, saying, ‘Who will revive these bones when they have rotted away?’”* The verse reminds humankind of his origin: a drop of fluid. It is a very fragile beginning. It is God’s power that made a fully developed human being out of a drop of fluid. Could not He, who created the human being in the first instance, bring him back to life again after death? *“Say, ‘He will revive them Who produced them at the first instance, for He has full knowledge of all the creation.’”*

An example of the limitless power of God is then given, *“He who has made for you fire (to burn) from the green tree, so that with it you kindle (fire).”* Who can imagine that a green tree can be used to generate fire? Another of the signs of God’s power, *“Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yes, and He is the Creator, the Omniscient.”* He needs only say, *“Be,”* and it is, *“His command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it, “Be,” and it is.”* He reigns supreme over the whole universe, *“So glory be to Him in whose hands is the dominion of all things; and to Him you will all be brought back.”* Glory be to Him; He is the absolute owner of everything.

## **Sura 37: Al-Saffat (The Ranged in Rows)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. Like the Sura before it, its verses are short and they have a fast rhythm. This Sura deals with the same subject matter of Meccan Suras. Its objective is to establish the fundamentals of the doctrine and emphasize the Oneness of God. However, this Sura deals with a specific form of myth that the Arabs before Islam believed in: the existence of a marriage relationship between God and the jinn. This myth claimed that the angels were the daughters of God as the result of this relationship.

The Sura has been divided into three sections. The first section deals with the myth of the relationship between God, jinn, and the angels. The second section gives examples from the history of nations which rejected God's messengers that came to them in the same way the Arabs rejected Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The third section returns back to discrediting the myth about the jinn and the angels. At the end the verses reassures the sincere and devout servants of God of His support.

### **Verses 1 to 68:**

1. *By those who arrange themselves in rows,*
2. *And those who drive away with reproof,*
3. *And those who recite the reminder.*
4. *Verily, your God is One.*
5. *Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of every sunrise.*
6. *We have indeed adorned the lowest heaven with the ornament of the stars;*
7. *And guarded it against every rebellious devil.*
8. *They cannot eavesdrop on the Higher Assembly- they are pelted from every side.*
9. *Repelled, for they are under a perpetual torment;*
10. *Except for him who snatches a fragment, and there pursues him a piercing flame.*
11. *Then ask them (Muhammad), "Are they more difficult to create, or those whom we have created?" We created them of sticky clay.*
12. *Truly you wonder, while they ridicule,*
13. *And when they are reminded, they pay no heed,*
14. *And when they see a sign, they ridicule.*
15. *And they say, "This is nothing but evident sorcery.*
16. *When we die, and become dust and bones, shall we be raised up (again);*
17. *And our forefathers?"*
18. *Say, "Yes, and you will be humiliated."*
19. *It will be a single blast and they will begin to see.*
20. *They will say, "Woe to us! This is the Day of Judgment."*
21. *This is the Day of Judgment, which you used to deny.*
22. *Assemble the wrongdoers, together with the like of them, and what they used to worship,*
23. *Besides God, and lead them to the path of Hell.*
24. *But stop them, for they must be questioned.*

25. *What is the matter with you that you do not help each other?*
26. *In fact, on that day they will be submissive.*
27. *And they will turn to one another, and question one another.*
28. *They will say, "It was you who used to come to us from the right."*
29. *They say, "You yourselves were not believers.*
30. *We had no power over you, but you were transgressing people;*
31. *Now the Word of our Lord has been fulfilled against us. We are about to taste (the torment).*
32. *We led you astray, for truly we were ourselves astray."*
33. *This day they will (both) share in the torment.*
34. *That is how We deal with the guilty.*
35. *For when it was said to them, "There is no deity except God," they were arrogant;*
36. *And said, "Shall we forsake our gods for a mad poet?"*
37. *He has come with the Truth, and he confirmed (the Message of) the messengers (before him).*
38. *You shall indeed taste the painful torment.*
39. *And you will only be repaid according to what you have done.*
40. *But the sincere (and devoted) servants of God,*
41. *For them there is a known provision.*
42. *Fruits, and they will be honored,*
43. *In the Gardens of bliss,*
44. *On couches facing one another;*
45. *A cup from a gushing spring will be brought round for them,*
46. *White, delicious to the drinkers,*
47. *Causing no headache or intoxication.*
48. *And with them are those of modest gaze, with lovely eyes,*
49. *As if they were eggs carefully protected.*
50. *Then they will turn to one another and question one another.*
51. *One of them will say, "I had an intimate companion (on the earth),*
52. *Who used to say, 'Are you one of those who believe?*
53. *Can we, when we are dead and have become mere dust and bones - can we (then) verily be brought to account?'"*
54. *He will say, "Will you have a look?"*
55. *He looked down and saw him in the depth of Hell.*
56. *He said, "By God, you almost ruined me.*
57. *Had it not been for the Blessing of my Lord, I would certainly have been among those brought (to Hell).*
58. *Are we then not to die?*
59. *Except our former death, and that we shall not be tormented?*
60. *Verily this is the supreme triumph.*
61. *For the like of this let all strive, who wish to strive."*
62. *Is that a better accommodation or the tree of Zaqqum?*
63. *We have truly made it (as) a trial for the wrongdoers.*
64. *It is a tree that springs out of the bottom of Hell.*
65. *The shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of devils.*
66. *Truly they will eat thereof and fill their bellies therewith.*

67. Then on top of that they will have a drink of boiling water.  
 68. Then they will return to Hell. (37: 1 - 68)

*“By those who arrange themselves in rows, and those who drive away with reproof, and those who recite the reminder. Verily, your God is One. Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of every sunrise.”* Those who arrange themselves in rows, who drive away with reproof, and who recite the reminders are three groups of angels. They were referred to using the tasks that they were given. The first task may be a reference to the angels who arrange themselves in rows in prayers or waiting for God’s commands to be issued. The second task may be a reference to the angels who rebuke and treat harshly the sinners at their time of death. The third task may be a reference to the angels who recite the Quran and sing God’s praise. An oath is being made using these angels to emphasize the concept of the Oneness of God. God then introduces Himself to His servants, *“Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of every sunrise.”* The heavens and the earth and everything in between are seen by the people. People should reflect on the signs that they see in the heavens and the earth, signs which testify to the existence of God. The expression, *“Lord of every sunrise,”* expresses a cosmic reality. As the earth rotates around the sun, sunrise changes every day. Each location on earth has its own sunrise. So as we live on earth we see many sunrises. The reflection on the signs of God in the universe fills the heart with awe of God.

*“We have indeed adorned the lowest heaven with the ornament of the stars;”* The verses refer to the jinn and to the miracle of the creation of heaven. One can see the ornaments of the stars. It indicates that the beauty of the creation was an intended plan of God. God wanted his creation to be beautiful, well proportioned, and meticulously arranged. The beauty that God embedded in His creation is part of the nature of the creation. God wanted His creation to look beautiful and to function perfectly. Some of the stars guard the heavens from the transgression of the jinn, *“and guarded it against every rebellious devil. They cannot eavesdrop on the Higher Assembly- they are pelted from every side. Repelled, for they are under a perpetual torment; except for him who snatches a fragment, and there pursues him a piercing flame.”* We do not know how these jinn eavesdrop, how they snatch the fragments, nor do we know how they are pelted. This knowledge is beyond our human ability. The important thing is that these jinn are prevented from getting into heaven. Had they had a relationship with God, they would not have been treated this way.

The Prophet (PBUH) was asked to pose a question to the disbelievers, *“Then ask them (Muhammad), ‘Are they more difficult to create, or those whom we have created?’”* If they believe that God created the heavens, the earth, the angels, and the jinn would it be difficult for God to create people? This was a rhetorical question. The answer follows directly, *“We created them of sticky clay.”* It is certainly not difficult to create them. The Prophet (PBUH) was wondering why they rejected the message. The answer was then given, *“Truly you wonder, while they ridicule, and when they are reminded, they pay no heed, and when they see a sign, they ridicule. And they say, ‘This is nothing but evident sorcery. When we die, and become dust and bones, shall we be raised up (again); and our forefathers?’”* They did not reflect on the signs of God’s power. They saw the signs in the universe and they saw the signs within themselves but they were heedless of their meanings. They simply rejected the concept of resurrection. The verse then confronted them with a blunt message, *“Say, ‘Yes, and you will be humiliated.’”* It

will be only one blast, *“It will be a single blast and they will begin to see. They will say, ‘Woe to us! This is the Day of Judgment.’”* They will cry in anguish asking, “is this the Day of Judgment?” The answer will come with rebuke, yes indeed, *“This is the Day of Judgment, which you used to deny.”*

The narrative then changes from the third person to the first person addressing those who denied the Day of Judgment before, *“Assemble the wrongdoers, together with the like of them, and what they used to worship, besides God, and lead them to the path of Hell.”* Assemble the wrongdoers and those who were like them, and guide them to the path of Hell. They refused to be guided to the straight path in their life, so in the Hereafter they will have to settle with being guided to the path of Hell. They will be questioned, *“But stop them, for they must be questioned.”* The first question is, *“What is the matter with you that you do not help each other?”* Why are you not helping each other? When no answer is given, their situation will be described, *“In fact, on that day they will be submissive.”*

The narrative then continues to describe what the disbelievers will do, *“And they will turn to one another, and question one another. They will say, ‘It was you who used to come to us from the right.’”* The followers will accuse their leaders of misleading them by coming from the right. This is a metaphorical expression. Coming from the right means coming with power. The followers will say to the leaders you forced us to follow you. Then the leaders will respond, *“They say, ‘You yourselves were not believers. We had no power over you, but you were transgressing people;’* You were not really believers in the first place, and moreover we did not have any power over you. You were misguided because you were transgressors. No, the Lord’s decree has been passed and we like you will get the torment that we deserve; *“Now the Word of our Lord has been fulfilled against us. We are about to taste (the torment). We led you astray, for truly we were ourselves astray.”*

The verdict will be issued, *“This day they will (both) share in the torment. That is how We deal with the guilty.”* The reason for the punishment will be given, *“For when it was said to them, ‘There is no deity except God,’ they were scornful; and said, ‘Shall we forsake our gods for a mad poet?’”* The answer to their claim will then be given, *“He has come with the Truth, and he confirmed (the Message of) the messengers (before him). You shall indeed taste the painful torment. And you will only be repaid according to what you have done.”*

But the sincere and devout servants of God will be saved from this punishment, *“But the sincere (and devoted) servants of God, for them there is a known provision, fruits. And they will be honored, in the Gardens of delight, on couches facing one another; a cup from a gushing spring will be brought round for them, white, delicious to the drinkers, causing no headache or intoxication.”* They will be in bliss. They will be given physical as well as spiritual pleasures. They were chosen by God and this is the highest rank of honor. They will be also honored at the High Assembly. They will be reclining on couches enjoying fruits and drinks with their spouse, *“And with them are those of modest gaze, with lovely eyes, as if they were eggs carefully protected.”*

They will reminisce about their previous life. One of them will remember a friend that he had in his lifetime, *“Then they will turn to one another and question one another. One of them will say, ‘I had an intimate companion (on the earth), who used to say, ‘Are you one of those who believe? Can we, when we are dead and have become mere dust and bones - can we (then) verily be brought to account?’”* His friend did not believe in the Day of Judgment. As he was recalling the conversation with his disbelieving friend, he thought to check upon him and find out what was his fate, *“He will say, ‘Will you have a look?’ He looked down and saw him in the depth of Hell.”* He looked and saw his disbelieving friend in the bottom of Hellfire. He then addressed him, *“He said, ‘By God, you almost ruined me. Had it not been for the Blessing of my Lord, I would certainly have been among those brought (to Hell).’”* The scene of his disbelieving friend in Hell reminds him of the great blessings of God that he is enjoying. He wanted to reassure himself of these blessings; he will ask *“Are we then not to die except our former death, and that we shall not be tormented? Verily this is the supreme triumph.”* Then a statement to awaken the hearts and to exhort people to strive for this achievement is made, *“For the like of this let all strive, who wish to strive.”*

Compare this to the fate that awaits the other group who rejected guidance, *“Is that a better accommodation or the tree of Zaqqum? We have truly made it (as) a trial for the wrongdoers. It is a tree that springs out of the bottom of Hell. The shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of devils.”* Is the permanent bliss better or is it the tree of Zaqqum? It is a tree that springs from the bottom of Hell. Its fruits are like the heads of devils. People do not know what a devil’s head look like, but it must look awful. It must be horrible to look at so how about eating it? This tree was made a test to the disbelievers. When Abu Jahl bin Hisham heard about it, he ridiculed the idea of talking about a tree that grows inside fire. But it is not difficult to imagine a tree having the same characteristics of fire to be growing in Hell. The disbelievers will eat from it, *“Truly they will eat thereof and fill their bellies therewith.”* When their bellies are full and they ask for water, they will be given boiling water to quench their thirst, *“Then on top of that they will have a drink of boiling water.”* Then they will be returned back to their permanent dwellings in Hell, *“Then they will return to Hell.”*

### **Verses 69 to 148:**

69. *They indeed found their fathers astray.*
70. *They rushed along in their footsteps.*
71. *And verily most of the people of old went astray before them,*
72. *Even though We sent messengers to warn them.*
73. *Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not),*
74. *Except the sincere (and devoted) servants of God.*
75. *And Noah called upon Us, and We are the best of responders.*
76. *And We delivered him and his people from the great distress.*
77. *And We made his offspring the survivors.*
78. *And We left (this blessing) for him among the later generations.*
79. *Peace be upon Noah among all people.*
80. *Thus indeed do We reward the doers of good.*

81. *He was one of Our believing servants.*
82. *Then We drowned the others.*
83. *Verily among those who followed his way was Abraham.*
84. *When he came to his Lord with a sound heart.*
85. *When he said to his father and his people, "What is it that you worship?*
86. *Is it false gods beside God that you desire?*
87. *Then what is your idea about the Lord of the worlds?"*
88. *Then he looked up to the stars.*
89. *And he said, "I am indeed sick,"*
90. *So they turned away from him, and departed.*
91. *Then he turned to their gods and said, "Will you not eat (of the offerings before you)?*
92. *What is the matter with you that you don't speak?"*
93. *Then he turned towards them, striking with his right hand.*
94. *And (his people) came toward him in haste.*
95. *He said, "Do you worship that which you carved yourselves?*
96. *When God created you and what you do?"*
97. *They said, "Build for him a furnace, and throw him into the blazing fire."*
98. *They wanted to harm him, but We humiliated them.*
99. *He said, "I will go to my Lord. He will surely guide me.*
100. *My Lord, grant me a righteous (son)."*
101. *So We gave him the good news of a forbearing boy.*
102. *And when (his son) was old enough to share in his father's endeavors, (Abraham) said, "My dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. What do you think?" He said, "My father, do that which you are commanded. God willing, you shall find me steadfast."*
103. *Then, when they both submitted (to God), and he had flung him down upon his face,*
104. *We called out to him, "Abraham;"*
105. *You have already fulfilled the vision" - thus indeed do We reward the doers of good.*
106. *That was verily a clear test.*
107. *And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.*
108. *And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times.*
109. *Peace be on Abraham.*

110. *Thus indeed We reward the doers of good.*
111. *He was one of our believing servants.*
112. *And We gave him the good news of Isaac - a prophet - one of the righteous.*
113. *We blessed him and Isaac. And of their seed some are righteous and some clearly wronged themselves.*
114. *And certainly We conferred a favor on Moses and Aaron.*
115. *And We saved them and their people from the great distress;*
116. *And We supported them, so they became the victors.*
117. *And We gave them the clear Scripture.*
118. *And We guided them to the straight path.*
119. *And We left (this blessing) for them among generations (to come) in later times.*
120. *Peace be on Moses and Aaron.*
121. *Thus indeed We reward the doers of good.*
122. *They were two of Our believing servants.*
123. *Elias was most surely of the messengers.*
124. *When he said to his people, "Will you not be conscious of God?*
125. *Do you call upon Ba'l and forsake the Best of Creators?*
126. *God, your Lord and the Lord of your ancestors?"*
127. *But they rejected him, and they will certainly be brought forward.*
128. *Except the sincere and devoted servants of God.*
129. *And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times.*
130. *Peace be on Elias.*



131. *Thus indeed We reward the doers of good.*
132. *He was one of Our believing servants.*
133. *And Lut was most surely of the messengers.*
134. *We delivered him and his followers,*
135. *All Except an old woman among those who stayed behind;*
136. *Then We destroyed the others.*
137. *And most surely you pass by them in the morning,*
138. *And at night; Will you not then use reason?*
139. *Jonah was most surely of the messengers.*
140. *When he ran away to a ship completely laden;*
141. *And then he drew lots and was of those who were cast off.*
142. *The big fish swallowed him, and he had done acts worthy of blame.*
143. *And had he not been one of those who glorify (God)*
144. *He would certainly have remained inside the fish till the Day of Resurrection.*
145. *Then We cast him on a barren shore while he was sick;*
146. *And We caused a tree of gourd to grow above him;*
147. *And We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more.*
148. *And they believed, therefore We let them enjoy (life) for a while. (37: 69 – 148)*

*“They indeed found their fathers astray. They rushed along in their footsteps.”* They hastened to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers, even though they knew that their forefathers went astray. They were warned but failed to heed the warning, *“And verily most of the people of old went astray before them, even though We sent messengers to warn them. Then see what was the end of those who were warned (but heeded not), except the sincere (and devoted) servants of God.”* So, see what was the fate of those who did not heed the warning? The consequences for those heedless people will be described in the following stories, which start with the story of

Prophet Noah (PBUH).

*“And Noah called upon Us, and We are the best of responders. And We delivered him and his people from the great distress; and We made his offspring the survivors. And We left (this blessing) for him among the later generations. Peace be upon Noah among all people. Thus indeed do we reward the doers of good. He was one of our believing servants. Then We drowned the others.”* The verses describe how Noah (PBUH) called upon his Lord; and how his call was completely and comprehensively answered. God saved Noah (PBUH) and those who believed with him and He helped Noah’s (PBUH) progeny to establish a new life on earth. His legacy was kept for generations after he passed away as a reward for his good deeds. The sign of his good deeds and the reason for the good reward was his faith in God. Noah (PBUH) was, *“one of our believing servants.”* The disbelievers were punished, *“Then We drowned the others.”*

The story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) followed the story of Prophet Noah (PBUH). First, the link between Abraham (PBUH) and Noah (PBUH) was established, *“Verily among those who followed his way was Abraham.”* Many years separated the two but they shared the same message. Abraham’s (PBUH) most important characteristic is then highlighted, *“When he came to his Lord with a sound heart;”* Abraham (PBUH) came to God with absolute submission and devotion. Abraham’s (PBUH) pure heart was shocked and dismayed at the behavior of his people, *“When he said to his father and his people, ‘What is it that you worship?’* He felt angry when he saw them worshipping idols and expressed his anger in a question, *“Is it false gods beside God that you desire?”* How can anyone worship false gods instead of the Lord of the Worlds, *“Then what is your idea about the Lord of the worlds?”* How would you worship other gods beside God? What do you think will happen to you when you meet God?

The narrative moves forward to another scene, *“Then he looked up to the stars. And he said, ‘I am indeed sick.’ So they turned away from him, and departed.”* It was narrated that this happened on the day of one of their festivals. They used to go out for a picnic on that day. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) wanted to teach them a lesson so he declined to go out with them. When they left he went to the temple, *“Then he turned to their gods and said, ‘Will you not eat (of the offerings before you)? What is the matter with you that you don’t speak?’”* He saw that there was food in front of the idols, so he asked them why do not they eat. Naturally, no answer was forthcoming from the idols. So he continued in his sarcasm asking them why they do not speak. When no one spoke, *“he turned towards them, striking with his right hand.”* When his people came back from their picnic and saw what happened to their gods, they went to question Abraham (PBUH), *“And (his people) came toward him in haste.”* His answer to their questions was a simple and logical question, *“He said, ‘Do you worship that which you carved yourselves? When God created you and what you do?’”* How can you worship what you carve yourselves? The true God, who is the only One worthy of worship is their maker. They were so incensed, *“They said, ‘Build for him a furnace, and throw him into the blazing fire.’”* This was the only logic they knew: do not argue with him but burn him and silence him forever. But God supported him, *“They wanted to harm him, but We humiliated them.”* They failed because God protected His sincere servant.

The narrative now turns to Abraham (PBUH), *“He said, ‘I will go to my Lord. He will surely guide me. My Lord, grant me a righteous (son).’”* Abraham (PBUH) migrated towards God. This was a spiritual migration more than a geographical migration. Abraham (PBUH) forsake everything in his life, his father, his people, and his home and submitted himself fully to God. He was certain that God will guide him. He did not have children so, he asked God to give him a child. God responded favorably to his prayer, *“So We gave him the good news of a forbearing boy.”* This was his son, Ishmael (PBUH). One can imagine Abraham’s (PBUH) happiness when he was given the glad tidings telling him that he will be a father to a, *“forbearing boy.”*

Then we come to the unique situation that Abraham (PBUH) found himself in, *“And when (his son) was old enough to share in his father’s endeavors, (Abraham) said, ‘My dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. What do you think?’ He said, ‘My father, do that which you are commanded. God willing, you shall find me steadfast.’”* How wonderful was the faith, the obedience, and the submission? Look at Abraham (PBUH), an old man who deserted his family and kin and migrated away from his homeland, yearning for a child and finally God gave him a forbearing boy. He was looking forward for the child to grow up and be his companion in life. When the child grew up and Abraham (PBUH) was about to start enjoying his son’s company, he saw a dream in which he was sacrificing his son. He knew that the dream was a sign from God for him to sacrifice his son. What could he do? It was not a clear command from God, neither was it a revelation from God, it was only a sign. But for Abraham (PBUH) that was enough. He did not hesitate. He submitted to God’s sign without even asking why? He was not annoyed nor was he afraid. He accepted Gods’ command willingly. He approached his son quietly telling him about the dream he saw. His words reflected his feeling of security in accepting God’s command. He wanted his son to think about this grave situation. He did not cheat nor force his son into accepting the sacrifice. He wanted his son to be his partner in the decision and in the reward that God will give to his obedient servants.

The son’s reaction was not much different from his father’s. The son not only accepted God’s command willingly submitting to the will of God but also showed his confidence in God’s wisdom. Like his father he felt secure and content with God’s decree. The Arabic word that has been translated here as, *“My father,”* is an endearing way of address. One can see that Ishmael’s response did not even reflect a shred of resentment towards his father. His words did not reflect any feeling of heroism, only an expression of the absolute trust in the will of God, *“God willing, you shall find me steadfast.”*

*“Then, when they both submitted (to God), and he had flung him down upon his face,”* They both submitted to the will of God and they proceeded to do what they were told to do. Their actions proved their faithfulness, the obedience and their submission. God Called, *“We called out to him, ‘Abraham; You have already fulfilled the vision’ - thus indeed do We reward the doers of good. That was verily a clear test. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.”* They fulfilled the command. Abraham (PBUH) has given the highest example of submission to God, even if it meant to sacrifice his son. God responded and ransomed Ishmael (PBUH) with a momentous sacrifice. God rewarded them for their submission. They were chosen for a very difficult test. God prepared their hearts and gave them the perseverance to accept and fulfill the command. So, they deserved the great reward.

Muslims celebrate these events every year. They sacrifice an animal to commemorate the story of Abraham (PBUH) and to learn the meaning of submission willingly to God. God does not want people to suffer. But people being tested to examine their willingness to submit to God's decrees. When the people show their truthfulness in submitting to God, He in turn will reward them as He rewarded their patriarch before. Abraham's (PBUH) legacy will be remembered till the end of time, "*And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times.*" His lord will bestow His peace on him, "*Peace be on Abraham.*" That is how God rewards the doers of good and the believing servants, "*Thus indeed We reward the doers of good. He was one of our believing servants.*" God then gave another of His blessings, "*And We gave him the good news of Isaac - a prophet - one of the righteous. We blessed him and Isaac. And of their seed some are righteous and some clearly wronged themselves.*" God did not only give him another son but also blessed that son and made him a prophet. Some of their progeny will be righteous and others will wrong themselves.

Moses (PBUH) and Aaron (PBUH) were from their righteous progeny, "*And certainly We conferred a favor on Moses and Aaron; and We saved them and their people from the great distress; and We supported them, so they became the victors. And We gave them the clear Scripture. And We guided them to the straight path. And We left (this blessing) for them among generations (to come) in later times. Peace be on Moses and Aaron. Thus indeed We reward the doers of good. They were two of Our believing servants.*" This is a very brief summary of the story of Moses (PBUH) and Aaron (PBUH). It mentions that they were chosen by God. They were saved together with their people from the, "*great distress.*" They were given victory over Pharaoh and his people, and they were given, "*the clear Scripture.*" They were guided to the straight path and their memory will remain forever. They were greeted with the greeting of peace, a reward for the doers of good.

Another brief glimpse into the story of Prophet Elias (PBUH) is given, "*Elias was most surely of the messengers. When he said to his people, 'Will you not be conscious of God? Do you call upon Ba'l and forsake the Best of Creators, God, your Lord and the Lord of your ancestors?' But they rejected him and they will certainly be brought forward; except the sincere and devoted servants of God. And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times. Peace be on Elias. Thus indeed We reward the doers of good. He was one of Our believing servants.*" Elias (PBUH) called his people to believe in the One God. He expressed his dismay that they left the worship of the, "*Best Creator,*" to worship an idol. But they rejected him and they will be brought to receive their punishment. But the believers will be saved.

A brief glimpse into the story of Prophet Lut (PBUH) follows, "*And Lut was most surely of the messengers. We delivered him and his followers, all except an old woman among those who stayed behind; then We destroyed the others. And most surely you pass by them in the morning, and at night; will you not then use reason?*" The verses describe how Lut (PBUH) was chosen as a messenger, how he was saved, and how the disbelievers were destroyed. It also reminds the Arabs with the close by remains of his city, the remains that they pass by almost every day.

The last of these brief stories is the story of Prophet Jonah (PBUH), "*Jonah was most surely of the messengers. When he ran away to a ship completely laden, and then he drew lots and was of*

*those who were cast off. The big fish swallowed him, and he had done acts worthy of blame. And had he not been one of those who glorify (God) he would certainly have remained inside the fish till the Day of Resurrection. Then We cast him on a barren shore while he was sick; And We caused a tree of gourd to grow above him; And We sent him to a hundred thousand people or more. And they believed, therefore We let them enjoy (life) for a while.”* The Quran did not mention where the people of Jonah (PBUH) used to live, but it is understood that they lived near the sea. The narrations mentioned that Prophet Jonah (PBUH) was angry at his people who rejected him. He warned them that they will be punished. In his anger, he left the city and went to the sea shore where he boarded a ship. The ship was tossed around by the waves. The people onboard thought that they have among them a person who committed a sin. They believed that the only way to save the ship was to find that person and threw him to the sea. They drew lots and the lots indicated that Jonah (PBUH) was the one to be thrown overboard. He was swallowed by the whale. He realized his sin, repented, and glorified God. God responded favorably to his prayer and he was saved. He was sent again to his people who became believers after he had left them.

### **Verses 149 to 182:**

149. *Now ask them (Muhammad), “Are the daughters for your Lord, while for them the sons?”*
150. *Or did We create the angels, females, while they were witnesses?*
151. *It is out of their falsehood that they say,*
152. *“God has begotten children.” Indeed, they are liars.*
153. *Has He chosen daughters in preference to sons?*
154. *What is the matter with you? How do you judge?*
155. *Will you not then reflect?*
156. *Or do you have a clear authority?*
157. *Then bring your book (of authority) if you are truthful.*
158. *And they have invented a relationship between Him and the jinn, whereas the jinn know well that they will be brought before (Him).*
159. *Glory be to God. (He is) far above the things they ascribe (to Him).*
160. *Except for the sincere and devoted servants of God.*
161. *Surely you and what you worship,*
162. *Cannot tempt (anyone) away from Him,*
163. *Except those who will burn in Hell.*
164. *And there is none of us but has an assigned place;*
165. *And we are verily arranged in rows;*
166. *And we are the glorifiers (of God).*
167. *And there were those who said,*
168. *“If only we had a scripture like previous people,*
169. *We would have certainly been sincere servants of God.”*
170. *Yet (now that it is come) they disbelieve therein; but they will come to know.*
171. *Our Word has been given to our servants, the messengers.*
172. *That they would certainly be victorious;*

173. *And that Our troops will certainly be victors.*  
 174. *So turn you away from them for a little while,*  
 175. *And watch them, for they will (soon) see.*  
 176. *Do they wish to hasten Our torment?*  
 177. *But when it descends into the open space before them, evil will be the morning for those who were warned.*  
 178. *So turn you away from them for a little while,*  
 179. *And watch, for they will (soon) see.*  
 180. *Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Eminence, far above what they describe;*  
 181. *And peace on the messengers.*  
 182. *And praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. (37: 149 -182)*

“Now ask them (Muhammad), ‘Are the daughters for your Lord, while for them the sons? Or did We create the angels, females, while they were witnesses?’ It is out of their falsehood that they say, ‘God has begotten children.’ Indeed, they are liars. Has He chosen daughters in preference to sons? What is the matter with you? How do you judge? Will you not then reflect?” The verses refute the myth that the Arabs used to believe in. The Arabs hated having daughters; they considered having daughters as a trial. They practiced infanticide against female babies. But they had the audacity to call the angels the daughters of God. So, Muhammad (PBUH) ask them how can they keep the sons for themselves and attribute the daughters to God? Or did God do that Himself? Then ask them about the origin of this myth. Did they witness the creation of the angels to know that they were created females? It is all a lie and they have no proof, otherwise they should bring that proof if they were truthful, “Or do you have a clear authority? Then bring your book (of authority) if you are truthful.”

What about the other myth? They claimed that the angels were the daughters of God born by the jinn. The jinn knew that they were created by God as the rest of His creation and on the Day of Judgment they will be held accountable for their deeds, “And they have invented a relationship between Him and the jinn, whereas the jinn know well that they will be brought before (Him).” God is far above what they ascribe to Him, “Glory be to God. (He is) far above the things they ascribe (to Him).” The believing jinn will escape the torment, “Except for the sincere and devoted servants of God.”

The Quran turns to the disbelieving Arabs, “Surely you and what you worship, cannot tempt (anyone) away from Him, except those who will burn in Hell.” The disbelievers along with what they worship have no power to tempt the believers. They will only tempt those who are already assigned to Hellfire.

The angels will then speak, “And there is none of us but has an assigned place; and we are verily arranged in rows; and we are the glorifiers (of God).” They know their places which were assigned to them and they perform the tasks which were prescribed for them.

The narrative turns back to the disbelievers reminding them of what they used to say. They envied the people of the Scripture. They said that had they been given a scripture like the people

before them they would have certainly believed, *“And there were those who said, ‘If only we had a scripture like previous people, We would have certainly been sincere servants of God.’”* But when they received guidance they rejected it, *“Yet (now that it is come) they disbelieve therein; but they will come to know.”* So let them wait for the consequence of rejecting guidance.

*“Our Word has been given to our servants, the messengers: that they would certainly be helped; and that Our troops will certainly be victors.”* God’s promise was fulfilled. His religion was established and His Message crushed the falsehood. All attempts to erase the divine message failed. The messengers of God were certainly the victors. This promise is one of the norms that God created. He will support his devoted servants who call to His straight path. Victory may be delayed; it may take a different form than what people wanted but it will come in the form that God wants it to be.

*“So turn you away from them for a little while, and watch them, for they will (soon) see. Do they wish to hasten Our torment? But when it descends into the open space before them, evil will be the morning for those who were warned. So turn you away from them for a little while, and watch, for they will (soon) see.”* The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to ignore them. The day will come when the promise of God will be fulfilled. Do they really wish to hasten the punishment? When it comes it will be their doom.

The Sura ends with glorifying God, greeting the messengers and singing the praise of God, *“Glory be to your Lord, the Lord of Eminence, far above what they describe. And peace on the messengers; and praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.”*

## Sura 38: Sad (The Letter Sad)

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It deals with the issues of the belief in the Oneness of God, the revelation that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) received, and the accountability of people. The Sura has been divided into four parts. The first part introduces the three issues which the Sura deals with. The second part deals with the stories of Prophets David, Solomon, and Job (pbuh). The third part describes scenes of the Day of Judgment. Finally, the fourth part concludes the Sura with a statement made by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

#### Verses 1 to 16:

1. *Sad. By the renowned Qur'an,*
2. *But those who disbelieve are in false pride and schism.*
3. *How many generations before them did We destroy? In the end they cried out when there was no longer time for escape.*
4. *So they wonder that a warner has come to them from among themselves; and the disbelievers say, "This is a lying magician.*
5. *Has he made all the gods One God? Indeed, this is an astounding thing.*
6. *And the notables among them went forth saying, "Go and persevere in worshiping your gods; this is most surely something planned.*
7. *We never heard (the like) of this in the former faith; this is nothing but a forgery.*
8. *Was the reminder sent down to him, out of all of us?" They are indeed in doubt as to My reminder. In fact, they have not yet tasted My torment.*
9. *Or do they possess the treasures of the mercy of your Lord, the Eminent, the Bestower?*
10. *Or do they possess the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them? Then let them ascend by ropes.*
11. *A defeated host are (all) the factions that are there.*
12. *The people of Noah before them rejected (their messenger) and (so did the tribe of) 'Ad, and Pharaoh the owner of the stakes.*
13. *And (the tribe of) Thamud, and the people of Lut, and the dwellers of the thicket; these were the parties.*
14. *Not one (of them) but rejected the messengers, therefore My punishment was justified.*
15. *These will only wait for a single cry, which will not be delayed.*
16. *They say, "Our Lord, hasten on for us our fate before the Day of Reckoning." (38: 1 – 16)*

*"Sad. By the renowned Qur'an."* The first two verses are an oath by the letter Sad and the Quran. God created the letter Sad as one of the letters of the Alphabets. He created the throat that produces the letter. People knew the Alphabet but they were unable to use it to compose a book like the Quran. The Quran is a reminder but it is also a book that states laws, tells stories, and guides to moral and ethical behavior. But the reminder to reach for God is the corner stone of the Quran. As a matter of fact the laws, the stories, and the ethical behavior are parts of the reminder that reminds people to reach for God.



*“But those who disbelieve are in false pride and schism.”* It seems on the face of it that the narrative has been interrupted by jumping from the oath to a statement describing the reaction of the disbelievers. However, a consideration in depth of the verses reveals that the two are closely connected. God makes an oath by a great thing: the Quran, yet the disbelievers are completely oblivious to the majesty of the Quran. They rejected the Quran so, they will meet the same fate as those who rejected faith before, *“How many generations before them did We destroy? In the end they cried out when there was no longer time for escape.”*

*“So they wonder that a warner has come to them from among themselves; and the disbelievers say, ‘This is a lying magician. Has he made all the gods One God? Indeed, this is an astounding thing.’”* The false pride made them challenge the fact that Muhammad (PBUH) was chosen to receive the revelation. They disagreed with the idea of replacing the worship of many deities with the worship of One God. Why should they wonder that God would choose a mortal like them as His messenger? They were unable to comprehend the nature of the message and the messengers. God sent messengers to lead the life that other mortals like him should lead. A messenger should be able to feel like they feel, to appreciate their concerns, and to understand their culture and traditions. The chiefs of Quraish tried to explain the phenomenon of the revelation as magic so that ordinary people do not fall for it, *“This is a lying magician.”* They expressed their astonishment that the new religion would replace the worship of many idols with the worship of One God. In their resistance to the guidance that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought they exhorted their people to hold tight to their old beliefs, *“And the notables among them went forth saying, ‘Go and persevere in worshiping your gods; this is most surely this is something planned.’”* It is the same tactics that tyrant leaders use to prevent the masses from getting involved in the discussions that may threaten their control. Tyrant leaders always deter the masses from ever finding the truth about the claims being made. To enforce their claim, they use a supporting argument: what Muhammad (PBUH) brought was an innovation, *“We never heard (the like) of this in the former faith; this is nothing but a forgery.”*

They continued to express their amazement that Muhammad (PBUH) would be chosen to receive the revelation, *“Was the reminder sent down to him, out of all of us?”* This simply reflected their envy of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They knew that the Quran is the truth but their envy made them stubborn in rejecting it. The Quran then threatened them, *“They are indeed in doubt as to My reminder. In fact, they have not yet tasted My torment.”* They should wait till they taste God’s torment, then we will see if they could express their amazement. The verses then continued to question their judgment, *“Or do they possess the treasures of the mercy of your Lord, the Eminent, the Bestower?”* Who are they to dispute God’s choice? Do they control God’s treasures of mercy? Or can they claim to be in possession of the dominion of heavens and earth, *“Or do they possess the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them? Then let them ascend by ropes.”* They will be defeated and will be rendered powerless, *“A defeated host are (all) the factions that are there.”*

The verses then recall examples of previous nations which rejected guidance and their well deserved fate, *“The people of Noah before them rejected (their messenger) and (so did the tribe of) ‘Ad, and Pharaoh the owner of the stakes. And (the tribe of) Thamud, and the people of Lut,*

*and the dwellers of the thicket; these were the parties. Not one (of them) but rejected the messengers, therefore My punishment was justified.”*

There will be only one cry; it will come at a precise time that has been determined by God; and no one can change it, *“These will only wait for a single cry, which will not be delayed.”* Those who did not appreciate God’s mercy were impatient, *“They say, ‘Our Lord, hasten on for us our fate before the Day of Reckoning.’”*

### **Verses 17 to 48:**

17. *Persevere in enduring what they say, and remember Our servant David, the possessor of power; surely he was frequently returning (to God).*
18. *It was We that made the hills declare, in unison with him, Our praises, at nightfall and sunrise.*
19. *And the birds assembled; all were turning to Him.*
20. *We strengthened his kingdom, and gave him wisdom and sound judgment in speech.*
21. *Has the story of the two litigants reached you? They climbed over the wall of his private chamber.*
22. *When they entered upon David he was startled by them, they said, “Fear not; two litigants, of whom one has acted wrongfully towards the other, therefore decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right way.*
23. *This man is my brother. He has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. Yet he said, “Entrust it to me, and he has prevailed against me in discourse.”*
24. *(David) said, "He has undoubtedly wronged you in demanding your ewe to be added to his (flock of) ewes. Truly many are the partners who wrong each other; except for those who believe and do good deeds, and how few are they?" And David realized that We were testing him. He asked forgiveness of his Lord, fell down prostrating, and repented.*
25. *So We forgave him this. He indeed had access to Our presence and a good place of return.*
26. *David, We did indeed make you a vicegerent on earth; so judge fairly between people; and do not follow your whims, for they will lead you away from the path of God. Those who wander astray from the path of God will have a grievous torment because they forgot the Day of Reckoning.*
27. *And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in vain. That is what those who disbelieve think; and woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire.*
28. *Shall We treat those who believe and do good deeds as those who do mischief on earth? Or shall We treat those who are conscious of God as the wicked?*
29. *(This is a) Blessed Book which We have sent down to you, that they may ponder its verses, and for those of understanding to reflect upon.*
30. *And We bestowed on David, Solomon, most excellent the servant. He was ever turning in repentance (toward God).*
31. *When the beautiful horses were paraded before him in the evening.*
32. *And he said, "Verily, I have come to love the love of all that is good because I bear my Sustainer in mind," till they were taken out of sight behind the curtain.*
33. *“Bring them back to me;” so he began caressing (their) legs and necks.*

34. *And verily We tried Solomon, and set upon his throne a (mere) body. Then he did repent.*
35. *He said, "My Lord, forgive me, and grant me a kingdom which, such as shall not belong to any after me. You are the Bestower.*
36. *Then We subjected the wind to his power, to flow gently to his order, wherever he willed.*
37. *And the devils, every kind of builder and diver.*
38. *As also others fettered in chains.*
39. *(We said), "This is Our gift, therefore give freely or withhold without reckoning.*
40. *He indeed had access to Our presence and a good place of return.*
41. *And remember (Muhammad) Our servant Job, when he cried to his Lord (saying), "The devil afflicted me with distress and torment."*
42. *(And it was said to him), "Strike the ground with your foot. This (spring) is a cool bath and a refreshing drink.*
43. *And We restored his family to him, and doubled their number as a mercy from Us, and as a reminder to those who understand.*
44. *And (it was said to him) "Take in your hand a bundle and strike therewith; and do not break your oath." We found him perseverant, most excellent the servant. He was ever turning in repentance (toward God).*
45. *And remember Our servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of power and insight.*
46. *Verily We did choose them for an exclusive quality; remembrance of the home (of the Hereafter.)*
47. *They were, in Our sight, truly, of the company of the elect and the excellent.*
48. *And remember Ishmael and Elisha and Dhu'l-Kifl. All are of the chosen. (38: 17 – 48)*

*"Persevere in enduring what they say, and remember Our servant David, the possessor of power; surely he was frequently returning (to God)."* The verse starts with a command which guided the Prophet (PBUH) to the path that all Prophets (PBUT) have trodden before him. It is the path of sacrifice, trial, and perseverance. Perseverance was the single most common trait that all the prophets had. All the prophets went through years of suffering and trials. They persevered to deliver the message which they were given and to fulfil the undertaking that was entrusted to them. They gave the perfect example for the ability of the spirit to overcome the material needs of the body. The verse describes Prophet David (PBUH) with two qualities: he was strong and he was repentant. In addition to the prophet-hood and the strength, God gave him heart that remembers God often and a beautiful voice, *"It was We that made the hills declare, in unison with him, Our praises, at nightfall and sunrise. And the birds assembled; all were turning to Him."* People may find it strange that the solid mountains sang the praise of God with David (PBUH) and the birds joined them in singing the praise of God. But there is nothing strange here. The mountains and the birds are part of the creation of God. All the creations of God are connected to Him. God gave David (PBUH) a soul that is pure and translucent which made him able to communicate with the rest of the creation of God whether solids or birds.

God gave David (PBUH) great power and wisdom and the firmness in making decisions, *"We strengthened his kingdom, and gave him wisdom and sound judgment in speech."* However, David (PBUH) was tested but God's hand was there to guide him through the test unscathed, *"Has the story of the two litigants reached you? They climbed over the wall of his private chamber; When they entered upon David he was startled by them, they said, 'Fear not; two*

*litigants, of whom one has acted wrongfully towards the other, therefore decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right way.’”*

David (PBUH) used to allocate a specific time for judging between people then he would go into his private chamber to worship God. His instructions were that no one should interrupt him while he was in his private chamber worshipping God. One day, while he was worshipping God in his private chamber two men climbed over the wall and jumped into his private chamber. He was startled. But they assured him that they only wanted him to settle a dispute that arose between them. One of them gave him his version of the dispute, *“This man is my brother. He has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe. Yet he said, ‘Entrust it to me, and he has prevailed against me in discourse.’”* From this version of the story, it was clear that the complainant was wronged. David (PBUH) did not wait to listen to the second man’s side of the story but spontaneously announced his judgment, *“(David) said, ‘He has undoubtedly wronged you in demanding your ewe to be added to his (flock of) ewes. Truly many are the partners who wrong each other; except for those who believe and do good deeds, and how few are they?’”* It seems that at this point the two men disappeared and David (PBUH) realized that these were two angels that came to test him, *“And David realized that We were testing him.”* God gave him authority to judge justly between people and this was a test for his ability to perform his assigned task. A judge should listen to all litigants and give due consideration to the evidence before passing judgment. When David (PBUH) realized the nature of the test he sought God’s forgiveness, *“He asked forgiveness of his Lord, fell down prostrating, and repented.”* God forgave him, *“So We forgave him this. He indeed had access to Our presence and a good place of return.”*

Some scholars made different interpretations for these verses which we consider invalid. The nature and purpose of the test that David (PBUH) was subjected to is captured by the next verse, *“David, We did indeed make you a vicegerent on earth; so judge fairly between people; and do not follow your whims, for they will lead you away from the path of God. Those who wander astray from the path of God will have a grievous torment because they forgot the Day of Reckoning.”* God made him a vicegerent on earth and gave him the undertaking to judge justly between people. The command not to, *“follow your desires,”* meant that he should follow due process and do not act impulsively.

Before concluding the story of Prophet David (PBUH), a reminder is made of the fundamental truth upon which the whole universe is established, *“And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in vain. That is what those who disbelieve think; and woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire. Shall We treat those who believe and do good deeds as those who do mischief on earth? Shall We treat those who are conscious of God as the wicked? (This is a) Blessed Book which We have sent down to you, that they may ponder its verses, and for those of understanding to reflect upon.”* These three verses explain this fundamental truth. The creation of the heavens and earth and what is in between was established on truth not falsehood. From this fundamental truth emanate all other truths: the truth that governs the rules of vicegerency on earth, the truth that govern the undertaking to judge among people, and the truth that govern the evaluation of peoples’ feelings and deeds. The believers who understand and reflect on the truth which this blessed Book brought, cannot be equated with those who are heedless of this truth. God’s law which was explained in the Quran is a part of the universal system that God created; it

has to be followed to perfect the harmony of the whole system and to establish justice between people.

God bestowed His bounty on David (PBUH) after he was tested, *“And We bestowed on David, Solomon, most excellent the servant. He was ever turning in repentance (toward God). When the beautiful horses were paraded before him in the evening. And he said, “Verily, I have come to love the love of all that is good because I bear my Sustainer in mind,” till they were taken out of sight behind the curtain. ‘Bring them back to me;’ so he began caressing (their) legs and necks. And verily We tried Solomon, and set upon his throne a (mere) body. Then he did repent.”* These verses tell of a trial that Prophet Solomon (PBUH) was subjected to. We did not find authentic reliable interpretations of this trial. We therefore conclude that Prophet Solomon (PBUH) was subjected to trials like any other prophet. The purpose of these trials was to direct and guide him to the right path. Solomon (PBUH) repented and prayed God, *“My Lord, forgive me, and grant me a kingdom which, such as shall not belong to any after me. You are the Bestower.”* Solomon (PBUH) requested a kind of power that would be unique to him, and God gave him the power to control the wind and the jinn, *“Then We subjected the wind to his power, to flow gently to his order, wherever he willed. And the devils, every kind of builder and diver. As also others fettered in chains.”* This was God’s bounty which He bestowed on Solomon (PBUH) and gave him the authority to use it whichever way he wanted, *“(We said), ‘This is Our gift, therefore give freely or withhold without reckoning.’”* God also honored him and gave him a special status, *“He indeed had access to Our presence and a good place of return.”*

The following verses recount the story of the trials which Prophet Job (PBUH) went through, *“And remember (Muhammad) Our servant Job, when he cried to his Lord (saying), ‘The devil afflicted me with distress and torment.’”* The story of Prophet Job (PBUH) gives a supreme example for the trials and perseverance of the prophets and the bounty and blessings of God. This story is well known, however, it has been mixed with fiction. We find that the following account can be safely trusted. Prophet Job (PBUH) was a righteous servant of God. God subjected him to a trial and he persevered. It seems that the trial involved loss of wealth, family, and health. However, he accepted his fate and continued to be sincerely devoted to his Lord. Satan used to whisper to the few friends that remained loyal to him and to his wife. Satan put doubt in their hearts about Job’s (PBUH) devotion. Satan insinuated that had Job (PBUH) been truly devoted to God, God would have not subjected him to such severe trial. Job (PBUH) was greatly distressed by their doubts about him. When his wife expressed these doubts to him he was so angry that he made an oath that he would strike her 100 lashes, if he ever became healthy again. He prayed to God, expressing his annoyance of what Satan was doing to his wife. Job (PBUH) proved through his devotion that he successfully endured his trials. It was time for the bounty and reward. Healing came in the form of a spring that God gave him so that he can wash his body and to quench his thirst. The water removed his illness and he regained his health, *“(And it was said to him), ‘Strike the ground with your foot. This (spring) is a cool bath and a refreshing drink.’”*

God gave him his family back. We do not know how this was done but it is an expression of the bounty of God, and something to reflect upon for those who understand, *“And We restored his*

*family to him, and doubled their number as a mercy from Us, and as a reminder to those who understand.”* God bestowed His mercy on him and his wife, who looked after him during his trial. God gave him a simple way to fulfill his oath. He was advised to bundle together a hundred thin sticks and strike his wife once, *“And (it was said to him) ‘Take in your hand a bundle and strike therewith; and do not break your oath.’ We found him perseverant, most excellent the servant. He was ever turning in repentance (toward God).”* So God rewarded his perseverant servant.

The previous three stories were mentioned in some detail. The following verses narrate very brief accounts of the trial of other prophets who persevered in their trials and God rewarded them for their perseverance. *“And remember Our servants, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of power and insight.”* We know that prophets Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and also Ishmael (PBUT) came all before the time of Prophets David and Solomon (PBUT) but we do not know which time periods in history during which Job, Elisha and Dhu'l-Kifl (PBUT) lived. These last three prophets were mentioned very briefly in the Quran. The verse stated that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (PBUT) possessed power and insight. This is a metaphorical expression for the fact that they used their strength to perform good deeds and that they had excellent understanding and wisdom. God bestowed on them the trait of being always able to remember the Hereafter and work for the life after death, *“Verily We did choose them for an exclusive quality; remembrance of the home (of the Hereafter.)”* They were also chosen by God to be in the company of the elect and excellent, *“They were, in Our sight, truly, of the company of the elect and the excellent.”* God also reminded His Messenger (PBUH) with other excellent prophets to benefit from their experience and to contemplate their example in having to endure the persecution of his own people, *“And remember Ishmael and Elisha and Dhu'l-Kifl. All are of the chosen.”*

## **Verses 49 to 64:**

49. *This is a reminder. And indeed those who are conscious of God will have a good place of return;*
50. *Gardens of Eden, with their doors wide-open for them,*
51. *Reclining therein, calling therein for abundant fruits and drink.*
52. *And with them are companions having modest gaze.*
53. *This is what you were promised for the Day of Reckoning.*
54. *Most surely this is Our sustenance; it will never be depleted.*
55. *All this; but the transgressors will have an evil place of return.*
56. *Hell, where they will burn, an evil resting-place.*
57. *Then they shall taste, a boiling dark, and murky fluid;*
58. *And similar torment of different kinds.*
59. *Here is a crowd rushing blindly with you. (Those who are already in the Fire say),  
“There is no welcome for them. They will burn in the Fire.”*
60. *They will say, “Nor there is welcome for you. It was you who brought this upon us, an evil resting-place.”*

61. *They will say, "Our Lord, whoever brought this upon us give him double torment in the Fire."*
62. *And they will say, "What has happened to us that we do not see men whom we used to count among the wicked?"*
63. *Did we take them (wrongly) for a laughing-stock, or have our eyes missed them?"*
64. *That is indeed the truth: the feuding of the inhabitants of the Fire. (38: 49 – 64)*

These verses describe scenes for events that will take place on the Day of Resurrection. Two opposite scenes are juxtaposed against each other. The first is the scene of those who were conscious of God, *"This is a reminder. And indeed those who are conscious of God will have a good place of return; Gardens of Eden, with their doors wide-open for them, reclining therein, calling therein for abundant fruits and drink. And with them are companions having modest gaze. This is what you were promised for the Day of Reckoning. Most surely this is Our sustenance; it will never be depleted."* They will enter through the open gates of the Gardens of Eden. In which they will be reclining comfortably, eating and drinking, enjoying the company of modest companions, and receiving God's limitless provision.

On the other hand, Hell will be the resting place for the transgressors. They will be drinking boiling murky fluid. They will receive other similar punishments, *"All this; but the transgressors will have an evil place of return. Hell, where they will burn, an evil resting-place. Then they shall taste, a boiling dark, and murky fluid; and similar torment of different kinds."*

Then the verses describe a third scene. The scene depicts a dialogue between two groups of the disbelievers who were friends in their lives but on the Day of Judgment they will be fighting against each other; each group will blame the other for meeting this fate, *"Here is a crowd rushing blindly with you. (Those who are already in the Fire say), 'There is no welcome for them. They will burn in the Fire.' They will say, 'Nor there is welcome for you. It was you who brought this upon us, an evil resting-place.' They will say, 'Our Lord, whoever brought this upon us give him double torment in the Fire.'"*

Then they will remember the believers whom they used to ridicule in the worldly life. They will wonder what happened to them, *"And they will say, 'What has happened to us that we do not see men whom we used to count among the wicked? Did we take them (wrongly) for a laughing-stock, or have our eyes missed them?'"* This is the promised end for the disbelievers, *"That is indeed the truth: the feuding of the inhabitants of the Fire."*

### **Verses 65 to 88:**

65. *Say (to them, Muhammad), "I am only a warner, and there is no deity except God, the One, the Dominator.*
66. *The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between, the Eminent, Full of Forgiveness.*
67. *Say, "It is a great message;*
68. *Yet you are ignoring it.*
69. *I had no knowledge of the Highest Assembly when they disputed.*
70. *It is revealed to me only that I am a plain warner.*

71. *When your Lord said to the angels, "I am about to create a mortal out of clay,*
72. *And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate."*
73. *The angels fell down prostrate, all of them,*
74. *But not Iblis. He was arrogant and he was one of the disbelievers.*
75. *(God) said, "Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with My own hands? Are you arrogant? Or are you one of the high (and mighty) ones?"*
76. *(Iblis) said, "I am better than him, You created me from fire, and him You created from clay."*
77. *(God) said, "Then get you out from here; you are accursed.*
78. *And My curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment."*
79. *(Iblis) said, "My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when the dead are raised."*
80. *(God) said, "You have been granted respite,*
81. *Till the Appointed Day."*
82. *(Iblis) said, "Then, by Your Eminence, I will tempt them all,*
83. *Except Your sincere servants among them."*
84. *He (God) said, "The truth is, and the truth I speak,*
85. *I will certainly fill Hell with you and those that follow you, everyone."*
86. *Say (Muhammad), "No reward do I ask of you for this (Quran), nor am I a pretender.*
87. *It is but a reminder to all people.*
88. *And you shall certainly know the truth of it after a while." (38: 65 – 88)*

*"Say (to them, Muhammad), 'I am only a warner, and there is no deity except God, the One, the Dominator. The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between, the Eminent, Full of Forgiveness.'"* This was a command to the Prophet (PBUH) to tell those who expressed their amazement by saying, *"Has he made all the gods One God?"* Tell them that this is the absolute truth, *"there is no deity except God, the One, the Dominator."* Tell them that you have no say in this: your only role is to warn people and admonish them. You have been sent to call people to God, *"The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between."* He has no partner and they will find no one to help them other than Him. He is the Eminent, the All- Powerful, the Strong; but He is also Full of Forgiveness. He will forgive the sins of His servants, accept their repentance, and forgives those who will return back seeking His protection.

Tell them that the message you brought them is much more momentous than what they think, there is more to it than they perceive, *"Say, 'It is a great message; yet you are ignoring it.'"* It is the message of God. It is as momentous as the creation of heavens and earth. It is very much closely related to God's law that governs the universe. It represents a milestone in the history of humankind. It affected those who believed in it as well as those who did not believe. The Muslims today, like the Arabs at the time of the revelation, are not able to understand the true nature of this message and its relationship to the existence of this universe.

Muhammad's (PBUH) role on the other hand is limited to the delivery of the message, *"I had no knowledge of the Highest Assembly when they disputed. It is revealed to me only that I am a*



*plain warner.”*

*“When your Lord said to the angels, ‘I am about to create a mortal out of clay, and when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down before him prostrate.’”* God created humankind from clay similar to others of God creations. However, there is a mystery regarding the creation of humankind. This is the mystery of life. The body was created from clay but God’s spirit changed that body into a human being. When the human being dies and the spirit leaves him, his body disintegrates back to the original elements from which that body was composed. We do not know much about the spirit that was breathed into humankind but we know its impact on him. One of the consequences of the spirit is that humankind is able to grow both mentally and spiritually. He has the ability to analyze the past and use the results of this analysis to understand and plan for the future. These traits are exclusively human traits. God did not bestow these traits on any creature other than humankind. God breathed of His spirit into humankind because God willed that humankind undertake the responsibility of being God’s vicegerent on earth. Humankind’s ability to grow mentally and spiritually is closely related to his closeness to God. The closer humankind is to God, the better he is equipped to grow and to break the barriers of knowledge.

All the angels obeyed God’s command, *“The angels fell down prostrate, all of them.”* How, where, and when did they do this? We do not know and these are matters of the unseen. However, the important thing is the moral of the story. It shows the high status that the human being acquired when he received the spirit of God. Iblis disobeyed. Was Iblis an angel? Apparently he was not. Had he been an angel he would not have disobeyed. Angels do not disobey God’s commands and they do what God tells them to do. The Quran also mentioned that he was created from fire and we know that angels were created from light. But it seems that he was in the company of the angels when this command was issued, *“But not Iblis. He was arrogant and he was one of the disbelievers.”* God rebuked Iblis for his disobedience, *“(God) said, ‘Iblis, what prevented you from prostrating yourself to one whom I have created with My own hands? Are you arrogant? Or are you one of the high (and mighty) ones?’”* Iblis’ response showed his envy of this being who was created from clay, *“(Iblis) said, ‘I am better than him, You created me from fire, and him You created from clay.’”* Then the divine decree was issued, *“Then get you out from here; you are accursed. And My curse shall be on you till the Day of Judgment.”*

Iblis’ envy changed into hatred towards this creature which made him an outcast. He decided to take revenge, *“(Iblis) said, ‘My Lord, give me then respite till the Day when the dead are raised.’”* God granted his request, *“(God) said, ‘You have been granted respite, till the Appointed Day.’”*

Iblis then uncovered his plan, *“(Iblis) said, ‘Then, by Your Eminence, I will tempt them all, except Your sincere servants among them.’”*

The truth was then announced, and God always says the truth, *“(God) said, ‘The truth is, and the truth I speak, I will certainly fill Hell with you and those that follow you, everyone.’”*

This was the start of the eternal fight between Satan and the children of Adam. The Children of Adam were warned of the animosity of Iblis; so they engage in this fight with full knowledge of their enemy. They have the freedom to choose which way to go. God by His grace; sent His messengers to keep warning people of the danger of Satan.

The Sura is concluded by a command to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to tell the disbelievers, that he did not expect any personal reward from them, *“Say (Muhammad), ‘No reward do I ask of you for this (Quran), nor am I a pretender. It is but a reminder to all people. And you shall certainly know the truth of it after a while.’”* It is a conclusion befitting the beginning of the Sura and the topics that it dealt with.

## Sura 39: Al-Zumar (The Throngs)

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

This Sura deals with the fundamental concept of the belief in the Oneness of God and that only He is worthy of worship. Hawwa is of the opinion that one of the main themes of this Sura is emphasizing that the Quran has been revealed by God. The first verse states the fact that the Quran has been revealed by God. Verses 2 and 41 restate again that the Quran is God's revelation. The Sura consists of an introduction and two sections. The introduction consists of one verse, verse 1. The first second section starts with verse number 2; while the second section starts with verse 41. The two themes are closely related. Only the One True God is worthy of being worship; and He revealed the Quran to guide people to the correct way to worship Him. If we consider the comprehensive meaning of worship as a way of life, then we can see the overlap of the two themes. The Sura is describing a way of life based on the premise of the Oneness of God.

#### Verses 1 to 7:

1. *The revelation of the Book is from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *Verily it is We who have revealed the Book to you with the Truth; so worship God with sincere devotion.*
3. *Unquestionably for God is the pure religion. And those who take protecting guardians besides Him (saying), "We worship them only that they may bring us near to God." God will judge between them concerning that in which they differ. God does not guide him who is a liar, ungrateful.*
4. *Had God wished to have a son, He could have chosen whom He pleased out of those whom He created; but Glory be to Him; (He is above such things.) He is God, the Unique, the Dominator.*
5. *He created the heavens and the earth with the truth. He wraps the night around the day, and He wraps the day around the night, and He subjected the sun and the moon to run their courses for an appointed term. Is not He the Eminent, Full of Forgiveness?*
6. *He created you from a single being, then from that (being) He made its mate; and He brought down, for you, cattle - eight kinds in pairs. He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold of darkness. That is God, your Lord. His is the Sovereignty. There is no God save Him. How then you are turned away?*
7. *If you disbelieve, truly God has no need of you; but He does not like His servants to be ungrateful. If you are grateful, He will be pleased with you. No bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another. In the end, you will all return to your Lord. He will then tell you the truth of all that you used to do. He knows well all that is in the hearts. (39: 1 – 7)*

The Sura starts with a decisive statement, "*The revelation of the Book is from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*" God is the Eminent. He is able to reveal the Book. He is Wise. He knows why the Book was revealed. The Book has been revealed with the truth, "*Verily it is We who have revealed the Book to you with the Truth.*" The fundamental truth that the Book brought is the absolute Oneness of God. This is the fundamental truth on which everything in the universe has

been established. This fundamental truth shapes everything that was created by God. Only He deserves to be worshipped alone, *“so worship God with sincere devotion.”* This command was issued to the Messenger of God (PBUH) who received the Book which included the message that he was responsible for communicating to all people. This Message is based on the fundamental truth: worship God alone with sincere devotion.

The belief in the Oneness of God is not a lip service but it is a way of life which starts with a belief in the heart and ends by shaping the way of life of individuals and communities. The heart that believes in the Oneness of God does not bow to anyone, does not seek help from anyone, nor does it depend on anyone, other than God. God is the only force in life of the believer. The heart of the believer believes in the oneness of the law that manages the whole universe. The believer accepts the divine project which God ordained to provide the best way of life for His servants. It is a way of life in harmony with the universe. God controls the whole creation.

The following verse states in an unequivocal terms the basis of the way of life, *“Unquestionably for God is the pure religion.”* Then indicates the dilemma which the disbelievers are facing, *“And those who take protecting guardians besides Him (saying), ‘We worship them only that they may bring us near to God.’ God will judge between them concerning that in which they differ. God does not guide him who is a liar, ungrateful.”* The disbelievers used to say that they believe that God is the Creator. But they associated partners with Him and they worshipped idols. These idols were statues of the angels which they claimed to be the daughters of God. They claimed that these idols were going to intercede on their behalf. But they were lying and God does not guide those who fabricate lies about Him. They lied when they claimed that the angels were God’s daughters and they lied when they claimed that God would accept their intercession.

These were absurd claims, *“Had God wished to have a son, He could have chosen whom He pleased out of those whom He created.”* God is high above all these absurd claims. Glory be to Him. He is above such things, *“He is God, the Unique, the Dominator.”*

Why would He have a son? He is the Creator and the Dominator of everything. He has dominion over everything in His Kingdom, *“He created the heavens and the earth with the truth. He wraps the night around the day, and He wraps the day around the night, and He subjected the sun and the moon to run their courses for an appointed term. Is not He the Eminent, Full of Forgiveness?”* It is not befitting God who created this universe alone to have a son or a partner. The way that the heavens and the earth were created attests to the Oneness of the Creator. Reading this verse, one cannot help but think of the shape of the earth. The expression, *“He wraps the night around the day, and He wraps the day around the night,”* implies clearly that the earth is spherical. The Arabic word which is used in the verse and which has been translated as “wrap,” actually describes the day and the night as if they were spheres wrapped over one another.

From this tour of the universe to the creation of humankind, *“He created you from a single being, then from that (being) He made its mate; and He brought down for you cattle - eight kinds in pairs. He creates you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold of*

*darkness. That is God, your Lord. His is the Sovereignty. There is no God save Him. How then you are turned away?"* Humankind has been created with certain basic characteristics. These basic characteristics are common to all human beings that lived on earth since the advent of the human race. These characteristics distinguish the human beings from all other creatures.

The verse also refers to the stages of the development of the fetus in the womb. The verse mentions three levels of darkness. The first level of darkness is formed by the Placentia which surrounds the fetus. The Placentia itself is surrounded by the uterus which represents the second level of darkness and finally the uterus is enclosed in the mother's abdomen which represents the third level of darkness.

The evidence that supports the truth of the belief in the Oneness of God is abundant. However, there are those who still disbelieve. God is not in need for people to believe, *"If you disbelieve, truly God has no need of you; but He does not like His servants to be ungrateful. If you are grateful, He will be pleased with you. No bearer of a burden can bear the burden of another. In the end, you will all return to your Lord. He will then tell you the truth of all that you used to do. He knows well all that is in the hearts."*

### **Verses 8 to 10:**

8. *When adversity touches a human being, he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him in repentance; but when He bestows on him a blessing from Himself, he forgets Him whom he called upon before, and he sets up partners with God, thus misleading others from God's path. Say, "Enjoy your blasphemy for a little while. Indeed, you are of the companions of the Fire."*
9. *Is one who worships devoutly during the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), takes heed of the Hereafter, and hopes for the mercy of his Lord - (like one who does not)? Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know? But only people of understanding will pay heed."*
10. *Say, "My servants who believe, be conscious of your Lord. Those who do good in this world will have a good reward. Spacious is God's earth; those who persevere will truly receive a reward without measure." (39: 8 – 10)*

*"When adversity touches a human being, he calls upon his Lord, turning to Him in repentance; but when He bestows on him a blessing from Himself, he forgets Him whom he called upon before, and he sets up partners with God, thus misleading others from God's path."* When a human being is afflicted with an adversity he returns back to his initial natural disposition. All the rust that has accumulated over the years and covered this initial natural disposition is removed when one faces harm. People turn back to their Creator at the time of need. But once the adversity has been removed and the need is replaced by affluence, then the rust creeps back on to cover the initial natural disposition. People forget their Creator and start associating partners with Him. There are many forms that these partners take. They include one's desires, ambitions, fears, wealth, children, and superiors. Some people practice unknowingly what is called hidden association of partners with God. The hidden form of associating partners with

God leads the person to go astray. No partner should be associated with God, whether explicitly or implicitly. All types of enjoyment in this life can only last for a limited time, *“Enjoy your blasphemy for a little while. Indeed, you are of the companions of the Fire.”*

The ugly image described in the previous verse is juxtaposed against the beautiful image of those who continuously remember God. They remember God at the time of ease as well as at the time of adversity. They are always connected with God hoping for His mercy and fearing His punishment, *“Is one who worships devoutly during the night prostrating himself or standing (in adoration), takes heed of the Hereafter, and hopes for the mercy of his Lord - (like one who does not)? Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who do not know? But only people of understanding will pay heed.’”* These are people who know God. True knowledge leads to the truth. True knowledge leads to the understanding of the facts of the creation of the universe. True knowledge leads to acquiring deep insight. This kind of knowledge can only be acquired through absolute devotion to God. Those who fear God and hope for His mercy are endowed with the tools to acquire true knowledge.

Having presented the two images, a command is issued to the believers to make good use of their short worldly life by remaining conscious of their Lord, *“Say, ‘My servants who believe, be conscious of your Lord. Those who do good in this world will have a good reward. Spacious is God’s earth; those who persevere will truly receive a reward without measure.’”*

### **Verses 11 to 20:**

11. Say, *“I am commanded to worship God with sincere devotion.*
12. *And I am commanded to be the first of those who submit.”*
13. Say, *“I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the torment of a grievous day.”*
14. Say, *“It is God I worship, with sincere devotion.*
15. *So worship what you will besides Him.” Say, “The losers will be those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. That indeed will be the clear loss.”*
16. *They shall have layers of fire above them, and layers below them. This is how God puts fear into His servants. My servants be conscious of Me.*
17. *Those who shun the worship of false gods and turn to God (in repentance), for them are glad tidings. So give My servants the glad tidings.*
18. *Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it, those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endued with understanding.*
19. *What about the one against whom the decree of torment is justly due? Can you rescue the one who is in the Fire?*
20. *But those who remain conscious of their Lord, for them are lofty chambers above them lofty chambers, built (for them), beneath which rivers flow. (It is) a promise of God. God does not fail in His promise. (39: 11 – 20)*

The Hereafter casts its shadows on this paragraph; the verses express the fear of its torment and the hope in its reward. The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to declare his belief in the

Oneness of God, *“Say, ‘I am commanded to worship God with sincere devotion. And I am commanded to be the first of those who submit.’ Say, ‘I fear, if I disobey my Lord, the torment of a grievous day.’”* This proclamation from the Messenger of God (PBUH) is of a great importance in defining the meaning of the Oneness of God. The Messenger (PBUH) is simply a servant of God; he stands side by side of all God’s servants. All God’s servants worship Him. The statement of declaring the Oneness of God is reiterated, *“Say, ‘It is God I worship, with sincere devotion. So worship what you will besides Him.’ Say, ‘The losers will be those who lose themselves and their families on the Day of Resurrection. That indeed will be the clear loss.’”* The Messenger (PBUH) worships God alone, if the disbelievers want to associate partners with God, let them do what they want because this will ultimately lead to their biggest loss. The consequences of disbelief is then described, *“They shall have layers of fire above them, and layers below them. This is how God puts fear into His servants. My servants be conscious of Me.”* This is a horrendous image, the image of fire surrounding people covering them from above and from underneath them. This may throw fear in the hearts of people so that they would try to avoid this fate.

On the other side stand those who attained salvation, *“Those who shun the worship of false gods and turn to God (in repentance), for them are glad tidings. So give My servants the glad tidings. Those who listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it, those are the ones whom God has guided, and those are the ones endowed with understanding.”* The verses describe the fate of those who shunned the worship of false gods in any form. The Arabic word which has been translated here as, “false gods” has the connotation of extreme tyranny. So it includes all forms of false gods. Those who shunned the worship of false gods will be given glad tidings. One of their traits was that they used to distill whatever they hear looking for the best advice; this is what they would follow. They were truly endowed with understanding. True understanding leads to salvation.

Those who used to worship false gods are doomed to Hell fire; no one can save them, *“What about the one against whom the decree of torment is justly due? Can you rescue the one who is the Fire?”* On the other hand, those who remained conscious of their Lord will receive great reward, *“But those who remain conscious of their Lord, for them are lofty chambers above them lofty chambers, built (for them), beneath which rivers flow. (It is) a promise of God. God does not fail in His promise.”*

### **Verses 21 to 29:**

21. *Do you not see that God sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through the earth to form springs? Then He produces with it crops of diverse hues; and afterward they wither and you see them turn yellow; then He makes them chaff. Indeed, in this is a reminder for those of understanding.*
22. *Is he whose heart God has opened for Islam, so that he follows a light from his Lord, (as he who disbelieves)? Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of God; those are in plain error.*
23. *God has revealed the most beautiful speech in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects); the skins of those who fear their Lord*

*tremble thereat; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the celebration of God's praises. This is God's guidance. He guides whom He pleases with it, but those whom God leaves to go astray, will have none to guide them.*

24. *Is he then who will guard with his face against the severe torment on the Day of Resurrection (like the one who is secure from it)? And it will be said to the wrongdoers taste what you have earned.*
25. *Those before them (also) rejected (the revelation), and so the torment came to them from wherever they did not realize?*
26. *Thus God made them taste humiliation in the life of this world, and verily the torment of the Hereafter will be greater if they did but know.*
27. *We have put forth for people, in this Quran, every kind of parable, in order that they may receive admonition.*
28. *(It is) a Quran in Arabic, without any crookedness (therein); in order that they may become conscious of God.*
29. *God puts forth a parable: a man belonging to many partners at variance with each other, and a man belonging entirely to one master. Are those two equal in comparison? Praise be to God, but most of them do not know. (39: 21 -29)*

The following verses draw the attention of people to a phenomenon that one sees often, “*Do you not see that God sends down rain from the sky, and leads it through the earth to form springs? Then He produces with it crops of diverse hues; and afterward they wither and you see them turn yellow; then He makes them chaff. Indeed, in this is a reminder for those of understanding.*” The formation of rain water that comes down, and flows either in rivers on the surface of the earth or as underground water which later forms springs, and causes different plants to grow are miracles. The formation of rain water is a miracle; without water life on earth could not be sustained. The growth of plants is a miracle; seeing the tiny seedling when it pierces the solid surface of the earth is an amazing scene. The verse describes the different stages through which a plant goes through; starting with a tiny seedling, then becoming a mature plant, and finally withering away. These are miracles that are worthy of the reflection of people who are endowed with understanding.

“*Is he whose heart God has opened for Islam, so that he follows a light from his Lord, (as he who disbelieves)? Then woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of God. Those are in plain error. God has revealed the most beautiful speech in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects); the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble thereat; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the celebration of God's praises. This is God's guidance. He guides whom He pleases with it, but those whom God leaves to go astray, will have none to guide.*” God causes water to descend from the sky so that plants can grow, similarly God causes the revelation to descend from the sky to give life to the hearts that are opened to it. When the hearts receive the revelation they move as if they were dead and became alive. The hearts are revived when they are touched by the revelation. But the revelation slides over the hard hearts in the same way rain slides over a hard rock; both will remain lifeless. Those who chose to go astray will try in vain to protect their faces from the fire on the Day of the Resurrection, “*Is he then who will guard with his face against the severe torment on the Day of*



*Resurrection (like the one who is secure from it)? And it will be said to the wrongdoers taste what you have earned.” This is a message to warn those who rejected Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) by alerting them to the fate of those who rejected guidance before, “Those before them (also) rejected (the revelation), and so the torment came to them from wherever they did not realize? Thus God made them taste humiliation in the life of this world, and verily the torment of the Hereafter will be greater if they did but know.”*

*“We have put forth for people, in this Quran, every kind of parable, in order that they may receive admonition. (It is) a Quran in Arabic, without any crookedness (therein); in order that they may become conscious of God. God puts forth a parable: a man belonging to many partners at variance with each other, and a man belonging entirely to one master. Are those two equal in comparison? Praise be to God, but most of them do not know.”* God strikes parables for believing and disbelieving servants. The disbelieving servant is like a servant who has many masters. The masters are fighting among themselves. They issue contradictory commands to the servant. The servant is confused and does not know which command he should follow. On the other hand, the believing servant is like a servant who has only one master. His master gives him one set of commands. The commands are clear and consistent. He listens to the commands and obeys them. This parable exemplifies the difference between the two concepts of the belief in the Oneness of God and associating partners with God. The belief in the Oneness of God promotes stability and security while associating partners with God promotes confusion and instability.

### **Verses 30 to 35:**

- 30. Certainly, you will die and they will die.*
- 31. Then you will dispute in the presence of your Lord on the Day of Resurrection.*
- 32. Who, then, has done more wrong than the one who utters a lie about God, and rejected the truth when it came to him; is there not an abode for the disbelievers in Hell?*
- 33. And he who brings the truth and confirms it - such are the God conscious.*
- 34. They shall have all that they wish for, in the presence of their Lord. That is the reward of the doers of good.*
- 35. God will absolve them of the worst of what they did, and will pay them for reward the best they used to do. (39: 30 – 35)*

*“Certainly, you will die and they will die. Then you will dispute in the presence of your Lord on the Day of Resurrection.”* Death is the ultimate end for each and every living creature. Only God remains eternal. Muhammad (PBUH) is like any mortal; he will also die. This fact reinforces the theme of the Oneness of God. But death is not an end in itself. Death is a door that leads to another life. On the Day of the Resurrection people will dispute among themselves. They will stand in front of God to listen to His verdict, *“Who, then, has done more wrong than the one who utters a lie about God, and rejected the truth when it came to him; is there not an abode for the disbelievers in Hell?”* This is a rhetorical question. There is no one who is more wrong than the one who claimed that God has daughters or partners; or rejected the truth that the messenger of God brought. Those are the disbelievers who will be destined to Hell.

God sent messengers to bring the truth to people, *“And he who brings the truth and confirms it - such are the God conscious.”* The God conscious will have a great reward from their Lord, *“They shall have all that they wish for, in the presence of their Lord. That is the reward of the doers of good. God will absolve them of the worst of what they did, and will pay them for reward the best they used to do.”* They will certainly get the reward that God promised them. He will reward them according to the best of their deeds.

### **Verses 36 to 52:**

36. *Is not God sufficient for his servant? But they try to frighten you with other (gods) besides Him. Those whom God leaves to go astray have no one to guide them.*
37. *And he whom God guides, there is none that can lead him astray. Is not God the Eminent, the Avenger?*
38. *If indeed you ask them who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they will say, "God". Say, "Consider those whom you invoke besides God - can they, if God wills harm for me - remove His harm? Or if He wills to bestow a mercy on me, can they stop His mercy? Say, "God is sufficient for me. In Him the trusting put their trust.*
39. *Say, "My people do whatever you can. I will do (my part); and soon you will know*
40. *Who will receive humiliating torment, and on whom will descend an everlasting torment.”*
41. *Verily, We have revealed the Book to you with the Truth for people. Whosoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, and whosoever strays away from it does so at his own peril. And you are not a guardian over them.*
42. *God takes the souls at the time of their death; and those who do not die (He takes them) during their sleep. He keeps those for which He has ordained death and releases the rest till an appointed term. In this are indeed signs for people who reflect.*
43. *Or have they taken other than God as intercessors? Say, "Even though they have no power whatsoever and no understanding?"*
44. *Say, "To God belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. In the end, it is to Him that you shall be brought back."*
45. *And when God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with resentment, and when those (whom they worship) besides Him are mentioned, they rejoice.*
46. *Say, "God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of all that is unseen and the visible, it is You who will judge between Your servants in those matters about which they used to differ."*
47. *Even if the wrongdoers had all that there is on earth, and as much more, they would seek to ransom themselves therewith on the Day of Resurrection from the awful torment. And there will appear to them, from God, that which they never reckoned.*
48. *And the evils that they earned will appear to them, and that whereat they used to scoff will surround them.*
49. *Now, when adversity touches the human being, he calls on Us; but when We bestow a blessing from Ourselves on him, he says, "This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge (I have)" - this is only a trial, but most of them do not understand.*
50. *Those before them said it, yet (all) what they had earned did not avail them.*

51. *And the evil consequences of what they earned struck them; and the wrongdoers from among them will be struck by the evil consequences of what they earned, and they will not escape.*
52. *Did they not know that God enlarges the provision or restricts it for whomsoever He pleases? Indeed, in this are signs for those who believe. (39: 36 – 52)*

*“Is not God sufficient for his servant? But they try to frighten you with other (gods) besides Him. Those whom God leaves to go astray have no one to guide them. And he whom God guides, there is none that can lead him astray. Is not God the Eminent, the Avenger? If indeed you ask them who it is that created the heavens and the earth, they will say, ‘God’. Say, ‘Consider those whom you invoke besides God - can they, if God wills harm for me - remove His harm? Or if He wills to bestow a mercy on me, can they stop His mercy?’ Say, ‘God is sufficient for me. In Him the trusting put their trust.’ Say, ‘My people do whatever you can. I will do (my part); and soon you will know who will receive humiliating torment, and on whom will descend an everlasting torment.’”* These four verses outline the logic behind the true faith- a simple, pure, and strong faith as that which existed in the heart of the Messenger of God (PBUH). This is the kind of faith that all believers should have in their hearts. God provides sufficient protection for His servants. They should not be frightened of any one. All others are creatures of God. How could one who is protected by God be frightened by a creature of God? God has the dominating power over everything He created. He will guide those who deserve to be guided and will leave those who do not deserve to be guided to go astray. He is the Eminent. These facts can be stated in another way, by questioning the disbelievers themselves. They knew that God is the Creator of heavens and earth. How can they believe that God is the Creator of heavens and earth and then claim that someone else has the power to provide benefit or inflict harm on any of God’s servants? Understanding this fact and believing in it will promote security and confidence in the believer’s heart. There will be no room for argument then. Each should do what he thinks is right and the ultimate verdict will be issued by God.

*“Verily We have revealed the Book to you with the Truth for people.”* The Book came with the truth. The Book brought a true divine project. The Book elucidated a set of laws that are based on the truth. These laws control the universe, the human beings and all God’s creations. The Messenger’s (PBUH) role is to deliver the message. It is up to the people to choose what will benefit or harm them, *“Whosoever follows the guidance does so for his own benefit, and whosoever strays away from it does so at his own peril. And you are not a guardian over them.”* God is the Guardian and He is the one who has control over people, *“God takes the souls at the time of their death; and those who do not die (He takes them) during their sleep. He keeps those for which He has ordained death and releases the rest till an appointed term. In this are indeed signs for people who reflect.”* How can they seek the help of those who will not be able to help them, *“Or have they taken other than God as intercessors? Say, ‘Even though they have no power whatsoever and no understanding?’ Say, ‘To God belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. In the end, it is to Him that you shall be brought back.’”* There is no escape from God. He is the owner of the universe and to Him all the creatures will all return.

*“And when God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who do not believe in the Hereafter shrink with resentment, and when those (whom they worship) besides Him are mentioned, they rejoice.”* This verse describes how the disbelievers of Mecca used to react when the Prophet (PBUH) talked to them about the belief in the Oneness of God. One can find contemporaneous people who would react in the same way. Our response would be simply to call upon God to judge, *“God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of all that is unseen and the visible, it is You who will judge between Your servants in those matters about which they used to differ.”*

The verses then describe the fate of the disbelievers, *“Even if the wrongdoers had all that there is on earth, and as much more, they would seek to ransom themselves therewith on the Day of Resurrection from the awful torment. And there will appear to them, from God, that which they never reckoned. And the evils that they earned will appear to them and that whereat they used to scoff will surround them.”* On the Day of Judgment, they will meet their doom. They will wish that they could ransom themselves, but it will be late. They will be surrounded by their evil deeds and they will realize that they could not escape this horrendous situation.

When they are afflicted by adversity, those who disbelieve remember God and pray for His help, but when the affliction has been removed they forget the blessings of God, *“Now, when adversity touches the human being, he calls on Us; but when We bestow a blessing from Ourselves on him, he says, ‘This has been given to me because of a certain knowledge (I have)’ - this is only a trial, but most of them do not understand.”* This example happens too often. Only those who possess sound initial natural dispositions that lead them to God, remember Him whether they are experiencing good or bad times. God tests people to see whether they are going to be grateful or ungrateful. Those who forget God’s blessings think that they earned their good fortune as a result of their own efforts. People before them made the same claim and they lost everything, *“Those before them said it, yet (all) what they had earned did not avail them. And the evil consequences of what they earned struck them; and the wrongdoers from among them will be struck by the evil consequences of what they earned, and they will not escape. Did they not know that God enlarges the provision or restricts it for whomsoever He pleases? Indeed, in this are signs for those who believe.”*

### **Verses 53 to 61:**

53. *Say, “My servants who have were given to excesses against themselves; do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. Indeed, He is All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.”*
54. *And turn to your Lord (in repentance) and submit to Him, before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped.*
55. *And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord, before the torment comes upon you suddenly while you are unaware.*
56. *Lest a soul should say, “How sorry I am, for having neglected my duty to God, and I was indeed among the scoffers;”*
57. *Or should say, “If only God had guided me, I would certainly have been among the God conscious.”*

58. *Or should say when it sees the torment, "If only I could have another chance, I might be among the doers of good."*
59. *(But now the answer will be), "My revelations came to you, but you rejected them and you were arrogant, and you were among the disbelievers."*
60. *On the Day of Resurrection, you will see the faces of those who told lies against God darkened. Is there not in Hell an abode for the arrogant?*
61. *And God will save those who were conscious of Him because of their achievement; evil shall not touch them, nor shall they grieve. (39: 53 – 61)*

*"Say, 'My servants who were given to excesses against themselves; do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. Indeed, He is All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.'"* God's mercy encompasses all sins. It offers an open door for God's forgiveness. This door is repentance. Therefore, *"And turn to your Lord (in repentance) and submit to Him, before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped. And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord, before the torment comes upon you suddenly while you are unaware."* The verse calls those who have committed sins to come back to God and seek His forgiveness. There are no protocols, no intercessors, no barriers between God and His servants. They can call upon Him directly, expressing their remorse, submitting to His will, and asking for His forgiveness. The Quran provides the best revelation, so follow it before it is too late. When the opportunity is lost, there will be no use for regret, *"Lest a soul should say, 'How sorry I am, for having neglected my duty to God, and I was indeed among the scoffers, or should say, 'If only God had guided me, I would certainly have been among the God conscious.' Or should say when it sees the torment, 'If only I could have another chance, I might be among the doers of good.'"* The answer will be, *"(But now the answer will be), 'My revelations came to you, but you rejected them and you were arrogant, and you were among the disbelievers.'"*

The following verse describes the fate of those who told lies about God, *"On the Day of Resurrection you will see the faces of those who told lies against God darkened. Is there not in Hell an abode for the arrogant?"* But those who were conscious of God will be saved, *"And God will save those who were conscious of Him because of their achievement; evil shall not touch them, nor shall they grieve."*

### **Verses 62 to 75:**

62. *God is the Creator of all things, and He is the Guardian over all things.*
63. *To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth; and those who disbelieve in the revelations of God are the losers.*
64. *Say, "Do you then command me to worship others than God, you, ignorant ones?"*
65. *And it has been revealed to you and to those before you (saying), "If you associate a partner with God, all your deeds will be in vain and you will be indeed among the losers."*
66. *No, worship God alone, and be of those who give thanks.*

67. *And they did not esteem God as He has the right to be esteemed, when the whole earth shall be in His grip on the Day of Resurrection and the heavens rolled up in His right hand; glory be to Him and exalted He above what they associate (with Him).*
68. *The trumpet will be blown, and all that is in the heavens and on earth will fall dead except whom God wills. Then it will be blown a second time, and they will be standing and looking on.*
69. *And the earth will shine with the light of its Lord. The Record (of Deeds) will be placed (open), the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward, and it is judged between them with the truth, and they are not wronged.*
70. *And each soul is paid in full for what it did. And He knows best what they do.*
71. *The disbelievers will be led to Hell in throngs, till when they reach it and its gates are opened, and its warders will say to them, "Did not messengers of your own come to you reciting to you the revelations of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours? They will say, "Yes, indeed. But the word of torment for disbelievers has been fulfilled."*
72. *It will be said (to them), "Enter the gates of Hell to abide therein forever. Evil is the abode of the arrogant."*
73. *And those who were conscious of their Lord will be led to the Garden in throngs, till they reach it and its gates are opened, and its warders will say to them, "Peace be on you. You are good, so enter you (the Garden of delight), to abide therein forever."*
74. *They will say, "Praise be to God, who has truly fulfilled His Promise to us, and has made us inherit the land, so we may settle in the Garden wherever we will. How excellent is the reward for the workers?"*
75. *And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, singing the praise of their Lord. And it will be judged between them with the truth. And it is said, "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds." (39: 62 – 75)*

*"God is the Creator of all things and He is the Guardian over all things."* This is the fundamental truth that is pronounced by everything in the universe. No one can claim that he created anything. This universe did not exist on its own. God is the Creator of everything. He owns the heavens and earth. He controls them and manages their affairs, *"To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth."* Those who disbelieve lost the understanding that would make them live in harmony with the universe, *"and those who disbelieve in the revelations of God are the losers."* They lost the security in their life and lost the reward in the Hereafter.

In view of this, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to renounce the disbelievers' claim, *"Say, 'Do you then command me to worship others than God, you, ignorant ones?'"* A warning against associating partners with God is then issued to all humanity. In the front of those to whom the warning is issued are the messengers to emphasize the gravity of the situation, *"And it has been revealed to you and to those before you (saying), 'If you associate a partner with God, all your deeds will be in vain and you will be indeed among the losers.'"* Worship God alone and be grateful to Him, *"No, worship God alone, and be of those who give thanks."*

*“And they did not esteem God as He has the right to be esteemed.”* They associated partners with God, thus denying God the esteem that He rightfully deserves. On the Day of Resurrection, *“whole earth shall be in His grip on the Day of Resurrection and the heavens rolled up in His right hand; glory be to Him and exalted He above what they associate (with Him).”* The Quran provides these images to help people appreciate the power of God. However, the power of God is limitless and cannot be captured by human imagination.

The following verses describe some of the scenes of the Day of Resurrection, *“The trumpet will be blown, and all that is in the heavens and on earth will fall dead except whom God wills. Then it will be blown a second time, and they will be standing and looking on.”* The first blow will put everyone to death. Then the second blow will resurrect people. However, it is not known how long will be the time between the two blows. The scene is then described, *“And the earth will shine with the light of its Lord. The Record (of Deeds) will be placed (open), the prophets and the witnesses will be brought forward, and it is judged between them with truth, and they are not wronged.”* The Record will be opened, and the prophets will testify and the judgment will be passed. No one will suffer any injustice, *“And each soul is paid in full for what it did. And He knows best of what they do.”*

The disbelievers will be driven to Hell, *“The disbelievers will be led to Hell in throngs till, when they reach it and its gates are opened, and its warders will say to them, ‘Did not messengers of your own come to you reciting to you the revelations of your Lord and warning you of the meeting of this Day of yours?’ They will say, ‘Yes, indeed. But the word of torment for disbelievers has been fulfilled.’”* They will have no recourse but to submit, *“It will be said (to them), ‘Enter the gates of Hell to abide therein forever. Evil is the abode of the arrogant.’”*

On the other hand, the believers will be led to the Garden, *“And those who were conscious of their Lord will be led to the Garden in throngs, till they reach it and its gates are opened, and its warders will say to them, ‘Peace be on you. You are good, so enter you (the Garden of delight), to abide therein forever.’”* They will be warmly received and they will be praised. They will respond by singing the praise of God, *“They will say, ‘Praise be to God, who has truly fulfilled His Promise to us, and has made us inherit the land, so we may settle in the Garden wherever we will. How excellent is the reward for the workers?’”*

The final scene is the scene of submission to God expressing the fact of the Oneness of God, *“And you will see the angels surrounding the Throne, singing the praise of their Lord. And it will be judged between them with the truth. And it is said, ‘Praise be to God, the Lord of the Worlds.’”*

## **Sura 40: Ghafir (The Forgiver)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 20:**

1. *Ha, Mim.*
2. *The revelation of this Book is from God, the Eminent, the Omniscient;*
3. *Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no deity except Him. To Him is the ultimate return.*
4. *None argue concerning the revelations of God save those who disbelieve, so let not their turn of fortune in the land deceive you.*
5. *Before them the people of Noah rejected the truth, as did the confederates after them. Every community plotted against their prophet, to seize him, and argued falsely to refute the Truth. Then I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment.*
6. *Thus was the word of your Lord concerning those who disbelieve fulfilled that they are companions of the Fire.*
7. *Those who carry the Throne (of God) and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord, believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe, "Our Lord, You have encompassed all things in mercy and knowledge, therefore forgive those who repented and followed Your way and save them from the torment of Hell.*
8. *Our Lord, admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You promised them, and the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring. Indeed, You are the Eminent, the Wise.*
9. *And protect them against (all) evil deeds; those whom You protect against evil deeds on that Day, on them You will have bestowed mercy indeed. That is indeed the supreme triumph."*
10. *Those who disbelieve will be informed (on that day), "Verily God's abhorrence is more terrible than your abhorrence one of another, when you were called to faith but you refused."*
11. *They will say, "Our Lord, twice You have made us lifeless, and twice You have given us life. Now we recognized our sins. Is there any way out (of this)?"*
12. *(The answer will be), "This is because, when God was invoked you rejected faith, but when partners were joined with Him, you believed. The Command is with God the Most High, the Great."*
13. *It is He who shows you His signs, and sends down provisions for you from the sky. But only those who turn to God will take heed.*
14. *So call upon God and dedicate your religion to Him alone, even though the disbelievers may resent it.*
15. *He is Exalted high in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever He pleases of His servants; that it may warn of the Day of the Meeting.*
16. *The Day when they come forth, nothing of them being hidden from God. Whose is the Sovereignty this day? It is God's, the Unique, the Dominator.*
17. *Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it has done; no injustice will be done. God is swift in reckoning.*



18. *Warn them of the ever-approaching Day, when the hearts choke the throats, (when) there will be no friend for the wrongdoers, nor any intercessor who will be obeyed.*
19. *He is aware of the stealthy glance and that which the breasts conceal.*
20. *And God will judge with truth, while whom they call upon besides Him cannot judge at all. Indeed, God is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. (40: 1 – 20)*

The main theme of this Sura is the struggle between truth and falsehood, between faith and disbelief, between the Call and its rejection, and between the arrogance of people and the punishment of God. It is the first of seven Suras that all start with the Alphabetical letters, “*Ha, Mim.*” One of these Suras has the letters, “*’Ain, Seen, Qaf,*” following the first two letters. We have discussed before the rationale behind starting a Sura with these Alphabetical letters.

*“The revelation of this Book is from God, the Eminent, the Omniscient; Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no deity except Him. To Him is the ultimate return.”* The verse states a fact that has been often repeated in the Suras which were revealed in Mecca, the Book is a revelation from God. Then a number of God’s attributes are mentioned. These are His Eminence, His Omniscience, His Forgiveness, His Acceptance of repentance, His Severity in punishment, His Abundance of bounty and blessings, His Uniqueness, and to Him everything will ultimately return. These attributes are relevant to the theme of the Sura and they are closely related to the day to day life of God’s servants.

He is the Eminent. He is strong and able. He is invincible. He is the controller; no one can control Him.

He is the Omniscient. He manages the universe on the basis of His knowledge. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows everything.

He is the Forgiver of sins. He forgives the sins of His servants; knowing who among His servants deserves forgiveness.

He is the Acceptor of repentance. He accepts the sinners who repent, opens His doors to them, and bestows His protection on them.

He is severe in punishment. He destroys the arrogant and punishes the stubborn who neither repent nor seek His forgiveness.

He is infinite in bounty. He favors His servants with unlimited bounty and multiplies their good deeds.

There is no deity except Him. He alone is God. He neither has a partner nor an associate. To Him is the ultimate return. No one will escape His meeting and no one can avoid being accountable to Him.

These attributes define clearly the relationship between God and His servants. Knowing these attributes, the servants come to know what to expect from their Creator; so they do what pleases Him and they avoid what angers Him.

*“None argue concerning the revelations of God save those who disbelieve,”* Only those who disbelieve in God argue and dispute about His revelations. God has decreed their fate. They will meet their fate no matter how powerful they are in this worldly life, *“so let not their turn of fortune in the land deceive you.”* Before them there were other nations who behaved similarly and their stories should be a lesson for the disbelievers of the day, *“Before them the people of Noah rejected the truth, as did the confederates after them. Every community plotted against their prophet, to seize him, and argued falsely to refute the Truth. Then I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment.”* This story has happened often since the time of Noah (PBUH). God sends His Messenger and the tyrants reject him. Rather than engaging the messenger in a civilized debate, they take recourse to violence and they try to silence the messenger by force. Then God interferes, He saves the messenger and punishes the tyrants, *“Then I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment.”* The tyrants are not only punished in this world, but they will also receive God’s punishment in the Hereafter, *“Thus was the word of your Lord concerning those who disbelieve fulfilled that they are companions of the Fire.”* This story presents a typical scenario for the struggle between faith and disbelief and between truth and falsehood, a scenario that was repeated often over the history of humanity. Falsehood may prevail for a while but the final victory is for the truth. This is a fact that those who take the responsibility for calling people to the word of God should know and understand. This should provide support for them in their struggle.

Another type of support for the believers who call to the word of God comes from the angels who pray God to forgive the believers and to support them in their struggle, *“Those who carry the Throne (of God) and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord, believe in Him, and ask forgiveness for those who believe, ‘Our Lord, You have encompassed all things in mercy and knowledge, therefore forgive those who repented and followed Your way and save them from the torment of Hell. Our Lord, admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You promised them, and the righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring. Indeed, You are the Eminent, the Wise. And protect them against (all) evil deeds; those whom You protect against evil deeds on that Day, on them You will have bestowed mercy indeed. That is indeed the supreme triumph.’”* We do not know what is the Throne? Nor do we know how it looks like? We do not know how it is carried? These are all matters of the unseen which we should not speculate about. It is enough for us to believe that there are servants of God who, *“celebrate the praise of their Lord, believe in Him,”* and who pray God to support the believers among the mortals. The intent of the verse is to show the close relationship between the angels and the believers from among the human beings.

In their prayer, they ask God to bestow several things on the believers. They start their prayer respectfully by acknowledging that God’s mercy has encompassed everything. So the first thing they ask God for, is to extend His mercy to the believers. They follow that by asking God to forgive the believers. Their third prayer is for God to admit the believers, *“into the Gardens of Eden.”* The prayer continues to encompass the, *“righteous among their fathers, their spouses, and their offspring.”* This part of the prayer is concluded by a reference to God’s relevant attributes, *“Indeed, You are the Eminent, the Wise.”* The prayer continues to ask for God’s protection to be bestowed upon the believers. The prayer is concluded by stating the objective of

the prayer, the achievement of, *“the supreme triumph.”*

While the angels are busy praying God for their believing brothers, we find the disbelievers in a contemptible situation, *“Those who disbelieve will be informed (on that day), ‘Verily God's abhorrence is more terrible than your abhorrence one of another, when you were called to the faith but you refused.’”* They realized that their leaders and friends who led them astray failed them and that the only refuge is with God, so they call upon God, *“Our Lord, twice You have made us lifeless, and twice You have given us life. Now we recognized our sins. Is there any way out (of this)?”* They will admit their sins and they will pray for forgiveness, but it will be too late now, *“(The answer will be), ‘This is because, when God was invoked you rejected faith, but when partners were joined with Him, you believed. The Command is with God the Most High, the Great.’”*

The verses turn to describe an attribute of God that is appropriate to the situation: commanding the believers to devote their worship to God alone, *“It is He who shows you His signs, and sends down provisions for you from the sky. But only those who turn to God will take heed. So call upon God and dedicate your religion to Him alone, even though the disbelievers may resent it.”* God's signs are abundant around us. He is the one who sends His provisions. One of God's provisions that descend on us is the rain. Water is the origin of life on this earth. People need it to drink and they use it to grow food. God's provisions go beyond rain. Only those who turn to God will remember these bounties. Believers should then devote their worship to God alone. Only He is worthy of worship, *“He is Exalted high in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever He pleases of His servants; that it may warn of the Day of the Meeting.”* He sends His Message to whomsoever He wills. The Message, *“Spirit,”* brings life to people. The Message is revealed so that it warns people, *“of the Day of the Meeting.”*

On that day, all people, angels, and jinn will come together. People will have a chance to see what they have done in their lives. Nothing will be hidden on that day, *“The Day when they come forth, nothing of them being hidden from God. Whose is the Sovereignty this day? It is God's, the Unique, the Dominator.”* The arrogant will be humiliated and the proud will be humbled. The whole universe will witness and testify when they will be asked, *“Whose is the Sovereignty this day?”* and they will answer, *“It is God's, the Unique, the Dominator.”* It will then be stated, *“Today each soul will be rewarded for whatever it has done; no injustice will be done. God is swift in reckoning.”*

The verses turn to the Prophet (PBUH) commanding him to warn the disbelievers of Mecca, *“Warn them of the ever-approaching Day, when the hearts choke the throats, (when) there will be no friend for the wrongdoers, nor any intercessor who will be obeyed. He is aware of the stealthy glance and that which the breasts conceal. And God will judge with truth, while whom they call upon besides Him cannot judge at all. Indeed, God is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.”*

The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to tell them that the Day of Resurrection is near. The verse paints a dynamic picture for that Day moving slowly towards them; people's hearts rising in their chests almost choking them out of fear. No one will be able to provide support or a word

of comfort. They will not be able to conceal anything even the stealthy glance will be acknowledged. On that day, only God will be the judge and He will judge with the truth.

### **Verses 21 to 55:**

21. *Have they not travelled in the land and observed how those who disbelieved before them met their end? They were mightier than these in power and they left behind more impressive marks on earth. Yet God seized them for their sins, and they had no protector from God.*
22. *That was because their messengers kept bringing them clear signs but they disbelieved; so God seized them. He is Strong, severe in punishment.*
23. *And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations and a clear authority,*
24. *To Pharaoh, Haman, and Qaroun; but they called (him), "A lying sorcerer."*
25. *And when he brought them the truth from Us, they said, "Slay the sons of those who believe with him, and spare their women." But the plot of disbelievers can only go astray.*
26. *And Pharaoh said, "Let me kill Moses, and let him call upon his Lord. I fear that he will alter your religion or spread corruption in the land."*
27. *Moses said, "I have indeed sought refuge with my Lord and yours from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning."*
28. *And a believing man from Pharaoh's folk, who hid his faith, said, "Would you kill a man because he says, 'My Lord is God,' and has brought you clear proofs from your Lord? If he is lying, then his lie is upon him; and if he is truthful, then some of that wherewith he threatens you will strike you. God does not guide him who is given to excesses, liar.*
29. *My People, yours is the dominion today, being uppermost in the land. But who would save us from the wrath of God should it reach us?" Pharaoh said, "I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the path of prudence."*
30. *And he who believed said, "My people, I fear for you a fate like that of the confederates;*
31. *Something like the fate of the people of Noah, 'Ad, and Thamud, and those after them, and God does not desire injustice for (His) servants."*
32. *And, my people, "I fear for you the Day of calling out.*
33. *A day when you will turn to flee, having no defender from God. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no guide.*
34. *And verily Joseph brought you clear proofs, yet you remained in doubt of what he brought you till, when he died, you said, 'God will not send any messenger after him.' Thus God leaves to go astray he who is given to excesses, doubter.*
35. *Those who dispute God's revelations without any authority given to them, are doing something that is greatly hateful in the sight of God and in the sight of the believers. Thus does God seal upon the heart of every arrogant, tyrant."*
36. *Pharaoh said, "Haman, build for me a tower, that I may attain the means;*
37. *The means of (reaching) heavens, and that I may mount up to the god of Moses. But I think (Moses) is a liar." Thus was made alluring, in Pharaoh's eyes, the evil of his deeds, and he was hindered from the path; and the plot of Pharaoh led only to ruin.*
38. *And he who believed said, "My people, follow me. I will guide you to the right path.*
39. *My people, the life of this world is nothing but fleeting enjoyment. It is the Hereafter that is the home that will last.*

40. *Whoso does an ill-deed, he will be repaid the like thereof, while whoso does good deed, whether male or female, and is a believer, will enter the Garden, where they will be given provision without measure.*
41. *And my people, how is it that I call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire?*
42. *You call me to disbelieve in God, and to associate partners with Him of whom I have no knowledge; and I call you to the Eminent, the Full of Forgiveness.*
43. *Assuredly, that what you call me to has no say in this world or in the Hereafter, and we will return back to God, and those who are given to excesses are the inmates of the Fire.*
44. *And you will remember what I say to you. I entrust my cause to God. God is All-Seeing of the servants."*
45. *Then God saved him from the evils which they plotted, while a dreadful torment encompassed Pharaoh's folk.*
46. *The Fire; they will be brought before it mornings and evenings and on the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, "Admit Pharaoh's folk to the severest torment."*
47. *And when they dispute in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant, "We were your followers; will you therefore rid us of a portion of the Fire?"*
48. *Those who had been arrogant will say, "We are all in it. God has judged between the servants."*
49. *Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, "Ask your Lord to lessen our torment one day."*
50. *They will say, "Did not your messengers come to you with clear proofs?" They will say, "Yes". They will reply, "Then pray. But the prayer of the disbelievers is in vain."*
51. *We will, without doubt, help our messengers and those who believe, (both) in this world's life and on the Day when the witnesses will stand forth.*
52. *The Day when their excuses will not benefit the wrongdoers; and the curse will be upon them, and theirs will be the evil abode.*
53. *And We verily gave Moses the guidance, and We passed on the Scripture to the Children of Israel,*
54. *A guide and a reminder for people of understanding.*
55. *Persevere; God's promise is the truth. Ask forgiveness for your fault, and celebrate the praise of your Lord in the evening and in the morning. (40: 21 – 55)*

The following verses reminded the disbelievers with the stories of previous nations. The verses directed them to travel, observe and understand the lesson, *"Have they not travelled in the land and observed how those who disbelieved before them met their end? They were mightier than these in power and they left behind more impressive marks on earth. Yet God seized them for their sins, and they had no protector from God. That was because their messengers kept bringing them clear signs but they disbelieved; so God seized them. He is Strong, severe in punishment."*

Then the story of Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh is told, *"And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations and a clear authority, To Pharaoh, Haman, and Qaroun; but they called (him), 'A lying sorcerer.'" This is a description of the first scene of the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh. When He brought them the truth, they had no logical argument against it so they took recourse to unfounded accusations, "they called (him), 'A lying sorcerer.'" When He*

continued to remind them of the truth, they took recourse to violence to silence him and his followers, *“And when he brought them the truth from Us, they said, ‘Slay the sons of those who believe with him, and spare their women.’ But the plot of disbelievers can only go astray.”*

Pharaoh suggested a way to get rid of this new religion, *“And Pharaoh said, ‘Let me kill Moses, and let him call upon his Lord. I fear that he will alter your religion or spread corruption in the land.’”* It seems from the way Pharaoh phrased his suggestion that there was some resistance to his suggestion. Someone might have suggested that killing Moses (PBUH) would not solve the problem. Killing him could make him a hero and a martyr. It is interesting to note what Pharaoh was afraid of, *“I fear that he will alter your religion or spread corruption in the land.”* This is the claim each and every tyrant makes to justify the persecution of the believers. Moses (PBUH), on the other hand, requested God’s help, *“Moses said, ‘I have indeed sought refuge with my Lord and yours from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning.’”*

A man from Pharaoh’s associates, who secretly believed in Moses (PBUH), came out to defend Moses (PBUH). He tried to talk sense into Pharaoh and his advisors, *“And a believing man from Pharaoh's folk, who hid his faith, said, ‘Would you kill a man because he says, ‘My Lord is God,’ and has brought you clear proofs from your Lord? If he is lying, then his lie is upon him; and if he is truthful, then some of that wherewith he threatens you will strike you. God does not guide him who is given to excesses, liar. My People, yours is the dominion today, being uppermost in the land. But who would save us from the wrath of God should it reach us?’”* The man started by expressing his disgust at what they wanted to do to Moses (PBUH). They wanted to face Moses’ (PBUH) words of belief with brutal force. He told them about the evidence that Moses (PBUH) brought them which proved that he was telling the truth. The believer continued to argue, even if Moses (PBUH) were lying, he could only hurt himself. But if he was telling the truth and they did not heed his warning, then they would be destroyed by the wrath of God. He reminded his people that even though they had the power at that time, they should heed the warning. God’s wrath could destroy them anytime, *“My People, yours is the dominion today, being uppermost in the land. But who would save us from the wrath of God should it reach us?”*

However, Pharaoh used to think with the mind of a tyrant, *“Pharaoh said, ‘I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the path of prudence.’”* The believer was not deterred by Pharaoh’s stubbornness. He continued to warn his people, *“And he who believed said, ‘My people, I fear for you a fate like that of the confederates; something like the fate of the people of Noah, ‘Ad, and Thamud, and those after them, and God does not desire injustice for (His) servants;’ And, my people, ‘I fear for you the Day of calling out; a day when you will turn to flee, having no defender from God. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no guide.’”* He continued to remind his people of the fate of those who came before them. He also reminded them of what they did to Joseph (PBUH), *“And verily Joseph brought you clear proofs, yet you remained in doubt of what he brought you till, when he died, you said, ‘God will not send any messenger after him.’ Thus God leaves to go astray who is given to excesses, doubter.”* This is the only place where Joseph’s (PBUH) mission in Egypt is mentioned in the Quran. We have known from Surat Joseph (Chapter 12) that Joseph (PBUH) reached a very powerful position in the Government of Egypt. He was in control of the stores of the land. Chapter 12 alludes also to the fact that Joseph (PBUH) sat on a throne. It could have been the throne of Egypt however; this

is not confirmed. But even though Joseph (PBUH) was in such a powerful position, people still doubted him, and when he died they expressed their relief that they got rid of him. They thought that God would not send another messenger to them. The believing man continued to berate his people and to warn them not to dispute the revelations of God, *“Those who dispute God’s revelations without any authority given to them, are doing something that is greatly hateful in the sight of God and in the sight of the believers. Thus does God seal upon the heart of every arrogant, tyrant.”*

In spite of this tremendous effort on the part of the believing man, Pharaoh was adamant in embracing falsehood and rejecting the truth. He gave the impression that he wanted to verify what Moses (PBUH) was saying, so he adopted a new approach, *“Pharaoh said, ‘Haman, build for me a tower, that I may attain the means; the means of (reaching) heavens, and that I may mount up to the god of Moses. But I think (Moses) is a liar.’ Thus was made alluring, in Pharaoh’s eyes, the evil of his deeds, and he was hindered from the path; and the plot of Pharaoh led only to ruin.”* He asked his minister to build a tower for him so that he can climb up the tower in search of Moses’ (PBUH) God. It is unbelievable that he was serious in finding God. This must have been a trick to avoid having to refute the argument that the believing man made. However, Pharaoh’s scheme was doomed.

The believing man gave his people the last advice, *“And he who believed said, ‘My people, follow me. I will guide you to the right path. My people, the life of this world is nothing but fleeting enjoyment. It is the Hereafter that is the home that will last. Whoso does an ill-deed, he will be repaid the like thereof, while whoso does good deed, whether male or female, and is a believer, will enter the Garden, where they will be given provision without measure. And my people, how is it that I call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire? You call me to disbelieve in God, and to associate partners with Him of whom I have no knowledge; and I call you to the Eminent, the Full of Forgiveness. Assuredly, that what you call me to has no say in this world or in the Hereafter, and we will return back to God, and those who are given to excesses are the inmates of the Fire. And you will remember what I say to you. I entrust my cause to God. God is All-Seeing of the servants.’”* He told Pharaoh and his people that if they follow him he will guide them to the right path. This was a challenge to Pharaoh’s statement in which he declared that he has the exclusive right to define the right path for his people, *“I do not show you except what I see, and I do not guide you except to the path of prudence.”* The believing man explained to his people the basic fact that this life is a transient stage. It is the Hereafter that will last forever and they should work for it. The rule for accountability is stated, *“Whoso does an ill-deed, he will be repaid the like thereof, while whoso does good deed, whether male or female, and is a believer, will enter the Garden, where they will be given provision without measure.”* God, out of His mercy, promised to multiply the reward for those who do good deeds while limiting the punishment to the actual sins committed. He expressed his surprise at his people; he was calling them to salvation while they were actually calling him to be punished, *“And my people, how is it that I call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire?”* Strictly speaking they did not call him to the Fire but they called him to associate partners with God, but what is the difference between the two? Then he made his last argument, *“Assuredly, that what you call me to has no say in this world or in the Hereafter, and we will return back to*

*God, and the extravagant are the inmates of the Fire.”*

The narrative leaves out the details of the rest of the story of Pharaoh and goes directly to scenes that describe the fate of Pharaoh and his people in the Hereafter, *“Then God saved him from the evils which they plotted, while a dreadful torment encompassed Pharaoh's folk. The Fire; they will be brought before it mornings and evenings and on the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, ‘Admit Pharaoh’s folk to the severest torment.’”* The text suggests that the sentence, *“The Fire; they will be brought before it mornings and evenings,”* refers to a punishment before the Day of Judgment. It may be a reference to the torment in the grave, because it then followed by the statement, *“and on the Day the Hour comes, it will be said, ‘Admit Pharaoh’s folk to the severest torment.’”*

Then another scene is described, the scene of the dispute that will erupt between groups of people who were followers in their life and their leaders who led them astray, *“And when they dispute in the Fire, the weak will say to those who were arrogant, ‘We were your followers; will you therefore rid us of a portion of the Fire?’”* The followers and the leaders will be gathered together in Hell. God bestowed on them honor, free will, and dignity but they gave all that up and became followers without honor, free will, or dignity. The leaders will respond, *“Those who had been arrogant will say, ‘We are all in it. God has judged between the servants.’”*

The disbelievers will then turn to the keepers of Hell asking them to intercede on their behalf, *“Those in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, ‘Ask your Lord to lessen our torment one day.’”* The keepers of Hell know their limits; they will remind the disbelievers of the opportunities that they missed, *“They will say, ‘Did not your messengers come to you with clear proofs?’ They will say, ‘Yes’. They will reply, ‘Then pray. But the prayer of the disbelievers is in vain.’”*

This part of the narrative is concluded by an unequivocal statement from God, *“We will, without doubt, help our messengers and those who believe, (both) in this world's life and on the Day when the witnesses will stand forth. The Day when their excuses will not benefit the wrongdoers; and the curse will be upon them, and theirs will be the evil abode. And We verily gave Moses the guidance, and We passed on the Scripture to the Children of Israel, a guide and a reminder for people of understanding. Persevere; God’s promise is the truth. Ask forgiveness for your fault, and celebrate the praise of your Lord in the evening and in the morning.”* God will support His Messengers both in this life and in the Hereafter. It is understood that God’s victory is guaranteed in the Hereafter, but what about in the worldly life? In their lives some messengers were killed and some were expelled out of their homes. The believers were tortured, persecuted, and even executed. We need to put this promise in perspective. People’s standard judges the outcomes of events that take place in a limited piece of land, over a limited span of time; while we need to apply a comprehensive standard that judges the outcome of the events in the whole world over a long span of time. If we use that standard we conclude that God’s promise of support has been verified. When at the end faith scores the ultimate victory, we realize that this is the victory for all the believers.



## Verses 56 to 77:

56. *Those who dispute about the revelations of God without any authority bestowed on them, there is nothing in their breasts but (the quest of) greatness, which they shall never attain. So, seek refuge in God. He is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.*
57. *Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the people, but most people do not know.*
58. *And the blind man and the seer are not equal, neither are those who believe and do good deeds and the evildoers. Little do you reflect?*
59. *The Hour will certainly come; there is no doubt about it. Yet most people do not believe.*
60. *And your Lord has said, "Call on Me and I will respond to you. Those who are too arrogant to worship Me will enter Hell, disgraced."*
61. *It is God who has made the night for you, that you may rest therein, and the day for seeing. God is bountiful to people, yet most people do not give thanks.*
62. *Such is God, your Lord; the Creator of everything; there is no deity but Him. How can you be deluded?*
63. *Thus are deluded those who rejected the revelations of God.*
64. *It is God who made for you the earth as a resting place, and the sky as a canopy, and has fashioned you and perfected your shapes, and provided you with good things. Such is God, your Lord. Then blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds.*
65. *He is the Living One. There is no deity but Him. Call upon Him, devoting your religion to Him. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.*
66. *Say (Muhammad), "I am forbidden to worship those whom you invoke besides God since there have come to me clear proofs from my Lord, and I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds.*
67. *It is He who has created you from dust then from a sperm-drop, then from a leech-like clot; then He brings you forth as a child; then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old – though some of you will die sooner - and lets you reach an appointed term; in order that you may understand.*
68. *It is He who gives life and death; and when He ordains a thing, He only says to it, "Be," and it is.*
69. *Have you not seen those who dispute about God's revelations? How are they turned away?*
70. *Those who reject the Book and the (revelations) with which We sent our messengers, they will soon know.*
71. *When the yokes (shall be) round their necks, and the chains; and they shall be dragged.*
72. *In boiling water, then in the Fire they will be burned.*
73. *Then it will be said to them, "Where are the (deities) that you used to associate (in worship)*
74. *Besides God? They said, "They have failed us; but we were not praying to anything before." Thus does God send the disbelievers astray.*
75. *That was because you exulted in the land unjustly and because you behaved insolently.*
76. *Enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein. Evil is the abode of the arrogant.*
77. *So persevere; for the promise of God is true: and whether We show you (in this life) a part of what We have promised them, or cause you to die, still to Us they will be*

*returned. (40: 56 - 77)*

This tiny human creature very often forgets how small in the scheme of things he is. He is dependent on his Creator. When the connection with his Creator is severed he becomes an easy prey to Satan who fills his mind with conceit and arrogance. He disputes about God's revelations. He claims that he disputes because he needs a convincing argument while in fact his dispute is rooted in his arrogance, *"Those who dispute about the revelations of God without any authority bestowed on them, there is nothing in their breasts but (the quest of) greatness, which they shall never attain. So seek refuge in God. He is indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."* Had the human being understood the nature of his existence in the context of the huge universe and the small role he was given to play in this life and had he realized that his duty is to excel in fulfilling his role, he would have felt content and secure. People should seek refuge in God of the arrogance that creeps into their hearts. God sees and hears and He will help those who seek His help.

The following helps humankind in understanding his role in the context of the whole universe, *"Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of the people, but most people do not know."* Humankind should consider the vastness of the universe that we live in. Pride and arrogance will evaporate when humankind compares himself to this huge and complex universe. The only element that gives value to humankind is the divine breath that God breathed into him. Without this divine breath he would be nothing.

*"And the blind man and the seer are not equal, neither are those who believe and do good deeds and the evildoers. Little do you reflect?"* The one who is able to see can see, learn, and understand his limits; while the blind does not appreciate his limitations. He could overestimate his ability and may wander astray. Similarly, those who do good deeds do them because they see, understand, and appreciate; while those who do evil deeds do them because they are like the blind they do not see, understand, nor appreciate.

Those who dispute about the Hour should know that it will happen, *"The Hour will certainly come; there is no doubt about it. Yet most people do not believe."* People who do not believe that the Hour will come are the ones who dispute the revelations of God. God opens a door for them to reach peace and security by devoting themselves sincerely to God and ask Him for healing. He promised to respond favorably to those who ask Him, *"And your Lord has said, 'Call on Me and I will respond to you.' Those who are too arrogant to worship me will enter Hell, disgraced."* But those who are too arrogant to ask God, they will be doomed.

The following verses explore some of the bounties of God for which we should be grateful, *"It is God who has made the night for you, that you may rest therein, and the day for seeing. God is bountiful to people, yet most people do not give thanks. Such is God, your Lord; the Creator of everything; there is no deity but Him. How can you be deluded? Thus are deluded those who rejected the revelations of God. It is God who made for you the earth as a resting place, and the sky as a canopy, and has fashioned you and perfected your shapes, and provided you with good*

*things. Such is God, your Lord. Then blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds.*” The day and night are cosmic phenomena. The earth and heavens are cosmic planets. They are mentioned in the context of reminding people of God’s bounty alongside other bounties like the creation of humankind in the best fashion and the good provision that God has provided people with. The verses also refer to articles of the doctrine by reminding people of the Oneness God. This shows that all these issues are closely related. We need to reflect upon them in the wider context.

God created the universe in a way that allows the existence and progress of life on earth. He made the earth a habitable place for humankind and for other creatures. He created the night so that people can rest and created the day so that people can work and run their errands. God created the universe in well balanced equilibrium and delicately maintained that balance. This balance is necessary for the continuation of life on earth. These are closely related issues, they work in harmony. God who maintains this harmony deserves to be worshipped praised, *“Then blessed be God, the Lord of the Worlds.”*

God is ever living. He is the only one whose life is intrinsic. It is not acquired nor created. It has no beginning and no end, *“He is the Living One. There is no deity but Him. Call upon Him, devoting your religion to Him. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.”*

The logical conclusion was then expressed in a command to the Prophet (PBUH), to devote himself completely to the worship of the One God, *“Say (Muhammad), ‘I am forbidden to worship those whom you invoke besides God since there have come to me clear proofs from my Lord, and I am commanded to submit to the Lord of the Worlds.’”* Then a list of the signs of the Majesty of God is given, *“It is He who has created you from dust then from a sperm-drop, then from a leech-like clot; then He brings you forth as a child; then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old – though some of you will die sooner - and lets you reach an appointed term; in order that you may understand. It is He who gives life and death; and when He ordains a thing, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”* People did not see how the creation of humankind started. But we know how life continues through mating and how the embryo is produced as a result of the combination of the sperm of a man and the egg of a woman. Human beings go through a standard cycle of life: childhood, youth, maturity and then old age. However, some people do not live to complete the whole cycle. God created life and death. When God wants to create something, all what He needs to do is to say, ‘Be,’ and it is.

It is surprising, in the light of these miracles, for some to continue in their dispute of God’s revelations, *“Have you not seen those who dispute about God’s revelations? How are they turned away? Those who reject the Book and the (revelations) with which We sent our messengers, they will soon know. When the yokes (shall be) round their necks, and the chains; and they shall be dragged. In boiling water, then in the Fire they will be burned. Then it will be said to them, ‘Where are the (deities) that you used to associate (in worship), besides God?’ They said, ‘They have failed us; but we were not praying to anything before.’ Thus does God send the disbelievers astray. That was because you exulted in the land unjustly and because you behaved insolently. Enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein. Evil is the abode of the arrogant.”*

Those who disputed the revelations of God and rejected His Message will end up in Hell fire. They will be abandoned by their false deities. They will face a tremendous, humiliating torment.

The narrative then turns to the Prophet (PBUH) to reassure him and to support him in his mission. He is told to persevere but he was also told that he should focus on his role as a deliverer of the message, the end result is in the hands of God, *“So persevere; for the promise of God is true: and whether We show you (in this life) a part of what We have promised them, or cause you to die, still to Us they will be returned.”* It is natural that a human being yearns to seeing the fruits of his work. Also it is only human to wish to see how one’s enemies are being punished. God commands His Messenger (PBUH) to resist these human desires. Controlling these desires requires a special type of perseverance. This explains the command to the Prophet (PBUH) to persevere in this verse.

### **Verses 78 to 85:**

78. *Verily We sent messengers before you, among them those of whom We have told you, and some of whom We have not told you; and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a sign except by God's leave, but when God's commandment comes just judgment will be passed between them; and there and then, the followers of falsehood will lose.*
79. *It is God who made cattle for you, that you may use some for riding and some for food;*
80. *And there are (other) benefits in them for you; that you may through them attain to any need (there may be) in your hearts; and on them and on ships you are carried.*
81. *And He shows you His signs: then which of the signs of God will you deny?*
82. *Have they not travelled in the land to see how the end of those before them was? They were more numerous than these and greater in strength, and made more impressive mark on the land, but what they earned did not avail them.*
83. *And when their messengers came to them with clear proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they had; but they were engulfed by the very punishment they mocked.*
84. *But when they saw Our punishment, they said, "We believe in God only and reject (all) that we used to associate (with Him).*
85. *But their professing the faith after they have seen Our punishment was not going to profit them. This is God's law which has indeed been ordained in regard to His servants, and there the unbelievers did lose. (40: 78 – 85)*

God sent messengers before Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) the names of some of them were mentioned to the Prophet (PBUH) but some remained unknown, *“Verily We sent messengers before you, among them those of whom We have told you, and some of whom We have not told you; and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a sign except by God's leave, but when God's commandment comes just judgment will be passed between them; and there and then, the followers of falsehood will lose.”* It is only human that we look for signs that give a concrete evidence of the truth. But the messenger’s role is to deliver the message. It is not his role to bring about miracles. Messengers are only mortals. It is God’s prerogative to send a sign whenever He wills.

Having said that, why do not those who want the Prophet (PBUH) to perform a miracle to prove his truthfulness reflect on the creation of God around them, *“It is God who made cattle for you, that you may use some for riding and some for food; and there are (other) benefits in them for you; that you may through them attain to any need (there may be) in your hearts; and on them and on ships you are carried. And He shows you His signs: then which of the signs of God will you deny?”* The creation of cattle is a miracle as much as the creation of humankind is a miracle. God not only created cattle but subjugated them to people for use in their daily life. Cattle provide humans with meat to eat and milk to drink and have other uses that people benefit from. Another sign of God are ships. Ships float on water and travel on sea by virtue of laws that God created. But there are those who still deny the signs of God and argue about His revelations.

*“Have they not travelled in the land to see how the end of those before them was? They were more numerous than these and greater in strength, and made more impressive mark on the land, but what they earned did not avail them. And when their messengers came to them with clear proofs, they exulted in the knowledge they had; but they were engulfed by the very punishment they mocked. But when they saw Our punishment, they said, ‘We believe in God only and reject (all) that we used to associate (with Him).’ But their professing the faith after they have seen Our punishment was not going to profit them. This is God’s law which has indeed been ordained in regard to His servants, and there the disbelievers did lose.”* Did they not learn from the history of previous nations who were mightier and more advanced than them? However, their power and their knowledge did not protect them from God’s punishment. They were very proud of their knowledge. Theirs was knowledge without faith which filled their hearts with arrogance and they mocked the messengers of God who came to guide them to the right path. Their arrogance led them to self-destruction. When they realized their bad end they regretted what they had done but it was too late and they lost.

## Sura 41: Fussilat (Explained in Detail)

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

### Verses 1 to 36:

1. *Ha, Mim.*
2. *A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*
3. *A Book, whereof the verses are explained in detail; an Arabic Quran, for people who know.*
4. *Giving glad tidings and a warning. But most of them turn away so that they do not hear.*
5. *They say, "Our hearts are kept undercover from that to which you invite us, and in our ears there is a deafness, and between us and you there is a barrier so do (whatever you will); for we will indeed do (what we will)"*
6. *Say (Muhammad), "I am but a mortal like you. It has been revealed to me, that your God is One. So stand true to Him, and ask for His Forgiveness; and woe to those who associate partners with God.*
7. *Who do not give the poor-due, and who disbelieve in the Hereafter.*
8. *Those who believe and do good deeds, for them is a reward that will never fail."*
9. *Say, "Do you disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days? And do you set up equals to Him? He is the Lord of the worlds.*
10. *He placed therein firm mountains rising above it, and blessed it and determined therein its sustenance in four days, alike for (all) who ask;*
11. *Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, "Come both of you, willingly or unwillingly." They said, "We come, willingly."*
12. *Then He formed them as seven heavens in two days and inspired in each heaven its mandate; and We decorated the lower heaven with lamps, and rendered it inviolable. That is the determination of the Eminent, the Omniscient.*
13. *But if they turn away, say you, "I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the one which overtook 'Aad and Thamud."*
14. *When their messengers came to them from before them and from behind them, saying, "Worship none but God." They said, "If our Lord had willed, He surely would have sent down angels, so we disbelieve in that which you have been sent with."*
15. *As for 'Aad, they were arrogant in the land without right, and they said, "Who is mightier than us in power?" Could they not see that God who created them, He was mightier than them in power? And they rejected Our revelations.*
16. *So We sent against them a raging wind in evil days, that We might give them a taste of the torment of humiliation in this life; but the torment of the Hereafter will be more humiliating still; and they will find no help.*
17. *As for Thamud, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness (of heart) over guidance; so the stunning torment of humiliation seized them, because of what they had earned.*
18. *But We delivered those who believed and were conscious of God.*
19. *On the day that the enemies of God will be gathered together to the Fire, they will be marched in ranks.*

20. *When they reach it, their hearing, their sight, and their skins will bear witness against them as to what they used to do.*
21. *They will say to their skins, "Why did you bear witness against us?" They will say, "God has given us the ability to speak as He has given the ability to speak to everything. He created you in the first instance, and to Him you will be brought back.*
22. *You did not seek to hide yourselves, lest your hearing, your sight, and your skins should bear witness against you. But you did think that God knew not many of the things that you used to do.*
23. *And this thought of yours which you did entertain concerning your Lord, has ruined you; and you find yourselves (this day) among the losers."*
24. *And though they may persevere, yet the Fire is still their abode; and if they ask for favor, they are not of those on whom favors can be bestowed.*
25. *And We have assigned them companions, who made alluring to them what was before them and what was behind them; and the sentence has come into effect on generations of jinn and people before them, who have passed away. They were ever losers.*
26. *The disbelievers say, "Do not listen to this Quran, and make noise (while it is being recited), perhaps you may prevail."*
27. *But verily We shall cause those who disbelieve to taste severe torment, and verily We shall recompense them according to the worst of what they used to do.*
28. *That is the recompense of God's enemies: The Fire. Therein is their immortal home, payment for their rejection of Our revelations.*
29. *And the disbelievers will say, "Our Lord, show us those, among jinn and people, who misled us; so that We shall place them underneath our feet, so that they become the lowest."*
30. *Those who say, "Our Lord is God," and continue on the straight path, the angels descend upon them, saying, "Fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the paradise which you were promised.*
31. *We are your allies in this life and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have all that your souls shall desire; therein you shall have all that you ask for,"*
32. *A gift of welcome from the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."*
33. *Who is better in speech than one who calls to God, does good deeds, and says, "I am of those who submit to God"?"*
34. *The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then he between you and him there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend.*
35. *And no one will be granted (such goodness) except those who persevere, and none is granted it except those who have the greatest good fortune.*
36. *And if a whisper from the devil reaches you then seek refuge in God. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient. (41: 1 – 36)*

This Sura deals with the fundamental elements of the doctrine: The Oneness of God, the Hereafter, and the revelation. In addition, it outlines a methodology for calling people to the straight path and the characteristics of the caller. One of the main themes of the Sura, according to Hawwa, is explaining the way to become conscious of God. This is indicated by the two commands: To worship God alone and to abstain from associating partners with God.

The Sura starts with the two Alphabetical letters, "*Ha, Mim.*" We discussed the significance of these letters earlier. The repetitive use of this style in starting different Suras is meant to emphasize the significance of this style. It is congruent with the style of Quran in repeating the facts that touch the human heart. This is an appropriate style to deal with the forgetful nature of the human heart. The second verse, "*A revelation from the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,*" can be combined with the first verse to form a sentence in which the first the two Alphabetical letters are the noun and the second verse is the predicate. Thus, the Quran which has been composed using the Arabic Alphabetical letters is a revelation from God. The reference to God, the author of the Book, using His merciful attributes is most appropriate since the Book was revealed as a mercy to the whole humanity. It is a mercy not only for the believers but for all human beings. It is a mercy not only for the human beings but also for all God's living creation.

*"A Book, whereof the verses are explained in detail; an Arabic Quran, for people who know."* One of the obvious characteristics of the Book is its ability to provide explanations that cater to people having different levels of intellect; living at different times and in different places; and having different needs. The verses of the Book have been detailed for people who are willing to learn. The objectives of the Quran are to give glad tidings and to warn people, "*Giving glad tidings and a warning.*" It gives glad tidings to the believers who do good deeds and it warns the disbelievers who spread mischief. The glad tidings and the warning were explained in an explicit Arabic language. However, many turned away refusing to listen, "*But most of them turn away so that they do not hear.*" The Arabs used to literally avoid listening to the Quran. They did not want to listen for fear of the effect that the Quran might have on their hearts. They tried to protect their hearts from the impact of the Quran, "*They say, 'Our hearts are kept undercover from that to which you invite us, and in our ears there is a deafness, and between us and you there is a barrier so do (whatever you will); for us, we will do (what we will).'*" They used to say to the Prophet (PBUH) that their hearts are covered, their ears are deaf, and there is a physical barrier between them and him, so leave us alone. He (PBUH) can do whatever he pleases and they will do whatever pleases them.

This was an example of the responses that the Prophet (PBUH) used to receive. However, he (PBUH) was commanded to persevere and to continue on his way to call people to Islam. He was commanded to emphasize that he (PBUH) was only a messenger. It is God who has the final say, "*Say you, 'I am but a mortal like you. It has been revealed to me, that your God is One. So stand true to Him, and ask for His Forgiveness; and woe to those who associate partners with God.'*" Perseverance is an essential quality of those who take the responsibility of calling people to God. They should endure the abuse and the hardship that they face. The verses continue to describe the disbelievers, "*Who do not give the poor-due, and who disbelieve in the Hereafter.*" The mention of the poor-dues in this verse must have been in response to a specific event that we are not aware of, because although the concept of the poor-due (Zakat) was known at that time but it was not yet ordained as one of the prescribed rituals for Muslims. This verse was revealed in Mecca while the poor-due (Zakat) was ordained in Medina. Some scholars are of the opinion that Zakat in this verse refers to the spiritual purity gained by the belief in the Oneness of God.



The following verses explore some of the facts related to the creation of heavens and earth. The creation of earth is mentioned first, *“Say, ‘Do you disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days? And do you set up equals to Him? He is the Lord of the worlds. He placed therein firm mountains rising above it, and blessed it and determined therein its sustenance in four days, alike for (all) who ask;’”* How dare they associate partners with the Lord of the worlds who created the earth in two days? The days mentioned in the verse refer to time periods that only God knows their length. The Arabic word which has been translated here as “mountains,” literally means stabilizers; from which we understand that the mountains were created to stabilize the earth. God blessed the earth and created the sustenance for the creatures who live on it.

*“Then turned He to the heaven when it was smoke, and said to it and to the earth, ‘Come both of you, willingly or unwillingly.’ They said, ‘We come, willingly.’”* This dialogue highlights the perfect control that God has over the universe. Everything in the universe expresses its willing obedience to God except the human being who sometimes has to obey unwillingly. The human being is a tiny part of this universe. He is controlled by the same laws that God created to control the universe. Life could be much easier and happier if we follow the law willingly. However, many choose not to follow the law willingly and the results are catastrophic.

God formed the heavens in two periods, *“Then He formed them as seven heavens in two days and inspired in each heaven its mandate; and We decorated the lower heaven with lamps, and rendered it inviolable. That is the determination of the Eminent, the Omniscient.”* We do not know exactly what is meant by the term “the lower heaven.” It could be a reference to the nearest galaxy to the earth. This lower heaven was also protected against the incursion of the devils. This is the determination of God, the Eminent, the Omniscient.

The consequence for turning away is then mentioned, *“But if they turn away, say you, ‘I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the one which overtook ‘Ad and Thamud.’ When their messengers came to them from before them and from behind them, saying, ‘Worship none but God.’ They said, ‘If our Lord had willed, He surely would have sent down angels, so we disbelieve in that which you have been sent with.’ As for ‘Ad, they were arrogant in the land without right, and they said, ‘Who is mightier than us in power?’ Could they not see that God who created them, He was mightier than them in power? And they rejected Our revelations. So We sent against them a raging wind in evil days, that We might give them a taste of the torment of humiliation in this life; but the torment of the Hereafter will be more humiliating still; and they will find no help. As for Thamud, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness (of heart) over guidance; so the stunning torment of humiliation seized them, because of what they had earned. But We delivered those who believed and were conscious of God.”* This dire warning which was issued to the idolaters of Mecca came as an appropriate response to their audacity and stubbornness in associating partners with God. The story behind this warning has been narrated by Ibn Ishaq.

One day the chiefs of Quraish were debating what to do in face of the increasing strength of Islam as the number of the Muslims grew larger. ‘Utba Ibn Rabee’a suggested that he would

negotiate an agreement with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He then went to see the Prophet (PBUH). He said, *“The son of my brother, we recognize your rank and status among us, but you brought this new religion which spread divisions among the members of the community. Let me offer you an agreement to resolve this situation.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“I am listening.”* ‘Utba said, *“If it were wealth you are after, we could raise a huge amount of money to give you. If it were honor and status that you are after, we could make you a king over us. If the revelation that you say you receive is a hallucination spell that overcomes you, we could seek the best of doctors to treat you and we would spare no amount of money in order for you to get cured.”* The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Now it is your turn to listen to me.”* The Prophet (PBUH) recited this Sura while ‘Utba listened to him. When he finished, ‘Utba left and went back to his colleagues. When they saw him, they noticed that his demeanor has changed. He said to the chiefs of Quraish, *“By God, I never heard anything like what I heard from Muhammad. It is not the words of a magician, a poet, or a soothsayer. My advice is to leave this man alone. I think his words will soon spread among the Arabs. The Arabs may reject his message and destroy him, this way you are saved of the trouble of dealing with him; but if they accept his message, honored him, and raised him to prominence you would have a share in the honor that he will receive.”* His colleagues did not like his advice; they thought that he was bewitched by Muhammad’s (PBUH) recitation.

The following verses illustrate the power that God has over His creation. Human beings do not even have control over their own senses. Only God has absolute power, *“On the day that the enemies of God will be gathered together to the Fire, they will be marched in ranks. When they reach it, their hearing, their sight, and their skins will bear witness against them as to what they used to do. They will say to their skins, ‘Why did you bear witness against us?’ They will say, ‘God has given us the ability to speak as He has given the ability to speak to everything. He created you in the first instance, and to Him you will be brought back. You did not seek to hide yourselves, lest your hearing, your sight, and your skins should bear witness against you. But you did think that God knew not many of the things that you used to do. And this thought of yours which you did entertain concerning your Lord, has ruined you; and you find yourselves (this day) among the losers.’”* On the Day of Judgment, the enemies of God will be gathered in flocks. They will march to Hell fire. Their tongues will be tied but their senses of hearing, seeing, and feeling will speak. Their senses will bear witness to what they used to do. They committed sins in secret thinking that God was unaware of what they did, but here are their own senses bearing witness against them. What a horrible surprise will the disbelievers have? They will ask their skins why did they testify against them and the response will be, *“God has given us the ability to speak as He has given the ability to speak to everything.”* God will enable the skins to speak as He enabled the tongues to speak. He created you and to Him you will return. There is no escape from Him. Their skins will reiterate the facts that their minds rejected before.

*“And though they may persevere, yet the Fire is still their abode; and if they ask for favor, they are not of those on whom favors can be bestowed.”* Now it is too late, whether they resign themselves to accept the punishment or seek forgiveness, their destination is Hell fire.

The verses go back to their life on earth and explain how their rejection of faith brought them into the company of evil friends, *“And We have assigned them companions, who made alluring to them what was before them and what was behind them; and the sentence has come into effect on generations of jinn and people before them, who have passed away. They were ever losers.”* Having known the state of their corrupt hearts, God assigned to them evil companions who tempted them further in committing sins. They thought that they can arrogantly reject the belief in their Creator but they ended up losing everything.

One of the tactics of the chiefs of Quraish was to prohibit people from listening to the Quran, *“The disbelievers say, ‘Do not listen to this Quran, and make noise (while it is being recited), perhaps you may prevail.’”* They were afraid that people will be bewitched when they listen to the Quran. They even went further by asking people to distract the believers when they start reciting the Quran. These were desperate measures that they had to take recourse to, since they were unable to challenge the Quran on rational basis. God threatened them with severe punishment as a response to these tactics, *“But verily We shall cause those who disbelieve to taste painful torment, and verily We shall recompense them according to the worst of what they used to do. That is the recompense of God's enemies: The Fire. Therein is their immortal home, payment for their rejection of Our revelations.”* On the Day of Judgment, when they will see themselves in Hell fire, they will be angry at those who misled them before, *“And the disbelievers will say, ‘Our Lord, show us those, among jinn and people, who misled us; so that We shall place them underneath our feet, so that they become the lowest.’”*

The situation of the believers is contrasted against the situation of the disbelievers. God will command the angels to fill the hearts of the believers with harmony, peace, and security in their lifetime and bring them glad tidings of their admission to paradise, *“Those who say, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and continue on the straight path, the angels descend upon them, saying, ‘Fear not nor grieve, but hear good tidings of the paradise which you were promised. We are your allies in this life and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have all that your souls shall desire; therein you shall have all that you ask for.’”* On the Day of Judgment they will be given the gift of welcome to paradise because they remained on the straight path during their lifetime, *“A gift of welcome from the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.”* Remaining on the straight path is a challenging feat, thus it deserves great bounty from God.

This group of verses end with a directive to the Prophet (PBUH) outlining the attributes which a person who calls to God should have, *“Who is better in speech than one who calls to God, does good deeds, and says, ‘I am of those who submit to God’?”* Calling people to God is a difficult task. People rejection to such calls may be motivated by their fear of losing power, status, or wealth. They may be even simply stubborn. The task of calling people to God is the noblest task that anyone can undertake. The person who calls to God should do so in a nice way even if the people ridiculed or abused him, *“The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better, then he, between you and him there was enmity (will become) as though he was a bosom friend.”* One should respond to a bad word with a good word. This tactic may even remove the enmity between people. This is a major undertaking. Those who are able to

do so will be given a great reward, *“And no one will be granted (such goodness) except those who persevere, and none is granted it except those who have the greatest good fortune.”*

Ibn Katheer said, *“’Ali ibn abi Talha quoted Ibn ‘Abbas’ interpretation of this verse. He said, ‘The verse commands the believers to persevere when they are angry, to be forbearing when they are insulted, and to forgive when they wronged. If they do so, then God will protect them from Satan. Those who wronged them will become their friends.’”*

The Prophet (PBUH) gave the best example of this practice. He never became angry in response to personal abuse or insult. Anger is motivated by Satan, *“And if a whisper from the devil reaches you then seek refuge in God. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* The response of the believer should be to seek refuge with God.

### **Verses 37 to 54:**

37. *Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to God, who created them, if it is Him you worship.*
38. *But if they are arrogant, those in the presence of your Lord do celebrate His praise by night and by day; and they are never tired.*
39. *And among His signs that you see the earth barren; but when We send down rain on it, it is stirred to life and grows. Truly, He who gives life to the (dead) earth can surely give life to (people) who are dead. He has power over all things.*
40. *Those who distort Our revelations are not hidden from Us. Which is better? he who is cast into the Fire or he that comes safe through, on the Day of Resurrection? Do what you will; verily He sees all that you do.*
41. *Those who disbelieved in the message when it came to them. And indeed it is an invincible Book.*
42. *No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by the Wise, the Praised.*
43. *Nothing was said to you that was not said to the messengers before you. Indeed, your Lord is the owner of forgiveness, and owner of dire punishment.*
44. *Had We sent this as a Quran (in a language) other than Arabic, they would have said, “Why are not its verses explained in detail?” Is it a non-Arabic book and an Arab Messenger? Say, “It is a guide and a healing for those who believe; and for those who disbelieve, there is deafness in their ears, and blindness in their (eyes). It is as if they were being called from a distant place.”*
45. *We certainly gave Moses the Scripture but disputes arose therein. Had it not been for a decree that went forth before from your Lord, (their differences) would have been settled between them; but they are in hopeless doubt concerning it.*
46. *Whoever does good deeds, it benefits his own soul; whoever does evil deeds, it is against his own soul. Your Lord is never unjust to the servants.*
47. *To Him is referred the knowledge of the Hour (of Judgment). No date-fruit comes out of its sheath, nor does a female conceive except by His knowledge. And on the Day when He will call upon them, “Where are the partners you attributed to Me?” They will say, “We declare to You, none of us is a witness.”*

48. *And those whom they used to invoke before failed them; and they realized that there is no escape for them.*
49. *Humankind does not tire of asking for good, and if ill touches him, then he is despairing, hopeless.*
50. *When we give him a taste of mercy from Ourselves after some adversity has touched him, he is sure to say, "This is my own; and I do not expect the Hour will ever come, and if I am brought back to my Lord, I will surely be better off with Him - But We verily shall tell those who disbelieve (all) what they did, and We verily shall make them taste hard torment.*
51. *When We bestow blessings on humankind, he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil touches him, he makes lengthy supplications.*
52. *Say, "Do you see if the (Revelation) is (really) from God, and you reject it? Who is more astray than one who is in a prolonged schism?"*
53. *We will show them our signs in the horizons, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord does witness all things?*
54. *Are they still in doubt about the meeting with their Lord? Does not He encompass all things. (41: 37 – 54)*

*“Among His signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Do not prostrate to the sun or the moon, but prostrate to God, Who created them, if it is Him you worship.”* These are apparent signs that can be seen by everyone. They are fascinating signs dearly cherished by the human heart even if the person is ignorant of its scientific significance. The Quran always tries to evoke the feelings that connect the humankind to these signs. However, some people took their fascination with these signs a step further. They started worshipping the sun and the moon and other cosmic planets. The verse’s objective is to rectify this transgression. It is telling these people that the Creator of these cosmic bodies is the one worthy of being worshipped. It does not matter if they persist, because God is being worshipped by His closest servants. The closest servants include the angels as well as others of His creatures, *“But if they are arrogant, those in the presence of your Lord do celebrate His praise by night and by day; and they are never tired.”*

Another of God’s signs is the earth, from which they were created and to which they will return. This is the earth which provides their sustenance. This earth stands in humility as it receives life from God, *“And among His signs that you see the earth barren; but when We send down rain on it, it is stirred to life and grows. Truly, He who gives life to the (dead) earth can surely give life to (people) who are dead. He has power over all things.”* The Arabic word which has been translated here as “barren,” has the connotation of standing in humility. One should stop here to reflect on the meaning of the expression that the earth is standing in humility. The term describes the state of complete calmness of the earth when it is dry. When water falls on the earth, its atoms vibrate and the soil grows as if it was expressing its gratitude and praying to God. The Creator who could to restore life to the dead earth can restore life to the dead human beings.

The verses then turn to rebuke and threaten those who ignore these signs and blaspheme God. God knows and sees all what they do. The threat of Hell fire is waiting for them, *“Those who distort Our revelations are not hidden from Us. Which is better? he who is cast into the Fire or he that comes safe through, on the Day of Resurrection? Do what you will; verily He sees all that you do.”*

The narrative turns to those who disbelieved in God’s revelation, *“Those who disbelieved in the message when it came to them. And indeed it is an invincible Book.”* The verse does not specify those who disbelieved nor does it spell out what will happen to them as if it is too disdainful to mention them explicitly. But the verse continues to praise the Book that they disbelieved in. This Book is invincible. Its integrity cannot be preached by falsehood because it is a revelation from the Wise, the Praised, *“No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by the Wise, the Praised.”*

God sent one single message, it the same message that was received by all messengers. People’s response to the message was always the same. The message was received by rejection, *“Nothing was said to you that was not said to the messengers before you. Indeed, your Lord is the owner of forgiveness, and owner of dire punishment.”* These were comforting words to the Prophet (PBUH) telling him that he does not stand alone. He is a member of the big family of the messengers chosen by God to carry the responsibility of delivering His message to humankind. He was further comforted by the reminder that God is, *“Indeed, your Lord is the owner of forgiveness, and owner of dire punishment.”*

*“Had We sent this as a Quran (in a language) other than Arabic, they would have said, ‘Why are not its verses explained in detail?’ Is it a non-Arabic book and an Arab Messenger?”* Even though the Quran was written in the language of the Arabs, they chose to ignore it. Not only they prohibited people to listen to its recitation but they also commanded people to make noise while it was recited to distract anyone who wanted to listen. Had it been revealed in another language, they would have raised other objections. The crux of the matter is that this Quran brings healing to the souls of the believers. The disbelievers are deaf, they cannot hear the Quran being recited; and they are blind, they cannot see its signs, *“Say, ‘It is a guide and a healing for those who believe; and for those who disbelieve, there is deafness in their ears, and blindness in their (eyes). It is as if they were being called from a distant place.’”*

The verses make reference to the Scripture which has been revealed to Moses (PBUH) as an example of the divine Scriptures, *“We certainly gave Moses the Scripture but disputes arose therein. Had it not been for a decree that went forth before from your Lord, (their differences) would have been settled between them; but they are in hopeless doubt concerning it.”*

Then the golden rule is stated: the punishment and reward are congruent with the deed, *“Whoever does good deeds, it benefits his own soul; whoever does evil deeds, it is against his own soul. Your Lord is never unjust to the servants.”*

Only God knows when the Hour will take place, *“To Him is referred the knowledge of the Hour (of Judgment). No date-fruit comes out of its sheath, nor does a female conceive except by His knowledge. And on the Day when He will call upon them, ‘Where are the partners you attributed to Me?’ They will say, ‘We declare to You, none of us is a witness.’”* The Hour is part of the unseen, similarly the date-fruit in its sheath and the baby in its mother’s womb are part of the unseen.

*“And those whom they used to invoke before failed them; and they realized that there is no escape for them. Humankind does not tire of asking for good, and if ill touches him, then he is despairing, hopeless. When we give him a taste of mercy from Ourselves after some adversity has touched him, he is sure to say, ‘This is my own; and I do not expect the Hour will ever come, and if I am brought back to my Lord, I will surely be better off with Him’ - But We verily shall tell those who disbelieve (all) what they did, and We verily shall make them taste hard torment.”* Greed is a trait for those who are not guided. They always want more. But when they are touched by an affliction, they despair. Because they had severed their ties with God, they have no one to seek refuge with when a calamity strikes. However, when God bestows a bounty on them, they forget to show gratitude to God. They think they earned the bounty as a result of their efforts, *“When We bestow blessings on humankind, he turns away, and gets himself remote on his side (instead of coming to Us); and when evil touches him, he makes lengthy supplications.”*

*“Say, ‘Do you see if the (Revelation) is (really) from God, and you reject it? Who is more astray than one who is in a prolonged schism?’”* What will the disbelievers do when the truth that the Quran was God’s revelation, is revealed? They should have at least considered this possibility.

*“Soon will We show them our signs in the horizons, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord does witness all things? Are they still in doubt about the meeting with their Lord? Does not He encompass all things.”* This is a promise that God will show humankind some of His signs. These signs will reveal some of the unseen facts about the universe and about themselves. This promise was fulfilled to a great extent during the last fourteen centuries. Humankind gained a great deal of knowledge about the facts surrounding the nature of creation, the composition of the universe, the matter, and the earth. Many discoveries were made which revealed the laws that control the motion of the earth and the other planets. Studies of the human bodies led to discoveries about the nature and composition of the human body. More is known about the ailments that afflict the human body and how to cure them. More is being revealed about the human spirituality and human psyche. As time goes by, we will know more about the signs of God in the horizons and in ourselves.

## Sura 42: Al-Shura (Consultation)

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

### Verses 1 to 24:

1. *Ha-Mim*
2. *'Ain. Sin. Qaf.*
3. *Thus does (He) send revelation to you as (He did) to those before you, God, the Eminent, the Wise.*
4. *To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that on earth; and He is the Most High, the Great.*
5. *The heavens are almost rent asunder from above and the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for (all) beings on earth. Verily God is He, the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.*
6. *And those who take as protecting guardians others besides Him, God watches over them; and you are not a guardian over them.*
7. *Thus We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the Mother of the cities and those around it; and warn (them) of the Day of the Assembly, of which there is no doubt; (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the blazing Fire.*
8. *If God had so willed, He could have made them a single people; but He admits whom He wills to His mercy; and the wrongdoers will have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper.*
9. *Or have they chosen protecting guardians besides Him? But God, He (alone) is the Protecting Guardian. He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things.*
10. *And in whatsoever you differ, the verdict therein belongs to God. Such is my Lord, in whom I put my trust, and to whom I turn;*
11. *The Creator of the heavens and the earth. He made for you pairs of yourselves, and of the cattle also pairs, whereby He multiplies you. Nothing is like Him; and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing.*
12. *To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. He enlarges and restricts the sustenance to whom He wills; for He has full knowledge of everything.*
13. *He ordained for you that religion which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed to you (Muhammad), and that which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, saying, "Establish the religion, and be not divided therein." It seems dreadful for the idolaters, that which you are calling them to. God chooses for Himself whom He wills, and guides unto Himself him who turns (toward Him).*
14. *And they became divided only after knowledge reached them, through selfish envy between themselves. Had it not been for a word that went forth before, from your Lord, for an appointed term, the matter would have been settled between them. But truly those who have inherited the Scripture after them are in disquieting doubt concerning it.*
15. *So to that (religion) invite (Muhammad). And remain upright as you are commanded, and do not follow their whims, but say, "I believe in whatever Scripture God has sent down, and I am commanded to judge justly among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds and for you are your deeds; no argument between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is the return."*



16. *But those who dispute concerning God after He has been accepted, futile is their dispute in the sight of their Lord. For them will be a severe torment.*
17. *It is God who has sent down the Book with the truth and the balance. How can you know? It may be that the Hour is near.*
18. *Those who do not believe therein seek to hasten it, while those who believe are fearful of it and know that it is the truth. Now most surely those who dispute obstinately concerning the Hour are in a great error.*
19. *God is Subtle with His servants. He provides for whom He wills. And He is the Strong, the Eminent.*
20. *Whoso desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We increase for him his harvest. And whoso desires the harvest of this world, We give him thereof, and he has no portion in the Hereafter.*
21. *Or have they partners (of God) who have made lawful for them in religion that which God did not allow? Were it not for a decisive word (gone forth already), it would have been judged between them. The wrongdoers will have a painful torment.*
22. *You will see the wrongdoers in fear on account of what they have earned, and (the burden of) that must fall on them. But those who believe and do righteous deeds will be in the flowering meadows of the Gardens. They will have what they wish from their Lord. This is the supreme blessing.*
23. *That is what God gives glad tidings of to His servants who believed and did righteous deeds. Say, "I ask you no reward for this except the love of those near of kin." And if any one earns any good, We shall add to its good for him; God is All-Forgiving, Grateful.*
24. *Or do they say, "He has invented a lie about God?" If God willed, He could have sealed your heart. And God will wipe out the lie and will establish the truth by His words. He is Aware of what is hidden in the breasts (of people). (42: 1 – 24)*

The theme of this Sura, like the other Meccan Suras, is the doctrine. However, the discussion is focused on the truthfulness of the revelation and the Message. It could be said that this is the main theme of the Sura. Other topics are woven into the discussion; however, they are all connected somehow to the main theme. Some of these topics are the concept of the Oneness of God, the inevitability of the Hereafter, description of the scenes of the Hereafter, the attributes of the believers, the different levels of livelihood awarded to people and the response of humankind to afflictions and happy times. However, the truthfulness of the revelation and the Message remain the prominent themes that all these topics revolve around.

*"Ha-Mim A'in. Sin. Qaf. Thus does (He) send revelation to you as (He did) to those before you, God, the Eminent, the Wise. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that on earth; and He is the Most High, the Great. The heavens are almost rent asunder from above and the angels celebrate the praise of their Lord, and pray for forgiveness for (all) beings on earth. Verily God is He, the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy. And those who take as protecting guardians others besides Him, God watches over them; and you are not a guardian over them."* We have dealt with significance of the incursive Alphabetical letters that appear in the beginning of some Suras before. The Sura starts with a statement addressed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about the revelation. He has been given a revelation similar to the revelations that were given to previous messengers of God. It consists of words and expressions which people are familiar with and whose meanings and significance can be understood by them, however they will not be able to

compose similar text. The statement also determines in an unequivocal tone that God, the Eminent, the Wise is the source of all revelations. All the revelations received by God's messengers, over the span of the history of humanity, embody the same message. This establishes the authenticity of the message and the common bond that binds all the believers who believed in the different revelations at all times and in all places. God has the power to choose whomsoever He wills to be a recipient of His revelation and He does that wisely. He is the true owner of the kingdom of heavens and earth. People's ownership of things is a transient ownership but God's ownership is permanent and eternal. He is the Most High, the Great. Once these facts are understood, people should then realize that God is the only One worthy of being asked. No human being can give. God is the Giver.

The heaven consists of the huge constellations which we see above us as inhabitants of the earth. We truly, know very little about them. These huge constellations are almost rent asunder as a result of their fear of God and being in awe of Him. The angels continue to praise God. They recognize the shortcomings of people living on earth and they worry about God's wrath in response to this deviation, so they continually ask God to forgive the inhabitants of the earth. They have hope in God's mercy because He is the All-Forgiving the Giver of Mercy. The verses reiterate God's attributes: Eminence, Wisdom, Highness, Greatness, Forgiveness, and Mercy. The verses then absolve the Messenger of God (PBUH) of any responsibility of the sin of those who associate partners with God. The Prophet (PBUH) is told that he was not sent as a keeper over them. He was only sent to deliver the Message.

*“Thus We revealed to you an Arabic Quran, that you may warn the Mother of the cities and those around it; and warn (them) of the Day of the Assembly, of which there is no doubt; (when) some will be in the Garden, and some in the blazing Fire.”* God decided, in His wisdom, to reveal this Quran in the Arabic language and to send a messenger who lives in Mecca with His Message. God knows best where and to whom He sends His Message. The Message came to warn people to be ready for the Day of Assembly. On that Day it will be decided who will be destined to Hell fire and who will be the happy inhabitant of paradise. God could have made them all a single nation; but His will was to create humankind to carry the responsibility of being God's vicegerents on earth. Humankind had to be created with special attributes that enable him to carry this responsibility. One of these attributes is the ability to choose whether to be guided or to reject guidance, *“If God had so willed, He could have made them a single people; but He admits whom He wills to His mercy; and the wrongdoers will have neither a protecting guardian nor a helper.”* Those who reject guidance and choose to associate partners with God will have no protection, because God is the only protector and He has the power over all things, *“Or have they chosen protecting guardians besides Him? But God, He (alone) is the Protecting Guardian. He gives life to the dead, and He has power over all things.”*

*“And in whatsoever you differ, the verdict therein belongs to God. Such is my Lord, in whom I put my trust, and to whom I turn.”* Since the message was revealed by God, then He is the only One worthy of settling the disputes that may result. God has revealed His final decree in the Quran. The Prophet (PBUH) bears witness that, *“Such is my Lord, in whom I put my trust, and to whom I turn.”* Therefore, all the believers should turn to God to settle all disputes. This is comforting to the believers. They know who they should reach to, to settle the disputes and there

should be no doubt or hesitation in accepting God's verdict. God is the only one worthy of settling the disputes because He is, *"The Creator of the heavens and the earth."* It is He who organized the lives of people and created them to be able to fit in the life on earth, *"He made for you pairs of yourselves, and of the cattle also pairs, whereby He multiplies you. Nothing is like Him; and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing."* He is the Provider, He provides according to His wisdom and He knows everything, *"To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth. He enlarges and restricts the sustenance to whom He wills; for He has full knowledge of everything."*

The narrative then goes back to the main theme, the oneness of the revelation, *"He ordained for you that religion which He enjoined upon Noah, and that which We revealed to you (Muhammad), and that which We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, saying, 'Establish the religion, and be not divided therein.' It seems dreadful for the idolaters, that which you are calling them to. God chooses for Himself whom He wills, and guides unto Himself him who turns (toward Him)."* This verse expands on the verse that came in the beginning of the Sura which stated the oneness of the revelation. The present verse enunciates this fact specifying the names of the previous messengers of God who received similar revelations. The revelation that was sent to Muhammad (PBUH) is similar to the revelation that was sent to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (PBUT). They all brought the same Message from God. There is a bond that binds the followers of these messengers. They should not then fight among themselves but should be united. But the idolaters of Mecca, who used to claim that they were following the religion of Abraham (PBUH) did not accept the Message which Muhammad (PBUH) brought. They did not think that Muhammad (PBUH) is worthy of being a messenger of God, they wanted the message to be given to one of the elite in their city. They were also afraid of the effect of the new religion on their power and financial interests. God chooses whom He wills to be the recipient of His revelation.

The followers of the previous messengers became divided because they envied each other. They knew the truth but they chose to fight each other. They deserved to be punished right there and then, but God decided to give them a reprieve for an appointed term, *"And they became divided only after knowledge reached them, through selfish envy between themselves. Had it not been for a word that went forth before, from your Lord, for an appointed term, the matter would have been settled between them. But truly those who have inherited the Scripture after them are in disquieting doubt concerning it."*

God sent His Messenger, Muhammad (PBUH) and commanded him to remain upright on the straight path, *"So to that (religion) invite (Muhammad). And remain upright as you are commanded, and do not follow their whims, but say, 'I believe in whatever scripture God has sent down, and I am commanded to judge justly among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds and for you are your deeds; no argument between us and you. God will bring us together, and to Him is the return.'"* This is the new leader who was sent to lead the whole humanity along the enlightened path, a straight path far from the whims and desires of those who are disputing with each other. The verse describes the characteristics of this Message. It is a message that came to unite all people together and to establish justice on earth. Those who continue to dispute after this, have nothing to support their argument, *"But those who dispute*

*concerning God after He has been accepted, futile is their dispute in the sight of their Lord. For them will be a severe torment.”*

*“It is God who has sent down the Book with the truth and the balance. How can you know? It may be that the Hour is near.”* God brought down the Book with truth and He established justice. Justice will also be established on the Day of Judgment; and who knows, it may be soon. The believers believe in the inevitability of the Day of Judgment and they are fearful of it, but the disbelievers are heedless of its consequences, *“Those who do not believe therein seek to hasten it, while those who believe are fearful of it and know that it is the truth. Now most surely those who dispute obstinately concerning the Hour are in a great error.”*

God is Subtle in dealing with His servants, He bestows His provision on all His servants, because human beings are unable to provide for themselves, *“God is Subtle with His servants. He provides for whom He wills. And He is the Strong, the Eminent.”* However, He treats those whose goal is the harvest of the Hereafter differently from those whose goal is the harvest of this life, *“Whoso desires the harvest of the Hereafter, We increase for him his harvest. And whoso desires the harvest of this world, We give him thereof, and he has no portion in the Hereafter.”*

The narrative then goes back to the main theme, *“Or have they partners (of God) who have made lawful for them in religion that which God did not allow? Were it not for a decisive word (gone forth already), it would have been judged between them. The wrongdoers will have a painful torment.”* Who gave them permission to follow laws different from what God has decreed? No one has the right to do that. It is the exclusive right of God to legislate the laws that organize the lives of His servants. God decreed that those who dispute this fact will be reprieved till the Day of Judgment. On the Day of Judgment, *“You will see the wrongdoers in fear on account of what they have earned, and (the burden of) that must fall on them. But those who believe and do righteous deeds will be in the flowering meadows of the Gardens. They will have what they wish from their Lord. This is the supreme blessing.”*

The Messenger (PBUH) was then commanded to remind the believers, *“That is what God gives glad tidings of to His servants who believed and did righteous deeds. Say, ‘I ask you no reward for this except the love of those near of kin.’ And if any one earns any good, We shall add to its good for him; God is All-Forgiving, Grateful.”* The Messenger (PBUH) was not asking them to reward him for guiding them to the bliss in the Hereafter, but he felt obligated to bring them the glad tidings to fulfill his obligation dictated by the kin relationship between them and him.

*“Or do they say, ‘He has invented a lie about God?’ If God willed, He could have sealed your heart. And God will wipe out the lie and will establish the truth by His words. He is Aware of what is hidden in the breasts (of people).”* No one can fabricate a revelation and claim that it is from God. God could have sealed on Muhammad’s (PBUH) heart and prevented him from uttering such a fabrication.

## Verses 25 to 53:

25. *It is He who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons the evil deeds, and He knows all what you do.*
26. *And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His bounty; and the disbelievers shall have a severe torment.*
27. *If God were to enlarge the provision for His servants, they would indeed transgress all limits on earth; but He sends down in due measure as He pleases. He is Totally-Aware and All-seeing of His servants.*
28. *It is He who sends down rain after people have given up all hope, and spreads His Mercy. And He is the Protecting Guardian, the Praised.*
29. *And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures that He has scattered through them; and He has power to gather them together when He wills.*
30. *Whatever misfortune happens to you is because of the things that your hands have earned; and He pardons much.*
31. *You cannot escape (God) on earth, and beside God you have no protecting guardian or a helper.*
32. *And among His signs are the ships that sail smoothly on the sea like mountains.*
33. *If He pleases, He can cause the wind to become still so that they lie motionless on its back; most surely there are signs in this for every perseverant, grateful one.*
34. *Or He can destroy them because of the (evil) which (the people) have earned; but He pardons much.*
35. *And those who dispute Our revelations know they have no escape.*
36. *Whatever you have been given is but a passing comfort for the life of this world, but that which God has is better and more lasting for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord.*
37. *And those who avoid major sins and indecencies, and they forgive even when they are angry;*
38. *And those who respond to their Lord; establish prayer; and conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; and who spend out of what We have given them;*
39. *And those who, when they are wronged, they defend themselves.*
40. *The recompense for an ill-deed is a deed like it. But whosoever pardons and amends, he shall have his reward from God. Indeed, He does not love the wrongdoers.*
41. *But indeed if any do defend themselves after being wronged, for such, there is no blame against them.*
42. *The blame is only against those who wrong people and transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying rights; for such there will be painful torment.*
43. *And verily whoso perseveres and forgives, that is indeed a sign of real resolve.*
44. *He whom God leaves to go astray, there is no protecting guardian apart from Him. And you will see the wrongdoers, when they see the torment will say, "Is there any way of return?"*

45. *And you will see them exposed to (the Fire), made humble by disgrace, and looking with veiled eyes. And those who believe will say, "The (eternal) losers are they who lose themselves and their people on the Day of Resurrection." Truly, the wrongdoers will remain in perpetual torment?*
46. *And they will have no protecting guardians to help them besides God. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no way.*
47. *Answer the call of your Lord before there comes to you a Day from God which cannot be averted. You have no refuge on that Day, nor will you have any (power of) refusal.*
48. *If then they turn away, We did not send you as a keeper over them. Your duty is only to convey (the Message). And truly, when We give humankind a taste of mercy from Ourselves, he exults in it; but when evil strikes him, on account of the deeds which his hands have sent forth, truly then is humankind ungrateful.*
49. *To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills. He bestows (children) females on whomsoever He wills and He bestows males on whomsoever He wills.*
50. *Or He bestows both males and females, and He makes barren whom He wills. He is Omniscient, All-Powerful.*
51. *It is not fitting for a human being that God should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, with God's permission, what God wills. He is Most High, Wise.*
52. *And thus have We, by Our command, sent a revelation to you. You did not know (before) what is the Book, or what is the faith. But We have made the (Quran) a light, with which We guide whomsoever We will from Our servants; and verily you do guide to the straight path.*
53. *The path of God, to whom belong whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. All affairs will return back to God. (42: 25 - 53)*

*"It is He who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons the evil deeds, and He knows all what you do." This verse exhorts people to repent; telling them that God accepts repentance and forgives sins. They should take advantage of God's grace before it is too late, "And He answers those who believe and do good deeds, and gives them more out of His bounty; and the disbelievers shall have a severe torment."*

God controls the provision of people. He sends down provision in a measured way because affluence tends to increase people's transgression, *"If God were to enlarge the provision for His servants, they would indeed transgress all limits on earth; but He sends down in due measure as He pleases. He is Totally-Aware and All-seeing of His servants."*

When drought threatens life on earth and people feel desperate, God sends down rain which is the source of life to revive the land by His grace, *"It is He who sends down rain after people have given up all hope, and spreads His Mercy. And He is the Protecting Guardian, the Praised."*

*“And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the living creatures that He has scattered through them; and He has power to gather them together when He wills.”* The creation of heavens and earth is one of God’s signs. No one can dispute its truthfulness. God scattered His creatures on the earth. Whatever, the human being earns is the fruit of his deeds, *“Whatever misfortune happens to you is because of the things that your hands have earned; and He pardons much.”* God bestows His mercy and pardons much of the sins people commit.

The previous verses talked about God’s power, compare that with humankind’s helplessness, *“You cannot escape (God) on earth, and beside God you have no protecting friend or a helper.”*

The ships sailing at sea smoothly are one of the signs of God. Who created the sea? Who created the characteristics of the sea for ships to be able to sail on it? Who created the wind that pushes the ships to move forward? All these are signs of God. God could make the wind to calm down and the ships will stop moving, *“And among His signs are the ships that sail smoothly on the sea like mountains. If He pleases, He can cause the wind to become still so that they lie motionless on its back; most surely there are signs in this for every perseverant, grateful one. Or He can destroy them because of the (evil) which (the people) have earned; but He pardons much.”* God bestows His mercy and forgives. Yet there are those who still dispute, *“And those who dispute Our revelations know they have no refuge.”*

The material comfort that people were given is a transient comfort, the real value is what will be given in the Hereafter. This is the provision that God is saving for those who believe. The following verses expand on the attributes of the believers, *“Whatever you have been given is but a passing comfort for the life of this world, but that which God has is better and more lasting for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; and those who avoid major sins and indecencies, and they forgive even when they are angry; and those who respond to their Lord; establish prayer; and conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; and who spend out of what We have given them; and those who, when they are wronged, they defend themselves. The recompense for an ill-deed is a deed like it. But whosoever pardons and amends, he shall have his reward from God. Indeed, He does not love the wrongdoers. But indeed if any do defend themselves after being wronged, for such, there is no blame against them. The blame is only against those who wrong people and transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying rights; for such there will be painful torment. And verily whoso perseveres and forgives, that is indeed a sign of real resolve.”*

These are the attributes of the believers. It is interesting to note that these verses were revealed in Mecca, however it lists among the attributes of the believers that they, *“conduct their affairs by mutual consultation.”* In Mecca there was no Muslim state. This implies that the principle of consultation is more than a political system to be adopted by the state. It is an ingrained characteristic of any group of Muslims. When a group of Muslims form a state, it then becomes a natural component of the system of government. Another interesting attribute is that they defend themselves when they are wronged. However, while in Mecca, the Muslims were commanded to persevere and not to retaliate against those who persecuted them; a command which was later changed when they migrated to Medina. Again, this implies that part of the Muslim character is not to accept persecution and oppression. It becomes natural for Muslims to defend themselves

against persecution. The command to persevere in Mecca was a tactical command issued to address a special circumstance.

The list of the attributes of Muslims is impressive: the belief in God, putting one's trust in God, avoiding major sins and indecencies, forgiveness when gripped by anger, responding to God's call, establishing prayers, spending out of God's bounty in His sake, defending oneself against oppression, pardoning and amending instead of retaliating, and perseverance. These are the characters of Muslims who realize that the pleasures of the life of this world are transient pleasures. The reward that God saved for those who enjoy these attributes is the eternal reward.

The verses juxtapose the horrible condition of the disbelievers in the Hereafter against the bliss in which the believers will revel in, *"He whom God leaves to go astray, there is no protecting guardian apart from Him. And you will see the wrongdoers, when they see the torment will say, 'Is there any way of return?' And you will see them exposed to (the Fire), made humble by disgrace, and looking with veiled eyes."* God's decree cannot be reversed. When God knows that a person deserves to be left to go astray, the decree will be issued that this person is a member of the nation that went astray. There will be no one to help or save that person. On the Day of Judgment when the disbelievers will see the punishment, they will cry, *"Is there any way of return?"* But it will be late, *"And those who believe will say, 'The (eternal) losers are they who lose themselves and their people on the Day of Resurrection.' Truly, the wrongdoers will remain in perpetual torment? And they will have no protecting guardians to help them besides God. He whom God sends astray, for him there is no way."*

A call will then be issued to those who rejected guidance to heed the warning before it is too late, *"Answer the call of your Lord before there comes to you a Day from God which cannot be averted. You have no refuge on that Day, nor will you have any (power of) refusal."* The task of the Messenger of God (PBUH) was explained, *"If then they turn away, We did not send you as a keeper over them. Your duty is only to convey (the Message)."*

Then the vulnerable nature of the human being is expounded, *"And truly, when We give humankind a taste of mercy from Ourselves, he exults in it; but when evil strikes him, on account of the deeds which his hands have sent forth, truly then is humankind ungrateful."* Why then they were adamant in their rejection of God's guidance, when God has the power over everything, *"To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He creates what He wills. He bestows (children) males on whomsoever He wills and He bestows females on whomsoever He wills. Or He bestows both males and females, and He makes barren whom He will. He is Omniscient, All-Powerful."*

At the end of the Sura, the narrative turns again to the main theme of the Sura, the truthfulness of the message and the revelation. The following verses explain the way God communicates His revelation to His messengers, *"It is not fitting for a human being that God should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, with God's permission, what God wills. He is Most High, Wise. And thus have We, by Our command, sent a revelation to you. You did not know (before) what is the Book, or what is the faith. But We have made the (Quran) a light, with which We guide whomsoever We will from Our servants; and*



*verily you do guide to the straight path. The path of God, to whom belong whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. All affairs will return back to God.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) himself told us about the ways the revelation was communicated to him.

Sometimes the Prophet (PBUH) received an inspiration that he (PBUH) felt in his heart without seeing the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“The Holy Spirit inspired me that no soul will die until it has fulfilled its term on earth and gained the provision that has been decreed for it. So, when you seek something be conscious of God and do it in a decent way.”*

Other times, the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH) came to the Prophet (PBUH) in a human form. The Archangel Gabriel (PBUH) then spoke to the Prophet (PBUH) and delivered God’s revelation to him.

Other times he would hear a noise like the ringing of a bell indicating the start of the delivery of the revelation. This was the most strenuous way for receiving the revelation.

Still a fourth way was when the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH) would come to the Prophet (PBUH) in his own angelic form, and he would deliver God’s revelation to the Prophet (PBUH).

These were the different ways through which the Messenger (PBUH) received the revelation. God is Most High, Wise. He sends his revelation from high above with wisdom to whomsoever He chooses.

Reading a verse dealing with the “revelation,” fills one with awe. One should wonder how can the revelation be communicated from the Immortal, Eternal to the tiny, mortal human soul? Prophet-hood is a magnificent feat and receiving the revelation is also a magnificent feat. But it is the blessing, the bounty, and the mercy of God that He willed that His guidance be revealed to humankind to guide them to the straight path.

The Prophet (PBUH), before receiving the revelation, never knew about the faith nor did he know about the Book; but God sent this revelation to him. God made this revelation a light to guide whomsoever He chooses to the straight path. This is the nature of the revelation; it is a guiding light. It guides to the straight path.

## **Sura 43: Al-Zukhruf (Ornaments)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Mecca except for verse 45. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars as to where was verse 45 revealed. Some said it was revealed during the trip of Israa and Mi'raj and others say that it was revealed in Medina. The Sura deals with the obstacles that faced the Islamic call and portrays the arguments which the disbelievers used to try to stem the progress of the call. It also describes the characteristics of the Quran.

#### **Verses 1 to 25:**

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *By the Book that makes things clear.*
3. *We have made it a Quran in Arabic that you may be able to understand.*
4. *And verily, it is in the Mother of the Book, which We possess; it is indeed sublime, full of wisdom.*
5. *Shall We utterly ignore you and hold back the reminder from you because you are a transgressing people?*
6. *How many a prophet did We send to earlier people?*
7. *And never came a prophet to them but they mocked him.*
8. *We destroyed people more powerful than them (the disbelievers of Mecca) - and the example of the people of old has passed away.*
9. *If you were to ask them, "Who created the heavens and the earth?" They would surely reply, "They were created by (Him), the Eminent, the Omniscient."*
10. *It is He, who made the earth a resting place for you, and placed roads for you therein, that you may find your way;*
11. *And who sent down water from the sky in due measure, and We revived a dead land therewith; and likewise you will you be brought forth;*
12. *He who created all the pairs, and made for you ships and the cattle you ride on.*
13. *In order that you may sit firm on their backs, and when so seated, you may celebrate the blessing of your Lord, and say, "Glory to Him who has subjected these to our (use), for we could never have accomplished this (by ourselves);*
14. *And to our Lord, surely, we will return."*
15. *And they assign to Him a part of His servants; humankind is clearly ungrateful.*
16. *Or did He choose daughters from what He created, and honored He you with sons?*
17. *And if one of them is given news of what he attributes to the Lord of Mercy his countenance is darkened and he is full of inward rage.*
18. *Is then one brought up among trinkets, and unable to give a clear account in a dispute (to be associated with God)?*
19. *And they make the angels, who are the servants of the Lord of Mercy, females. Did they witness their creation? Their testimony will be recorded and they will be questioned.*
20. *And they say, "If the Lord of Mercy had willed, we should not have worshipped them." They have no knowledge whatsoever of that. They are merely guessing.*
21. *Or have We given them any scripture before (this Quran) so that they are holding fast to it?*

22. *No indeed, but they say, "We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we are guided by their footsteps."*
23. *And thus, We did not send before you any warner in a town, but those who led easy lives in it said, "Surely we found our fathers on a course, and surely we are following in their footsteps."*
24. *(And the warner) said, "Even though I bring you better guidance than that you found your fathers following?" They answered, "We disbelieve in what you bring."*
25. *We exacted revenge on them; see what was the end of those who rejected (Truth). (43: 1 – 25)*

*"Ha. Mim. By the Book that makes things clear, We have made it a Quran in Arabic that you may be able to understand." God takes an oath by the Alphabetical letters of the Arabic language, then another oath by the Book that He revealed, to emphasize the fact that the Book was revealed in Arabic so that it could be understood by the Arabs whom God has chosen to carry His Message to the rest of the world. This Book is a supreme Book. God describes it as a sublime Book full of wisdom, "And verily, it is in the Mother of the Book, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, full of wisdom." The Arabs should have appreciated the great blessing that God bestowed upon them by choosing their language to be the vehicle for the transmission of the Quran. Instead they ridiculed the Message and turned away from it. God then threatened them, "Shall We utterly ignore you and hold back the reminder from you because you are a transgressing people?" In addition to the threat, they were reminded with the fate of the people before them who ridiculed their messengers in the same way, "How many a prophet did We send to earlier people. And never came a prophet to them but they mocked him. We destroyed people more powerful than them (the disbelievers of Mecca) - and the example of the people of old has passed away."*

What is astonishing about the behavior of the people of Mecca is that they did believe in God, the Creator. However, they did not translate this belief into its natural conclusion: the belief in the Oneness of God. They associated partners with Him; assigned to God daughters from among the angels; and worshipped these angels. The Quran tried to reason with them in a way that appeals to their initial natural disposition, *"If you were to ask them, 'Who created the heavens and the earth?' They would surely reply, 'They were created by (Him), the Eminent, the Omniscient.'"* The Quran takes the discussion further by portraying the attributes of God which supports His Oneness, *"It is He who made the earth a resting place for you, and placed roads for you therein, that you may find your way; and who sent down water from the sky in due measure, and We revived a dead land therewith; and likewise you will you be brought forth."* The verses reminded them of the wonders of the creation. God brings the water down in due measure to revive the land. Water is the source of life. God started life and He is able to resurrect people after their death as He is able to revive the land.

The fundamental rule underlying the creation, the concept of duality, is then stated, *"He who created all the pairs, and made for you ships and the cattle you ride on. In order that you may sit firm on their backs, and when so seated, you may celebrate the blessing of your Lord, and say, 'Glory to Him who has subjected these to our (use), for we could never have accomplished this*

*(by ourselves); and to our Lord, surely, we will return.*” The verses also remind humankind with the bounties that God bestowed on him, by making him vicegerent on earth. The verse teaches Muslims how to respond to God’s blessings using appropriate invocations. It also reminds them that these invocations are not merely a lip service but they are activities in which the words enunciated by the tongue are used to evoke feelings of gratitude in the hearts of the believers.

The narrative continues to deal with and refute the claims of the disbelievers about the relationship between the angels and God, *“And they assign to Him a part of His servants; humankind is clearly ungrateful. Or did He choose daughters from what He created, and honored He you with sons?”* The verse ridicules these false claims using simple logic. Why would the Creator choose the daughters and bestow sons on the disbelievers? Especially when they consider that having daughters is demeaning, *“And if one of them is given news of what he attributes to Lord of Mercy his countenance is darkened and he is full of inward rage. Is then one brought up among trinkets, and unable to give a clear account in a dispute (to be associated with God)?”*

They were then questioned about the basis of their claim, *“And they make the angels, who are the servants of the Lord of Mercy, females. Did they witness their creation? Their testimony will be recorded and they will be questioned.”* They will bear the dire consequences of making such false claims. But they made excuses, *“And they say, ‘If the Lord of Mercy had willed, we should not have worshipped them.’ They have no knowledge whatsoever of that. They are merely guessing.”* Were they given a book before this that supported their lame excuse? Not really, they followed blindly what their fathers were doing, *“Or have We given them any scripture before (this Quran) so that they are holding fast to it? No indeed, but they say, ‘We found our fathers following a certain religion, and we are guided by their footsteps.’”*

At the end of this discourse, the end of the previous nations which rejected the truth is portrayed, *“And thus, We did not send before you any warner in a town, but those who led easy lives in it said, ‘Surely we found our fathers on a course, and surely we are following their footsteps.’ (And the warner) said, ‘Even though I bring you better guidance than that you found your fathers following?’ They answered, ‘We disbelieve in what you bring.’ We exacted revenge on them; see what was the end of those who rejected (Truth).”* It is the same excuse that people who rejected the truth over the history made: we were simply following in the footsteps of our forefathers. Islam came to free the human intellect from the shackles of blind imitation, urging people to use their intellect to think logically and rationally.

### **Verses 26 to 56:**

26. *And when Abraham said to his father and his people, “I am innocent of what you worship.”*
27. *(I worship) only Him who created me, and He will certainly guide me.”*

28. *And he left it as a word to endure among his seed that they might return.*
29. *But I let these and their fathers enjoy life (only) till there came to them the truth and a messenger who makes things clear.*
30. *But when the truth came to them, they said, "This is sorcery, and we reject it."*
31. *And they say, "If only this Quran had been revealed to one of the great men of the two towns?"*
32. *Is it they who distribute the Mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned their livelihood among them in the life of this world; and We raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others in their service. But the Mercy of your Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass.*
33. *And were it not that (all) people would become one community (of disbelievers), We would have made for everyone that blasphemes against the Lord of Mercy, silver roofs for their houses and (silver) stairways on which to go up;*
34. *And for their houses doors (of silver) and couches whereon to recline;*
35. *And ornaments of gold. Yet all that would have been but a provision of the life of the world. And the Hereafter with your Lord will be for those who are conscious of Him.*
36. *And whoever is blinded from the remembrance of the Lord of Mercy, We appoint for him a devil, as an associate.*
37. *Such (devils) bar them from the path, but they think that they are being guided.*
38. *Till, when he comes to Us, he says (to his comrade), "If only were between me and you the distance of the east and the west - an evil comrade."*
39. *And it will not benefit you on that day, since you did wrong, that you will be partners in the torment.*
40. *Can you (Muhammad) make the deaf to hear, or can you guide the blind or him who is in evident error?*
41. *And if We take you away, We will surely exact revenge on them;*
42. *Otherwise We will show you that which We have promised them, for verily We have full power over them.*
43. *So hold fast to what has been revealed to you; verily you are on a straight path.*
44. *And indeed, it is a reminder for you and for your people; and soon you will be brought to account.*
45. *And ask our messengers whom We sent before you; did We appoint any deities other than the Lord of Mercy, to be worshipped?*
46. *And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations to Pharaoh and his chiefs, and he said, "I am a messenger of the Lord of the Worlds."*
47. *But when he came to them with Our signs, they laughed at them.*
48. *We showed them signs, one after another, each one was greater than the previous one. And We seized them with torment, in order that they might turn (to Us).*
49. *And they said, "Sorcerer, invoke your Lord for us, by virtue of His covenant with you, for we shall truly accept guidance."*
50. *But when We removed the torment from them, they broke their word.*
51. *And Pharaoh proclaimed among his people, saying, "My people, does not the dominion of Egypt belong to me and these rivers flowing underneath me? Do you not then see?"*
52. *Am I not better than this fellow, who is a contemptible wretch and can scarcely express himself clearly?*

53. *Why has he not been given any gold bracelets, and why did not the angels accompany him?"*
54. *Thus he made fools of his people, and they obeyed him. Truly they were transgressing people.*
55. *When at length they provoked Us, We exacted revenge on them, and We drowned them all.*
56. *And We made them a thing of the past, and an example for those who came after (them). (43: 26 – 56)*

The Arabs used to claim that they were the progeny of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and that they were the followers of his religion. The first claim is true but the second is false, because Abraham (PBUH) believed in the Oneness of God, he never associated partners with Him, *“And when Abraham said to his father and his people, ‘I am innocent of what you worship. (I worship) only Him who created me, and He will certainly guide me.’”* It is clear from these verses that Abraham’s (PBUH) people also believed in God but they associated partners with Him. Abraham’s (PBUH) religion was propagated by His seed, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (PBUT), who brought the three monotheistic religions to humanity, *“And he left it as a word to endure among his seed that they might return.”*

Then people forgot the true religion, nevertheless God decreed that they would be reprieved, and He sent them a messenger to remind them and to bring them back to the straight path, *“But I let these and their fathers enjoy life (only) till there came to them the truth and a messenger who makes things clear.”* However, when the messenger came to them they rejected him, *“But when the truth came to them, they said, ‘This is sorcery, and we reject it.’”* The Quran then uncovers their hypocrisy. They were afraid that the belief in the Oneness of God will destroy their power base. So, they rejected the Message. They questioned why did God choose Muhammad (PBUH)? Why did not God choose one of the chiefs to be His Messenger? This way the power structure would remain unchanged, *“And they say, ‘If only this Quran had been revealed to one of the great men of the two towns?’”*

They did not understand that it is God’s decision to choose whomsoever He wills to deliver His Message, *“Is it they who distribute the Mercy of your Lord? It is We who have apportioned their livelihood among them in the life of this world; and We raised some of them above others in rank, so that some may take others in their service. But the Mercy of your Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass.”* God provides whatever He wills to whomsoever He chooses. Provision in life is not restricted to monetary earnings; but it also includes skills, talents, position in the societal hierarchy, and living conditions. Life is built on the fact that people are different. Diversity is God’s intended plan. People complement each other and this guarantees that life on earth will continue. God also bestows His mercy on those who deserve it.

The material gains in this life are so trivial. Had God wished, He could have given everything to the disbelievers; but that would have been a severe trial for the believers, *“And were it not that (all) people would become one community (of disbelievers), We would have made for everyone that blasphemes against the Lord of Mercy, silver roofs for their houses and (silver) stairways on*

*which to go up; and for their houses doors (of silver) and couches whereon to recline; and ornaments of gold. Yet all that would have been but a provision of the life of the world. And the Hereafter with your Lord will be for those who are conscious of Him.*” All of these ornaments are transient pleasures; but the real permanent treasures are saved for the God conscious.

The verses continue to describe the condition of the disbelievers, *“And whoever is blinded from the remembrance of the Lord of Mercy, We appoint for him a devil as an associate. Such (devils) bar them from the path, but they think that they are being guided.”* Those who chose to become blinded and heedless of the remembrance of God will be assigned companions from among the devils. Their companions will do their best to keep them away from the straight path. They will keep them in the dark until, at the end they will realize that they were pursuing a mirage, *“Till, when he comes to Us, he says (to his comrade), ‘If only were between me and you the distance of the east and the west - an evil comrade.’”* He will wish that the distance between him and his associate was as long as the distance between the east and the west, *“And it will not benefit you on that day, since you did wrong, that you will be partners in the torment.”* But it will be too late. It will not be a consolation for him that they will be partners in the torment.

The verses now turn to provide comfort to the Prophet (PBUH). His people denied him and rejected the guidance that he brought them, but it is not his mistake, *“Can you (Muhammad) make the deaf to hear, or can you guide the blind or him who is in evident error? And if We take you away, We will surely exact revenge on them, Otherwise We will show you that which We have promised them, for verily We have full power over them. So hold fast to what has been revealed to you; verily you are on a straight path. And indeed, it is a reminder for you and for your people; and soon you will be brought to account. And ask our messengers whom We sent before you; did We appoint any deities other than the Lord of Mercy, to be worshipped?”* This type of address to the Prophet (PBUH) has been repeated often in the Quran. It provided comfort to the Prophet (PBUH) during his struggle against falsehood, defined for him the boundaries of his responsibility, and established the principle that everything is done according to the will of God.

The following verses move on to another theme, going back to Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“And verily We sent Moses with Our revelations to Pharaoh and his chiefs, and he said, ‘I am a messenger of the Lord of the Worlds.’ But when he came to them with Our signs, they laughed at them.”* The verse describes the first meeting between Moses (PBUH), after he was sent by God, and Pharaoh. The description is very brief. It highlights the main points: Moses (PBUH) told Pharaoh that he was sent as a messenger of God and showed him and his chiefs the signs that God sent him with but they rejected these signs and they laughed at them. Then the verses talk about the trials that God inflicted on Pharaoh and his people, *“We showed them signs, one after another, each one was greater than the previous one. And We seized them with torment, in order that they might turn (to Us).”* However, these miracles did not convince them. This verifies the earlier statement, *“Can you (Muhammad) make the deaf to hear, or can you guide the blind or him who is in evident error.”* Miracles cannot change a heart that has been sealed and whose owner does not want to be guided.

However, they appealed to Moses (PBUH) to pray His lord to save them from these trials promising him that they will be guided if God removes His wrath, *“And they said, ‘Sorcerer, invoke your Lord for us, by virtue of His covenant with you, for we shall truly accept guidance.’”* But they were not truthful in their promise, *“But when We removed the torment from them, they broke their word.”*

Pharaoh had the audacity to challenge the truth that Moses (PBUH) brought, *“And Pharaoh proclaimed among his people, saying, ‘My people, does not the dominion of Egypt belong to me and these rivers flowing underneath me? Do you not then see? Am I not better than this fellow, who is a contemptible wretch and can scarcely express himself clearly? Why has he not been given any gold bracelets, and why did not the angels accompany him?’”* He used his crooked logic, a logic that appeals to the superficial signs of power in this worldly life, to deceive his people and they listened to him like fools, *“Thus he made fools of his people, and they obeyed him. Truly they were transgressing people.”* They were really transgressing people because they believed Pharaoh’s crooked logic blindly. They deserved to be punished, *“When at length they provoked Us, We exacted revenge on them, and We drowned them all. And We made them a thing of the past, and an example for those who came after (them).* They were made an example for all those who came after them.

### **Verses 57 to 89:**

57. *When (Jesus) the son of Mary was cited as an example, your people raised a clamor.*
58. *And they said, “Are our gods better, or is he?” They raised their objection only to challenge you. They are a contentious people.*
59. *He was only a servant on whom We bestowed Our blessings; and We made him an example for the Children of Israel.*
60. *And had We willed We could have set among you angels to be successors on earth.*
61. *And indeed, he will be a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment); therefore, have no doubt about it, and follow Me. This is a straight path.*
62. *Let not Satan bar you; for he is your avowed enemy.*
63. *When Jesus came with clear signs, he said, “I have come to you with wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the (points) on which you dispute. Therefore, be conscious of God and obey me.*
64. *God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is the straight path.”*
65. *But the factions among them differed. Then woe to the wrongdoers from the torment of a painful day.*
66. *Are they only waiting for the Hour to come upon them suddenly, while they are unaware?*
67. *On that Day, the friends will be enemies of one another, except for the God conscious.*
68. *My servants, for you there is no fear on this Day, nor will you grieve;*
69. *(Being) among those who believed in Our revelations and submitted to Us.*
70. *Enter the Garden, you and your wives, rejoicing.*
71. *Dishes and goblets of gold will be brought round for them, and therein is all what the soul desire and the eyes find sweet. And you will abide therein eternally.*
72. *This is the Garden of which you are made heirs because of what you used to do.*
73. *You shall have therein abundance of fruit; from which you shall eat.*



74. *But the sinners will abide in the torment of Hell eternally.*
75. *From which there will be not relief, and they will despair therein.*
76. *We did not wrong them, but they were the wrongdoers.*
77. *They will cry, "Malik, let your Lord make an end of us." He will say, "Here you must remain."*
78. *Certainly We have brought you the truth, but most of you are averse to the truth.*
79. *Or did they devise a plan (among themselves)? We will also devise.*
80. *Or do they think that We do not hear their secrets and their private counsels? Indeed (We do), and Our messengers are by them, to record.*
81. *Say (Muhammad), "If the Lord of Mercy has a son, then, I shall be the first among the worshippers."*
82. *Glorified be the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne, from that which they ascribe (to Him).*
83. *So leave them to babble and play (with vanities) until they meet that Day of theirs, which they have been promised.*
84. *It is He who is God in the heaven and God on earth; and He is the Wise, the Omniscient.*
85. *And blessed is He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all in between them. With Him is the Knowledge of the Hour (of Judgment); and to Him shall you be brought back.*
86. *And those whom they invoke besides God have no power of intercession; only those who bear witness to the truth, and they know.*
87. *If you ask them, who created them, they will certainly say, God. How then are they deluded?*
88. *And he said, "My Lord, indeed these are a people who do not believe."*
89. *So turn away from them and say, "Peace," for they shall soon come to know. (43: 57 – 89)*

*"When (Jesus) the son of Mary was cited as an example, your people raised a clamor. And they said, 'Are our gods better, or is he?' They raised their objection only to challenge you. They were a contentious people." These verses describe the objections that the Arabs used to make in their argument with the Prophet (PBUH) and to challenge him. The Quran then turns to the claims that the Christians had about Jesus (PBUH). The verse states clearly that Jesus (PBUH) was not a god to be worshipped but he was a messenger that was chosen by God to deliver the Message to the Children of Israel, "He was only a servant on whom We bestowed Our blessings; and We made him an example for the Children of Israel." Had God willed, He would have created angels on earth. God is all Powerful, "And had We willed We could have set among you angels to be successors on earth."*

The verses then remind people of the inevitability of Day of Judgment, *"And indeed, he will be a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment); therefore, have no doubt about it, and follow Me. This is a straight path. Let not Satan bar you; for he is your avowed enemy."* Many prophetic traditions were narrated which stated that Jesus (PBUH) will descend back to earth before the Day of Judgment. Thus, the coming of Jesus (PBUH) will be a sign that the Day of Judgment is looming. The Quran keeps reminding people that Satan is their avowed enemy, and

he will try very hard to turn them away from the straight path. They should be alert to the danger of Satan; and should protect themselves from falling a prey to him.

The following verses narrate what transpired between Jesus (PBUH) and his people, *“When Jesus came with clear signs, he said, ‘I have come to you with wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the (points) on which you dispute. Therefore, be conscious of God and obey me. God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is the straight path.’ But the factions among them differed. Then woe to the wrongdoers from the torment of a painful day.”* Jesus (PBUH) brought them clear signs and brought them wisdom. But they were divided among themselves. He (PBUH) stated unequivocally that he was a messenger of God. God is his Lord and their Lord, who deserves to be worshipped.

*“Are they only waiting for the Hour to come upon them suddenly, while they are unaware?”* A very clear warning, the Hour may come suddenly while they are heedless. On that day everything will be different; the relationships that we are familiar with will change and friends will be no longer friends, *“On that Day, the friends will be enemies of one another.”* But those who remained God conscious they have nothing to fear, *“except for the God conscious; My servants, for you there is no fear on this day, nor will you grieve; (Being) among those who believed in Our revelations and submitted to Us. Enter the Garden, you and your wives, rejoicing. Dishes and goblets of gold will be brought round for them, and therein is all what the soul desire and the eyes find sweet. And you will abide therein eternally. This is the Garden of which you are made heirs because of what you used to do. You shall have therein abundance of fruit; from which you shall eat.”* Those who heeded the warning of the messenger, they became servants of God, and remained conscious of Him they will be admitted to the Garden where they will reside forever. They will rejoice therein and they will have what pleases the soul and the eyes.

However, the criminals will be taken to Hell where they will abide forever, *“But the sinners will abide in the torment of Hell eternally. From which there will be not relief, and they will despair therein. We did not wrong them, but they were the wrongdoers. They will cry, ‘Malik, let your Lord make an end of us.’ He will say, ‘Here you must remain.’ Certainly We have brought you the truth, but most of you are averse to the truth. Or did they devise a plan (among themselves)? We will also devise. Or do they think that We do not hear their secrets and their private counsels? Indeed (We do), and Our messengers are by them, to record.”* They will suffer the continuous torment that they were warned about. They will wish that God will finish them off. But they were given the truth in the life of the world and they chose to reject it. So, they deserve what they are getting in the Hereafter. Or did they think that they devised a plan to deceive God? But God knows their secrets and their scheming in the dark.

The verses then come back to the Prophet (PBUH) asking him to state that, *“If the Lord of Mercy has a son, then, I shall be the first among the worshippers.”* But God is high above what they ascribe to Him, *“Glorified be the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne, from that which they ascribe (to Him).”* So let them indulge in their vain talk, they will meet the Day which they were promised, *“So leave them to babble and play (with vanities) until they meet that Day of theirs, which they have been promised.”*

God is the Creator of everything and He has the knowledge of everything, *“It is He who is God in the heaven and God on earth; and He is the Wise, the Omniscient. And blessed is He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all in between them. With Him is the Knowledge of the Hour (of Judgment); and to Him shall you be brought back.”* He has no partners. Those whom they ascribe as partners to Him will not benefit them on the Day of Judgment, *“And those whom they invoke besides God have no power of intercession; only those who bear witness to the truth, and they know.”* How can they make these false claims while they know that God is the Creator, *“If you ask them, who created them, they will certainly say, God. How then are they deluded?”*

At the end of the Sura, God turns to His Messenger (PBUH) listening to him, *“And he said, ‘My Lord, indeed these are a people who do not believe.’* God listened to His Messenger (PBUH) and directed him kindly to ignore the disbelievers, *“So turn away from them and say, ‘Peace,’ for they shall soon come to know.”*

## Sura 44: Al-Dukhan (Smoke)

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

This is a Meccan Sura. Its quick and strong rhythm is like a hammer that strikes the taught strings of the human heart. The main objective of the Sura is to evoke the sense of belief in the Oneness of God in the human psyche. It uses scenes from the Day of Judgment, stories of ancient nations, and citations of cosmic phenomena to achieve its goal.

#### Verses 1 to 59:

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *By the Book that makes things clear;*
3. *We revealed it on a blessed night - We are ever warning;*
4. *Therein every wise command is made clear;*
5. *As a command from Our presence - We are ever sending;*
6. *Mercy from your Lord. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
7. *The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you have certitude.*
8. *There is no god but He. It is He who gives life and gives death; your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.*
9. *Yet they are in doubt, playing.*
10. *Then you should watch for the day when the sky will produce visible smoke;*
11. *That will envelop the people. This will be a painful torment.*
12. *(They will say), "Our Lord, relieve us of the torment. Surely, we are believers."*
13. *How can there be a reminder for them, when a messenger making (the truth) clear had already come to them,*
14. *But they had turned away from him and said, "He was taught (by others), (he is) a madman."*
15. *We shall indeed remove the torment a little, (but) you will surely return (to disbelief).*
16. *On the day when We shall seize them with the greater seizure, (then) We shall exact revenge.*
17. *We did, before them, put the people of Pharaoh to trial. There came to them a noble messenger.*
18. *Saying, "Deliver the servants of God to me, surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you.*
19. *And do not be arrogant against God; for I come to you with a clear authority.*
20. *I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord, lest you stone me to death.*
21. *But if you do not believe in me, then leave me alone."*
22. *And (finally) he called to his Lord, (saying), "These are guilty people."*
23. *Then (his Lord commanded), "Take away My servants by night. You will be followed,*
24. *And leave the sea behind at rest, for they are a drowned host."*
25. *How many were the gardens and springs they left behind?*
26. *And corn-fields and noble buildings,*
27. *And pleasant things wherein they took delight?*
28. *Thus (was their end) and We made other people inherit (those things).*
29. *And neither heaven nor earth shed a tear over them; nor were they given a respite.*
30. *And We delivered the Children of Israel from the humiliating torment,*

31. *Inflicted by Pharaoh, for he was arrogant and given to excesses.*
32. *And We chose them, purposely, above (all) nations.*
33. *And gave them revelations in which there was a clear test.*
34. *These people say,*
35. *"There is nothing beyond our first death, and we shall not be raised again.*
36. *Then bring (back) our forefathers, if what you say is true."*
37. *Are they better, or the people of Tubba' and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty.*
38. *And We did not create the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in jest.*
39. *We did not create them except with truth, but most of them do not know.*
40. *Assuredly the Day of Decision is the appointed term for all of them,*
41. *A Day when no friend can avail a friend, nor can they be helped,*
42. *Except him on whom God bestows mercy. He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*
43. *Verily the tree of Zaqqum,*
44. *Will be the food of the sinner.*
45. *Like molten brass; it will boil in their bellies,*
46. *Like the boiling of scalding water.*
47. *(And it will be said), "Take him and drag him to the midst of hell,*
48. *Then pour over his head the torment of boiling water,*
49. *(Saying), 'Taste this, you powerful, respected man!'"*
50. *This is what you disputed about.*
51. *Surely those who remained God conscious will be in a secure place,*
52. *Amid gardens and water springs,*
53. *Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, facing one another.*
54. *And We shall wed them to fair women with wide, lovely eyes.*
55. *There, they can call for every kind of fruit in peace and security;*
56. *They will not taste death therein, save the first death. And He has saved them from the torment of Hell,*
57. *As a bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph.*
58. *Verily, We have made this (Quran) easy, in your tongue, in order that they may give heed.*
59. *So, wait then (Muhammad). They (too) are waiting. (44: 1 – 59)*

The Sura starts with the two letters, "*Ha. Mim.*" The second verse is an oath with, "*By the Book that makes things clear.*" The oath by the letters is similar to the oath by the Book, because each letter represents one of the signs of God. He created the human being in such a way to understand these letters, to pronounce them, and to use them to gain knowledge. The oath emphasizes the fact that the Book was revealed in a blessed night, "*We revealed it on a blessed night*" This night is the night of Power. This is the night on which the revelation of the Book started. It is one of the nights of the month of Ramadan. It is a blessed night because it marks the beginning of the process of the revelation of the Quran, which came to guide humanity to the straight path. This path is aligned with the initial natural disposition of humankind. It leads to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. The Quran also educates humankind about the rules that govern the universe.

The Quran came to communicate a warning to humankind, *“We are ever warning;”* because God knows the limitations of humankind and the need to remind him continuously. The night that witnessed the start of the process of the revelation of the Quran is a milestone in the history of humanity, *“Therein every wise command is made clear;”* The Quran made everything clear. This was all by God’s decree, *“As a command from Our presence - We are ever sending;”* The Quran is a major sign of God’s mercy, because it guides humankind to the way for salvation, *“Mercy from your Lord. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* God is also, *“The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you have certitude. There is no god but He. It is He who gives life and gives death; your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.”*

The narrative turns to the disbelievers chastising them for their recklessness, *“Yet they are in doubt, playing.”* And a warning is issued, *“Then you should watch for the day when the sky will produce visible smoke; That will envelop the people. This will be a painful torment. (They will say), ‘Our Lord, relieve us of the torment. Surely, we are believers.’ How can there be a reminder for them, when a messenger making (the truth) clear had already come to them, But they had turned away from him and said, ‘He was taught (by others), (he is) a madman.’ We shall indeed remove the torment a little, (but) you will surely return (to disbelief). On the day when We shall seize them with the greater seizure, (then) We shall exact revenge.”* There are different interpretations of this verse. Does the verse refer to one of the scenes on the Day of Judgment? Or does the verse refer to an event that has already happened before? We chose the interpretation that this is a smoke that will occur on the Day of Judgment. This opinion has been supported by Ibn Abbas (RA). It is also more reasonable since the verses indicate that their request for forgiveness will not be accepted.

The following verses narrate one of the episodes of the story of Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh, *“We did, before them, put the people of Pharaoh to trial.”* Trials can be administered with adversity as well as felicity. God tested Pharaoh and his people by giving them wealth and power. Then he sent them his messenger, *“There came to them a noble messenger. Saying, ‘Deliver the servants of God to me, surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you. And do not be arrogant against God; for I come to you with a clear authority. I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord lest you stone me to death. But if you do not believe in me, then leave me alone.’”* Moses (PBUH) came to ask them to submit to God, however, if they chose not to listen to him they should leave him alone. But in their arrogance they rejected his call and also moved to persecute him. His only recourse was to ask for God’s help, *“And (finally) he called to his Lord, (saying), ‘These are guilty people.’”* God commanded Moses (PBUH) to go forward with his people and leave Pharaoh and his people to receive the punishment that God decreed, *“Then (his Lord commanded), ‘Take away My servants by night. You will be followed, and leave the sea behind at rest, for they are a drowned host.’”* Then the verses detail the wealth that God gave them; the wealth which they lost because of their obstinacy, *“How many were the gardens and springs they left behind, and corn-fields and noble buildings, and pleasant things wherein they took delight?”* God bestowed this wealth on other people, *“Thus (was their end) and We made other people inherit (those things).”*

They were arrogant tyrants. They reveled in comfort and wealth; however, all of this vanished in a blink of an eye. No one felt sorry for them. Not even a drop of tears was spilled over their demise, *“And neither heaven nor earth shed a tear over them; nor were they given a respite.”* God saved the Children of Israel, *“And We delivered the Children of Israel from the humiliating torment, inflicted by Pharaoh, for he was arrogant and given to excesses. And We chose them, purposely, above (all) nations. And gave them revelations in which there was a clear test.”* Not only the Children of Israel were saved by God, but they were also chosen by Him. They were tested with trials.

The narrative then turns to the disbelieving Arabs, *“These people say, ‘There is nothing beyond our first death, and we shall not be raised again. Then bring (back) our forefathers, if what you say is true.’”* They declared that they did not believe in the resurrection after death. Their argument which they used to challenge the Prophet (PBUH) with was that, if this was true; then bring back our dead forefathers. They did not understand that God made this life a testing ground for people. People will be resurrected and will be held accountable for what they have done during their lives on earth. Those who did good will be rewarded and those who did evil will be punished. God then reminded them with other nations which were destroyed before them, *“Are they better, or the people of Tubba’ and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty.”* The verse commanded them to reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth, *“And We did not create the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in jest. We did not create them except with truth, but most of them do not know. Assuredly the Day of Decision is the appointed term for all of them, a Day when no friend can avail a friend, nor can they be helped, except him on whom God bestows mercy. He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.”* The connection between the resurrection after death and the creation of the heavens and earth is mentioned to underline the fact that there is a purpose behind the creation of this universe. This huge and highly complex universe has been created with great care and is managed in a very meticulous and accurate way. This indicates that there is a purpose behind this creation and it was not simply done as a game.

The verses then take us on a tour of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“Verily the tree of Zaqqum will be the food of the sinner. Like molten brass; it will boil in their bellies, like the boiling of scalding water. (And it will be said), ‘Take him and drag him to the midst of hell, then pour over his head the torment of boiling water, (Saying), ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’””* It is a horrible scene for the torment that will be administered to the sinners. They will be told, now you cannot dispute the veracity of this torment as you used to do in the worldly life, *“This is what you disputed about.”*

Contrast this with the reward for those who remained conscious of God, *“Surely those who remained God conscious will be in a secure place, amid gardens and water springs, dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, facing one another. And We shall wed them to fair women with wide, lovely eyes. There they can call for every kind of fruit in peace and security. They will not taste death therein, save the first death. And He has saved them from the torment of Hell, as a bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph.”* This is certainly the supreme triumph.

The Sura ends by reminding the disbelievers with the blessings of God embodied in the Quran and warning them of the consequences of rejecting this blessing, “*Verily, We have made this (Quran) easy, in your tongue, in order that they may give heed. So, wait then (Muhammad). They (too) are waiting.*”



## **Sura 45: Al-Jathiya (Kneeling Down)**

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

This Meccan Sura portrays the response of the idolaters of Mecca to the Islamic call. It shows how their arguments were subjective, irrational, and based on their whims and desires. The Sura refutes their arguments and tries to open their eyes to the truth.

#### **Verses 1 to 23:**

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *The revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise.*
3. *Verily in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who believe.*
4. *And in your creation, and in the creatures which He scattered on earth, are signs for people who have certitude.*
5. *And in the alternation of night and day, and the fact that God sends down sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth after its death, and in the management of the winds, are signs for those who use their reason.*
6. *These are the verses of God, which We recite to you in truth; then in what message will they believe after (rejecting) God and His revelations?*
7. *Woe to every sinful liar.*
8. *He hears the verses of God recited to him, yet is obstinate and arrogant, as if he had not heard them. Give him tidings of a painful torment.*
9. *And when he learns something of Our verses, he takes them in jest. For such there will be a humiliating torment.*
10. *Before them is Hell; and that which they have earned will not benefit them, nor will those whom they have chosen for protecting guardians beside God. Theirs will be horrendous torment.*
11. *This is guidance. And those who disbelieve the revelations of their Lord, for them there is an agonizing painful torment.*
12. *It is God who has subjected the sea to you, that ships may sail through it by His command, that you may seek of his bounty, and that you may be grateful.*
13. *And He has subjected to you, all that is in the heavens and on earth. In that are signs indeed for those who reflect.*
14. *Tell those who believe, to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him to recompense (for good or ill) each people according to what they have earned.*
15. *Whoso does good, it is for his soul, and whoso does wrong, it is against it. And afterward to your Lord you will be brought back.*
16. *And verily We gave the Children of Israel the Scripture, the Command, and the Prophethood; and provided them with good things and favored them above (all) peoples;*
17. *And gave them plain commandments. And they did not differ until after the knowledge came to them, out of mutual rivalry. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed.*
18. *Then We set you upon a pathway of faith, so follow it, and do not follow the whims of those who do not know.*

19. *They cannot help you against God, in any way. Indeed, the wrongdoers some of them are protecting guardians of others; and God is the Protecting Guardian of those who are conscious of Him.*
20. *These are clear evidences to people and a guidance and mercy to those who have certitude.*
21. *Or do those who commit ill-deeds think that We shall make them as those who believe and do good deeds, the same in life and death? Bad is their judgment.*
22. *God created the heavens and the earth with truth, so that every soul may be recompensed for what it has earned. And they will not be wronged.*
23. *Have you not seen him who takes his whims as his god? God has, knowing (him as such), left him to go astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and put a cover on his sight. Who, then, will guide him after God (has withdrawn Guidance)? Will you not then heed? (45: 1 – 23)*

The Sura starts with the discursive letters of the Alphabet, “*Ha. Mim.*” The use of these familiar letters of the Alphabet in composing the Book is a sign that it has been revealed by God, the Eminent, the Wise, “*The revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise.*” The verses direct their attention to the signs of God all around them, “*Verily in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who believe.*” The signs of God are all around us, but only those who believe can perceive these signs. Faith opens the hearts to be sensitive to the magnificence of the creation of God. The signs are not only limited to one aspect of life, but they can be seen in all aspects of life. All God’s creatures portray His signs, “*And in your creation, and in the creatures which He scattered on earth, are signs for people who have certitude.*” The signs are also portrayed in the cosmic phenomena all around us, “*And in the alternation of night and day, and the fact that God sends down sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth after its death, and in the management of the winds, are signs for those who use their reason.*”

“*These are the verses of God, which We recite to you in truth; then in what message will they believe after (rejecting) God and His revelations?*” No one can produce words that would be more convincing than God’s words.

A threat is posed to those who fabricate lies and commit sins, “*Woe to every sinful liar;*” those who are arrogant and obstinate in rejecting guidance, “*He hears the verses of God recited to him, yet is obstinate and arrogant, as if he had not heard them. Give him tidings of a painful torment.*” These people deserve only to be ridiculed and punished, so give them the glad tidings of a painful torment. They distort God’s verses and use it in jest, “*And when he learns something of Our verses, he takes them in jest. For such there will be a humiliating torment. Before them is Hell; and that which they have earned will not benefit them, nor will those whom they have chosen for protecting guardians beside God. Theirs will be horrendous torment.*” They will not escape Hell fire and nothing will benefit them. The truth about the Quran is then emphasized, “*This is guidance. And those who disbelieve the revelations of their Lord, for them there is an agonizing painful torment.*”

The narrative then moves to remind them of the cosmic signs around them, *“It is God who has subjected the sea to you, that ships may sail through it by His command, that you may seek of his bounty, and that you may be grateful. And He has subjected to you, all that is in the heavens and on earth. In that are signs indeed for those who reflect.”* The human being, this tiny creature, receives all this bounty from God. God subjects all that in the heavens and on earth to help him establish his life on earth. God guided humankind to be able to benefit from all these resources and discover the laws that govern them. Without God’s help humankind would not have been able to make these discoveries.

Having reminded the believers of God’s blessings which connects their hearts with the rest of the universe, the verses address them to evoke in their hearts emotions of forgiveness and magnanimity, *“Tell those who believe, to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him to recompense (for good or ill) each people according to what they have earned. Whoso does good, it is for his soul, and whoso does wrong, it is against it. And afterward to your Lord you will be brought back,”* a noble command to forgive from a position of strength not a position of weakness and to teach them to relegate everything to God. God will recompense everyone according to his deeds.

The narrative turns to the Children of Israel, how they were chosen to lead humanity and how they relinquished this responsibility by fighting together because of the mutual rivalry that divided them, *“And verily We gave the Children of Israel the Scripture, the Command, and the Prophet-hood; and provided them with good things and favored them above (all) peoples; and gave them plain commandments. And they did not differ until after the knowledge came to them, out of mutual rivalry. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differed.”* They were given the Torah which embodied God’s law; they were given the command to rule, and they were given the prophet-hood. God bestowed on them great blessings. They were given clear criteria which differentiate between the right and wrong. However, because of their subjectivity, mutual envy, and wrongdoing they differed among themselves. God deprived them of the leadership He bestowed upon them before and gave it to a new Messenger and a new Message, *“Then We set you upon a pathway of faith, so follow it, and do not follow the whims of those who do not know. They cannot help you against God, in any way. Indeed, the wrongdoers some of them are protecting guardians of others; and God is the Protecting Guardian of those who are conscious of Him.”* The criterion is clear. On one side there is God’s law and on the other side, there are the whims of those who do not know. The Messenger (PBUH) is warned not to follow the whims of those who do not know. He should follow the message that embodied God’s law because therein is the guidance, *“These are clear evidences to people and a guidance and mercy for people who have certitude.”*

God will not treat the evil doers and the believers equally, *“Or do those who commit ill-deeds think that We shall make them as those who believe and do good deeds, the same in life and death? Bad is their judgment.”* Those who believe and do good deeds will receive their rewards from God, while the evil doers will be punished, but no one will be wronged, *“God created the heavens and the earth with truth, so that every soul may be recompensed for what it has earned. And they will not be wronged.”*

The verses then describe a human model, the model of those who follow their desires, whims, and urges. The people in this model submit to their whims instead of submitting to their Creator, “Have you not seen him who takes his whims as his god? God has, knowing (him as such), left him to go astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and put a cover on his sight. Who, then, will guide him after God (has withdrawn Guidance)? Will you not then heed?” These are those who followed their whims and refused to allow the light of guidance to shine on their hearts, so God sealed their senses and prevented the light of guidance to go through their ears, their eyes, and their hearts. How can they hope for guidance after that?

### **Verses 24 to 37:**

24. *And they say, “What is there but our life in this world? We shall die and we live, and nothing but time can destroy us;” when they have no knowledge whatsoever of that; they are only guessing.*
25. *And when Our clear revelations are recited to them their only argument is that they say, “Bring (back) our fathers then, if you are truthful.”*
26. *Say, “It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; then He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment about which there is no doubt.” But most people do not know.*
27. *To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and on the Day on which the Hour occurs, on that Day those who follow falsehood will lose everything.*
28. *And you will see every nation kneeling down. Every nation will be called to its Record, “This Day you shall be recompensed for all what you used to do.*
29. *This is Our Record speaks about you with truth. Surely, We have been recording everything you did.”*
30. *Then, as for those who believed and did good deeds, their Lord will admit them to His mercy. That is the evident triumph.*
31. *But as to those who disbelieved, (to them it will be said), “Were not Our verses recited to you, but you were arrogant, and you were guilty people?”*
32. *And when it was said that the promise of God was true, and that there is no doubt about the inevitability of the Hour, you used to say, ‘We do not know what is the Hour; we think it is only a conjecture, and we are not certain about it.’”*
33. *Then will appear to them the evil of what they did, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to ridicule.*
34. *It will also be said, “This day We forget you as you forgot the meeting of this Day of yours. And your refuge is the Fire, and you have no helpers.*
35. *This is because you used to take the revelations of God in jest, and the life of the world deceived you.” This Day, therefore, they shall not be taken out thence, nor can they make amends.*
36. *Then praise be to God, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of all the worlds.*
37. *And to Him belongs the supreme pride through the heavens and the earth; and He is the Eminent, the Wise. (45: 24 – 37)*

The idolaters had a very superficial understanding of life. They never wondered about the beginning of life nor did they reflect on the its purpose, *“And they say, ‘What is there but our life in this world? We shall die and we live, and nothing but time can destroy us;’ when they have no knowledge whatsoever of that; they are only guessing.”* But even the logic they used was flawed. If people simply died because, *“nothing but time can destroy us,”* how can they explain the death of the children and healthy people? Time is not the only cause of death. In addition, they had no solid proof for this, they were only guessing. They were baffled by the revelation, so the only excuse for their rejection was to pose a challenge to the Messenger (PBUH), *“And when Our clear revelations are recited to them their only argument is that they say, ‘Bring (back) our fathers then, if you are truthful.’”* But God has His own plan. If they want a proof, then they should reflect on the question of life and death, *“Say, ‘It is God who gives you life, then causes you to die; then He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment about which there is no doubt.’ But most people do not know. To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and on the day on which the Hour occurs, on that day those who follow falsehood will lose everything.”*

On the Day of Judgment, all nations will be gathered together and they will be seen kneeling down, *“And you will see every nation kneeling down. Every nation will be called to its Record, ‘This Day you shall be recompensed for all what you used to do. This is Our Record speaks about you with truth. Surely, We have been recording everything you did.’”* They will be given their records. All deeds have been recorded. People will be divided into two groups. The first group is the group of those who believed and did good deeds, *“Then, as for those who believed and did good deeds, their Lord will admit them to His mercy. That is the evident triumph.”* The second group is the group of those who disbelieved, *“But as to those who disbelieved, (to them it will be said), ‘Were not Our verses recited to you, but you were arrogant, and you were guilty people? And when it was said that the promise of God was true, and that there is no doubt about the inevitability of the Hour, you used to say, ‘We do not know what is the Hour; we think it is only a conjecture, and we are not certain about it.’”* On that Day, there will be no doubts. The truth will be obvious. Then they will see the consequences of what they did before, *“Then will appear to them the evil of what they did, and they will be completely encircled by that which they used to ridicule.”* They will be forgotten, just like they forgot this Day, *“It will also be said, ‘This Day We forget you as you forgot the meeting of this Day of yours. And your refuge is the Fire, and you have no helpers. This, because you used to take the revelations of God in jest, and the life of the world deceived you.’ This Day, therefore, they shall not be taken out thence, nor can they make amends.”*

The voices of the praise of God will then be heard, *“Then praise be to God, Lord of the heavens and Lord of the earth, Lord of all the worlds. And to Him belongs the supreme pride through the heavens and the earth; and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

## **Sura 46: Al-Ahqaf (The Dunes)**

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

This is a Meccan Sura. It deals mainly with topics which are part of the doctrine of Islam: the belief in the Oneness of God, the belief in the divine revelation, the belief in the Message, the belief in Muhammad (PBUH) as a messenger of God and that he received the Quran, and the belief in the resurrection and the accountability of people on the Day of Judgment. The doctrine provides the basic fundamentals upon which Islam was established. That is why the Quran stressed these fundamentals in all the Suras that were revealed in Mecca. The relationship between the fundamental beliefs and Islamic laws were expounded upon in the Suras of the Quran which were revealed in Medina.

#### **Verses 1 to 14:**

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *The revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise.*
3. *We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except in truth, and for an appointed term. But those who disbelieve turn away from what they are warned of.*
4. *Say, "Do you see what it is you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created on earth, or do they have a share in (the creation of) the heavens? Bring me a scripture (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (you may have), if you are truthful."*
5. *And who is more astray than he who invokes besides God those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection and they are heedless of their call?*
6. *And when the people are gathered together (on the Day of Resurrection), they will be their enemies, and they will be deniers of their worshipping (them).*
7. *And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who disbelieve say of the truth when it reaches them, "This is clear magic."*
8. *Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Had I fabricated it, you have no power to support me against God. He knows best what you say among yourselves concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you. And He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."*
9. *Say, "I am not different from the other messengers (of God), nor do I know what will be done to me or to you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am only a plain warner."*
10. *Say, "Have you considered if it was from God, and you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to something similar and believed while you were arrogant? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers."*
11. *And those who disbelieve said of those who believe, "If it had been (any) good, they would not have preceded us in attaining it." And since they will not be guided by it, they say, "This is an ancient lie."*
12. *And before this, was the Scripture of Moses a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it) in an Arabic tongue; to admonish the wrongdoers, and a glad tiding to the doers of good.*

13. *Verily those who said, "Our Lord is God," and remained firm (on the Path), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
14. *These are the dwellers of the garden, abiding therein, a reward for what they did. (46: 1 – 14)*

*"Ha. Mim. The Revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise. We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except in truth, and for an appointed term. But those who disbelieve turn away from what they are warned of."* These verses refer to the fact that the Quran has been composed using the letters of the Arabic Alphabets. However, the result is a Book that is different from any book a mortal can compose using the same letters of the Alphabet. An implicit reference is also made to the link between the written Book of God and God's Book that can be seen by looking at the universe. Both books are established on the truth. The revelation is a testimony of God's Eminence and Wisdom and the creation is a testimony of God's Power. However, the disbelievers are heedless of both Books.

It is really astounding how can the disbelievers ignore the magnificence of the recited Book and the seen Book? The Book that has been revealed to the Messenger of God (PBUH) emphasizes the facts that there is only One God and that He is the Creator of everything; the Book of the universe which can be seen manifested in the creation of heavens and earth testifies to the same fact. If there were other gods, what did they create? *"Say, 'Do you see what it is you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created on earth, or do they have a share in (the creation of) the heavens?'"* No one can claim that the objects that the disbelievers worshipped, whether idols, trees, jinn, or angels, did actually create anything on earth. No One can also claim that these objects could have participated in the creation of heaven. But if anyone has the audacity to make such a claim, then they should provide a proof for their claim, *"Bring me a Scripture (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (you may have), if you are truthful."*

The idolaters of Mecca used to worship idols, statues that represent the angels, and trees. Some even worshipped the angels or Satan. These objects would never respond to them if they called upon them, and on the Day of Judgment they will deny that they had any connection with those who worshipped them, *"And who is more astray than he who invokes besides God those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection and they are heedless of their call? And when the people are gathered together (on the Day of Resurrection), they will be their enemies, and they will be deniers of their worshipping (them)."*

The following verses discuss the idolaters' response to the revelation and refute their claim that it was fabricated, *"And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who disbelieve say of the truth when it reaches them, 'This is clear magic.' Or do they say, 'He has fabricated it'? Say, 'Had I fabricated it, you have no power to support me against God. He knows best what you say among yourselves concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you. And He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.'* The Prophet (PBUH) was told to respond to them with these questions, how could he have fabricated it? Why would he fabricate it? And what is the benefit that he would possibly gain by fabricating it? They should know that no one can protect the imposters from God's wrath. God knows what the disbelievers say and He is sufficient as a judge to judge between the disbelievers and the Messenger (PBUH).

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to explain to them that his task was to deliver the message just like all other messengers before him did, *“Say, ‘I am not different from the other messengers (of God), nor do I know what will be done to me or to you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am only a plain warner.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) was the last messenger of God in a long chain of messengers sent by God to guide humanity. He had no supernatural powers, he did not know what will be done to him, nor did he know what will be done to them. He was only fulfilling his task as has been commanded by God. The Prophet (PBUH) then reminded them with the testimony of one of the scholars of the Children of Israel, *“Say, ‘Have you considered if it was from God, and you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to something similar and believed while you were arrogant? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers.’”* We do not know who that scholar was. There are narrations which indicate that this verse was revealed in Medina. These narrations link the verse to Abdul Allah ibn Salam (RA). However, it may have been someone else. The verse aimed at alerting them to be more cautious. They had no evidence that the Book was fabricated, what would then be their fate if the Book was a true divine revelation? However, if they insist on their disbelief, they should know that God does not guide the wrongdoers.

*“And those who disbelieve said of those who believe, ‘If it had been (any) good, they would not have preceded us in attaining it.’ And since they will not be guided by it, they say, ‘This is an ancient lie.’”* The chiefs of Mecca saw that Islam was adopted by people who were poor and some of them were slaves. Their arrogant nature put them in a state of denial. This religion could not have been good, because if it were good, we would have been the first to adopt it. This is a reflection of their irrationality in dealing with the situation. Having decided that it is not good, they tried to find a justification for their decision, so they decided that it must be a kind of sorcery.

Continuing with the issue of divine revelation, a reference is made to the Scripture that was revealed to Moses (PBUH) and the similarity between the two divine revelations, *“And before this, was the Scripture of Moses a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it) in an Arabic tongue; to admonish the wrongdoers, and a glad tiding to the doers of good.”*

The verses then turn to the reward of the doers of good, *“Verily those who said, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and remained firm (on the Path), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. These are the dwellers of the garden, abiding therein, a reward for what they did.”* Those who said, *“Our Lord is God,”* did not merely pay lip service to the statement they uttered, nor did they believe in it as a mere thought in their hearts. They made the statement because they believed that it is the divine plan for a complete way of life. This statement shapes the thought of people, it should be reflected on their deeds, and it shapes all possible human relationships in the society.

## **Verses 15 to 20:**

15. *We have enjoined on humankind kindness to his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a*



- period of) thirty months. Till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he says, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for the blessings which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases You. And make my offspring righteous; surely I have repented to You, and surely I am of those who submit.*
16. *These are from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and overlook their evil deeds. (They shall be) among the dwellers of the Garden, a promise of truth, which was made to them (in this life).*
  17. *But (there is one) who says to his parents, "Fie on you, do you threaten me that I shall be brought forth (again) when generations before me have passed away? And they twain cry to God for help (and say), "Woe to you, believe. The promise of God is true. But he says, "This is nothing except ancient fables."*
  18. *These are the ones upon whom the word (i.e. the decree) has come into effect among nations of the jinn and humankind which have passed on before them. They are the losers.*
  19. *And for all there will be ranks from what they do, that He may pay them fully for their deeds; and they will not be wronged.*
  20. *And on the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire (it will be said), "You squandered your good things in the life of the world and sought comfort therein. Now this day you are rewarded with the humiliating torment because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to transgress. (46: 15 – 20)*

God enjoined on the whole race of humankind to be kind to their parents. This is a command which has been addressed specifically to the human race. Members of this race should be kind to their parents. The word, "Ihsan," in Arabic which has been used in this verse to describe how a human being should treat his parents has a much wider scope than kindness. The word implies that parents should be treated in the best way possible. This is the parents' right decreed by the Creator of the human race. They deserve this right by virtue of being parents, "*We have enjoined on humankind kindness to his parents.*" This command has been repeated in the Quran and in the tradition of the Messenger of God (PBUH). While there is no mention of a similar command issued to the parents, except in very special cases. The initial natural disposition of the parents takes care of such command. The parents are normally naturally disposed to sacrificing everything they have, even their own lives, to make their children happy.

Part of this sacrifice is mentioned here, "*In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months.*" What can a son or a daughter repay their mother for such a sacrifice? The Prophet (PBUH) saw a man performing circumambulation around the Ka'ba, the man was carrying his mother on his back. The man asked the Prophet (PBUH), "*Did I fulfill my obligation towards my mother?*" The Prophet (PBUH) replied, "*You did not even pay her for one exhalation that she made in pain.*"

The verse continues to describe the process of growing up of the child, "*Till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years.*" The term full strength here is taken to mean forty years of age. The response of those who have been guided is given next, "*he says, 'My Lord, enable me to be grateful for the blessings which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases You. And make my offspring righteous; surely I have repented to You, and*

*surely I am of those who submit.’”* These people ask God to grant them three things: to enable them to express their gratitude to Him; to enable them to do good deeds that please God; and to raise their children in a way that pleases God. God’s response is more generous, *“These are from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and overlook their evil deeds. (They shall be among the dwellers of the Garden, a promise of truth, which was made to them (in this life).”* Their reward will be made on the basis of the best of their deeds; their sins will be forgiven; and their abode will be paradise.

On the other hand, there are those who reject guidance, who treat their parents harshly, *“But (there is one) who says to his parents, ‘Fie on you, do you threaten me that I shall be brought forth (again) when generations before me have passed away?’ And they twain cry to God for help (and say), ‘Woe to you, believe. The promise of God is true. But he says, ‘This is nothing except ancient fables.’”* Not only they treat their parents harshly, but they refuse their sincere advice and reject God’s guidance. Their recompense will be similar to their deeds, *“These are the ones upon whom the word (i.e. the decree) has come into effect among nations of the jinn and humankind which have passed on before them. They are the losers.”* No one will be wronged, and everyone will be recompensed according to their deeds, *“And for all there will be ranks from what they do, that He may pay them fully for their deeds; and they will not be wronged.”*

The next verse portrays a very brief and quick scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“And on the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire (it will be said), ‘You squandered your good things in the life of the world and sought comfort therein. Now this day you are rewarded with the humiliating torment because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to transgress.’”* They squandered the good things that God bestowed upon them during the worldly life. They did not invest in the Hereafter but spent all what they had in enjoying the transient pleasures of the worldly life. So, on that Day they will get nothing and they will suffer the humiliating torment that they were warned about.

### **Verses 21 to 28:**

21. *Mention the brother of A’ad when he warned his people at the dunes - but there have been warners before him and after him - “Worship none other than God. Truly, I fear for you the torment of a tremendous Day.”*
22. *They said, “Did you come in order to turn us away from our gods? Then bring upon us the (calamity) with which you are threatening us, if you are truthful.”*
23. *He said, “The knowledge (of when it will come) is only with God. I proclaim to you the mission on which I have been sent. But I see that you are a people in ignorance.”*
24. *Then, when they saw the cloud coming toward their valleys, they said, “This cloud will give us rain.” In fact, it is what you were asking to be hastened; a wind wherein is a painful torment.*
25. *It will destroy everything by the commandment of its Lord. And in the morning, nothing was found of them except their dwellings. Thus, do We reward the guilty people.*

26. *And We had firmly established them in (prosperity and) power which We have not given to you (Quraish) and We had endowed them with (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect; but their (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect did not benefit them at all because they rejected the revelations of God; and they were (completely) encircled by that which they used to mock at.*
27. *And verily We have destroyed townships round about you, and displayed (for them) Our revelations, that haply they might return.*
28. *Why then was no help forthcoming to them from those whom they worshipped as gods, besides God, as a means of access (to God)? They left them in the lurch; but that was their lie, and what they used to invent.” (46: 21 – 28)*

“Mention the brother of A’ad when he warned his people at the dunes - but there have been warners before him and after him – ‘Worship none other than God. Truly, I fear for you the torment of a tremendous Day.’” The brother of A’ad is Prophet Hud (PBUH). The verse refers to him as, “the brother of A’ad,” to portray the close relationship between him and his people. It is a similar relationship that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had with his people who were at that time persecuting him. This is one of the stories which the Quran used to comfort the Messenger (PBUH) during the period of persecution which he received at the hands of his people. The story is also a reminder for the Arab idolaters of the inevitable fate of those who reject guidance. The people of A’ad were adamant in their rejection, “*They said, ‘Did you come in order to turn us away from our gods? Then bring upon us the (calamity) with which you are threatening us, if you are truthful.’*” However, Prophet Hud (PBUH) persevered and answered their challenge quietly, “*He said, ‘The knowledge (of when it will come) is only with God. I proclaim to you the mission on which I have been sent. But I see that you are a people in ignorance.’*” He told them that his task was only to warn them. Only God knows, when and how His wrath will descend on them.

It is narrated that they suffered a severe drought and the weather became hot, so when they saw the clouds moving towards their valley, they were joyful. They thought that at last they will be getting rain to ease their suffering. They did not realize that the clouds were not bringing them the comfort they were looking for, but they were bringing the destruction which they were promised, “*Then, when they saw the cloud coming toward their valleys, they said, ‘This cloud will give us rain.’ In fact, it is what you were asking to be hastened; a wind wherein is a painful torment.*”

The verse portrays the wind as a living creature that fulfills the commands of its Lord, “*It will destroy everything by the commandment of its Lord. And in the morning, nothing was found of them except their dwellings. Thus, do We reward the guilty people.*” They were completely destroyed. Only empty houses remained as a sign of a civilization that has once existed, but now only its traces remained.

The verses then reminded the idolaters that these people who were destroyed were given more power and wealth than the idolaters of Quraish ever had, “*And We had firmly established them in (prosperity and) power which We have not given to you (Quraish) and We had endowed them with (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect; but their (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and*

*intellect did not benefit them at all because they rejected the revelations of God; and they were (completely) encircled by that which they used to mock at.”* God gave them not only prosperity and power but senses that can see, hear, and think. But they did not use any of this for their benefit. The stories of the fate that the early disbelieving nations met were meant to bring the lessons of history to the attention of the idolaters, *“And verily We have destroyed townships round about you, and displayed (for them) Our revelations, that haply they might return. Why then was no help forthcoming to them from those whom they worshipped as gods, besides God, as a means of access (to God)? They left them in the lurch; but that was their lie, and what they used to invent.”* They should know that those whom they took as partners with God will never be able to help them.

### **Verses 29 to 35:**

29. *And remember when We turned towards you a company of jinn to listen to the Quran. They stood in the presence thereof, they said, "Listen in silence." When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people to warn them.*
30. *They said, "Our people, We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides to the truth and to a straight path.*
31. *Our people, hearken to the one who invites to God, and believe in Him. He (God) will forgive you your faults, and deliver you from a painful torment.”*
32. *And whoso does not respond to the one who calls to God he will not be able to escape in the earth, and he has no protecting guardians besides Him. Those are in clear error.*
33. *Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth, and never wearied with their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Verily He has power over all things.*
34. *And on the Day that the disbelievers will be brought in front of the Fire, (they will be asked,) "Is this not the truth?" they will say, "Yes, by our Lord." (One will say): "Then, taste you the torment for having disbelieved.”*
35. *Therefore, persevere, as did the messengers who had firm resolve; and be in no haste about the (disbelievers). On the Day that they see what they were promised, (it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour of the day. A clear message; shall any be destroyed save the transgressors? (46: 29 – 35)*

The following verses relate an incident involving jinn; when God sent a group of jinn to listen to the Quran. The statement indicates the existence of creatures that are called jinn. They were able to listen to the Quran and understand its meaning. The statement indicates that jinn have the ability to choose between right and wrong and some of them are believers and some are disbelievers. The mention of this in the Quran is proof enough that all of this is true. This is part of the unseen.

*“And remember when We turned towards you a company of jinn to listen to the Quran. They stood in the presence thereof, they said, ‘Listen in silence.’ When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people to warn them.”* This incident was planned to convey the message to the jinn. They recognized that the Quran embodies a message of guidance similar to that which was revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH) before. They listened attentively then they went to their people to bring them the news, *“They said, ‘Our people, We have heard a Book revealed after*

*Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides to the truth and to a straight path. Our people, hearken to the one who invites to God, and believe in Him. He (God) will forgive you your faults, and deliver you from a painful torment.*” Ibn Ishaq narrated that this was the end of what the group of jinn said to their people. However, the narrative indicates that the following verses are a continuation to their speech, *“And whoso does not respond to the one who calls to God he will not be able to escape in the earth, and he has no protecting guardians besides Him. Those are in clear error. Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth, and never wearied with their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Verily He has power over all things.”* These two verses seem to be a natural continuation of the speech of the group of jinn who listened to the Quran and went back to warn their people. The first verse stresses the punishment for those who disbelieve and the second verse cites the miracle of the creation as supporting evidence that the Quran is a divine revelation.

The narrative then turns to a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“And on the Day that the disbelievers will be brought in front of the Fire, (they will be asked,) ‘Is this not the truth?’ they will say, ‘Yes, by our Lord.’ (One will say), ‘Then, taste you the torment for having disbelieved.’”* The verses are narrated in the form of a dialogue during which the disbelievers will be asked about their previous doubts and whether what they see is the truth. They will swear that it is the truth. It will be then said to them, then suffer the consequences of your disbelief.

The last verse carries a command to the Messenger of God (PBUH) to persevere. We know that the Messenger (PBUH) persevered the suffering and the persecution, however he needed the reminder of His Lord. The command was meant also to comfort him by reminding him of the experiences of the previous messengers, *“Therefore persevere, as did the messengers who had firm resolve; and be in no haste about the (disbelievers).”* He was told that soon the disbelievers will see the consequences of their deeds, *“On the Day that they see what they were promised, (it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour of the day. A clear message; shall any be destroyed save the transgressors?”* Time till the Day of Judgment will pass as if it were only one hour.

## Sura 47: Muhammad (Muhammad)

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

This Sura was revealed in Medina. It has another name, the Fighting. This is an appropriate name because the main topic of the Sura is fighting.

#### Verses 1 to 15:

1. *Those who disbelieve and bar people from the way of God, He renders their actions vain.*
2. *But those who believe, do good deeds, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad - for it is the truth from their Lord - He will absolve them of their sins and improve their condition.*
3. *This is because those who reject God follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus, does God coin for people their lessons using similitudes.*
4. *Therefore, when you encounter the disbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks until, when you have thoroughly subdued them, then bind them firmly and either (confer) a favor afterwards or ransom (them) until the war lays down its burden. That (is the command). If it had been God's will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test some of you by means of others. But those who are slain in the way of God - He will never let their deeds be wasted.*
5. *He will guide them and improve their condition;*
6. *And admit them to the Garden Which He has made known to them.*
7. *Believers, if you will support (the cause of) God, He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*
8. *And those who disbelieve perdition is for them; and He will render their actions fruitless.*
9. *That is because they hate that which God has revealed; therefore, He made their actions fruitless.*
10. *Have they not travelled through the land to see the end of those who were before them? God wiped them out. And for the disbelievers there will be the like thereof.*
11. *That is because God is the Patron of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no patron.*
12. *Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to gardens beneath which rivers flow; while those who reject God will enjoy (this world) and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode.*
13. *And how many a township, stronger than your township (Muhammad) which has cast you out, have We destroyed and they had no helper.*
14. *Is then one who is on a clear (path) from his Lord like those for whom the evil that they do is beautified while they follow their own whims?*
15. *The parable of the Garden which the God conscious are promised; in it are rivers of water unpolluted; rivers of milk whose taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits and grace from their Lord. (Can those in such bliss) be compared to those who will dwell forever in the Fire. They will be given boiling water to drink, so that it tears their bowels? (47: 1 – 15)*

The Sura starts with an attack on the disbelievers and a threat that all their deeds will be rendered useless, *“Those who disbelieve and bar people from the way of God, He renders their actions vain.”* They may have hoped that these actions will benefit them. These actions may have appeared on the surface as good deeds, but what is the use of a good deed that is not supported by faith? It is important that the intention behind the action would be also good. On the other hand, the believers will be rewarded, *“But those who believe, do good deeds, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad - for it is the truth from their Lord - He will absolve them of their sins and improve their condition.”* Those who believed, did good deeds, and believed in the Book that was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH), because they knew it is the truth from their Lord, those will be treated differently. Their sins will be forgiven and that will make them feel better. They will feel secure, comfortable, confident, content, and peaceful. This will make them lead much more comfortable and happy life. Why is this difference in treatment? Because, *“those who reject God follow falsehood while those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus does God coin for people their lessons using similitudes.”* Falsehood has no roots to hold it down and everything based on it will be transient. The actions that were based on falsehood will fade away. But the truth is firmly rooted. Actions based on the truth will remain solidly intact. Since those who believe followed the truth that came from their Lord, then their deeds will be firmly rooted, God will forgive their sins and will improve their condition.

*“Therefore, when you encounter the disbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks until, when you have thoroughly subdued them, then bind them firmly and either (confer) a favor afterwards or ransom (them) until the war lays down its burden.”* This verse establishes the rules for the tactics to be followed in wars between Muslims and their enemies. First, they have to fight fiercely until the enemy is subdued; then take those who surrender captives. The captives can be either freed as a favor from the Muslims or they can be freed for a ransom.

*“That (is the command). If it had been God's will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test some of you by means of others.”* The history shows that all those who disbelieved and barred people from the path were tyrants. They persecuted the Muslims and spread corruption in the land. God could have destroyed them without a fight, but God wanted to test the believers. This kind of test kindles the flame of gallantry in the believers and motivates them to fight those who are persecuting or attacking them. God wanted to educate the believers to become objective in their views and to rid them of all whims and vain desires. They are fighting to protect the principles that they believe in. They are not fighting for a worldly gain. Another objective of this test is to show that death is inevitable. There is no life that is worth to be lived in humility or under persecution. The test provides an opportunity to those who would rather die martyrs than live slaves. This is also a test to determine those who are worthy of leadership. The test uncovers those who are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of a worthy cause, those who rid themselves of any shred of selfishness, and those who are interested only in establishing a good life on earth. These were promised a great reward, *“But those who are slain in the way of God - He will never let their deeds be wasted. He will guide them and improve their condition; and admit them to the Garden which He has made known to them.”* The key word here is, *“improve their condition.”* This is a promise that God will look after those who die in His cause to purify their souls and to guide them. They will then be admitted to the paradise that they were promised.

The following verse motivates the believers to fight in the sake of God promising them God's support, "*Believers, if you will support (the cause of) God, He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*" For the believers to get God's support, they should have the sincere intention to fight only for God's cause. The pure intention to serve God's cause is the condition for gaining God's support whether to die as a martyr or to overcome God's enemy. Sometime the lack of faith or the lack of objectivity clouds the vision and this fact is lost. It has been narrated that Abu Musa (RA) asked the Messenger of God (PBUH), "*Which fight can be considered to be in the sake of God: a person who fights motivated by his courage, a person who fights motivated by his gallantry, or a person who fights because he wants to show off?*" The Messenger (PBUH) replied, "*Only a person who fights so that God's word reign supreme over any other word, is considered to be fighting in the sake of God.*"

One notices that the verse indicates that God will grant victory to the believers then will make their foothold firm, "*He will support you, and will make your foothold firm.*" This is a subtle indication that victory in battle is not the end of the fight between truth and falsehood. The believers need to be cautious because the fight between the truth and falsehood will never end; it will simply take other forms other than armed struggle.

On the other hand, those who disbelieve will meet their fate, "*And those who disbelieve perdition is for them; and He will render their actions fruitless.*" They will be destroyed and their deeds will be rendered fruitless, "*That is because they hate that which God has revealed, therefore He made their actions fruitless.*"

The disbelievers are then directed to reflect on the fate of those who were destroyed before, "*Have they not travelled through the land to see the end of those who were before them? God wiped them out. And for the disbelievers there will be the like thereof.*" They were destroyed because they had no protection. They forfeited the protection of God; and there are no protectors besides Him, "*That is because God is the Patron of those who believe, and because the disbelievers have no patron.*" God is sufficient for the believers as a protecting Patron. Even if the victory over falsehood is delayed, it is forthcoming.

"*Verily God will admit those who believe and do good deeds, to gardens beneath which rivers flow; while those who reject God will enjoy (this world) and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire will be their abode.*" The believers may enjoy the pleasures of the life of this world, but they will get the real and permanent enjoyment in paradise. But those who disbelieve will only get their enjoyment in this life. The pleasures they will enjoy in the life of this world is an enjoyment of low quality; it a material enjoyment void of any high human value; so it is more like cattle's enjoyment of material things.

"*And how many a township, stronger than your township (Muhammad) which has cast you out, have We destroyed and they had no helper.*" This verse was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) during his trip when he migrated from Mecca to Medina. It brought comfort to the Prophet (PBUH) at this difficult time.



A comparison is then made between the conditions of the believers and the disbelievers, *“Is then one who is on a clear (path) from his Lord like those for whom the evil that they do is beautified while they follow their own whims?”* There is a basic difference between the two groups. The believers were able to see the truth in the guidance that they received from God and they followed it. The vision of the disbelievers, on the other hand, was overclouded by their whims and desires. They followed their whims and desires which led them astray. The difference between the two categories in the reward is then outlined, *“The parable of the Garden which the God conscious are promised; in it are rivers of water unpolluted; rivers of milk whose taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits and grace from their Lord. (Can those in such bliss) be compared to those who will dwell forever in the Fire. They will be given boiling water to drink, so that it tears their bowels?”*

### **Verses 16 to 31:**

16. *Among them are those who listen to you (Muhammad) and when they go forth from your presence they say to those who have been given knowledge, “What did he say just now?” Those whose hearts have been sealed by God, and they follow their own whims.*
17. *But those who are guided, He increases their guidance, and bestows on them their consciousness of Him.*
18. *Are they then only waiting for the Hour- that it should come upon them suddenly? But some of its signs have already come. But how, when it comes upon them, can they take their warning?*
19. *Know, therefore, that there is no god but God; and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the men and women who believe. God knows how you move about and knows your abode.*
20. *Those who believe say, “Why is not a sura sent down?” But when a sura of unequivocal meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, you will see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at you with a look of one who is fainting at the approach of death. But more fitting for them –*
21. *To obey and say what is just, and when the matter is determined - if they are loyal to God it will be better for them.*
22. *Would you then, if you were given the command, to spread mischief in the land and sever your ties of kinship?*
23. *Those are whom God has cursed, so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes.*
24. *Why do not they reflect on the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?*
25. *Those who turned back as apostates after guidance was clearly shown to them, Satan has seduced them and gave them false hopes.*
26. *This is because they said to those who hate what God has revealed, “We will obey you in part of (this) matter;” but God knows their secrets.*
27. *Then how (will it be with them) when the angels cause them to die smiting their faces and their backs.*
28. *This is because they followed that which angered God, and they hated God's good pleasure; so He made their deeds useless.*
29. *Or do those, in whose hearts is a disease, think that God will not bring to light their entire rancor?*

30. *Had We so willed, We could have made them known to you, and you should have known them by their marks; but surely you will know them by the tone of their speech. And God knows all that you do.*
31. *And verily We shall try you till We know those of you who strive hard (for the cause of God) and the steadfast, and till We test your record. (47: 16 – 31)*

*“Among them are those who listen to you (Muhammad) and when they go forth from your presence they say to those who have been given knowledge, ‘What did he say just now?’ Those whose hearts have been sealed by God, and they follow their own whims.”* The verse refers to the hypocrites who used to pretend that they were deeply interested in the Prophet’s (PBUH) speech then they turn around and subtly ridicule what he was saying. Compare this with what the believers were promised, *“But those who are guided, He increases their guidance, and bestows on them their consciousness of Him.”* They will be guided, their consciousness of God will increase, and they will be in awe of God. Juxtapose this against the condition of the hypocrites. They will be led astray, their hearts are sealed, and they will be heedless. The following verse expresses amazement at what the hypocrites were waiting for, *“Are they then only waiting for the Hour- that it should come upon them suddenly? But some of its signs have already come. But how, when it comes upon them, can they take their warning?”* When the Hour comes it will be too late for heeding the warning.

A command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers to take the path leading to knowledge, remembrance of God, and seeking His forgiveness, *“Know, therefore, that there is no god but God; and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the men and women who believe. God knows how you move about and knows your abode.”* The believers should know the fundamental fact upon which Islam is based: the belief in the oneness of God. Then they should seek God’s forgiveness. Knowledge is the basis for action. Knowledge is like a tree and action is its fruits. A tree that does not yield fruits is useless. The address is directed to the Messenger (PBUH), knowing that his sins have been all forgiven to emphasize the fact that one of the objectives for asking God’s forgiveness is to express one’s gratitude to God. In addition, the verse is not only directed to the Messenger (PBUH) but to all the believers as well. The last sentence in the verse, *“God knows how you move about and how you dwell in your homes,”* reassures the believers of the nearness of God, His care, and His protection. It also alerts them to the fact they cannot hide any secret from God, because He knows everything.

*“Those who believe say, ‘Why is not a sura sent down?’”* This may have been an expression of yearning for another sura from the Quran that they loved. Or they may have been looking for an answer to a question that has been posed about fighting in the way of God. However, *“But when a sura of unequivocal meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, you will see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at you with a look of one who is fainting at the approach of death.”* The verse continues to describe the reaction of the hypocrites to the revelation of God’s command to fight. The fear fills their heart, they become overwhelmed with panic, and they become on the verge of losing consciousness for fear of death. The recipe for salvation from such a despicable reaction is then prescribed, *“But more fitting for them - to obey and say what is just, and when the matter is determined - if they are loyal to God it will be better for them.”*

Trusting in God and obeying them is the prescription for salvation.

The verse then addresses the hypocrites directly, *“Would you then, if you were given the command, to spread mischief in the land and sever your ties of kinship?”* This was a warning in case their behavior led them to completely abandoning Islam and they became apostates. The consequences for such behavior are then expounded, *“Those are whom God has cursed so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes.”* Those who continue on the path of hypocrisy will be deprived of God’s mercy, they will be cursed by Him, and they will be made deaf and blind. Why do not they reflect on the Quran? Or their intellect has been locked, it cannot think, *“Why do not they reflect on the Quran, or are there locks on the hearts?”*

*“Those who turned back as apostates after guidance were clearly shown to them, Satan has seduced them and gave them false hopes. This is because they said to those who hate what God has revealed, ‘We will obey you in part of (this) matter;’ but God knows their secrets.”* The verses uncover the reason behind turning away from Islam by some of the hypocrites. They aligned themselves with the enemy of Muslims. God knows all what they do, and they will be punished severely, *“Then how (will it be with them) when the angels cause them to die smiting their faces and their backs.”* They will receive this punishment because they made the wrong choice, *“This is because they followed that which angered God, and they hated God's good pleasure; so He made their deeds useless.”*

The threat is then posed to the hypocrites that God can very easily expose them, *“Or does those, in whose hearts is a disease, think that God will not bring to light their entire rancor? Had We so willed, We could have made them known to you, and you should have known them by their marks; but surely you will know them by the tone of their speech. And God knows all that you do.”*

God knows everything and He will test the believers to make known those who stand fast and are willing to strive in His way, *“And verily We shall try you till We know those of you who strive hard (for the cause of God) and the steadfast, and till We test your record.”*

### **Verses 32 to 38:**

32. *Those who disbelieved and barred people from the way of God and opposed the messenger after the guidance has been manifested to them, they will not hurt God, and He will make their actions fruitless.*
33. *Believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.*
34. *Those who disbelieved and barred people from the path of God, then died rejecting God; God will not forgive them.*
35. *So do not falter and cry out for peace when you (will be) the uppermost, and God is with you, and He will not deprive you (of the reward of) your deeds.*

36. *The life of this world is but play and amusement; and if you believe and remain conscious of God, He will reward you, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions.*
37. *If He were to ask you for all of them, and press you, you would covetously withhold, and He would expose your malice.*
38. *Here you are being invited to spend (of your substance) in the path of God; but among you are some who are niggardly. But any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own souls. But God is free of all want, and it is you that are needy. If you turn back (from the path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you. (47: 32 – 38)*

*“Those who disbelieved and barred people from the way of God and opposed the Messenger after the guidance has been manifested to them, they will not hurt God, and He will make their actions fruitless.”* God has decreed that the deeds of those who disbelieved, barred people from the straight path, and fought the Messenger (PBUH) - during his life by carrying arms against him or after his death by fighting his Message – after they have received guidance will be rendered fruitless. Needless to say that they cannot harm God in any way but they cannot inflict any harm on God’s Message or those who are carrying the responsibility of calling to His Message. If they succeed in harming those who call to God’s Message, it will only be for a limited time and for a wisdom which only God knows.

Then the believers were commanded to obey God, the Messenger (PBUH), *“Believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and do not invalidate your deeds.”* This command indicates that within the Muslim community at that time there were people who did not comply totally with this principle, so they needed a reminder. They were warned that this may result in invalidating their deeds. True Muslims were shocked by this warning and were extremely cautious; they took all precautions to make sure that they were not part of this group.

The consequences for those who disbelieve and fight the Messenger of God (PBUH) were then explained, *“Those who disbelieved and barred people from the path of God, then died rejecting God; God will not forgive them.”* They have the chance to repent in their life time, but once they die it will be too late. This verse applies to the believers as well. It is a reminder to stay on the straight path. The believers are also warned of certain behaviors, *“So do not falter and cry out for peace when you (will be) the uppermost, and God is with you, and He will not deprive you (of the reward of) your deeds.”* They should not tarry when the call to strive in the path of God was made. They should not lose confidence and try to avoid fighting in the path of God, when the fight was called for. They were defending the truth, so by the help of God, they will have the upper hand over their enemy sooner or later. The pleasures of life should not be a factor to soften their resolve because, *“The life of this world is but play and amusement; and if you believe and remain conscious of God, He will reward you, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions.”* Life is a game for those who do not live according to God’s project. For those who live according to God’s project, life is a field that one sows to be harvested in the Hereafter. They try to fulfill the undertakings that God has prescribed for those whom He designated to be vicegerents on earth. Their reward will be with God who will not ask them to sacrifice their possessions because God knows the niggardly nature of humankind, *“If He were to ask you for all of them, and press you, you would covetously withhold, and He would expose your malice. Here you are being invited to spend (of your substance) in the path of God; but among you are*

*some who are niggardly. But any who are niggardly are so at the expense of their own souls. But God is free of all wants, and it is you that are needy. If you turn back (from the path), He will substitute in your stead another people; then they would not be like you.*” These verses show that the requirements of the religion of Islam are tailored to suit the initial natural disposition, the abilities, and the aptitudes of humankind. God knows best His creatures. The verses urge the Muslims to be generous in spending voluntarily in the path of God. However, the believers should realize that God is independent of any need; all of their possessions were given to them as a blessing from God. Niggardliness is a bad policy because any wealth that is spent in the way of God will be rewarded in multitude. God also can easily replace those who turn away with people that are not like them.

## **Sura 48: Al-Fath (The Victory)**

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

This Sura was revealed in Medina in the sixth year of Hijra after the agreement of Hudaibiyah was concluded. The main theme of the Sura is the agreement of Hudaibiyah, the condition of the Muslims community, and the circumstances that surrounded this agreement. Let us first discuss the circumstances that lead to the agreement of Hudaibiyah. Quraish prevented the Muslims who migrated to Medina to come back to Mecca to visit the Holy Mosque to perform Umra. Quraish's decision flew in the face of the well-established Arabic traditions. These traditions established the right to visit the K'aba. No one was ever prevented to enter Mecca, if they wanted to visit the K'aba. On the sixth year after the migration to Medina, the Messenger of God (PBUH) saw in a dream that he was entering the K'aba accompanied by Muslims; some Muslims shaved their heads and others cut their hair short. The Messenger (PBUH) told his companions of his dream and they considered this a good omen. During the month of Zul-Quida the Messenger (PBUH) decided to perform Umra. He asked the Muslims in Medina as well as the desert Arabs residing around Median to join him. Many of the desert Arabs lagged behind and he started his trip to Mecca with the Muslims who joined him. The Messenger and his companions were dressed in the unsown cloth required to perform the rituals of Umra, declared his intention to perform Umra, and brought with him the animals that he and his companions will sacrifice in Mecca as a part of the rituals of Umra. There were about fourteen hundred Muslims who joined the Messenger (PBUH) with the intention to perform Umra. When they reached a place called Sa'fan, the Prophet (PBUH) was met by a man called Bishr ibn Sufian Al-Ka'bi, he said, *"Messenger of God, Quraish heard about your intention to visit Mecca, and they decided to debar you from entering Mecca. They prepared an army which is waiting for you at a place called Zi-Towa and their cavalry under the leadership of Khaled ibn Al-Waleed is waiting at a place called Kira' Al-Ghamim. They will not allow you and your companions to proceed to Mecca."* The Messenger of God (PBUH) said, *"Why does Quraish want war with us? Why do not they let me talk to the other Arab tribes? If the tribes rejected me then that should please Quraish, but if they joined me then Quaraish can then chose whether they chose Islam or they can fight me at that time. Let Quraish know, that I will continue to strive to call people to Islam until I succeed or I perish."*

The Messenger (PBUH) asked his companions if any of them knows a route to Mecca which can bypass the route stalked by Quraish's army. A man from the tribe of Aslam knew of such a route so he led the Messenger (PBUH) and his companions. It was a very difficult route but it lead to a flat valley. Upon entering the valley, the Messenger (PBUH) asked his companions to ask God for forgiveness. The Muslims continued to proceed toward Mecca. When they reached Hudaibiyah, the Messenger's (PBUH) camel sat down and refused to move. In the mean time, when the observers from Quraish army realized that the Messenger (PBUH) changed his route, they went back to the army to alert them. The companions of the Messenger (PBUH) thought that the camel did not want to move because it had a mind of its own. The Messenger (PBUH) explained to them that the camel sat there because this was a command from God. The Messenger of God (PBUH) told his companions that this is God's plan and that he will agree to any agreement that Quraish would suggest as long as it respects God's prohibitions.

The companions came to the Messenger (PBUH) complaining that they cannot find water. He gave one of them one of his arrows and told him to go and dig. They dug and found water.

A number of mediators went back and forth between the Muslims and Quraish. First came Badil ibn Warqaa from the tribe of Khoza'a. The tribe of Khoza'a were not Muslims but they were sympathetic to the Muslim cause. Then Quraish sent Mikriz ibn Hafs followed by Al-Hulaiss ibn Azzaban as mediators. The three men received the same message from the Messenger of God (PBUH): The Muslims did not come to fight Quraish; they only wanted to perform Umra. The three mediators were convinced of the truth of the message and tried to convince Quraish to let the Muslims perform Umra. However, the chiefs of Quraish were adamant not to allow the Muslims into Mecca.

The Prophet (PBUH) then sent a man from Khoza'a to talk to the chiefs of Quraish. They killed his camel and tried to kill him but he was able to escape. Quraish sent a group of about forty people to kidnap a couple of Muslims but they were captured by the Muslims, however the Prophet (PBUH) freed them as a token of the Muslims' good intention.

The Prophet (PBUH) then sent Uthman ibn A'ffan (RA) to negotiate with Quraish. Uthman (RA) was delayed in Mecca and a rumor started to circulate that he was killed by Quraish. When the Prophet (PBUH) received this news, he decided that fighting Quraish became inevitable. He asked the Muslims to give him their oath of allegiance to join him in the war against Quraish. All Muslims gave their oath except a person by the name of Al-Jadd ibn Qais. The oath of allegiance took place under a tree. However, it came to be known that the rumor of Uthman's (RA) killing was not true. Quraish then sent Suhail ibn A'mr to negotiate a treaty with the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) negotiated the treaty of Hudaibiyah with Suhail; Ali ibn abi Taleb (RA) wrote down the conditions of the treaty. It was decided that the treaty would last for ten years. The treaty allowed the different Arab tribes to choose which side they wish to be allied with; as a result, the tribe of Khoza'a chose to be allied to the Muslims while the tribe of Banu Bakr chose Quraish as their allies. It was also agreed that the Muslims would not perform Umra this year, however, they can come back the following year they to perform Umra. Another condition was that Muslims should not accept any new reverts from Quraish while they would allow anyone who apostates to go back to Quraish. The Muslims were not pleased with these conditions. Even Umar ibn Al-Khatib (RA) was very angry. Umar (RA) later confessed that he continued to do good deeds asking God to forgive him for expressing his anger on that day.

While the conditions of the treaty were being written, Abu Gandal the son of Suhail came to the Prophet (PBUH) to announce that he became a Muslim; he wanted to join the Muslims but the Prophet (PBUH) refused to accept him because he felt that he was compelled to honor his agreement with Quraish.

The Prophet (PBUH) asked the Muslims to slaughter their sacrifice and to shave their heads as a sign of ending their state of Ihram (signifying the completion of the rituals of Umra). The Muslims were reluctant to oblige. The Prophet (PBUH) went into his tent complaining to his wife, Um Salamah (RA), about the reluctance of the Muslims to obey his orders. She advised him to go out, slaughter his sacrifice, and shave his head; which he did. When the Muslims saw the Prophet (PBUH) doing that they followed suit.

The present Sura was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) while he was on the way back to Medina. When the Prophet (PBUH) recited the verse, “*We have given you (Muhammad) a clear victory.*” The Muslims asked, “*Is this really a victory?*” The Prophet (PBUH) said, “*By God in whose hand is my soul, it is a true victory.*”

### **Verses 1 to 17:**

1. *We have given you (Muhammad) a clear victory.*
2. *That God may forgive you your sins, that which is past and that which is to come; and may perfect His blessings on you; and may guide you on a straight path,*
3. *And that God may help you with a mighty victory.*
4. *It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith. To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
5. *That He may admit the believing men and women into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever, and absolve them of their sins; and that is, in the sight of God, the supreme triumph.*
6. *And that He may torment the hypocrites, men and women, and the idolaters, men and women, who entertain evil thoughts about God. Upon them is a misfortune of evil nature; the wrath of God is on them. He has cursed them and got Hell ready for them; and evil is it for a destination.*
7. *To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; and God is Eminent, Wise.*
8. *We have truly sent you as a witness, as a bringer of glad tidings, and as a warner.*
9. *In order that you (people) may believe in God and His Messenger and that you may assist and honor Him, and celebrate His praise morning and evening.*
10. *Those who pledge allegiance to you (Muhammad), pledge allegiance only to God. The hand of God is above their hands. So whosoever breaks his oath breaks it only to his own detriment; while whosoever keeps his covenant with God, God will bestow on him immense reward.*
11. *The desert Arabs who lagged behind will say to you, "Our possessions and our households occupied us, so ask forgiveness for us." They say with their tongues that which is not in their hearts. Say, "Who can avail you anything against God, if He intended for you harm or He intended for you benefit?" God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
12. *But, you thought that the Messenger and the believers will never return to their families; this seemed pleasing in your hearts, and you conceived an evil thought, for you are a worthless people.*
13. *And if any does not believe in God and His Messenger, We have prepared a blazing Fire for the disbelievers.*
14. *To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
15. *Those who lagged behind will say to you, when you set forth to capture booty, "Let us follow you." They wish to change the verdict of God. Say (to them), "You shall not follow*



*us. God has said this before.” Then they will say, “You are envious of us.” How little they understand?*

*16. Say to the desert Arabs who lagged behind, "You shall be summoned (to fight) against a people of great military might, you should fight them unless they surrender. Then if you show obedience, God will grant you a goodly reward, but if you turn back as you did before, He will punish you with a painful torment."*

*17. There is no blame for the blind, nor is there blame for the lame, nor is there blame for the sick (that they do not go forth to war). And whoso obeys God and His messenger, He will admit him to Gardens underneath which rivers flow; and whoso turns back, He will punish him with a painful torment. (48: 1 – 17)*

*“We have given you (Muhammad) a clear victory. That God may forgive you your sins, that which is past and that which is to come; and may perfect His blessings on you; and may guide you on a straight path. And that God may help you with a mighty victory.”* The opening verse of the Sura outlines the divine blessings that God has bestowed on His Messenger (PBUH): clear victory, comprehensive forgiveness, perfect favor, firm guidance, and mighty victory. This is the reward for the complete submission to God and the absolute trust in Him which the Messenger (PBUH) exhibited. The Messenger (PBUH) relinquished his own personal will and followed God’s will which has been conveyed subtly through a dream. He stood firm against the great pressure exerted by his companions to fight and concluded the treaty in obedience to God’s command.

It was truly a great victory. During the two years that followed the conclusion of the treaty, the number of people who accepted Islam exceeded by far the number of Muslims that existed before the treaty. The number of Muslims who went out with the Messenger (PBUH) to perform Umra in the sixth year of Hijra was about fourteen hundred, two years later the number of Muslims who participated in the conquest of Mecca were about ten thousand people. Among the people who accepted Islam during these two years, were prominent leaders like Khaled ibn Al-Waleed (RA) and ‘Amr ibn Al-‘Aass (RA). The peace between the Muslims and Quraish allowed the Muslims to deal with their enemies, the Jewish tribe of Bani Khaiber. The allegiance that the Muslims pledged under the tree – the pledge of Al-Ridwan – represented another victory for the hearts that submitted to the will of God.

The Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims were very pleased with this Sura, which outlined the great blessings that God bestowed on His Messenger (PBUH) and the believers who expressed their submission to God in a very practical way and at a very difficult time. God filled their hearts with tranquility, bestowed His forgiveness on them, and promised them great rewards in the Hereafter, *“It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith. To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; and God is Omniscient, Wise.”* The tranquility and serenity that filled the hearts of the believers were important factors that moved the believers to submit and be content with God’s verdict. This was needed in view of the fact that the Muslims embarked on this trip full of hope that they will get to perform Umra with the Messenger of God (PBUH) but their hopes were dashed when Quraish debarred them from entering Mecca. The situation was further aggravated by the treaty that was concluded between the Messenger (PBUH) and Quraish. The Muslims did not like the conditions stipulated in the treaty. They felt that the conditions were favorable to Quraish; they were worried that this

would be seen as a sign of weakness. God filled the hearts of the believers with the tranquility that made them submit to His will.

Then God reminded the believers, that he could have subdued Quraish for their sake, using His hosts, *“To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth;”* but the divine wisdom willed otherwise. So that, *“He may admit the believing men and women into Gardens underneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein forever, and absolve them of their sins; and that is, in the sight of God, the supreme triumph.”* God wanted to grant the believers the supreme triumph. On the other hand, He wanted the hypocrites and the idolaters to be punished, *“And that He may torment the hypocrites, men and women, and the idolaters, men and women, who entertain evil thoughts about God. Upon them is a misfortune of evil nature; the wrath of God is on them. He has cursed them and got Hell ready for them; and evil is it for a destination.”* Then the power of God is reiterated once more, *“To God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; and God is Eminent, Wise.”*

*“We have truly sent you as a witness, as a bringer of glad tidings, and as a warner.”* This verse emphasized the responsibility of the Messenger of God (PBUH). He was sent to be a witness over humankind that he had delivered the Message. He was sent to bring glad tidings to those who will accept the guidance and to warn those who will reject it. The believers are then told of their responsibility, *“In order that you (people) may believe in God and His Messenger and that you may assist and honor Him, and celebrate His praise morning and evening.”* They should believe in God and His Messenger (PBUH), support the divine project, revere God, and pray to Him during the day. These prayers will maintain the connection between their hearts and God. So, they will be always connected with God. This connection was made possible through the Messenger (PBUH); they made that connection when they pledged their allegiance to him. That is why when they swore allegiance to the Messenger (PBUH) they were actually pledging allegiance to God, *“Those who pledge allegiance to you (Muhammad), pledge allegiance only to God. The hand of God is above their hands. So whosoever breaks his oath breaks it only to his own detriment; while whosoever keeps his covenant with God, God will bestow on him immense reward.”*

*“The desert Arabs who lagged behind will say to you, ‘Our possessions and our households occupied us, so ask forgiveness for us.’ They say with their tongues that which is not in their hearts. Say, ‘Who can avail you anything against God, if He intended for you harm or He intended for you benefit?’ God is Totally-Aware of what you do. But, you thought that the Messenger and the believers will never return to their families; this seemed pleasing in your hearts, and you conceived an evil thought, for you are a worthless people.”* The verses did not only relate the story of those who lagged behind but they also offered a recipe for addressing the ills of the souls and the doubts that lingered in the hearts. The verses refer to the Arabs of the tribes of Ghifar, Muzainah, Ashga’, Aslam and others who resided around Medina and were reluctant to join the Prophet (PBUH) when he asked them to join him on his trip to Umra. Not only they had no excuse to lag behind, but they were also insincere in asking for forgiveness. They forgot that God is Totally-Aware of what they think and what they do. They forgot also that no one can protect them if God desired to punish them; nor that no one can prevent God’s blessings to reach them. Then they were given the true reason for their reluctance to join the

Messenger (PBUH), *“But, you thought that the Messenger and the believers will never return to their families; this seemed pleasing in your hearts, and you conceived an evil thought, for you are a worthless people.”* They thought that the Messenger’s (PBUH) trip to Mecca to perform Umra was a suicidal mission. They did not understand how could the Messenger (PBUH) go to Mecca to perform Umra, knowing that he was expelled from Mecca and that there was a state of war between the Muslims and Quraish. They had great doubts that he and those who went with him would return safely from such a trip. They forgot that it was God’s command and that God promised to protect His Messenger and his companions. These evil thoughts which they harbored in their hearts made them lag behind. They thought that by lagging behind they would be safe but the criterion of salvation that God decreed is different from their material calculations, *“And if any does not believe in God and His Messenger, We have prepared a blazing Fire for the disbelievers. And if any does not believe in God and His Messenger, We have prepared a blazing Fire for the disbelievers. To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

The following verse brought the believers glad tidings of an imminent victory, *“Those who lagged behind will say to you, when you set forth to capture booty, ‘Let us follow you.’ They wish to change the verdict of God. Say (to them), ‘You shall not follow us. God has said this before.’ Then they will say, ‘You are envious of us.’ How little they understand?”* Most of the scholars believe that this verse points to the battle of Khaibar. That could be true but the verse could also be understood as a promise to the believers that they will be engaging in a battle which they will win. Those who lagged behind will then discover the truth of the situation. The Messenger (PBUH) was to reject their request. They declared that they were rejected only because the Muslims were envious of them, how little did they know?

However, they were given another chance, *“Say to the desert Arabs who lagged behind, ‘You shall be summoned (to fight) against a people of great military might you should fight them unless they surrender. Then if you show obedience, God will grant you a goodly reward, but if you turn back as you did before, He will punish you with a painful torment.”* It is not known exactly which battle the Quran is referring to, but the verse stated a principle in general. However, exemptions were granted to those who had real excuses, *“There is no blame for the blind, nor is there blame for the lame, nor is there blame for the sick (that they do not go forth to war).”* The reward for those who obey and the punishment for those who disobey were then enunciated, *“And whoso obeys God and His messenger, He will admit him to Gardens underneath which rivers flow; and whoso turns back, He will punish him with a painful torment.”*

### **Verses 18 to 29:**

18. *God was well pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility on them, and has rewarded them with an imminent victory;*
19. *And abundant gains will they acquire; and God is Eminent, Wise.*

20. *God has promised you abundant gains that you shall acquire, and He has given you this in advance, and has restrained people's hands from you, that it may be a sign for the believers, and that He may guide you on a straight path.*
21. *And other (gains) which you have not been able to achieve, God has surely encompassed them, and God is All-Powerful.*
22. *And if those who disbelieve should fight you they will certainly turn (their) backs, then they would not find any protecting guardian or a helper.*
23. *This is the law of God which has taken course always. You will not find any change in the law of God.*
24. *And it is He who has restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the midst of Mecca, after He had made you victors over them. God is All-Seeing of what you do.*
25. *They are the ones who disbelieved and debarred you from the inviolable Place of Worship, and debarred the offering from reaching its goal. And if it had not been for believing men and believing women, whom you did not know - lest you should tread them under foot and thus incur guilt for them unknowingly; that God might bring into His mercy whom He wills - If (the believers and the disbelievers) had been clearly separated We verily would had punished those of them who disbelieved with painful torment.*
26. *When those who disbelieve had set up in their hearts zealotry, the zealotry of the age of ignorance, then God sent down His tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the believers and imposed on them the word of God consciousness, for they were entitled to it and worthy of it. And God is Omniscient.*
27. *Truly God has fulfilled the vision of His Messenger. You shall enter the Sacred Mosque - if God wills - secure, heads shaved or hair cut short, and without fear. He knew what you knew not, and He granted, besides this, an imminent victory.*
28. *It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religions. And God suffices as a Witness.*
29. *Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and those who are with him are strong against the disbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. You will see them bowing and prostrating themselves (in prayer), seeking bounty from God and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Torah; and their similitude in the Gospel- like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight. As a result, it fills the disbelievers with rage at them. God has promised those among them who believe and do good deeds forgiveness and a great reward. (48: 18 – 29)*

*“God was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent down tranquility on them, and has rewarded them with an imminent victory.”* Reading this verse, one can try to imagine the scene described in this verse. This was a sacred moment in the life of humanity, when God revealed to His Messenger (PBUH) how He was pleased with the behavior of the believers who gave their oath of allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH). This must have been a momentous occasion for those who participated in this event. As a sign of His pleasure, He filled their hearts with tranquility and gave them the glad tidings of an imminent victory and abundant gains, *“And abundant gains will they acquire;*

*and God is Eminent, Wise.”*

Then the verses turned to address the believers themselves, *“God has promised you abundant gains that you shall acquire, and He has given you this in advance, and has restrained people's hands from you, that it may be a sign for the believers, and that He may guide you on a straight path. And other (gains) which you have not been able to achieve, God has surely encompassed them, and God is All-Powerful.”* This was good news for the believers. They heard it and were certain of its truthfulness. They lived afterwards to see the promise being fulfilled. The verse referring to a victory in advance was made to stress that the treaty of Hudaibiyah was a true victory. God blessed the believers and saved them the consequences of a fight on that occasion. This was a lesson to the believers which they only understood later on. God guided them to the straight path as a reward for their submission to the will of God.

A promise was then made for another victory, *“And if those who disbelieve should fight you they will certainly turn (their) backs, then they would not find any protecting guardian or a helper.”* This may have been a reference to the conquest of Mecca, which took place two years after the conclusion of the treaty of Hudaibiyah as a result of the actions of Quraish which nullified the treaty. It is God’s law that the believers will eventually win their battle against the disbelievers, *“This is the law of God which has taken course always. You will not find any change in the law of God.”* God’s law does not change.

The following verse refers to the incident which occurred before the agreement between Quraish and the believers. The disbelievers from Quraish sent a group of about forty men to kidnap Muslims, but the Muslims were able to capture them and the Prophet (PBUH) set them free as a token of good will, *“And it is He who has restrained their hands from you and your hands from them in the midst of Mecca, after He had made you victors over them. God is All-Seeing of what you do.”*

The following verses describe the enemy of the Muslims, *“They are the ones who disbelieved and debarred you from the inviolable Place of Worship, and debarred the offering from reaching its goal. And if it had not been for believing men and believing women, whom you did not know - lest you should tread them under foot and thus incur guilt for them unknowingly; that God might bring into His mercy whom He wills - If (the believers and the disbelievers) had been clearly separated We verily would had punished those of them who disbelieved with painful torment.”* They earned the description of the disbelievers because they debarred the Muslims from performing Umra even though they saw the animals that the Muslims brought for sacrifice as part of the rituals of Umra. This was considered a major offence both in the Arab traditions before Islam and in the Islamic tradition. The reasons for effecting this restraint on the believers was the presence of Muslims who were still living in Mecca and who did not declare their faith for fear of Quraish’s reprisal. In addition, the fact that Muslims did not fight at that time was an effective way for calling to Islam; many idolaters embraced Islam after Hudaibiyah.

The chiefs of Quraish broke a long standing Arabic tradition by debarring the Muslims from performing Umra. The decision to debar the Muslims from performing Umra was not done on principle but was motivated by subjective zealotry, *“When those who disbelieve had set up in*

*their hearts zealotry, the zealotry of the age of ignorance, then God sent down His tranquility upon His messenger and upon the believers and imposed on them the word of God consciousness, for they were entitled to it and worthy of it. And God is Omniscient.*” Those who are controlled by their own whims and zealotry will never be able to get peace of mind. On the contrary, the believers received tranquility and guidance from their Lord because they deserved the status of those who remain conscious of God.

*“Truly God has fulfilled the vision of His Messenger. You shall enter the Sacred Mosque - if God wills - secure, heads shaved or hair cut short, and without fear. He knew what you knew not, and He granted, besides this, an imminent victory.”* God’s promise was fulfilled; the Muslims went back and performed Umra the following year. Then they were able to conquer Quraish after one more year. The verse reminded the believers that everything is controlled by God’s will.

*“It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to proclaim it over all religions. And God suffices as a Witness.”* The true religion prevailed not only in the Arab peninsula but all over the world.

The final verse paints a bright image of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), *“Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and those who are with him are strong against the disbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. You will see them bowing and prostrating themselves (in prayer), seeking bounty from God and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Torah; and their similitude in the Gospel- like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight. As a result, it fills the disbelievers with rage at them. God has promised those among them who believe and do good deeds forgiveness and a great reward.”* The verse starts by emphasizing the fact which Quraish denied: Muhammad (PBUH) is certainly God’s Messenger. Then it goes on to describe the way the believers deal with each other on one side and the way they deal with the disbelievers on the other side. Then it describes their state of submission to their Lord. Then it delves into their hearts and describes their inner feelings, *“Seeking bounty from God and (His) Good Pleasure.”* The image given for the believers in this verse was not a new image. It was the same as the one given in the Torah and the Gospel. The believers are like a new plant that grows strong and straight, which pleases those who sow the seeds in the first place; but displeases the disbelievers. God promised them a great reward.

## **Sura 49: Al-Hujrat (The Private Apartments)**

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

This is a short but magnificent Sura. It states a number of the principles of the doctrine and the law, the facts of life, and the rules of etiquette and ethics. One can glean two main features from reading the Sura. The first feature is that it lays down the ethical rules that enable a society that strives to get closer to God and deserves to belong to God, to be established. This is a society whose members enjoy the purity of hearts, the cleanliness of feelings, and the chastity of senses. The second feature of the Sura is that it exhibits the unrelenting effort of the Quran to establish and train a community of believers which represents such a society.

### **Verses 1 to 18:**

1. *Believers, do not put yourselves forward before God and His Messenger; but be conscious of God; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
2. *Believers, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him, as you may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds be rendered fruitless while you do not realize.*
3. *Those who lower their voices in the presence of the Messenger of God- God has tested their hearts for piety. Theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward.*
4. *Indeed, those who call out to you from behind the private apartments - most of them lack understanding.*
5. *And if they had been patient till you (could) come out to them, it would have been better for them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
6. *Believers, if a transgressing person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest you harm people unwittingly, and you would become regretful for what you have done.*
7. *And know that among you is God's Messenger. If he were to obey you in much of the matters, you would certainly be in trouble; but God has endeared the faith to you and has beautified it in your hearts, and has made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful to you. Such are they who are the rightly guided.*
8. *(It is) a bounty and a blessing from God; and God is Omniscient, Wise.*
9. *And if two parties among the believers fall into a fight, make peace between them; but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight you (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God. And if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair. God loves those who are fair (and just).*
10. *The believers are but a single brotherhood. So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and be conscious of God, that you may receive mercy.*
11. *Believers, let not some people among you ridicule other people; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor let some women ridicule other women; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Neither defame each other nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after (one had accepted) faith. And those who do not desist are (indeed) the wrongdoers.*
12. *Believers, avoid most of suspicion. Indeed, suspicion in some cases is a sin. And neither spy on nor backbite each other. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead*

*brother? You would abhor it. Remain conscious of God; God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.*

13. *People, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) most conscious of God. Indeed, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.*
14. *The desert Arabs say, "We believe." Say, "You did not believe; but rather say 'We submit,' for faith has not yet entered into your hearts. Yet, if you obey God and His messenger, He will not withhold from you any of (the reward for) your deeds; God is all-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
15. *The (true) believers are only those who believe in God and His messenger and do not entertain any doubt, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of God. Those are the truthful ones.*
16. *Say (to them, Muhammad), "Are you going to teach God about your religion, when God knows all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, and God is Cognizant of all things."*
17. *They consider it a favor to you (Muhammad) that they have submitted. Say, "Do not deem your submission a favor to me; but God does confer a favor on you that He guided you to the faith if you are truthful.*
18. *Verily God knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth; and God is All-Seeing of all that you do." (49: 1 -18)*

The Sura starts with an endearing call to the believers, *"Believers, do not put yourselves forward before God and His Messenger; but be conscious of God; God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."* Qatadah (RA) mentioned that some believers used to suggest topics which they thought the Quran should address. Ibn Abbas (RA) said that this verse admonished the believers not to disagree with the Quran or the prophetic tradition. This verse then outlined the etiquette for speaking to God and His Messenger (PBUH). It outlined and established the rules of receiving admonitions from God and His Messenger (PBUH). The adherence to this etiquette reflected the degree of God consciousness that a believer had. The believers were told not to suggest what should be revealed but accept the Quran as revealed.

The second rule of the etiquette of speaking to the Prophet (PBUH) was the given, *"Believers, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him, as you may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds be rendered fruitless while you do not realize."* The verse commanded the believers to address the Prophet (PBUH) respectfully. Speaking to the Prophet (PBUH) disrespectfully may cause their deeds to become worthless. The believers were quick to abide by these rules. It has been narrated that Thabet ibn Qais (RA) was known for his loud voice. When he heard this verse he thought he was doomed because he used to talk loudly in the presence of the Messenger (PBUH). He was so stressed and dismayed; he stayed home and refused to go to the Mosque. When the Messenger (PBUH) missed him, he asked the other companions about the whereabouts of Thabet (RA). They went to see Thabet (RA) and enquired about his absence, he told them that he was afraid the he was destined to Hell fire because he used to speak loudly in the presence of the Messenger (PBUH). The companions went back and told the Messenger (PBUH) of the reason that kept Thabet (RA) away from the Mosque. The



Messenger (PBUH) told them to go back and reassure Thabet (RA) that this verse was not about him and that he has been destined to paradise.

The verses continued to praise those who speak softly in the presence of the Messenger (PBUH), *“Those who lower their voices in the presence of the Messenger of God - God has tested their hearts for piety. Theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward.”* God consciousness is a great gift from God. God bestows this gift on those whom are deemed well deserving.

The following verse narrates an event that occurred on the ninth year of Hijra, when a delegation from the tribe of Tameem came to announce their acceptance of Islam. They stood outside the Messenger’s private apartments and started calling him loudly, asking him to come out to meet them. This annoyed the Messenger (PBUH), *“Indeed, those who call out to you from behind the private apartments - most of them lack understanding.”* The verse accused them of being lacking in understanding. Then they were admonished to be more patient, *“And if they had been patient till you (could) come out to them, it would have been better for them.”* It would have been better for them to have had patience. However, they were given the opportunity to repent and ask for forgiveness, *“God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

The Sura started by calling on the believers to understand clearly who their leader was. Then the verses established the etiquette of addressing the leader respectfully. These two principles paved the way for the commands that followed. The first of these commands was how to deal with news, especially when such news may cause harm to someone, *“Believers, if a transgressing person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest you harm people unwittingly, and you would become regretful for what you have done.”* News narrated by a transgressor is likely to be false. One should ascertain the veracity of such news before acting upon it. This verse refers to a specific incident. The Messenger of God (PBUH) sent Al-Waleed ibn ‘Uqbah (RA) to collect the poor-due from the tribe of Bani Al-Mustalq. When Al-Waleed approached their town he saw a gathering on the outskirts of the town. He thought that they were waiting to hurt him, so he went back to the Messenger (PBUH) telling him that the tribe of Bani Al-Mustalq were coming to fight the Messenger (PBUH). The Messenger (PBUH) sent Khaled ibn Al-Waleed (RA) to ascertain the veracity of the news which ‘Uqbah claimed. The Messenger (PBUH) advised Khaled (RA) to be careful in assessing the situation, he asked Khaled (RA) not to enter the town by night but to wait till the morning so he would have a good chance to assess the situation. Khaled (RA) came back with the good news that ‘Uqbah was mistaken in assessing the situation. However, the verse establishes a fundamental principle in ascertaining the facts before a rash reaction to a situation is embarked upon.

The believers were then reminded that the Messenger of God (PBUH) always acted according to God’s revelation. They should not pressure him to follow their opinions, *“And know that among you is God’s Messenger. If he were to obey you in much of the matters, you would certainly be in trouble; but God has endeared the faith to you and has beautified it in your hearts, and has made disbelief and lewdness and rebellion hateful to you. Such are they who are the rightly guided. (It is) a bounty and a blessing from God; and God is Omniscient, Wise”* The verse reminded them of the blessings that God has bestowed upon them. They should then submit to God and be

satisfied with His decrees and accept His verdicts.

Another fundamental principle that the Sura established deals with how to settle disputes between two contending Muslim groups, *“And if two parties among the believers fall into a fight, make peace between them; but if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight you (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of God. And if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair. God loves those who are fair (and just). The believers are but a single brotherhood. So make peace and reconciliation between your two (contending) brothers; and be conscious of God, that you may receive mercy.”* This verse may have been revealed to deal with a specific event but it establishes a general principle. It stipulates that a disagreement may arise between two Muslim groups as a result of an injustice inflicted by one group on another. This disagreement may develop into full-fledged fight between the two groups. Muslims who do not belong to either group are obliged to mediate between the two groups to stop the war and establish peace. If one of the groups refused to come to peaceful terms and continued its transgression against the other group, then the other Muslims are obliged to fight the transgressors until they listen to the voice of reason and accept God’s rules. The verse establishes the principle that in settling these disputes Muslims should refer to God’s law and should practice equity and objectivity. During any conflict Muslims should remember that they share a single bond of brotherhood. They should always remain conscious of God. This is the way to gain God’s mercy.

Islam endeavors to establish a society that is guided by the Quran. It is a society that espouses high ethical standards. Each member of this society enjoys a secure dignified position. People are protected against any kind of slander, assault, or harassment, *“Believers, let not some people among you ridicule other people; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Nor let some women ridicule other women; it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former). Neither defame each other nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after (one had accepted) faith. And those who do not desist are (indeed) the wrongdoers.”* People should understand that God’s standards in evaluating people are different from their human standards. It may be that God values someone that they consider of a lesser value than themselves. Believers should then refrain from defaming, ridiculing, or calling each other names. Having accepted faith, one should be cautious not to be rendered a disbeliever by his own actions.

*“Believers, avoid most of suspicion. Indeed, suspicion in some cases is a sin. And neither spy on nor backbite each other. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would abhor it. Remain conscious of God; God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.”* This verse sets another level of protection for people living in an Islamic society. It sets the standard for dealing with doubts that may arise as a result of hearsay. Muslims should not harbor bad feelings towards their fellow Muslims on the basis of unsubstantiated information. The verse confirms the principle that people are innocent until proven guilty. Islam even goes beyond this rule to a higher standard. The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“A doubt is not acceptable reason to investigate.”* Investigations should be done on the basis of concrete

evidence, not on the basis of a probable cause. People should not spy on each other. Muslims have the right to lead a secure, peaceful, and protected life. Exposing the secrets of people is a sin. The Messenger (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Whoever protected the secret of a believer it is as if he was able to resurrect a victim of infanticide after its death.”*

The verse continued to establish these high ethical standards that a Muslim society should espouse. It admonished against backbiting. It drew a parallel between a person who backbites and the person who commits the abhorrent action of eating the flesh of his brother alive. No decent human being would want to see himself in that position. The conclusion of the verse reminded people of the main thing that will guard them against all these evils: God consciousness. However, if one sins, then one should not despair because the door to repentance is always open, *“God is Ever-Relenting, Giver of Mercy.”*

*“People, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) most conscious of God. Indeed, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware.”* This verse addresses all humankind. The Creator tells all people that they were all created from a single source. The whole human race came from one pair: a male and a female. They were then spread into different nations so that they can get to know each other; work, and collaborate with each other. The standard against which people should be evaluated is God consciousness. People should not be valued according to their race, language, color, or nationality. All people have equal worth in the sight of God. The only standard that determines their individual worth is the level of their God consciousness.

*“The desert Arabs say, ‘We believe.’ Say, ‘You did not believe; but rather say “We submit,” for faith has not yet entered into your hearts. Yet, if you obey God and His messenger, He will not withhold from you any of (the reward for) your deeds; God is all-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’”* It is narrated that this verse was revealed in reference to a tribe by the name of Bani Asad. They accepted Islam and bragged about it. They indicated that they did the Messenger (PBUH) a favor by accepting Islam. This verse was revealed to set the record straight; informing them that they were actually the recipients of God’s favor who guided them to Islam. They should express gratitude to God. God’s reward is available for those who obey God and do good deeds. The verses continue to list the traits of the true believers, *“The (true) believers are only those who believe in God and His messenger and do not entertain any doubt, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of God. Those are the truthful ones.”* Faith constitutes full acceptance of God and His Messenger (PBUH) in the heart of a believer. Such acceptance is not marred in any way by a shred of doubt. Such acceptance renders the sacrifice of wealth and life in the way of God easy. People who enjoy these traits are the true believers, who are truthful in their covenant with God.

Going back to desert Arabs, the query is posed, *“Say (to them, Muhammad), ‘Are you going to teach God about your religion, when God knows all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, and God is Cognizant of all things.’”* Do they really think that God does not know what is in their hearts? God knows everything in the heaven and earth. God’s knowledge encompasses everything.

*“They consider it a favor to you (Muhammad) that they have submitted. Say, ‘Do not deem your submission a favor to me; but God does confer a favor on you that He guided you to the faith if you are truthful.’”* The fact that the desert Arabs thought they were doing the Messenger (PBUH) a favor by accepting Islam is an indication that they did not understand the meaning of true belief. They did not taste the sweetness of faith. They should be grateful to God that He bestowed His guidance on them. Faith is the most valuable bounty of God that a human being could be blessed with. Faith shapes the outlook of people and how they deal with life and its changing conditions. It is the light that guides people during their journey on earth from birth to death.

*“Verily God knows the unseen of the heavens and the earth; and God is All-Seeing all that you do.”* The final verse concludes the Sura with the fundamental fact that describes God’s encompassing knowledge.

## Sura 50: Qaf (The letter Qaf)

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

### **Verses 1 to 45:**

1. *Qaf. By the Glorious Quran.*
2. *But they wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves. So the disbelievers say, "This is an amazing thing.*
3. *When we are dead and have become dust (shall we be brought back again)? That would be a farfetched return."*
4. *We already know how much the earth takes of them, and with Us is a recording book.*
5. *But they denied the truth when it came to them; so they are in a confused state.*
6. *Have they not observed the sky above them, how We have constructed it and beautified it, and how there are no rifts therein?*
7. *And the earth have We spread it out, and set upon it mountains standing firm, and produced therein every kind of beautiful plant;*
8. *Giving insight and a reminder for every devotee turning (to God).*
9. *And We send down from the sky blessed water whereby We give growth to gardens and the grain of crops,*
10. *And lofty date-palms with ranged clusters,*
11. *Provision (made) for people; and by it We gave life to a dead land. This is how the dead will be resurrected.*
12. *The people of Noah denied (the truth) before them, and (so did) the dwellers at Ar-Rass and (the tribe of) Thamud,*
13. *And (the tribe of) A'ad, and Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lot;*
14. *And the companions of the thicket, and the people of Tubba'; every one denied their messengers; therefore, My threat was justly fulfilled.*
15. *Were We then weary with the first creation, that they should be in confused doubt about a new creation?*
16. *It was We who created humankind, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein.*
17. *When the two receivers receive (him), seated on the right hand and on the left;*
18. *Not a word does he utter but there is with him an observer ready.*
19. *And the stupor of death will bring truth (before his eyes). (It will be said,) "This is what you were trying to escape."*
20. *And the trumpet shall be blown. This is the threatened Day.*
21. *And every soul shall come, along with it a driver and a witness.*
22. *(It will be said,) "You were heedless of this; now We have removed your veil, and your sight will be sharp this Day."*
23. *And his companion will say, "Here is (his Record) ready with me."*
24. *(And it will be said,) "Do cast into Hell every ungrateful, rebellious one,*
25. *Hinderer of good, transgressor, and doubter;*
26. *Who set up another god beside God. Throw him into the severe torment."*
27. *His companion will say, "Our Lord, I did not make him transgress, but he was (himself) far astray."*

28. *He will say, "Do not dispute with each other in My presence. I had already in advance sent you warning.*
29. *The sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed, and I do not treat the servants unjustly."*
30. *On the day when We say to Hell, "Have you been filled? and it will say, "Are there any more to come?"*
31. *And the Garden will be brought near to those who are God conscious, not far away.*
32. *(And it will be said), "This is what you were promised. (It is) for every penitent and heedful one,*
33. *Who feared the Lord of Mercy in secret and comes with a contrite heart?*
34. *Enter it in peace; this is the Day of immortality."*
35. *They have therein what they desire, and there is more with Us.*
36. *But how many generations before them did We destroy, who were mightier than these in prowess so that they overran the lands. Had they any place of escape?*
37. *Verily in this is a message for any that has a heart and understanding or who gives ear and earnestly witnesses (the truth).*
38. *And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between them, in six days, and no fatigue touched Us.*
39. *Therefore (Muhammad) persevere in enduring what they say, and glorify your Lord before the rising and before the setting of the sun;*
40. *And in the night-time glorify Him, and after the (prescribed) prostrations.*
41. *And listen on the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quiet near,*
42. *The Day when they will hear a (mighty) cry in truth. That is the Day of coming forth (from the graves).*
43. *Verily it is We who give life and death; and to Us is the final destination.*
44. *The Day when the earth will be rent asunder for them to hurry out. That will be an easy gathering for Us.*
45. *We know best what they say, and you (Muhammad) are not a tyrant over them; therefore, remind by the Quran whoever fears My threat. (50: 1 – 45)*

The Sura starts with an oath made by God, "*Qaf. By the Glorious Quran.*" The oath uses the letter Qaf which is a letter of the Arabic Alphabet and in the mean time it is the first letter of the word, Quran. The verses do not specify the subject of the oath. The oath is mentioned to alert the listener to a grave matter. The verses continue to address the attitude of the idolaters of Mecca towards the Messenger of God (PBUH), "*But they wonder that there has come to them a warner from among themselves. So the disbelievers say, 'This is an amazing thing. When we are dead and have become dust (shall we be brought back again)? That would be a farfetched return.'*" The idolaters expressed their astonishment that God sent a man from among them as a messenger. The fact that the Messenger (PBUH) told them that there will be resurrection after death was another source of their astonishment. The concept of resurrection is an integral part of the Islamic doctrine. Muslims are required to devote all their lives working for the sake of God. The reward for their deeds may not be given fully in their lifetime; it may be delayed till the Day of Judgment. Resurrection is essential so that the reward or punishment should be fulfilled. The principle of accountability has no sense if there were no resurrection. The idolater's attention was focused on one aspect of the problem, how can life return after the body has disintegrated and became dust? The Quran responds to this question, "*We already know how much the earth*

*takes of them, and with Us is a recording book.*” God knows exactly where their bodies disintegrated into. A meticulous record is kept which keeps track of each and every atom of their bodies.

The Quran confronted them with the real problem, *“But they denied the truth when it came to them; so they are in a confused state.”* Their confusion is not the result of the difficulty of the resurrection. Their doubt has originated from the fact that they denied the truth. Those who deny the truth are always in a state of doubt. The Quran continued to bring to their attention the signs of God that surround them. These signs are miracles similar to the miracle of resurrection, *“Have they not observed the sky above them, how We have constructed it and beautified it, and how there are no rifts therein? And the earth have We spread it out, and set upon it mountains standing firm, and produced therein every kind of beautiful plant.”* These signs reflect the stability of the universe which has been created with the truth. These signs should lead the one who reflects to the straight path, *“Giving insight and a reminder for every devotee turning (to God).”* Reflecting on these signs connects one to the whole universe. The universe is the book of truth that can be seen and read in all languages. The divine project considers the scientific method a legitimate means to discover and explain the individual scientific universal phenomena. However, only through the divine project an integrated and consistent framework of these phenomena can be achieved. The framework not only integrates the phenomena together but it links them to the human heart. And when this framework is linked to the human heart, the abstract rules and laws are transformed into feelings and emotions that fills the heart with awe.

Another sign for those who reflect, *“And We send down from the sky blessed water whereby We give growth to gardens and the grain of crops, and lofty date-palms with ranged clusters, provision (made) for people; and by it We gave life to a dead land. This is how the dead will be resurrected.”* The water that comes down from the sky is a sign that brings life to the dead heart before it brings life to the dead land. Rain is a blessing from God. It descends on the land and produces all kinds of vegetations. These vegetations provide food for people, for which they should be grateful to God. The verses draw the parallel between the resurrections of people which is part of the unseen and the revival of the dead earth which people observe every day.

The following verses review very briefly and quickly the stories of the previous peoples who rejected guidance. The aim of the review is to emphasize the inevitable consequence of the rejection of guidance, *“The people of Noah denied (the truth) before them, and (so did) the dwellers at Ar-Rass and (the tribe of) Thamud, and (the tribe of) A'ad, and Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lot; and the companions of the thicket, and the people of Tubba’; every one denied their messengers; therefore My threat was justly fulfilled.”* The verses have two messages. The first is that God sent messengers to guide people to the straight path; all messengers were asked to deliver the same message. The second is that the consequence of rejecting guidance is doom.

The following rhetorical question is posed as an answer to the rejection of the idea of resurrection, *“Were We then weary with the first creation, that they should be in confused doubt about a new creation?”* God who created humankind in the first place will be able to recreate them again. The Creator knows everything about His creation, their composition, their thoughts,

and their secrets, *“It was We who created humankind, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein.”* God is very close to the human being, closer even than his own veins. This expression is enough to fill the human heart with caution and awe. When humankind knows that he cannot keep a secret from God, even his own inner thoughts are exposed, one then should be careful not to utter a word or do a deed that displeases God. Not only that God knows everything, but also the deeds of each human being are recorded in a meticulous record, *“When the two receivers receive (him), seated on the right hand and on the left, not a word does he utter but there is with him an observer ready.”* We do not know how the recording is done and we are not going to speculate about it. The important thing is that it is being done and we should take that into consideration each time we speak or act during our lives before death overcomes us, *“And the stupor of death will bring truth (before his eyes). (It will be said,) ‘This is what you were trying to escape.’”* Every human being wishes that he can avoid death but death is inevitable. When it comes, it will bring the truth closer to us, and suddenly we will be able to realize the truth.

The verses then move from the scene of death to the scene of the Day of Resurrection, *“And the trumpet shall be blown. This is the threatened Day. And every soul shall come, along with it a driver and a witness.”* Each soul will be led by a driver and will be accompanied by a witness. The souls will then stand up for the reckoning. It will be said, *“You were heedless of this; now We have removed your veil, and your sight will be sharp this Day. And his companion will say, ‘Here is (his Record) ready with me.’”* The verses do not describe the details of the reckoning but move directly to the conclusion and the verdict that will be issued, *“Do cast into Hell every ungrateful, rebellious one, hinderer of good, transgressor, and doubter, who set up another god beside God. Throw him into the severe torment.”* We notice the long list of the bad attributes which the verse uses to describe the evildoers. This is a way to express God’s wrath for their transgression. The evil companion who was accused of seducing him will then try to absolve himself of the responsibility, *“His companion will say, ‘Our Lord, I did not make him transgress, but he was (himself) far astray.’”* But it is too late and the decree has been issued already, *“He will say, ‘Do not dispute with each other in My presence. I had already in advance sent you warning. The sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed, and I do not treat the servants unjustly.’”*

This Sura was composed in a style which uses a dialogue style. This style continues to describe the scenes of Hell, *“On the day when We say to Hell, ‘Have you been filled?’ and it will say, ‘Are there any more to come?’”* Juxtaposed with this is the scene of paradise, *“And the Garden will be brought near to those who are God conscious, not far away. (And it will be said), ‘This is what you were promised. (It is) for every penitent and heedful one, who feared the Lord of Mercy in secret and comes with a contrite heart. Enter it in peace; this is the Day of immortality.’”* Each word carries a sentiment of honor. They do not walk towards the garden but the garden will be brought to them. They will be welcomed with the blessings of peace and fulfillment. Good attributes will be bestowed on them. They will be blessed with everything they wish for and God will have more for them, *“They have therein what they desire, and there is more with Us.”*

Then the Sura is concluded again by the memory of those who lost their way and were punished, *“But how many generations before them did We destroy, who were mightier than these in*



*prowess so that they overran the lands. Had they any place of escape?”* These memories should be sufficient to wake up people from their heedlessness, but only those who have hearts that yearns to the truth are able to heed the lesson. The other hearts are dead and are unable to witness the truth, *“Verily in this is a message for any that has a heart and understanding or who gives ear and earnestly witnesses (the truth).”*

Other lessons can be gleaned from the signs of God all around us, *“And verily We created the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between them, in six days, and no fatigue touched Us.”* The process of the first creation was easy for God. He never suffered any fatigue. Resurrecting people will be as easy.

The Messenger (PBUH) was then commanded to be patient and to remember God at certain times during the day. These are all times that are related to the cosmic phenomena of heavens and earth, *“Therefore (Muhammad) persevere in enduring what they say, and glorify your Lord before the rising and before the setting of the sun; and in the night-time glorify Him, and after the (prescribed) prostrations.”* Be patient, glorify God and prostrate yourself to Him but also wait for the big event, *“And listen on the Day when the Caller will call out from a place quiet near, The Day when they will hear a (mighty) cry in truth. That is the Day of coming forth (from the graves).”* On that Day the graves will open up and people will come out to the gathering. This is an easy task for God just as was the creation easy, *“Verily it is We who give life and death; and to Us is the final destination; the Day when the earth will be rent asunder for them to hurry out. That will be an easy gathering for Us.”* The Messenger (PBUH) was again comforted and his task was emphasized, *“We know best what they say, and you (Muhammad) are not a tyrant over them; therefore, remind by the Quran whoever fears My threat.”*

## Sura 51: Al-Dhariyat (The Dispersers)

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

### Verses 1 to 24:

1. *By the (Winds) that disperse.*
2. *And those that bear the burden (of the rain.)*
3. *And those that glide with ease.*
4. *And those who distribute (blessings) as commanded.*
5. *Verily, that which you are promised is true;*
6. *And verily the judgment must indeed come to pass.*
7. *By the sky with (its) numerous paths;*
8. *Most surely you are at variance with each other in what you say;*
9. *Through which are deluded (away from the truth) those who are deluded.*
10. *Accursed are the conjecturers;*
11. *Those who are heedless in ignorance.*
12. *They ask, "When will be the Day of Judgment?"*
13. *(It is) the day when they will be tormented at the Fire;*
14. *(And it will be said to them), "Taste your torment. This is what you sought to hasten."*
15. *Those who remain conscious of God shall be in gardens and fountains.*
16. *Taking that which their Lord gives them; for they were doers of good;*
17. *They used to sleep but little of the night,*
18. *And in the hour of early dawn, they used to pray for forgiveness;*
19. *And in their wealth, there was a share for the beggar and the deprived.*
20. *And on earth are signs for those who have certitude.*
21. *As also in your own selves; will you not then see?*
22. *And in the heaven is your sustenance, as (also) that which you are promised.*
23. *Then, by the Lord of the heaven and earth, this is the very truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other. (51: 1 -23)*

This Sura has a special atmosphere. It starts with the mention of four of the forces of God. The expressions are somewhat vague which conveys the impression that there are more than meets the eye of these forces. The Sura starts with four oaths made by God, "*By the (Winds) that disperse. And those that bear the burden (of the rain.) And those that glide with ease. And those who distribute (blessings) as commanded.*" These four words: the dispersers, the bearers, the gliders, and the distributors are not commonly used words; their meanings are not readily known to people. The oath seems to be implicitly referring to the forces of the unseen. It seems that the main objective of the Sura is to connect the human heart with the unseen. Several people from the earlier Muslim generations asked about the meanings of these verses. It has been narrated that Ali ibn Abi Taleb (RA) gave the following explanations: the dispersers refer to the wind; those that bear the burden refers to the clouds; those that glide with ease are the ships; and those who distribute (blessings) as commanded are the angels. The wind, the clouds, the ships, and the angels are tools created by God to perform certain tasks according to His command. The oath is meant to attract the attention of people to the importance of God's creation. People should also reflect on the function of each of these tools and how they affect their lives; especially their

effect on the provision of people. Peoples' provision is one of the issues that the Sura deals with. So, what is the oath about, "*Verily that which you are promised is true; and verily the judgment must indeed come to pass.*" God's promise will certainly be fulfilled. God promised to reward people according to their deeds. If they do not get their reward in this life, they will certainly receive it in the Hereafter. Similarly, the judgment will come to pass. One of the promises that God made is that He will provide for us and His promise will be fulfilled as well.

Then God makes an oath with the well-organized sky emphasizing that the idolaters were confused in what they say, "*By the sky with (its) numerous paths; most surely you are at variance with each other in what you say; through which are deluded (away from the truth) those who are deluded.*" Confusion is a salient feature of falsehood, while truth is stable, firm, and well organized as the well-organized sky. They are deluded in their falsehood and they will be doomed on the Day of Judgment, "*Accursed are the conjecturers; those who are heedless in ignorance. They ask, 'When will be the Day of Judgment?' (It is) the Day when they will be tormented at the Fire, (and it will be said to them), 'Taste your torment. This is what you sought to hasten.'*" They were basing their decisions on conjecture which led them to heedlessness and ignorance. They were asking, "*When will be the Day of Judgment?*" not because they wanted to know but because they thought it is farfetched. The verse showed them a scene of the Day of Judgment as an answer to their question.

On the other hand, there is another scene for those who were secure in their faith. They spent their life serving God and seeking His forgiveness, "*Those who remain conscious of God shall be in gardens and fountains. Taking that which their Lord gives them; for they were doers of good; they used to sleep but little of the night and in the hour of early dawn, they used to pray for forgiveness; and in their wealth, there was a share for the beggar and the deprived.*" They will be rewarded by a place in Paradise. They will receive God's bounty as a reward for what they used to do in the worldly life. They used to spend most of the night praying. They designated part of their wealth to the needy who ask and the needy who were too proud to ask. This was a voluntary charity but they made it a duty on themselves.

Then the verses direct the attention to the signs of God, "*And on the earth are signs for those who have certitude. As also in your own selves; will you not then see.*" God's signs are all around us but they cannot be seen except by those who are secure in their faith, those who are able to reflect on the creation of God. The security in faith sets the heart alive and frees it to understand the secrets of the signs. Those who do not have secure faith see the same signs with their eyes but they do not touch their hearts. Their hearts remain dead unable to see or reflect. There are also signs within ourselves. The human body is one of the greatest signs of God. The human body has many systems that work in amazing ways that we still do not understand. The systems work together without conscious interference from us. What about the secrets of the soul and its hidden power? How can we see, understand, and remember? What about that amazing information retrieval system that we have?

The previous verses alluded to the signs of God in the universe, then the signs of God in the human body, and here it refers to the unseen and how the livelihood of people is part of this unseen decided by God, "*And in heaven is your sustenance, as (also) that which you are*

*promised.*” The human being works hard and uses the material means to earn his livelihood, but that is not enough because the livelihood that the individual will be able to attain is decided by God. The believer understands the meaning of this message. It does not mean that we neglect the hard work and the pursuit of the material means for earning our livelihood; but we should realize that hard work and the pursuit of the material means is not sufficient to attain the objective. The ultimate decision regarding our attainment is made by God. God decrees the amount and type of provision to be granted to every living creature. This frees the heart from being obsessed by the material means and it allows the heart to fly high up in the sky seeking and understanding God’s signs. The human being has been created to stand firmly on earth but to try to reach to the sky with his heart and soul. The believer considers the material means for earning his livelihood to be signs that lead to the Creator of the means. This is certainly true, *“Then, by the Lord of heaven and earth, this is the very truth, as much as the fact that you can speak intelligently to each other.”*

### **Verses 24 to 60:**

24. *Has the story of Abraham's honored guests reached you (Muhammad)?*
25. *When they entered upon him and said, “Peace,” he answered, “Peace.” (and thought) These are people unknown (to me).*
26. *Then he turned quickly to his household and brought out a fat calf;*
27. *And placed it before them. He said, "Will you not eat?"*
28. *(When they did not eat), He became fearful of them. They said, "Fear not," and they gave him glad tidings of a son endowed with knowledge.*
29. *Then his wife came crying; she struck her face and said, “An old barren woman.”*
30. *They said, “Thus says your Lord; indeed, He is the Wise, the Omniscient.”*
31. *(Abraham) said, "Messengers, what you are here for?"*
32. *They said, "We have been sent to a guilty people;*
33. *That we may send upon them stones of clay,*
34. *Marked by your Lord for (the destruction of) those who were given to excesses.*
35. *Then We evacuated all the believers who were there,*
36. *But We found there only one house of those who submitted (to God).*
37. *And We left behind therein a sign for those who fear the painful torment.*
38. *And in Moses (was another sign). We sent him to Pharaoh, with clear authority.*
39. *But (Pharaoh) turned back with his chiefs, and said, "A sorcerer, or a mad man."*
40. *So We took him and his forces, and threw them into the sea; and his was the blame.*
41. *And in (the tribe of) ‘Ad (there is a sign) when we sent the destructive wind against them.*
42. *It spared nothing it came upon, but made it (all) as dust.*
43. *And in (the tribe of) Thamud (there is a sign) when it was told to them: enjoy yourselves for a while.*
44. *But they insolently defied the command of their Lord. So the thunderbolt overtook them while they gazed;*
45. *Then they could not even stand (on their feet), nor could they help themselves.*
46. *And the people of Noah before, surely they were a transgressing people.*
47. *We have built the heaven with might, and indeed, We are expanding it.*
48. *And the earth We have spread out, how gracious is the spreader.*

49. *And of everything We have created pairs; that you may be mindful.*
50. *Therefore, flee unto God; I am a plain warner to you from Him.*
51. *And do not take another deity with God; I am a plain warner to you from Him.*
52. *Similarly, no messenger came to the people before them, but they said (of him), "A sorcerer, or a mad man."*
53. *Is this the legacy they have transmitted, one to another? They are themselves a transgressing people.*
54. *So turn away from them, you are not to be blamed.*
55. *And continue to remind, for surely the reminder benefits the believers.*
56. *I have only created jinn and humankind to worship Me.*
57. *I seek no livelihood from them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me.*
58. *God is He who gives sustenance. God is indeed, the Provider, the Possessor of strength, the Firm.*
59. *Indeed, for the wrongdoers, their portion of torment like the portion of their fellows (of earlier generations). Then let them not ask Me to hasten (that portion).*
60. *And woe to those who disbelieve, from their day which they are promised. (51: 24 – 60)*

The second part of this Sura deals with synopsis of the stories of Prophet Abraham (PBUH), Prophet Lot (PBUH), and Prophet Moses (PBUH), the tribes of ‘Ad and Thamud, and finally the people of Prophet Noah (PBUH). This section is closely connected with the previous section as well as the next section, *“Has the story of Abraham's honored guests reached you (Muhammad)? When they entered upon him and said, ‘Peace,’ he answered, ‘Peace.’ (and thought) These are people unknown (to me). Then he turned quickly to his household and brought out a fat calf; and placed it before them. He said, ‘Will you not eat?’ (When they did not eat), He became fearful of them. They said, ‘Fear not,’ and they gave him glad tidings of a son endowed with knowledge. Then his wife came crying; she struck her face and said, ‘An old barren woman.’ They said, ‘Thus says your Lord; indeed, He is the Wise, the Omniscient.’”*

This story refers to the signs of God in sending messengers to guide people to the straight path. The story starts with a question to the Prophet (PBUH), *“did he hear about the story of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his honored guests?”* Then it continues to illustrate the generosity of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). When the angels came to visit him, he went in a hurry to bring them food, before even knowing who they were or why they came. He came back with a fat calf. However, they did not eat and that made him apprehensive because that may have been a sign that they harbored an evil intention to harm him. But they immediately reassured him, telling him who they were and they gave him the glad tidings of a son. This would be Prophet Isaac (PBUH). When his wife heard this she was stunned by the surprise. How can she, an old barren woman, give birth? She forgot that they were angels so they reminded her of the unlimited power of God. He says, “Be,” and it is.

Abraham (PBUH) asked them what else they came to accomplish, *“(Abraham) said, ‘Messengers, what you are here for?’”* They told him about their mission to destroy the people of Prophet Lot (PBUH), *“They said, ‘We have been sent to a guilty people; that we may send upon them stones of clay, Marked by your Lord for (the destruction of) the transgressors.’”* They saved the believers, but it was only one household in the whole city which believed in the message brought by Prophet Lot (PBUH), *“Then We evacuated all the believers who were there,*

*but We found there only one house of those who submitted (to God). And We left behind therein a sign for those who fear the painful torment.”*

Another sign of God, the story of Prophet Moses (PBUH), *“And in Moses (was another sign). We sent him to Pharaoh, with clear authority. But (Pharaoh) turned back with his chiefs, and said, ‘A sorcerer, or a mad man.’”* God sent Moses (PBUH) with strong evidence and clear proof to support the message that he brought Pharaoh. God also bestowed an air of reverence on Moses (PBUH). But Pharaoh turned away from him and he refused to listen to the truth. This shows that miracles alone cannot guide certain hearts to the truth. These are the sealed hearts that are not able to receive the truth. The story ends by narrating the fate of Pharaoh, *“So We took him and his forces, and threw them into the sea; and his was the blame.”* The verse indicates that the punishment was inflicted by God directly, which emphasizes the intended purpose of telling the story: God’s promises will certainly be fulfilled.

Yet another sign in the story of the tribe of ‘Ad, *“And in (the tribe of) ‘Ad (there is a sign) when we sent the destructive wind against them. It spared nothing it came upon, but made it (all) as dust.”* The Arabic word used to describe the wind is, “barren,” indicating that it was a wind that did not bring any rain but was mainly meant for destruction.

Then the story of the tribe of Thamud, *“And in (the tribe of) Thamud (there is a sign) when it was told to them: enjoy yourselves for a while,”* another sign of the signs of God. Followed by a reference to the people of Prophet Noah (PBUH), *“But they insolently defied the command of their Lord. So the thunderbolt overtook them while they gazed; then they could not even stand (on their feet), nor could they help themselves. And the people of Noah before, surely they were a transgressing people.”*

The verses then turned to the cosmic signs of God, *“We have built the heaven with might, and indeed, We are expanding it. And the earth We have spread out, how gracious is the spreader.”* The creation of the heavens needed a great amount of power. The verses also refer to the expanding nature of the universe. This may be also a reference to the expanding stores of provision that God has for people. Another sign is the land which God has spread for us, so that we travel through it with ease.

The following verse states an amazing principle, *“And of everything We have created pairs; that you may be mindful.”* This is a fact that was not known fourteen hundreds years ago. Then a warning was issued, *“Therefore flee unto God; I am a plain warner to you from Him. And do not take another deity with God; I am a plain warner to you from Him.”* The warning is repeated twice to emphasize the seriousness of the matter.

The stories of the prophets are then concluded by a comment, *“Similarly, no messenger came to the people before them, but they said (of him), ‘A sorcerer, or a mad man.’ Is this the legacy they have transmitted, one to another? They are themselves a transgressing people. So turn away from them, you are not to be blamed. And continue to remind, for surely the reminder benefits the believers.”* All those who rejected guidance belong to the same school. They all have the same response. Each group accused its prophet of being either a magician or a mad man. The

Prophet (PBUH) was then comforted. God commanded him not to worry about those who denied him, but he was commanded to continue calling people to Islam and keep reminding them because reminding is beneficial for the believers.

The final conclusion of the Sura explains the meaning of fleeing unto God, *“I have only created jinn and humankind to worship Me. I seek no livelihood from them, nor do I ask that they should feed Me. God is He who gives sustenance. God is indeed, the Provider, the Possessor of strength, the Firm.”* This short verse states a major and fundamental truth, the jinn and the humans were created for a purpose. Everyone should fulfill the purpose for which he was created otherwise his life becomes useless. The purpose of the creation is to worship God. This shows that the concept of worship is a comprehensive concept that goes beyond performing the rituals. The concept of worship encompasses all the daily activities that God created us to perform. The purpose of life of humankind is to establish a flourishing life on earth. This involves the discovery and study of the available resources and using it to make earth a place for good life. The essence of worship should be manifested in two main beliefs that should reside deep in the heart of the believer:

1. The deep belief that God is the Lord to be worshipped. The relationship between God and humankind is a relationship between the Lord and His servant. The Lord is to be worshipped and the servant’s duty is to worship.
2. The complete dedication of every feeling, emotion, intention, or action to God. This dedication should be pure and free of any hypocrisy or showing off which may cast a doubt on the sincerity of the person.

When these two conditions are fulfilled then we will be able to truly flee unto God. We will be able to play the role that we have been created to perform. This will free us from all the shackles of doubts and insecurity. One of the consequences of this is that the value of human actions is not measured by the results they achieve but rather by the underlying motivation behind them. The reward is based on the actions themselves not on what they achieve. The believer is requested to work hard and use all the available material means however, he should believe that the results are in the hand of God. We should not worry about the results we should worry only about the effort which we spend in pursuing the goal. The Quran tries to inculcate these meanings in the heart of the believer. The emphasis of the human being on securing his sustenance is replaced by the emphasis of the need to please God by performing what he has been created to do, *“Indeed for the wrongdoers, their portion of torment like the portion of their fellows (of earlier generations). Then let them not ask Me to hasten (that portion).”*

A final warning is issued, *“And woe to those who disbelieve, from their day which they are promised.”*

## **Sura 52: Al-Tur (The Mountain)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 49:**

1. *By the mountain;*
2. *And a Book inscribed,*
3. *On fine parchment unrolled;*
4. *And the frequented House;*
5. *And the elevated ceiling;*
6. *And the swollen sea;*
7. *Most surely the torment of your Lord will come to pass;*
8. *There is none that can avert it.*
9. *On the Day when the heaven shall move from side to side,*
10. *And the mountains will move away,*
11. *Then woe that day to the deniers;*
12. *Who amuse themselves with idle talk.*
13. *That Day they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell forcefully,*
14. *(And it will be said to them), "This is the Fire which you were denying.*
15. *Is this magic, or do you not see?*
16. *Endure the heat thereof, it is the same whether you endure patiently or not; you shall be recompensed only (for) what you did."*
17. *Indeed, those who remained conscious of God will dwell in gardens and bliss,*
18. *Enjoying the (bliss) which their Lord has bestowed on them and their Lord shall deliver them from the torment of the Fire.*
19. *(And it will be said to them,) "Eat and drink in health (as a reward) for what you used to do."*
20. *They will recline (with ease) on ranged couches. And We will wed them to large-eyed beautiful ones.*
21. *And those who believe and whose offspring followed them in faith, We will unite them with their offspring. We will not deprive them any of the reward of what they have done. Each individual is responsible for his deeds.*
22. *And We will provide them with fruit and meat such as they desire.*
23. *There, they will pass, from hand to hand, a cup wherein is neither vanity nor cause of sin.*
24. *Round about them will serve, (devoted) to them, young male servants (handsome) as pearls well-guarded.*
25. *And some of them shall advance towards others questioning each other.*
26. *Saying, "When we were with our families, we were ever anxious;*
27. *But God has been gracious to us and has saved us from the torment of the intense Fire.*
28. *We used to pray to Him before. He is the Doer of Good, the Giver of Mercy.*
29. *Therefore, continue to remind, for by the Blessing of your Lord, you are neither a sorcerer, nor a madman.*
30. *Or do they say, "He is only a poet, we are waiting for a calamity to befall him."*
31. *Say (to them), "Wait, I too will wait along with you."*
32. *Do their minds command them to do this, or are they a transgressing people?*



33. *Or do they say, "He has forged it." Indeed, it is they who do not believe.*
34. *Let them then produce a statement like it, if they are truthful.*
35. *Were they created out of nothing, or were they themselves the creators?*
36. *Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Indeed, they have no certitude.*
37. *Or do they have the treasures of your Lord, or are they the controllers?*
38. *Or do they have a ladder, by which they can (climb up to heaven and) listen (to its secrets)? Then let (such a) listener of theirs produce a clear proof.*
39. *Or does He have only daughters and you have sons?*
40. *Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are overburdened with debt?*
41. *Or do they have access to the unseen? Could they write it down?*
42. *Or are they planning a conspiracy (against you)? The conspiracy will befall the disbelievers.*
43. *Or do they have a deity other than God? Exalted is God far above the things they associate with Him.*
44. *Were they to see a piece of the sky falling (on them), they would (only) say, "A heap of clouds."*
45. *So leave them alone until they encounter that Day of theirs, wherein they will be thunderstruck.*
46. *The Day when their plotting will avail them nothing and no help shall be given them.*
47. *And verily, for the wrongdoers, there is another torment besides this; but most of them do not know.*
48. *So persevere (Muhammad) waiting for your Lord's decree, for surely you are in Our sight; and celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise,*
49. *And glorify Him during the night, and at the setting of the stars. (52: 1 – 49)*

*"By the mountain; and a Book inscribed, on fine parchment unrolled; and the frequented House; and the elevated ceiling; and the swollen sea; most surely the torment of your Lord will come to pass; there is none that can avert it."* The Sura is characterized with its short verses. The first verse consists of one word, and then the number of words in the verses increases gradually until it reaches twelve words. In the meantime, the rhyme of the verses is kept in a consistent manner. The mountain mentioned in the first verse is most probably the mountain on which Moses (PBUH) received the Tablets from God. The Book may be a reference to the Scripture that was given to Moses (PBUH). However, there is an opinion that the Book refers to the Protected Tablet. This seems appropriate, since the following verse refers to the Holy House of God (the most frequented House.) The House may also be a reference to the Ka'ba. The elevated canopy refers to the sky, this is consistent with the verse, *"And we made the sky a protected ceiling."* (21: 32) The Arabic word used to describe the sea in these verses could either mean a sea full of water (swollen sea) or it could also mean a sea on fire. God makes oaths using these signs of His creation to emphasize that His promise to punish those who denied the truth will indeed be fulfilled. No one can avert it. The next verses describe scenes from the Day of Judgment, *"On the Day when the heaven shall move from side to side; and the mountains will move away."* It is a horrendous scene, the sky will be shaking and the mountains will be moving. Then the threat is issued to those who denied the truth, *"then woe that day to the deniers; who amuse themselves with idle talk. That Day they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell forcefully."* This description applies to all those who rejected the truth based on conjectures. They had no rational arguments. All their arguments were based on idle talk.

The Quran provides a consistent and logical explanation for the existence of humankind and the creation of the universe. Rejecting the truth on the basis of irrational conjectures is useless. Islam provides a plan for the intellectual growth of people. It also raises their awareness of the universe around them. It provides logical answers to the questions that dwell in the minds of many people: “*from where did I come? Why did I come? And where am I going?*” The answers to these questions outline the Islamic understanding of the purpose of the creation. Humankind is not alone in this universe and there are millions of God’s creatures that inhabit the same universe which humankind inhabits. The life of a Muslim is a very busy life because he has a major purpose behind his existence and every minute of our time should be spent in fulfilling this purpose.

On the Day of Judgment, those who denied the truth will be forced into Hell fire. They will then be told that this is the Hell fire that they denied before. They will be ridiculed, “*(and it will be said to them), ‘This is the Fire which you were denying. Is this magic, or do you not see?’*” Then, the verdict will be delivered, “*Endure the heat thereof, it is the same whether you endure patiently or not; you shall be recompensed only (for) what you did.*”

The second image is an image which reflects comfort and happiness, “*Indeed, those who remained conscious of God will dwell in gardens and bliss; enjoying the (bliss) which their Lord has bestowed on them and their Lord shall deliver them from the torment of the Fire.*” Being saved of the torment of Hell fire is in itself a great achievement; but those who accepted the truth and remained conscious of their Lord will be given more. It will be said to them, “*Eat and drink in health (as a reward) for what you used to do.*” They will be reclining comfortably on couches and they will be paired, with beautiful mates, “*They will recline (with ease) on ranged couches. And We will wed them to large-eyed beautiful ones.*” In addition, their righteous offspring will join them, “*And those who believe and whose offspring followed them in faith, We will unite them with their offspring. We will not deprive them any of the reward of what they have done. Each individual is responsible for his deeds.*” The verses continue to describe the bliss that they will enjoy, “*And We will provide them with fruit and meat such as they desire. There, they will pass, from hand to hand, a cup wherein is neither vanity nor cause of sin. Round about them will serve, (devoted) to them, young male servants (handsome) as pearls well-guarded.*”

They will talk to each other, “*And some of them shall advance towards others questioning each other. Saying, ‘When we were with our families, we were ever anxious; But God has been gracious to us and has saved us from the torment of the intense Fire. We used to pray to Him before. He is the Doer of Good, the Giver of Mercy.’*” This is the secret of this bliss; they were cautious and avoided committing sins. They were not deluded by the transient security that they felt living among their families. They were always concerned about the Day of Reckoning. That is why they prayed God to save them of the torment of Hell fire; and by His Grace He accepted their prayer.

The Quran then addressed the Messenger (PBUH), “*Therefore continue to remind, for by the Blessing of your Lord, you are neither a sorcerer, nor a madman.*” The Messenger (PBUH) was commanded to continue to remind the idolaters even though they were insolent to him, sometimes calling him a sorcerer and sometimes they called him a madman. But God comforted

His Messenger (PBUH) by bestowing on him His grace. Some of the idolaters claimed that he was a poet, *“Or do they say, ‘He is only a poet, we are waiting for a calamity to befall him.’”* The Quran responded to them saying, *“Say (to them), ‘Wait, I too will wait along with you.’”* The verse told them to wait; very soon they will see the consequences of their insolence.

The chiefs of Quraish claimed to be wise people. The Quran addressed them sarcastically, *“Do their minds command them to do this, or are they a transgressing people?”* Is this the way wise people behave? Or is it their transgression that makes them behave foolishly?

They went far in their insolence claiming that the messenger (PBUH) fabricated the Quran. If this was true, why could not they fabricate one like it? *“Or do they say, ‘He has forged it.’ Indeed, it is they who do not believe. Let them then produce a statement like it, if they are truthful.”*

The Quran then questions them about how they were created, *“Were they created out of nothing, or were they themselves the creators?”* It is against logic that they were created from nothing; let alone claiming that they are the creators. The truth is that they and everyone else were created by God. Then the verses turn to the creation of the heavens and earth. Who created them? *“Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Indeed, they have no certitude.”* They used to say that God created everything; yet this saying never translated into a firm belief in their hearts. Who owns the treasures of heaven and earth? Do they own it themselves? Or do they have any control over it? *“Or do they have the treasures of your Lord, or are they the controllers?”* The Quran says that God is the owner of the treasures of heavens and earth and He is the sole controller of everything. Can they prove otherwise?

*“Or do they have a ladder, by which they can (climb up to heaven and) listen (to its secrets)? Then let (such a) listener of theirs produce a clear proof.”* Muhammad (PBUH) told them that he was receiving revelations from God. Do they have the means to reach to the heavens to ascertain that Muhammad (PBUH) was not receiving a revelation from God? The verses turn around to mock a statement that they used to make, *“Or does He have only daughters and you have sons?”*

The Messenger (PBUH) never asked them for a reward for the guidance that he offered them; yet they did not want to receive such guidance, *“Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are overburdened with debt?”* The Quran confronted them with a question whose answer they should know, *“Or do they have access to the unseen? Could they write it down?”* They knew very well that they have no access to the unseen. They were only trying to conspire against the Messenger (PBUH); they were told that their conspiracy will turn back against them, *“Or are they planning a conspiracy (against you)? The conspiracy will befall the disbelievers.”* Then another challenge was posed, *“Or do they have a deity other than God? Exalted is God far above the things they associate with Him.”* Could their deity protect them against the wrath of God?

In their delusions they misinterpreted the wrath of God, *“Were they to see a piece of the sky falling (on them), they would (only) say, ‘A heap of clouds.’”*

The Sura is concluded by an address to the Messenger of God, *“So leave them alone until they encounter that Day of theirs, wherein they will be thunderstruck.”* The Messenger (PBUH) was told not to worry about them; they will see their doom on the Day of Judgment. On that Day, they will have no support or help to save them, *“The Day when their plotting will avail them nothing and no help shall be given them. And verily, for the wrongdoers, there is another torment besides this; but most of them do not know.”*

The Quran then addressed the Messenger (PBUH) in a very special way. First, he was asked to persevere; then he was given a great honor; the honor of being in the sight of God, *“So persevere (Muhammad) waiting for your Lord's decree, for surely you are in Our sight;”* This is a high rank that was not given to any human. Moses (PBUH) was told, *“I have chosen you so listen to what is being revealed,”* (20: 13), *“And I bestowed upon you love from Me,”* (20: 39) *“I produced you for Myself.”* (20: 41) all these indicate the high rank that was bestowed on Moses (PBUH) but Muhammad (PBUH) was given the highest honor of all, God told him, *“you are in Our sight.”* The Prophet (PBUH) was then told of the way to keep this precious link with God, *“celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise, and glorify Him during the night, and at the setting of the stars.”*

Hawwa commented that the Sura cites two of the attributes of those who are God conscious: fear of God's punishment and recitation of supplication. The Sura also includes a command to the Messenger of God (PBUH) to persevere and glorify God. The Messenger of God (PBUH) was the role model for those who are calling people to Islam. Thus, a person who undertakes the duty of calling to Islam must persevere and seek God's help through celebrating the praise of God and glorifying Him often.

## **Sura 53: Al-Najm (The Star)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 62:**

1. *By the Star when it goes down,*
2. *Your companion has neither strayed, nor has he erred.*
3. *Nor does he speak of (his own) whims.*
4. *It is nothing but a revelation that is revealed,*
5. *It was taught to him by one of mighty powers,*
6. *One vigorous; and he rose to (his) true form;*
7. *When he was on the uppermost horizon;*
8. *Then he approached and came closer,*
9. *And was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer;*
10. *And He revealed to His servant that which He revealed.*
11. *The heart did not lie about what it saw.*
12. *Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?*
13. *For indeed he saw him at another descent,*
14. *Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass.*
15. *Near it is the Garden of refuge.*
16. *As there covered the Lote-tree what covered it.*
17. *(His) sight never swerved, nor did it exceed the limit.*
18. *Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.*
19. *Have you considered Al- Lat and Al- Uzza,*
20. *And Manat, the third, the other one?*
21. *Are yours the males and His are the females?*
22. *This indeed is unfair division.*
23. *These are nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which God has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.*
24. *Or shall humankind have what he wishes?*
25. *But to God belong the Hereafter, and the first (life).*
26. *And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails nothing save after God gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts.*
27. *Those who do not believe in the Hereafter name the angels with female names.*
28. *But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against the truth.*
29. *Therefore, turn away from whoever turns away from Our Message and desire nothing except the life of this world.*
30. *Such is their sum of knowledge. Your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and He knows best who follows guidance.*
31. *And to God belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, that He may reward those who do evil with that which they have done, and reward those who do good with goodness.*

32. *Those who avoid major sins and abominations - except minor offences - (for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness. He knows you well (from the time) when He created you from the earth, and when you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. Therefore, do not claim yourselves to be virtuous. He knows best who is conscious of Him.*
33. *Did you see the one who turned away?*
34. *And gave a little, then held back.*
35. *Does he have knowledge of the unseen so that he can foresee?*
36. *Or has he not been informed of what is in the Scriptures of Moses?*
37. *And of Abraham who fulfilled his obligations?*
38. *That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another;*
39. *And that humankind can have nothing but what he strives for;*
40. *And that his effort will be seen.*
41. *Then he will be rewarded with the fullest reward.*
42. *And that to your Lord is the finality;*
43. *And that it is He who makes (one) laugh and weep,*
44. *And that it is He who causes death and gives life;*
45. *And that He created the two mates, the male and the female,*
46. *From a sperm drop when lodged (in its place);*
47. *And that He has ordained the second creation;*
48. *And that it is He who enriches and suffices;*
49. *And that He is the Lord of the Sirius;*
50. *And that it is He Who destroyed the (powerful) ancient (tribe of) 'Ad,*
51. *And (the tribe of) Thamud He did not spare;*
52. *And before them, the people of Noah, for that they were (all) most unjust and most insolent transgressors,*
53. *And He destroyed the overturned cities;*
54. *And covered them by that which He covered.*
55. *Then which of the favors of your Lord will you dispute about?*
56. *This is a warner, of the (series of) former warners.*
57. *The threatened Hour is near.*
58. *None beside God can disclose it.*
59. *Do you then wonder at this statement?*
60. *And you laugh and not weep,*
61. *while you amuse yourselves?*
62. *Rather prostrate yourselves before God and worship Him. (53: 1 – 62)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca and it deals with the same issues that the Meccan Suras dealt with: the fundamentals of the doctrine, the revelation, the Oneness of God, and the Hereafter. The Sura approaches the topics from a specific angle. The Sura builds an argument to support the veracity of the revelation, and to show the lame basis for the concept of polytheism.

The Sura starts with an oath, “*By the Star when it goes down,*” which takes us to the environment in which Muhammad (PBUH) lived when he was receiving the revelation. The bright star eventually sets which is very much in tandem with the movement of Gabriel (PBUH) when he appeared first at the highest horizon then drew near to deliver the revelation. The star may be Sirius which is mentioned later on in the Sura because of its importance to the Arabs. The oath

also alluded to the fact that every star will eventually set. Stars are transient phenomena; they are not worthy of being worshipped. The oath affirmed the credibility of the Prophet (PBUH), *“Your companion has neither strayed, nor has he erred. Nor does he speak of (his own) whims. It is nothing but a revelation that is revealed.”* He did not go astray nor did he err. More importantly, he did not speak out of his own accord. He is the deliverer of a revelation. The revelation is the truth revealed by the Truth. The revelation was delivered to the Prophet (PBUH) by a strong messenger, Gabriel (PBUH). He appeared to the Prophet (PBUH) at the highest horizon, then he drew near to him and gave him the revelation from his Lord, *“It was taught to him by one of mighty powers, one vigorous; and he rose to (his) true form; when he was on the uppermost horizon; then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer; and He revealed to His servant that which He revealed.”* This is the undisputed truth, the Prophet (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH) and received the revelation from him, *“The heart did not lie about what it saw. Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?”* Seeing by the heart is more certain than seeing by the eyes because the eye may be deceived by what it sees. The Prophet (PBUH) was certain of what he saw and certain of what he received.

This was not the only time Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH), *“For indeed he saw him at another descent, near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass. Near it, is the Garden of refuge. As there covered the Lote-tree what covered it. (His) sight never swerved, nor did it exceed the limit. Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.”* This was during the Israa and Mi’raj. During Israa and Mi’raj Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH) in the form in which he was created. The Garden of Abode may be a reference to the final destination for the trip of Mi’raj. This is where the Prophet (PBUH) and Gabriel (PBUH) parted company, when Muhammad (PBUH) continued his trip into heaven and Gabriel (PBUH) stayed behind. These are all matters of the unseen. The Prophet’s (PBUH) sight was not swerved nor did it exceed the limit. He (PBUH) did certainly see the greatest of the signs of God. The revelation delivered to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a fact. The Prophet (PBUH) did not only see Gabriel (PBUH) and receive the revelation from him, but he also felt in his heart the certainty and truth of the revelation.

The previous paragraph explored the truth from God. The following verses juxtapose the truth of the revelation against the falsehood of polytheism, *“Have you considered Al- Lat and Al- Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other one? Are yours the males and His are the females? This indeed is unfair division. These are nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which God has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.”*

The verses refer to three of the idols which the Arabs used to worship. Al-Lat was a white rock covered with certain decorations. It was located in the city of Taif and was housed in a temple designated for it. It was the pride of the people of Taif. It is thought that its name is the feminine of the word God in Arabic. Al-Uzza on the other hand was a tree housed in a building and it was located at a place on the road between Mecca and Taif. This was worshiped by Quraish. It is thought that its name was derived from the feminine of the Arabic word for the eminent. The third idol, Manat was located on the road between Mecca and Medina. This was worshiped by the tribes of Medina. It is narrated that these idols were considered females and they represented angels. The idolatrous Arabs claimed that they were God’s daughters. The verses questioned the

rationale behind worshipping these idols and then posed a rhetorical question which showed the absurdity of the assumption that these idols represented God's daughters. The Arabs used to prefer sons over daughters. So, how could they ascribe to God daughters and keep the sons for themselves. The truth is that these claims are all lies which were fabricated by them and their forefathers. There was nothing to support these conjectures. Now, that they received guidance they should rectify the situation.

*"They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord."* These claims were not based on concrete evidence but they were motivated by human whims and desires. But matters of the doctrine should be based on evidence not on conjecture. Now, they have received guidance based on evidence, so they have no excuse not to follow it. However, since they are motivated by their whims and desires, there is no hope that they will follow the right path, *"Or shall humankind have what he wishes?"* But they should realize the truth, *"But to God belong the Hereafter, and the first (life). And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails nothing save after God gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts."* To God belongs everything in heaven and on earth. The verses refute the claims made by idolaters Arabs that they only worship the angels because they will intercede on their behalf. These are unfounded claims. God decides everything.

Not only they made unfounded claims but they also invented myth based on conjectures. Conjectures cannot stand against the truth, *"Those who do not believe in the Hereafter name the angels with female names. But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against the truth."*

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to ignore the disbelievers to show how unimportant they were, *"Therefore turn away from whoever turns away from Our Message and desire nothing except the life of this world. Such is their sum of knowledge."* The command was issued to the Messenger (PBUH) in the first place but it extends to all believers. They should also ignore those who do not believe in the Hereafter and are only interested in the pleasures of this life. God knows best who is guided and who has gone astray, *"Your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and He knows best who follows guidance."* Faith is a fundamental value in the life of people because it shapes the standards for life and ethics. No sound relationship can exist between the believers and the disbelievers because the two groups have different standards and norms. To God belongs the decision He will reward each group according to their deeds. Since God owns everything He is the One who decides the reward in the Hereafter, *"And to God belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, that He may reward those who do evil with that which they have done, and reward those who do good with goodness."* The traits of the doers of good are then detailed, *"Those who avoid major sins and abominations - except minor offences - (for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness."* Several traditions were narrated to explain the meaning of minor offences. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *"God has decreed that each human being would commit his share of adultery and it is certain that it will happen. Adultery may be committed by the eyes, by the tongue, by desires"*



*harbored by the soul. It may stop at that (these are considered minor offences) or it may progress to an actual adulterous act (that is considered a major sin.)”*

There are also other narrations which indicate that when a person repents, his sins become minor offences. We argue that this opinion is more appropriate since the verse makes a reference to the vast forgiveness of God, *“(for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness.”* God forgives those who commit sins then repent quickly and go back to the straight path and do not insist on pursuing the path of sin. This opinion is also supported by the verse, *“And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done.” (2:135)* God called them the God conscious and promised them forgiveness and a paradise the width of which is as large as the width of the heavens and earth.

God’s knowledge is encompassing. He knows people even before they were created from dust, *“He knows you well (from the time) when He created you from the earth, and when you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. Therefore, do not claim yourselves to be virtuous. He knows best who is conscious of Him.”* He knows what they do not know about themselves. He knows how they were created, their nature, and who they truly are. He knows their actions before they act and their thoughts before they think. So no one should claim being virtuous in front of God, because He knows everything about them.

*“Did you see the one who turned away? And gave a little, then held back?”* The verse describes the kind of people who would give a little charity while being able to give more. The fear of becoming poor prevents them from giving more. The verse may have been revealed in reference to a particular incident but it also applies to general behavior of human beings. It describes a common model of human behavior. It refers to those people who do not persevere in doing good deeds. The Quran berates these people for their lack of commitment, *“Does he have knowledge of the unseen so that he can foresee?”* No one is able to predict the future and find out what will happen to him. One can guarantee security by doing good and hoping in the forgiveness of God.

The Message that was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) is the same message that was revealed to other prophets, *“Or has he not been informed of what is in the Scriptures of Moses? And of Abraham who fulfilled his obligations?”* The verse stresses Abraham’s (PBUH) absolute dedication and fulfillment of duty in juxtaposition to those who lack commitment. The Message established fundamental principles, *“That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; And that man can have nothing but what he strives for; and that his effort will be seen. Then he will be rewarded with the fullest reward.”* Everyone is responsible for his own deeds. No one will carry the burden of another. Then God will reward people according to their deeds. No good deed will be wasted. The reward will be paid in full. The final destination is to God, *“And that to your Lord is the finality.”* There is no escape and there is no refuge except with God.

The following verses explore the power of God in all aspects of life, *“And that it is He who makes (one) laugh and weep.”* God gave the human being the ability to laugh and weep. No one knows how these complicated systems work. What are the physiological and psychological

processes that produce laughter and crying? Different people laugh and cry at the same events. Even the same person may laugh today for something that made him cry yesterday.

*“And that it is He who causes death and gives life.”* God created life and death. These are familiar phenomena but no one knows their secrets. What is life? And what is death? Where does life come from and how does it vanish?

*“And that He created the two mates, the male and the female, from a sperm drop when lodged (in its place).”* This phenomenon happens every minute but we do not think about it. A sperm drop is the origin of life of a human being. How can a sperm drop develop into a human being? How can it become a male or a female? How are the characteristics of the human being obtained?

*“And that He has ordained the second creation.”* The second creation is part of the unseen. He who created humankind in the first place is able to recreate him again. The second creation is inevitable because without it there will be no accountability.

*“And that it is He who enriches and suffices.”* It is God who bestows His bounty on people. God’s bounty is limitless in quantity and in type. He is the Provider that people should ask. He gives whom He wishes what He wishes.

The following verses make a quick and brief reference to previous peoples who rejected the truth and were destroyed, *“And that it is He Who destroyed the (powerful) ancient (tribe of) A’ad, and (the tribe of) Thamud He did not spare; and before them, the people of Noah, for that they were (all) most unjust and most insolent transgressors, and He destroyed the overturned cities; and covered them by that which He covered.”*

*“Then which of the favors of your Lord will you dispute about?”* The destruction of these people was then a favor done to humanity because evil was destroyed, and signs were left behind to remind people of the fate of those who reject the truth.

Then a warning is issued, *“This is a warner, of the (series of) former warners. The threatened Hour is near. None beside God can disclose it.”* The Day of Judgment could be very close. The Prophet (PBUH) came to give you guidance and to lead you to salvation. Salvation is only achieved through God’s guidance.

*“Do you then wonder at this statement? And you laugh and not weep, while you amuse yourselves?”* This is a serious talk; people should pay heed to it. There is no time for laughter and amusement. There are great tasks to be achieved before it is too late. They should heed the command, *“Rather prostrate yourselves before God and worship Him.”*

It has been narrated that when the idolaters of Mecca heard this last verse they prostrated themselves together with the believers. They were still idolaters and they disputed the truth of the revelation and the Quran but nevertheless they prostrated themselves. This must have been an extraordinary event. Many stories are narrated about how the idolaters were moved by the Quran when it was recited to them. We have heard many stories about how idolaters were overwhelmed with emotions when they listened to the Quran. However, their arrogance and stubbornness prevented them from accepting Islam.

It has been narrated that ‘Utebbah ibn Abi Rabiyy’ah, one of the chiefs of Quraish was delegated by the rest of the chiefs to negotiate with Muhammad (PBUH). They were willing to give him what he wanted if he stops calling people to Islam. ‘Utebbah came to the Messenger (PBUH) and offered him money, status, and power. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him to listen first to the Quran and ‘Utebbah agreed. The Prophet (PBUH) started to recite Surat Fussilat (Chapter 41) until he reached the verse, “*But if they turn away, then say, ‘I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck ‘Ad and Thamud.’*” (41: 13) At this point ‘Utebbah was visibly shaken and he begged the Prophet (PBUH) to stop. So it is clear that the Quran had an overwhelming effect on the disbelievers as on the believers.

## Sura 54: Al-Qamar (The Moon)

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

### **Verses 1 to 55:**

1. *The Hour has drawn near and the moon has split in two.*
2. *Yet when they see a sign they turn away and say, "Prolonged illusion."*
3. *They denied (the truth) and followed their own whims. Yet everything will come to what was decided for it.*
4. *There have already come to them information in which there is (enough) deterrence.*
5. *Extensive wisdom; but warnings do not avail (them).*
6. *So turn away from them (Muhammad). On the Day when the Caller will summon to a difficult thing;*
7. *With downcast eyes, they will come forth from the graves as if they were locusts spreading.*
8. *Hastening towards the Caller; the disbelievers will say, "This is a difficult day."*
9. *The people of Noah denied before them; they denied Our servant and said, "A madman;" and he was repulsed.*
10. *Then he called on his Lord, saying, "I have been overcome, so help (me)."*
11. *So We opened the gates of heaven, with pouring water.*
12. *And We caused the earth to gush forth with springs, so the waters met (and rose) to a measure already ordained.*
13. *And We carried him upon a thing of planks and nails.*
14. *She floats under our eyes (and care), a recompense for the one who had been rejected.*
15. *And verily We left it as a sign; but is there any who will remember?*
16. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
17. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
18. *(The tribe of) A'ad denied. Then how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
19. *Indeed, We sent against them a furious wind, on a Day of violent disaster,*
20. *Plucking out men as if they were roots of palm-trees torn up (from the ground).*
21. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings.*
22. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
23. *(The tribe of) Thamud denied the warnings.*
24. *For they said, "Is it a mortal, alone among us, that we are to follow? Then indeed we should fall into error and madness."*
25. *Has the Message been sent to him, of all the people among us? He is an insolent liar.*
26. *(It was said), "Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is?"*
27. *Indeed, We will send the she-camel as a test for them; so watch them and persevere;*
28. *And tell them that, the water is to be divided between them. Every drinking will be witnessed.*
29. *But they called to their companion, and he took a sword in hand, and hamstrung (her).*
30. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
31. *For We sent against them a single mighty blast, and they became like crushed hay.*

32. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
33. *The people of Lot denied the warnings.*
34. *We sent a storm of stones upon them (all) save the family of Lot, whom We rescued in the last watch of the night,*
35. *As a Blessing from Us; thus, We reward him who gives thanks.*
36. *And he indeed did warn them of Our blow, but they disputed the warnings.*
37. *They even demanded him to deliver his guests to them. Then We blinded their eyes (and said), "Taste now My torment and My warnings."*
38. *Early on the morrow an enduring torment seized them.*
39. *So taste My torment and My warnings.*
40. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
41. *And warnings were certainly sent to the people of Pharaoh.*
42. *The (people) rejected all Our signs; so We seized them – the seizure of an Eminent, Omnipotent.*
43. *Are your disbelievers better than those, or have you some immunity in the Scriptures?*
44. *Or do they say, "We are an alliance and we will be victorious?"*
45. *The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee.*
46. *But the Hour (of doom) is their appointed time, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter (than their earthly failure).*
47. *Indeed, the guilty are in error and madness.*
48. *On the Day when they will be dragged into the Fire upon their faces (it is said to them), "Feel the touch of Hell."*
49. *Verily, We have created everything in due proportion and measure.*
50. *And Our commandment is but one (commandment), as the twinkling of an eye.*
51. *And verily We have destroyed your fellows; but is there any who remembers?*
52. *And everything they did is noted in their records.*
53. *Every matter, small and great, is on record.*
54. *The God conscious will dwell among gardens and rivers;*
55. *In the seat of honor in the presence of the Omnipotent Sovereign. (54: 1 – 55)*

This Sura has dual purpose. The first, it launches a horrific attack on the disbelievers, those who defied the warnings. The second, purpose is to provide comfort and reassurance to the believers. The Sura is divided into different episodes, each one ends with a verse that shakes the human conscious to heed the warning, *"Then see how (dreadful) was My punishment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?"*

The Sura deals with the same issues dealt with in the Meccan Suras. It portrays scenes of the Day of Judgment and it also introduces very quickly and briefly synopsis from the stories of peoples who rejected guidance before. However, these stories are told in a different style. The stories are narrated through a series of horrific images of the destruction of the disbelievers. The Sura ends with the comforting scene of the God conscious having secure and honored seating in the presence of their Lord.

The Sura starts with the mention of a cosmic phenomenon that had been witnessed by the Arabs at that time together with a warning of the approaching Hour, *“The Hour has drawn near and the moon has split in two.”* It has been narrated that the idolaters of Mecca asked the Messenger of God (PBUH) for a sign to support his claim that he was a messenger of God, and the sign came twice in the form of a split moon. This phenomenon has been cited by a large number of scholars. In addition, the people of Mecca heard the description of the event of the split moon from the recitation of the Quran and no one of them denied its occurrence. However, I would like to comment on these narrations; specifically, the part of the narration which indicated that the phenomenon of the split moon was a miracle that occurred in response to the request of the idolaters of Mecca that the Prophet (PBUH) should come up with a miracle to support his claim. This reasoning contradicts the meaning conveyed by one of the verses of the Quran which indicates that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not given a physical miracle like the physical miracles which were given to the messengers who came before him as mentioned in the following verse, *“And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them.”* (17: 59) Every time the idolaters requested a miracle from the Prophet (PBUH) he would decline and say, *“Glory be to my Lord, was I ever but a human messenger?”* (17: 93) So, the claim that the splitting of the moon was in response to the request of the pagans of Mecca does not seem to be valid. The Quran was meant to address the human intellect without taking recourse to physical miracles. We believe that there were physical miracles that occurred at the hands of the Prophet (PBUH) but the purpose of these miracles was to provide comfort, support, and security to the heart of the Prophet (PBUH) not as a means to convince people of the authenticity of the message.

The split moon is a miracle but the moon itself is a bigger miracle. The Quran came to connect the human heart to the universe and to invite it to reflect on God’s signs. These signs are continuously available for people to reflect upon while the split moon was a momentary miracle that was witnessed only by the group of people who lived in Arabia at that time.

However, the idolaters of Mecca did not heed the warning but continued in their stubborn heedlessness, *“Yet when they see a sign they turn away and say, ‘Prolonged illusion.’ They denied (the truth) and followed their own whims. Yet everything will come to what was decided for it. There have already come to them information in which there is (enough) deterrence. Extensive wisdom; but warnings do not avail (them).”* They turned away and said this was magic. That was also what they thought about the Quran, they said it is magic. However, they had no proof of these claims. Everything around them in the universe was firmly established in its place. They received enough information to bring them into the fold of the believers; information from the cosmic phenomena around them and from the history of peoples who lived before them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then told to turn away from them, *“So turn away from them (Muhammad). On the Day when the Caller will summon to a difficult thing; with downcast eyes, they will come forth from the graves as if they were locusts spreading. Hastening towards the Caller; the disbelievers will say, ‘This is a difficult day.’”* The verses depict one of the horrific scenes of the scenes of the Day of Judgment. It will be a difficult day.

The Sura then proceeds to the narrations of the history of those who were destroyed before, *“The people of Noah denied before them; they denied Our servant and said, ‘A madman;’ and he was repulsed.”* Similar to the response that Prophet (PBUH) received from Quraish, the people of Noah (PBUH) denied his message and persecuted him. When he tried everything and failed to convince his people, he had to turn back to his Lord asking for help, *“Then he called on his Lord, saying, ‘I have been overcome, so help (me).’”* God responded, *“So We opened the gates of heaven, with pouring water. And We caused the earth to gush forth with springs, so the waters met (and rose) to a measure already ordained.”* This was a huge universal phenomenon, water coming from the sky and water gushing from the ground. The water coming down from the sky and the water gushing out from the ground met so that what has been ordained would take place. When the flood covered the land, Noah (PBUH) and the people who believed in him were carried on the ship; the ship that Noah (PBUH) built under the care of God and which sails by His grace and under His protection, *“And We carried him upon a thing of planks and nails. She floats under our eyes (and care), a recompense for the one who had been rejected.”* The verse does not mention the ship by name but it describes how it was constructed alluding to her value and magnificence. This was the reward for the one who was rejected. Then it was left as a sign for the following generations, hopefully they would remember, *“And verily We left it as a sign; but is there any who will remember?”* The story was followed by a question to awaken the heedless hearts, *“Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings;”* and a statement about the Quran, *“And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”*

*“(The tribe of) A’ad denied. Then how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings. Indeed, We sent against them a furious wind, on a Day of violent disaster, Plucking out men as if they were roots of palm-trees torn up (from the ground). Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”* This is the second scene of the scenes of God’s punishment. God sent a very cold wind over them. The wind blew over them and left their bodies to like the empty trunks of palm-trees. It is a horrific scene. The wind is one of God’s forces. God controls the wind; it fulfills whatever mission it is commanded to fulfil.

The third scene depicts the story of the tribe of Thamud, *“(The tribe of) Thamud denied the warnings. For they said, ‘Is it a mortal, alone among us, that we are to follow? Then indeed we should fall into error and madness.’ Has the Message been sent to him, of all the people among us? He is an insolent liar. (It was said), ‘Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is.’”* They were too arrogant to accept the fact that one of them was sent by God to guide them. God chooses whomsoever He pleases to be His messenger. God knows best who is most qualified to fulfill the mission. The remarkable thing is that they thought that they would go astray if they followed their messenger. They were quite rude calling their messenger an insolent liar. The Quran said, *“Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is.”*

So God sent them the she-camel as a test and everyone stood waiting to see what will happen, *“Indeed We will send the she-camel as a test for them; so watch them and persevere;”* Their messenger was commanded to tell them the conditions for the test, *“and tell them that the water is to be divided between them. Every drinking will be witnessed.”* The water was divided

between the tribe and the she-camel; one day the tribe can access the water and the next day would be allocated to the she-camel, only she would be able to drink on that day. But they did not like this arrangement and called upon one of the evil men of their tribe, *“But they called to their companion, and he took a sword in hand, and hamstringed (her). Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings.”* They failed the test so they were punished with a mighty blast that destroyed them, *“For We sent against them a single mighty blast, and they became like crushed hay. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”* The Quran does not explain the nature of the blast. In Surat Fussilat (Chapter 41) it was called a thunderbolt. It seems that both the blast and the thunderbolt are the same. The blast made the people to look like crushed hay.

The next episode that is mentioned in this Sura is the story of the people of Lot (PBUH). This story was mentioned in greater detail in other places of the Quran, so the objective here is to attract the attention to the inevitable end of those who reject guidance, *“The people of Lot denied the warnings. We sent a storm of stones upon them (all) save the family of Lot, whom We rescued in the last watch of the night, as a Blessing from Us; thus, We reward him who gives thanks.”* The beginning and end of the story were given in the previous verses, then some more details were given, *“And he indeed did warn them of Our blow, but they disputed the warnings. They even demanded him to deliver his guests to them. Then We blinded their eyes (and said), ‘Taste now My torment and My warnings.’”* Lot (PBUH) warned them repeatedly but they did not heed his warning. They even had the audacity to demand that he should deliver his guests to them; not knowing that these guests were angels coming to destroy them. The destruction happened in the early morning, *“Early on the morrow an enduring torment seized them. So taste My torment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”* The verse that was mentioned at the end of each of the previous episodes, *“Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings;”* was replaced in this episode by another verse, *“So taste My torment and My warnings,”* as if the scene was happening in front of our eyes. This is one of the special characteristics of the Quranic style.

The last story is the story of the people of Pharaoh, *“And warnings were certainly sent to the people of Pharaoh. The (people) denied all Our signs; so We seized them – the seizure of an Eminent, Omnipotent.”* The story was told very briefly. Only the beginning and end are mentioned. The verses emphasized two of God’s attributes, His Eminence and His unlimited power, an ending which is appropriate to the story of Pharaoh who was a tyrant and thought he was a deity for his people.

The verses turn around to address the idolaters of Mecca, *“Are your disbelievers better than those, or have you some immunity in the Scriptures? Or do they say, ‘We are a host victorious?’ The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee. But the Hour (of doom) is their appointed time, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter (than their earthly failure). Indeed, the guilty are in error and madness. On the day when they will be dragged into the Fire upon their faces (it is said to them), ‘Feel the touch of Hell.’”* It is a threat of the punishment in this life as well as in the Hereafter. They have seen what happened to those who rejected guidance before them, what makes them think they will be able to escape God’s punishment? Do they



think that they have a larger army, *“We are an alliance and we will be victorious.”* They will be defeated and they will turn back and flee; not only that, but the torment of the Hereafter is more severe. They will be dragged on their faces in Hell. It will be said to them, *“Feel the touch of Hell.”*

The narrative states the fundamental truth, *“Verily, We have created everything in due proportion and measure. And Our commandment is but one (commandment), as the twinkling of an eye.”* One single word or sign and God’s commandment will come to pass. God’s power defies the constraints of time and space. One commandment started the whole universe and one commandment can bring it to its end. One commandment creates, one commandment puts to death, and one commandment raises people to be gathered for the Day of Judgment and reckoning.

Then the Quran reminded them of the fate of previous peoples who rejected the truth, *“And verily We have destroyed your fellows; but is there any who remembers? And everything they did is noted in their records. Every matter, small and great, is on record.”* Everything is recorded.

Then a new page is turned. The secure and serene scene of those who are God conscious, *“The God conscious will dwell among gardens and rivers, in the seat of honor in the presence of the Omnipotent Sovereign.”* The image reflects an opposite image to that describing the disbelievers. This is the image of bliss and honor. The most important is the bliss of the hearts when they find themselves in the presence of God. They were conscious of Him in the worldly life and now they are secure in His presence in the Hereafter. The fear of God in the life of the world and the fear of God in the Hereafter are two irreconcilable emotions; they cannot co-exist in the heart of the human being.

## **Sura 55: Al-Rahman (The Lord of Mercy)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 78:**

1. *The Lord of Mercy;*
2. *It is He who has taught the Quran.*
3. *He created humankind.*
4. *He taught him clear expression.*
5. *The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed;*
6. *And the stars and the trees - both prostrate.*
7. *And the sky He has uplifted; and He has set the balance;*
8. *In order that you may not transgress in the balance.*
9. *So establish weight with justice and do not fall short in the balance.*
10. *And the earth He set down for His creatures;*
11. *Therein are fruits and sheathed palm-trees,*
12. *Husked grain and scented plants.*
13. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
14. *He created humankind from clay like the potter's,*
15. *And He created jinn from smokeless fire.*
16. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
17. *(He is) Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings;*
18. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
19. *He merged the two seas, converging together;*
20. *Between them is a barrier which they do not transgress;*
21. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
22. *Out of them come Pearls and Coral.*
23. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
24. *And His are the ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains.*
25. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
26. *All that is on earth will perish.*
27. *Only the Face of your Lord, the Lord of Majesty and Generosity, will remain.*
28. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
29. *All that are in the heavens and the earth entreat Him. Every day He exercises power.*
30. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
31. *We will attend to both of you prominent beings.*
32. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
33. *Jinn and humankind, if you can penetrate the regions of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate (them). You will never penetrate them save with (Our) sanction.*
34. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
35. *There will be sent, against you both, heat of fire and flash of brass, and you will not escape.*
36. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
37. *When the sky is rent asunder, and it becomes rosy like red hide;*
38. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*

39. *On that day neither humankind nor jinn will be questioned about his sin.*
40. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
41. *The guilty will be known by their marks, and will be taken by the forelocks and the feet.*
42. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
43. *This is the Hell which the guilty deny.*
44. *They will go circling round between it and fierce, boiling water.*
45. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
46. *But for those who feared the standing before their Lord there are two gardens.*
47. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
48. *With spreading branches.*
49. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
50. *Wherein are two flowing springs.*
51. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
52. *Wherein is every kind of fruit in pairs.*
53. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
54. *Reclining upon couches lined with silk brocade, the fruit of both the gardens shall be within reach.*
55. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
56. *Therein are those of modest gaze, whom neither human nor jinn will have touched before them.*
57. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
58. *Like rubies and coral.*
59. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
60. *Is there any reward for goodness but goodness?*
61. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
62. *And besides these two, there are two other gardens.*
63. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
64. *Dark-green in color.*
65. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
66. *Wherein are two gushing springs.*
67. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
68. *Wherein is fruit, the date-palm and pomegranate.*
69. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
70. *Wherein are good and beautiful women;*
71. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
72. *Fair ones, closely-guarded in pavilions;*
73. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
74. *Whom neither human nor jinn will have touched before them;*
75. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
76. *Reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets;*
77. *Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?*
78. *Blessed be the name of your Lord, the Lord of Majesty and Generosity. (55: 1 -78)*

This is a Meccan Sura. It has a very special style. It presents a general proclamation in the universal court. It enumerates the different signs of God which are reflected on the creation of

the universe and humankind. It addresses the two prominent bodies: humankind and jinn challenging them to deny God's blessings and favors.

The Sura starts with a verse of one word, "*The Lord of Mercy;*" a beginning which sets the tone for the whole Sura; a call to each heart to listen; a call that attracts the attention of the whole universe to the proclamation of God. Then the proclamation follows, "*It is He who has taught the Quran.*" The Quran is the greatest blessing of God. It is an expression of the mercy of God. It embodies the laws that organize the whole universe. It embodies the divine project which organizes the life of people on earth and provides them with a link to the rest of the universe. It provides them with the means to lead comfortable, safe, and secure life.

The Quran opens the eyes of people to see the beauty of the universe. The Quran teaches people the meaning of being vicegerents of God on earth. That is why the verse that deals with the teaching of the Quran precedes the verse that tells of the creation of humankind, "*He created humankind. He taught him clear expression.*" God taught humankind to express himself and to communicate with other beings in the universe. This is a great blessing that we usually take for granted.

The following verses talk about the signs of God in the universe, "*The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed.*" The creation and the control of the universe are a testimony of the accurate planning and design of the universe. The universe is full of stars, many of which are much bigger than the sun. But the sun is the most important star for us, the inhabitants of the earth. The light and heat we get from the sun are essential for our continuous survival. The moon is also important to us. The gravitational attraction of the sun and the moon are accurately calculated to guarantee their equilibrium and stability. In this huge universe, in which there are millions of the stars, every star moves along its orbit with great precision.

The previous verse explained the precision of the creation and the next verse explains the relationship between the created and the Creator, "*And the stars and the trees - both prostrate.*" The existence of the universe is contingent on the sound relationship between the created and the Creator. Every creature in this universe recognizes its Creator and submits to Him.

*"And the sky He has uplifted; and He has set the balance; in order that you may not transgress in the balance. So establish weight with justice and do not fall short in the balance."* The reference to the sky aims at attracting the attention of the heedless heart to contemplate the magnificence of God's creation. It motivates the human being to look high up and reflect on the huge universe that has millions of the stars moving around without colliding with each other. In addition to the majesty of the creation of the vast universe, a reference is made to the establishment of the balance; the balance that weighs with the truth. The balance that sets the standard for everything: people, events and other things. This balance guarantees the stability of life. The balance means that we should use objective judgment not whims and desires in our dealings. This is the balance that God embedded in the initial natural disposition of humankind and is included in the divine project as explained in the Quran. It is thus incumbent on us not to

transgress this balance and to maintain justice and fairness in our dealings.

*“And the earth He set down for His creatures. Therein are fruits and sheathed palm-trees, husked grain and scented plants.”* Having lived on earth for a long time, humankind tends to take things for granted. We do not think of the power that made this earth habitable; the power that made it a secure place for us to live on. We are reminded every now and then of the precarious nature of this place when we suffer the occurrence of an earthquake or the eruption of a volcano. We do not realize that this earth, on which we live, rotates and moves in the universe with vast speeds. In the mean time the earth provides the appropriate soil for magnificent plants to grow and sustain our lives. Then which of these blessings would humankind and jinn dispute? *“Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”*

God’s blessings in creating humankind and jinn are then explored, *“He created humankind from clay like the potter’s, and He created jinn from smokeless fire. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* Having been created is a great blessing from God on both jinn and humankind. The creation and existence of both humankind and jinn are miracles beyond comprehension. Humankind was created from clay. We know from science that the elements that constitute the human body are the same elements that constitute the soil. However, scientific knowledge should not be used in interpreting the verses of the Quran. Quranic verses may be alluding to the scientific facts or they may mean something else. We would like to emphasize that we should not consider a single and limited scientific theory as the sole explanation of a Quranic verse. Scientific theories may be proven to be facts and may be proven wrong later on; very often their findings change with time. Scientific theories may be used in the context of providing probable explanations of the verses of the Quran. The creation of jinn from fire is beyond human comprehension, it is part of the unseen.

*“(He is) Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* The reference to the two risings and the two settings evokes in the heart the encompassing nature of God. Wherever one goes or looks, one can find God. The risings and settings could be a reference to the risings and settings of the sun and the moon. They could also be a reference to the different risings and settings of the sun in the winter and the summer; or the different risings and setting of the sun in the two hemispheres. What is more important is the significance of the mention of the two risings and the two settings. The verse urges the human being to consider the risings and settings as signs of God to reflect upon.

God created water on earth to be used by people, *“He merged the two seas, converging together; between them is a barrier which they do not transgress. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? Out of them come Pearls and Coral. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? And His are the ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* One of the two seas is a salt water sea and the other is a fresh water one. The first represents all seas and oceans and the second represents all rivers. God allowed the rivers to converge on the seas but neither one transgresses upon each other. Their waters do not cross the natural barrier between the two. Although, most

rivers end up flowing into seas, but the characteristics of the sea water do not change. The level of the river is usually higher than the level of the sea to which it is connected. So, sea water does not affect the characteristics of the fresh water in the river. Both have wonders of God's creation. Pearl and coral are harvested from them. Ships sail through rivers and seas. They look like mountains. God created the laws that keep them afloat and allow them to sail through water.

*“All that is on earth will perish. Only the Face of your Lord, the Lord of Majesty and Generosity, will remain. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* Reading this verse, the sounds become quite and the senses become still. Everything will perish. Only God's Face will remain. So, which blessing would humankind and the jinn dispute?

*“All that are in the heavens and the earth entreat Him. Every day He exercises power. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* Only God can answer those who ask Him, that is why everyone asks Him. He controls everything, He is the owner of everything and He is the provider.

The following verse embodies a horrific warning, *“We will attend to both of you prominent beings. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* God the Lord of Majesty, the Mighty, the Strong, the Dominator, the Compeller, the Great, the Most High will attend to the reckoning of the two weak kinds of creatures: humankind and jinn. This is a horrific matter, beyond all imagination. There is nothing that can keep God busy; He does not need to take time off to attend to humankind and jinn. But it is a figure of speech which magnifies the impact of the warning. Could they dispute any of His favors?

Then a challenge is posed. Can jinn and humankind penetrate the heavens and earth, *“Jinn and humankind, if you can penetrate the regions of the heavens and the earth, then penetrate (them). You will never penetrate them save with (Our) sanction. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* Only by God's permission can they penetrate the heavens and earth otherwise, *“there will be sent, against you both, heat of fire and flash of brass, and you will not escape. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”*

The rest of the Sura describes some of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“When the sky is rent asunder, and it becomes rosy like red hide; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* The scene of the sky as a red rose like a red hide refers to the catastrophic events which will happen on the Day of Judgment. Many of the verses in the Quran describe the destruction of the planets and the stars which will take place on the Day of Judgment. On that Day no one will be asked. The deeds of everyone will be known. The faces will reflect these deeds, those who did good, will have happy and bright faces but those who did evil will have miserable and darkened faces, *“On that day neither humankind nor jinn will be questioned about his sin. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”*

The criminals will be known by the marks on their faces. They will be taken by the forelocks and the feet and thrown into Hell fire, *“The guilty will be known by their marks, and will be taken by*

*the forelocks and the feet. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?” It will be said, “This is the Hell which the guilty deny. They will go circling round between it and fierce, boiling water. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”*

The other scene is the scene of bliss, *“But for those who feared the standing before their Lord there are two gardens. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”* This is the first time in the Quran that two gardens are mentioned. Most probably they are parts of the big garden that has been mentioned frequently in the Quran. The mention of two gardens may have a special significance. As we will see in Surat Al-Waqiah (Chapter 56), the companions of the garden are two groups: the group of those who will be brought closer to God, and the group who are called the people of the right. It may be that the two gardens mentioned in this verse are meant for those who have higher rank, the group of those who are brought closer to God. The two gardens which will be mentioned later on in this Sura may have been meant for the other group, the group of the people of the right.

The first two gardens have, *“Spreading branches; two flowing springs, every kind of fruit in pairs.”* And those who inhabit them will be, *“reclining upon couches lined with silk brocade, the fruit of both the gardens shall be within reach. Therein are those of modest gaze, whom neither human nor jinn will have touched before them, like rubies and coral.”* The fundamental standard is then set, *“Is there any reward for goodness but goodness?”*

The group of the people of the right will be admitted to two different gardens. These gardens are slightly lower in rank than the previous two, *“and besides these two, there are two other gardens, dark-green in color. Wherein are two gushing springs.”* Here it is mentioned that the water is gushing in pulses from the two springs while in the previous two gardens, water was flowing continuously from the two springs. But there will be fruits and other good things, *“Wherein are fruits, the date-palm and pomegranate. Then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? Wherein are good and beautiful women; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? Fair ones, closely-guarded in pavilions; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? Whom neither human nor jinn will have touched before them; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny? Reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets; then which of the favors of your Lord would you deny?”*

The Sura explored the blessings of God on the universe, on His creatures, and in the Hereafter; it thus appropriate to conclude by glorifying God, the Everlasting, *“Blessed be the name of your Lord, the Lord of Majesty and Generosity.”*

## **Sura 56: AL-Waqi'ah (The Inevitable Event)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 56:**

1. *When the inevitable event occurs,*
2. *There is no denying that it will occur.*
3. *Abasing (some), exalting (others);*
4. *When the earth shall be shaken to its depths,*
5. *And the mountains shall be crumbled to powder,*
6. *Becoming a scattered dust;*
7. *And you shall be sorted out into three kinds:*
8. *Those on the right, what of those on the right?*
9. *And those on the left, what of those on the left?*
10. *And the foremost in the race, the foremost in the race,*
11. *Those are they who will be brought close (to God),*
12. *In gardens of bliss;*
13. *A numerous company of the former generations,*
14. *And a few of the later generations,*
15. *On lined couches,*
16. *Reclining on them, facing each other.*
17. *There will circulate among them immortal youths;*
18. *With cups, pitchers and a cup from a flowing spring;*
19. *Causing them neither headache, nor will they suffer intoxication;*
20. *And fruit that they prefer;*
21. *And flesh of fowl that they desire.*
22. *And (there will be) companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes;*
23. *Like pearls well-guarded;*
24. *A reward for what they used to do.*
25. *They will not hear therein vain or sinful discourse,*
26. *Only the saying, "Peace, Peace."*
27. *And those on the right, what of those on the right?*
28. *(They will be) among Lote-trees without thorns,*
29. *And trees with flowers (or fruits) piled one above another,*
30. *And extended shade,*
31. *And water flowing continuously,*
32. *And fruits in abundance;*
33. *Whose season is not limited, nor (supply) forbidden*
34. *And raised couches.*
35. *We have created (their companions) in a (new) creation.*
36. *And made them virgins,*
37. *Loving, equals in age,*
38. *For those on the right;*
39. *A numerous company of the former generations,*
40. *And a numerous company of the later generations.*



41. *And those on the left, what of those on the left?*
42. *In scorching wind and scalding water,*
43. *And the shadow of black smoke,*
44. *Neither cool nor refreshing.*
45. *Indeed, they were, before that, indulging in affluence;*
46. *And used to persist in the awful sin.*
47. *And they used to say, "When we die and become dust and bones, will we indeed be raised up again?"*
48. *And also our forefathers?*
49. *Say, "Indeed, the former and later generations,*
50. *Will all be brought together to the tryst of an appointed day.*
51. *Then indeed you who have gone astray, the deniers,*
52. *You will surely eat of a tree of Zaqqum,*
53. *And will fill your bellies with it;*
54. *And drinking on top of it boiling water;*
55. *And you will drink the way thirsty camels drink.*
56. *This will be their welcome on the Day of Judgment. (56: 1 -56)*

The inevitable event is the name of the Sura as well as its topic of discussion. The main issue that the Sura addresses is the concept of resurrection. The Sura opens up with a horrific statement that is appropriate to a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *"When the inevitable event occurs, there is no denying that it will occur. Abasing (some), exalting (others); when the earth shall be shaken to its depths, and the mountains shall be crumbled to powder, becoming a scattered dust."* The verses alludes to the events of the Day of Judgment without explicitly detailing what will happen giving the impression that it so horrific that it could not be mentioned explicitly. The verses emphasize the inevitability of the event. On that Day some people will be in high places while others will be debased. A description of the cosmic disruption on that Day then follows: the earth will be shaken and the mountains will be destroyed becoming dust scattered in the universe.

The following verses explain in more details the earlier statement about raising some people and debasing others. People are divided into three categories, *"And you shall be sorted out into three kinds: those on the right, what of those on the right? And those on the left, what of those on the left? And the foremost in the race, the foremost in the race."* The people of the first category are the people on the right, then the second category includes the people on the left. The people of the third category are the foremost in the race. No details are mentioned about the people of each category. However, the mention of each group is followed by a question: what about them? The verses build up the anticipation of the reader to know more about each category. Then the verses detail the rank of each group in front of God and what will they receive from Him. The verses start with those who are the foremost in the race, *"Those are they who will be brought close (to God), In gardens of bliss; a numerous company of the former generations, and a few of the later generations, on lined couches, reclining on them, facing each other. There will circulate among them immortal youths; with cups, pitchers and a cup from a flowing spring; causing them neither headache, nor will they suffer intoxication; and fruits that they prefer; and flesh of fowl that they desire. And (there will be) companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes; like pearls well-*

*guarded; a reward for what they used to do. They will not hear therein vain or sinful discourse, only the saying, 'Peace, Peace.'*" The verses start with the greatest bliss that this group will enjoy: the bliss of being close to God. The verses describe the composition of the group, "*a numerous company of the former generations, and a few of the later generations.*" Then continue to describe the other bounties of God that they will enjoy. They will be reclining on couches feeling happy and secure. They will be served by young people who will serve them whatever they like of fruits, meat, and drinks. They will have beautiful companions, like well protected pearls. They will live in peace, security, and harmony.

The next group consists of the people on the right, "*And those on the right, what of those on the right? (They will be) among Lote-trees without thorns, and trees with flowers (or fruits) piled one above another, and extended shade, and water flowing constantly, and fruits in abundance; whose season is not limited, nor (supply) forbidden, and raised couches. We have created (their companions) in a (new) creation, and made them virgins, loving, equals in age, for those on the right; a numerous company of the former generations, and a numerous company of the later generations.*" The previous verses describe the details of the bliss that the people on the right will enjoy. They will live in Gardens with thorn-free flowering trees, water will be flowing around them. They will enjoy the shade and the different types of fruits. They will be sitting on high couches and they will have beautiful companions. These companions will be virgins, loving, and of compatible age. Finally, the composition of the group is mentioned, "*a numerous company of the former generations, and a numerous company of the later generations.*"

The third group is the group of those on the left, "*And those on the left, what of those on the left? In scorching wind and scalding water; and the shadow of black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing. Indeed they were, before that, indulging in affluence; and used to persist in the awful sin.*" The scene is contrasted against the scene of those on the right. They will be in scorching wind drinking boiling water. This is their recompense. They used to enjoy affluent life. They were adamant in breaking the covenant that God took from humankind, the covenant that God instilled in the initial natural disposition of humankind. They used to deny the accountability on the Day of Judgment, "*And they used to say, 'When we die and become dust and bones, will we indeed be raised up again? and also our forefathers.'*" Their question will be answered, "*Say, 'Indeed, the former and later generations, will all be brought together to the tryst of an appointed day.'*" Certainly you will be raised, you and your forefathers and you will be held accountable, "*Then indeed you who have gone astray, the deniers, you will surely eat of a tree of Zaqqum, and will fill your bellies with it; and drinking on top of it boiling water; and you will drink the way thirsty camels drink. This will be their welcome on the Day of Judgment.*" They will drink boiling water. Such water neither quenches their thirst, nor does it cool their insides. So, they will keep drinking in the same fashion that sick camels keep drinking.

## **Verses 57 to 96:**

*57. We have created you, so why do you not believe?*

*58. Have you seen that which you emit?*

*59. Is it you who create it, or are We the Creator?*

*60. We have decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated.*

61. *In order that We may bring in your place the likes of you and make you grow into what you do not know.*
62. *And you certainly know already the first creation; why then do you not remember?*
63. *Have you seen that which you sow?*
64. *Is it you who make it to grow, or are We the growers?*
65. *If We willed, We verily could make it chaff, then you would not cease to lament?*
66. *(Saying), "We are indeed left with debts;*
67. *Rather, we are deprived.*
68. *Have you considered the water which you drink?*
69. *Is it you who send it down from the raincloud, or are We the senders?*
70. *If We willed, We verily could make it bitter. Why then, you are not grateful?*
71. *Have you considered the fire which you ignite;*
72. *Was it you who produced its trees, or are We the producers?*
73. *We have made it a reminder and a provision for the travelers.*
74. *Therefore, glorify the name of your Lord, the Tremendous.*
75. *I swear by the positions of the stars.*
76. *That is verily a tremendous oath, if you only knew.*
77. *Most surely it is a noble Quran,*
78. *In a book that is well-protected.*
79. *None shall touch it except the purified ones;*
80. *A revelation from the Lord of the worlds.*
81. *Do you then hold this discourse in contempt?*
82. *And you have made it your livelihood that you should declare it false?*
83. *Then why when (the soul of the dying man) reaches the throat,*
84. *And you are, at that time, looking on;*
85. *But We are nearer to him than you, and yet you do not see.*
86. *Then why do you not, if you are exempt from (future) account,*
87. *Bring it back, if you are truthful?*
88. *If he was of those who are brought near to God,*
89. *Then (for him) happiness and bounty and a garden of bliss.*
90. *If he was of those on the right,*
91. *For him is the salutation, "Peace be to you," from those on the right.*
92. *And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones,*
93. *Then the welcome will be boiling water;*
94. *And burning in Hell-Fire.*
95. *Verily, this is the certain truth.*
96. *Therefore, glorify the name of your Lord, the Tremendous. (56: 57 – 96)*

The following section of the Sura deals with the fundamentals of the doctrine. However, the emphasis is placed on the principles of the doctrine that are related to the resurrection. The verses exhibit the characteristics of the style of the Quran in addressing the initial natural disposition of humankind and how it explains the axioms of faith using simple but logical arguments. The Quran turns the familiar settings and the ordinary events in the lives of people into major cosmic phenomenon; through which divine laws are explained. Then these laws are used to form a universal and comprehensive doctrine that controls the whole universe. This

doctrine becomes the divine project which organizes the lives of the believers and energizes their hearts and souls.

The way which the Quran uses in addressing the initial natural disposition of humankind provides the proof that the Quran is God's revelation. The methodology used in composing the Quran is exactly the same methodology used in the creation of the universe. Very simple and elementary components were combined together to create the highly complex universe. Similarly, the Quran uses simple and elementary observations which are familiar to people in building up the most sophisticated religious doctrine. Everyone lives on earth - whether he lives in a city, a village, or in a cave - has seen plants growing, babies being born, water flowing, and fires burning. These are the elements that the Quran uses to build up the doctrine. These elementary observations are also a witness of the most significant cosmic realities and divine secrets.

The verses in this section start with concept of the resurrection, "*We have created you, so why do you not believe? Have you seen that which you emit? Is it you who create it, or are We the Creators?*" People have been created and are continuously being created; no one can deny this fact. The role of the human being in the creation is simply for the male to place his sperm inside the womb of the female. God transforms this tiny drop of water into a fully fashioned human being. We do not know how does this happen, but it happens every day in front of our eyes. The end is not less miraculous than the beginning, "*We have decreed death to be your common lot, and We are not to be frustrated. In order that We may bring in your place the likes of you and make you grow into what you do not know. And you certainly know already the first creation; why then do you not remember?*" Every one dies. No one will escape death. However, we do not know how it happens. God is capable of replacing us with new people, if He wills.

The second example is the familiar scene of planting seeds, "*Have you seen that which you sow? Is it you who make it to grow, or are We the growers? If We willed, We verily could make it chaff, then you would not cease to lament?*" The seed which is sown by a human being, grows into a tree by the will of God. No one interferes in the process. You hear people say, "We planted." All what they did is sowing the seed. The miracle of the transformation of a tiny seed into a full blown plant is God's work. God is capable of destroying it, if He so willed. If the plant is destroyed somehow, they still do not recognize God's role. Instead, they lament, "*(Saying), 'We are indeed left with debts; rather, we are deprived.'*"

Another familiar scene in our daily life, "*Have you considered the water which you drink? Is it you who send it down from the raincloud, or are We the senders? If We willed, We verily could make it bitter. Why then, you are not grateful?*" Water plays a major role in the continuance of life on earth. What role does the human being play in making this water? It is God who sends down water from the sky. God could have very well made it bitter rather being fresh.

Still another familiar example, "*Have you considered the fire which you ignite; Was it you who produced its trees, or are We the producers? We have made it a reminder and a provision for the travelers.*" The discovery of fire was a milestone in the history of humankind. But now we take it for granted. Human beings can light fires, but who created the tree that can be ignited to provide the fire? The fire we deal with in our daily life, is a reminder of the bigger fire of the

Day of Judgment. Having presented these signs, it is appropriate to end this section by Glorifying God's name who created these miracles, *"Therefore glorify the name of your Lord, the Tremendous."*

The next section starts with an oath, an oath by the positions of the stars, *"I swear by the positions of the stars; that is verily a tremendous oath, if you only knew; most surely it is a noble Quran, in a book that is well-protected. None shall touch it except the purified ones. A revelation from the Lord of the worlds."* Those who lived at the time during which the Quran was being revealed did not know the significance of the positions of the stars. So, they were told that this is a tremendous oath. Today we know more about this. The scientists of astronomy tell us that the universe has billions of planets and stars. Each one has its own orbit and gravity. It is almost impossible for two stars to collide with each other because they were positioned in the universe with great accuracy and deliberations. This shows how tremendous this oath is. So what is the oath about? The oath emphasizes the authenticity of the Quran. It has not been written by a crazy person or a magician. It is a noble Quran; noble in itself, noble because it came from a noble source, and noble because of the noble directions it sets. This Book is also protected; only to be touched by those who are pure. The Quran could not be touched by Satan. This statement addressed the claim that the idolaters of Quraish made that the Quran is Satan's revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This is re-emphasized by the statement, *"A revelation from the Lord of the worlds."*

The last section of the Sura depicts the scene of a person on death bed, *"Do you then hold this discourse in contempt? And you have made it your livelihood that you should declare it false? Then why when (the soul of the dying man) reaches the throat, and you are, at that time, looking on, but We are nearer to him than you, and yet you do not see, then why do you not, if you are exempt from (future) account, bring it back, if you are truthful?"* You deny the Quran and you are doubtful of the Hereafter and all what you are going to get from this life is the fact that you rejected the Quran. What will you do then, when a person is on death bed? A person is dying and you are watching helplessly unable to bring him back to life. But God is nearer to him than you. So, if you doubt the veracity of the Hereafter, why cannot you bring him back to life?

The following verses depict scenes of the end of members of each of the three categories mentioned earlier in the Sura, *"Thus if he was of those who are brought near (to God), then (for him) happiness and bounty and a garden of bliss. And if he was of those on the right, (For him is the salutation), 'Peace be to you,' from those on the right. And if he is one of the rejecters, the erring ones, then the welcome will be boiling water; and burning in Hell-Fire."* As the soul leaves the body it sees what is waiting for it. Those who are brought near to God will have happiness and bounty and a garden of bliss. Those who are on the right will be greeted by their companions with a greeting of peace. The ones on the left will reside in Hell fire. This is the certain truth so, *"glorify the name of your Lord, the Tremendous."*

## **Sura 57: Al-Hadid (The Iron)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 15:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

## Verses 16 to 29:

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

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

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

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

Another high status, that is achievable for those who work for it, is the status of the supporters of the truth, *“And those who believe in God and His Messengers, they are the supporters of the truth.”* It is a high ranking status but easy to attain. The way to earn this status is to believe in God and His Messengers. A third high ranking status is awarded to the martyrs who sacrifice their lives in God’s cause, *“And the martyrs are with their Lord; they have their reward and their light.”* They will be given a status that brings them closer to God. On the other side of these high ranking places we find the abasement which is waiting for the disbelievers, *“as for those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations, they are the owners of Hell-fire.”*

The following verses show how little is the sacrifice that the believers are asked to perform in the way of God, *“Know that the life of the world is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry, and boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children; as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the tillers, but afterward it dries up and you see it turning yellow, then it becomes straw. And in the Hereafter there is grievous torment, and (also) forgiveness from God and His good pleasure, whereas the life of this world is but a matter of illusion.”* The life of this world is a fleeting opportunity; what one gets out of it is worthless in comparison with what one can get in the Hereafter. This life is only play, idle talk, pageantry,

boasting, and rivalry. These are all fleeting pleasures. It is like a seed that is sown and grows into a beautiful plant, the plant gets old, turns yellow then it withers and becomes dust. The Hereafter, on the other hand is permanent. That is why the life of this world is merely an illusion.

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

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

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

The following verses conclude the Sura by exploring the history of guidance which was brought to humankind by a number of God’s Messengers, *“We verily sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the balance, that humankind may maintain (their affairs) in justice; and We brought down iron, wherein is mighty power and (many) uses for humankind, and that God may know him who supports Him and His Messengers, though unseen; God is the Strong, the Eminent. And We sent Noah and Abraham, and established prophet-hood and the Scripture in their progeny; and among them is he who is guided, but many of them became transgressors. Then We sent following in their footsteps Our Messengers, and followed with Jesus the son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. And We placed in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and Mercy. But the monasticism which they invented for*

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

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

## **Sura 58: Al-Mujadila (She who Disputes)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 22:**

1. *God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your dialogue. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*
2. *Those of you who legally estrange their wives (saying to them you are like the back of my mother -Zihar) they are not their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave birth to them. And they indeed utter an ill word and a lie. And God is Effacer of Sins, Giver of Mercy.*
3. *Those of you who estrange their wives by equating them with their mothers, then wish to go back on the words they uttered, (the penalty) in this case (is) the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. This is what you commanded to do; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
4. *But whoever does not have the means, let him fast for two successive months before they touch each other; as for him who is not able, let him feed sixty needy persons; that is in order that you may have faith in God and His Messenger, and these are God's limits, and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment.*
5. *Those who controvert God and His Messenger will be abased as those before them were abased; and We have sent down clear verses, and for the disbelievers is an abasing torment.*
6. *On the day that God will raise them all up and inform them of what they did. God has kept account of it while they forgot it. And God is Witness over all things.*
7. *Do you not see that God knows (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He makes the fourth among them; nor between five but He makes the sixth; nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of what they did. God knows all things.*
8. *Do you not see those who were forbidden from engaging in secret counsels yet they revert to that which they were forbidden (to do)? And they hold secret counsels among themselves to commit sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to you they greet you with a greeting which God does not use to greet you, and say within themselves, "Why does not God torment us for what we say?" Hell will suffice for them; in which they will burn; a wretched destination.*
9. *Believers, when you hold secret confabulations, do not do it for committing sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger; but do it for righteousness and piety; and be conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.*
10. *Secret confabulations are only (inspired) by Satan, in order that he may cause grief to the believers; but he cannot harm them in the least, except as God permits; and in God let the believers put their trust.*
11. *Believers, when you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room; God will make (ample) room for you. And when you are told to rise up, rise up.*

- God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
12. *Believers, when you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That is better and purer for you. But if you do not have the means, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
  13. *Were you reluctant to give in charity before your consultation? So when you do not do it and God has accepted your repentance, then establish prayer and pay the poor-dues and obey God and His Messenger; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
  14. *Do you not see those who befriend people with whom God is angry? They are neither of you nor of them, and they swear a false oath knowingly.*
  15. *God has prepared for them a severe torment. Evil indeed are their deeds.*
  16. *They made their oaths to serve as a cover and they averted people from the path of God; therefore, they shall have humiliating torment.*
  17. *Their wealth and their children will avail them nothing against God. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein forever.*
  18. *On the day when God will raise them up all together, they will swear to Him as they (now) swear to you, and they will fancy that they have some standing. They are indeed liars.*
  19. *Satan has overcome them, so he made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Indeed, those of the party of Satan are the losers.*
  20. *Those who controvert God and His messenger, they will be among the most abased.*
  21. *God has decreed that, "It is I and My messengers who must prevail." God is Strong, Eminent.*
  22. *You will not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who controvert God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). God will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. Indeed, those in the party of God are the successful? (58: 1 – 22)*

This Sura and most of the Suras in this part of the Quran narrate some of the events that occurred during the early years of the formation of the Muslim community in Medina. The Suras include directions, guidelines, and commands which played a major role in training the fledgling society to play the role which God assigned them to perform on this earth. This nation was trained to lead an Islamic way of life and to become a model for such a way of life for the whole world. It is a humongous role that requires a long and arduous training program.

The Sura starts with an amazing example of the connection between heaven and earth. The example shows the way the Quran dealt with matters of everyday life to rectify people's crooked behavior and mistakes, "*God has indeed heard the statement of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband and complains to God. And God hears your dialogue. God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.*" This is an example which shows how heaven interfered to resolve a dispute that engulfed a simple poor family and to render God's verdict. God heard the voice of the woman who was arguing with the Prophet (PBUH) and complaining to God; while 'Aisha

(RA), who was sitting in the adjacent room at the time, was not able to hear what the woman was saying. The verses paint an image which fills the heart with the feelings of God's nearness, mercy, and kindness.

The dispute which is the subject of this Sura is about an old tradition that the Arabs used to practice before Islam. It is an unfair and abusive tradition. Up until the occurrence of this incident, there was no Islamic ruling regarding this tradition. Before Islam when a man got very angry at his wife, he would say to her, *"You are like the back of my mother."* Once he uttered these words the wife becomes legally estranged from her husband, however, she would not be considered divorced. So, the wife lives in a state of limbo. Normal marital relationship between the couple becomes forbidden but in the mean time she was not considered a divorcee. She cannot lead the life of a married woman nor can she leave her husband and remarry again. This was one of the kinds of abuse which women suffered before Islam. Khawlah bint Tha'labah (RA) was married to Awas ibn Al-Samet (RA). Awas (RA) grew old and became impatient and irritant. One day, he became angry with his wife and said to her, *"You are like the back of my mother."* He then went to meet with his friends, came after a while, and wanted to have sex with his wife. She pushed him away. She said, *"I would not have sex with you until God and His Messenger (PBUH) settle this matter between us."* He tried hard to get to her but she was able to push him away and she went to ask the Prophet (PBUH) for God's verdict regarding this situation. She complained to the Prophet (PBUH) about what her husband had done. At that time there was no rule in Islam regarding this situation. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Khawlah, your husband is an elderly person so be conscious of God regarding him."* The argument continued until the verses outlining the penalty for committing this sin has been revealed.

*"Those of you who legally estrange their wives (saying to them you are like the back of my mother -Zihar) they are not their mothers. None can be their mothers except those who gave birth to them. And they indeed utter an ill word and a lie. And God is Effacer of Sins, Giver of Mercy."* This verse deals with the root of the problem. Words uttered by an angry husband do not change the reality which God created: the wife cannot become a mother simply by uttering these words. A mother is the one who gave birth to the person. These are evil words. God will forgive the sins that were committed before this verdict has been issued.

The process for redressing the wrong committed is then outlined, *"Those of you who legally estrange their wives by equating them with their mothers, then wish to go back on the words they uttered, (the penalty) in this case (is) the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. This is what you commanded to do; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do."* The first act of expiation is to free a slave. God made acts of expiation for sins an element in the scheme of freeing those who were enslaved. Acts of expiation is a way to remind people to abstain from committing this wrong. Another incentive for abstaining from sin is to remember that God is Totally-Aware of what we do. However, for those who do not have the means to free a slave then, *"let him fast for two successive months before they touch each other; as for him who is not able, let him feed sixty needy persons; that is in order that you may have faith in God and His Messenger, and these are God's limits, and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment."* Applying God's commands and injunctions in matters of daily life is an expression of the



submission to God and the obedience of His Messenger (PBUH). Those who transgress the boundaries set by God's commands are considered among the disbelievers. They will suffer a painful punishment.

Ending the previous verse by the statement, *“and the disbelievers shall have a painful torment,”* leads to the following verse which mentions those who controvert God and His Messenger (PBUH), *“Those who controvert God and His messenger will be abased as those before them were abased; and We have sent down clear verses, and for the disbelievers is humiliating torment.”* Those who controvert God and His Messenger (PBUH) will be abased exactly as people from the previous generations who committed the same sin were abased. God has explained this in clear verses revealed to His Prophet (PBUH). This was their punishment in this life and in the Hereafter, they will be accountable for what they did, *“On the day that God will raise them all up and inform them of what they did. God has kept account of it while they forgot it. And God is Witness over all things.”* They may have forgotten what they did, but it will be all kept in record.

*“Do you not see that God knows (all) that is in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret confabulation between three, but He makes the fourth among them; nor between five but He makes the sixth; nor between fewer nor more, but He is in their midst, wherever they may be. Then, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of what they did. God knows all things.”* The verse reiterates the comprehensiveness and universality of God's knowledge. Not only He knows what is in the heavens and what is on earth, but He also knows what is in the hearts of people. The statement touches the hearts of the believers. Its implications make the hearts tremble. It evokes the warm and secure feelings of being always in the presence of God. On the other hand, it warns that God knows all what is being said in secret. Nothing can be hidden from God. God knows everything.

*“Do you not see those who were forbidden from engaging in secret counsels, yet they revert to that which they were forbidden (to do)? And they hold secret counsels among themselves to commit sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger. And when they come to you they greet you with a greeting which God does not use to greet you, and say within themselves, “Why does not God torment us for what we say?” Hell will suffice for them; in which they will burn; a wretched destination.”* The verse shows that the Messenger's (PBUH) plan in dealing with the hypocrites was to advise them to abide by goodness and righteousness in their behavior. However, they continued to conspire with some of the Jewish tribes against the Muslims. They even would greet the Prophet (PBUH) with a twisted tongue in a subtle way to denigrate the Prophet (PBUH). They were saying to themselves that had Muhammad (PBUH) been a true prophet, God would have punished them for their abuse. The verse reiterated God's knowledge of everything to send a message to the hypocrites that God is aware of their conspiracy. God has decreed that their destination will be Hell fire.

It seems that there were some Muslims who did not yet fully embrace the Islamic behavior and they used to get together to have secret confabulations. The following verse rebuked them for doing this, *“Believers, when you hold secret confabulations, do not do it for committing sin, aggression, and disobedience to the Messenger; but do it for righteousness and piety; and be*

*conscious of God, to Whom you shall be gathered.*” The verse still addressed these Muslims with the endearing term, “Believers,” to teach them the proper etiquette of dealing with matters that need to be discussed. Their aim should be to hold these discussions in an atmosphere which is conducive to righteousness and piety. They should remember that they will be accountable to God.

Secret confabulation is motivated by Satan and creates suspicion and doubt. This is Satan’s way to create animosity and disunity among Muslims, however Satan cannot harm anybody except by the leave of God, “*Secret counsels are only (inspired) by Satan, in order that he may cause grief to the believers; but he cannot harm them in the least, except as God permits; and in God let the believers put their trust.*” The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, “*If you were a group of three people then no two of you should hold secret counsel leaving the third person out of the conversation.*” This is the proper etiquette. However, sometimes it would be beneficial to hold secret consultations, if holding such consultation in public would cause harm to certain people.

Another lesson in the etiquette of general meetings is given, “*Believers, when you are told to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and) make room; God will make (ample) room for you. And when you are told to rise up, rise up. God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*” The verse exhorts Muslims to welcome those who come late to the meeting and to make room for them so they can sit and participate in the meeting. God promises those who make room for their brothers a greater reward from Himself. Those who obey the Prophet (PBUH) when he commands them to leave are promised a greater reward, “*God will raise up those of you who believe and who have knowledge to higher ranks.*” The lesson is that faith teaches tolerance and knowledge teaches obedience.

“*Believers, when you consult the Messenger in private, spend something in charity before your private consultation. That is better and purer for you. But if you do not have the means, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*” It was narrated that Imam Ali (RA) practiced this command. He used to pay a charity each time he wanted to consult with the Prophet (PBUH). However, some Muslims found this practice onerous. So, the verse came to remove this obligation, “*Were you reluctant to give in charity before your consultation? So when you do not do it and God has accepted your repentance, then establish prayer and pay the poor-due and obey God and His Messenger; and God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*” These verses provide lessons that teach the Muslims the proper etiquette.

The narrative turns to the hypocrites to warn them not to conspire with the Jewish tribes, “*Do you not see those who befriend people with whom God is angry? They are neither of you nor of them, and they swear a false oath knowingly.*” The strong condemnation of the hypocrites gives an indication of the grave danger they posed to the Muslim community in Medina. They superficially accepted Islam as a cover for their surreptitious activities to harm Muslims. But they will get their proper punishment, “*God has prepared for them a severe torment. Evil indeed*

*are their deeds. They made their oaths to serve as a cover and they averted people from the path of God; therefore, they shall have humiliating torment. Their wealth and their children will avail them nothing against God. Such are the rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein forever.*” They will be humiliated on the Day of Judgment. They will swear to God, but God knows that they are liars, *“On the day when God will raise them up all together, they will swear to Him as they (now) swear to you, and they will fancy that they have some standing. They are indeed liars.”* Satan has overcome them and they became under his control, therefore they lost everything, *“Satan has overcome them, so he made them forget the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. Indeed, those of the party of Satan are the losers.”*

The hypocrites thought the support of the Jewish tribes will strengthen their status in Medina. They forgot that it is God who provides the true and genuine support, *“Those who controvert God and His messenger, they will be among the most abased. God has decreed that, ‘It is I and My messengers who must prevail.’ God is Strong, Eminent.”* This is the ultimate truth that will prevail; God and His Messengers must prevail. The believers may suffer and may be persecuted but ultimately they will be victors.

The following verse states a fundamental truth: only the love of God and His Messenger (PBUH) should fill the heart of a believer, *“You will not find any people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who controvert God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). God will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. Indeed, those in the party of God are the successful.”* A believing heart cannot entertain two kinds of love at the same time. One cannot love God and in the meantime love those who oppose God. It is one or the other; even if those who oppose God were, *“their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred.”* God has established faith in the hearts of those who love God and His Messenger (PBUH). He will be pleased with them and they will be pleased with Him. They are the members of the party of God. They are the successful ones.

## **Sura59: Al-Hashr (The Gathering)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 24:**

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifies God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *It is He who evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering (of the forces). You did not think that they would get out. And they thought that their fortresses would protect them from God. But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their dwellings by their own hands and the hands of the believers so learn a lesson, O you who have eyes.*
3. *And had it not been that God had decreed that they should be evicted, He would certainly have tormented them in this world; and in the Hereafter they shall (certainly) have the torment of the Fire.*
4. *That is because they opposed God and His Messenger; and if any one opposes God, verily God is severe in punishment.*
5. *Whatsoever palm-trees you cut down or leave standing on their roots, it was by God's leave, in order that He might confound the transgressors.*
6. *And that which God gave as spoil to His Messenger from them, you spurred neither a horse nor a camel, but God gives authority to His messengers against whom He pleases, and God has power over all things.*
7. *What God has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships, it belongs to God, to His Messenger, and to kindred and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you. And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it). And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment.*
8. *(It is) for the poor migrants who have been driven out from their homes and their belongings, who seek bounty from God and help God and His Messenger. These are the truthful.*
9. *But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith – show their affection to those who migrated to them, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful.*
10. *And those who came after them say, "Our Lord, forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and do not leave in our hearts rancor against those who have believed. Our Lord, You are indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy."*
11. *Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the Scripture? "If you are evicted, we too will go out with you, and we will never obey any one against you; and if you are attacked (in fight) we will help you." But God is witness that they are indeed liars.*

12. *If they are evicted, they will never go out with them; and if they are attacked (in fight), they will never help them; and if they do help them, they will turn their backs; and then they would not have been victorious.*
13. *Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God. This is because they are people who do not understand.*
14. *They will not fight against you in a body save in fortified villages or from behind walls. Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who cannot reason.*
15. *Like those who shortly preceded them, they have tasted the evil result of their conduct; and (in the Hereafter there is) for them a painful torment.*
16. *Like Satan, when he says to the human being, "Disbelieve in God," but when he disbelieves in God, (Satan) says, "I disown you; I do fear God, the Lord of the Worlds."*
17. *And the consequence for both will be that they are in the Fire, therein abiding. This is the reward for the wrongdoers.*
18. *Believers, be conscious of God and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow. And remain conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
19. *And do not be like those who forgot God; and He made them forget their own souls. Such are the transgressors.*
20. *Not equal are the companions of the fire and the companions of paradise. The companions of paradise, they are the successful.*
21. *Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and rent asunder for fear of God. We cite these parables for the people that they may reflect.*
22. *He is God, there is no god other than Him; the Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy.*
23. *He is God is, there is no god other than Him; the King, the Holy, the Flawless (the Source of Peace), the Faithful, the Guardian, the Eminent, the Compeller, the Supreme in Pride. Glorified He above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him).*
24. *He is God, the Creator, the Producer, the Fashioner. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth glorifies Him, and He is the Eminent, the Wise. (59: 1 – 24)*

This Sura was revealed during the fourth year of Hijra. It describes the events that led to the eviction of the Jewish tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer from Medina. It also describes the impact that these events had on the organization of the Muslim community. The narrative is delivered in the special style of Quran. We will first summarize the events that lead to the revelation of this Sura then we will discuss its interpretation.

The events of this story occurred in the beginning of the fourth year of Hijra just after the Muslims fought the idolaters of Mecca in the battle of Uhud. The story began when a Muslim man killed by mistake two non Muslim men. According to the traditions of the time, the Muslims had to pay the victims' tribe a ransom. The treaty that was agreed upon between the Muslims and the Jews when the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina included an article which required the Muslims and the Jews to help each other in the payment of such ransoms. Since the Muslims were short of money at that time, the Prophet (PBUH) headed a delegation of ten of his

companions to request the help of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer in paying the ransom. The Prophet (PBUH) and his companions were well received and the chiefs of Bani Al-Nadeer promised to help out. They requested the Prophet (PBUH) to wait until they have deliberated the matter with each other. However, their secret deliberations were not about offering the help that the Muslims requested but were about how to assassinate the Prophet (PBUH). Some of them thought that this is a golden opportunity to murder the Prophet (PBUH) and thus break up the Muslims. The Prophet (PBUH) was sitting on the ground with his back to the wall of a house. The idea of sending one of them to the roof of the house to throw a rock on the Prophet (PBUH) fomented in their heads. However, the Prophet (PBUH) received a revelation which alerted him to the conspiracy being conceived by the chiefs of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer. The Prophet (PBUH) stood up suddenly and left his companions without telling anyone where he was going and went back to Medina, thus foiling their conspiracy. The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) waited for some time for the Prophet (PBUH) to return but then realized that he had gone to Medina so they left and went back to Medina. War was the inevitable consequence for renegeing on the treaty. The Prophet (PBUH) led a Muslim army which struck a siege around the dwellings of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer. The Prophet (PBUH) gave them the choice either to abandon their dwellings and leave Medina taking with them their wealth and whatever they can carry of their property and belongings or stay and fight. The hypocrites of Medina under the leadership of Abd- Allah ibn Saloul urged the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer not to leave and promised to support them in their fight. However, this was an empty promise. The siege continued for twenty six days, during which the Muslims burned down some of the palm trees which belonged to Bani Al-Nadeer but were outside their fortifications. The tribe of Bani Al- Nadeer eventually capitulated and accepted the terms that the Prophet (PBUH) offered them and they left their dwellings. Some of them settled in Khaiber and others moved to Syria. On their way out, the people of Bani Al-Nadeer destroyed the property and belongings which they could not carry with them rather than leave it intact for the Muslims to enjoy.

The Sura starts with glorifying God, *“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorifies God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”* The verse states the fact that everything in the universe glorifies God. God is the Eminent, the Wise. He has the power to destroy His enemy and support His servants.

Then the verses narrate the events of the story, *“It is He who evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture from their homes at the first gathering (of the forces). You did not think that they would get out. And they thought that their fortresses would protect them from God. But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their dwellings by their own hands and the hands of the believers so learn a lesson, O you who have eyes.”* The verse states clearly that God evicted those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture. The way the statement is composed emphasizes that this was an explicit act of God. Neither the Muslims, nor Banu Al-Nadir thought that this would happen. The fortifications that Banu Al-Nadir built around their dwellings were invincible. However, the threat came from within not from without, *“But the (wrath of) God came to them from where they had not expected, and He cast terror into their hearts.”* They were mainly concerned with strengthening their fortresses and never thought that fear would overwhelm their hearts. But God cast fear in their hearts and they simply gave in.

God does what He wills and no one can escape the wrath of God. They cherished their dwellings, but God made them destroy the property that they loved with their own hands. Those who can see should take a lesson from this.

They deserved to be punished, so even if God had decided not to evict them, they would have been punished in a different way; and in the Hereafter they will get the torment of fire, *“And had it not been that God had decreed that they should be evicted, He would certainly have tormented them in this world; and in the Hereafter they shall (certainly) have the torment of the Fire.”* They deserved this punishment because they opposed God and His Messenger (PBUH) and violated their covenant with God, *“That is because they opposed God and His Messenger; and if any one opposes God, verily God is severe in punishment.”*

It should be noted that the tribe of Banu Al-Nadeer is described in this Sura as, “those who disbelieved from among the People of the Scripture.” They disbelieved in God’s Message which was sent through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Scripture that was revealed to them and which they believed in foretold the coming of a Messenger from God. They have been expected the Messenger to come. But, when the Messenger came they rejected him. So, they broke their covenant with God and became disbelievers.

The verses continue to explain to the Muslims the rationale behind the actions they were commanded to undertake, *“Whatsoever palm-trees you cut down or leave standing on their roots, it was by God's leave, in order that He might confound the transgressors.”* The Muslims were commanded not to cut a tree except for a reason, so when they were commanded to cut down some of the palm trees that belonged to Bani Al-Nadeer they had doubts in their hearts about the legality of such action. This verse was revealed to reassure them that what they were commanded to do was in fulfillment of God’s will. God decides what tree to cut and what tree to spare. Banu Al-Nadeer felt sad for the trees that were cut because they saw their wealth being destroyed and they were also sad for the trees that were spared because they left them behind for the Muslims to benefit from.

The following verses describe the model that Muslims should follow in distributing the spoils of war, *“And that which God gave as spoil to His Messenger from them, you spurred neither a horse nor a camel, but God gives authority to His Messengers against whom He pleases, and God has power over all things.”* The first rule deals with the spoils that they gained without engaging in actual combat. The Muslims did not use a horse or a camel to gain these spoils. These spoils were to be distributed according to a scheme different from the scheme that was used to distribute the spoils gained as a result of active combat, *“What God has bestowed on His Messenger (and taken away) from the people of the townships, it belongs to God to His Messenger and to kindred and orphans and the needy and the wayfarer; in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you. And whatsoever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it). And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment.”* The Messenger of God (PBUH) was given the authority to distribute the spoils among the mentioned categories as he saw fit. The term “kindred” mentioned in the verse refers to the Messenger’s (PBUH) family. Members of the Messenger’s (PBUH) family were not

eligible to receive charity whether obligatory (poor-dues) or voluntary. The Messenger (PBUH) was not also allowed to leave an estate to be distributed among his poor relatives. For these reasons, they were given a share in the spoils obtained without combat. The verse also sends a message that whatever happens, happens according to the will of God. God creates the reasons to achieve the results, *“God gives authority to His messengers against whom He pleases.”*

The verses also explain the rationale for the scheme described for the division of the spoils, *“in order that it may not circulate perpetually among the wealthy among you.”* This is one of the fundamental principles on which the economic system in Islam has been founded. Islam allows and respects the right of people to own property and wealth, however there are also mechanisms that prevent the wealth from being perpetually circulating among the rich while the poor are continuously deprived.

The second fundamental principle that these verses establish is that the Quran and the Prophet’s (PBUH) tradition are the sources for the laws which govern the Muslim society, *“And whatsoever the messenger gives you, take it; and whatsoever he forbids, abstain (from it).”* Islamic Jurisprudence is derived from the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). This principle takes away the people’s right to enact laws that contradict the Quran or the Prophetic tradition. However, if there are no rules dictated by the Quran or the Prophetic tradition regarding a specific problem, then the people are allowed to introduce whatever law they see fit as long as it does not contradict the basic principles of Islam. People are warned not to deviate from these principles, otherwise they would be subjected to God’s wrath, *“And remain conscious of God. God is severe in punishment.”*

The verses continued to mention in detail those who were eligible to receive a share from these spoils, *“(It is) for the poor migrants who have been driven out from their homes and their belongings, who seek bounty from God and help God and His messenger. These are the truthful.”* The verse depicts the actual sad conditions of the migrants. They were oppressed in Mecca and chose to migrate from Mecca to Medina fleeing from oppression. Their only crime for being oppressed was that they said, *“God is our Lord.”* They left their property, their wealth, and their homes in Mecca and went out seeking God’s pleasure. Although they were weak and poor they pledged to support God and His Messenger. They were the true believers. They professed the word of faith and were true in their undertaking.

The above verse described the first group of people who constituted the Muslim society. A second group is described in the following verse, *“But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith – show their affection to those who migrated to them, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful.”* This is a brief description of the supporters (the people of Medina.) It highlights the main characteristics of the members of this group. They established the faith of Islam in Medina before the migrants from Mecca came to them. Although, many of them were poor but they welcomed their brethren from Mecca and were very generous in helping them to settle in Medina. They even gave them preference over themselves.



The verse ends by stating one of the basic principles, *“And those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls; these are the successful.”*

Then came the third group, *“And those who came after them say, ‘Our Lord, forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the faith, and do not leave in our hearts rancor against those who have believed. Our Lord, You are indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.’”* The verse depicts the main characteristics of the subsequent generations of Muslims. These are the characteristics that the members of the Muslim nation should enjoy at all times and in all places. Although this group did not exist at the time of the revelation of these verses, but God knew the characteristics of the true Muslim generations. They will express their love to the earlier generations by asking God to forgive them. This shows how the Muslim nation consists of strongly connected groups of people living at different times and in different places. The verse refers to the strong feeling of brotherhood that permeates the Muslim nation.

The narrative then goes back to the events that surrounded the eviction of Bani Al-Nadeer, *“Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the Scripture? “If you are evicted, we too will go out with you, and we will never obey any one against you; and if you are attacked (in fight) we will help you.” But God is witness that they are indeed liars. If they are evicted, they will never go out with them; and if they are attacked (in fight), they will never help them; and if they do help them, they will turn their backs; and then they would not have been victorious. Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God. This is because they are people who do not understand. They will not fight against you in a body save in fortified villages or from behind walls. Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse. That is because they are a people who cannot reason.”* The verses describe the behavior of the hypocrites during the events that led to the expulsion of the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer from Medina. They urged them to stand their grounds and promised them support, but they let them down. The verses stress the close relationship between the two groups, *“Have you not seen the hypocrites say to their disbelieving brethren among the People of the Scripture?”* The verse reiterates the promise that the hypocrites made, however it states that God knew they were liars. The Quran then reveals the secrets of the disbelievers and the hypocrites, *“Fear of you is more intense in their hearts than the fear of God.”* They feared the believers more than they feared God. Had they feared God, they would not have been afraid of any of His creation. Fear of God and fear of His creation do not occupy the heart of a human being at the same time. God is the Eminent; all the forces in the universe are under His control. They did not have the courage to fight the believers face to face; they would only fight them from behind fortifications. The Quran then points to one of the main differences between the believers on one side and the hypocrites and the disbelievers on the other side. The believers were bonded together with the bond of brotherhood in faith while the hypocrites and the disbelievers had no such bond. A superficial look at them may show that they were united but the reality is that, *“Their enmity among themselves is very great. You think of them as a whole whereas their hearts are diverse.”* They would be able to overcome the believers only if the bond of brotherhood that binds the believers together is broken and they are no longer united. The Quran states these characteristics to reassure the believers and to motivate them to stay united and not to fear their enemy.

This episode with the tribe of Bani Al-Nadeer was not the first confrontation between the Muslims and the other tribes that lived in Medina. The Quran refers to one of these confrontations which happened between the Muslims and the tribe of Bani Quanoquaa, *“Like those who shortly preceded them, they have tasted the evil result of their conduct; and (in the Hereafter there is) for them a painful torment.”* This confrontation happened after the Muslims had won the battle of Badr. Banu Quanoquaa had hoped that the idolaters of Mecca would humiliate the Muslims in the battle of Badr, but when the Muslims won they felt bad and feared that this victory may strengthen the Muslim position in Medina. They started harassing and challenging the Muslims. The Muslims laid a siege around their dwellings and eventually they were allowed to leave Medina with whatever they can carry of their property and wealth.

The verses draw a parallel between the roles of the hypocrites and Satan in seducing human beings and then letting them down, *“Like Satan, when he says to the human being, ‘Disbelieve in God,’ but when he disbelieves in God, (Satan) says, ‘I disown you; I do fear God, the Lord of the Worlds.’ And the consequence for both will be that they are in the Fire, therein abiding. This is the reward for the wrongdoers.”* The parable’s objective is to generalize the lesson learnt from the events of this story. This is one of the facets of the style of Quran. It uses a concrete example as the basis for establishing a general principle.

The narrative turn into an address to the believers, *“Believers, be conscious of God and let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow. And remain conscious of God. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* God consciousness is a state of the heart that cannot be described in words. It is a state that evokes in the heart the continuous feeling of God’s observance. This feeling is a combination of fear, shame, and embarrassment that arises when a person commits a deed that may displease God, knowing that God is ever observing. The verses then alert the person to remember the passage of time. The verse reminds the believers that they should prepare for the future. Have they prepared themselves for the day when they will stand in front of God to account for their deeds? The command of remaining conscious of God is then repeated with the reminder that God is Totally Aware of what we do.

A warning is then issued, *“And do not be like those who forgot God; and He made them forget their own souls. Such are the transgressors. Not equal are the companions of the Fire and the companions of paradise. The companions of paradise, they are the successful.”* Those who forget God lose the divine guidance and walk aimlessly in this vast life. In doing so one loses one of the most important characteristics of the human nature which elevates him above the material life. One then forgets to work for the Hereafter. Those are the true transgressors. Their path leads to Hell fire but the believers’ path leads to paradise. Those are the successful.

The following verse impacts the heart and shakes it as it visualizes the scene when a solid mountain is crushed under the heavy weight of the Quran, *“Had We sent down this Quran on a mountain, verily, you would have seen it humble itself and rent asunder for fear of God. We cite these parables for the people that they may reflect.”*

The following verses glorify God by reciting His beautiful names. They are like a concert in which the whole universe participates. Each one of these names has its own effect on the universe and on the lives of people. These names evoke in the hearts the practical implications that accompany each name.

*“He is God, there is no god other than Him;”* a statement of the belief in the uniqueness and oneness of God. He is the sole Creator and only He is worthy of being worshiped.

*“The Knower of the unseen and the seen,”* Only He knows what is visible and what is invisible. One should be aware that nothing can be hidden from God. He knows everything we do, whether we do it surreptitiously or in the open.

*“He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,”* this is an attribute which evokes a feeling of serenity and security. The hope overcomes the fear. God does not pursue His servants to punish them but He wants them to be guided and He helps them to achieve felicity.

*“He is God is, there is no god other than Him;”* The statement of the belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God is reiterated because it is the basis of all other attributes.

*“The King,”* He is the only sovereign and He is the only master that deserves to be obeyed.

*“The Holy,”* This is an attribute from which emanates absolute purity and holiness. It falls on the human heart to cleanse, purify, and make it fit for glorifying God.

*“The Flawless (the Source of Peace),”* This is the attribute that generates peace, safety and security in the whole universe and in the heart of the believer.

*“The Faithful,”* God is the giver of faith. This attribute provides the incentive to the believer to follow the path of faith.

*“The Guardian,”* God is the Guardian and the controller over everything.

He is *“the Eminent, the Compeller, the Supreme in Pride.”* These are the attributes which describe the supremacy and power of God. No one else share these attributes with Him, *“Glorified He above all that they ascribe as partners (to Him).”*

He is God, *“the Creator, the Producer, the Fashioner. To Him belong the most beautiful names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth glorifies Him, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

## **Sura 60: Al-Mumtahina (The Woman Tested)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 13:**

1. *Believers, do not take My enemies and yours as protecting guardians, offering them friendship, even though they disbelieve in the truth that has come to you, and have driven out the Messenger and yourselves because you believe in God your Lord; if you have come out to strive in My way and to seek My good pleasure. Do you show them friendship secretly, when I know what you conceal and what you reveal? And whosoever does it among you he verily has strayed from the right path.*
2. *If they have the upper hand on you, they will be your foes, and will stretch out their hands and their tongues toward you with evil (intent), and they long for you to disbelieve.*
3. *Your ties of kindred and your children will avail you nothing; on the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you, and God is All-Seeing of what you do.*
4. *You have an excellent example in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, "We disown you and whatever you worship besides God; we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred forever, unless you believe in God alone." Save that which Abraham promised his father (when he said), "I will ask forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God." They prayed, "Our Lord, we put our trust in You, and to You we turn repentant, and to You is our final destination.*
5. *Our Lord, do not make us a prey for the disbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord, for You are the Eminent, the Wise."*
6. *There was indeed in them an excellent example for you to follow, for those whose hope is in God and in the Last Day. But if any turns away, truly God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.*
7. *It may be that God will instill affection between you and those whom you (now) hold as enemies. For God has power (over all things); And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
8. *God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you because of your faith nor drove you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. God loves those who are just.*
9. *God only forbids you, with regard to those who fought you because of your faith, drove you out of your homes, and supported (others) in driving you out from your homes, that you make them your friends. Whosoever befriends them, these are the wrongdoers.*
10. *Believers, when believing women come to you as emigrants, test them. God knows their faith best. Then, if you know them to be true believers, do not send them back to the disbelievers. They are not lawful for them (the disbelievers), nor are they (the disbelievers) lawful for them. And give them (the disbelievers) that which they have spent (upon them). And it is no sin for you to marry such women when you have given them their dues. And hold not to the ties of disbelieving women; and ask for (the return of) that which you have spent; and let them (the disbelievers) ask for that which they have spent. That is the judgment of God. He judges between you. God is Omniscient, Wise.*
11. *And if any of your wives deserts you to the disbelievers, and afterward you have your turn (of triumph), then give to those whose wives have deserted them the like of that which they have spent, and be conscious of God in whom you believe.*

12. *Prophet, when believing women come to you to take the oath of allegiance that they will not ascribe a partner to God, and will neither steal nor commit adultery nor kill their children, nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, nor disobey you in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
13. *Believers, do not befriend people with whom God is angry; they despaired of the Hereafter, just as the disbelievers are in despair about those are (buried) in the graves. (60: 1 – 13)*

This Sura provides another lesson in the series of divine lessons which were used to teach the Muslim community in Medina the characters that Muslims should acquire. It is important for Muslims to have these characters if they were to show the world a live example of the Islamic way of life.

The Sura starts with the endearing address, “*Believers.*” God is calling upon the believers to educate them how to deal in an appropriate way with those who chose to be the enemies of God. God tells the believers that these people are His enemies as well as theirs. This way of addressing the believers makes them feel that God is on their side, “*Believers, do not take My enemies and yours as protecting guardians, offering them friendship.*” The basic reason that they have become God’s, as well as, their enemies is that they disbelieved in the truth that had come to the believers. In addition, they expelled the Messenger (PBUH) as well as the believers from their homes simply because they believed in the truth, “*even though they disbelieve in the truth that has come to you, and have driven out the Messenger and yourselves because you believe in God your Lord;*” The reason for the enmity between you and them is that they rejected your faith, how can then the believers take the disbelievers as friends? If the believers really migrated to, “*strive in My way and to seek My good pleasure,*” then there is no place for the friendship between the believers and the disbelievers. The believer’s heart has no room for the love of both God and the disbelievers.

God then issued a warning for those who may entertain affection towards the disbelievers, “*Do you show them friendship secretly, when I know what you conceal and what you reveal?*” God knows what they reveal and what they conceal. Those who befriend the disbelievers are issued a dire warning, “*And whosoever does it among you he verily has strayed from the right path.*”

The reasons for this warning are then revealed, “*If they have the upper hand on you, they will be your foes, and will stretch out their hands and their tongues toward you with evil (intent), and they long for you to disbelieve.*” The disbelievers will never be true friends to the believers. They will always persecute and assault them if they can. They will always wish that the disbelievers revert back to disbelief. For the believers, relinquishing the faith of Islam is worse than any harm that can be inflicted upon them by their enemy.

The believers at that time still had family members and even children who did not believe. The Quran tells them that they will not be of benefit for them on the Day of Judgment, “*Your ties of*

*kindred and your children will avail you nothing on the Day of Resurrection. He will decide between you; and God sees what you do.*” The believers and disbelievers will be in separate camps on the Day of Judgment. The kin relationships have been severed between the believers and the disbelievers. The believers were reminded that God sees everything.

The following verses remind the believers at all times with the beginning of this nation; the nation that believes in the Oneness of God. It is a single nation that extends over the history of humanity, a nation of believers that disown all relationships except the relationship of faith. It is the nation that emanated from the first patriarch, Prophet Abraham (PBUH). He gave the Muslim nation the true example not only in believing in the uniqueness and Oneness of God but also in the best behavior, *“You have an excellent example in Abraham and those with him, when they said to their people, ‘We disown you and whatever you worship besides God; we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred for ever, unless you believe in God alone.’ Save that which Abraham promised his father (when he said), ‘I will ask forgiveness for you, though I cannot protect you from God.’ They prayed, ‘Our Lord, we put our trust in You, and to You we turn repentant, and to You is our final destination. Our Lord, do not make us a prey for the disbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord, for You are the Eminent, the Wise.”* These verses remind the believers that they belong to a nation that has a long history. Many generations before them lived in similar circumstances; they, strived in the way of God as they are striving and suffered oppression as they are suffering. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and those who followed him experienced similar circumstances to those which the migrants from Mecca were experiencing. What did they do? They said to their people, *“We disown you and whatever you worship besides God; we have rejected you, and there has arisen, between us and you, enmity and hatred for ever, unless you believe in God alone.”* They severed all ties except the ties that were established on the basis of the shared faith. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was still hoping that his father would join the nation of the believers, so he promised to ask God to forgive him, however he made it clear that it is God’s decision, *“though I cannot protect you from God.”* The Quran explains in a different Sura that when Prophet Abraham (PBUH) became certain that his father will not believe he applied the same rule and he disowned his father, *“But when it became apparent to him (Abraham) that he (his father) was an enemy of God, he disowned him.”* (9:114)

The invocation of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his followers, *“Our Lord, we put our trust in You, and to You we turn repentant, and to You is our final destination. Our Lord, do not make us a prey for the disbelievers, but forgive us, our Lord, for You are the Eminent, the Wise,”* reflect the absolute submission which is one of the major traits that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) had. The invocation carries a message to the believers to follow in Abraham’s (PBUH) footsteps and to submit to God.

The lesson that the believers should learn about emulating Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his followers is reiterated, *“There was indeed in them an excellent example for you to follow, for those whose hope is in God and in the Last Day. But if any turns away truly God is the Self-Sufficient, the Praised.”* The lesson was also emphasized by reminding the believers that this is the path for those who have hope in God and the Last Day. God is Self sufficient and Independent. He does not need those who dissociate themselves from the caravan of the

believers.

The following verse brings hope to the believers that their enemies may become believers and it establishes a basic principle that govern the relationships between the Muslim state and other non Muslims states. Muslims should maintain amicable and peaceful relationships with non aggressive states. As long as they are not being attacked by others, Muslims should treat others with kindness and justice, *“It may be that God will instill affection between you and those whom you (now) hold as enemies. For God has power (over all things); and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* Islam is a religion of peace and love. It is a system under which people can live as brothers and sisters. The verse goes beyond this. Muslims should treat their enemies fairly and kindly; who knows, maybe they will become believers? This promise was later realized when the tribe of Quraish became Muslims, *“God does not forbid you, with regard to those who did not fight you because of your faith nor drove you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. God loves those who are just. God only forbids you, with regard to those who fought you because of your faith, drove you out of your homes, and supported (others) in driving you out from your homes, that you make them your friends. Whosoever befriends them, these are the wrongdoers.”*

*“Believers, when believing women come to you as emigrants, test them. God knows their faith best. Then, if you know them to be true believers, do not send them back to the disbelievers. They are not lawful for them (the disbelievers), nor are they (the disbelievers) lawful for them. And give them (the disbelievers) that which they have spent (upon them). And it is no sin for you to marry such women when you have given them their dues. And hold not to the ties of disbelieving women; and ask for (the return of) that which you have spent; and let them (the disbelievers) ask for that which they have spent. That is the judgment of God. He judges between you. God is Omniscient, Wise. And if any of your wives deserts you to the disbelievers, and afterward you have your turn (of triumph), then give to those whose wives have deserted them the like of that which they have spent, and be conscious of God in Whom you believe.”*

These two verses were revealed after the conclusion of the agreement of Hudaibiyah. Some Muslim women from Mecca came to the Prophet (PBUH) asking to join the Muslims in Medina. The chiefs of Quraish objected to this thinking that this contravenes the agreement. The verses came down to settle the dispute. The verses forbade the Muslims to deliver the Muslim women who wanted to migrate to Medina back to the disbelievers. The verses also established a process to determine who is eligible for this refugee status. The Muslims have to ascertain the basis for the claim of the refugee, *“Believers, when believing women come to you as emigrants, test them. God knows their faith best.”* The test would only examine the face value of the claim, but only God knows the truth of their claim. The rationale for not returning the women refugees to the disbelievers is explained, *“. They are not lawful for them (the disbelievers), nor are they (the disbelievers) lawful for them.”* However, the disbelieving husbands should be treated equitably and should not be cheated out of what gifts they gave their wives, *“give them (the disbelievers) that which they have spent (upon them).”* These women were then considered divorcees and they can remarry according to the Islamic rules, *“And it is no sin for you to marry such women when you have given them their dues.”* This is God’s rule. God knows best.

The verses also prohibited Muslim men to remain wedded to disbelieving women, *“And hold not to the ties of disbelieving women.”* If the disbelievers refused to pay back a Muslim husband the amount of money he paid as a wedding gift, then it is the duty of the Muslim government to compensate the husband for his loss.

The text for the pledge which these women would make was then given, *“Prophet, when believing women come to you to take the oath of allegiance that they will not ascribe a partner to God, and will neither steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet, nor disobey you in what is right, then accept their allegiance and ask God to forgive them; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* The pledge embodied all the basic principles on which the Muslim society is established.

The Sura is then concluded by a command to the believers, *“Believers, do not befriend people with whom God is angry; they despaired of the Hereafter, just as the disbelievers are in despair about those (buried) in graves.”* The believers should not take as protective patrons those whom God considers enemies. These people have no hope in the Hereafter because they do not believe in the resurrection after death. Their hope in the Hereafter is similar to the hope of the disbelievers in the resurrection of their dead people.



## Sura 61: Al-Saff (The Ranks)

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

### **Verses 1 to 14:**

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *Believers, why do you say that which you do not do?*
3. *It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say that which you do not do.*
4. *God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure.*
5. *And remember, when Moses said to his people, "My people, why do you hurt me, although you know that I am the messenger of God (sent) to you?" And when they swerved, God let their hearts swerve. God does not guide those who are transgressors.*
6. *And remember, when Jesus, the son of Mary said, "Children of Israel, I am the messenger of God (sent) to you, confirming the Torah (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, "This is obvious magic."*
7. *Who is a greater wrongdoer than one who invents a lie against God, when he is summoned to submit to God? And God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
8. *Their intention is to extinguish God's light (by blowing) with their mouths. But God will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers are averse to it.*
9. *It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may be averse to it.*
10. *Believers, shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a painful torment?*
11. *Believe in God and His Messenger, and strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves. That will be best for you, if you but knew.*
12. *He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, and into beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity. That is indeed the supreme achievement.*
13. *And another (favor will He bestow) which you love, help from God and a speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the believers.*
14. *Believers, be the supporters of God; as Jesus the son of Mary said to the disciples, "Who will be my supporters for God?" The disciples said, "We are God's supporters." And a party of the Children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost. (61: 1 – 14)*

This Sura has two basic objectives which are apparent from the narrative. The first objective is to establish in the psyche of the believers that Islam is the final form of the divine project which God sent down to guide the human race. The verses refer to the Message that was revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH) and show how did the Children of Israel abdicated their duties. Then Jesus (PBUH) was sent to continue Moses' (PBUH) work and to state that another Messenger will follow to complete God's divine project.

The second objective which emanates from the first objective is to outline the responsibility of the believers in establishing this religion on earth. The believers should be sincere in striving in the cause of God with their possessions and persons.

The whole universe glorifies God announcing that Islam came to establish the divine project in its final form. Muslims are entrusted with establishing this religion which professes the Oneness of God, *“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

The believers were rebuked for what some of them committed; they committed something that God hates. How can they not practice what they preach, *“Believers, why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of God that you say that which you do not do.”* Ibn Jareer mentioned that these verses were revealed as a message of rebuke to the believers who said they would fight in the cause of God, but when fighting was ordained they declined to fight. The verses state that God hates such behavior. The Quran usually uses an incident or an event as a platform to launch a general principle. The principle is that the believers should not say what they do not do because God hates those who do not practice what they preach.

The verses then continue to address fighting in the cause of God, *“God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as if they were a solid structure.”* The believers should fight as a solid unit in the cause of God.

The following verses deal with the stages of revelation of the divine project. First, came Moses (PBUH), *“And remember, when Moses said to his people, ‘My people, why do you hurt me, although you know that I am the messenger of God (sent) to you?’ And when they swerved, God let their hearts swerve. God does not guide those who are transgressors.”* He was then followed by Jesus (PBUH), *“And remember, when Jesus, the son of Mary said, ‘Children of Israel, I am the messenger of God (sent) to you, confirming the Torah (which came) before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.’ But when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obvious magic.’”* The Children of Israel treated Prophet Moses (PBUH), who saved them from the persecution of Pharaoh and his chiefs, badly. The Quran told many stories about the difficult experience that Prophet Moses (PBUH) had with the Children of Israel. In this verse Prophet Moses (PBUH) rebukes them mildly, *“My people, why do you hurt me.”* However, they were adamant in their transgression so God let their hearts swerve. They were no longer qualified to carry the responsibility of establishing God’s religion on earth. Then Jesus (PBUH) came to continue Moses’ (PBUH) task and to bring the glad tidings of another prophet who will bring about the last phase of a complete and comprehensive project that addresses the intellect of the mature humanity.

These verses show how the different stages of the same religion were revealed to guide the human race to the straight path. Each stage came in a different form suitable for the needs and abilities of the human race at the time of its revelation. The verse mentions the good news that Jesus (PBUH) brought to the Children of Israel about the expected Messenger. The truth of the statement was accepted by many of their scholars e.g. Abdul Allah ibn Salam. It is historically known that the Jews were expecting a Messenger from God, but they had hoped that it would be

one of them. So, they refused to accept the new religion since the Messenger was not a Jew. They fought Islam and the Muslims in different ways, *“Who is a greater wrongdoer than one who invents a lie against God, when he is summoned to submit to God? And God does not guide the wrongdoers.”*

They tried in vain to extinguish God’s light, *“Their intention is to extinguish God's light (by blowing) with their mouths. But God will perfect His light, even though the disbelievers are averse to it.”* The verse establishes a fact and paints an image of desperation. It is a fact that they fought the message with their words claiming that it was clear magic. Their words expressed their desperate effort to extinguish the light that Islam brought. However, God fulfilled His promise and Islam was soon established.

God sent His messenger to establish the religion of truth, *“It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that he may proclaim it over all religion, even though the idolaters may be averse to it.”* The religion was established in more than one way. The content of the religion were established in its original form and did not suffer the mutilation that happened to all other religions; and it was established when it spread to all parts of the world.

The following verse addresses the believers with the endearing term, *“Believers.”* Then it guides them to a very profitable bargain, *“shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a painful torment?”* The question whips up their curiosity; then it provides the answer, *“Believe in God and His Messenger, and strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves. That will be best for you, if you but knew.”* They have already fulfilled the first part of their end of the bargain, they believed in God and His Messenger. So they need to fulfill the second part, to *“strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your possessions and yourselves.”* The Quran then outlines God’s end of the bargain, *“He will forgive you your sins, and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow, and into beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity. That is indeed the supreme achievement. And another (favor will He bestow,) which you love, help from God and a speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the believers.”* They will be granted forgiveness, mansions in the Gardens of Eden, and speedy victory. What else would they desire? This is indeed the supreme achievement.

The Sura is concluded by a command which raises the rank of the believers. They will become God’s supporters. What an honor? *“Believers, be the supporters of God; as Jesus the son of Mary said to the disciples, ‘Who will be my supporters for God?’ The disciples said, ‘We are God's supporters.’ And a party of the Children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost.”* The verse’s objective is to make a point not to narrate a story. The point is made that when the disciples of Jesus (PBUH) supported God and His Messenger, Jesus (PBUH), God gave them victory over their enemy. There are two possible interpretations for this verse. The first interpretation is that those who believed in Jesus (PBUH) are all Christians. God made them dominant over the Jews. The second interpretation is that those who believed in Jesus (PBUH) are those who believed in him as a prophet not as a son of God. They became dominant by the clarity and strength of their argument which supports the oneness of God.

The lesson to be learnt from the verse is that God supports those who support His cause. God will make them victors and they will overcome their enemies.

## **Surat 62: Al-Jumu'ah (The day of the Congregation)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 11:**

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, the King, the Holy, the Eminent, the Wise.*
2. *It is He who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to recite to them His verses, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error.*
3. *And others from among them who have not yet joined them; and He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
4. *That is the bounty of God; which He gives to whom He wills. God is of tremendous bounty.*
5. *The similitude of those who were charged with the Torah, yet they did not apply it, is as the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of people who deny the revelations of God. And God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
6. *Say (Prophet), "You who follow the Jewish faith, if you claim that you are favored by God, to the exclusion of (other) people, then express your desire for death, if you are truthful."*
7. *But they will never express their desire (for death), because of the (deeds) their hands have sent on before them. And God knows well the wrongdoers.*
8. *Say, "The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be sent back to the One who knows the unseen and the seen; and He will tell you all the things that you did."*
9. *Believers, when the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the remembrance of God, and leave off business. That is best for you if you but knew.*
10. *And when the prayer is finished, then you may disperse through the land, and seek of the bounty of God; and celebrate the praises of God often that you may succeed.*
11. *But when they see some bargain or some entertainment, they disperse headlong to it, and leave you standing. Say, "That which God has is better than entertainment and merchandise, and God is the best of Providers." (62: 1 -11)*

This Sura was revealed after Surat Al-Saf (Sura 61). The two Suras deal with the same issue. However, this Sura uses different approach and style in dealing with this issue. The issue which is dealt with in this Sura is the concepts that Islam is the last phase in the divine project and that Muslims are entrusted with the establishment of this religion on earth. The Sura aims at inculcating these concepts in the psyche of Muslims. To prepare the Muslims for such undertaking the Sura tries to instill certain characters that are required to build the Muslim personality. The Sura addresses the natural desires of greed and money making endeavors which may distract Muslims from their principal undertaking. It recounts a specific incident which happened on a Friday, when someone announced the arrival of a long awaited for caravan while the Prophet (PBUH) was giving the sermon that preceded the Friday congregational prayer. Many of the Muslims left the Mosque and ran to be among the first to receive the goods that the

caravan brought. Only about twelve people remained to listen to the sermon among them were Abu Bakr (RA) and Umar (RA). Such incident shows the enormity of the effort that was spent in changing the character of the early Muslims to turn them into the unique models that were worthy of carrying the undertakings that were requested of them.

The Sura starts with the statement that the whole universe glorifies God, *“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God, the King, the Holy, the Eminent, the Wise.”* He is the King who owns everything; He is the only provider. He is the Holy; He is high above everything. He is the Eminent; the Wise.

*“It is He who has sent among the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to recite to them His verses, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the wisdom, although they were before certainly in clear error.”* God has blessed the Arabs by sending them a messenger from among themselves to purify them. The Messenger (PBUH) taught them how to purify their conscious, their deeds and behavior, their married lives, and their social lives. He also purified their creed and beliefs. He taught them the Book and the wisdom so that they would be able to differentiate between right and wrong. Before that, they were in clear error. This error has been explained by Jaffer ibn Abi Taleb (RA) when he addressed the king of Abyssinia. He said, *“O’ King, before Islam we were ignorant. We used to worship idols, eat dead animals, commit indecencies, break the ties of kin, hurt our neighbors, and the strong would persecute the weak. Then God sent us a Messenger from among ourselves. We knew his family, his truthfulness, his honesty, and we trusted his integrity. He called us to worship God alone; he commanded us to tell the truth, fulfill the trust, join the kin, and to be good to our neighbors. He commanded us to abstain from indecencies, give a false testimony, kill each other, slander decent women, and cheat orphans out of their possessions. He commanded us to worship God, not to associate partners with Him, pray, fast, and pay poor dues.”* God chose the nation residing in the Arabian Peninsula to carry the responsibility of establishing the religion on earth. He knew that they can carry the responsibility so He sent His messenger to recite the words of God to them and to teach them the Book and the wisdom. They will be joined by the rest of Muslims to the end of time, *“And others from among them who have not yet joined them; and He is the Eminent, the Wise.”*

*“That is the bounty of God; which He gives to whom He wills. God is of tremendous bounty.”* It is a great bounty from God to be chosen to carry that undertaking.

*“The similitude of those who were charged with the Torah, yet they did not apply it, is as the ass carrying books. Wretched is the likeness of people who deny the revelations of God. And God does not guide the wrongdoers.”* The Children of Israel were given the responsibility of following the Torah and they were entrusted with establishing its doctrine and law but they did not fulfill their trust. Fulfillment of the trust starts with understanding and ends with behaving accordingly. But they neither understood it nor did they work according to it. Their example is like an ass carrying books. The ass will not benefit from the books it is carrying and it will only suffer from carryings its weight.

This example is not restricted to the Jews who did not act according to the Torah but it applies to any one who did not fulfill the trust that God has entrusted him with. This includes Muslims who were entrusted with the religion of Islam and they neither understood its tents nor did they act

according to its teachings.

The Jews claimed, as they claim now, that they are the chosen people. The Quran asked the Prophet (PBUH) to challenge them, *“Say (Prophet), ‘You who follow the Jewish faith, if you claim that you are favored by God, to the exclusion of (other) people, then express your desire for death, if you are truthful.’”* In this form of the challenge, the two groups would stand face to face and each group would pray to God to destroy the lying group. The Jews refused to accept the challenge, as was predicted by the Quran, *“But they will never express their desire (for death), because of the (deeds) their hands have sent on before them. And God knows well the wrongdoers.”* And if they were truly certain of being the chosen people, why would they be afraid of death? If they were the chosen people, death will be the door to receive the bounty of God which He promised those who believe in Him. But they should realize that no one can escape death, *“Say, ‘The death from which you flee will certainly overtake you. Then you will be sent back to the One who knows the unseen and the seen; and He will tell you all the things that you did.’”*

The Sura then concludes with commands regarding Friday prayer especially after the incident which was mentioned earlier, *“Believers, when the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the remembrance of God, and leave off business. That is best for you if you but knew. And when the prayer is finished, then you may disperse through the land, and seek of the bounty of God; and celebrate the praises of God often that you may succeed. But when they see some bargain or some entertainment, they disperse headlong to it, and leave you standing. Say, ‘That which God has is better than entertainment and merchandise, and God is the best of Providers.’”* The first verse in this group of verses commands the believers to abandon all regular activities once the call to the prayer is proclaimed. When they hear the call to the prayer, people should hasten to the Mosque. This is better than engaging in business deals or other activities which they hope will bring them profit. There is greater profit that can be gained by connecting with God. Once the prayer has been completed then they can resume their normal activities. These two verses outline the balance that Islam brings to the life of human beings. It is a balance between the spiritual needs and the material needs of the human being. The last verse address the incident that occurred when the Muslims left the Prophet (pbuh) while he was giving his sermon and hurried to the caravan seeking worldly gains. The verse emphasizes that God has much more better things for them than what they had hoped to gain from the caravan.

## **Sura 63: Al-Munafiqun (The Hypocrites)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 11:**

1. *When the hypocrites come to you, they say, "We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of God." God knows that you are indeed His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars.*
2. *They made their faith a pretext so that they may turn people from the way of God. Verily evil is that which they do.*
3. *That is because they believed, then they disbelieved, therefore their hearts are sealed so that they do not understand.*
4. *And when you look at them, their figures please you; and when they speak, you listen to their talk. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. May God destroy them? How perverted are they?*
5. *And when it is said to them, "Come, the Messenger of God will pray for your forgiveness," they turn their heads aside and you see them turning away their faces in arrogance.*
6. *It is all the same whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; God will not forgive them. God does not guide the transgressors.*
7. *They are the ones who say, "Do not spend on those who are with God's Messenger that they may disperse. And to God belong the treasures of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites do not understand.*
8. *They say, "If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable will expel therefrom the more humble." But honor belongs to God and His Messenger, and to the believers; but the hypocrites do not know.*
9. *Believers, let not your wealth nor your children distract you from the remembrance of God. Those who do so, they are the losers.*
10. *And spend out of what We have given you before death comes to one of you, so that he would say, "My Lord, if only You delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be of the righteous?"*
11. *But never will God delay a soul when its time has come; and God is well aware of what you do. (63: 1 – 11)*

The name of this Sura suggests its subject matter. This is not the only Sura that dealt with the problem of hypocrisy. The topic of hypocrisy and the problems caused by hypocrites appear in most of the Suras that were revealed in Medina. However, this Sura deals only with these topics. The Sura castigates the hypocrites and exposes their mean characters. It concludes by a command to the believers to relinquish any character that may be remotely related to hypocrisy. The phenomenon of hypocrisy appeared after the migration to Medina and continued in one form or another until the death of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Sura starts by exposing their deceptive attitude towards the believers. They disguised their animosity to Islam and Muslims under a pretense that they have adopted Islam, "When the



*hypocrites come to you, they say, "We bear witness that you are indeed the Messenger of God." God knows that you are indeed His Messenger, and God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars. They made their faith a pretext so that they may turn people from the way of God. Verily evil is that which they do."* They used to come to the Messenger of God (PBUH) pretending they have adopted Islam while deep in their hearts they harbored ill feelings towards Islam and Muslims. The verse is very accurate in its statement. First, it ascertains the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) is God's Messenger, *"God knows that you are indeed His Messenger."* Then it exposes their malice, *"God bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars."* They would take an oath to support their claim that they have become Muslims whenever they need to, but only to use it as a means to debar people from the straight path, *"They made their faith a pretext so that they may turn people from the way of God."* They did experience faith but recanted, *"That is because they believed, then they disbelieved, therefore their hearts are sealed so that they do not understand."* A person who tastes the sweetness of faith then recants is indeed a person whose heart has been sealed and indeed has no understanding.

The verse then describes them in a sarcastic way. Their looks are pleasing to the eye but their inner selves hold nothing except cowardice and treachery. They are figures but not people. Just like a statue that cannot stand on its own and it has to be propped up, *"And when you look at them, their figures please you; and when they speak, you listen to their talk. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. May God destroy them? How perverted are they?"* They were always weary of being exposed and apprehensive of any criticism. The Quran warned the Messenger (PBUH) against them, *"They are the enemies; so beware of them."* They were a fifth column who wanted to attack the Muslims from within. The verse however, did not command the Messenger (PBUH) to fight them. Instead, the verse curses them, *"May God destroy them."* This curse is a decree from God that is destined to happen.

*"And when it is said to them, 'Come, the Messenger of God will pray for your forgiveness,' they turn their heads aside and you see them turning away their faces in arrogance. It is all the same whether you ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them; God will not forgive them. God does not guide the transgressors. They are the ones who say, 'Do not spend on those who are with God's Messenger that they may disperse. And to God belong the treasures of the heavens and the earth, but the hypocrites do not understand. They say, 'If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable will expel therefrom the more humble.' But honor belongs to God and His Messenger, and to the believers; but the hypocrites do not know."* It has been narrated that these verses describe an event that occurred on the way back from the battle of Bani Al-Mustalaq. Two men, one from the tribe of Khazraj and the other from the tribe of Bani Ghofar fought together about who would drink first. The first person called upon the Ansar (people from Medina) to support him and the other called upon the Muhajereen (people from Mecca) to support him. Abd Allah ibn Saloul became angry when he saw that scene. He attacked the migrants in the presence of a group of his friends, lamented how they were crowding the people of Medina, and threatened to expel them from Medina when they return back, *"If we return to Medina, surely the more honorable will expel therefrom the more humble."* A young man by the name of Zaid ibn Arqam (RA) was among those who listened to Ibn Saloul's talk. He went to the Messenger (PBUH) and told him what Ibn Saloul had said. Umar (RA) was present and

suggested to the Prophet (PBUH) to send someone to kill Ibn Saloul but the Prophet (PBUH) declined to do that. The Messenger (PBUH) decided that the best course of action is to distract people from the conflict so he commanded the army to start moving. When Ibn Saloul realized that Zaid (RA) told the Messenger about what he said, he went to the Messenger (PBUH) and took an oath that he did not say that.

One of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) from Medina by the name of Osaid ibn Hudair (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) about the reason that the army was commanded to move on before they had their rest. The Prophet (PBUH) told him about what Ibn Saloul said and the potential for a fight between the people from Mecca and the people from Medina. Osaid (RA) said, *“Prophet of God, you will - God willing – expel him from Medina.”* Osaid (RA) then explained the reason for Ibn Saloul anger. Just before the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina, the people of Medina were about to appoint Ibn Saloul their king. When the people of Medina accepted Islam and the Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina, the plans for appointing Ibn Saloul a king fell through. That is why he held a grudge against the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) marched with the army to a place where they camped again. The men were so tired, they fell asleep right away. Thus, the potential fight was avoided.

The son of Abd Allah ibn Saloul heard about the conflict and his father’s behavior. He stood at the gate of Medina with a sword in his hand. When his father showed up he stopped him and told him that he would not allow him to enter until he gets permission from the Messenger (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) rode at the rear of the army so when he reached the gate of Medina he gave Ibn Saloul the permission to enter Medina.

The Sura shows how the Prophet (PBUH) dealt with the hypocrites. Although the Prophet (PBUH) knew them by name but he did not expose them and tried hard to reform them. The Prophet (PBUH), just before he died, told only one companion - Huzaifah ibn Al-Yaman (RA) - the names of the hypocrites and he asked him not to divulge these to anyone. Umar (RA) was very apprehensive that he would be one of them and kept asking Huzaifah (RA). Huzaifah (RA) only assured him that he is not one of the hypocrites. Umar (RA) used to watch Huzaifah’s (RA) behavior during funerals of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH). He would only participate in the funeral prayer if he saw Huzaifah (RA) participating. The lesson to be learnt from this is that people should only judge the actions not the people. Only God knows what the hearts of people harbor. People should only judge what they can see.

The verses describe the arrogance of the hypocrites and tell the Prophet (PBUH) that God has decreed that the hypocrites will not be forgiven. The verses also expose the strategy of the hypocrites to persecute and harass the believers whenever they are able to. They forgot that God owns the treasures of heavens and earth and only He can bless people with honor and dignity.

Then a command is issued to the believers, *“Believers, let not your wealth nor your children distract you from the remembrance of God. Those who do so, they are the losers. And spend out of what We have given you before death comes to one of you, so that he would say, ‘My Lord, if only You delay me for a brief term so I would give charity and be of the righteous?’ But never will God delay a soul when its time has come; and God is well aware of what you do.”* Wealth

and progeny are sources for distractions. God gave people the wealth and the family to support them in achieving the task that they were created for. The hearts should always be connected with God. The wealth has been given by God and should be spent the way that pleases Him. One should spend in the sake of God before it is too late. Everyone is destined to death and when the time comes no one can delay it.

## **Sura 64: Al-Taghabun (Loss and Gain)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 18:**

1. *All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God; all sovereignty belongs to Him and all praise belongs to Him, and He has power over all things.*
2. *It is He who has created you; and of you are some who are disbelievers, and some who are believers. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.*
3. *He created the heavens and the earth with truth, and He shaped you and perfected your shapes, and to Him is the final destination.*
4. *He knows what is in the heavens and earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God knows well the secrets of the hearts.*
5. *Has not the story of those who disbelieved before, reached you? So they tasted the bad consequences of their conduct, and they will have a painful torment.*
6. *That was because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they said, "Shall we take guidance from mere mortals?" So they disbelieved and turned away. But God had no need for them. God is Rich and Praised.*
7. *The disbelievers claimed that they will not be resurrected. Say, "By my Lord, you shall surely be resurrected, then you shall be told of all that you did. And that is easy for God."*
8. *You should therefore, believe in God and His Messenger, and in the light which we have sent down. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.*
9. *The day when He shall gather you to the Day of Gathering; that will be a day of loss and gain. And whoso believes in God and does good, He will absolve him of his evil deeds and admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; that is the great achievement.*
10. *But those who disbelieved and belied Our verses, they will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein forever; what a wretched destination.*
11. *No calamity befalls save by God's leave. And whosoever believes in God, He guides his heart. And God is Omniscient.*
12. *So obey God, and obey His Messenger: but if you turn back, the duty of Our Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly.*
13. *God, there is no god but He. Let the believers put their trust in God.*
14. *Believers, truly, among your wives and your children are (some that are) enemies to you; so beware of them. But if you pardon, forbear, and forgive, verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
15. *Your wealth and your children are only a temptation, whereas God has with Him an immense reward.*
16. *So remain conscious of God as much as you can; listen and obey and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls; and those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls they are the successful.*
17. *If you lend God a goodly loan, He will double it for you and will forgive you, for God is Grateful, Forbearing.*
18. *The Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Eminent, the Wise. (64: 1 -18)*

This Sura, with the exception of the last few verses, sounds like a Meccan Sura. The first few verses aim at establishing the fundamentals of the doctrine and creating an Islamic understanding in the hearts of people using the same style used in the Meccan Suras. However, the last few verses exhort the believers to spend out of their wealth in charity in a style similar to that used in the Suras revealed in Medina. There are conflicting opinions about the time of revelation of this Sura. Some say it was revealed in Mecca and others say it was revealed in Medina. The most probable opinion of the scholars indicates that it was revealed in Medina. In addition, the Suras that were revealed in Medina sometimes addressed issues related to the doctrine as well.

*“All that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth glorify God; all sovereignty belongs to Him and all praise belongs to Him, and He has power over all things.”* Everything in the heavens and on the earth glorify their Lord. The heart and soul of the universe believe in God. God owns everything in existence. All God’s creatures celebrate His praise. God has absolute power over everything. The image that this verse paints is an image that reflects the essence of the belief in God. In the middle of this believing universe which glorifies and praises God, we find humankind standing alone in a unique situation: some are believers and others are disbelievers. God chose to give humankind the propensity of being a believer or a disbeliever. God gave humankind the responsibility to choose and the tools that enable him to make the right choice. God sees everything. He observes people’s behavior, He sees what they do, and He knows their intentions and inclinations, *“It is He who has created you; and of you are some who are disbelievers, and some who are believers. And God is All-Seeing of what you do.”*

The following verse states the original truth that God has instilled in this universe, *“He created the heavens and the earth with truth, and He shaped you and perfected your shapes, and to Him is the final destination.”* The truth is an integral part of the universe; it is the foundation upon which the universe was created. God created humankind in the best form. Humankind should show gratitude for the bounty of God who honored humankind and blessed him with a good form. Not only humankind was blessed with a good figure but also with a sound psyche. A study of the human body would reveal this immediately. The final destination of everything is to God.

Then a statement about the comprehensive nature of the divine knowledge is made, *“He knows what is in the heavens and earth; and He knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God knows well the secrets of the hearts.”* Such a reality evokes in the humankind the feelings that connect him to his Lord. These three verses inform humankind of the truth about his own existence, the truth about the existence of the whole universe, his connection to his Creator, the proper etiquette in dealing with God; and command him to remain always conscious of God.

The following verse addressed the idolaters, *“Has not the story of those who disbelieved before, reached you? So they tasted the bad consequences of their conduct, and they will have a painful punishment. That was because their messengers came to them with clear signs, but they said, ‘Shall we take guidance from mere mortals?’ So they disbelieved and turned away. But God had no need for them. God is Rich and Praised,”* reminding them of the evil consequences that awaits those who disbelieve in God. They deserved this punishment because they refused to believe that a mortal like them can be a messenger of God. It was a ridiculous objection. Since the messenger’s duty is to provide a living example of the message. Their arrogance and

ignorance barred them from accepting guidance and they chose to disbelief in the message and to reject the messenger. They did not understand that God does not need their belief. This should have been a lesson to the idolaters of Mecca who were following in the footsteps of those who rejected faith before them.

*“The disbelievers claimed that they will not be resurrected. Say, ‘By my Lord, you shall surely be resurrected, then you shall be told of all that you did. And that is easy for God.’ You should therefore, believe in God and His Messenger, and in the light which we have sent down. And God is Totally-Aware of what you do.”* The idolaters made the false claim that they will not be resurrected. The verse commands the Prophet (PBUH) to refute this claim by making an oath, *“By my Lord, you shall surely be resurrected, then you shall be told of all that you did.”* This is easy for God. He knows everything. And He has the power to do anything. They were then called to believe in God, His Messenger, and the light that was sent with His Messenger. This faith that God revealed in the Quran is a light that guides people. It is light because it came from God and God is the light of the heavens and earth. It is also light because it illuminates the heart and leads it to the truth.

God will gather you to the Day of Gathering, when all people will be gathered together. On that Day the believers will gain while the disbelievers will lose. That is why it is called the Day of loss and gain, *“The day when He shall gather you to the Day of gathering; that will be a day of loss and gain.”* The gain and loss are detailed, *“And whoso believes in God and does good, He will absolve him of his evil deeds and admit him to gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; that is the great achievement. But those who disbelieved and belied Our verses, they will be companions of the fire, to dwell therein forever; what a wretched destination.”*

A fundamental principle is then stated, *“No calamity befalls save by God's leave. And whosoever believes in God, He guides his heart. And God is Omniscient.”* It is appropriate to state this principle here as a part of the truth of faith. Faith would not be complete without believing in this principle. Faith would not be complete without the belief that everything is in the hand of God. The believers should be content with what happens to them. This has been corroborated by the tradition, *“I am amazed at the condition of the believer. God always gives him what is good. When he faces a hardship he perseveres – this is good for him- and when he is blessed by a bounty from God he is grateful –this is also good for him. No one else gets this except a believer.”* In addition God's guides the heart of the believer to accepting what God has decreed for him.

The call to faith is followed by a call to be obedient, *“So obey God, and obey His Messenger: but if you turn back, the duty of Our Messenger is only to convey (the Message) plainly. God, there is no god but He. Let the believers put their trust in God.”* The verse outlines the task of the messenger; his responsibility is to convey the message in a clear way. The believers should put their trust in God.

The following verse admonishes the believers not to be distracted away from the remembrance of God, *“Believers, truly, among your wives and your children are (some that are) enemies to you; so beware of them. But if you pardon, forbear, and forgive, verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* This verse reflects one of the realities of life when taking care of the family

may hamper the efforts of people to strive in the cause of God. Striving in the cause of God may expose the person and his family to hardships. Some families may not accept such hardships so they try to prevent the person from striving in God's cause. The same meaning is emphasized in a different way by alerting the believers that wealth and children are sources of temptation, *"Your wealth and your children are only a temptation, whereas God has with Him an immense reward."* One should focus on the immense reward that God has.

The believers are then called upon to be conscious of God as much as they can, *"So remain conscious of God as much as you can; listen and obey."* God's mercy is reflected in asking the believers to do only things which are within their power, *"as much as you can."* The verses continue to urge the believers to spend in the cause of God, *"and spend in charity for the benefit of your own souls; and those who are saved from the covetousness of their own souls they are the successful."* Whatever they are spending is for their own benefit. Success can only be achieved when one is saved of the covetousness of one's own soul.

Spending in the cause of God is like giving God a good loan. This is a very profitable bargain, God will double it, in addition, He will grant the believer His forgiveness, *"If you lend God a goodly loan, He will double it for you and will forgive you, for God is Grateful, Forbearing. The Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Eminent, the Wise."*

God teaches us how to overcome our weaknesses and how to look up to God to try to emulate Him within our limited capacity. He calls Himself, *"Grateful, Forbearing."* These are traits that we should endeavor to emulate.

## **Sura 65: Al-Talaq (Divorce)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 12:**

1. *Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start, and count (accurately), their prescribed periods. And be conscious of God your Lord. Do not evict them from their houses, nor shall they (themselves) leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness. These are limits set by God; whoever transgresses the limits of God, has indeed wronged himself. You never know, God may afterward bring about a new situation.*
2. *Then, when they have reached their appointed term, take them back in kindness or part from them in kindness, and call to witness two just men among you, and keep your testimony upright for God. Whoso believes in God and the Last Day is exhorted to heed this. God will find a way out for he who remains conscious of Him.*
3. *And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whosoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him. God brings His command to pass. God has set a measure for everything.*
4. *As for those of your women who have reached menopause, if you have any doubts, their term shall be three months – and also for those who have not yet menstruated. As for those who are pregnant, their period shall be till they have delivered. And whosoever remains conscious of God, He will make his course easy for him.*
5. *This is God's command, which He has sent down to you; and whoever remains conscious of God, God will absolve him of his sinful deeds and will magnify his reward.*
6. *Lodge them where you dwell, according to your means, and do not harass them in order to oppress them. And if they are pregnant, then spend on them till they give birth. Then, if they breast feed for you, then give them their due payment and consult together in kindness; but if you make difficulties for one another, then let some other woman breast feed for him.*
7. *Let the man of means spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what God has given him. God does not burden any person beyond what He has given him. After a difficulty, God will soon bring relief.*
8. *And how many a community revolted against the ordinance of its Lord and His messengers, and We called it to a stern account and punished it with dire torment.*
9. *Then they tasted the bad consequences of their conduct, and the end of their conduct was perdition.*
10. *God has prepared for them a severe torment (in the Hereafter). Therefore, people of understanding who have believed be conscious of God. God has indeed sent down to you a reminder.*



11. *A messenger who recites to you the revelations of God, clear and distinct, that He may bring those who believe and do good deeds from darkness into light. And whosoever believeth in God and does good deeds, He will bring him into gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to abide forever. God has given him excellent provision.*
12. *God is He who created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment comes down among them slowly, that you may know that God has power over everything, and that God has indeed encompassed all things in knowledge. (65: 1-12)*

In this Sura, rules to be followed during the process of divorce are explained. Some of the rules governing divorce were mentioned in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2). This Sura also outlines the rights of the divorcees.

*“Prophet, when any of you intend to divorce women, do so at a time when their prescribed waiting period can properly start, and count (accurately), their prescribed periods. And be conscious of God your Lord. Do not evict them from their houses, nor shall they (themselves) leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness. These are limits set by God; whoever transgresses the limits of God, has indeed wronged himself. You never know, God may afterward bring about a new situation.”* To emphasize the gravity of the matter the command was directed to the Prophet (PBUH), but it also applies to all Muslims. The verse indicates that a man cannot divorce his wife during her monthly period. It has been narrated that the Umar (RA) told the Prophet (PBUH) that his son Ibn Umar (RA) divorced his wife while she was menstruating. The Prophet (PBUH) was angry and he commanded Umar (RA) to tell his son to bring her back until she becomes clean. They should wait until she has had her period another time and becomes clean again. If he still wanted a divorce, then he should not touch her before he could have the divorce. This is the meaning of the waiting period. This is an attempt to give a chance for people to think things over; it may be that they change their minds. The parties should keep account of the waiting period so that the woman would not be treated unjustly. During this waiting period women should remain in their homes. Men should not evict them and they should not leave the houses unless it has been proven that the woman has committed an open lewdness. During this period the woman would still live in the house however, there will be no intimate relationship between the couple. The ruling provides an opportunity for the parties to deal with their differences. However, in case a gross and open indecency has occurred then the woman should leave the house. Her presence in the house after such incident will produce an acrimonious atmosphere and will cause the differences to escalate not to abate.

These are the limits set by God. He who transgresses these limits has indeed wronged himself. This is a very stern warning for those who transgress. However, who knows, the situation may change and the couple may be able to reconcile their differences. This is the rationale behind the requirement that the woman should stay at home during the waiting period.

*“Then, when they have reached their appointed term, take them back in kindness or part from them in kindness, and call to witness two just men among you, and keep your testimony upright for God. Whoso believes in God and the Last Day is exhorted to heed this. God will find a way out for he who remains conscious of Him.”* This is the second stage in the divorce process. If the husband changed his mind before the waiting period has ended, then they can go back and resume their married life together. But once the waiting period has ended then the divorce has taken place. If he changed his mind after that, they can only go back to resume their married life together with a new marriage contract. Whether they go back to resume their married life according to the above mentioned conditions or they continue with the divorce procedure they should do that amicably. In both cases, the decision should be witnessed by two just men so that the decision would be publicly known. This testimony is for God; He is a witness on the transaction. The believers are exhorted to abide by these rules. God will find a way out of the difficulty that faces those who remain conscious of Him. God will also provide for them from wherever they do not expect. This promise provides an incentive to the believers to abide by the rules decreed for the divorce process. It is difficult to ensure the application of the rules decreed by God without exercising God consciousness, *“And will provide for him from where he does not expect. And whosoever puts his trust in God, He will suffice him. God brings His command to pass. God has set a measure for everything.”* God has set a measure for everything; what happens, when it happens, where it happens, and how it happens? Everything that happens in this universe is well planned. The rules governing the divorce process are part of this well planned universe and should be observed meticulously.

*“As for those of your women who have reached menopause, if you have any doubts, their term shall be three months – and also for those who have not yet menstruated. As for those who are pregnant, their period shall be till they have delivered. And whosoever remains conscious of God, He will make his course easy for him. This is God’s command, which He has sent down to you; and whoever remains conscious of God, God will absolve him of his sinful deeds and will magnify his reward.”* These verses determine the length of the waiting period for the women who have reached menopause and those who have not yet menstruated. Their waiting period is three months. Delivery signals the end of the waiting period for those who are pregnant. Then the verses bring a promise for those who remain conscious of God; God will make their course easy for them. Ease of life is a great blessing from God and it is the ultimate goal for any one. The verses again remind people that these are God’s commands revealed specifically for the believers so that they obey them. Two more promises are made; those who remain God conscious are promised a wide forgiveness for their previous sins and a great reward from God. It is a general statement and a generous offer. Mentioning these promises in connection with the divorce process is an incentive for people to be conscious of God during the whole process.

*“Lodge them where you dwell, according to your means, and do not harass them in order to oppress them. And if they are pregnant, then spend on them till they give birth. Then, if they breast feed for you, then give them their due payment and consult together in kindness; but if you make difficulties for one another, then let some other woman breast feed for him.”* This is the last rule regarding the dwelling of the divorcees and their financial rights. A man should lodge his divorcee in a home of the same class as the home that he himself lives in, with the caveat that it should be within his means. Men should not lodge their divorcees during the waiting period in inferior dwellings, nor are they allowed to harass them. Although men should provide for their divorcees during the waiting period according to their means but the provisions for the pregnant women are specifically mentioned; indicating that the provision has to continue until delivery has taken place.

Breast feeding is not an obligation on the mother and she should be amply remunerated if she chose to breast feed her baby. They should maintain an amicable atmosphere, otherwise someone else should breast feed the baby. The parents were commanded to consult together regarding the affairs of the baby. The child has been entrusted to their care; they should not let the conflict between them affect the interest of the child.

Men are required to spend according to their means. God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. He is the Provider so both the man and the woman should be considerate in their requirements, *“Let the man of means spend according to his means; and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what God has given him. God does not burden any person beyond what He has given him.”* Another ray of hope is shown, *“After a difficulty, God will soon bring relief.”* God has the ultimate power in bringing relief, so people should remain conscious of Him.

The Sura concludes with a lesson from the history of those who committed tyranny against God and His messengers in the past. They neither listened nor did they obey. The verses remind the people of the consequence of tyranny against God. They also remind the believers of the blessings that God bestowed on them in His revelation by detailing the rules that should govern their lives and allows them to lead a decent life, *“And how many a community revolted against the ordinance of its Lord and His messengers, and We called it to a stern account and punished it with dire torment.”* A dire punishment awaits those who revolt against God and His messengers. This is God’s rule that does not change. The consequences are then detailed, *“Then they tasted the bad consequences of their conduct, and the end of their conduct was perdition. God has prepared for them a severe torment (in the Hereafter).”* Let us stop for a moment and reflect on this warning. Every nation that revolted against God and His messenger was seized and punishment a painful punishment. This warning is mentioned here after the divorce process has been described. This implies that there is a connection between the two. One may conclude that divorce is not a private matter between two individuals, but it is a matter that concerns the whole society. The Muslim nation as a whole is responsible for upholding God’s command

regarding divorce. A nation that does not abide by the rules decreed by God is a nation that has revolted against God. God's commands were decreed to organize the way of life of people. A nation that does not apply these commands is warned by a dire punishment. The nations that were punished in the past received its punishment in this life, but there is more severe punishment that awaits them in the Hereafter.

An address is directed to the people of understanding, those whose understanding guided them to believe in God, *"Therefore, people of understanding who have believed be conscious of God. God has indeed sent down to you a reminder."* God has brought down a reminder. This reminder is being recited to you by His Messenger, *"A messenger who recites to you the revelations of God, clear and distinct, that He may bring those who believe and do good deeds from darkness into light. And whosoever believeth in God and does good deeds, He will bring him into gardens underneath which rivers flow, therein to abide forever. God has given him excellent provision."* This reminder was passed to them through the Messenger (PBUH), however the contents of the revelation were delivered intact and did not suffer any distortion through the process of transmission by the Messenger (PBUH). The verse may also imply that the person of the Messenger (PBUH) has been transformed into a form of the remembrance of God. The Messenger (PBUH) was a living example of the revelation. It has been narrated that Aisha (RA) described the Prophet (PBUH) by saying, *"His character was the Quran."* This reminder brings the blessings of the light, guidance, righteousness, a great reward in the Hereafter, in addition a promise of excellent provision. God is the Provider. He will provide in this life as well as in the Hereafter. The provision in the Hereafter is the best of provision.

*"God is He who created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment comes down among them slowly, that you may know that God has power over everything, and that God has indeed encompassed all things in knowledge."* We have no way of knowing what is meant by the seven heavens and the seven earths. There is no need to dwell on conjectures regarding these verses. We focus here on the impact of such verses on the process of belief. God decrees His commands from high above to be obeyed. We can glean two lessons from this verse. The first is that God is Omniscient. His knowledge has encompassed everything. He is the one who decrees the rules and set the limits. He knows that these are the best rules to deal with the conflict between a husband and a wife. The second lesson is that the only guarantee that not only the letter but also the spirit of the rules would be implemented is for people to be conscious of God.

## Sura 66: Al-Tahrim (Prohibition)

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

### **Verses 1 to 12:**

1. *Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
2. *God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise.*
3. *When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives, and she then divulged it (to another), and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and ignored a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, "Who told you this?" He said, "The Omniscient, the Totally-Aware told me."*
4. *Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers - and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up.*
5. *It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.*
6. *Believers, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe; they do not disobey God's in what He commands them and they do what they are commanded."*
7. *Disbelievers, do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for that which you did."*
8. *Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your sinful deeds and admit you into gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the day when God will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right hands; they will say, "Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything."*
9. *Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their refuge is Hell, a wretched destination.*
10. *God sets forth, an example of the disbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut. They were under two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and they (the husbands) availed them nothing against God and it was said (to them), "Enter the Fire along with those who are entering."*
11. *And God sets forth, an example of the believers, the wife of Pharaoh. She said, "My Lord, build for me, in nearness to You, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoers."*
12. *And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Books, and was one of the devout (servants). (66: 1 - 12)*

This Sura portrays some of the scenes of the daily life of the Prophet (PBUH) in connection with his wives. It describes some of the dynamics of the interaction between the Prophet (PBUH) and

his wives. The incident that the Sura alludes to, must have happened after the wedding of the Prophet (PBUH) to Zainab bint Jahsh (RA).

*“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise. When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives, and she then divulged it (to another), and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and repudiated a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, “Who told you this?” He said, “The Omniscient, the Totally-Aware told me.” Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and righteous among the believers - and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up. It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.”* It was narrated that the Prophet’s (PBUH) wife Zainab bin Jahsh (RA) used to offer the Prophet (PBUH) honey when he visited her. Aisha (RA) and Hafsa (RA) became jealous and schemed together. They agreed that one of them who would be visited by the Prophet (PBUH) would make a casual remark about the Prophet’s (PBUH) smell. She would say casually that the Prophet (PBUH) smelled as if he ate Maghafeer (A kind of gum that has a delicious taste but has a bad smell.) When the Prophet (PBUH) heard this comment he said, *“No, I did not eat Maghafeer. But I ate honey from Zainab bint Jahsh. I will not do that again, but this is between you and me. So do not tell anybody.”* The Quran blamed the Prophet (PBUH) for vowing not to eat honey, which is a lawful food. *“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives.”*

The wife of the Prophet (PBUH) who told him that he smelled like Maghafeer told her partner in the conspiracy about the Prophet’s (PBUH) response. The Prophet (PBUH) was apprised of the matter by God. So, he mentioned it briefly to his wife who was surprised. How could the Prophet (PBUH) know about this conspiracy? She asked him, *“Who told you this?”* and he answered, *“The Omniscient, the Totally-Aware told me.”* As a result of this episode and because of other interactions between the wives of the Prophet (PBUH), he decided to go into seclusion and stay away from his wives for a period of one month. He was even on the verge of divorcing them. Then these verses were revealed. These verses calmed and comforted the Prophet (PBUH) and he resumed his marital life with his wives.

The Sura starts with a verse that mildly and kindly rebuked the Prophet (PBUH), *“Prophet, why do you forbid (yourself of) that which God has made lawful to you, seeking to please your wives. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God has already ordained for you, the dissolution of your oaths. And God is your Patron, and He is Omniscient, Wise.”* The verse states a fundamental principle. It is not reasonable to deprive oneself of the benefit of something that God has decreed to be lawful just to please someone else. However, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. God provided a solution for breaking vows which do not achieve a good end. When someone vows to abstain from doing a good thing, then it is better to dissolve one’s commitment to that vow. The way to dissolve one’s commitment to this kind of oath has been described. God is your Patron; He helps you in the time of difficulty and He is Omniscient, Wise. He knows

what is best for you. So do not make lawful what He has forbidden and do not forbid that which He made lawful.

The verses then continue to allude to the story without details, *“When the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives and she then divulged it (to another),”* The verse refers to an amazing time in the history; a time when the communication lines were open between heaven and earth. God told the Prophet (PBUH) what transpired and the Prophet (PBUH) made his wife aware that he knew what she and her partner in the conspiracy are up to, *“and God made it known to him, he confirmed part thereof and ignored a part. Then when he told her thereof, she said, “Who told you this?” He said, “The Omniscient, the Totally-Aware told me.”* The Quran then addressed the two wives, *“Would you two turn in repentance to God, for your hearts have swerved; but if you back up each other against him, truly God is his Patron, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers - and furthermore, the angels will back (him) up.”* They have been called upon to repent sincerely to God. The conflict must have taken its toll on the Prophet (PBUH). God comforted him by pronouncing not only His support but the support of Gabriel, the angels and the righteous from among the believers. Then the choices that God had made available for His Messenger (PBUH) were announced, *“It may happen that his Lord, if he divorces you, will give him in your stead wives better than you, submissive (to God), believing, pious, penitent, devout, inclined to fasting, widows and virgins.”* These are the desired traits in the Prophet’s (PBUH) wives. So, they should strive to acquire them. It is also a warning against engaging in such conspiracies. These verses achieved the desired result and the Prophet’s (PBUH) marital life continued smoothly afterwards.

*“Believers, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe; they do not disobey God’s in what He commands them and they do what they are commanded.”* The believer has a great responsibility towards his family. He should not only protect himself but also protect his family of the punishment of the Fire. It is a huge and fearful fire that uses stones as fuel and it is managed by stern and fierce angels who obey God’s commands. On that day the disbelievers will try to make excuses, but it will be said to them, *“Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for that which you did.”*

But how can one save himself and his family from this fire, *“Believers, turn to God in sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your sinful deeds and admit you into gardens underneath which rivers flow, on the day when God will not abase the Prophet and those who believe with him. Their light will proceed before them and on their right hands; they will say, ‘Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything.’”* The road to salvation is a sincere repentance that starts with regretting the sins that have been committed and ends by doing good deeds and obeying God. This will lead not only to forgiveness of sins but also to be blessed by the acquisition of light from God. On that day the believers will pray God, *“Our Lord, perfect our light for us, and forgive us. You have the power to do everything.”*

The lesson we glean from these verses is that the believer is responsible for guiding his family as

well as guiding himself. Islam is a religion of the family. The family is the building block of the society. The building blocks have to be strong for the building to be strong. So, if we want to build a strong society we have to start by building strong families. Building a strong family is not the responsibility of the father alone but it is a shared responsibility between the father and the mother. The Quran has been revealed for both men and women in the society and they should work together to build generations of believers.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to take suitable measures to protect the Muslim society, *“Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their refuge is Hell, a wretched destination.”* This statement has great significance. The Muslims need to take suitable measures to protect the society from those who attack it from within and from without. The disbelievers are the external enemy and the hypocrites are the internal enemy. They should be dealt with harshly by the believers in this life and God will punish them in the Hereafter.

The last part of this Sura deals with examples of disbelieving women who were closely associated with prophets and believing women who were closely associated with disbelievers, *“God sets forth, an example of the disbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut. They were under two of our righteous servants, but they betrayed them and they (the husbands) availed them nothing against God and it was said (to them), ‘Enter the Fire along with those who are entering.’ And God sets forth, an example of the believers, the wife of Pharaoh. She said, ‘My Lord, build for me, in nearness to You a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings, and save me from the wrongdoers.’”* The wives of Prophets Noah (PBUH) and Lut (PBUH) did not believe in the message that their husbands brought and followed those who rejected their guidance. The wife of Pharaoh was a believing woman. The message that the verses convey is that belief is an individual responsibility. A prophet will not be able to defend his closest family member in front of God if they choose to disbelieve. On the other hand, the wife of Pharaoh chose to believe even though she was living in the midst of a disbelieving environment. She disowned Pharaoh and his evil deeds. She gave the highest example of sacrificing all the pleasures of life for the sake of her faith.

Another example of piety and devotion is given by Mary the daughter of Imran, *“And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into her of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Books, and was one of the devout (servants).”* Mary was a pure and chaste woman. She believed in the truthfulness of God words and His books.

The mention of the wife of Pharaoh in conjunction with Mary shows the high rank that God has bestowed on her. These are two excellent role models for all believing women.



## **Sura 67: Al-Mulk (The Sovereignty)**

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

1. *Blessed is He in whose hand is the sovereignty, and He has power over all things.*
2. *He who created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed; and He is the Eminent, the All-Forgiving;*
3. *He who created the seven heavens one above another. You will not see a flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates. So look again, can you see any rifts?*
4. *Then look again and yet again, your sight will return to you weak and exhausted.*
5. *And we have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and We have made such (lamps) (as) missiles to drive away the devils, and have prepared for them the torment of the blazing fire.*
6. *And for those who disbelieve in their Lord there is the torment of Hell; wretched is the destination.*
7. *When they are flung therein they hear its roaring as it boils up, as it would burst with rage.*
8. *Whenever a host is flung therein the wardens thereof ask them, "Did not a warner come to you?"*
9. *They will say, "Yes indeed; a warner came to us, but we rejected him and said, 'God never sent down any (Message); you are only in a great error.'"*
10. *They will say, "Had we listened or reasoned, we should not be among the companions of the blazing fire."*
11. *They will then confess their sins; but far will be (forgiveness) from the companions of the blazing fire.*
12. *As for those who fear their Lord in secret, for them is forgiveness and a great reward.*
13. *And whether you hide your word or proclaim it, He certainly has (full) knowledge, of the secrets of the hearts.*
14. *Should He not know what He created? and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware.*
15. *It is He who made the earth manageable for you, so walk through its tracts and enjoy the sustenance which He provides; and to Him is the Resurrection.*
16. *Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes?*
17. *Or do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not send against you a violent tornado to pelt you with stones? Then you would know how (severe) was My warning?*
18. *And verily those before them denied, and how (terrible) was My wrath?*
19. *Do they not see the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy. Indeed, He sees everything.*
20. *Or who is there that can help you, (even as) an army, besides the Lord of Mercy? The disbelievers are only in delusion.*
21. *Or who is there that can provide for you if He were to withhold His provision? No, they obstinately persist in insolence and aversion.*
22. *Is he who walks falling on his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?*
23. *Say, "It is He who created you, and endowed you with hearing, sight, and understanding; little is it that you give thanks."*

24. Say, "It is He who has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered together."
25. They ask, "When will this promise be (fulfilled), if you are telling the truth?"
26. Say, "The knowledge is with God only, and I am only a plain warner."
27. And when they see it close at hand, the disbelievers' faces will be gloomy; and it will be said, "This is (the promise fulfilled), which you were calling for."
28. Say, "If God were to destroy me and those with me, or if He bestows His Mercy on us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful torment?"
29. Say, "He is the Lord of Mercy, We have believed in Him, and in Him we put our trust. And you will soon know who it is that is in clear error."
30. Say, "Have you thought: if (all) your water was to disappear into the earth, who could then bring you flowing water?" (67: 1 – 30)

This is the first Sura of Part 29. All the Suras in this Part have been revealed in Mecca. Some of the verses in this Part were among the very first verses that have been revealed e.g. the opening verses in Surat Al-Muzzammil (Chapter 73), and Surat Al-Muddathir (Chapter 74). The verses of the Quran that have been revealed in Mecca were mainly concerned with establishing the doctrine and formulating an understanding of the universe and its relationship to its Creator. They also dealt with introducing the attributes of the Creator in a way that fills the hearts of people with awe of God. These feelings drive people to connect with their Creator.

This Sura delves into the worlds of God's creations e.g. jinn and birds. It also deals with the Hereafter and its keepers. It states the absolute sovereignty of God and His limitless power over everything. It describes the perfection of the creation of God.

*"Blessed is He in whose hand is the sovereignty, and He has power over all things."* This opening which expresses the praise of God, indicates the limitless blessings of God which He bestows on His dominion. He is the Sovereign and the Controller of the universe and His power is limitless. He created death and life. Death indicates the two states of death. The first is before one has been born and the second is after life has ended; and life means life in this world and life in the Hereafter. Describing the state before birth as a state of death justifies the mention of death before life in the verse. All these states are created by God because He wanted to test humankind. The creation was done according to a deliberate plan to uncover the knowledge that God already has about people's behavior and reward people for what they have actually done not according to God's knowledge. God is Eminent and All-Forgiving. These are attributes which fill the heart of the believer with security and serenity. God is Mighty and Overwhelming but He is also All-Forgiving and Tolerant, *"He who created death and life, that He may test which of you is best in deed; and He is the Eminent, the All-Forgiving."*

The true image of God which Islam portrays is the image of a God who wants people to understand the purpose of their existence and to live up to the honor that God bestowed on them. This is the honor which they received when God breathed in them of His spirit. This honor made them better than many of God's creations. If people achieve this end then they will receive God's mercy, support, and forgiveness. Signs of these facts can be seen in the universe, *"He who*

*created the seven heavens one above another. You will not see a flaw in what the Lord of Mercy creates. So look again, can you see any rifts?"* God's creation is perfect. It is a testimony to the limitless power of God. The question is repeated again, *"Look again and yet again, your sight will return to you weak and exhausted."* You will not find any flaw. The challenge posed in these verses is meant to motivate people to observe and reflect on God's creation. People should reflect on the marvels of the creation of God. The heart of the believer is tuned to the subtle responses of the universe.

*"And we have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps,"* What is meant by the, *"lowest heaven?"* Maybe it is the sky that the people living on earth see with their naked eyes. The Quran attracts the attention to the beauty of the sky and the beauty of the whole universe. This is the best way to understand and discover the beauty of the Creator. The discovery of the beauty of the creation is the easiest and most realistic way to discover the beauty of the Creator. These lamps which are used to adorn the heaven have another function, *"and We have made such (lamps) (as) missiles to drive away the devils, and have prepared for them the torment of the blazing fire."* The devils are part of the unseen. We believe that they exist but we do not know anything about them except what we read about them in the Quran. These devils are pelted in this life; in the Hereafter they will receive the punishment of the blazing fire. The disbelievers will also be punished, *"And for those who disbelieve in their Lord there is the torment of Hell; wretched is the destination."* The details of Hell are then described, *"When they are flung therein they hear its roaring as it boils up, as it would burst with rage. Whenever a host is flung therein the wardens thereof ask them, 'Did not a warner come to you?' They will say, 'Yes indeed; a warner came to us, but we rejected him and said, 'God never sent down any (Message); you are only in a great error.' They will say, 'Had we listened or reasoned, we should not be among the companions of the blazing fire.' They will then confess their sins; but far will be (forgiveness) from the companions of the blazing fire."* The verses paint an image of Hell as if it were a living creature that feels and reacts. Such images lead to the conclusion that all the creatures of God believe in their Creator and praise Him. These creatures express their amazement that humankind does not heed the message of guidance sent to him. The dialogue between the keepers of Hell and the disbelievers reflects the regret that the disbelievers will experience when they are faced by the reality on the Day of Judgment.

The happy image of the believers on the Day of Judgment is juxtaposed against the horrible image of the disbelievers, *"As for those who fear their Lord in secret, for them is forgiveness and a great reward."* They did not see their Lord but they believed in Him. They also knew that God sees them whether they are in public or alone. Their behavior does not change either way. They then deserve the great reward that God has kept for them.

The theme of the previous verse continues in the following verse, *"And whether you hide your word or proclaim it, He certainly has (full) knowledge, of the secrets of the hearts. Should He not know what He created? and He is the Subtle, the Totally-Aware."* God knows what people do in the open and what they hide in their hearts. No one can escape this fact and nobody can hide from God. When people understand this fact and when it rests deep in their psyche they will be able to fulfill the undertaking that they have been entrusted with; the undertaking of conveying

the doctrine, establishing justice, being sincere in their relationship with God. Their outward behavior will be a reflection for their inner feelings.

The narrative moves to another aspect of the creation of God, *“It is He who made the earth manageable for you, so walk through its tracts and enjoy the sustenance which He provides; and to Him is the Resurrection.”* One should reflect on the word, *“manageable.”* The early scholars understood that this word means that God has made it easy for us to travel whether we travel on foot, travel using a vehicle, or travel using an animal. It also meant that it was easy to cultivate and to grow plants. But when we look at the meaning of *“manageable,”* in terms of describing a vehicle then we can think of other interpretations. Consider the earth as a moving platform it rotates around itself, it rotates around the sun, and the solar system itself moves. These motions occur at phenomenal speeds however, while we are living normally, performing our daily chores without being affected by any of these motions. We are standing up or walking upright on earth as if the earth was a standing still platform. In this sense the earth becomes a *“manageable”* platform.

Each of the three motions of the earth serves a purpose. The rotation of the earth around itself produces the night and the day. If the earth was standing still, we would either have a night that would continue forever or a day that would continue forever. In the earlier case everything on the surface of the earth would freeze up and in the latter case everything on the surface of the earth would burn. The rotation of the earth around the sun produces the different seasons. Life as we know it would not have continued if we have only one season year around. The purpose of the third motion is not yet known.

God made the earth manageable by assigning a gravitational force that keeps people attached to its surface while it is moving around. God surrounded the earth with an atmosphere that allows people to move on its surface easily.

God made the earth manageable by covering it with a layer of soil that can be used to grow plants. God made the earth manageable by surrounding it with an atmosphere that allows life to continue on its surface.

There are many other things that one can think of that attach significant meanings to the word *“manageable.”*

Suddenly, while they are feeling secure and enjoying easy living on the earth that has been made manageable to them, the earth starts shaking under their feet and they are being pelted by stones carried by tornados, *“Do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not cause you to be swallowed up by the earth when it shakes? Or do you feel secure that He who is in heaven will not send against you a violent tornado to pelt you with stones? Then you would know how (severe) was My warning? And verily those before them denied, and how (terrible) was My wrath?”* This is a reminder that the manageable earth can turn suddenly into a wild beast. Earthquakes, tornados, and hurricanes destroy, kill, and burn. People stand helpless in front of these natural catastrophes. Only God controls these natural phenomena.

The narrative's theme turns from the warning mode to the reflection mode, asking people to pay attention to common scenes that they see every day, *"Do they not see the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in? None can uphold them except the Lord of Mercy. Indeed He sees everything."* Many of the miracles that we see around us lose its novelty by time. People need to reflect on the simple phenomena like birds flying. These miracles happen by the command of the Lord of Mercy who sees everything.

*"Or who is there that can help you, (even as) an army, besides the Lord of Mercy? The disbelievers are only in delusion."* Who can protect you from God's wrath? Even the biggest armies could not protect people who disbelieve. Who would provide for you if God withheld His sustenance, *"Or who is there that can provide for you if He were to withhold His provision? No, they obstinately persist in insolence and aversion."* God controls the sustenance of people. Who can provide for people if God prevented the rain from coming down, caused the air to be polluted, or caused the basic elements needed for production to be depleted? But people do not understand these facts and they continue in their insolence and aversion.

The Quran then provides a comparison between those who are guided and those who went astray, *"Is he who walks falling on his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?"* Those who are deprived from God's guidance and have gone astray will never be happy; they will always be confused and lost. On the other hand, those who are guided will join the caravan of faith walking upright along a straight and easy path.

The verses then remind humankind of their Creator, and the blessings that God bestowed on them, *"Say, 'It is He who created you, and endowed you with hearing, sight, and understanding; little is it that you give thanks.'"*

*"Say, 'It is He who has multiplied you through the earth, and to Him shall you be gathered together.'"* God multiplied people and scattered them on the earth to go through the experience of life and to be tested. God will gather them on the Day of Judgment to account for what they did during their lifetime.

But they are in doubt of the Day of Judgment, *"They ask, 'When will this promise be (fulfilled), if you are telling the truth?'"* The task of the Prophet (PBUH) is to convey the clear warning; only God knows when the Day of Judgment will be. But we are certain that it will happen, *"Say, 'The knowledge is with God only, and I am but a plain warner.'"* When it happens they will face it with gloomy faces, *"And when they see it close at hand, the disbelievers' faces will be gloomy; and it will be said, 'This is (the promise fulfilled), which you were calling for.'"*

The idolaters thought that if they stay patient long enough, the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers will be annihilated. They can then go back to the old daily life routine. The Prophet (PBUH) challenged them; even if we die all of us, who will protect you? *"Say, 'If God were to destroy me and those with me, or if He bestows His Mercy on us, who can protect the disbelievers from a painful torment?'"* The verse does not confront them with their disbelief but alludes to the torment that awaits the disbelievers.

The disbelievers have no protector; but God is the protector of the believers, “*Say, ‘He is the Lord of Mercy, We have believed in Him, and in Him we put our trust. And you will soon know who it is that is in clear error.’*” The believers are closely connected to God, the Lord of Mercy, and in Him they have put their trust. The idolaters will soon know who is guided and who has gone astray.

The Sura is then concluded with a final warning, “*Say, ‘Have you thought: If (all) your water were to disappear into the earth, who then could bring you flowing water?’*”

## Sura 68: Al-Qalam (The Pen)

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

### **Verses 1 to 52:**

1. *Nun. By the pen and that which they write.*
2. *By the Blessing of your Lord, you are not mad.*
3. *And most surely you will have a never-ending reward.*
4. *And you are of a great moral character.*
5. *And you will see and they will see*
6. *Which of you is afflicted with madness.*
7. *Indeed, your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path; and He knows best those who are guided.*
8. *Therefore, do not obey the rejecters.*
9. *They wish that you would compromise, that they may compromise.*
10. *Do not yield to any contemptible swearer,*
11. *A slanderer, going about with calumnies,*
12. *Hinderer of good, transgressor, and sinful;*
13. *Cruel, and above all of this, an imposter;*
14. *Because he is a possessor of wealth and children.*
15. *When Our revelations are recited to him, he says, "Mere fables of former people."*
16. *We shall brand him on the nose.*
17. *Indeed, We have tried them as We tried the people of the garden, when they vowed that they would harvest its fruits the next morning,*
18. *And made no allowance (for the will of God);*
19. *Then there came on the (garden) a visitation from your Lord, (which swept away) all around, while they were asleep.*
20. *So the (garden) became, by the morning, like a dark and desolate spot, (whose fruits had been gathered).*
21. *As the morning broke they called out, one to another,*
22. *Saying, "Go early to your field if you are you going to harvest (the fruits)."*
23. *So they went off, saying one to another in low tones,*
24. *"No needy man shall enter it today."*
25. *And in the morning they went, bent on their purpose.*
26. *But when they saw the (garden), they said, "We have surely lost our way.*
27. *No, indeed we have been deprived."*
28. *The best among them said, "I said to you, 'Why you do not glorify (God)?'"*
29. *They said, "Glory to our Lord. Verily we have been wrongdoers."*
30. *Then they turned, one against another, in reproach.*
31. *They said, "Alas for us, we have indeed transgressed.*
32. *It may be that our Lord will give us in exchange a better (garden) than this; for we do turn to Him (in repentance.)"*
33. *Such was the torment. And verily the torment of the Hereafter is greater if they did but know.*
34. *Verily, for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens of bliss with their Lord.*

35. *Shall We then treat those who submit as the guilty?*
36. *What is the matter with you? How do you judge?*
37. *Or do you have a Scripture, from which you learn,*
38. *That you shall indeed have all that you choose?*
39. *Or do you have a covenant on oath from Us, reaching to the Day of Judgment, that you shall have whatever you shall demand?*
40. *Ask them, which of them will vouch for that?*
41. *Or do they have other gods? Then let them bring their other gods if they are truthful.*
42. *On the day when the shin will be exposed, and they will be invited to prostrate, but they will be unable.*
43. *Their eyes will be downcast; ignominy will cover them. And they used to be invited to prostration while they were sound.*
44. *Leave Me (to deal) with those who reject this statement. We shall lead them on by steps from where they do not know.*
45. *I will grant them respite, truly My plan is firm.*
46. *Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are burdened with debt?*
47. *Or do they have (knowledge) of the unseen, so they can write it down?*
48. *So persevere waiting for the command of your Lord, and be not like the companion of the fish, when he cried out in agony.*
49. *Had not the Blessing from his Lord reached him, he would indeed have been cast off on the naked shore, in disgrace.*
50. *But his Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous.*
51. *And indeed, those who disbelieve would almost smite you with their eyes when they hear the reminder, and they say, "Most surely he is mad."*
52. *But it is only a reminder to the worlds. (68: 1 – 52)*

We cannot ascertain the time of revelation of this Sura. In the chronological order of revelation, it has been narrated that this Sura occupies the second place after Surat Al-‘Alaq (Chapter 96). However, based on the topic discussed in the Sura we tend to believe that it has been revealed after the Prophet (PBUH) started to call openly to Islam which only happened after a period of three years from the start of the revelation. Some narrations indicated that verses 17 to 33 and 42 to 50 were revealed in Medina, but we think that this farfetched. We believe that the whole Sura was revealed in Mecca. It should be noted that the first few verses and the last few verses deal with one issue: the insolent response of the idolaters of Mecca to the call of Islam.

Hawwa points out some similarities between this Sura and other Suras in the Quran. Each one of the three Suras Sad, Qaf, and Nun starts with one letter: Sad, Qaf, and Nun, respectively. The three Suras also have similar ending. The last verse in the three Suras refers to the Qur’an as a reminder. Surat Sad ends by the verse, *“It is but a reminder to all people. And you shall certainly know the truth of it after a while.”* Surat Qaf ends with verse, *“therefore remind by the Quran whoever fears My threat.”* Surat Nub ends with verse, *“But it is only a reminder to the worlds.”* However, the main theme of each Sura is different.



*“Nun. By the pen and that which they write,”* God makes an oath with the letter “Nun,” the pen, and writing. It is clear that the three are closely related. The oath emphasizes the importance of these tools in learning. This oath was made at a time when the Arabs were mostly illiterate, few of them were able to read and write, to prepare this nation for the role that God wanted it to play. The oath emphasizes two facts, *“by the Blessing of your Lord, you are not mad.”* It emphasizes the fact that Muhammad (PBUH) has been blessed by the grace of his Lord and he is not a mad man as the idolaters claimed. The tone of the address is endearing, *“your Lord.”* It is amazing how these people could make such a claim about the Prophet (PBUH). They have known him all his life. They used to admire his wisdom, his honesty, and his integrity. They called him, *“The honest, the trustworthy.”*

God not only promised him a perpetual reward, *“And most surely you will have a never-ending reward,”* but He bestowed on him the greatest honor, *“And you are of a great moral character.”* This was a rank bestowed on Muhammad (PBUH) alone. No one else earned this highest honor. The verse also emphasizes the importance of moral characters for humankind. Ethical behavior is an integral and clear component of Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“I was sent to perfect the ethical behavior.”*

God then reassured His Messenger (PBUH) about the future of the message, *“And you will see and they will see, which of you is afflicted with madness. Indeed, your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path; and He knows best those who are guided.”* These verses warn the idolaters and reassure the believers and the Prophet (PBUH). The verses promise to expose the reality regarding the claim of the disbelievers, because God knows everything.

The following verses expose the tactics of the idolaters in fighting the Prophet (PBUH), *“Therefore do not obey the rejecters. They wish that you would compromise, that they may compromise.”* They wanted to reach a compromise with the Prophet (PBUH). No believer can compromise regarding his faith. One cannot pick and choose the components of the doctrine. The doctrine has to be accepted as a whole. There are several narrations which described the details of the deals that the idolaters offered the Prophet (PBUH) which would make Islam acceptable to them. However, the Prophet (PBUH) stood firm and never compromised the faith. He did not accept any of these compromises. Even when he and the believers were besieged in Mecca and persecuted by the idolaters, they remained steadfast in their position. Several stories have been narrated about the different strategies which were adopted by the idolaters of Quraish to force the Prophet (PBUH) to compromise. Sometimes they threatened to kill him and sometimes they promised him honor and wealth. When the Prophet’s (PBUH) uncle Abu Taleb tried to mediate between him and the chiefs of Quraish, the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“My uncle, even if they were able to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand so that I stop calling people to Islam, I would not do it.”* His uncle was so impressed with the sincerity and steadfastness of his nephew, he told the Prophet (PBUH) to continue on his path and continued to offer his protection to the Prophet (PBUH).

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded not to listen to the rejecters, *“Do not yield to any contemptible swearer, a slanderer, going about with calumnies, hinderer of good, transgressor, and sinful; cruel, and above all of this, an imposter; because he is a possessor of wealth and*

children. When Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Mere fables of former people.' We shall brand him on the nose." It has been narrated that these verses refer to Al-Waleed ibn Al-Mughirah, one of the chiefs of Quraish. He was aggressively opposing the Prophet (PBUH) and barring people from listening to him. The verses attach to him several bad characters. The verses describe him as a liar, he frequently used oaths in his speech to convince people because he knew that people did not trust him. He was a slanderer. He used to go around spreading calumnies. He was a hinderer of good deeds, an aggressor, sinful, cruel and imposter. God gave him wealth and children but he was ungrateful and he rejected the revelations of God when they were recited to him. God promised to punish him severely.

The following verses relate a story, which seems to be familiar to the Arabs at that time. The story is about the consequences of showing ingratitude to God, *"Indeed, We have tried them as We tried the people of the garden, when they vowed that they would harvest its fruits the next morning, And made no allowance (for the will of God); then there came on the (garden) a visitation from your Lord, (which swept away) all around, while they were asleep. So the (garden) became, by the morning, like a dark and desolate spot, (whose fruits had been gathered). As the morning broke they called out, one to another saying, "Go early to your field if you are you going to harvest (the fruits)." So they went off, saying one to another in low tones, "No needy man shall enter it today." And in the morning they went, bent on their purpose. But when they saw the (garden), they said, "We have surely lost our way. No, indeed we have been deprived." The best among them said, "I said to you, 'Why you do not glorify (God)?'" They said, "Glory to our Lord. Verily we have been wrongdoers." Then they turned, one against another, in reproach. They said, "Alas for us, we have indeed transgressed. It may be that our Lord will give us in exchange a better (garden) than this; for we do turn to Him (in repentance.)"*

*Such was the torment. And verily the torment of the Hereafter is greater if they did but know."*

The verses tell the story of a group of young men who inherited a garden. Their father used to give some of its harvest in charity to poor people. When he died the children decided to keep all the harvest for themselves. They decided to go very early in the morning to harvest the fruits before any poor person would approach them for a charity. They decided not to give any of the harvest in charity as was the habit of their father. God destroyed their plants while they were asleep at night. They woke up early in the morning and went surreptitiously to harvest the garden. When they reached the location of their garden, they found a barren land in its stead. Their first reaction was that they must have made a mistake and went to a different place. But they soon realized that this was the wreckage of their garden after it has been destroyed. One of them, who seems to be the wisest among them reminded them of something he had told them when they were planning to cut off the poor. He said, *"I said to you, 'Why you do not glorify (God)?'"* They suddenly realized their fault. They responded, *"Glory to our Lord. Verily we have been wrongdoers."* They started blaming each other. Then they confessed their sin and asked for forgiveness. This was their punishment in this life, but the torment in the Hereafter is more severe. This was the message sent to the idolaters of Mecca. They were being tested as others were tested before them. On the other hand, those who are conscious of God will be rewarded generously, *"Verily, for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens of bliss with their Lord."*

The Quran addressed the disbelievers directly, *“Shall We then treat those who submit as the guilty? What is the matter with you? How do you judge? Or do you have a Scripture, from which you learn, that you shall indeed have all that you choose? Or do you have a covenant on oath from Us, reaching to the Day of Judgment, that you shall have whatever you shall demand? Ask them, which of them will vouch for that? Or do they have other gods? Then let them bring their other gods if they are truthful.”* A rhetorical question was posed to the idolaters, “Is it reasonable that the believers and the disbelievers would be treated similarly?” If that is what they expected, then another question follows: what is the basis for your expectations? The Quran then mocked the idolaters. Did they base their expectations on a scripture that they received before? Or is it their whims that dictated such an expectation? Did they have a covenant with God that guaranteed these expectations? Or do they have other gods? Let them bring their gods if such gods did exist.

Then a warning of what they will see on the Day of Judgment was issued, *“On the day when the shin will be exposed, and they will be invited to prostrate, but they will be unable. Their eyes will be downcast, ignominy will cover them. And they used to be invited to prostration while they were sound.”* The expression, *“the shin will be exposed,”* is a figure of speech which is used to denote a difficult time that will be encountered. This is the difficult time that they will encounter on the Day of Judgment. On that day they will be asked to prostrate but they will be unable to prostrate. They will be humiliated and they will be reminded that this is the punishment which they earned because they rejected guidance to which they were invited during their lifetime.

The warning is repeated, *“Leave Me (to deal) with those who reject this statement.”* Who can withstand God’s punishment? God has a plan for those who rejected guidance, *“We shall lead them on by steps from where they do not know. I will grant them respite, truly My plan is firm.”* More rhetorical questions were posed. Were they asked to pay for guidance? *“Or do you ask them for a reward, so that they are burdened with debt?”* Or did they know something of the unseen, so that they were not afraid of God’s punishment? *“Or do they have (knowledge) of the unseen, so they can write it down?”*

The verses reassure the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers that they should not be worried about the fight with the disbelievers. God manages the battle between the truth and the falsehood. The disbelievers are fighting God and He will take care of them. These verses were revealed in the early days of Islam when Muslims were few and weak to establish the principle that the disbelievers’ fight is with God. The believers may have a role to play but it is a limited role and its objective is to test the perseverance of the believers.

A command to the Prophet (PBUH) to persevere was then issued, *“So persevere waiting for the command of your Lord, and be not like the companion of the fish, when he cried out in agony. Had not the Blessing from his Lord reached him, he would indeed have been cast off on the naked shore, in disgrace. But his Lord chose him and placed him among the righteous.”* These verses allude to the story of Prophet Jonah (Yunus; PBUH) which has been mentioned in Surat As-Saffat (Chapter 37). Reciting the story here is part of the necessary preparation for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to enable him to complete his mission. Prophet Jonah (PBUH) was sent by God to a town to guide its people to the straight path. They did not respond to his call quickly

enough and he became impatient. He left the town and boarded a ship. The weather turned rough and the sailors needed to lighten the ship's load. They decided to take lots to find out who can be thrown overboard to lighten the ship's load. When the lot was cast, it happened to be Prophet's Jonah (PBUH) turn. He was thrown overboard and a whale swallowed him. When he was in the belly of the whale he prayed God saying, *"There is no deity but You, glory be to You, I have been indeed a wrongdoer."* God saved him and commanded the whale to spit him alive. God then chose him and made him one of the righteous. This was a lesson in perseverance given to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Sura is concluded with an image of the rage which engulfed the disbelievers as they were being invited to Islam. When they looked at the Prophet (PBUH), their looks were full of hate and anger it could have made him slip and fall. Their words were not less harsh than their looks, *"And indeed, those who disbelieve would almost smite you with their eyes when they hear the reminder, and they say, 'Most surely he is mad.'"*

But This Quran is only a reminder, *"But it is only a reminder to the worlds."* One should reflect on the wording, *"a reminder to the worlds."* The Message from its first day was intended for the whole world. It was not meant to be a local message and later evolved. It was meant to be a universal message since its inception.

## Sura 69: Al-Haqqah (The Reality)

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

### Verses 1 to 52:

1. *The Reality.*
2. *What is the Reality?*
3. *And what will make you realize what the Reality is?*
4. *(The tribes of) Thamud and A'ad denied the Striking Calamity.*
5. *As for Thamud, they were destroyed by the overwhelming blast.*
6. *And as for A'ad, they were destroyed by a fierce roaring wind;*
7. *He made it rage against them seven nights and eight days in succession; so that you could see the people lying dead as if they were hollow trunks of palm-trees.*
8. *Do you see any remnant of them?*
9. *And Pharaoh, and those before him, and the Overturned Cities, committed habitual sin.*
10. *And they disobeyed the messenger of their Lord, therefore He seized them with a tightening grip.*
11. *When the waters overflowed, We carried you on the ship;*
12. *That We might make it a reminder for you, and that attentive ears may take heed.*
13. *And when the trumpet is blown with a single blast;*
14. *And the earth with the mountains shall be lifted up and crushed with a single blow,*
15. *On that day will the Event befall.*
16. *And the sky will be rent asunder, for it will that Day be flimsy,*
17. *And the angels will be on its sides, and eight will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them.*
18. *On that day you will be exposed; not a secret of you will be hidden.*
19. *Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, "Here, read my book.*
20. *Surely I knew that I should have to meet my reckoning."*
21. *And he will be in a life of bliss,*
22. *In a high garden,*
23. *The fruits of which are near at hand.*
24. *(And it will be said), "Eat and drink at ease for what you did beforehand in the days gone by."*
25. *But as for him who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, "I wish I had not been given my book.*
26. *And never knew what my account was.*
27. *If only it was the end.*
28. *My wealth availed me nothing.*
29. *My power has vanished from me."*
30. *(It will be said), "Take him and put a chain on him,*
31. *And burn him in Hellfire.*
32. *Further, make him march in a chain, the length of which is seventy cubits.*
33. *He used not to believe in God, the Great;*
34. *Nor did he advocate feeding of the poor.*

35. *Therefore, today he has no true friend here,*
36. *Nor any food except scum,*
37. *Which none but the sinners eat.*
38. *Indeed, I swear by what you see,*
39. *And what you do not see,*
40. *That this is verily the speech of a noble messenger;*
41. *And it is not the speech of a poet - little it is you believe;*
42. *Nor it is the speech of a soothsayer - little it is you take heed.*
43. *It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds.*
44. *And if he had fabricated against Us some sayings,*
45. *We assuredly would have taken him by the right hand,*
46. *And then severed his life-artery.*
47. *And not one of you could have restrained Us from him.*
48. *But verily this is a Message for the God conscious.*
49. *And We certainly know that there are among you those who reject (it).*
50. *And it surely a source of grieve for the disbelievers.*
51. *But verily it is the truth of assured certainty;*
52. *S fo glorify the name of your Lord, the Great. (69: 1 – 52)*

This is a great and horrifying Sura. Upon hearing it being recited, one cannot control oneself not to shudder. Each verse of the Sura is like a hammer that strikes the psyche of the individual creating a horrifying feeling. The Sura instills in the psyche of the person one message: one should take this religion and its doctrine very seriously. One should not take this Message lightly because it is greater than the Messenger (PBUH) and greater than the whole human race. It is the truth, the truth of assured certainty from the Lord of the worlds.

The Sura starts with the mention of the Day of Resurrection, “*The Reality. What is the Reality? And what will make you realize what the Reality is?*” The word used to describe the Day of Resurrection is “the reality.” The reality is the truth of the matter, it is the judgment that has been decreed, and it is what will certainly happen. All these meanings are plausible explanation for the title of the Sura and the word used to start the Sura. The question was asked but no answer was given because it is beyond human understanding.

The subsequent verses speak of those who rejected guidance, “*(The tribes of) Thamud and A'ad denied the Striking Calamity.*” The expression “*Striking Calamity,*” is another name for the Day of Resurrection. The Striking Calamity is a calamity that strikes the hearts with terrifying fear and strikes the universe with destruction. Thamud and A’ad were punished because they denied the Day of Judgment, “*As for Thamud, they were destroyed by the overwhelming blast.*” The tribe of Thamud used to live in the area between Hijaz and Syria. They were destroyed by an overwhelming blast. The blast that seized the tribe of Thamud was sudden and the destruction happened very quickly. While the tribe of A’ad suffered for a number of days, “*And as for A'ad, they were destroyed by a fierce roaring wind, He made it rage against them, seven nights and eight days in succession; so that you could see the people lying dead as if they were hollow trunks of palm-trees. Do you see any remnant of them?*” They were destroyed by a very cold

wind which raged for seven nights and eight days. It left them dead like hollow trunks of palm-trees.

The verses then refer briefly to peoples who rejected guidance earlier and met similar ends, “*And Pharaoh, and those before him, and the Overturned Cities, committed habitual sin. And they disobeyed the messenger of their Lord, therefore He seized them with a tightening grip.*” The verse refers to Pharaoh of Egypt at the time of Moses (PBUH) and to the people of Lut (PBUH). They all sinned regularly and furthermore they disobeyed the messengers who were sent to them. The verse refers to the different messengers as one, because they all came with the same message.

Then a reference is made to the flood, the drowning of Noah’s (PBUH) people who disbelieved, and the rescuing of the believers on the ship, “*When the waters rose, We carried you on the ship; that We might make it a reminder for you, and that attentive ears may take heed.*” The scene of the flood with a ship being tossed by huge waves fits appropriately in the overall theme of the Sura; even the words used in the description all rhyme nicely. These stories should be a reminder for anyone who may take heed.

These terrifying images described limited catastrophes in comparison with the big one, the Day of Judgment. First the trumpet will be blown, “*And when the trumpet is blown with a single blast.*” Then this earth, on which we live and dwell securely, will be lifted up together with its huge mountains and then crushed completely, “*And the earth with the mountains shall be lifted up and crushed with a single blow.*” This is the big event that the Sura is talking about, “*On that day will the Event befall.*” The “Event” is another name to the Day of Judgment. It is a unique event that will certainly happen. That is why it is only referred to by the name “the Event.” The sky will be split asunder, “*And the sky will be rent asunder, for it will that Day be flimsy.*”

The subsequent verses describe a different scene; a majestic serene scene, where the angels appear carrying the Throne of the Lord, “*And the angels will be on its sides, and eight will, that Day, bear the Throne of your Lord above them.*” Then the reckoning process will start. All secrets will be exposed, “*On that day you will be exposed; not a secret of you will be hidden.*” Nothing will be hidden. Everything will be exposed: bodies, souls, consciences, and deeds.

The scene continues to describe the fate of the different groups of people, “*Then, as for him who is given his record in his right hand, he will say, ‘Here, read my book. Surely I knew that I should have to meet my reckoning.’*” The expression, “*given the record in his right hand,*” may also be taken literally, or it could be taken figuratively; since in Arabic the right hand is a symbol of goodness; and the left hand and behind the back are symbols of evil. The scene describes the state of those who attained salvation. They will be overwhelmed with happiness, they will cry out, “*Here, read my book.*” They feared standing up for the reckoning, but they found that they were spared that severe situation, “*I knew that I should have to meet my reckoning.*”

Ibn ‘Umar (RA) narrated that he heard the Messenger of God (PBUH) say, “On the Day of Judgment, the servant is brought in front of his Lord; he will confess all his sins. Then, God will

say, *'I did not expose these sins in your life time, and today I forgive you these sins.'* Then the servant will be given his book in his right hand. The witnesses will testify against the disbelievers and the hypocrites saying, *'These are ones who fabricated a lie against their Lord.'* And they will be cursed." The reward for the servants who attained salvation is then described, *"And he will be in a life of bliss, in a high garden, the fruits of which are near at hand. (And it will be said), 'Eat and drink at ease for what you did beforehand in the days gone by.'"*

On the other hand, those who are given their books in their left hand will realize that there is no escape from the punishment, they will lament their situation, *"But as for him who is given his record in his left hand, he will say, 'I wish I had not been given my book. And never knew what my account was. If only it was the end. My wealth availed me nothing. My power has vanished from me.'"* They will express their regret and reiterate the fact that neither wealth nor power availed them anything. The command is then issued, *"(It will be said), 'Take him and put a chain on him, and burn him in Hellfire. Further, make him march in a chain, the length of which is seventy cubits.'"* It is a horrifying scene. The reasons for their predicament are pronounced, *"He used not to believe in God, the Great; nor did he advocate feeding of the poor."* Their hearts were devoid of the belief in God and had no feelings of mercy towards the needy. These hearts deserve nothing but Hellfire. The rest of the punishment is outlined, *"Therefore, today he has no true friend here nor any food except scum, which none but sinners eat."*

The subsequent verses deal with another theme. They ascertain the truthfulness of the Message, *"Indeed, I swear by what you see, and what you do not see, that this is verily the speech of a noble messenger; and it is not the speech of a poet - little it is you believe; nor it is the speech of a soothsayer - little it is you take heed. It is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds."* An oath with what you see and what you do not see takes the imagination beyond what we see; indicating the vastness of the universe beyond that which is visible. The idolaters used to accuse the Prophet (PBUH) one time that he was a poet and another that he was a soothsayer. Their accusations were based on their realization of the miraculous nature of the Quran. But the style and content of the Quran are completely different from poetry and magic. The Quran in addition to its linguistic excellence embodies a complete and comprehensive way of life. It is a divine project different from any of the literary works composed by humans. It is God's message that was transmitted by a noble messenger. They only made these claims because they did not believe and they did not take heed.

Then a dire threat is issued against anyone who would contemplate fabricating a lie against God, *"And if he had fabricated against Us some sayings, We assuredly would have taken him by the right hand, and then severed his life-artery, and not one of you could have restrained Us from him."* This statement ascertains beyond any doubt the truthfulness of the Prophet (PBUH). God has indicated His punishment for those who fabricate a lie against Him; and since this punishment was not exercised against the Prophet (PBUH) then he must be truthful in what he says.

The Sura concludes by outlining the nature of the revelation, *"But verily this is a Message for the God conscious. And We certainly know that there are among you those that reject (it). And it surely a source of grieve for the disbelievers. But verily it is the truth of assured certainty."* This



Quran reminds the hearts of the God conscious who take heed. The facts that the Quran brought are instilled deep in their psyche. The Quran merely exposes these facts and brings it to the conscious mind. But the disbelievers reject this guidance to their own detriment. But it is certainly the truth of the assured certainty. Therefore, "*Glorify the name of your Lord, the Great.*"

## **Sura 70: Al-Ma'arij (The Ways of Ascent)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 44:**

1. *A questioner asked about the imminent torment,*
2. *For the disbelievers, which none can repel,*
3. *From God, Lord of the Ways of Ascent.*
4. *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a Day the measure of which is fifty thousand years.*
5. *But persevere (Muhammad) graciously.*
6. *They see that (Day) indeed as a far-off (event).*
7. *But We see it (quite) near.*
8. *The Day when the sky will be like molten brass,*
9. *And the mountains will be like wool,*
10. *And no close friend will ask his close friend.*
11. *Though they will be put in sight of each other, the criminal wishes he would be able to redeem himself from the torment of that Day by (sacrificing) his children,*
12. *And his spouse, and his brother,*
13. *And his kindred who sheltered him,*
14. *And everyone on earth, if that would deliver him.*
15. *By no means, it is the raging fire.*
16. *It strips away the skin;*
17. *Inviting him who turned his back and fled,*
18. *And hoarded (wealth) and withheld it.*
19. *Truly humankind was created very impatient.*
20. *Fretful when evil touches him.*
21. *And niggardly when good reaches him;*
22. *Except those who pray*
23. *And who remain constant at their prayer.*
24. *And in whose wealth there is a fixed portion,*
25. *For the beggar and the destitute;*
26. *And those who believe in the Day of Judgment.*
27. *And those who fear the torment of their Lord;*
28. *Indeed, the torment of their Lord is not that from which one is safe;*
29. *And those who guard their chastity,*
30. *Except with their wives, and those whom their right hands possess, for they are not to be blamed.*
31. *But those who trespass beyond this are transgressors;*
32. *And those who keep their pledges and their covenant;*
33. *And those who are upright in their testimonies;*
34. *And those who are attentive in their prayer.*
35. *These will dwell in gardens, honored.*
36. *But what is the matter with those who disbelieve that they hasten on around you,*
37. *From the right and from the left, in crowds?*

38. *Does every man of them long to enter the Garden of Bliss?*
39. *By no means, We have created them from what they know.*
40. *I swear by the Lord of every sunrise and every sunset that We are certainly able,*
41. *To replace them by better than them. And we are not to be overcome.*
42. *So leave them to wallow in vain talk, until they encounter that Day of theirs which they have been promised;*
43. *The Day when they will emerge from the tombs in a rush, as though they were hurrying towards a target.*
44. *Their eyes lowered in dejection, ignominy covering them. This is the Day which they were promised. (70: 1 – 44)*

This is an episode in the slow healing process which the Quran used to deal with the ailments which afflicted the human soul in the age of ignorance. It was one of the battles which were part of the long struggle by the Quran to change the hearts of people and to remove the rust that accumulated on them during the long ages of ignorance. The main issue that the sura deals with is the inevitability of the Hereafter and the torment that the disbelievers should expect.

The concept of the Hereafter was one of the most difficult concepts for the idolaters of Mecca to grasp and accept. Their reaction to the concept, when it was mentioned to them, was a mixture of amazement, denial, and resistance. They challenged the Prophet (pbuh) to bring about the Day of Judgment or to tell them when it will happen. The sura cites one of these challenges. Someone came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked him about the Hereafter, “*A questioner asked about the imminent torment, for the disbelievers.*” The verses continued to emphasize the inevitability of the torment in the Hereafter. Such torment will be inescapable and it will be inflicted by the Lord of the Ways of Ascent, “*none can repel, from God, Lord of the Ways of Ascent.*”

“*The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him in a Day the measure of which is fifty thousand years.*” The Day of Judgment will be a long day. On that Day the angels and Gabriel (pbuh) will ascend. The objective of highlighting the ascension of the angels and Gabriel (pbuh) is to draw the attention to the importance of that day. The way the angels ascend, the duties that they perform, or where will they be ascending are all parts of the unseen. The length of the day mentioned in the verse could be the literal length; or it could be a figure of speech to highlight the facts mentioned in the following verses, “*But persevere (Muhammad) graciously. They see that (Day) indeed as a far-off (event). But We see it (quite) near.*” Gracious perseverance is the kind of perseverance that a confident person who accepts God’s decrees with content should exercise.

The following verses describe some of the characteristics of this day, “*The Day when the sky will be like molten brass, and the mountains will be like wool.*” This indicates that on this Day there will be cosmic changes that will change the characteristics of the universe as we know it.

“*And no close friend will ask his close friend, though they will be put in sight of each other, the criminal wishes he would be able to redeem himself from the torment of that Day by (sacrificing) his children, and his spouse, and his brother, and his kindred who sheltered him, and everyone*

*on earth, if that would deliver him.*” Everyone will be busy with his own affairs. No one will care about the other. The criminal will wish if he could sacrifice anyone to redeem himself.

But he will not be able to do so, and he will have to meet his doom, *“By no means, it is the raging fire.”* It is a very terrifying scene indeed. This fire will, *“strip away the skin.”* It is a live fire that will invite him who, *“turned his back and fled, and hoarded (wealth) and withheld it.”* The emphasis in this sura, as well as in the previous sura, on helping the needy and avoiding niggardliness indicates that the prevalent atmosphere in Mecca at that time was an atmosphere where people were competing together to amass wealth. The rich were concerned with getting more wealth and the poor were forgotten. No one was concerned about the poor and the needy. Social injustice and exploitation of the poor were the dominant features of the society. The Quran continued the fight to change this.

The few following verses focus on the nature of the human being, *“Truly humankind was created very impatient; fretful when evil touches him; and niggardly when good reaches him.”* The Quran paints a very accurate image of the human being when his heart becomes devoid of faith. Such a person will be anxious and impatient. He will be fretful when an affliction touches him. Sadness will overwhelm him and he will see no end for the adversity that afflicted him. He will think that his suffering will continue forever. He has no support to rely upon. He does not understand the dynamics of the provision and how it is controlled by God. Similarly, when he is blessed by bounties, he thinks that he earned these bounties as a result of his own work. He does not show gratitude for the Provider. He will hoard the wealth which God gave him for fear of losing it if he spends some of it in helping the poor. He is unhappy whether he is in a state of affliction or in a state of affluence.

The believers are saved of this destiny, *“except those who pray.”* They are secure in their faith, safe in their reliance on God. The believers persevere when they are afflicted; and they show gratitude when they are blessed. The traits of those believers are then listed. They are, *“constant at their prayer.”* Prayer is one of the pillars of Islam; it is a sign of faith, and it is a medium for communication with God. It is an expression of the ultimate submission to God. The constancy in prayer indicates the continuous connection between the believer and God. They assign a portion of their wealth to help those who ask and those who are needy, *“and in whose wealth there is a fixed portion, for the beggar and the destitute.”* Most probably this refers to the poor-dues (Zakat). Or it may refer to the general concept of charity. These people have dedicated part of their money over and beyond the prescribed obligatory poor-dues to combat the niggardliness of their souls and to express their gratitude for the blessings of God.

They, *“believe in the Day of Judgment.”* This trait is directly related to the main subject of the sura. In the meantime, it describes one of the essential traits of the believer; believing in the Day of Judgment is an integral component of faith. It has a direct impact on the life style of people. A person who believes in the Day of Judgment considers the Hereafter as an extension to this life, while the person who rejects the Day of Judgment focuses only on this life. These two will adopt different life styles. The former will base his calculations on the gain and loss in the two lives, while the latter will only be concerned about the gain and loss in this life.

Another level of faith that goes beyond believing in the Day of Judgment is the fear of displeasing God, *“and those who fear the torment of their Lord. Indeed, the torment of their Lord is not that from which one is safe.”* That implies that the person measures everything he does using one standard; the standard of pleasing God.

They, *“guard their chastity, except with their wives, and those whom their right hands possess, for they are not to be blamed. But those who trespass beyond this are transgressors.”* This guarantees the moral purity of the individual and the community. Islam wants to build communities based on moral purity and ethical cleanliness. Such communities require that intimate relationships between the sexes are conducted within an acceptable framework and not left to uncontrolled desires and whims. These relationships should not be considered as means for the satisfaction of animal urges only. The verse mentions marriage as an institution within which these relations can be practiced. A reference is made also to relationships with slave girls. At the time of advent of Islam, slavery was a well-established institution in the world. However, Islam abolished all ways of acquiring slaves except for those obtained as captives of war. This was dictated by the necessity to treat others the way they would treat Muslims.

They, *“keep their pledges and their covenant.”* This is one of the most important ethical characteristics of Muslims. The most important covenant that a believer should keep is the covenant with God. Islam emphasized the importance of keeping covenants and honoring pledges. Keeping covenants and honoring pledges is the only way to build a safe and secure community. Islam attached the trait of breaking covenants and dishonoring pledges to the hypocrites and the disbelievers.

They, *“upright in their testimonies.”* Testimonies are an important tool in the Islamic judicial system. That is why it is an important trait for the believer.

The traits of the believers started with the trait of establishing the prayer and ends with the trait of being attentive in the prayer, *“and those who are attentive in their prayer.”* This includes performing the prayers on time and being careful in fulfilling the prayer in the proper form and content.

The reward for the believers who have acquired these traits is then enunciated, *“These will dwell in gardens, honored.”*

The narrative then turns to explore one of the scenes in Mecca. The scene describes those who used to go to listen to the Prophet (pbuh) without having the true intention of following guidance, *“But what is the matter with those who disbelieve that they hasten on around you, from the right and from the left, in crowds?”* The verse alludes to their curiosity about what the Prophet (pbuh) was saying and it questioned their intention. Did they think that this curiosity is sufficient for them to attain salvation? *“Does every man of them long to enter the Garden of Bliss?”* A definite answer was then given, *“By no means, We have created them from what they know.”* They were created from a drop of a sperm like everyone else. So, they should not expect to be treated differently. They should remember that God can replace them any time He pleases, *“I swear by the Lord of every sunrise and every sunset that We are certainly able, to replace them by better than them. And we are not to be overcome.”*

So let them, *“wallow in vain talk, until they encounter that Day of theirs which they have been promised. The Day when they will emerge from the tombs in a rush, as though they were hurrying towards a target. Their eyes lowered in dejection, ignominy covering them. This is the Day which they were promised.”* The verses carry a dire warning for the disbelievers. They describe their situation on the Day of Resurrection, when they will get what they were promised.

## Sura 71: Nuh (Noah)

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

### **Verses 1 to 28:**

1. *We sent Noah to his people (with the command), "Warn your people before there comes to them a painful torment."*
2. *He said, "My people, I am a plain warner to you.*
3. *Serve God, be conscious of Him, and obey me.*
4. *He will forgive your sins and grant you a reprieve to an appointed term; surely the term of God when it comes is not postponed; if you only knew."*
5. *He said, "My Lord, I have called my people night and day;*
6. *But my call only added to their flight;*
7. *And every time I called them, that you might forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance.*
8. *And I have called them openly;*
9. *I called them publicly and I appealed to them in private.*
10. *Saying, 'Ask forgiveness from your Lord; for He is All-Forgiving;*
11. *He will send rain to you in abundance;*
12. *And will increase you in wealth and sons; and provide for you gardens and rivers.*
13. *What is the matter with you, that you do not appreciate God's majesty?*
14. *Seeing that it is He who created you in stages?*
15. *Do not you see how God has created the seven heavens one above another.*
16. *And He set the moon in their midst a light, and made the sun a lamp?*
17. *And God has made you grow out of the earth as a growth;*
18. *And in the end He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)?*
19. *And God has made the earth for you as a wide expanse*
20. *That you may go about therein in spacious roads.'"*
21. *Noah said, "My Lord, they have disobeyed me, and followed one whose wealth and children increase him in nothing but ruin;*
22. *And they have devised a tremendous plot.*
23. *And they have said (to each other), 'Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd nor Suwa', neither Yaguth nor Ya'uq, nor Nasr;'*
24. *They have already misled many; and do not increase the wrongdoers except in going astray."*
25. *Because of their sins they were drowned, and were made to enter the Fire. And they found no helpers besides of God.*
26. *And Noah, said, "My Lord, do not leave on the earth a single one of the disbelievers.*
27. *If You leave them they will mislead Your servants, and they will beget none but wicked ungrateful ones.*
28. *My Lord, forgive me, my parents, all the believers who enter my house, and (all) believing men and believing women. And increase the wrongdoers in perdition." (71: 1 -*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca.

This Sura narrates the experience that Prophet Noah (PBUH) had with his people. The Sura presents an example of obstinate and arrogant people who follow their leaders blindly. They refuse to think or benefit from the guidance offered to them.

Another dimension of the narrative is the divine mercy which opens the doors to guidance to humankind. This dimension is reflected in the fact that God sent many Messengers to guide people to the straight path. A third dimension of the narrative is the description of the struggle which the Messengers' of God had to go through to deliver God's Message to people, their hard work, patience, and persistence. They did not gain a personal benefit nor did they aspire to a material reward in the life of this world for their hard work.

The Sura starts with a statement about the source of the Message, "*We sent Noah to his people,*" God sent the Messengers with the Message. God is the Creator. He instilled in humankind the initial natural disposition to discover and worship God. When the people swerved away from God's path He sent the Messengers with the Message to guide people to the straight path. Noah (PBUH) was the first Messenger to come after Adam (PBUH). The Quran does not mention that Adam (PBUH) was given a Message. However, he was the teacher who taught his children and grandchildren the principles of submission to God. They may have strayed away from the straight path after his death, so God sent Noah (PBUH) to bring people back to the straight path and to the belief in the Oneness of God.

The verses then continue to outline Noah's (PBUH) task, "*Warn your people before there comes to them a painful torment.*" Noah (PBUH) was sent to warn his people of the consequences of practicing idolatry. So, Noah (PBUH) started to fulfill the undertaking that he was entrusted with, "*He said, 'My people, I am a plain warner to you.'*" He started with a clear statement of the task that he was sent to accomplish, "*Serve God, be conscious of Him, and obey me. He will forgive your sins and grant you a reprieve to an appointed term; surely the term of God when it comes is not postponed; if you only knew.*" He called them to worship God alone, to be conscious of Him, and to obey the Messenger that came to them with the Message. These are the basic principles of the Message brought by all God's Messengers.

Serving God alone is a way of life. It is based on understanding the nature of Godliness and the nature of being human. This understanding delineates the correct relationship between the creature and the Creator. This relationship controls and shapes the way of life of people on earth. The commitment to live according to this way of life is only guaranteed by being always conscious of God. Obeying the Messenger is essential because he is the medium through which the details of the way of life are conveyed. People who are committed to this way of life are rewarded by God. God promised to forgive their sins and to delay their reckoning to a specific predetermined Day. This means that they will not be punished in the life of this world for their sins. However, the predetermined Day will certainly come, and no one can change it. Some scholars indicated that the predetermined day means the time of death.



Noah (PBUH) tried hard to fulfill his task, *“He said, ‘My Lord, I have called my people night and day; but my call only added to their flight; and every time I called them, that you might forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance.’”* These verses summarize Noah’s struggle to fulfill his commitment and outline the results of his persisting efforts. His people did not respond favorably to his call; every time he called them they turned away and fled. They were fleeing from God, the source of their existence and their life; the source of the blessings and bounties; the source of guidance and light. When they could not flee, they put their fingers in their ears so that they would not listen to Noah’s (PBUH) call. Noah (PBUH) adopted different strategies in calling his people, *“And I have called them openly; I called them publicly and I appealed to them in private.”* He also tried to use different approaches to call them to guidance. He warned them and he detailed to them the benefits that they will gain in this life and in the Hereafter. He described the great rewards that await those who ask God for forgiveness; God will, *“send rain to you in abundance; and will increase you in wealth and sons; and provide for you gardens and rivers.”* The verse emphasizes the direct relationship between asking for forgiveness and the provisions that God bestows on His servants. This message was repeated in many places in the Quran, e.g. *“And if only they had upheld the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have consumed (provision from above them and from beneath their feet.”* (5: 66) *“And if only the people of the cities had believed and were conscious of God, We would have bestowed upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth.”* (7: 96) *“Seek forgiveness of your Lord and repent to Him, He will let you enjoy a good provision for a specified term and give every doer of good his reward.”* (11: 3) This is a basic principle based on God’s promise. The history of human civilization supports this principle as well. The rule applies to nations not to individuals. Every nation that established its way of life on God’s law, sought sincerely God’s forgiveness, and remained conscious of God was rewarded by God’s blessings and bounties. Such nations were not only able to establish safe and secure environment for their people but they also enjoyed God’s support.

Sometimes we see a nation whose laws are not based on God’s law and its people are not conscious of God but it enjoys abundance in provisions and material possessions. Such nation is being tested by God. God tests nations and people sometimes by granting them abundant provision and sometimes by making them face adverse conditions.

Noah (PBUH) tried to reason with his people by directing their attention to the signs of God, *“What is the matter with you, that you do not appreciate God’s greatness? Seeing that it is He who created you in stages?”* The stages that Noah’s (PBUH) mentioned must have been a reference to a phenomenon that they were aware of at that time. These stages could very well be the stages of the development of the embryo. This is the opinion of most of the scholars. It is easy to imagine that this is something they have been aware of, because they must have seen incomplete embryos delivered. Then he continued to ask them to reflect on the cosmic signs that they would see around them, *“Do not you see how God has created the seven heavens one above another, and He set the moon in their midst a light, and made the sun a lamp?”*

Noah (PBUH) pointed to the fact that humankind was created from the earth, will go back to the earth, and then will be resurrected, *“And God has made you grow out of the earth as a growth; and in the end He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the*

*Resurrection)?” Finally, Noah (PBUH) mentioned the blessings of God in making life easy on this earth, “and God has made the earth for you as a wide expanse, that you may go about therein in spacious roads.”*

The verses refer to a connection between the beginning of human life and plant life, both grew out of the earth. This connection has been mentioned in other Suras in the Quran as well. This is an interesting point that deserves to be contemplated. It indicates that the primary elements which constitute both humans and plants came from the earth. Their lives continue because both humans and plants feed on elements that are provided by the earth.

Noah (PBUH) used different strategies and various approaches to reach the hearts of his people to call them to his Lord. He persevered and persisted for a long time, nine hundred and fifty years. But finally, he went back to God to report his work and to complain about the response of his people, *“Noah said, ‘My Lord, they have disobeyed me, and followed one whose wealth and children increase him in nothing but ruin; and they have devised a tremendous plot. And they have said (to each other), ‘Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd nor Suwa’, neither Yaguth nor Ya’uq, nor Nasr;’”* After his long struggle to guide them, they left him and followed their chiefs who had the wealth and the power; wealth and power that only bring loss to their owners. These chiefs plotted against Prophet Noah (PBUH). They warned their people not to abandon the idols they were worshipping. Noah’s response was to ask God to punish them, *“They have already misled many; and do not increase the wrongdoers except in going astray.”*

They were punished right there and then, *“Because of their sins they were drowned, and were made to enter the Fire. And they found no helpers besides of God.”* They were drowned then they were admitted to Hellfire. Their wealth, their leaders, and their idols did not avail them anything. They did not find any supporter besides God.

Noah (PBUH) continued his prayer, *“And Noah, said, ‘My Lord, do not leave on the earth a single one of the disbelievers. If You leave them they will mislead Your servants, and they will beget none but wicked ungrateful ones.’”* Noah (PBUH) realized that a drastic measure was needed to cleanse the earth from the transgression of the wrongdoers. Sometimes this would be the only viable solution. The wrongdoing must have been so entrenched in the land that no other solution would have been possible to enable those who wanted to worship God alone to survive. Then Noah (PBUH) prayed God to forgive him, *“My Lord, forgive me.”* This is a proper prophetic etiquette. He did not forget that he was a human being and human beings do err and they have shortcomings. Noah (PBUH) knew that he can be admitted to paradise only by the grace of God. Then he prayed God to forgive his parents, the believers who enter his house and all the believers in general, *“my parents, all who the believers who enter my house, and (all) believing men and believing women.”* These prayers express Noah’s (PBUH) kindness towards his parents and his fellow believers. These prayers express the power of faith which binds all the believers with the bond of brotherhood. His final prayer expressed his hate of the disbelievers, *“And increase the wrongdoers in perdition.”*

## Sura 72: Al-Jinn (The Jinn)

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

### **Verses 1 to 28:**

1. *Say, "It has been revealed to me that a company of jinn listened in. They said, 'We have really heard a wonderful Quran.*
2. *It guides to righteousness, so we believed in it and we will never associate anyone with our Lord.*
3. *And exalted is the glory of our Lord. He has taken neither a wife nor a son.*
4. *There were some foolish ones among us, who used to utter extravagant lies against God.*
5. *But we had thought that humankind and jinn would not speak a lie against God.*
6. *And indeed some of humankind used to invoke the protection of individuals of the jinn, so that they increased them in wrongdoing.*
7. *And indeed they thought, even as you thought, that God would not resurrect anyone.*
8. *And we probed the heaven but had found it filled with strong guards and meteors.*
9. *We used, indeed, to sit there in (hidden) stations, to (steal) a hearing; but any who listens now will find a flame waiting for him.*
10. *And we do not know whether ill is intended to those on earth, or whether their Lord intends guidance for them.*
11. *And among us there are righteous ones and among us there are far from that. We are sects having different ways.*
12. *But we think that we cannot escape from God in the earth, nor can we escape by flight.*
13. *And as for us, since we have listened to the guidance, we have accepted it; and any who believes in his Lord should neither fear loss nor oppression.*
14. *And there are among us some who have submitted (to God) and there are among us some who are wrongdoers. And whoso has submitted (to God), such have taken the right path purposefully.*
15. *And as for the unjust, they are firewood for Hell."*
16. *If they had remained straight on the path, We would have given them to drink of water in abundance.*
17. *That We may test them thereby, and whoso turns away from the remembrance of his Lord; He will thrust him into ever-growing torment.*
18. *And the places of worship are only for God, so do not call upon anyone along with God.*
19. *And when the slave of God stood up in prayer to Him, they crowded on him, almost stifling.*
20. *Say (unto them, Muhammad), "I pray to God only, and I do not associate partners with Him."*
21. *Say, "It is not in my power to cause you harm, nor to benefit you."*
22. *Say, "No one can protect me from God, nor can I find any refuge except with Him.*
23. *I only deliver (what I receive) from God and His messages;" and whoever disobeys God and His Messenger surely he shall have the fire of Hell to abide therein forever.*
24. *Till (the day) when they shall see that which they were promised; then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and fewer in number.*

25. *Say (Muhammad, to the disbelievers), "I do not know whether that which you are promised is near, or if my Lord has set a distant term for it.*
26. *He (alone) knows the unseen, He does not make any one acquainted with His secret,*
27. *Except a messenger whom He has chosen; and then He makes a guard to go before him and a guard behind him.*
28. *That He may know that they have (truly) brought and delivered the Messages of their Lord; and He encompasses what is with them and He records the number of all things.*  
(72: 1 – 28)

This Sura is a unique musical piece that has a strong rhythm and clear resonance. However, the music is overshadowed by a touch of sadness, especially towards the end of the Sura when the verses talk about the Messenger (PBUH). It evokes feelings of love and kindness towards the Messenger (PBUH) who suffered greatly in the course of delivering the message.

The Sura carries a testimony from a different world, the world of jinn. The idolaters of Mecca claimed that Muhammad (PBUH) was getting his revelations from the jinn. In this Sura, the jinn testify that the first time they heard about the Quran was when they listened to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reciting it.

The Sura also corrects many of the misunderstandings about the world of jinn. The idolaters believed in the supernatural powers of the jinn. They also believed that the jinn know the unseen. Some of the idolaters worshipped the jinn as well.

It has been narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) that he said, *"The Messenger of God (PBUH) never recited the Quran to the jinn and he never saw them."* The event that the first few verses of the Sura is talking about has been reported by Al-Bukhari as follows: *"The Messenger of God (PBUH) and a group of his companions were heading towards the market place of Okaz. In the meantime, some of the jinn came to their people saying that they were prevented from listening to what was happening in heaven. Their people said that this would not have happened unless some major event was happening. They decided to investigate. A group of jinn went along the same route that the Messenger (PBUH) took. They found him praying Fajr with his companions, so they listened to him reciting the Quran. They went back to their people telling them about what they heard."*

*"Say, 'It has been revealed to me that a company of jinn listened in. They said, "We have really heard a wonderful Quran. It guides to righteousness, so we believed in it and we will never associate anyone with our Lord. And exalted is the glory of our Lord. He has taken neither a wife nor a son. There were some foolish ones among us, who used to utter extravagant lies against God; but we had thought that humankind and jinn would not speak a lie against God."* This opening indicates that the Messenger of God (PBUH) came to know about the jinn who listened to the Quran through a revelation from God. This may have been the first time that a group of jinn listened to the Quran, but it could have been one of many times. These verses also indicate that the jinn were surprised when they heard the Quran. This was something new to them. They were overwhelmed by the experience. They believed in the Quran and they returned back to their people carrying the glad tidings of this new revelation. Their first reaction was to describe the Quran as a wonderful Quran. They realized that it guides to righteousness. The word

righteousness has many dimensions. These include guidance, truth, maturity, straight forwardness, and knowledge. Righteousness is a state of the self which guides to goodness and straight forwardness.

Their reaction, after the effect of the surprise was worn out, was to believe in the Quran. This is a natural reaction to those who listen to the Quran, understand its nature, and realize the truth that it embodies. They also realized that believing in the Quran means the belief in the oneness of God, *“will never associate anyone with our Lord. And exalted is the glory of our Lord. He has taken neither a wife nor a son.”* The Arabs believed in a myth which claimed that the angels are the daughters of God. The jinn in this Sura refute this myth. The believing jinn described those who believed in this myth as foolish, *“There were some foolish ones among us, who used to utter extravagant lies against God; but we had thought that humankind and jinn would not speak a lie against God.”*

*“And indeed some of humankind used to invoke the protection of individuals of the jinn, so that they increased them in wrongdoing.”* This verse refers to the old belief that jinn have superpowers and they can benefit and harm people. Satan is ever waiting to enter into the hearts of people, except those who hold tight to the rope of God. Those who open their hearts to Satan will only go deeper in their wrongdoing.

*“And indeed they thought, even as you thought, that God would not resurrect anyone.”* This is continuation of the discussion between the group of jinn, who listened to the Quran, and their people. Those who sought the help of jinn, as well as the jinn themselves, thought that God will not send a messenger. The verse could also mean that they thought that there will be no resurrection and no accountability. Both assumptions are wrong. God created humankind with equal propensity to good as well as to evil. The jinn also shared these qualities with humankind. God, out of His mercy, sent messengers to guide people to the straight path. In the Hereafter both humankind and jinn will be held accountable for their deeds.

*“And we probed the heaven but had found it filled with strong guards and meteors. We used, indeed, to sit there in (hidden) stations, to (steal) a hearing; but any who listens now will find a flame waiting for him.”* These verses indicate that the jinn tried to find out what was happening in heaven to use it against humankind. The verse indicates that their ability to probe heaven has been revoked. There were guards that sent meteors on whoever attempted to approach heaven. The guards, the meteors, and the jinn are all matters of the unseen which we will not dwell on.

The jinn reiterated their inability to discover the unseen, *“And we do not know whether ill is intended to those on earth, or whether their Lord intends guidance for them.”* They also described the nature of their creation. This allows us to understand that God gave them the propensity for good as well as for evil, *“And among us there are righteous ones and among us there are far from that. We are sects having different ways.”* They believed in God and in His unlimited power, *“But we think that we cannot escape from God in the earth, nor can we escape by flight.”* And they reiterated their belief in God, *“And as for us, since we have listened to the guidance, we have accepted it; and any who believes in his Lord should neither fear loss nor*

*oppression.*” Those who believe in God also believe in His justice and in His power. God will protect the believers and will not treat them unjustly.

Some jinn, like humankind, are righteous and some are transgressors, *“And there are among us some who have submitted (to God) and there are among us some who are wrongdoers. And whoso has submitted (to God), such have taken the right path purposefully.”* Some intentionally believed in God and chose to submit to Him. But others chose not to believe, they will get their punishment in the Hereafter, *“And as for the unjust, they are firewood for Hell.”*

The previous account quoted the jinn speaking to each other, the following verses continue to quote the dialogue of the jinn in an indirect approach, *“If they had remained straight on the path, We would have given them to drink of water in abundance. That We may test them thereby, and whoso turns away from the remembrance of his Lord; He will thrust him into ever-growing torment.”* The jinn said to each other that had humankind remained on the straight path, God would have given them great provision. This statement indicates several facts.

The first fact is that there is a direct relationship between the behavior of a nation and the provision that God bestows on this nation. If the nation as a whole is guided and follows the straight path God will provide for its people in abundance. The verse refers to one of the essential resources which is necessary for survival: water. God will provide water in abundance for nations which follow guidance.

The second fact is the concept of trials. God may test people by subjecting them to adverse conditions and may test others by granting affluence. These tests are meant to show the reaction of people to the state they find themselves in. Will people who were tested with adversity exercise perseverance? Will people who were tested with affluence show gratitude?

The third fact is the fact that affluence may lead people to turn away from the remembrance of God. Those who take that route will be punished severely.

The following verse could be a continuation of the jinn’s words, or it may be statement made by God, *“And the places of worship are only for God, so do not call upon anyone along with God.”* Places of worship should be dedicated solely to the remembrance of God. These are places in which absolute submission to God should be expressed.

*“And when the slave of God stood up in prayer to Him, they crowded on him, almost stifling.”* If the verse was a continuation of the jinn’s speech, then it could be referring to the idolaters of Quraish who used to assemble around the Prophet (PBUH) while he was praying expressing their astonishment at what he was doing. However, this could be a statement made by God describing the state of the jinn when they were listening to Prophet (PBUH) reciting Quran. God knows best.

The following verses address the Prophet (PBUH), *“Say (to them, Muhammad), ‘I pray to God only, and I do not associate partners with Him.’”* This is a statement expressing the essence of

the belief in the Oneness of God. This is a belief that both jinn and humankind should subscribe to.

*“Say, ‘It is not in my power to cause you harm, nor to benefit you.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) is commanded to refute any doubt that he has special powers. All power belongs to God alone. He is the one who decrees whatever happens. The Prophet (PBUH) continued by saying, *“No one can protect me from God, nor can I find any refuge except with Him. I only deliver (what I receive) from God and His Messages.”* The Prophet (PBUH) makes the unequivocal declaration: only God can provide protection, no one else can provide protection, not even the Prophet (PBUH) himself. The task of the Prophet (PBUH) is only to deliver the Message. Whoever disobeys God has to contend with the terrifying consequence, *“whoever disobeys God and His Messenger surely he shall have the fire of Hell to abide therein forever.”* Those who depend on their power and think that they can escape God’s punishment should wait and see, *“Till (the day) when they shall see that which they were promised; then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and fewer in number.”*

Then the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to reiterate that he was only a deliverer of the Message and had no knowledge of the unseen, *“Say (Muhammad, to the disbelievers), ‘I do not know whether that which you are promised is near, or if my Lord has set a distant term for it. He (alone) knows the unseen, He does not make any one acquainted with His secret, except a messenger whom He has chosen; and then He makes a guard to go before him and a guard behind him. That He may know that they have (truly) brought and delivered the Messages of their Lord; and He encompasses what is with them and He records the number of all things.’”* No one is privy to the knowledge of the unseen except by the will of God. Only, if God wishes to allow one of His Messengers to know something of the unseen, then the Messenger will acquire that knowledge. The Messengers who are given knowledge of the unseen are protected and observed until they fulfill the undertaking that they were entrusted with. God’s knowledge encompassed everything and He records the number of all things.

## **Sura 73: Al-Muzzammil (The Enwrapped One)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 20:**

1. *You wrapped up in your garments.*
2. *Keep vigil the night long praying, except a little,*
3. *Half of it, or a little less.*
4. *Or a little more; and recite the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones.*
5. *We shall send down to you a heavy Message.*
6. *Indeed, the vigil of the night is (a time) when impression is more keen and speech more certain.*
7. *Surely you have during the day a long occupation.*
8. *So remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself with a complete devotion.*
9. *(He is) Lord of the east and the west; there is no god but He. Take Him therefore as your Guardian.*
10. *And persevere in enduring what they say, and ignore them graciously.*
11. *And leave Me (alone to deal with) the deniers, lords of ease and comfort (in this life); and give them a brief respite.*
12. *With Us are shackles, and a burning fire,*
13. *And a food that chokes, and a painful torment;*
14. *On the day when the earth and the mountains will shake, and the mountains become heaps of sand.*
15. *We have sent to you a messenger as a witness against you, as We sent to Pharaoh a messenger.*
16. *Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger; so We seized him with a ruinous seizure.*
17. *Then how shall you, if you disbelieve, guard yourselves against a Day that will make children turn children grey,*
18. *The heaven shall rend asunder thereby; His promise is ever brought to fulfillment.*
19. *Indeed, this is a reminder. Let him who wills, then, choose a way to his Lord.*
20. *Your Lord knows that you keep vigil sometimes nearly two-thirds of the night, or (sometimes) half or a third thereof, as do a party of those with you. God determines the extent of the night and the day. He knows that you do not count, and turns to you in mercy. Recite, then, of the Quran that which is easy for you. He knows that there are sick people among you, while others travel in the land in search of God's bounty, and others are fighting for the cause of God. So recite of it that which is easy (for you), and establish prayers and pay the poor-dues, and lend God a goodly loan. Whatsoever good you send before you for your souls, you will find it with God, better and greater in the recompense. And seek forgiveness of God. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. (73: 1 – 20)*

It has been narrated that the Chiefs of Quraish had a meeting to plot against the Prophet (PBUH). When the Prophet (PBUH) heard about this meeting he was stressed out and he wrapped himself in his clothes and went to bed. The first part of the Sura was then revealed to him. Verse twenty was revealed a year later. This verse came to lessen the burden of performing night prayer for the



Prophet (PBUH) and the believers who used to pray all night until their feet would become swollen. Another narration indicated that this Sura was revealed on the second encounter between Gabriel (PBUH) and the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) was terrified of the meeting so he went home hurriedly and asked his wife to wrap his garment around him. Either way, the Sura came to tell the Prophet (PBUH) that the time of comfort has ended and that there is hard work ahead of him, *“You wrapped up in your garments. Keep vigil the night long praying, except a little,”* This was a divine command, commanding the Prophet (PBUH) to stand up and keep vigil during the night praying. Praying by night was part of the training program that aimed at preparing the Prophet (PBUH) for the heavy task that was entrusted to him. Keeping vigil during the night praying to God and reciting Quran, *“Half of it, or a little less, or a little more; and recite the Quran in slow, measured rhythmic tones,”* was meant to prepare the Prophet (PBUH) for his task.

Authentic narrations indicated that the Prophet (PBUH) never prayed more than eleven rakaa during his night vigil. However, the eleven rakaa would consume two thirds of the night. It has been narrated that Sa'id ibn Hesham (RA) asked 'Aisha (RA) about the character of the Prophet (PBUH) she said, *“His character was as the Quran prescribed.”* He asked her, *“Tell me about how he performed his night vigil?”* She said, *“Did you not read Surat Al-Muzzammil?”* He said, *“Yes.”* She said, *“The first few verses of this Sura revealed God's command of the prescribed night prayers for the believers. The Prophet (PBUH) prayed all night for a period of twelve months until the last verse of the Sura was revealed. The verse changed the status of the night vigil in prayer from a compulsory prayer to a voluntary one.”* Ibn Hesham (RA) then asked about how the Prophet (PBUH) performed the night prayers. She said that the Prophet (PBUH) used to wake up during the night. He would pray eight rakaa continuously, then he sits, remembers God, and make invocations; then he stands up and continue with the ninth rakaa. Then he would pray two rakaa after that. These are eleven rakaa. When he became older, he would pray seven and two. Once the Prophet (PBUH) started to pray a voluntary prayer, it would become his habit to do it regularly afterwards.

Praying during the night while people are asleep; opening one's heart to connect with God and receive His light. Enjoying the company of God all alone were parts of the training program that the Prophet (PBUH) received to prepare him for the hard task ahead of him, *“We shall send down to you a heavy Message. Indeed, the vigil of the night is (a time) when impression is more keen and speech more certain.”* During the night people are asleep, the atmosphere is quite, and there are no distractions. This is an appropriate environment for the enjoyment of night prayer. During the day people engage in different activities that preoccupy them, *“Surely you have during the day a long occupation.”* Nevertheless, one should always remember God, *“So remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself with a complete devotion.”* Remembrance of God should not be a mere lip service. Remembrance of God is a joint task for the heart and the tongue. Prayer and reciting Quran are two types of the activities of the remembrance of God. These acts require complete devotion.

One should devote his worship to the Lord of everything, *“(He is) Lord of the east and the west; there is no god but He. Take Him therefore as your Guardian.”* He is the Guardian in whom one should put his trust.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to persevere, *“And persevere in enduring what they say, and ignore them graciously.”* This verse must have been revealed after the call to Islam was made public, when the chiefs of Quraish started persecuting the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers. The command to persevere came next to the command to pray and remember God. These two actions are always connected together in preparing people for the heavy tasks of the call to Islam. Patience is a very important trait for God’s Messengers as well as for the believers in general. The Prophet (PBUH) was simply commanded to ignore the abusers graciously. He should not be angered by the abuse, nor should he attempt to retaliate or blame the abusers. This would certainly require a great deal of perseverance and prayers.

*“And leave Me (alone to deal with) the deniers, lords of ease and comfort (in this life); and give them a brief respite.”* God is capable of dealing with the deniers, especially those who are wealthy and arrogant. God is giving them a short respite, after this short respite they will get the appropriate recompense, *“With Us are shackles, and a burning fire, and a food that chokes, and a painful torment.”* This will happen on a horrific day, *“On the day when the earth and the mountains will shake, and the mountains become heaps of sand.”*

A reminder of what happened to Pharaoh was then given, *“We have sent to you a Messenger as a witness against you, as We sent to Pharaoh a Messenger. Pharaoh disobeyed the Messenger; so We seized him with a ruinous seizure.”* A rhetorical question was then posed to the deniers, if this is what happened before, how are you going to protect yourselves? How will you protect yourselves *“against a Day that will make children turn children grey? The heaven shall rend asunder thereby; His promise is ever brought to fulfillment?”* A horrible image is painted for the Day of Judgment; and God’s promise will be fulfilled.

Seeing this horrible picture, a way for salvation is then described, *“Indeed, this is a reminder. Let him who wills, then, choose a way to his Lord.”*

The following single verse brings ease and comfort to the hearts of the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers. After toiling for a full year, standing up in prayer the whole night they received the command that made life easier for them; praying by night was no longer mandatory, it was made voluntary, *“Your Lord knows that you keep vigil sometimes nearly two-thirds of the night, or (sometimes) half or a third thereof, as do a party of those with you. God determines the extent of the night and the day. He knows that you do not count, and turns to you in mercy. Recite, then, of the Quran that which is easy for you. He knows that there are sick people among you, while others travel in the land in search of God's bounty, and others are fighting for the cause of God. So recite of it that which is easy (for you), and establish prayers and pay the poor-dues, and lend God a goodly loan. Whatsoever good you send before you for your souls, you will find it with God, better and greater in the recompense. And seek forgiveness of God. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

## **Sura 74: Al-Muddathir (The Cloaked One)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 56:**

1. *You, wrapped up in your cloak*
2. *Arise and deliver and warn,*
3. *And your Lord magnify,*
4. *And your garments purify,*
5. *And all abomination shun,*
6. *And do not confer a favor to acquire more.*
7. *Persevere in your Lord's cause.*
8. *And when the trumpet sounds;*
9. *Certainly, that day will be a difficult day,*
10. *Not easy for the disbelievers.*
11. *Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created alone.*
12. *Then gave him vast wealth,*
13. *And sons dwelling in his presence,*
14. *And made (life) smooth for him.*
15. *Yet he desires that I should give more.*
16. *By no means, he has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelations.*
17. *Soon I will impose a spiraling torment on him.*
18. *He thought and he plotted;*
19. *And woe to him, how he plotted.*
20. *Woe to him; how he plotted.*
21. *Then he looked around.*
22. *Then he frowned and he scowled.*
23. *Then he turned back and was haughty.*
24. *Then said he, "This is nothing but magic from the past.*
25. *This is nothing but the speech of a mortal."*
26. *I will cast him into Hellfire.*
27. *And what will explain to you what the Hellfire is?*
28. *It leaves nothing; it spares nothing.*
29. *It scorches the mortal.*
30. *Over it are nineteen.*
31. *We have appointed only angels to be wardens of the Fire, and We made their number to be a trial for those who disbelieve; that those to whom the Scripture has been given may have certainty, and that the believers may increase in faith; and that those to whom the Scripture has been given and the believers may not doubt; and that those in whose hearts there is disease, and the disbelievers, may say, "What does God mean by this similitude?" Thus, God sends astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. None knows the hosts of your Lord save Him. This is nothing else than a reminder to mortals.*
32. *I swear by the moon,*
33. *And by the night as it retreats,*

34. *And by the dawn as it shines,*
35. *This is but one of the greatest,*
36. *A warning to humankind,*
37. *To him among you who wishes to go forward or remain behind.*
38. *Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds;*
39. *Except the companions of the right hand.*
40. *(They will be) in gardens; they will ask each other,*
41. *Concerning the guilty,*
42. *“What led you into Hellfire?”*
43. *They will say, “We were not of those who prayed;*
44. *Nor did we feed the poor;*
45. *And we used to enter into vain discourses with those who enter into vain discourses.*
46. *And we used to deny the Day of Judgment,*
47. *Till the Inevitable came to us.”*
48. *So the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them.*
49. *Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition?*
50. *As if they were frightened asses,*
51. *Fleeing from a lion.*
52. *Each one of them desires that he should be given pages spread out.*
53. *By no means, they do not fear the Hereafter.*
54. *This is surely an admonition;*
55. *So whoever pleases may heed it.*
56. *And they will not heed unless God wills (it). He is the Lord who should be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness. (74: 1 – 56)*

There are different narrations about the time of revelation of this Sura. One narration states that it was revealed subsequent to the revelation of Surat Al-‘Alaq (Chapter 96) but another narration indicates that it was revealed just after the proclamation of Islam had become public.

It seems from the narrative that the first seven verses of the Sura were revealed in the early days of the Message, because they set the stage for the public proclamation of the Message. These verses provided the psychological preparation that the Prophet (PBUH) needed to be able to convey the Message to Quraish. The remaining verses would have been revealed after the Message had become public because they describe the stubbornness of Quraish in resisting the call of the Prophet (PBUH) and the harassment and persecution that the Muslims received at the hands of the idolaters.

“*You, wrapped up in your cloak, arise and deliver and warn.*” This was a divine command for the Prophet (PBUH) to fulfill the undertaking that has been entrusted to him: to warn humankind, to awaken them, to rid them of the evil in this life, and to grant them salvation from the torment in the Hereafter. Then the command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH), “*And your Lord magnify.*” God alone deserves to be magnified. Then, “*And your garments purify.*” Purifying ones garments is a figure of speech in the Arabic language. It means the purification of the heart, behavior, and deeds. It is the purification of the psyche to become suitable for receiving the revelation. It is necessary for the person who is calling to the Message to be morally pure in

order to be able to ask others to rid themselves from the impurity of their sins.

*“And all abomination shun.”* The prophet (PBUH) has been known to have shunned all abomination even before he was given the responsibility of conveying the Message. His sound initial natural disposition protected him from indulging in any of the bad habits that were prevalent in the Arabic society at that time. The command then means that the Prophet (PBUH) should declare that all abominations are forbidden by Islam. Muslims should shun all these abominations.

*“And do not confer a favor to acquire more.”* This was a command issued to the Prophet (PBUH) to be altruistic in his endeavors. The Prophet (PBUH) should be prepared to make many and great sacrifices and it was not fitting for him to expect a worldly reward for these sacrifices. The final command was a command to persevere in pursuing his mission, *“Persevere in your Lord’s cause.”* The message to the Prophet (PBUH) was that the battle which he was about to embark on will be long and severe. It will require perseverance, steadfastness, and patience to see it through.

A general warning was issued to the deniers, *“And when the trumpet sounds, certainly, that day will be a difficult day, not easy for the disbelievers.”* The coming of the Day of Judgment will be announced by a trumpet that will hammer the ears. This day will a difficult day for the disbelievers.

A warning was then directed to a single individual from among the disbelievers. This individual had a major role in leading the resistance against Islam. The warning was a dire one and the verses paint a humiliating picture for that individual, *“Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created alone. Then gave him vast wealth, and sons dwelling in his presence, and made (life) smooth for him. Yet he desires that I should give more. By no means, he has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelations. Soon I will impose a spiraling torment on him. He thought and he plotted; and woe to him, how he plotted. Woe to him; how he plotted. Then he looked around. Then he frowned and he scowled. Then he turned back and was haughty. Then said he, ‘This is nothing but magic from the past; this is nothing but the speech of a mortal.’ I will cast him into Hellfire.”*

There are several narrations which indicate that the verses refer to Al-Waleed ibn Al-Mughirah Al-Makhzoumi. This man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and listened to him reciting the Quran. It seemed that Al-Waleed was touched by the Quran. Abu Jahl ibn Hesham, one of the chiefs of Quraish, came to know about this and was afraid that Al-Waleed would accept Islam. Abu Jahl was a wicked, scheming man. He wanted to embarrass Al-Waleed. So he pledged, in the name of Quraish, a great sum of money to Al-Waleed; if the latter promised not to go again to listen to the recitation of the Quran. Al-Waleed expressed his indignation saying, *“Quraish knows that I am one of the richest among them.”* Abu Jahl then told him that he should express publicly his rejection of what Muhammad (PBUH) was saying. Al-Waleed thought about it; he wondered what to say about the Quran. He said *“What could I say about the Quran? I am most familiar with poetry and the jinn inspired poetry. The Quran is different from the poetry that we know.”*

*The Quran is sweat. It is superior to all other known forms of expression.*” Abu Jahl was annoyed and told Al-Waleed your people will not accept you unless you make your rejection of the Quran public. Al-Waleed wanted some time to think about this. Then he came back saying, *“This is magic received from old magicians.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was told to leave this individual alone, God promised to deal with him directly. The verses mentioned above start by describing the bounty that God bestowed on this individual in spite of his expressed ingratitude. He was obstinate in his hostility. As a result, God promised to subject him to an escalating process of torment. The verses then describe the struggle of the individual to find something wrong with the Quran. He tried very hard but he could not find anything wrong with it, so he decided to make up something. He decided that it is magic. There was no logic behind his conclusion; his arrogance barred him from accepting the truth. As a result, he will be admitted to Hell. But what is this Hell, *“And what will explain to you what the Hellfire is?”* It is beyond human comprehension, *“It leaves nothing; it spares nothing. It scorches the mortal.”*

God appointed nineteen angels to guard it, *“Over it are nineteen.”* Who are these nineteen? *“We have appointed only angels to be wardens of the Fire, and We made their number to be a trial for those who disbelieve; that those to whom the Scripture has been given may have certainty, and that the believers may increase in faith; and that those to whom the Scripture has been given and the believers may not doubt; and that those in whose hearts there is disease, and the disbelievers, may say, “What does God mean by this similitude?” Thus, God sends astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. None knows the hosts of your Lord save Him. This is nothing else than a reminder unto mortals.”* They are angels. They do what they are told. The verse mentions that this number was given as a trial for the disbelievers. The idolaters of Mecca were always argumentative. However, this is a matter of the unseen and we have no way of knowing the meaning of this number except that which we understand from the Quran. The people of the Scripture must have had something in the Scripture that corroborates the story mentioned here. It was mentioned that was meant to make them certain about the truthfulness of the Quran. The believers’ hearts are always open to receive more assurances from the Quran. On the other hand, those who doubt and the hypocrites will always find a reason for doubt. God guides whomsoever He wills and lets whomsoever He wills to go astray. Only God knows His hosts, because they are part of the unseen.

*“I swear by the moon, and by the night as it retreats, and by the dawn as it shines, this is but one of the greatest, a warning to humankind.”* This is an oath by some of the signs of God in the universe. It evokes many feelings in the hearts of the believers. The oath was made to emphasize the gravity of the responsibility and to warn those who are heedless.

*“To him among you who wishes to go forward or remain behind. Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.”* Every soul is responsible for its own deeds. People are held accountable for what they advance for themselves. The believers will be given their rewards, *“Except the companions of the right hand. (They will be) in gardens; they will ask each other, concerning the guilty.”* They will be given the right to question the criminals, *“What led you into Hellfire?”* The

criminals will confess their crimes, *“We were not of those who prayed; nor did we feed the poor; and we used to enter into vain discourses with those who enter into vain discourses. And we used to deny the Day of Judgment.”* The disbelievers did not pray. This means they did not believe. The verse highlights the importance of prayer by referring to it as the symbol of faith. Prayer is a hallmark for the believers. The second crime is that they did not care for the poor and the needy. Feeding the poor is an act of worship. They approached the concept of faith in jest; they were not serious about it. The most important crime was that they did not believe in the Day of Judgment. This upsets all standards and values. Those who disbelieve in the Day of Judgment lose the goal that humankind should endeavor to achieve. Their lives become confused and chaotic until they die, *“Till the Inevitable came unto us.”* There is no chance for intercession after death, *“So the intercession of intercessors shall not avail them.”*

The following verses paint a scene describing the attitude of the disbelievers towards guidance. Their similitude in turning away from guidance is like wild asses fleeing an approaching lion, *“Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition? As if they were frightened asses, fleeing from a lion.”* This is their image: frightened asses fleeing a lion.

Not only their outward appearance will be humiliated but also their psyche will be confused, *“Each one of them desires that he should be given pages spread out.”* Their obstinate hostility was motivated by their jealousy. Why was not each one of them chosen to be a messenger and to receive a scripture? Another reason for their hostility was that they really did not believe in the Hereafter, *“By no means, they do not fear the Hereafter.”* This motivated them to turn their backs to guidance.

The Sura then concludes by a reminder, *“This is surely an admonition; so whoever pleases may heed it. And they will not heed unless God wills (it). He is the Lord who should be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness.”* The Quran is only an admonition. Those who wish to heed the admonition will be guided, and those who refuse to heed it will be left to go astray. Ultimately, it is God who will decide who will be guided and who will be left to go astray. He has the power and He controls everything. Indeed, He is the Lord who deserves to be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness.

## **Sura 75: Al-Qiyama (The Resurrection)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 40:**

1. *I swear by the Day of Resurrection;*
2. *I swear by the self-reproaching soul.*
3. *Does humankind think that We cannot assemble his bones?*
4. *Yes, verily; We are able to reshape his very fingertips.*
5. *But humankind wants to deny what is ahead of him.*
6. *He asks, "When is the Day of Resurrection?"*
7. *So when the vision is dazzled,*
8. *And the moon is eclipsed,*
9. *And the sun and the moon are brought together;*
10. *On that day humankind will cry, "Where is the escape?"*
11. *By no means, there is no refuge.*
12. *With your Lord alone shall on that day be the final destination.*
13. *On that Day humankind will be informed of what he sent before and (what he) kept back.*
14. *Humankind will be a witness against himself,*
15. *Despite the excuses he will present.*
16. *Do not move your tongue with it to hasten with it.*
17. *It is upon Us to put it together and to recite it.*
18. *And when We recite it, follow its recitation.*
19. *It is for Us to explain it (and make it clear).*
20. *But you love the fleeting life,*
21. *And you disregard the Hereafter.*
22. *That Day some faces will be bright,*
23. *Looking towards their Lord;*
24. *And some faces, that Day, will be gloomy,*
25. *Knowing that a great calamity will befall them.*
26. *When it comes up to the throat,*
27. *And it is said, "Who is the healer?"*
28. *And he knows that it is (the time of) parting.*
29. *And when the legs are entwined together,*
30. *To your Lord on that Day shall be the drive;*
31. *For he neither accepted, nor prayed.*
32. *But he denied and turned back,*
33. *Then went he to his family, full of pride.*
34. *Woe to you, and woe.*
35. *Again, woe to you, and woe.*
36. *Does humankind think that he will be left aimless?*
37. *Was he not a drop of sperm emitted?*
38. *Then he became a leech-like clot; then God fashioned (him) in due proportion.*
39. *And made of him a pair, the male and the female.*
40. *Is not He able to give life to the dead? (75: 1 – 40)*



The short Sura amasses a huge amount of facts, emotions, images, and scenes that overwhelm the heart. The Sura starts with an oath, *“I swear by the Day of Resurrection; I swear by the self-reproaching soul.”* God takes an oath by the Day of Resurrection and by the self-reproaching soul. The nature of the self-reproaching soul needs to be explored. Different scholars had different interpretations for the term, “self-reproaching soul.” However, we chose the explanation provided by Al-Hassan Al-Basri. He said, *“The believer always reproaches himself for everything he does; what he says and what he eats. But the transgressor does not care about what he does.”* The self-reproaching soul is a soul which continuously examines its deeds and expresses its regret for the sins it committed. It is a soul which is always in state of alert, afraid of succumbing to human weaknesses.

The idolaters of Quraish always had a problem with the concept of resurrection. This verse addressed their doubts, *“Does humankind think that We cannot assemble his bones? Yes, verily; We are able to reshape his very fingertips.”* Not only God is able to bring their bones back together but He is also able to reshape their finger tips so that they get back their original finger prints. This is a figure of speech which indicates that God is capable of resurrecting humans and shaping them in a form which preserves all their minute physical details.

The idolaters denied the concept of the resurrection because they were transgressors; they resisted any force that tried to restrain their desires and whims, *“But humankind wants to deny what is ahead of him.”* The way they asked, *“When is the Day of Resurrection?”* indicates that they thought it was not going to happen. The response to their question was a quick and an unequivocal illustration of scenes for the events which take place on that Day, *“So when the vision is dazzled, and the moon is eclipsed, and the sun and the moon are brought together, on that day humankind will cry, ‘Where is the escape?’ By no means, there is no refuge. With your Lord alone shall on that Day be the final destination.”* Three phenomena will take place on the Day of Resurrection: the eyes will be dazed, the moon will be eclipsed, and the moon and the sun will be brought together. The astronomical system will be disrupted. The people will panic. They will look for an escape, but there will be no escape. Safety and security can only be found with God. On that Day, the people will be presented with their accounts of deeds. Each one will testify against his/her own self, *“On that day humankind will be informed of what he sent before and (what he) kept back. Humankind will be a witness against himself. Despite the excuses he will present.”*

The following four verses were addressed to the Prophet (PBUH) giving him instructions regarding how to receive the revelations, *“Do not move your tongue with it to hasten with it. It is upon Us to put it together and to recite it. And when We recite it, follow its recitation. It is for Us to explain it (and make it clear).”* In the beginning of his mission, the Prophet (PBUH) was worried that he will not be able to retain the Quran in his memory, as Gabriel (PBUH) was reciting it. God told him that he should not worry. God will make sure that he remembers the verses which Gabriel (PBUH) will recite to him. In addition, God promised to explain the meanings of its verses, so that the Prophet (PBUH) will understand what the verses mean.

The verses continue to describe the scenes of the Day of Resurrection, *“But you love the fleeting life, and you disregard the Hereafter. That Day some faces will be bright, looking towards their Lord; and some faces, that day, will be gloomy, knowing that a great calamity will befall them.”* The verses reprimand the people for their love of the worldly life, ignoring the life of the Hereafter. The worldly life is only a fleeting life while the life of the Hereafter is the eternal life. On the Day of Resurrection there will be two groups of people. The group that worked for the Hereafter; their faces will be bright as they look towards their Lord. The people who preferred the fleeting life over the eternal life will have gloomy faces. They will be expecting a great calamity to befall them.

The narrative turns to another scene, the scene of a dying person, *“When it comes up to the throat; and it is said, “Who is the healer?” And he knows that it is (the time of) parting; and when the legs are entwined together, to your Lord on that day shall be the drive.”* When the soul reaches the throat, these will be the last moments of life. Those around the dying person will be trying to save him, *“Who is the healer?”* But there will be no healer. And when every method to save him has been tried and failed then he will be taken to the inevitable end. His deeds are then listed, *“For he neither accepted, nor prayed. But he denied and turned back, Then went he to his family, full of pride. Woe to you, and woe. Again, woe to you, and woe.”* It has been narrated that these verses referred to ‘Amr ibn Hesham (Abu Jahl). He used to assault the Prophet (PBUH) verbally and then go back to his family walking in arrogance. The verses mocked him and warned him of an evil ending.

Do people think that God created them in vain, *“Does humankind think that he will be left aimless? Was he not a drop of sperm emitted? Then he became a leech-like clot; then God fashioned (him) in due proportion; and made of him a pair, the male and the female.”* God created people to pursue certain objectives in life. This life is a period for humankind to be tested. Everyone will be held accountable for his/her deeds on the Day of Judgment. God created humankind from a drop of sperm. The verses then describe the stages of the development of the embryo. Finally, a well fashioned creature is born, sometimes it is a male and sometimes it is a female. Glory be to the Creator who created in the first instance. Is not He able to repeat the process again, *“Is not He able to give life to the dead?”*

## Sura 76: Al-Insan (Humankind)

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

### **Verses 1 to 31:**

1. *Has there come upon humankind a period of time when he was nothing to be mentioned?*
2. *Indeed, We created humankind from a mixture of fluids to test him; and We made him hearing, seeing.*
3. *We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or disbelieving.*
4. *We have prepared for the disbelievers chains and shackles and a burning fire.*
5. *The righteous shall drink of a cup whose mixture is camphor;*
6. *A fountain where the servants of God drink, making it gush forth abundantly.*
7. *They fulfill (their) vows, and they fear a day whose evil will be wide-spreading.*
8. *And they feed, for the love of God, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive,*
9. *(saying), "We feed you for the sake of God alone; no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.*
10. *We dread from our Lord a frowning grim day."*
11. *But God will guard them from the evil of that day, and will shed over them a light of beauty and (blissful) joy.*
12. *And because they were perseverant, He will reward them with a garden and (garments of) silk.*
13. *Reclining in the (garden) on raised couches, they will see neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor excessive cold.*
14. *And the shades of the (garden) will come low over them, and its fruits shall be made near (to them), being easy to reach.*
15. *Goblets of silver are brought round for them, and beakers of glass;*
16. *Crystal-clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes).*
17. *And they will be given to drink there of a cup (of wine) mixed with ginger.*
18. *A fountain there, called Salsabil.*
19. *And round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness); when you see them, you would think them scattered pearls.*
20. *And when you look, you will see therein bliss and a great kingdom.*
21. *Upon them will be green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver; and their Lord will give them to drink a pure drink.*
22. *(And it will be said to them), "This is a reward for you. Your striving shall be recompensed.*
23. *It is We who have sent down the Quran to you in stages.*
24. *Therefore, persevere waiting for the command of your Lord, and do not obey of them any guilty one or disbeliever.*
25. *Remember the name of your Lord at morning and evening.*
26. *And worship Him (a part) of the night. And glorify Him through the long night.*
27. *Indeed, these (disbelievers) love the fleeting life, and put behind them (the remembrance of) a grievous day.*

28. *We created them and made firm their make, and when We Please, We can replace them entirely with others of their kind.*
29. *This is an admonition, whosoever wills let him take a (straight) path to his Lord.*
30. *But you will not, except as God wills; for God is Omniscient and Wise.*
31. *He will admit to His Mercy whom He wills; but He has prepared a painful torment for the wrongdoers. (76: 1- 31)*

Most of the scholars are of the opinion that this Sura was revealed in Mecca. However, there are opinions that the Sura was revealed in Medina after Surat al-Rahman. The style of the Sura, the description of the bliss in paradise, the torment that awaits the disbelievers and the command to the Prophet (PBUH) to persevere are all signs that support the opinion that it was revealed in Mecca. The Sura is a sequel to Surat al-Qiyama. Surat al-Qiyama describes the horrendous conditions which the disbelievers will face on the Day of Judgment. In this Sura, the felicity and bliss that the believers will enjoy on the Day of Judgment are described.

Hawwa mentioned that the Sura has different names, of these we mention al-Dahr (Time), al-Abrar (the righteous), and al-Amshaj (Mixture).

The Sura starts with a rhetorical question, *“Has there come upon humankind a period of time when he nothing to be mentioned?”* The objective of the verse is to remind humankind of the origin of his creation; so that he may reflect on this fact and express his gratitude to the Creator who brought him to this world.

*“Indeed, We created humankind from a mixture of fluids to test him; and We made him hearing, seeing.”* The mixture of fluids may be a reference to the mixture of the male’s sperm and the female’s egg. Or it may mean the genes that exist in the fertilized egg. God created humankind to be tested. God gave humankind the ability to hear and to see so that he can learn and respond. Then God showed him the way to choose, *“We have shown him the way, whether he be grateful or disbelieving.”* The verses indicate that gratitude is synonymous to belief, because believers are always grateful.

The following verse describes the torment that awaits the disbelievers, *“We have prepared for the disbelievers chains and shackles and a burning fire.”* Then the narrative moves quickly to describe the bliss that the believers will enjoy, *“The righteous shall drink of a cup whose mixture is camphor; a fountain where the servants of God drink, making it gush forth abundantly.”* God calls the believers in one place righteous and in another the servants of God. These are all ways for endearment and honoring them. The narrative then moves to introduce the righteous, *“They fulfill (their) vows, and they fear a day whose evil will be wide-spreading. And they feed, for the love of God, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive, (saying), ‘We feed you for the sake of God alone; no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks. We dread from our Lord a frowning grim day.’”* They fulfill their vows. They take their promises seriously and they fulfill whatever they promised to do. They fear the evil of the Day of Judgment which will afflict the disbelievers, so they endeavor to perform their duties. They feed the needy, the orphan and the captive. They are willing to share their food with those who are in need. But they are not interested in a worldly reward. They do these acts of charity because they want to express their gratitude to God; hoping

that these acts will save them from the torment of the gloomy day. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“Protect yourself from Hell-fire even with half a date.”* Feeding the needy has dual purpose. It trains the believers to be altruistic and it also satisfies the need of the poor. God responded to them and not only saved them from the torment of that day but also gave them beauty and happiness, *“But God will guard them from the evil of that day, and will shed over them a light of beauty and (blissful) joy.”*

The verses continue to describe the details of their reward, *“And because they were perseverant, He will reward them with a garden and (garments of) silk. Reclining in the (garden) on raised couches, they will see neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor excessive cold. And the shades of the (garden) will come low over them, and its fruits shall be made near (to them), being easy to reach. Goblets of silver are brought round for them, and beakers of glass, crystal-clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes). And they will be given to drink there of a cup (of wine) mixed with ginger; a fountain there, called Salsabil. And round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness); when you see them, you would think them scattered pearls.”*

The scene is summarized in one verse, *“And when you look, you will see therein bliss and a great kingdom.”* But then the details of the kingdom are expounded, *“Upon them will be green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver; and their Lord will give them to drink a pure drink. (And it will be said to them), ‘This is a reward for you. Your striving shall be recompensed.’”*

The idolaters of Mecca did not resist the call to Islam only because they wanted to preserve the religion of their forefathers but also because they were afraid of the effect that Islam will have on their economic, political, and social lives. The chiefs of Quraish stood to lose a great deal of power, status, and wealth had they accepted Islam.

The Quran was revealed in stages to provide a continuous source of support to the Prophet (PBUH) during his long struggle to establish the religion of God, *“It is We who have sent down the Quran to you in stages.”* The verse stresses the fact that the Quran was revealed by God; and indicates that it was not revealed all at once but was revealed in stages. One of the objectives behind the gradual revelation is to provide a continuous support for the Prophet (PBUH). Then the Prophet's (PBUH) role is explained, *“Therefore persevere waiting for the command of your Lord, and do not obey of them any guilty one or disbeliever.”* There is no compromise between the truth and falsehood. So, the believers have to continue their struggle and to persevere. However, patience requires an arduous training program. The program is detailed, *“Remember the name of your Lord at morning and evening. And worship Him (a part) of the night. And glorify Him through the long night.”*

The disbelievers were heedless. They loved the pleasures of this transient world and were not aware of the disastrous result that awaited them, *“Indeed, these (disbelievers) love the fleeting life, and put behind them (the remembrance of) a grievous day.”*

God created these people in the first place; if He wills He can always replace them with others, *“We created them and made firm their make, and when We please, We can replace them entirely with others of their kind.”*

The Sura ends by opening a door to the mercy of God, reminding them of the opportunity that they have, *“This is an admonition, whosoever wills let him take a (straight) path to his Lord.”*

However, only by God’s mercy they can be guided, *“But you will not, except as God wills; for God is Omniscient and Wise.”* God has absolute power to guide whomsoever He wills and to let whomsoever He wills go astray, *“He will admit to His Mercy whom He wills; but He has prepared a painful torment for the wrongdoers.”*

## **Sura 77: Al-Mursalat (Those Sent Forth)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 50:**

1. *By those sent forth one after another;*
2. *Which blow violently;*
3. *And scatter (things) far and wide.*
4. *Then separate them, one from another;*
5. *And those who bring down the reminder,*
6. *To excuse or to warn.*
7. *Surely that which you are promised will befall.*
8. *When the stars become dim;*
9. *When the heaven is rent asunder;*
10. *When the mountains are blown away;*
11. *And when the Messengers' time has come.*
12. *For what day was it postponed?*
13. *For the Day of Judgment.*
14. *And what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?*
15. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
16. *Did We not destroy the former people?*
17. *Then caused the latter people to follow after?*
18. *Thus, We deal with the guilty.*
19. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
20. *Did We not create you from a base fluid?*
21. *Then We placed it in a secure resting place;*
22. *For a known term.*
23. *We determine; how excellent We determine?*
24. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
25. *Did We not make the earth a home?*
26. *For the living and the dead.*
27. *And We made therein firm and lofty mountains; and provided for you sweet water to drink?*
28. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
29. *(It will be said,) "Go to that which you used to deny."*
30. *Go to a shadow having three columns;*
31. *Offering no shade, and is of no use against the flame.*
32. *Indeed, it throws about sparks like castles;*
33. *As if they were yellow camels.*
34. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
35. *That Day they will not speak;*
36. *Nor will they be given permission to apologize.*
37. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
38. *This is the Day of Judgment. We have gathered you with the former people.*
39. *If you have a plot, then use it against Me.*

40. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
41. *The righteous will be amidst shades and fountains,*
42. *And fruits as they desire.*
43. *(It will be said) Eat and drink to your heart's content for what you used to do.*
44. *This is how We reward the doers of good.*
45. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
46. *Eat and enjoy yourselves for a little while, surely you are guilty.*
47. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
48. *And when it was said to them, "Bow down in prayer," they do not bow down.*
49. *Woe on that Day to the deniers.*
50. *In what message, after this, will they believe? (77: 1 -50)*

This Sura has very stern features, violent scenes and severe rhythm. The verses are like whips of fire. They are like sharp arrows carrying a series of queries, threats, and warnings directed to the heart. The Sura presents scenes from both this life and the Hereafter. The main argument of the Sura is about the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. It uses a similar style to that used in Surat Al-Rahman (Chapter 55). The verse, "*Woe on that Day to the deniers,*" is repeated at the end of each scene to maximize the impact of the scene on the psyche.

*"By those sent forth one after another; which blow violently; and scatter (things) far and wide; then separate them, one from another. And those who bring down the reminder, to excuse or to warn, surely that which you are promised will befall."* The Sura starts with this strong oath which emphasizes the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. The issue has been dealt with in many places of the Quran to address the denial of the idolaters of Mecca and because the belief in the Day of Judgment is an integral part of the doctrine of Islam. The oath is made with matters of the unseen. The words used in the oath are ambiguous which seem to convey the message that the unseen is beyond people's knowledge.

It has been narrated that the reference in these verses is to the angels, while there are other narrations which indicate that the reference is to the wind.

The verses then describe some of the terrifying scenes of the Day of Judgment, *"When the stars become dim; when the heaven is rent asunder; when the mountains are blown away; and when the Messengers' time has come. For what day was it postponed? for the Day of Judgment. And what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? Woe on that Day to the deniers."* These scenes were also mentioned in other places of the Quran. They all refer to the chaos that will occur on the Day of Judgment. All the cosmic phenomena that we are familiar with will be disturbed. This is the Day of Judgment, the Day which was appointed for the reckoning. This will be a terrifying day for those who denied the Message.

Some of the scenes from the history of humanity are then given, *"Did We not destroy the former people? Then caused the latter people to follow after? Thus We deal with the guilty. Woe on that Day to the deniers."*



Then the miracle of creation is reiterated, *“Did We not create you from a base fluid? Then We placed it in a secure resting place, for a known term, We determine; how excellent We determine? Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* God has determined everything according to a meticulous plan.

The verses take us on a tour of the earth, *“Did We not make the earth a home? For the living and the dead, and We made therein firm and lofty mountains; and provided for you sweet water to drink? Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* Did We not make the earth a home for people, during their lives and after their death? Did We not establish these huge firm mountains? These are matters that need power, planning and wisdom. How can they still deny?

The verses move to the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“(It will be said,) ‘Go to that which you used to deny. Go to a shadow having three columns, offering no shade, and is of no use against the flame. Indeed, it throws about sparks like castles. As if they were yellow camels.’ Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* Go and seek that which you have denied before, you will see it in front of your eyes. It is the shadow of the smoke of the fire of Hell. Its flames are composed of three tongues. It is a shadow that does not provide shade, nor does it protect from the heat of the flame. It throws huge sparks like houses built of stone; one follows the other as if they were running camels.

*“That Day they will not speak. Nor will they be given permission to apologize. Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* On that Day they will neither be permitted to speak, nor will they be allowed to make excuses for their sins. As if it is said to them, you have been gathered today to receive the judgment for your deeds not to make excuses, *“This is the Day of Judgment. We have gathered you with the former people. If you have a plot, then use it against Me. Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* If you can still plot and scheme then bring it about your schemes.

The narrative turns to the side of the righteous, *“The righteous will be amidst shades and fountains; and fruits as they desire. (It will be said) Eat and drink to your heart's content for what you used to do. This is how We reward the doers of good. Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* They will enjoy food and drink and gardens with shade and springs. This is the reward for the good deeds that they used to do.

The narrative turned to address the guilty in this life, *“Eat and enjoy yourselves for a little while, surely you are guilty. Woe on that Day to the deniers.”* They can eat and drink in this fleeting life but it will only be temporary. The scenes of the Hereafter and the worldly life alternate as well as the address to the believers and the deniers. The juxtaposition of the two states brings forward the contradiction between them.

*“And when it was said to them, “Bow down in prayer,” they do not bow down. Woe on that Day to the deniers. In what message, after this, will they believe?”*



## **Sura 78: Al-Naba (The Announcement)**

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

1. *Of what do they ask one another?*
2. *About the great announcement;*
3. *About which they differ?*
4. *Verily, they will soon find out.*
5. *Most certainly, they will find out.*
6. *Did We not make the earth comfortably stretched?*
7. *And the mountains pegs?*
8. *And We created you in pairs,*
9. *And made your sleep for rest,*
10. *And made the night a cover?*
11. *And made the day for seeking livelihood?*
12. *And We built over you the seven strong (heavens)?*
13. *And We placed a blazing lamp?*
14. *And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance?*
15. *That We may produce therewith grain and plant?*
16. *And luxuriant gardens?*
17. *Indeed, the Day of Judgment has an appointed time.*
18. *On that Day the trumpet shall be blown and you will come in hosts,*
19. *And the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors,*
20. *And the mountains will be set in motion and become a mirage.*
21. *Truly, Hell is lying in ambush;*
22. *For the transgressors a place of destination.*
23. *They will dwell therein for ages.*
24. *Nothing cool shall they taste therein nor any drink,*
25. *Except a boiling fluid, dark, and murky.*
26. *A fitting recompense (for them).*
27. *Surely they did not expect the reckoning,*
28. *And they denied our revelations,*
29. *And We have recorded everything in a book,*
30. *"So taste (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in torment."*
31. *Verily, the God conscious will triumph;*
32. *Gardens and vineyards,*
33. *And nubile women of equal age;*
34. *And a full cup.*
35. *They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying;*
36. *A reward from your Lord, a fitting gift;*
37. *(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between, the Lord of Mercy. They will have no authority from Him to speak.*
38. *On that Day the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by the Lord of Mercy and who will say what is right.*

39. *That is the Day of Truth. Therefore, whoso wills let him take a (straight) return to his Lord.*
40. *Verily, We have warned you of a torment near at hand, the Day when humankind will see what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever will say, "Woe to me, I wish I were mere dust."*

This Sura is the first Sura in Part 30, of the Qur'an. All the Suras in this part were revealed in Mecca except Surat Al-Bayyinah (Chapter 98) and Surat Al-Nasr (Chapter 110). All these Suras are short in length. They have short verses and quick rhythm. The verses are like hammers that hammer the psyche of the human being with the same message over and over again: wake up, see where you are going, and reflect on what you are doing; there is a God, there will be reckoning, there will be a Day of Judgment, and there will be Paradise and Hell. The verses of this part in general are very impressive from the linguistic point of view and they use expressions and images which are very eloquent. Very often figures of speech are used instead of explicit expressions.

Hawwa states that the Sura consists of four parts. The first five verses serve as an introduction; it is followed by two sections. The first section consists of eleven verses, and the second consists of twenty-three verses. Verse 40 represents the closure of the Sura.

In the introduction, a question is posed. Verse 40 gives an answer to the question posed in the introduction. The first section, verses 6 to 16, describes signs of the power of God. All these signs can be seen by humankind during their lives on earth. But, the second section, verses 17 to 39, describes the signs of the Day of Judgement. These are matters of the unseen.

The main theme of the Sura is the inevitability of the Day of Judgement. The Sura explores the signs of the power of God and warns of the consequences of disbelief. The argument could be: God the Creator, who has the power to create all these signs which can be seen by people in their lives, has the power to resurrect people after death and hold them accountable.

*"Of what do they ask one another? about the great announcement, about which they differ?"* The Sura starts with a rhetorical question, *"Of what do they ask one another?"* The answer is then given, *"about the great announcement, about which they differ?"* The verses renounce the idolaters' doubt about the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. They express the astonishment that such a question should be asked. The repudiation of the way the idolaters think is then followed by a warning, *"Verily, they will soon find out. Most certainly, they will find out."* The repetition of the statement magnifies the impact of the warning.

Al-Razi states that there are three interpretations for the term, "the great announcement." The first is that it means the Day of Judgement. This is the agreed upon interpretation. The second is that it means the Qur'an, and the third, it means the prophet-hood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Hawwa is in favor of the second interpretation. He connects between the ending of Surat al-Mursalat and the beginning of Surat al-Naba. Surat al-Mursalat ends with the verse, *"In what message, after this, will they believe,"* which refers to the Qur'an; and Surat al-Naba' starts with the mention of the, *"Great announcement."* He also refers to the statement, *"about which*

*they differ,*” saying that the disbelievers did not differ about the Day of Judgment. They rejected the concept of the resurrection. But, they differed about the nature of the Qur’an.

The first section of the Sura after the introduction, takes us on a tour of the universe citing signs of God that move the heart, *“Did We not make the earth a cradle? And the mountains pegs? And We created you in pairs, and made your sleep for rest, and made the night a cover? And made the day for seeking livelihood? And We built over you the seven strong (heavens)? And We placed a blazing lamp? And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance? That We may produce therewith grain and plant? And luxuriant gardens?”* The word that has been translated as “cradle” could mean that the earth was made easy for people to travel. This may be the first impression that one gets from the verse and that would be the elementary and simple meaning that one gleans from it. But the word cradle in Arabic has a much deeper meaning. The more knowledge we gain about the earth the deeper becomes the understanding of the meaning of this word. God made this earth a cradle for the life of the human race. It provides all what is needed for the maintenance and progress of human life. It may also suggest that the life of the human being on earth is only the tome of infancy of the human life. The Hereafter is the place for the mature life.

The mountains were made as pegs. The mountains do look like huge pegs. They look like the pegs which are used to hold the tent down so that it does not fall or fly with the wind. Similarly, the mountains were created to give the earth its well-balanced equilibrium.

The verses refer to another phenomenon; the fact that we were created in pairs. This was essential for the continuation of human life as we know it. But what makes a male, male? And what makes the female, female? It is the divine power that articulated the creation.

God gave us time for rest and time for work. Both are needed for the continuation of human life. People need sleep to rest their bodies and remove the stress that accumulated during the day. They wake up the next day ready for resuming another day of work and various activities.

God created seven strong heavens. The specific meaning of this is still unknown. The verse indicates the firm construction of these heavens, meaning they are built with strength enough to keep them from disintegrating.

God created the sun. It gives us light and heat which are necessary for the continuation of life on earth. Describing the sun as “Siraj Wahaj,” is a very accurate description; because the word in Arabic means a source of both light and heat. God sends down the rain to provide the necessary water for plants to grow.

The narrative then moves to talk about the Day of Judgment, *“Indeed the Day of Judgment has an appointed time. On that Day the trumpet shall be blown and you will come in hosts, and the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors, and the mountains will be set in motion and become a mirage.”* People were not created in vain. There is a purpose for the creation of people. God who created people for a purpose does not leave them to wander around aimlessly. God appointed a Day for Judgment. On that Day the universe as we have known it, will no longer

exist. The trumpet will be blown to announce the beginning of that Day. People will be gathered together. Can you imagine all the people from the beginning of life on earth till the last day gathered together in one place? This is a tremendous scene. The heavens will be opened as if it has gates. The mountains will be moved as if it were a mirage.

The narrative continues to describe the final abode that will be waiting for the tyrants, *“Truly Hell is lying in ambush, for the transgressors a place of destination. They will dwell therein for ages. Nothing cool will they taste therein nor any drink, except a boiling fluid, dark, murky; a fitting recompense (for them). Surely they did not expect the reckoning, and they denied our revelations. And We have recorded everything in a book. ‘So taste (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in torment.’”*

Hell was created to be the dwelling place for the tyrants and the transgressors. It is as if they went on a trip to the earth for a short while and then they will come back to settle in it. Their drinks are only boiling and murky fluids. This is a fitting recompense for what they did during their journey on earth. They denied God’s verses and rejected the concept of accountability.

But the God conscious will be triumphant, *“Verily the God conscious will triumph; Gardens and vineyards, and nubile women of equal age; and a full cup. They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying; a reward from your Lord, a fitting gift.”* These are images of physical pleasures which are used to symbolize the pleasures that await the God conscious. These are images which can be understood and appreciated by human beings. Their true meaning is beyond our understanding. In addition to the physical pleasures there will also be spiritual pleasures, *“They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying.”* This is a fitting reward from their Lord.

Another scene from the scenes of the Day of Judgment is described. The scene of Gabriel (PBUH) standing with the angels in front of God, *“(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between; the Lord of Mercy. They will have no authority from Him to speak. On that Day the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by the Lord of Mercy and who will say what is right.”* No one will speak except by permission, and when he speaks, he will speak the truth.

A cry of warning is then issued, *“That is the Day of Truth. Therefore, whoso wills let him take a (straight) return to his Lord. Verily, We have warned you of a torment near at hand, the Day when humankind will see what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever will say, ‘Woe to me, I wish I were mere dust.’”* This is the strong shock which may bring those who are still in doubt of the inevitability of the great event to their senses. They better believe before it is too late.

## **Sura 79: Al-Nazi'at (The Snatchers)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 46:**

1. *By those who snatch violently;*
2. *And those who remove gently;*
3. *And those who glide smoothly;*
4. *And those who overtake swiftly;*
5. *Then those who regulate the affairs.*
6. *The day on which the quaking one shall quake,*
7. *There will follow it the subsequent one;*
8. *On that day hearts will beat painfully;*
9. *While eyes will be downcast.*
10. *They say, "Will we indeed be returned to (our) former state?*
11. *Even after we have become rotten bones?"*
12. *They say, "This is indeed a losing proposition."*
13. *But it will be only a single cry,*
14. *And they will be awake.*
15. *Has the story of Moses reached you?*
16. *When his Lord called upon him in the Holy valley, Tuwa,*
17. *"Go to Pharaoh for he has indeed transgressed all bounds;*
18. *And say to him, 'Do you want to purify yourself?*
19. *And I guide you to your Lord, so that you should fear Him?'"*
20. *And he showed him the tremendous sign.*
21. *But he denied and disobeyed,*
22. *Then he turned away in haste,*
23. *Then he gathered and proclaimed.*
24. *He said, "I am your lord, most high."*
25. *So God seized him (and made him) an example for the Hereafter and for the former life.*
26. *In this is indeed a lesson for him who fears.*
27. *Are you more difficult to create, or is the heaven that He built?*
28. *He raised its height, then He perfected it.*
29. *And He made its night dark, and He brought out its bright morning.*
30. *And after that He spread the earth,*
31. *And produced from it its water and its pasture.*
32. *And the mountains, He made them firm;*
33. *A provision for you and for your cattle.*
34. *But when the overwhelming calamity comes,*
35. *The day when man will remember (all) that he endeavored;*
36. *And Hell will be made visible to him who sees.*
37. *Then as for him who transgressed,*
38. *And preferred the life of this world,*
39. *Hell will be his refuge.*

40. *But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from following its whims,*
41. *The Garden will be his refuge.*
42. *They ask you about the Hour, "When will be its appointed time?"*
43. *How can you tell?*
44. *Only your Lord knows its time.*
45. *You are only a warner for those who fear it.*
46. *The day they see it, (It will be) as if they had tarried but a single evening, or (at most till) the following morning.*

Hawwa indicates that the first fourteen verses of the Sura serve as an introduction. There are two main sections that follow. The first is comprised of the verses 15 to 26; and the second is comprised of the verses 27 to 41. The closure is given in verses 41 to 46.

Ibn Abbas (RA) indicated that it was revealed after Surat al-Naba. Its introduction sounds like a detailed explanation of the last verse in Surat al-Naba.

The main objective of this Sura is to remind the human heart of the Hereafter and its enormity. It stresses the fact that the Hereafter is an integral part of God's plan for humankind who were created to live on earth, die, and then resurrected to account for their deeds.

*"By those who snatch violently; and those who remove gently; and those who glide smoothly; and those who overtake swiftly; then those who regulate the affairs."* One of the interpretations of these verses is that they refer to the angels who remove the souls violently, they move energetically and swiftly, they glide in the higher spheres, they hasten to obedience, and they perform all the commands of God. Another interpretation indicated that these verses refer to the stars. A third interpretation mentioned that the first four verses refer to the stars and the last one refers to the angels.

Whatever interpretation we consider, the verses were meant to awaken the heedless and to alert them to the inevitability of the enormous event, the event that is described in the following verses, *"The day on which the quaking one shall quake there will follow it the subsequent one. On that day hearts will beat painfully; while eyes will be downcast."* The quaking refers to the shaking earth. It was mentioned that the "subsequent one" refers to the sky, which will be rent asunder. It was also mentioned that these two verses refer to the first and second blasts on the Day of Judgment. Either way they will cause the hearts to tremble and to beat painfully; the eyes will be downcast. People will rise from their graves and they will ask, *"Will we indeed be returned to (our) former state? even after we have become rotten bones?"* They will ask will we return back to our first life? They will realize that they are going to a different life. Those who disbelieved in the Hereafter will then express their disappointment, *"This is indeed a losing proposition."* Only one blast will sound and they will find themselves awake on the land of the assembly, *"But it will be only a single cry, and they will be awake."* These are all matters of the unseen which we will not try to delve into its details.



The following verses relate briefly the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh. The verses start by a question to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Has the story of Moses reached you?”* This is a rhetorical question which is used to introduce the story, *“When his Lord called upon him in the Holy valley, Tuwa.”* This must have been a majestic moment: God addresses one of His servants. This is part of the divine mysteries; how does God communicate with His creatures. Then the story continues, God commanded Moses (PBUH) to go to Pharaoh, *“Go to Pharaoh for he has indeed transgressed all bounds.”* Transgression and tyranny are unacceptable. They spread corruption in the land. God does not love tyranny, transgression, or corruption. So, God chose one of His servants to stop Pharaoh’s tyranny.

God taught Moses (PBUH) how to approach this tyrant, *“Say to him, ‘Do you want to purify yourself? and I guide you to your Lord, so that you should fear Him?’”* The first step that Moses (PBUH) was commanded to take was to invite Pharaoh to purify himself from the sin of transgression so that he would know the way to his Lord. Upon knowing his Lord, Pharaoh would become awed with his Lord and would abstain from displeasing Him. The verses move quickly from the scene of communicating God’s command to Moses (PBUH) to the end of the story. The scene of the confrontation between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh has been omitted, only the final result is outlined, *“And he showed him the tremendous sign. But he denied and disobeyed.”* Pharaoh denied and disobeyed.

The next scene in the story is the scene that demonstrates Pharaoh’s stubbornness and his obstinate refusal to follow the guidance, *“Then he turned away in haste. Then he gathered and proclaimed. He said, ‘I am your lord, most high.’”* He gathered his people and the magicians and displayed his arrogance and ignorance. The people listened to him either out of ignorance or out of fear. God seized him and made him an example so that people would learn the lesson, *“So God seized him (and made him) an example for the Hereafter and for the former life. In this is indeed a lesson for him who fears.”*

The narrative then addressed the idolaters of Mecca, *“Are you more difficult to create, or is the heaven that He built? He raised its height, then He perfected it.”* It is a question that has one possible answer. The One who created the heaven and perfected it is the most powerful; He is able to resurrect you after death. He made its night dark and its day bright. *“And after that He spread the earth, and produced from it its water and its pasture. And the mountains, He made them firm; a provision for you and for your cattle.”* He spread the earth so that people can use it for travel and to grow crops. He made the mountains firm to stabilize the earth. God produced water from springs so that people can live, plant, and raise cattle.

Raising the heaven, making its night dark and its day bright; spreading the earth, producing its water and its pasture are all signs of the divine power. These are all signs that are apparent to all human beings at any place and at all times.

The narrative moves to the Day of Judgment, *“But when the overwhelming calamity comes, the day when man will remember (all) that he endeavored, and Hell will be made visible to him who sees, then as for him who transgressed, and preferred the life of this world, Hell will be his*

*abode. But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from following its whims, the Garden will be his refuge.*” The life of this world is a transient pleasure. Only God knows how long it will continue. When it ends, the overwhelming calamity will strike. On that day people will remember what they have done during their lives. They will see Hell in front of their eyes. Those who transgressed will find their abode in Hell. But those who controlled their desires and whims because they knew they will be accountable for what they do will end up in paradise.

“*They ask you about the Hour, ‘When will be its appointed time?’*” This is the question that the idolaters of Mecca used to ask the Prophet (PBUH). The answer is, “*How can you tell?*” It is an answer which indicates how tremendous the Hour will be. Only God knows when it will happen, “*Only your Lord knows its time. You are only a warner for those who fear it. The day they see it, (It will be) as if they had tarried but a single evening, or (at most till) the following morn.*”

## Sura 80: 'Abasa (He Frowned)

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

### Verses 1 to 42:

1. *He frowned and turned away,*
2. *When the blind man came to him.*
3. *But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified;*
4. *Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him?*
5. *But for him who was indifferent,*
6. *You gave him your attention;*
7. *Though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself.*
8. *And as to him who comes to you striving hard,*
9. *And he fears,*
10. *From him you were distracted.*
11. *By no means! Indeed, it is an admonition.*
12. *Therefore, let whoso wills remember it.*
13. *(It is recorded) on honored sheets,*
14. *Exalted, purified,*
15. *(Written) by the hands of scribes,*
16. *Noble and righteous.*
17. *Woe to man! How ungrateful is he?*
18. *From what thing did He create him?*
19. *From a sperm-drop, He created him, and then fashioned him in due proportions;*
20. *Then He made the path easy for him;*
21. *Then He put him to death, and buried him.*
22. *Then, when it is His will, He will raise him up (again).*
23. *By no means has he fulfilled what God has commanded him.*
24. *Then let man look at his food;*
25. *How We pour water down in abundance,*
26. *And We split the soil open,*
27. *And produce therein grain,*
28. *And grapes and green fodder,*
29. *And olives and palm-trees,*
30. *And thick gardens,*
31. *And fruits and fodder,*
32. *Provision for you and your cattle.*
33. *But when the Deafening Blast comes;*
34. *On the day man will flee from his brother,*
35. *And from his mother and his father,*
36. *And from his wife and his children.*
37. *Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others.*
38. *Some faces that Day will be beaming,*
39. *Laughing, rejoicing.*

40. *And other faces that Day will be dust-stained,*  
 41. *Blackness will cover them.*  
 42. *Those are the disbelievers, the wicked.*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It comes after Surat al-Nazi'at. Hawwa points to the similarities between the two Suras. The last sections in the two Suras talk about the Day of Resurrection. These sections start with, "*But when the overwhelming calamity comes,*" in al-Nazi'at and, "*But when the Deafening Blast comes,*" in 'Abasa. The two Suras have verses which point to the power of God in creating suitable conditions on earth which enable human life to continue; the plants, the fruits, and the fodder. Hawwa also points to the theme started with the verse, "*You are only a warner for those who fear it,*" in Surat al-Nazi'at which is picked up in the beginning of Surat 'Abasa, "*Though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears.*"

The Sura is divided into four sections. The first section is comprised of the first ten verses. This section describes the interaction between the Prophet (PBUH) and Ibn Um Maktoum (RA). This event was used to establish one of the fundamental principles in Islam: people are not to be judged according to their material status but rather according to their level of God consciousness. The second section is comprised of the following six verses. It talks about the Qur'an as a reminder and a source of guidance for those who seek guidance. The third section is comprised of the following sixteen verses. It restates the principle that human life on earth is only transient. It reminds the human being of the simple miracles that enable human life to continue on earth. Finally, the last section, which is comprised of verses thirty-three to the end, describes some of the events of the Day of Judgment.

*"He frowned and turned away, when the blind man came to him. But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified. Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him? But for him who was indifferent, you gave him your attention; though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears, from him you were distracted. By no means! Indeed, it is an admonition. Therefore let whoso wills remember it. (It is recorded) on honored sheets, exalted, purified, (written) by the hands of scribes, noble and righteous."* This directive which was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) is a very serious issue; more serious than it would seem on the surface. A fundamental principle which establishes the worth of human beings. The relationships between people in any social setting are governed by many social, political, economical factors. These relationships are colored by the way society attaches status to individuals. It is customary, even in the so called classless societies, to classify people according to their social, political, and economical worth. Islam came to abolish these standards; a new standard was established, "*The most noble of you in the sight of God is the most conscious of God.*" (49: 13)

The incident referred to in these verses was used by the Qur'an as a platform to emphasize this fundamental principle. People should be classified according to God's standard not according to people's standard. One day, the Prophet (PBUH) was busy talking to some of the chiefs of Quraish about Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) sensed that the chiefs may be interested in knowing

more about Islam. He was hoping that if they adopt Islam, many of their followers would follow suit. Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) – a blind poor man- came to the Prophet (PBUH) to ask him about Islam. The chiefs of Quraish were resisting Islam and persecuting Muslims. Not only they prevented their followers to accept Islam but they also barred people from other cities to approach the Prophet (PBUH) to know about Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) was hoping to change this situation by convincing them to accept Islam. Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) came to the Prophet (PBUH) while he was busy talking to the chiefs of Quraish and wanted to learn from the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) was not happy with the interruption of his critical discussion with the chiefs of Quraish, so he turned away from him. However, Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) was persistent in his request. The Prophet (PBUH) frowned and ignored Ibn Um Maktoum (RA). These verses were then revealed to settle this issue. The Qur'an came to reprimand the Prophet (PBUH) for his behavior with Ibn Um Maktoum (RA).

The Sura starts by stating what the Prophet (PBUH) did, *“He frowned and turned away, when the blind man came to him.”* The speech was coined in the third person, to make it sound like a mild rebuke to the Prophet (PBUH). Then the verses continue to present the reprimand, *“But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified. Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him?”* The Qur'an told the Prophet (PBUH) that he does not know who will benefit more from the guidance. Then the tone of the reprimand was heightened a little bit more, *“But for him who was indifferent, you gave him your attention; though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears, from him you were distracted.”* You gave your attention to the one who was indifferent and you ignored the one who was sincere in his interest; although you are not responsible for guiding the one who is not interested.

The level of reprimand was then raised another notch, *“By no means!”* This should not have happened because this religion is simply a reminder, *“Indeed, it is an admonition. Therefore let whoso wills remember it. (It is recorded) on honored sheets, exalted, purified, (written) by the hands of scribes, noble and righteous.”*

This was the standard that God established for people in this religion. This standard was established while the call to Islam was still in the early formative years, when Islam was new and Muslims were weak and persecuted. After this incident, the Prophet (PBUH) used to greet Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) warmly; and he would say to him whenever he met him, *“Welcome to the man who was the cause for my Lord's reprimand.”*

*“Woe to man! How ungrateful is he?”* The verse indicates the horrible deed that humankind commits when he refuses to accept guidance and shows ingratitude to God who created him. Had he reflected on the way he was created, he would have expressed his gratitude to his Creator. But why does he behave arrogantly any way, did he forget how he was created, *“From what thing did He create him?”* He was created from a tiny little insignificant thing, *“From a sperm-drop, He created him, and then fashioned him in due proportions.”* God fashioned him in the best form. Then God made life easy for him; He made the way to guidance available to him; and He equipped him with the necessary tools and knowledge for the continuation of his life, *“Then He made the path easy for him.”* And when he completes his role on earth, God will put him to death, *“Then He put him to death, and buried him.”* God honored humankind and made the

earth, from which he was created, his final resting place rather than leaving his body to be preyed upon by wild animals. At the time that God has decreed, he will be resurrected to face his accountability, *“Then, when it is His will, He will raise him up (again).”* Humankind was created for a purpose and he will be accountable for his deeds.

*“By no means has he fulfilled what God has commanded him.”* The different generations of the human race since the beginning till the end did not and will not fulfill God’s commands. Humankind has great shortcomings. He never fulfills his duty. He did not remember the story of his creation nor did he express enough gratitude to his Creator. He did not spend his life on earth preparing for the Day of Reckoning. In addition, most people turned away from guidance and behaved arrogantly.

The Sura then asks humankind to reflect on his food, *“Then let man look at his food. How We pour water down in abundance, and We split the soil open, and produce therein grain, and grapes and green fodder, and olives and palm-trees, and thick gardens, and fruits and fodder, provision for you and your cattle.”* These verses describe the process of producing the food which allows humankind to survive. He should reflect on it. Does he have any control over this process? The Creator who created humankind is the one who miraculously developed this process.

*“We pour water down in abundance.”* Everyone knows about rain. We know now more about the water cycle and the role that rain plays in this cycle. Water coming from the sky is the first step in producing food. The second stage is, *“We split the soil open.”* Water goes through the soil and then the slender plant comes out through the heavy soil by the power of God and reaches out for air and sun to grow. These facts are seen and can be appreciated by every human being regardless of their level of education or knowledge. The third stage is the production of all types of edible things, *“grain, and grapes and green fodder, and olives and palm-trees, and thick gardens, and fruits and fodder, provision for you and your cattle.”* This is the story of the production of food. It has been created by God who created humankind. It is a miraculous process especially when we look at how the same pieces of land, irrigated by the same water produce different types of plants. All the characteristics of the plant have been preserved in the tiny seed that produces the plant. God has created this as a provision for humankind and their cattle.

*“But when the Deafening Blast comes; on the day man will flee from his brother, and from his mother and his father, and from his wife and his children. Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others. Some faces that Day will be beaming, laughing, rejoicing. And other faces that Day will be dust-stained, blackness will cover them; those are the disbelievers, the wicked.”* Then the end of life and its enjoyments come to conclude the different stages of human life on earth, which have been planned meticulously and deliberately. The conclusion of the Sura fits nicely with its beginning. It explains the way the two - the one who came striving hard and he fears; and the one who was indifferent and turned away from guidance - will be evaluated using the divine standard. The deafening blast will split the

air and pierces the ears to introduce the horrific scene that will follow. Everyone is for himself/herself. No one cares for anyone else even if they were his/her brother, mother, father, spouse, or son. The strong relationships that existed between these people are severed by the blast. It is psychological horror that will keep people apart from each other.

The verses then describe the conditions of the two groups. The believers will come having bright faces, happy, and joyful. But the disbelievers who rejected guidance and transgressed, they will have blackened faces covered with dust.

## **Sura 81: Al-Takweer (Shrouding in Darkness)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 29:**

1. *When the sun is shrouded in darkness;*
2. *And when the stars are dispersed;*
3. *And when the mountains are set in motion;*
4. *And when the pregnant she-camels are abandoned;*
5. *And when the wild beasts are herded together;*
6. *And when the seas boil over;*
7. *And when the souls are paired;*
8. *And when the female infant, buried alive, is questioned,*
9. *For what crime she was killed;*
10. *And when the scrolls are laid open;*
11. *And when the sky is torn away;*
12. *And when the Hell is kindled up;*
13. *And when the Garden is brought near;*
14. *(Then) shall each soul know what it has put forward.*
15. *I swear by the planets that recede;*
16. *Those that run (their course) and disappear;*
17. *And the night as it departs;*
18. *And the dawn as it breathes;*
19. *This is indeed the speech of a noble Messenger;*
20. *Endued with power, and is held in honor by the Lord of the Throne,*
21. *One (to be) obeyed, and trustworthy.*
22. *And your companion is not mad.*
23. *And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon.*
24. *He does not withhold knowledge of the unseen.*
25. *Nor is it the utterance of the cursed Satan.*
26. *Where will you go?*
27. *It is nothing but a reminder for all people,*
28. *For him among you who wishes to go straight.*
29. *But you will only wish to do so by the will of God, the Lord of the Worlds.*

This Sura may be divided into two parts. Each part deals with a fundamental principle of the principles of the doctrine of Islam. The first principle deals with the characteristics of the Day of Resurrection and the cosmic cataclysm that will accompany it. This cataclysm will engulf the sun, the stars, the mountains, the seas, the earth, the sky, the cattle, the wild beasts, as well as the human beings. The second principle deals with the essence of the revelation, the angel who brought it down, the Prophet who received it, the people who are being addressed by it, and the Divine will that created them and sent them this revelation.



*“When the sun is shrouded in darkness; and when the stars are dispersed; and when the mountains are set in motion; and when the pregnant she-camels are abandoned; and when the wild beasts are herded together; and when the seas boil over; and when the souls are paired; and when the female infant, buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed; and when the scrolls are laid open; and when the sky is torn away; and when the Hell is kindled up; and when the Garden is brought near; (then) shall each soul know what it has put forward.”* This is the scene of the cataclysm that will occur. It will change the whole universe as we know it. This cataclysm will engulf the planets, the animals both domestic and wild, and the human beings. All secrets will be uncovered and each human being will stand up to account for his/her deeds. These cosmic changes indicate that the well balanced, meticulously controlled universe will be destroyed and its parts will be scattered. This is what the Sura is trying to instill in the psyche of the human being: abandon these fleeting appearances and get connected to the eternal truth that will never change, God is the absolute truth, the Eternal.

We have no way of knowing the true nature of the phenomena described in these verses. They are part of the unseen. But they are signs of the great upheaval that the universe will suffer. When all these signs occur then each soul will be held accountable.

The second part of the Sura starts with an oath by the beautiful cosmic scenes, *“I swear by the planets that recede; those that run (their course) and disappear; and the night as it departs; and the dawn as it breathes.”* The oath is by the planets that move in their orbits, the night when it becomes dark, and the morning as it breathes. These are beautiful scenes that are being described using extremely elegant expressions that bring the scenes to life. Even the morning is described as if it were a living creature that breathes.

What is the oath about? It is about the truthfulness of the revelation, *“This is indeed the speech of a noble Messenger; endued with power, and is held in honor by the Lord of the Throne, one (to be) obeyed, and trustworthy.”* This Qur’an and this description of the Day of Judgment are the speech of a noble messenger, Gabriel (PBUH). He was chosen to deliver the Message. The verses then list the attributes of this Messenger. He is strong and is deemed noble by his Lord. He is being obeyed among the higher host and he is trustworthy. These attributes indicate the nobility of the Message, its enormity, and its majesty. They also indicate the amount of care that God bestowed on humankind when He chose a Messenger with these attributes to convey His Message to humankind.

*“And your companion is not mad. And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon. He does not withhold knowledge of the unseen. Nor is it the utterance of the cursed Satan. Where will you go? It is nothing but a reminder for all people, for him among you who wishes to go straight. But you will only wish to do so by the will of God, the Lord of the Worlds.”* The pagans of Mecca claimed that the Prophet (PBUH), whom they knew very well, was mad. Those who were impressed by the language of the Qur’an thought that it must have been the speech of a devil. They ignored the only logical explanation, that this Qur’an is God’s revelation. So the verses emphasize that the Prophet (PBUH) was not mad, and that he did truly see Gabriel (PBUH) at the horizon. The Prophet (PBUH) is to be trusted about what he says about the unseen. Finally, it is not the speech of a cursed devil, but it is a reminder for the people. It is a reminder that reminds people of the truth of their creation and the truth of the universe around them. It is a

universal Message to all people. The verses also remind them that the door to guidance is open for those who desire to be guided. However, it is all contingent on the will of God. People should understand that their will is not independent from the will of God, but it is part of the Divine will. Everything that exists in the universe existed because of the Divine will and it is controlled by that will. God gives people the freedom to choose as part of His will.

## **Sura 82: Al-Infitar (The Cleaving Asunder)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 19:**

1. *When the sky is cleft asunder;*
2. *And when the planets are scattered;*
3. *And when the seas are exploded;*
4. *And when the graves are overturned;*
5. *Each soul will know what it has sent before (it) and what it has left behind.*
6. *Humankind, what has lured you away from your Lord, the Generous?*
7. *Who created you, then fashioned you, then proportioned you?*
8. *He puts you together in whatever form He wills.*
9. *But you do reject the religion.*
10. *And, indeed, there are guardians over you;*
11. *Noble recorders.*
12. *They know all that you do.*
13. *Indeed, the righteous will be in bliss;*
14. *And the wicked - will be in Hell,*
15. *They will burn therein on the Day of Judgment,*
16. *And they will not be able to keep away from it.*
17. *And what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?*
18. *Again, what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is?*
19. *A day on which no soul has power at all for any (other) soul. The (absolute) command on that day is God's.*

This short Sura describes the cosmic cataclysm which was described in Surat At-Takweer (Chapter 81). But this Sura uses a different style and a different approach. Its verses have a quite rhythm that touches the human heart in a special way, a way of mild reprimand that embodies a threat. It describes the cataclysm scenes briefly without going into details. It can be divided into four parts. The first part deals with the sky being cleft asunder, the scattering of the planets, the explosion of the seas, and the overturning of the graves. All of these scenes accompany the realization of each soul of what it did. The second part introduces a touch of reprimand that embodies a threat. The third part explains the reason behind humankind ingratitude. The last part warns of the enormity of the Day of Judgment.

*“When the sky is cleft asunder; when the planets are scattered; when the seas are exploded; and when the graves are overturned; each soul will know what it has sent before (it) and what it has left behind.”* The cleaving asunder of the sky has been mentioned in several places in the Qur’an. It is one of the facts of the Day of Judgment; however we do not know how it will happen. It is part of the cosmic cataclysm that will happen on the Day of Judgment. The verses then refer to the scattering of the planets, the explosion of the seas, and the overturning of the graves. As these scenes are happening, each soul will realize the truth about what it did during its life on earth and

what it missed. It could be understood that the verse may be referring to the things that each soul enjoyed during its lifetime and the things that each soul prepared for the Hereafter.

*“Humankind, what has lured you away from your Lord, the Generous? Who created you, then fashioned you, then proportioned you? He puts you together in whatever form He wills.”* A mild reprimand is then issued to humankind. God blessed you with the human nature. He looked after you and educated you. Why have you been lured away from His path and did not fulfill your duties to Him? He is your Generous Lord who bestowed on you all these blessings. The verses then detail some of God’s blessings. He created humankind in a perfect form. Only God is able to perfect the form of humankind. However, humankind response to the kindness and grace of God is ingratitude. Humankind is addressed directly by God to evoke in him the feelings of recognition of God’s blessings and to direct him to reflect on these bounties that God bestowed on him.

The verses uncover the reason behind humankind’s ingratitude and shortcomings, *“But you do reject the religion. Indeed, there are guardians over you; noble recorders. They know all that you do. The righteous will be in bliss. And the wicked - they will be in the Hell, they will burn therein on the Day of Judgment, and they will not be able to keep away from it.”* You reject the concepts of accountability and judgment. This is the reason behind humankind’s arrogance and shortcomings. The heart that rejects the concepts of accountability and judgment cannot seek God’s guidance. The spirituality of the heart may attain high levels of transparency so that the heart becomes full of the love of God; for these hearts, obedience becomes a natural reaction. These hearts obey God because they love Him not because they fear His torment or they hope for His reward. However, you should remember that there are angels who have been assigned to each human being. These angels will observe and record the deeds of each and every human being. These angels are noble. One should be ashamed of doing something wrong knowing that he is being observed by these noble angels. The reward for the righteous and the punishment for wicked are then outlined. The righteous will be destined to the Garden while the wicked will be destined to Hell. They cannot escape it.

The nature of the Day of Judgment is then reiterated, *“And what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? Again, what will explain to you what the Day of Judgment is? a day on which no soul has power at all for any (other) soul. The (absolute) command on that day is God’s.”* Repeating the rhetorical question amplifies its psychological effect. On that Day, no one will have any power, everyone will be completely helpless. God will have the absolute power. God has the absolute power in this life as well as in the Hereafter. On the Day of Judgment, this fact will become glaringly known to the heedless who did not realize it in their worldly life.

## **Sura 83: Al-Mutaffifin (The Defrauders)**

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

**Verses 1 to 36:**

1. *Woe to the defrauders;*
2. *Those who, when they have to receive a measure from people, they take it in full;*
3. *But when they give a measure or weight to people, they give less than what is due.*
4. *Do they think that they will not be raised again?*
5. *To a mighty Day,*
6. *The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?*
7. *No, indeed! The record of the wicked will be in Sijjin.*
8. *And what will explain to you what Sijjin is?*
9. *A written record.*
10. *Woe, that Day, to the deniers;*
11. *Those who deny the Day of Judgment.*
12. *And none can deny it except a transgressor, sinner.*
13. *Who, when Our revelation is recited to him, says, "Ancient fables."*
14. *Verily, their hearts are covered by rust because of what they used to earn.*
15. *Verily, that Day they will be debarred from their Lord.*
16. *Then they will burn in Hell,*
17. *And it will be said (to them), "This is what you used to deny."*
18. *Surely the record of the righteous shall be in the 'Iliyin.*
19. *And what will explain to you what 'Iliyun is?*
20. *A written record.*
21. *Those who are drawn near (to God) shall witness it.*
22. *Truly the righteous will be in Bliss;*
23. *On couches, gazing.*
24. *You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss.*
25. *They will be given to drink pure wine, sealed,*
26. *Whose seal is musk - this is what the competitors should compete for.*
27. *And mixed with water of Tasnim,*
28. *A fountain from which those drawn near (to God) drink.*
29. *Surely, the guilty used to laugh at those who believed.*
30. *And whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at each other;*
31. *And when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting;*
32. *And whenever they saw them, they would say, "These people have gone astray."*
33. *But they were not sent as keepers over them.*
34. *But on this Day the believers will laugh at the disbelievers;*
35. *On high couches, gazing.*
36. *Have the disbelievers been paid back for what they did?*

There is a difference in opinion among the scholars about the place of revelation of this Sura. Some, like Ibn Mas'oud (RA) and al-Dahhak, believe that it was revealed in Mecca. While, al-Hassan and 'Ikrimah (RA) are of the opinion that it was revealed in Medina.

Al-Souti made an insightful comment on the fact that Surat al-Mutaffifin is preceded by Surat al-Infitar and is followed by Surat al-Inshiqaq. He said that Surat al-Infitar focuses on the events which will occur early on the Day of Judgment, while Surat al-Inshiqaq focuses on the events which will occur late on the Day of Judgment (the actual passing of the judgments). In between, comes Surat al-Mutaffifin which refers to the long duration of events in between the beginning and end of the Day, *“The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds.”*

Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of four well defined sections. The first section is comprised of the first six verses. This section describes the characteristics of the defrauders. The second section is comprised of the verses 7 to 17. This section describes the characteristics of the transgressors. The third section is comprised of the verses 18 to 28. The third section describes the characteristics of the righteous. The final section is comprised of the verses 29 to 36. This section describes the promised reward that the righteous will get and the promised punishment that the transgressors will get.

This Sura deals with one of the ills which was prevalent in the society at the time of the advent of Islam. Powerful business people forced their crooked ways of conducting business on helpless people. Islam sought to correct this injustice by inculcating high ethical values in the hearts of people. The Sura aimed at awakening the hearts and evoking the feelings so that people would accept the changes in the values which have been brought by the Divine Message.

The Sura starts with a dire threat to the defrauders outlining the punishment they will receive on the Day of Judgment. It describes the bad behavior of the disbelievers who went astray and were mocking the believers. It ends by a description of the rewards that will be given to the believers.

*“Woe to the defrauders; those who, when they have to receive a measure from people, they take it in full; but when they give a measure or weight to people, give less than what is due. Do they think that they will not be raised again? to a mighty Day,”* The Sura starts with a declaration of war on the defrauders. It is the same whether this was a decree that the defrauders will be destroyed or a mere invocation asking for their destruction. An invocation made by God is a decree. The verses explain what is meant by the term “defrauders.” These are the people who receive their share in full but they do not give people their due share. The verses express an amazement that these people subscribe to such an evil practice, *“Do they think that they will not be raised again? to a mighty Day. The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?”*

Considering the opinion that the Sura was revealed in Mecca, it is interesting that a Meccan Sura would deal with the issue of defrauding. The Meccan Suras usually dealt with the fundamental principles of the doctrine e.g. the belief in the oneness of God, the Divine will, the revelation, and the Hereafter. They also tried to relate ethical principles to the doctrine. But it was not usual to discuss a specific ethical problem, especially those related to normal daily life dealings. The discussion of these issues appeared later in the Suras of the Qur’an which were revealed in Medina, which dealt with the organization of the Muslim society in general. So it is interesting to find a Meccan Sura dealing with such topic. One may deduce several indicators from this.

Defrauding people of their due share must have been prevalent in the Meccan society at that time. It was practiced mainly by the rich traders. These rich traders monopolized the caravan trade between Mecca and Yemen in the winter and Mecca and Syria in the summer. They also established and controlled big markets, like the market of ‘Okaz which was held every year during the season of pilgrimage. The verses used the term “the defrauders” in reference to these rich traders who had the power to oppress the helpless people and treat them unfairly. This shows that Islam is a comprehensive religion. It encompasses all aspects of life. It aims at establishing a way of life based on ethical practices and sound moral values. These verses pronounce Islam’s disapproval of the social injustices that were part and parcel of the society at that time. This is remarkable since this was done at a time when the religion of Islam was still a fledgling call. A call that did not have yet the power to control the social life of people. Islam made the call to awaken the masses and to alert them to the injustice that they have been subjected to; it was not the opium of the masses.

This also explains the reason that the chiefs of Quraish resisted adamantly the call to Islam. They realized that Islam is not a mere belief that rests deep in the heart, or a testament of faith to be pronounced by the tongue but it is a Divine project that will destroy all the unfair practices on which their society was established. This project does not accept compromise nor does it allow the amalgamation between the Divine and the earthly values. Only tyrants and oppressors would object to the values that the Islamic project aims at establishing. They know that the Islamic project threatens their interests, their bad behavior, and the power that they usurped.

Those who pledged allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) also realized this. When the chiefs of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj came to pledge allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH), Al-Abass ibn Nadlah Al-Ansari said to them, *“Are you fully aware of the meaning of this pledge?”* They said, *“Yes.”* He said, *“You are pledging to fight with him against all people, red or black. If you think that you will renege on your pledge if your wealth is lost or your nobility are killed, then do not give him your pledge now, because this would be something that you would be ashamed of in this life and in the Hereafter. But if you think that you will fulfill your pledge even if your wealth is lost or your nobility are killed, then go ahead with your pledge. This pledge is the best thing for you in this life and in the Hereafter.”* They said, *“We will fulfill our pledge to him even if our wealth is lost or our nobility are killed.”* They asked the Messenger of God (PBUH), *“What do we get out of this?”* He said, *“Paradise.”* So they made the pledge.

*“Surely the record of the wicked will be in Sijjin. And what will explain to you what Sijjin is? a written record.”* In the earlier verses they were called defrauders but in these verses they are called wicked. The wicked people are those who transgress all limits. Their deeds will be recorded. However, this record is part of the unseen. This record is kept in Sijjin. The enormity of Sijjin is then expressed by the rhetorical question, *“And what will explain to you what Sijjin is?”* Naming the place of the record assures the addressee of its existence, even if the place is unknown to the addressee. The record will be kept intact until the Day of Judgment. Who are the wicked? *“Woe, that Day, to the deniers, those who deny the Day of Judgment. and none can deny it except a transgressor, sinner. Who, when Our revelation is recited to him, says, ‘Ancient fables.’”* Their transgression and wickedness lead them to deny the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. Their denial was caused by the rust that covered their hearts and prevented them from

seeing the truth. Their hearts died because the rust covered it and prevented the light of guidance to shine on them, *“No indeed; their hearts are covered by rust because of what they used to earn.”*

*“Verily, that Day they will be debarred from their Lord. Then they will burn in Hell, and it will be said (to them), ‘This is what you used to deny.’”* The sins covered their hearts and prevented them from connecting with their Lord in the life of this world so it is logical that they will not be able to connect with God in the Hereafter. They will be deprived of the pleasure of looking at God’s face. Thus they will lose the greatest joy that anyone can experience; the joy will only be experienced by those whose souls became pure and transparent, there will be no barrier between them and their Lord. The wicked will suffer the deprivation of looking at God’s face which is itself a great punishment. They will be admitted to Hell, and will be reminded that they used to deny it during their life on earth.

The situation of the wicked is then juxtaposed against the situation of the righteous, *“Surely the record of the righteous shall be in the ‘Iliyin. And what will explain to you what ‘Illiyun is? a written record, those who are drawn near (to God) shall witness it. Truly the righteous will be in bliss; on couches, gazing. You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss. They will be given to drink pure wine, sealed, whose seal is musk - this is what the competitors should compete for; and mixed with water of Tasnim, a fountain from which those drawn near (to God) drink.”* The verses start with the Arabic word, “Kalla” which indicates severe reproach and a command to the wicked to desist. Then the verse emphasize firmly that the written record of the righteous is in ‘Iliyin. This word has the connotation of highness and elevation, which indicates that the word Sijjin has the connotation of lowliness and abasement. The effect is also magnified by the use of a rhetorical question, *“what will explain to you what ‘Illiyun is?”* The righteous will be honored by the fact that the angels will witness their record. The righteous situation is then described. They will be in bliss sitting comfortably on couches. They look wherever they wish. Their eyes will not be down cast nor will they suffer any hardship that will prevent them from enjoying their surroundings. Their faces will be radiant and they will be drinking a pure drink. Their drink will be mixed with a fluid coming from a fountain from which only those who are drawn near to God drink. This is something worthy of competing for. Compare that with the fact that the wicked were competing for trivial pleasures of the fleeting world.

It is amazing that competition in matters of the Hereafter elevates the souls of all competitors while competition in matters of the worldly life debases the souls of all competitors. Competing for matters of the Hereafter purifies the earth and makes a better place for living while competing for the pleasures of worldly life turns the earth into a swamp in which worms eat each other.

*“Surely the guilty used to laugh at those who believed; and whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at each other; and when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting; and whenever they saw them, they would say, ‘These people have gone astray.’ But they were not sent as keepers over them. But on this Day the believers will laugh at the disbelievers; on high couches, gazing. Have the disbelievers been paid back for what they did?”* The images that the Qur’an portrays for the ridicule that the believers suffered at the hands of the criminals are taken directly from scenes that used to occur in Mecca. But one can see these images repeated at different times, and different places. The nature of the wicked criminals is the same at



all times and in all places.

The criminals used to laugh at the believers who may have been poor, weak, or unable to defend themselves. Part of this ridicule was expressed by winking to each other. Having enjoyed ridiculing the believers, the criminals would then go back to their families happy and content. They even had the audacity to call the believers, "*those who have gone astray.*" The Qur'an dismisses this by simply stating that they were not sent as keepers over the believers. On the Day of Judgment the situation will change. On one hand, the wicked are deprived of the pleasure of looking at their Lord; while the believers are enjoying the bliss, they are free to look around as they wish, and they drink a sealed pure drink. Today is the turn for the believers to laugh at the disbelievers and ask, "*Did the disbelievers get what they deserve?*"

## **Sura 84: Al-Inshiqaq (The Splitting Asunder)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 25:**

1. *When the sky is split asunder,*
2. *Obeying its Lord as it rightly must.*
3. *And when the earth is extended out,*
4. *And casts forth what is within it and becomes empty,*
5. *Obeying its Lord as it rightly must.*
6. *Humankind, you are verily ever toiling towards your Lord until you meet Him.*
7. *Then he who is given his record in his right hand,*
8. *He will receive an easy reckoning;*
9. *And he will return to his people, rejoicing.*
10. *But he who is given his record behind his back,*
11. *He will cry for perdition,*
12. *And he will burn in a blazing fire.*
13. *Indeed, he used to live among his people rejoicing.*
14. *Surely he thought that he would never return.*
15. *Indeed, he will. His Lord was watching.*
16. *I swear by the twilight,*
17. *And the night and what it covers;*
18. *And the moon as it grows full;*
19. *You will surely travel from stage to stage.*
20. *What is the matter with them; that they do not believe?*
21. *And when the Qur'an is recited to them, they do not prostrate,*
22. *But the disbelievers are in denial;*
23. *But God has full knowledge of what they hide.*
24. *So give them tidings of a painful torment,*
25. *Except to those who believe and do righteous deeds; for them is a reward that will never fail.*

The Sura starts with some of the scenes of the cosmic cataclysm which were detailed in Surat Al-Naba (Chapter 78), Surat Al-Takweer (Chapter 81), and Surat Al-Infitar (Chapter 82), respectively. But in this Sura the exposition has a special mood, the mood of submission to God, the submission of the sky and the earth in obedience and humility. The Sura then addresses humankind. The third part of the Sura describes cosmic scenes that everyone observes every day. The last part of the Sura poses a question expressing an amazement at the people who refuse to believe.

*“When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Lord as it rightly must. And when the earth is extended out, and casts forth what is within it and becomes empty, obeying its Lord as it rightly must.”* The rupture of the sky has been dealt with in previous Suras. What is new is the total submission of the sky to its Lord, expressing the right of God to Whom everyone should submit.

Another new expression is the extension of the earth. It may mean the extension of its area or its form as a result of the cosmic cataclysm. The expression indicates that this phenomenon is caused by an external agent. But the following verses describe the earth as if it were a living thing that casts forth what it has inside it and becomes empty. The earth will also be obedient to its Lord. The verses paint an image for the sky and the earth as if they were living creatures who listen, obey, and submit.

Then the verses address humankind, *“Humankind, you are verily ever toiling towards your Lord until you meet Him.”* Humankind, who has been created by his Lord in a perfect way and whom God blessed with a nature that makes him unique in this universe, will toil on earth till the end; when he will return to his Lord. To Him everything will return. Humankind can choose what is fitting according to the characteristics that God bestowed on him. He could be one of those who are given their records in their right hands. Those will receive easy reckoning and will return to their family rejoicing. The one who is given his record in his right hand will be happy and content. He believed and did good deeds, so God will be pleased with him. He will not be called to account. ‘Aisha (RA) said that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, *“The one who is called to account will be tormented.”* She said, *“Did not God say, ‘His reckoning will light.’”* The Messenger (PBUH) said, *“This does not refer to the reckoning, it refers to the presentation of the record. Whoever is called to account will be tormented.”*

The one who is given his record in his right hand will present his record and will be saved, and he will go back to his people rejoicing. But, he who is given his record behind his back will cry for perdition, *“But he who is given his record behind his back, he will cry for perdition, and he will burn in a blazing fire.”* The Qur’an usually mentions the expression *“given the record in the left hand”* to describe the method by which the disbelievers will receive their records. However, in this Sura a new expression is used, *“given the book behind the back.”* That may mean he is given his record in the left hand behind his back. However, we do not really know anything about the record and how it will be given. But the important thing is that he who attained salvation will be given his record in his right hand and he who will be punished will be given his record behind his back. This poor wretched who spent all his life toiling after sin, falsehood, and disobedience will realize his end and will face his destiny. He will realize that he will continue toiling without end. He will cry for perdition. He used to live rejoicing among his people thinking that there will be no accountability, *“Indeed, he used to live among his people rejoicing. Surely he thought that he would never return.”* But God was watching him, *“Indeed, he will. His Lord was watching.”*

The narrative then turns to scenes from the universe that we live in, *“I swear by the twilight, and the night and what it covers; and the moon as it grows full; you will surely travel from stage to stage.”* The twilight is a time for quiet reflection after sunset when the soul absorbs the beauty around it and the heart feels the sadness of parting ways. It is time when one feels the awesome approach of the night and the fear which is associated with darkness. The expression *“the night and what it covers,”* is a brief ambiguous expression that can be interpreted in so many ways. However, it paints a scene engulfed in serenity. Then one sees the magnificent view of the moon as it attains its full form. *“You will surely travel from stage to stage;”* you will suffer the change from one state to another according to the predetermined plan. The change from one state to

another is expressed in the form of travel to magnify the hardship that people suffer during the process of change.

Then a question is posed, *“What is the matter with them; that they do not believe?”* Yes, why do not they believe? They have seen all the signs of God all around them and they still do not believe. The Qur’an is beautiful, it evokes so many emotions when it is recited, but the disbelievers are heedless, *“And when the Qur’an is recited to them, they do not prostrate.”*

Then the reason for their heedlessness is explained, *“But the disbelievers are in denial; but God has full knowledge of what they hide, so give them tidings of a painful torment.”* Except those who believed and did good deeds, *“Except to those who believe and do righteous deeds; for them is a reward that will never fail.”* The exception mentioned in the last verse is a form of expression in Arabic called *“unrelated exception.”* The exception here does not mean that the believers were originally included in the group which received the bad tidings then they were taken out of the group. The style serves to draw the attention to what follows, *“for them is a reward that will never fail.”* They will be given a perpetual and eternal reward in the Hereafter.

## **Sura 85: Al-Buruj (The Constellations)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 22:**

1. *By the sky, with its constellations;*
2. *And the promised Day;*
3. *And the witness, and the witnessed;*
4. *Damned were the makers of the ditch,*
5. *The fuel-fed fire,*
6. *When they sat by it,*
7. *And were themselves the witnesses of what they did to the believers.*
8. *Their only grievance against them was that they believed in God, the Eminent, the Praised;*
9. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And God is Witness over all things.*
10. *Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance will have the torment of Hell. And they will have the torment of the burning Fire.*
11. *For those who believe and do righteous deeds will be Gardens, beneath which rivers flow. That is the great triumph.*
12. *Truly, the punishment of your Lord is severe.*
13. *It is He who originates and reproduces,*
14. *And He is the All-Forgiving, the Most Loving;*
15. *The Glorious Lord of the Throne,*
16. *Doer of what He wills.*
17. *Has the story of the hosts reached you?*
18. *Of Pharaoh and Thamud?*
19. *And yet the disbelievers persist in denial.*
20. *But God is encompassing over them.*
21. *It is a glorious Qur'an,*
22. *In a guarded tablet.*

This short Sura displays the basic principles of the doctrine. These are principles that emit far reaching lights. The main subject of this Sura is the story of the people of the ditch. A group of believers, before the time of Islam - it was said that they were Christians who believed in the Oneness of God – were being persecuted by their enemies. These enemies were oppressing tyrants. They tried to force them to relinquish their faith, but the believers persevered. The oppressors dug a ditch in the ground and they lit a huge fire inside the ditch. The believers were killed when the oppressors threw them in the ditch. The whole town was gathered to witness the incident. The Sura thus presents an admonition to the people and a support for the believers.

The Sura consists of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first eleven verses. This section narrates the story of the people of the ditch. The section ends with two verses; the first outlines the punishment for the oppressors and the second details the reward for the believers. The second section is comprised of the verses from 12 to 22. The section reminds people of the

power of God and admonishes them to believe before it is too late. This section represents an admonition for people and a promise of God's support for the believers.

The Sura begins with an oath, *“By the sky, with its constellations. And the promised Day; and the witness, and the witnessed.”* The Arabic word for constellations may actually mean the huge constellations in the sky alternatively it could mean the positions that the planets take as they move around in their orbits. The promised day is the Day of Judgment. On that day the deeds will be presented and they will be witnessed by everyone who will then be witnesses.

The narrative then moves to describe briefly the incident, *“Damned were the makers of the ditch, the fuel-fed fire, when they sat by it, and were themselves the witnesses of what they did to the believers. Their only grievance against them was that they believed in God, the Eminent, the Praised. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And God is Witness over all things.”* The Sura starts by cursing the oppressors. They have committed a heinous crime. They dug the ditch and lit a huge fire inside it. They were sitting watching as the believers were thrown into the fire. The only crime that the believers committed was that they believed in God. They believed in God, the Eminent the Praised. He has the power to do whatever He wills and He deserves to be praised in all situations and conditions. He is a witness to what the believers suffered. The incident shows an example of the perseverance of the believers. They were willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith.

This incident is not the first, nor will it be the last incident of persecution to be committed against the believers. The believers will always be subject to persecution and oppression. Unless the oppressors repent to God they will be punished in the same way, *“Those who persecute the believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance, will have the torment of Hell. And they will have the torment of the burning Fire.”*

The believers will be rewarded, *“For those who believe and do righteous deeds, will be Gardens; beneath which rivers flow. That is the great triumph.”*

*“Truly, the punishment of your Lord is severe.”* It is appropriate to mention God's punishment here to send a message to the oppressors that their power is negligible in comparison with God's power. It is He who originates and reproduces, *“It is He who originates and reproduces.”* The processes of originating and reproducing do not refer to the first creation and the resurrection only but they also refer to the ever continuous processes of originating and reproducing.

God is, *“the All-Forgiving, the Most Loving.”* He accepts the repentance of people. His grace is limitless. The servants would give anything for a word of encouragement from their human masters. Compare this to a word of encouragement from the, *“Glorious Lord of the Throne.”* Who does what He wills, *“Doer of what He wills.”* There is no comparison. What is more valuable than the love of God which He bestows on one of His servants?

*“Has the story of the hosts reached you? of Pharaoh and Thamud?”* These are long stories which have been narrated in details elsewhere. But here their mention is simply a reminder of their fates. What happened to them is an example of how the Divine will was turned into action. God destroyed Pharaoh and his army and saved the Children of Israel. God established the

Children of Israel in the land for a period of time to perform His will. God willed that the people of Saleh (PBUH) be completely destroyed and that Saleh (PBUH) and those who believed with him to be saved.

*“And yet the disbelievers persist in denial. But God is encompassing them.”* The disbelievers are always in denial. They are heedless of God’s power and knowledge.

This is a glorious Qur’an, *“It is a glorious Qur’an, in a guarded tablet.”* The Qur’an has been kept in the Guarded Tablet.

## Sura 86: Al-Tariq (The Night Comer)

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

### Verses 1 to 17:

1. *By the heaven and the night comer;*
2. *And what will explain to you what the morning star is?*
3. *The piercing star.*
4. *No human soul but has a guardian over it.*
5. *So let humankind consider from what he is created.*
6. *He is created from a gushing fluid.*
7. *That is issued from between the loins and the ribs.*
8. *Certainly God is able to bring him back.*
9. *On the day when hidden thoughts shall be made manifest,*
10. *Then he will not have might or a helper.*
11. *By the sky which returns,*
12. *And the earth which splits open.*
13. *Most surely it is a decisive word,*
14. *And it is no joke.*
15. *They plot and scheme.*
16. *And I plot and scheme.*
17. *So give a respite to the disbelievers, a brief respite.*

We mentioned in the beginning of this part that its suras hammer the psyche of the person with severe and strong blows. They try to awaken people who are deep asleep. These blows send one message, *“Wake up, look, think, and reflect. There is only one God. He controls everything. There will be a test, there will be accountability, and there will be either a severe punishment or a tremendous bliss.”* This Sura exemplifies these characteristics. It displays scenes of the piercing star, the gushing fluid, the sky that returns and the earth that splits open. There is a number of lessons that one gleans from this Sura. They are: each soul is under close observation, humankind will have no might nor helpers on the Day of Judgment, and the Qur’an is a decisive word not a joke.

*“By the heaven and the night comer; and what will explain to you what the night comer is? The piercing star. No human soul but has a guardian over it.”* These verses include a cosmic scene and a principle of faith. It starts with an oath by the sky and the morning star, then it poses a rhetorical question. This a familiar feature of the Qur’anic style. The night comer is a piercing star. It pierces the darkness by its light. The verse does not specify a particular star. This ambiguity is a way of generalization; as if it says, *“By the sky and all its piercing starts.”* Every soul is being closely observed.

The Divine project is then referred to by the request to reflect on how people were created, *“So let humankind consider from what he is created. He is created from a gushing fluid. That is*



*issued from between the loins and the ribs.*” This process was not known to people until the mid eighteenth hundreds. It is a huge leap between the beginning and the end, between the gushing fluid that comes out between the loins and the ribs and the mature human being with his highly complex physical, psychological and mental systems. This process shows that there is a major power which causes this transformation from the simple fluid to the complex human.

*“Certainly God is able to bring him back. On the day when hidden thoughts shall be made manifest, then he will not have might or a helper.”* God created him and took care of him; God is able to bring him back to life after death. This will happen on the Day when all what is hidden will be uncovered. On that Day, humankind will have no power nor will he have a helper.

*“By the sky which returns, and the earth which splits open. Most surely it is a decisive word, and it is no joke.”* This is another oath to ascertain that the Qur’an is a decisive word. The sky keeps returning the rain water, and the earth splits open so that the plants can come out. These are images of life. The water comes down from the sky and the plant pierces the ground to grow.

The verses then turn to address the Prophet (PBUH) and the few believers who were with him at that time, *“They plot and scheme. And I plot and scheme. So give a respite to the disbelievers, a brief respite.”* The verse reassures the Prophet (PBUH) and the few who believed with him. The disbelievers’ plots are in vain. God has control over every thing.

## Sura 87: Al-A'la (The Most High)

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

### **Verses 1 to 19:**

1. *Glorify the name of your Lord Most-High,*
2. *Who created in due proportion;*
3. *He who measures and guides;*
4. *He who produces the pasture,*
5. *And then turns it into black debris.*
6. *We will make you recite (Muhammad) so that you do not forget;*
7. *Except what God wills. He knows what is manifest and what is hidden.*
8. *And We will ease your way to the state of ease.*
9. *Therefore, remind, if the reminder should benefit.*
10. *He who fears will be reminded.*
11. *But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones,*
12. *Who will enter the great Fire,*
13. *Then therein he shall neither live nor die.*
14. *He will be successful who purifies himself,*
15. *And glorifies the name of his Lord and prays.*
16. *But you prefer the life of this world;*
17. *Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.*
18. *This is in the former Scriptures,*
19. *The Scriptures of Abraham and Moses.*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. It has been reported by Imam Ahmed that Imam Ali (RA) narrated that the Messenger of God (PBUH) loved this Sura. Imam Muslim reported that the Messenger used to recite this Sura in the prayers on Fridays and Eid. It is most fitting that the Messenger (PBUH) should love this Sura because it transforms the whole universe to a temple in which God is glorified. The Sura gave the Messenger of God (PBUH) glad tidings of God's guarantee that the Messenger (PBUH) will not forget the Qur'an that is recited to him and will ease his way to the easy state. The Sura summarizes the fundamental principles of faith: the belief in the oneness of God, the affirmation of the truth of the revelation, and the inevitability of the accountability in the Hereafter.

*“Glorify the name of your Lord Most High, who created in due proportion; He who measures and guides; He who produces the pasture, and then turns it into black debris.”* The opening of the Sura sends a universal call to glorify God which turns the whole universe into a temple in which God is glorified. In this temple the unique attributes of God are exhibited. God's glorification does not only mean uttering the words which glorify God but also implies the remembrance and understanding of God's unique attributes.

The main attribute of God that emerges from these verses is the attribute of God as the Lord. The Lord is the Educator and the Sheppard; two attributes which reflect God's kindness. The attribute Most High opens wide horizons for reflections and contemplations. The command in the verse is

directed to the Messenger (PBUH) first then to the believers. Every time the Prophet (PBUH) would recite this verse he would say, “*Glory be to my Lord Most High.*” When this verse was revealed the Prophet (PBUH) commanded the believers saying, “*Recite this while you are prostrating in the prayer.*” God created everything and perfected it. God assigned to each one of His creatures its mission and prepared it to accomplish that mission. One can see this fact clearly in all the creations of God.

God produced all plants and made each one of them to benefit some of His creatures. This verse is more encompassing than just the pasture for cattle. It encompasses all the plants that God made to feed each and every creature that God created. Plants start first having green color then they shrivel and become darker in color. In either case it could be useful as a food for some creatures. The mention of the plants alludes to the fact that each sowing has a harvest and each life has an end, which fits with the verses, “*But you prefer the life of this world; although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.*” The life of this world is like a pasture and it will eventually shrivel but the Hereafter is the eternal life.

God gave His Messenger (PBUH) this great glad tidings, “*We will make you recite (Muhammad) so that you do not forget; except what God wills. He knows what is manifest and what is hidden. And We will ease your way to the state of ease.*” The glad tidings started by the removal of the responsibility for memorizing the Qur’an off the shoulders of the Prophet (PBUH). He only needs to recite, and God will ensure that the Qur’an is committed to the Prophet’s memory. It is also a glad tidings to the Muslims because it reassures them that the Qur’an has been protected by God. In this verse as well as in any other place in the Qur’an where a firm promise or a perpetual law is mentioned, a reference is made to the will of God, “*except what God wills.*” Everything is controlled by the will of God. God knows everything and therefore decides when the exception should take place.

The second piece of glad tidings is, “*And We will ease your way to the state of ease.*” It is a glad tidings for the Prophet (PBUH) and to the Muslims as well. The verse confirms the essence of the religion of Islam. It came to harmonize the life of the human being with the whole universe. The two words in Arabic which have been translated as, “*And We will ease your way to the state of ease.*” Embodiment of one of the fundamental facts of the doctrine of Islam and the universe. It connects the disposition of the Messenger (PBUH) with the essence of the Message and the reality of the universe. God created the universe with ease and made it move forward with ease until it reaches its end with ease.

When God eases someone’s way to the state of ease, he will live his life with ease moving in harmony with the whole universe approaching God. He will experience ease in all aspects of his life. ‘Aisha (RA) said that whenever the Prophet (PBUH) had the chance to choose between two things, he always chose the easier of the two. The sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) which urges ease, tolerance, and gentleness in handling all affairs are countless. Even in naming names he would choose the easy names. These things show that he was truly created in a state of ease. The Prophet (PBUH) was created this way so that he would be able to convey the Message to the world in an easy way, so that ease would be one of the characteristics of this Message.

The Qur'an describes the Prophet (PBUH) saying, *"We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds."* (21: 107) *"Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and prohibits them from what is wrong and makes lawful for them what is good and forbids them from what is evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them."* (7: 157) Thus, indicating that the Prophet (PBUH) was sent to make things easy for people. The easy nature of the Message was also described, *"We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?"* (54: 22) *"God does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you."* (5: 6) *"On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear"* (2: 286) The message of Islam came to make life easy for people not to make it difficult. Thus, the essence of the Message connects with the disposition of the Messenger in promoting ease.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded, *"Therefore remind, if the reminder should benefit."* The reminder is always of benefit to someone. There will always be someone who would listen and benefit from the reminder. So this was the task of the Prophet (PBUH). He should remind, but it is up to the people to benefit from the reminder, *"He who fears will be reminded. But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones, who will enter the great Fire, then therein he shall neither live nor die. He will be successful who purifies himself, and glorifies the name of his Lord and prays."* Those who have hearts looking for guidance and fear the wrath of their Lord will benefit from the reminder. But the wretched will turn away from the reminder. He will not listen and will not benefit. His end will be in Hell. He will be wretched because death will not relieve him of the torment, and life will be full of agony. On the other side we find the successful who purified himself; who remembered the name of his Lord, and prayed.

The reason for unhappiness is then given, *"But you prefer the life of this world, although the Hereafter is better and more lasting."* Preferring the life of this world over the Hereafter is the source of all evils because it turns people away from the remembrance of God.

The Sura is concluded by referring to the authenticity and continuity of the Message, *"This is in the former Scriptures, the Scriptures of Abraham and Moses."* The verses of this Sura stated the fundamentals of the Message which have been mentioned in the early Scriptures of Abraham (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH). This indicates that there is only one truth and one Message both came from a single source, your Lord Most High, who created in due proportion.

## **Sura 88: Al-Ghashiya (The Overwhelming Event)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 26:**

1. *Has the story of the overwhelming event reached you?*
2. *On that Day some faces will be downcast,*
3. *Toiling, weary,*
4. *Scorched by burning fire,*
5. *Given to drink from a boiling spring,*
6. *No food will there be for them except thorns,*
7. *Which will neither nourish nor satisfy hunger.*
8. *On that Day other faces will be radiant,*
9. *Pleased with their endeavor,*
10. *In a lofty Garden,*
11. *Where they will hear no vain talk,*
12. *Wherein is a flowing spring,*
13. *Wherein are raised couches,*
14. *And goblets set at hand.*
15. *And cushions set in a row,*
16. *And carpets spread out.*
17. *Do they not look at the camels, how they are created?*
18. *And at the sky, how it is raised high?*
19. *And at the mountains, how they are firmly fixed?*
20. *And at the earth, how it is spread out?*
21. *Therefore, remind them, you are only a reminder.*
22. *You are not a controller over them.*
23. *But if any turns away and disbelieves;*
24. *God will punish him with the greatest torment.*
25. *Surely to Us is their return,*
26. *And upon Us rests their reckoning.*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. Hawwa suggests that the Sura is composed of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first sixteen verses; and the second section is comprised of verses seventeen to twenty-six. The first section describes the torment that the disbelievers should expect on the Day of Judgment; and the bliss that the believers will enjoy on that Day. The second section, discusses the signs of the power of God and it also clarifies the role of the Prophet (PBUH).

This Sura has a deep calm rhythm that induces people to think, reflect, and hope. It also evokes feelings of fear and apprehension of the reckoning on the Day of Reckoning. It takes the human heart on two tours; one around the Hereafter, its vast universe and its impressive scenes; the other is around the signs of God in the vast universe exposed to everyone to see. At the end it reminds people with the limitless power of God and the inevitability of the reckoning.

*“Has the story of the overwhelming event reached you?”* The Sura starts with this rhetorical question to bring the hearts back to God, to remind them with His signs, and to remind them of the inevitability of the reckoning. The Day of Judgment is given a new description, the overwhelming event. This is the calamity that will overwhelm the people with its horror. The question is addressed in the first place to the Prophet (PBUH) but it is also addressed to anyone who recites the Qur’an or listens to it being recited.

*“On that Day some faces will be downcast, toiling, weary, scorched by burning fire, given to drink from a boiling spring, no food will there be for them except thorns, which will neither nourish nor satisfy hunger.”* The Sura starts with the description of the scenes of torment, which is more fitting to the title. On that Day, some faces will look humiliated and exhausted. They worked hard but they only ended with a great loss. They worked hard for the benefit of the worldly life and did not work for the sake of God. They did not achieve happiness in the worldly life and they lost the reward in the Hereafter. They will be burnt in Hell, drinking boiling water and eating thorns or fruits from a tree that grows in Hell. It is obvious that we have no way of perceiving the nature of the torment in the Hereafter. However, these descriptions give us an idea that the torment in the Hereafter is beyond our imagination. It is a torment that combines humiliation, weakness, disappointment, and sorts of physical agony.

On the other side, we find a description of the bliss, *“On that Day other faces will be radiant, pleased with their endeavor, in a lofty Garden, where they will hear no vain talk, wherein is a flowing spring, wherein are raised couches, and goblets set at hand, and cushions set in a row, and carpets spread out.”* Here are faces which are radiant with the light of bliss, pleased with their endeavors, and enjoying what they received. They will be in a lofty garden, lofty in its place and lofty in its rank. They will not listen to vain talk. They will have a flowing spring. They will be resting on high couches, drinking from goblets within easy reach. They will be reclining on cushions. These are all signs of affluence and comfort that people are familiar with. They are only mentioned to give the people a taste of the pleasures of paradise.

*“Do they not look at the camels, how they are created? And at the sky, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are firmly fixed? And at the earth, how it is spread out?”* These four short verses cite examples of the environment that the Arabs were familiar with. In addition, they describe some of the examples of God’s creation. The verses invite people to reflect on the miracle behind each of these creations.

The Sura concludes by an address to the Prophet (PBUH) defining his mission, *“Therefore, remind them, you are only a reminder. You are not a controller over them.”* The Prophet’s (PBUH) task was to remind. He should remind people of the Hereafter using God’s signs in the universe. The Prophet (PBUH) was not sent as a controller or keeper over people. He could not control the hearts of people. Only God can control people’s hearts. God will punish those who will turn away, *“But if any turns away and disbelieves; God will punish him with the greatest torment. Surely to Us is their return, and upon Us rests their reckoning.”* Certainly they will all return to God and He will reward each one appropriately.

Religion cannot be enforced by authority, power, or force. Religion is a personal choice. That choice will be judged by God on the Day of Judgement.

## **Sura 89: Al-Fajr (The Dawn)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 30:**

1. *By the Dawn,*
2. *And the ten nights,*
3. *And the even and the odd,*
4. *And the night as it departs,*
5. *Is there, in this, an oath for a rational man?*
6. *Have you considered how did your Lord deal with (the tribe of) A'ad,*
7. *Of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars,*
8. *The like of which was not created in the land;*
9. *And with the (tribe of) Thamud, who carved rocks in the valley;*
10. *And with Pharaoh, the owner of the stakes?*
11. *They all transgressed all bounds in the land,*
12. *And spread corruption therein.*
13. *Therefore, did your Lord pour on them a scourge of torment.*
14. *Your Lord is ever watchful.*
15. *As for humankind, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and makes him lead an easy life, he says, "My Lord has honored me."*
16. *But when He tries him, restricting his subsistence for him, then he says, "My Lord has humiliated me."*
17. *No indeed, you do not honor orphans,*
18. *Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor,*
19. *And you devour inheritance with greed,*
20. *And you love wealth with inordinate love.*
21. *No indeed, when the earth is pounded and crushed,*
22. *And your Lord comes, and the angels, rank upon rank,*
23. *And Hell, that Day, is brought near, on that Day will humankind remember, but how will that remembrance profit him?*
24. *He will say, "Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for (this) my life?"*
25. *For, on that Day, no one will torment as He torments,*
26. *And no one will bind as He binds.*
27. *But as for you, tranquil soul,*
28. *Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing,*
29. *So enter among My servants,*
30. *And enter into My garden.*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of three sections. The first section is comprised of the first fourteen verses. It provides a warning and admonition for people. The second section is comprised of verses fifteen to twenty. This section describes some of the traits of humankind; and their attitudes towards affluence and adversity. The third section is comprised of verses twenty-one to thirty. The section describes very briefly the punishment for the disbelievers and the reward for the believers.



*“By the Dawn, and the ten nights, and the even and the odd, and the night as it departs, is there in this an oath for a rational man?”* The Sura starts with an oath using gentle and familiar scenes. Dawn is the beginning of the daily life, a time for ease, happiness, and friendship. There are several narrations about the meaning of the ten nights. It may be a reference to the first ten nights of the month of Zul-Hijja, the first ten nights of the month of Muharram, or the last ten nights of the month of Ramadan. The fact that the Sura did not specify which ten nights were meant makes the mystery more effective and intriguing. Only God knows which ten nights are referred to in this verse; but God has chosen these nights and attached special significance to them. The even and the odd refer to the prayer; this brings the spirit of worship to the scene. Then the night that departs as if it were a living creature. These are not mere words but they are like the soft breeze that massages the conscious to evoke in it feelings of appreciation of the beauty of nature. These oaths lead to a rhetorical question, *“Is there, in this, an oath for a rational man?”* This oath should be convincing to anyone who is able to think.

*“Have you considered how did your Lord deal with (the tribe of) A'ad, of the (city of) Iram, with lofty pillars, the like of which was not created in the land; and with the (tribe of) Thamud, who carved rocks in the valley; and with Pharaoh, the owner of the stakes? They all transgressed all bounds in the land, and spread corruption therein. Therefore, did your Lord pour on them a scourge of torment. Your Lord is ever watchful.”* This style which uses a questioning format is more effective in attracting the attention. The questions were posed to the Prophet (PBUH) initially, but they are also addressed to everyone. Using the term, *“Your Lord,”* is a form of endearment, which was meant to reassure the Muslims who were being persecuted in Mecca at the time.

The verses brought together the stories of the tyrants who were known in the old history. The verses outlined, how God destroyed them all when they transgressed and spread corruption in the land. God is ever watching. He sees people, holds them accountable, and rewards or punishes according to accurate standards that do not err nor inflect injustice on any one.

*“As for humankind, when his Lord tries him, then treats him with honor and makes him lead an easy life, he says, ‘My Lord has honored me.’ But when He tries him, restricting his subsistence for him, then he says, ‘My Lord has humiliated me.’”* This is the human perception of how God treats people. The humankind does not have the proper understanding of the rationale behind God’s trials. He thinks that his provision is closely related to his status in the sight of God. If he gets a bigger provision, he thinks that this is a sign that God has chosen him. But when his provision is restricted, he thinks that he is being punished. He is mistaken on both counts. Restricting the provision is a test in perseverance. Enlarging the provision is a test in expressing gratitude. A person whose heart is devoid of belief does not understand the rationale behind restricting or enlarging the provision. But people whose hearts are full of faith they understand the rationale. They try to cope with the trials in either case, because they understand that trials, whether by affluence or adversity, are amply rewarded by God. They feel secure in both cases because they know that whatever they are facing, has been decreed by God.

*“No indeed, you do not honor orphans, nor do you urge one another to feed the poor, and you devour inheritance with greed, and you love wealth with inordinate love.”* No, it is not as you think that the condition of provision is related to one’s status in the sight of God. But you do not endeavor to do the things that please God. You do not honor the orphan nor do you urge each other to feed the needy. You devour inheritance and you love wealth passionately. These bad characters were prevalent in the Meccan society before Islam. The verses condemned such behavior and urged people to rid themselves of these vices.

*“No indeed, when the earth is pounded and crushed, and your Lord comes, and the angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought near, on that Day will humankind remember, but how will that remembrance profit him? He will say, ‘Would that I had sent forth (good deeds) for (this) my life?’ For, that Day, no one will torment as He torments, and no one will bind as He binds.”* These verses describe scenes from the Day of Judgment as a warning. The earth will be pounded and crushed as part of the cataclysm that will accompany the Day of Judgment. The coming of God and the angels is part of the unseen. But it fills the heart with awe and fear. The same can be said about bringing Hell near. On that Day the heedless will regret the lost opportunity, but it will be too late.

In the midst of this horrific scenes, there will be tranquil and secure souls. These are the souls of those who were referred to in Surat al-Ghashiya, *“On that Day other faces will be radiant”*. They will be addressed by the Divine host, *“But as for you tranquil soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased (with him), well-pleasing, so enter among My servants, and enter into My garden.”* The verse describes a scene of serenity, mercy, and security.

## Sura 90: Al-Balad (The City)

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

### **Verses 1 to 20:**

1. *I swear by this city,*
2. *And you are a resident of this city;*
3. *And the father and what he fathered.*
4. *Verily We have created humankind for toil and struggle.*
5. *Does he think that no one has power over him?*
6. *He will say, "I have wasted much wealth."*
7. *Does he think that no one sees him?*
8. *Did We not give him two eyes?*
9. *And a tongue, and a pair of lips?*
10. *And We showed him the two ways?*
11. *But he would not attempt the uphill road,*
12. *And what will explain to you what the uphill road is?*
13. *(It is) freeing a slave;*
14. *Or giving food on a day of hunger,*
15. *To an orphan near of kin,*
16. *Or to a poor man in misery,*
17. *Then he will be of those who believe, and enjoin perseverance, and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion.*
18. *These are the people of the right hand.*
19. *But those who disbelieve in Our revelations, their place will be on the left hand.*
20. *And the Fire will be closed on them.*

The Sura starts with an oath which emphasizes the holiness of the city of Mecca. God honored His Prophet (PBUH) and made him a resident of this Holy city. The Sacred House is also honored by having the Prophet (PBUH) as a resident in this city. The oath that God makes by the Holy city and the one residing in it amplifies the greatness and the sacredness of the city. This exposes the ugliness of the behavior of the disbelievers in treating the Prophet (PBUH) and the Muslims. The disbelievers claimed that they were the protectors of the Sacred House, but their behavior desecrated the sanctity of the House. They persecuted the Prophet (PBUH) and those who believed with him. The oath by the father and what he fathered is a reference to Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and his son Prophet Ishmael (PBUH). However, the oath can be also a reference to the general process of the propagation of the human race, "*I swear by this city. And you are a resident of this city; and the father and what he fathered.*"

The oath is made to emphasize a fundamental fact in the life of human beings, "*Verily We have created humankind for toil and struggle.*" A life of struggle starts as soon as the first cell is established in the fetus. It tries to establish for itself, by the grace of God, the appropriate conditions for survival and growth. Then it goes through the difficult process of birth; once a person is born a life of struggle starts. Each stage of growth presents new challenges and new difficulties. A mature person struggles hard to earn his living. Some struggle with their muscles,

some with their thoughts, and some with their souls. Some struggle in the way of God and some struggle to satisfy their lusts and desires. Struggle is the nature of life. Those who struggle in the worldly life and go on to face a harder struggle in the Hereafter are the losers. The successful are those who struggle trying to reach God in the worldly life so that when they meet their Lord they will be qualified for a life of comfort in the Hereafter.

The verses challenge some of the claims that humankind makes and which are reflected on his behavior, “*Does he think that no one has power over him? He will say, ‘I have wasted much wealth.’ Does he think that no one sees him?*” This humankind, who has been created to struggle, forgets his nature and becomes deluded with the power, ability and wealth that his Creator bestows on him. He behaves as if he will not be held accountable for what he does. He thinks that no one can overpower him so he commits transgressions, oppression, and fraud. He amasses wealth and commits sins with impunity. When he is asked to give the poor he declines saying, “*I have wasted much wealth.*” Does he not realize that he is being watched?

God bestowed on him great bounties, “*Did We not give him two eyes, and a tongue, and a pair of lips? And We showed him the two ways?*” Humankind becomes deluded with the power he has. He forgets that this power is one of the blessings that God bestowed on him. He is stingy, although his wealth has been bestowed on him by God. God gave him the senses with which he is able to live, and God gave him the ability to differentiate between right and wrong.

This verse uncovers different aspects of human nature. It also establishes the ground for the Islamic Psychological Theory, which we will discuss later in Surat As-Shams (Chapter 91). All these blessings that God bestowed on human kind: eyes that see the signs of God in the universe, a tongue and two lips with which he expresses his thoughts and feelings, and the ability to differentiate between right and wrong; all these blessings did not push him to conquer the obstacle that bars him from entering paradise. This obstacle is the uphill road to paradise, “*But he would not attempt the uphill road, and what will explain to you what the uphill road is? (It is) freeing a slave; or giving food on a day of hunger, to an orphan near of kin, or to a poor man in misery, then he will be of those who believe, and enjoin perseverance, and enjoin deeds of kindness and compassion. These are the people of the right hand.*” This is the obstacle that prevents humankind from entering paradise. The verse exhorts humankind to overcome this obstacle. Then it details the ways to overcome this obstacle: freeing a slave, feeding a needy person or an orphan, believing in God, and enjoining patience and compassionate and merciful deeds.

This verse was revealed in Mecca when Islam was surrounded by its enemies, having no state power to enforce its rules. Slavery was a well-established institution in the world. Slaves were treated harshly. When slaves like ‘Amar ibn Yaser (RA) and his family, Belal ibn Rabah (RA), and Suhaib (RA) and others became Muslims, they were tortured by their masters. Buying their freedom was the only practical way of saving them from this torture. Abu Bakr (RA) was one of the first Muslims to buy Muslim slaves their freedom.

Another way that helps humankind overcomes the obstacle to paradise is to feed an orphan relative or a needy person on a day when food is scarce. Freeing slaves and feeding the poor

were actions of high priority in Mecca at that time. Then the verse mentions the belief in God, enjoining perseverance, and enjoining compassionate deeds. These deeds should all go together hand in hand. These verses reflect the importance of the social collective duties of the members of the community. Islam promotes the unity of the community. Islam provides the blue prints for way of life for a community and for a nation; however, it also stresses the personal responsibility of their individuals. Those who are able to overcome the obstacle are the companions of the right hand. The disbelievers are the companions of the left hand. They will be locked up in Hell fire. *“But those who disbelieve Our revelations, their place will be on the left hand; and the Fire will be closed on them.”*

## Sura 91: Al-Shams (The Sun)

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

### Verses 1 to 15:

1. *By the sun and its brightness,*
2. *And the moon as it follows it,*
3. *And the day as it displays it,*
4. *And the night as it conceals it,*
5. *And the sky and He who built it,*
6. *And the earth and He who spread it,*
7. *And a soul and He who perfected it,*
8. *And inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.*
9. *He is indeed successful who purifies it,*
10. *And he is indeed a failure who corrupts it.*
11. *(The tribe of) Thamud denied (the truth) because of their rebellious pride,*
12. *When the wicked man among them was deputed.*
13. *And the Messenger of God said to them, "It is the she-camel of God, so let her drink."*
14. *But they denied him, and they hamstrung her, so God doomed them for their sin and leveled it.*
15. *And He does not fear its consequence.*

The Sura has been revealed in Mecca. It consists of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first ten verses. The section attracts the attention to some of the physical phenomena of the universe. These are signs of the power of God. The section ends with a statement about who will be successful and who will be a failure. The second section is comprised of the verses eleven to the end. This section narrates briefly the story of the tribe of Thamud.

*"By the sun and its brightness, and the moon as it follows it, and the day as it displays it, and the night as it conceals it, and the sky and He who built it, and the earth and He who spread it."*

God makes an oath by cosmic scenes; His creatures; and the soul and its perfection and inspiration. The oath bestows on these creatures high status and directs the heart to reflect upon them. The oath starts with the sun and its brightness, then the moon as it follows after the sun, the day as it makes things clear, the night as it covers the earth, the sky and He who built, and the earth and He who spread it. The fact that God is making an oath using these creatures of His elevates these creatures to a high status. The oath evokes in the human being the sense to appreciate the signs of God and to reflect upon them.

The verses then discuss an important fact regarding the human soul, *"and a soul and He who perfected it, and inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who purifies it. And he is indeed a failure who corrupts it."* These verses in addition to the verses, *"And We showed him the two ways? " (90: 10) and "Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful." (76: 3) establish the Psychological theory of Islam. Humankind has a dual nature and a dual propensity. Because of the fact that his body was created from mud and then God breathed into him of His spirit, he has equal propensity to*

goodness and evil; and to guidance and going astray. Humankind has the ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. He also has the ability to motivate himself to do what is right as well as doing what is wrong. This ability to differentiate and to guide oneself is expressed by the verse, “*and a soul and He who perfected it, and inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.*” This ability is instilled in the initial natural disposition of humankind. God sent His Message to unleash this ability and to strengthen it.

In addition to the ability instilled in the initial natural disposition to differentiate between right and wrong, humankind has a built in conscious decision making mechanism. The decisions made by this mechanism are the decisions that humankind will be held accountable for. The person who uses this mechanism to purify himself and to do good deeds will be successful while those who use the mechanism to commit sins will be losers. The consequence of giving humankind this conscious decision making mechanism is that humankind is held accountable for his deeds. It is a mercy of God that he sent the Message to guide humankind to the right path and to help him make the right decisions.

An example of making the wrong decision is then given, “*(The tribe of) Thamud denied (the truth) because of their rebellious pride, When the wicked man among them was deputed, and the Messenger of God said, “It is the she-camel of God, so let her drink.” But they denied him, and they hamstrung her, so God doomed them for their sin and leveled it. And He does not fear its consequence.*” The story of the tribe of Thamud was narrated in several places in the Qur’an. It is mentioned here to highlight the fact that the decision that the tribe of Thamud made to deny its Prophet was only caused by its tyranny. Tyranny motivated the wicked among them to hamstring the she-camel. Their Prophet warned them but they did not heed the warning. They hamstrung the she-camel and God punished them.

## Sura 92: Al-Lail (The Night)

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

### **Verses 1 to 21:**

1. *By the night as it enshrouds,*
2. *And the day as it shines,*
3. *And He who created the male and the female,*
4. *Indeed, your endeavors are diverse.*
5. *As for him who gives and is conscious of God,*
6. *And believes in goodness,*
7. *Surely, We will ease his way to the state of ease.*
8. *But as for him who hoards and deems himself independent,*
9. *And denies goodness;*
10. *Surely, We will ease his way into adversity.*
11. *His wealth will not profit him when he perishes.*
12. *Verily, it is upon Us to guide,*
13. *And verily, to Us (belong) the Hereafter and the first (life).*
14. *Therefore, I warn you of a flaming Fire,*
15. *In which only the most wretched will burn,*
16. *He who denied and turned away.*
17. *But those most devoted to God will avoid it,*
18. *He who spends his wealth for self-purification,*
19. *Seeking no favor in return,*
20. *Only seeking the countenance of his Lord Most High;*
21. *And he will be well-pleased.*

The Sura consists of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first eleven verses; and the second section is comprised of the verses twelve to the end.

*“By the night as it enshrouds, and the day as it shines, and He who created the male and the female.”* God makes an oath using the two signs: the night and the day; mentioning their inherent characteristics. The night covers, and the day shines. The day and night are two opposites. Another couple of opposite characteristics are the male and female. The night and day are two comprehensive phenomena. They affect the human heart. The cyclical rotation of the day and night drives the human being to reflect on the universe and its mysteries; raising the questions of who controls these changes and who controls the universe?

The oath emphasizes that the people have different endeavors in life. These endeavors differ in their nature, they differ in what motivate them, and they differ in their end results. Consequently, people will be rewarded differently, depending on their different endeavors, *“Indeed, your endeavors are diverse. As for him who gives and is conscious of God and believes in goodness, surely, We will ease his way to the state of ease. But as for him who hoards and deems himself independent, and denies goodness; surely, We will ease his way into adversity. His wealth will not profit him when he perishes.”* People can generally be classified into two categories. Those



who give and are conscious of God, and believe in goodness; and those who hoard and deem themselves independent, and deny goodness. These two categories have different endeavors in life. They will be rewarded differently. God will ease the way of the first category to achieve a state of ease while He will ease the way into adversity for the second category. The lives of the members of the first group will run smoothly, they will be secure, content, and successful. They will join the easy way that has been awarded to the Messenger of God. All their affairs will be processed easily. Members of the second group will find everything difficult. Each step they make will take them away from guidance. Their wealth which they hoarded and refused to spend in the way of God will not benefit them.

The destiny of each group in the Hereafter is outlined, *“Verily it is upon Us to guide, and verily to Us (belong) the Hereafter and the first (life). Therefore I warn you of a flaming Fire, in which only the most wretched will burn, he who denied and turned away. But those most devoted to God will avoid it, he who spends his wealth for self-purification, seeking no favor in return, only seeking the countenance of his Lord Most High; and he will be well-pleased.”* God made it incumbent on Himself to instill guidance in the initial natural disposition of humankind. He also gave humankind guidance through His Messengers and His Message. No one has an excuse for denying guidance; and God will not treat anyone unjustly. God has absolute control over the life of the world and the Hereafter. People have been warned of a flaming fire in which the wretched will burn. Who is the wretched? It is he who denied the truth and turned away from guidance. But the God conscious will be saved. He used to spend his money seeking God’s acceptance. He never expected a worldly reward in return; he was only seeking his Lord’s acceptance. This person will be well pleased with what he gets in the Hereafter.

## Sura 93: Al-Duha (The Morning Light)

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

### Verses 1 to 11:

1. *By the morning light,*
2. *And by the night when it settles,*
3. *Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor He is displeased.*
4. *And verily the Hereafter will be better for you than the First.*
5. *And your Lord will give you and you will be well-pleased.*
6. *Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter?*
7. *And He found you wandering, and He gave guidance?*
8. *And He found you in need, and made you rich?*
9. *Therefore, do not oppress the orphan,*
10. *Nor repulse the petitioner;*
11. *And proclaim the Blessing of your Lord.*

The Sura has been revealed in Mecca. It offers a touch of kindness, a breath of mercy, and a message of love. It is like a gentle hand that removes the pain and pours security and certainty. It addressed the Prophet (PBUH) to comfort him and to wipe out his troubles. It has been narrated that the revelation stopped for a period of time and the idolaters said that Muhammad (PBUH) has been abandoned by his Lord. This Sura was then revealed.

*“By the morning light, and by the night when it settles, your Lord has not forsaken you, nor He is displeased. And verily the Hereafter will be better for you than the First. And your Lord will give you and you will be well-pleased.”* God makes an oath using these two signs to establish a connection between the cosmic phenomena and the emotions of the soul. This encourages the human heart to find harmony with the cosmic phenomena and to deepen the feeling of friendliness with the universe. The objective of the Sura is to surround the Prophet (PBUH) with an atmosphere of friendliness, gentleness, and companionship. To make him feel that he was not abandoned. Your God did not abandon you, nor is He displeased with you. God addresses the Prophet (PBUH) saying, *“your Lord,”* to emphasize this connection between the Prophet (PBUH) and God. He is your Lord who looks after you and will take care of you. What He has kept for you in the Hereafter is better than what you were given in this life. You will be well-pleased.

*“Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter? And He found you wandering, and He gave guidance? And He found you in need, and made you rich?”* These verses send a reassuring message to the Prophet (PBUH); God cares about you and He will protect you in the future as He has done in the past. The bounties of God which He blessed His Messenger (PBUH) are enumerated. You were born orphan, so He gave you shelter under His care. You were poor, so He enriched you with contentment and made you self-sufficient. You grew up in a bad environment, among people who are ignorant and misguided; so He guided you.

The Prophet (PBUH) and the believers were commanded to be kind and generous, “*Therefore, do not oppress the orphan, nor repulse the petitioner; and proclaim the Blessing of your Lord.*” These commands were very much needed to change the bad and unfair practices that were prevalent in the Arab society before Islam.

## Sura 94: Al-Sharh (The Relief)

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

### Verses 1 to 8:

1. *Did We not expand your breast for you?*
2. *And remove your burden,*
3. *Which weighed down your back?*
4. *And raised your reputation high?*
5. *Indeed, with hardship comes ease;*
6. *Indeed, with hardship comes ease.*
7. *So when you have finished (your work),*
8. *Then stand up for worship,*
9. *And turn to your Lord for everything.*

This Sura was revealed after Surat Al-Duha (Chapter 93), as if it came to complement it. The Sura echoes the same tender gentle dialogue between God and His Messenger (PBUH). It reviews the signs of care that God bestowed on him and it gives him glad tidings of the expected ease and the way to get it.

*“Did We not expand your breast for you? And remove your burden, which weighed down your back? And raised your reputation high?”* The verses suggest that the Messenger (PBUH) was facing a difficult time as a result of the conspiracies the idolaters were plotting against him and the obstacles that they were placing in his way to prevent him from continuing to call people to Islam. God addressed the Prophet (PBUH) directly. God expanded your breast so that your heart became happy with this undertaking. Look into your heart, do you not see it full of light? Taste the sweetness of the task that was entrusted to you. Do you not find comfort from this trust that overcomes the difficulty of the struggle. We removed the burden that has been placed on your back. We raised your reputation in the sky to the High Host, on earth among people, and in the whole universe. Your name will always be associated with the name of God, *“There is no deity except God, and Muhammad is His Messenger.”* There is no rank higher than this. This is the unique status that was bestowed only on Muhammad (PBUH). Your reputation was also raised in the Guarded Tablet. How can you feel tired after these bounties have been bestowed on you? These bounties should be enough to remove all tiredness and all difficulties.

God further dealt gently with the chosen beloved one; He comforted him and gave him glad tidings, *“Indeed, with hardship comes ease, indeed with hardship comes ease.”* There will always be some ease in each difficulty. You can see it in your case (Muhammad). When the burden was too much, We expanded your breast so you were able to cope with your burden. It is certain that with difficulty comes ease.

Then the verses explain the way to achieve ease, “*So when you have finished (your work), then stand up for worship, and turn to your Lord for everything.*” So, when you finish your daily duties whether earning your living or dealing with people, then devote yourself in worship to God. This is the provision that one needs to bring ease with each difficulty.

## Sura 95: Al-Tin (The Fig)

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

### Verses 1 to 8:

1. *By the fig and the olive,*
2. *And the Mount of Sinai,*
3. *And this secure city,*
4. *We have indeed created humankind in the best stature,*
5. *Then We abased him (to be) the lowest of the low,*
6. *Except those who believe and do good deeds, for they will have an unfailing reward.*
7. *So why do you still deny the Judgment?*
8. *Is not God the Wisest of judges?*

This Sura presents a fundamental fact about the nature of the initial natural disposition that God instilled in humankind. The initial natural disposition which God instilled in humankind is upright and in complete harmony with the essence of faith. Together they will allow humankind to reach the perfection which God decreed for him but if the initial natural disposition becomes crooked and deviates from the straight path of faith he will sink to the lowest of the low. God makes an oath on this fact by the fig, olive, the mount of Sinai, and the secure city. The oath usually forms the framework for the verses that come after it.

It is on the mount of Sinai that God talked to Moses (PBUH). Mecca is the secure city. Both the mount and the city have close connection to Islam. But what is the relationship between the fig and olive to matters of faith? It has been narrated that Adam and Eve used the leaves of the fig tree to cover their shame before they were sent to live on earth. It was also narrated that fig grows on the mount on which Noah's (PBUH) Ark has settled. The olive may be a reference to Jerusalem or it may be a reference to the olive branch that the pigeon which Noah (PBUH) sent to discover land brought back to him. Some other narrations suggest that the fig and the olive mentioned in this Sura are simply the fig and olive that we eat.

We have no way of ascertaining the meaning of the reference to the fig and olive in this Sura. What we could say based on our understanding of the style of Qur'an is that they must refer to places or memories that are connected with faith somehow.

However, the main fact which this Sura presents is, "*We have indeed created man in the best stature, then We abased him (to be) the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do good deeds, for they will have an unfailing reward.*" This shows the care that God took in creating humankind. God created him in the perfect form. This has been mentioned in several verses in different places in the Qur'an. God has bestowed His care on this creature in spite of the weaknesses that this creature exhibits which cause him to swerve away for the straight path. Humankind must be important in the sight of God; this may be because of the role that God has assigned to humankind. God's care in creating humankind is apparent in many ways; the complex body structure, the unique mental capacity, and the amazing psychological makeup.

The emphasis in this Sura is on the spiritual characteristics of humankind. These characteristics can sink to the lowest of the low when his initial natural disposition becomes crooked and he strays away from the straight path of faith. It is obvious that his physical form does not suffer any changes when he strays away from the straight path. The same characteristics can raise humankind to a very high rank if he follows guidance and purifies his soul. However, if humankind chooses to go astray from the straight path then he will sink to the lowest of the low. Except the believers who do good deeds; those who keep their initial natural disposition upright and complement it with faith until they achieve the perfection that God has decreed for them. They will receive an unfailing reward in the life of perfection which they will lead in the abode of perfection.

In the light of this fact, God addressed humankind, “*So why do you still deny the Judgment? Is not God the Wisest of judges?*” Why after knowing all these facts you still deny the judgment? Why are they not guided by the light? Is not God the most fair of the fair judges?

It has been narrated by Abo Hurairah (RA), that when one recites Surat At-Tin and comes to the last verse, “*Is not God the Wisest of judges?*” One should say, “*Yes, and I bear witness to this.*”

## Sura 96: Al-‘Alaq (The Clot)

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

### **Verses 1 to 19:**

1. *Read: In the name of your Lord who created;*
2. *Created humankind from a clot.*
3. *Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous,*
4. *He taught by the pen,*
5. *Taught humankind that which he knew not.*
6. *Indeed, humankind transgresses all bounds,*
7. *When he thinks that he is self-sufficient.*
8. *Verily, to your Lord is the return.*
9. *Have you seen him who forbids;*
10. *A servant when he prays?*
11. *Have you considered if he is guided;*
12. *Or enjoins God consciousness?*
13. *Have you considered if he denies the truth and turns (his) back?*
14. *Does he not know that God sees?*
15. *No. If he does not desist, We will drag him by the forelock;*
16. *A deceitful, sinful forelock.*
17. *Then let him summon his associates,*
18. *We will call the guards of Hell.*
19. *No, do not obey him; but prostrate yourself, and draw near.*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. The beginning of this Sura consists of the first verses of the Qur'an that were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). 'Aisha (RA) has been quoted to have said, "The first signs of revelation came to the Prophet (PBUH) as clear dreams that he saw in his sleep but then occurred in real life just as he saw them in his dreams. Then he started to go into seclusions. He used to spend several nights in seclusion in the cave of Hira. During these periods of seclusion he would worship God. One day when he was in the cave he was visited by the Archangel Gabriel (PBUH). Gabriel (PBUH) said to him, 'Read.' The Prophet said, 'I do not read.' Gabriel (PBUH) embraced him tightly until the Prophet (PBUH) was exhausted. Gabriel (PBUH) said, 'Read.' Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, 'I do not read.' Gabriel (PBUH) embraced him again, then released him and asked him to read. Again the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'I do not read.' He repeated the same thing for the third time. Then he said, '*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created humankind from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*' The Messenger of God (PBUH) returned home shaken. He asked Khadija (RA) to cover him. When he felt secure, he told Khadija (RA) what happened. Then he said to Khadija (RA), 'I fear for myself.' She said, 'You should not fear. This is glad tidings and God will never let you down. You join your kin, you always tell the truth, you help the weak, you are generous to your guest, and you help the needy in calamities.' Khadija (RA) suggested that they should go to visit her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal. Waraqah was a Christian, he was literate, and he knew how to read and write the Gospel. They went, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told him what happened in the cave.



Waraqah said, ‘This is the same revelation that was sent to Prophet Moses (PBUH). I wish I were a young man so that I would live until I see your people drive you out from the city.’ Muhammad (PBUH) asked Waraqah, ‘Will they drive me out?’ Waraqah said, ‘Yes, every man who comes with what you have been given has been expelled by his people. If I live until your day comes, I will support you unconditionally.’ However, Waraqah died very soon after this incident.”

How many times did we read this story? However, we would quickly forget it; or maybe we reflect a little on it then forget it. The revelation of these verses was a major event. In fact, it was a tremendous event; an event which had a tremendous impact on the history of humanity. This event changed the course of the history of humanity. God in His Majesty, God the Great, the Compeller, the One supreme in Pride, the King of absolute Sovereignty looked upon the creature He called humankind who lived in a tiny place in the vast universe and bestowed His honor on this race by choosing one of them to become the recipient of His Divine light, the storage of His wisdom, and the landing place of His Word. This is an enormous fact whose dimensions become clear only when humankind tries to explore, as much as he can, the nature of the Divine.

Humankind was reborn when he received his values from the Divine instead of receiving them from human experience; when he received his laws from the revelation not from the whims. This event was a milestone in the history of humankind. This event changed the path of this history.

The Sura starts with a command to recite, “*Read: In the name of your Lord who created; created man from a clot. Read; and your Lord is the Most Generous, He taught by the pen, taught humankind that which he knew not.*” It is the first Sura in the Qur’an, so it starts with the name of God and commands the Messenger (PBUH) to read in the name of his Lord. It starts by specifying the attribute of God, “*Who created.*” Then it explains further, He created humankind from a clot.

This is a process that testifies to God’s generosity as much as to God’s power. God taught by the pen; and He is the source of knowledge. This verse established the fundamental concept of faith: everything, every movement, every step, every action should be in the name of God. In the name of God we start, in the name of God we walk, in the name of God we go towards Him, and in the name of God we return to Him. God is the Creator and He is the Teacher. He taught humankind that which he knew not.

The logical consequence of this fundamental concept of faith is that humankind should be grateful to God who created him, who taught him, and who honored him. But this did not happen. Indeed, what happened was the opposite, “*Indeed, humankind transgresses all bounds, when he thinks that he is self-sufficient. Verily, to your Lord is the return.*” God bestowed his bounties on humankind and made him self-sufficient. Generally, when humankind becomes self-sufficient, he does not show gratitude nor does he acknowledge the source of his self-sufficiency; except those who are protected by their faith. The verses outline another fundamental concept of

faith: to God is the return; the return to God in everything, every intention, and every movement. There is no one else to return to except God.

The following verses display an example of the tyranny of humankind, *“Have you seen him who forbids? a servant when he prays? Have you considered if he is guided, or enjoins God consciousness? Have you considered if he denies the truth and turns (his) back? Does he not know that God sees?”* The expression expresses amazement and renunciation of this behavior. This is indeed horrendous behavior. Does he not know that God sees him?

The tyrants prevent people from worshipping God; they do not follow guidance; they do not enjoin God consciousness; they deny the truth; and they turn away from the straight path. A dire warning is issued to these tyrants, *“No. If he does not desist, We will drag him by the forelock; a deceitful, sinful forelock. Then let him summon his associates, We will call the guards of Hell.”* Very stern warning, We will drag him severely by his forelock. The forelock is a symbol of pride for humankind. Let him call upon his associates, they will find the guards of Hell waiting for them. There is no doubt about what his end will be.

The command to the believer was, *“No, do not obey him; but prostrate yourself, and draw near.”* Leave the tyrant to the guards of Hell and devote yourself to the prayer. The prayer will bring you close to God. You will be most closer to God when you prostrate yourself in worship to God. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The closest one can get to God is during prostration. So, make many supplications during your prostration.”*

## **Sura 97: Al-Qadr (The Power)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 5:**

1. *We have indeed revealed this (Message) in the Night of Power;*
2. *And what will explain to you what the Night of Power is?*
3. *The Night of Power is better than thousand months.*
4. *In it, descend the angels and the Spirit, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. Peace it is; until the rise of dawn.*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. The talk in this Sura is about the glorious night that was registered by the whole universe as a night of joy, happiness and prayers. This was the night in which the connection was established between the earth and the Higher Host. This was night in which the revelation of the Qur'an started. This was a major event the like of which the earth has never witnessed before. Its glory, its significance, and its impact on human life are beyond the understanding of humankind.

The verses of the Qur'an that describe the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an almost show the light of God through His Word. It is known that this is one of the nights of the month of Ramadan. Some narrations say that it is the night of the twenty seven of Ramadan. Others indicate that it is the night of the twenty first of Ramadan. A third opinion indicates that it is one of the last ten nights of Ramadan. A fourth group is of the opinion that it has not been specified, so it is one of the nights of Ramadan.

Its name is the Night of the Power. The name may mean the power, control, and decree. Or it could mean glory and status. Both alternatives are appropriate to describe such a major universal event. It has shaped the life of the humankind. It is better than thousand months. This is not a definite number. It simply means that this night is better than a great many number of months.

Humanity may ignore the significance of this night, due to its ignorance and bad luck. But the believers are commanded to always remember the significance of this night. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, "*Seek the Night of the Power during the last ten nights of Ramadan.*" He also has been quoted to have said, "*God will forgive all previous sins of whoever spent the Night of the Power in prayer.*" Islam is not a religion of superficial formalities. The prayer during the Night of the Power has to be done on the basis of pure faith and has to be devoted solely to God.

The Islamic project relates the rituals of worship to the belief in the fundamentals of the doctrine. It makes the rituals a way for seeking the understanding of the concepts of the doctrine and transforming these concepts into feelings and behavior. The connection between the Night of the Power and prayer is one of the aspects of the successful Islamic project.

## **Sura 98: Al-Bayyina (The Clear Evidence)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 8:**

1. *Those who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture, and among the idolaters, could not have separated themselves (from disbelief) until there had come to them the clear evidence:*
2. *A messenger from God, reciting purified pages;*
3. *In them there are valuable books.*
4. *Nor were the People of the Scripture divided until after the clear evidence had come to them.*
5. *And they have been commanded only to worship God, devoting their faith to Him alone, to establish regular prayer; and to give alms. That is the upright religion.*
6. *Those who disbelieve, among the People of the Scripture and the idolaters, will abide in the fire of Hell. They are the worst of creation.*
7. *Those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation.*
8. *Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they dwell forever. God is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. All this is for those who stand in awe of their Lord.*

Many of the narrations indicate that this Sura was revealed in Medina. However, there are some narrations which indicate that it was revealed in Mecca. The style of the Sura may support the opinion that it was revealed in Medina. However, one cannot completely dismiss the opinion that it was revealed in Mecca.

*“Those who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture, and among the idolaters, could not have separated themselves (from disbelief) until there had come to them the clear evidence: a messenger from God, reciting purified pages; in them there are valuable books.”* The earth was desperate for a new message. Corruption was prevalent. The only hope for abolishing corruption was a new message, a new project, and a new movement. Disbelief crept into the doctrine of faith of all people, whether those who received Scriptures before or the idolaters. The only way that they would relinquish the state of disbelief that they arrived at was through the belief in a new message that would be conveyed by a new messenger; a Messenger who recites purified pages. These pages are purified of disbelief and idolatry. These pages include valuable books. The word books in this verse may mean writings or topics; as we call the information about the rituals of purification the book of purification, and the rituals of prayer the book of prayer. These purified pages, meaning the Qur’an, brought valuable information to people.

*“Nor were the People of the Scripture divided until after the clear evidence had come to them.”* The first division occurred among the Jews before the coming of Jesus (PBUH). They became divided into five sects: the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Asians, the Extremists, and the Samaritans. Although all sects believed in one Messenger - Moses (PBUH) - and one book - the Torah - but each sect had its own characteristics and direction. Then the Christians were separated from the Jews, although Jesus (PBUH) was one of the prophets sent to the Children of

Israel. He came to confirm the Torah. History tells of great many massacres that happened as a result of the enmity between the Christians and Jews.

Then the Christians became divided in spite of the fact that they all have the same book and the same Messenger. First, they were divided in matters of doctrine then the different sects became mutually antagonistic to each other and they started fighting among themselves. There were also differences among the Christian sects about the nature of Jesus (PBUH), his mother Mary, and the doctrine of trinity.

However, the religion was clear and the faith was simple, *“and they have been commanded only to worship God, devoting their faith to Him alone, to establish regular prayer; and to give alms. That is the upright religion.”* They were only commanded to worship God alone, become fully devoted to Him, establish prayer, and pay alms. These are the elements of the upright religion; pure faith in the psyche and rituals that express this faith in practice, and spending in the way of God. Whoever fulfilled these principles has fulfilled the principles of faith as was mentioned in the revealed books. It is one religion and one doctrine that came in different messages conveyed by different messengers. It is a clear religion with no mysteries and no complexities.

The destiny of those who received the clear evidence through their messengers and through this last Messenger, who recited to them purified pages, and still disbelieved is clear, *“Those who disbelieve, among the People of the Scripture and the idolaters, will abide in the fire of Hell. They are the worst of creation. Those who believe and do good deeds are the best of creation. Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they dwell forever. God is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. All this is for those who stand in awe of their Lord.”* Muhammad (PBUH) is the last Messenger of God. Islam is the last Message. The two represent the last chance for people to be guided. They have to choose one of two alternatives: either belief and salvation or disbelief and destruction. The disbelievers will abide in Hell forever; these are the worst of creation. The believers will be admitted to the Gardens of Eden; these are the best of creation. God will be pleased with them and they will be pleased with God. This is the best reward for those who stand in awe for God.

## Sura 99: Al-Zalzala (The Earthquake)

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

### **Verses 1 to 8:**

1. *When the earth is shaken with its (violent) earthquake;*
2. *And the earth throws out its burdens;*
3. *And humankind says, "What is the matter with it?"*
4. *On that Day it will tell its news,*
5. *Because your Lord will have inspired it.*
6. *On that Day people will emerge in scattered groups to be shown their deeds.*
7. *And whoever does the weight of an atom of good will see it;*
8. *And whoever does the weight of an atom of evil will see it.*

There are different narrations about whether this Sura was revealed in Mecca or in Medina. We are of the opinion that it was most probably revealed in Mecca. Its style and its topic corroborate this opinion. It shakes the heedless hearts violently. Both the style and the topic contribute to this shock which shakes these heedless hearts.

*"When the earth is shaken with its (violent) earthquake; and the earth throws out its burdens; and humankind says, 'What is the matter with it?' On that Day it will tell its news, because your Lord will have inspired it."* The verses describe scenes from the Day of Resurrection. The earth will shake violently and will throw out what it has inside it; bodies, metals and other things. It is as if the earth is ridding itself of the burden that it was carrying all these years. It is a scene that shakes the ground under the feet of those who listen to it. People will be wondering, what is happening? This is a question of a person who was taken by surprise and does not know what is happening. On that Day, the earth will tell all its news because God would have inspired it to shake and to throw its burdens.

People will then emerge, *"On that Day people will emerge in scattered groups to be shown their deeds. And whoever does the weight of an atom of good will see it; and whoever does the weight of an atom of evil will see it."* The graves will open and people will come out from different directions. They will be shown their records to be held accountable for what they have done. Whoever did a deed even as small as the weight of an atom will be held accountable for it. We know now that there is a body that we call an atom and it is a minute thing. It is so small that we cannot even see it using a microscope. So, one should not belittle any of his deeds whether good or bad.

## Sura 100: Al-‘Adiyat (The Chargers)

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

### **Verses 1 to 11:**

1. *By the charging steeds, panting;*
2. *And striking sparks;*
3. *Raiding at dawn;*
4. *Raising clouds of dust;*
5. *Storming in the midst;*
6. *Indeed, humankind is ungrateful to his Lord;*
7. *And he bears witness to that;*
8. *And he is fierce in his love of wealth.*
9. *Does he not know, when the contents of the graves are scattered around;*
10. *And that which is (locked up) in (human) breasts is made manifest;*
11. *On that Day, their Lord will be fully aware of them.*

*“By the charging steeds, panting; and striking sparks; raiding at dawn; raising clouds of dust; storming in the midst.”* God makes an oath by the battle horses and describes its movement one after the other; as they charge forward panting, striking the ground with their hoofs, raiding at dawn, and raising clouds of dust. They charge in the middle of the ranks causing disturbance and chaos. This is a battle scene that was familiar to the people at the time of the revelation of the Qur’an.

What is the oath about? *“Indeed, humankind is ungrateful to his Lord; and he bears witness to that; and he is fierce in his love of wealth.”* Humankind is indeed ungrateful to his Lord. The signs of this are shown in his actions and in his sayings. These actions and sayings bear witness to his ingratitude as if he was the one who was giving the testimony. Humankind is extremely selfish, he loves himself; and he loves wealth and power. This is part of his initial natural disposition. However, when faith enters his heart this can be changed. When faith enters his heart, it will change his values and standards. It will transform his ingratitude into gratitude. His nature will be transformed from a selfish nature into an altruistic one.

One remedy for ingratitude and miserliness is to reflect on one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *“Does he not know, when the contents of the graves are scattered around; and that which is (locked up) in (human) breasts is made manifest; on that Day, their Lord will be fully aware of them.”* It is a horrifying scene: contents of the graves being scattered and secrets of the hearts being exposed. People should know that God is fully aware of all what they do.

## **Sura 101: Al-Qari'a (The Striking Calamity)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 11:**

1. *The Striking Calamity;*
2. *What is the Striking Calamity?*
3. *And what will explain to you what the Striking Calamity is?*
4. *(It is) a Day when people will be like scattered moths;*
5. *And the mountains will be like tufted wool.*
6. *Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy;*
7. *He will live a pleasant life.*
8. *But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light;*
9. *His abode will be the abyss.*
10. *And what will explain to you what this is?*
11. *Raging Fire.*

*“The Striking Calamity; what is the Striking Calamity? and what will explain to you what the Striking Calamity is?”* The Sura starts with a single word like a single projectile being thrown. The word, *“The Striking Calamity,”* is thrown without an explanation, then it is repeated again to maximize the effect of the strike. The answer then comes, *“(It is) a Day when people will be like scattered moths; and the mountains will be like tufted wool.”* This is the first scene. It is a scene that makes the hearts fly and makes the limbs shake. Then the end result is explained, *“Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy; he will live a pleasant life. But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light; his abode will be the abyss. And what will explain to you what this is? Raging Fire.”* The terms heavy and light indicates that God has standards; certain values are important and others are not in the sight of God. Those who will come to the Day of Judgment with heavy weighted deeds will have a pleasant life. No details were given about what is involved in the pleasant life. Using such a term without specifying any details opens the imagination for a life full of the best kind of bliss.

But those who bring light weighted deeds, their abode will be the abyss. What does that mean? It means raging fire.



## **Sura 102: Al-Takathur (Striving for More)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 8:**

1. *Striving for more distracts you;*
2. *Until you visit the graves.*
3. *No indeed, you will come to know;*
4. *No indeed, you will come to know.*
5. *If you knew with certain knowledge,*
6. *You will most certainly see Hellfire.*
7. *And you will most certainly see it with the eye of certainty.*
8. *Then on that day you shall most certainly be questioned about the Bliss.*

‘Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “*Whoever recited one thousand verses in one night, Allah will smile in his face when He meets him.*” They asked him, “*Who can recite one thousand verses in one night?*” He (PBUH) recited Surat al-Takathur and said, “*By He who has my soul in His hand, it is equivalent to the one thousand verses.*” Al-Ghazali indicated that it elucidates one sixth of the objectives of the Qur’an. These are definition of the Message, definition of the straight path, description of what one should expect when he/she meets God, describing the state of the obedient servants, stating what the ungrateful servants say, and description of the stages on the path.

“*Striving for more distracts you; until you visit the graves.*” You heedless idiots! You who are competing for more wealth, progeny, and the pleasures of life; look where your end will be. You will end up in a small grave. In this grave there will be neither wealth nor pleasure. You should wake up and reflect on what is waiting for you.

You will certainly come to know, a statement that is repeated so that it sinks in the psyche. If you know the truth, you would see the Hellfire and you will most certainly see it with the eye of certainty. Then you will be asked on that Day about the Bliss. Where did you get it? Where did you spend it? What did you use it for? Did you use to earn a sin or to perform an act of obedience?

## **Sura 103: Al-‘Asr (The Time)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 3:**

1. *By the time, indeed humankind is in loss;*
2. *Except those who believe and do good deeds,*
3. *And exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to perseverance. (103: 1 – 3)*

This short Sura which has only three verses presents a complete project for human life as dictated by Islam. The Sura establishes the Islamic constitution in these three verses. It describes the true characteristics and the obligations of the Muslim nation in one verse, the third verse in the Sura. This Sura is an example of the miraculous eloquence of the Qur'an.

*“By the time, indeed humankind is in loss; except those who believe and do good deeds, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to perseverance.”* These three verses establish one single major fact: there is only one successful project for human life. This is the project that the Sura describes. What is belief? Belief is what connects the tiny mortal being with the Eternal Originator of the universe. This connection also connects humankind with the universe and the laws that govern the universe. This connection gives humankind an access to the powers and resources that exist in this universe and allows him to go beyond his limited sphere of influence to the spacious sphere of the universe. Belief allows humankind to enjoy his existence and the beauty of the universe.

Worshipping one God elevates humankind above the servitude to anyone else and establishes equality between all the servants of God. This is the ultimate freedom that humankind can hope for. It is a freedom that emanates from the human conscious and from the understanding of the fact that there is only one power and only one Lord in this universe.

The Lordship of God determines the source of all human concepts, values, standards, laws, and rules. It defines the relationship between the human being and his Lord, between the human being and other people, and between the human being and the universe. The clear, direct, and simple relationship between the servant and the Lord fills the servant's heart with light, security, friendliness, and comfort. It removes feelings of hesitation, fear, stress, and confusion. It also eliminates any tendencies for arrogance and tyranny.

Belief brings consistency in following the Islamic project. It becomes a way of life not a transient condition or a discrete event. The whole Muslim nation becomes united under a single banner and pursuing a single objective. Belief is the origin of life from which all branches of goodness emanate. It is the project that defines the framework of all good deeds in life.

Good deeds are the natural fruits and the practical consequence of belief. Belief is not only a theory that resides in the conscious of the believer, nor it is only an expression of good intentions but it is also a positive force that motivates the believer to move, to act, and to build. Once belief

is settled deeply in the heart of the believer, it will shape the deeds and the behavior of the believer.

The concept of enjoining truth and perseverance reflects and defines the special characteristics of the Muslim nation. It is a nation aware of its responsibility and confident of its character. It is aware of the requirements and the hard work that are needed to fulfill its responsibility. This responsibility can only be fulfilled through the mechanism of the collective enjoining of the truth and perseverance. Enjoining truth is essential but difficult. There are many things that can distract people from the truth; including among other things: temptations, social pressures, and tyranny of rulers.

Enjoining perseverance is also necessary. It is required to be able to fulfill the requirements of belief and doing good deeds; and to protect the truth and justice. Enjoining perseverance strengthens the resilience of the nation.

These values define the meaning of profit and loss as one will find them in the Hereafter. This Sura defines clearly how to avoid loss in the Hereafter.

## **Sura 104: Al-Humaza (The Backbiter)**

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

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

1. *Woe to every slanderer backbiter,*
2. *Who amasses wealth and counts it over;*
3. *Thinking that his wealth would make him live forever;*
4. *By no means. He will be thrown into the Crusher;*
5. *And what will explain to you what is the Crusher?*
6. *It is God's kindled Fire;*
7. *Which rises above people's hearts.*
8. *It will be closed down on them;*
9. *In extended columns.*

This Sura reflects one of the images of real life at the early days of Islam in Mecca. It also describes a model that exists in all societies. The Sura paints an image for a mean person who becomes obsessed by wealth. Wealth becomes his ultimate goal for which all values can be trampled upon. He thinks that he can control people and their destiny with his wealth. He thinks that wealth can buy him anything even life; it may even buy his salvation.

The Sura warns those who belong to this category of people. The warning is portrayed in one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment. The person who belongs to this category will find himself on the Day of Judgment thrown into the Crusher which crushes everything that is thrown into it. Not only he will be crushed but he will burn in God's fire that rises above his heart the source of the slander and backbiting.

## **Sura 105: Al-Fil (The Elephant)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 5:**

- 1. Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant?*
- 2. Did He not completely confound their plans?*
- 3. And He sent against them swarms of birds,*
- 4. Striking them with stones of baked clay.*
- 5. Then He made them like eaten straw.*

This Sura refers to a well known incident that took place in the Arabian Peninsula before the advent of Islam. The incident shows clearly the level of protection that God bestowed on this sacred land which God has chosen to be the spot from which the last light emanates; the spot He chose to be the incubator for the new faith.

This story refers to the invasion of Mecca by Abraha, the Abyssinian ruler of Yemen. Abraha built a huge church in Yemen under the name of the king of Abyssinia. His goal was to attract the Arabs who used to perform pilgrimage to Mecca to his church. But the Arabs did not relinquish the K'aba in favor of Abraha's church. The K'aba was the pride of the Arabs who believed that they were the descendents of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and Prophet Ishmael (PBUH) who built the K'aba. Abraha decided to destroy the K'aba so that the Arabs would be forced to come to his church to perform the rites of pilgrimage. Abraha led a huge army. The army included a number of elephants. Several Arab tribes tried to stop Abraha's army but he was able to defeat all of them. The army camped in a place called Al-Maghmas between the city of Taif and the city of Mecca. Abraha sent one of his lieutenants on the head of a battalion to Mecca. They were able to capture camels and other booties. Among the booties were two hundred camels that belonged to Abd El-Muttaleb ibn Hashem, the chief of Quraish. Abraha sent a messenger to Quraish to tell them that he did not come to fight them. All what he wanted is to destroy the K'aba. If they do not fight his army, the army will not attack them. Abraha also wanted to speak to the chief of Quraish, so Abd Al-Muttaleb went to see him. Abd Al-Muttaleb was a handsome and respectable man; when Abraha saw him he was quite impressed. Abraha left his throne and sat with Abd Al-Muttaleb on the ground. Abraha asked Abd Al-Muttaleb through a translator if there is anything that Abraha could do for him. Abd Al-Muttaleb said, "I want my camels back." Abraha was disappointed, he said to Abd Al-Muttaleb, "I was impressed when I first saw you, but that impression was lost when I heard you speak about your camels. I came to destroy the house that you consider part of your faith and the faith of your forefathers; and you are only worried about your camels? Abd Al-Muttaleb said, "I am the Lord of the camels. The house has a Lord who will protect it." Abraha said, "It will not be protected from me." Abd Al-Muttaleb said, "It is your business." Abd Al-Muttaleb got his camels back and left. Abd Al-Muttaleb went back to his people and told him to evacuate the city and go to the mountains. They all prayed God to protect the K'aba and left.

Abraha moved with his army towards Mecca, however, just before entering Mecca the elephants sat down and refused to move. God then sent swarms of birds that pelted them with stones of

clay. The whole army was destroyed and Abraha was wounded and he died upon his return to Yemen.

Some scholars tried to explain the action of the birds using human logic. However, we are inclined to think of this as miracle. This inclination is corroborated by the style and language of the Sura. The main objective of the Sura is to emphasize the fact that God wanted to preserve this house so that it becomes the place from which the Islamic faith starts. The environment in Mecca at that time was conducive to the achievement of this goal. So, it was the most suitable place for Islam to start.

We do appreciate the efforts of the scholars who tried to find logical explanations of the phenomenon mentioned in this Sura. They wanted to steer away from mythical explanations which may lead to superstition. However, we would like to state that we should not try to force the Qur'anic verses into forms that fit known scientific or logical models. Scientific and logical models may change from time to time while the Qur'an is permanently unchangeable. Qur'anic verses should be the source from which we receive our fundamental facts about our faith. These facts should shape our logical approach to all events and incidents. We should accept whatever the Qur'an states as facts. Our intellect is a product of our limited reality and our limited experience. We are inclined to accept the Sura at its face value and treat what happened to the army of Abraha as a miracle.

The Sura starts with a rhetorical question, "*Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant?*" This incident was well known to the Arabs to the extent that they used the year in which it happened as a standard for their Almanac. The Prophet (PBUH) was born in the year of the Elephant, meaning that he was born in the year this incident took place. The intention of the question was to remind the Arabs of the story.

Then the verse explained how God dealt with the attacking army, "*Did He not completely confound their plans?*" God frustrated the plans of the attackers and they lost their way. How did this happen? "*He sent against them swarms of birds, striking them with stones of baked clay. Then He made them like eaten straw.*"

There are many lessons to be learnt from this Sura.

God did not want to give the idolaters of Mecca the honor of protecting His House. God wanted to save His House Himself through a miracle.

It would have been logical for the idolaters to remember the miracle which God provided to protect His House at the time of the advent of the Prophet (pbuh) and to accept his call to Islam. However, they abused the House that God protected by placing their idols in it. They used this as an excuse to resist the call to Islam.

God did not want Abraha and his army to destroy His House even when the House was being abused by the idolaters of Mecca. God wanted this House to remain pure and free from any type of control.

The Arabs did not have any major role to play before the advent of Islam. Under the banner of Islam they were able to play a major role in the history of humanity.

## **Sura 106: Quraish (Quraish)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 4:**

1. *For the security of Quraish;*
2. *Their security during the winter and the summer journeys;*
3. *So let them worship the Lord of this House,*
4. *Who feeds them against hunger and made them safe from fear.*

After Abraham (PBUH) had completed the building of the House, He prayed God, “*My Lord, make this city secure and provide its people with fruits.*” (2: 126). God made Mecca secure, free of the control of anyone, and safe from the tyranny of the oppressors. He made it a safe refuge for everyone; even when people turned away from the straight path and worshiped idols; for a reason God only knows.

God saved the House when Abraha tried to destroy it. This incident raised the sanctity of the House in the psyche of the Arabs. Quraish enjoyed a high status among the Arabs and was able to establish two trade routes, one to Syria and the other to Yemen. Even when the security conditions around Mecca deteriorated, Mecca remained a safe haven and its trade routes were protected from the attacks of thieves and highway gangsters.

This Sura reminds Quraish of the bounty of God, which He bestowed upon them. He reminded them of the security that they enjoy and of the profit which they gain from the trade carried by the summer and winter caravans. This would not have been possible had God not willed. They are being reminded with this bounty so that they feel ashamed for turning away from the worship of God alone to the worship of idols. The Sura commanded them to worship God alone who gave them provision and security. Had it been not for the grace of God they would not have been able to establish the trade routes and they would not have had enough to feed their people; the protection of God kept them safe of attacks of thieves and intruders.

This Sura seems to be a sequel to Surat Al-Fil (Chapter 105). They both deal with similar topics. However, there are nine other Suras that were revealed between these two Suras.



## **Sura 107: Al-Ma'un (Small Acts of Kindness)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 7:**

1. *Have you considered him who denies the Judgment?*
2. *It is he who mistreats the orphan,*
3. *And does not urge (others) to feed the poor.*
4. *So woe to those who pray,*
5. *But are heedless of their prayer;*
6. *Those who show off,*
7. *Yet withhold small acts of kindness.*

Some are of the opinion that this Sura has been revealed in Mecca; others are of the opinion that the first three verses were revealed in Mecca while the last four were revealed in Medina. However, the seven verses mesh together nicely; they all have the same objective. This makes me inclined to think that the whole Sura was revealed in Medina, especially that the Sura deals with the subject of showing off and hypocrisy. These topics were not known to Muslims in Mecca. However, it is still possible that the first three verses were revealed in Mecca and the last four were revealed in Medina.

*“Have you considered him who denies the Judgment? It is he who mistreats the orphan, and does not urge (others) to feed the poor.”* The Sura starts with a question about those who deny the Judgment. Then the verses continue to identify those who deny the Judgment: those who mistreat the orphan and do not encourage the feeding of the poor. This may be a surprise for those who expected a traditional definition of belief. But the answer defines the essence of belief. Disbelievers are those who insult, harm, and humiliate the orphan; and they do not encourage feeding the poor and being kind to them. Anyone who truly believes in the Judgment would not commit such acts.

Belief is not a lip service. Belief is a transformation that happens to the heart and motivates it to do good deeds and to be kind to other human beings. God does not want people to talk but He wants them to act. These three verses provide the clearest representation of the essence of the faith.

The following verses present a practical illustration of what was mentioned above, *“So woe to those who pray, but are heedless of their prayer; those who show off, yet withhold small acts of kindness.”* Who are those who are heedless of their prayer? They are those who perform the movements of the prayer but they do not establish it. They go through the motions, they recite the invocations, but their hearts are far away from it. Their souls are not aware of the true content of the prayer. They pray not because they are devoted to God but because they want to show off. Those people do not benefit from their prayer. They do not enjoy the transformation that prayer

brings to the soul to motivate it to do good deeds. That is why they do not perform any acts of kindness to their fellow human beings.

## **Sura 108: Al-Kawthar (Abundance)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 3:**

1. *We have given you abundance;*
2. *So pray to your Lord, and sacrifice.*
3. *He who hates you is the one who is cut off.*

This Sura, similar to Surat Ad-Duha (Chapter 93) and Surat Ash-Sharh (Chapter 94), has been dedicated exclusively to the Prophet (PBUH). Its purpose was to comfort the Prophet (PBUH), promise him glad tidings, threaten his enemies, and guide him to the path of thanksgiving. It exhibits an example of the plots that the idolaters of Mecca were plotting to hurt the Messenger (PBUH) and to stop the spread of Islam. The Sura also illustrates an example of the care and protection that God bestowed on His Messenger (PBUH) and the Muslims who believed with him.

The Sura exhibits the reality of guidance, goodness, and faith on one side; and the reality of misguidance, evil, and disbelief on the other. The former is one of abundance and expansion, while the latter is one of scarcity and shrinking resources.

It has been reported that the idolaters of Quraish used to harm and insult the Prophet (PBUH) hoping that these insults would drive the people away from listening to the call to Islam. One of the ways to slander the Prophet (PBUH) that they used was to say that he will die leaving no male descendants. This kind of ignoble statements would resonate with the people in the Mecca, because these people in their ignorance used to find great pride in having male descendants. They mocked the Prophet (PBUH) saying that his lineage has been cut off. The Sura came to comfort the Prophet (PBUH) and to emphasize the ever lasting legacy that he will leave behind. This legacy is an embodiment of the goodness which God has entrusted His Messenger (PBUH) to convey to the world. The Sura states that it is his enemies whose lineage will be truly cut off.

The Sura starts by emphasizing that God will give His Messenger abundance. He will find this abundance in the prophethood which connects him with God and the universe. He will find abundance in the Qur'an. He will find abundance in the Higher Host who pray peace for him. He will find abundance in the legacy that he will leave behind which will continue to benefit people for millions of years. He will find abundance in the goodness that he brought to humankind.

“*So pray to your Lord and sacrifice.*” Having received the great abundance of goodness that God has bestowed on him, it is now the time for showing gratitude. The best way to show gratitude to God is to pray, devoting oneself completely to Him; and to slaughter an animal as a sacrifice dedicated to God's name alone. The repeated mention of the name of God each time we slaughter an animal is a way of expressing the belief in the oneness of God.

*“He who hates you is the one who is cut off.”* God’s promise was fulfilled. Their memory was completely forgotten, while the Prophet’s (PBUH) name is continuously mentioned around the world.

## **Sura 109: Al-Kafirun (The Disbelievers)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 6:**

1. *Say, "Disbelievers; I do not worship what you worship,*
2. *Nor will you worship what I worship.*
3. *And I will never worship what you worship,*
4. *And you will never worship what I worship.*
5. *You have your religion*
6. *And I have my religion.*

The Arabs were not atheists, but they simply did not understand that God, as He described Himself, is One and Unique. They associated partners with Him. They used to worship idols which symbolized righteous ancestors, great men of the past, or angels. They also claimed that the angels are the daughters of God. They thought that the idols could intercede on their behalf to God.

The Qur'an told us that they knew that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth. They believed that He controls the Sun, the Moon, and the rain. However, they still associated partners with Him.

They also believed that they were following the religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) and that they were better guided than the People of the Scripture who were living in the Arabian Peninsula.

When Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told them that he was following the religion of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) they said, "We are following the religion of Abraham (PBUH), so why should we leave what we are following and follow Muhammad (PBUH)?" They tried also to negotiate with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a middle ground. They made him an offer that if he accepts their idols as gods, they would accept his God. They may have thought that they can convince the Prophet (PBUH) to meet them halfway.

This Sura came to declare unequivocally that there is no middle ground and that idolatry and Islam are completely two distinct religions, "*Say, 'Disbelievers; I do not worship what you worship, nor will you worship what I worship. And I will never worship what you worship, and you will never worship what I worship. You have your religion and I have my religion.'*" This is very clear and unequivocal statement. It starts with a firm command to the Prophet (PBUH), telling him to describe the idolaters of Mecca using their principal characteristic, "Disbelievers," so there would be no doubt that they were certainly disbelievers. This emphasized the distinct difference between the two groups, a difference that could not be bridged. The verses reiterated this fact in several ways to show that this difference could not be reconciled.

## Sura 110: Al-Nasr (Victory)

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

### Verses 1 to 3:

1. *When there comes God's victory, and conquest;*
2. *And you see people entering God's religion in multitudes,*
3. *Celebrate the praises of your Lord, and pray for His forgiveness. He is Ever-Relenting.*

This short Sura brought the Prophet (PBUH) the glad tidings of God's victory; telling him that people will be coming into the fold of Islam in multitudes. In the same time the Sura emphasized a fundamental characteristic of the religion of Islam: its objective to elevate, purify, and honor humankind. Only under the banner of Islam, could humankind achieve such a status. The Sura also directs the Messenger (PBUH) to seek God's forgiveness when he receives God's victory.

Many narrations were reported about this Sura. We will choose the narration reported by Imam Ahmed. 'Aisha (RA) said, "The Messenger of God (PBUH) used to say often, towards the end of his life, 'I glorify God and praise Him. I seek God's forgiveness and I repent to Him.' He also used to say, 'My Lord told me that I will see a sign in my nation. He commanded me that when I see this sign I should glorify Him and praise Him. Now I see the sign. The sign is, "*When there comes God's victory, and conquest; and you see people entering God's religion in multitudes, celebrate the praises of your Lord, and pray for His forgiveness. He is Ever-Relenting.*"'"

The first verse emphasizes the fundamental concept of faith: everything belongs to God. It is God's victory. God decides when this victory will take place and how it will take place. Only He can bring about this victory. God bestowed this victory on the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers. They should respond by expressing their gratitude to God and praising Him.

They should glorify God for the bounty He bestowed on them when He made them the guardians of His Message. They should glorify Him for the mercy that He bestowed on humankind by establishing His religion and allowing people to come into its fold in multitudes.

Seeking forgiveness would address many shortcomings; the shortcoming of the possibility of entertaining a feeling of pride at the moment of victory; the shortcoming of the possibility of entertaining a feeling of despair or impatience during the long struggle before victory; the shortcoming of the possibility of not showing enough gratitude to God. One important reason for seeking forgiveness at the time of victory is to remind oneself of one's own shortcomings to eliminate any possibility of feeling arrogant.

## **Sura 111: Al-Masad (The Palm Fibre)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 5:**

1. *May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he.*
2. *His wealth and what he earns will not avail him.*
3. *He will burn in a flaming Fire,*
4. *And his wife, the firewood-carrier,*
5. *Will have upon her neck a rope of palm-fibre.*

Abu Lahab was the Prophet's (PBUH) uncle. His name was Abd Al-Ozza ibn Abd Al-Muttaleb. He acquired the nick name Abu Lahab because his face looked bright. He and his wife, Um Jamil were among the worst of those who persecuted the Prophet (PBUH) and resisted Islam. Abu Lahab used to stalk the Prophet (PBUH) and whenever the Prophet (PBUH) started to call people to Islam, Abu Lahab would stand behind him to tell lies about Islam. He would then ask people not to listen to the Prophet (PBUH). He was the enemy of the Prophet (PBUH) and Islam since day one.

When Quraish decided to boycott Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Muslims, the clan of Bani Hashem under the leadership of Abu Taleb, with the exception of Abu Lahab, decided to protect the Prophet (PBUH). Abu Lahab sided with Quraish against his nephew. His two sons were married to the daughters of the Prophet (PBUH) before the advent of Islam. When the Prophet (PBUH) announced that he was sent as a messenger of God, Abu Lahab commanded his two sons to divorce their wives. He continued, together with his wife, to wage a merciless war on the Prophet (PBUH) and Islam. Um Jamil used to place thorns on the way of the Prophet (PBUH).

This Sura was revealed as a response to the war which Abu Lahab and his wife waged against the Prophet (PBUH) and Islam. The Sura started by warning Abu Lahab that he will perish, then emphasized that this warning will take place, "*May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he.*" His wealth will not avail him in this life, and in the Hereafter he will burn in Hellfire. His wife will be lead to Hell by a rope of palm-fibre bound around her neck.

## **Sura 112: Al-Ikhlās (Purity of Faith)**

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

### **Verses 1 to 4:**

1. *Say, "He is God, the One and Only;*
2. *God, the Eternal, Absolute;*
3. *He begets not, nor is He begotten;*
4. *And there is none like Him."*

Authentic traditions reported that this short Sura is equivalent to one third of the Quran. This is not surprising because the Sura proclaims the Oneness of God which is the fundamental concept of the faith, it explains the existence of everything, and it outlines a lifestyle. The Sura includes the most fundamental fact that underlies the faith of Islam. The first verse does not only say, "God is one," but it says, "He is One and the One only." This indicates the oneness of existence. God is the only existing truth and there is no true existence except His. The existence of everything is dependent on the existence of God. The statement also means that He is the only One who has true power. He controls all actions in this universe. The understanding and belief in this concept purifies the heart and opens it to the true understanding of the meaning of the Oneness of God.

True freedom is attained when this belief rests deep in the heart and replaces all other false beliefs. The heart will be able to see that God's hand controls everything. There is no true will nor real power in this universe except the will and power of God. It becomes clear that the apparent causes have no power in themselves. The causes produce effects only by the will and power of God. This fact has been emphasized in several verses in the Quran, "And you did not throw, (Muhammad) when you threw, but it was God who threw." (8:17), "And victory is not except from God." (3:126) and "And you do not will except that God wills." (81: 29). For this reason, the first years of the call to Islam was focused on establishing the true meaning of the belief in the oneness of God, because the belief in the oneness of God is not only an article of faith but it also explains the rules that control the universe and it establishes the foundation of the Islamic project. This will consequently mean that there is no material causality. Every cause refers to the original cause.

According to the Islamic project, one only seeks help from God alone; whether at time of ease or time of adversity. The project is based on God made laws not manmade laws. The project binds the human heart with everything that exists in the universe with a bond of love, compassion, and friendliness. It is a project that opens up the horizon for the progress, the development, and the betterment of life for the whole humanity.



This explains why the Prophet (PBUH) dedicated all his efforts during the early years to establish the fundamental concept of the belief in the oneness of God and to inculcate it in the psyche of the believers. The belief of the oneness of God is the corner stone of the Islamic project as a whole. All aspects of the Islamic project, doctrine, rituals, laws, values, and morals are based on this fundamental concept.

The attributes of God mentioned in the subsequent verses, “*God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like Him;*” are simply products of the fundamental concept of God’s Oneness and Uniqueness.

## Sura 113: Al-Falaq (The Daybreak)

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

### Verses 1 to 5:

1. *Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak;*
2. *From the evil of that which He created;*
3. *From the evil of the darkness when it is intense;*
4. *And from the evil of those who practice witchcraft,*
5. *And from the evil of the envious when he envies."*

This Sura and the following one constitute a directive from God to His Prophet (PBUH) and the believers to seek refuge in Him. God will protect His Prophet (PBUH) and the believers from all evil and harm. It is a call for them to seek security, safety, and serenity in the closeness of God.

‘Uqba ibn ‘Amer (RA) narrated that the Messenger of God (PBUH) told him, "I have received tonight verses that nothing similar to them was revealed before, ‘Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak;" and ‘Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord of the people."'"

The Sura starts with stating the words that we should use to call upon God when we seek refuge in Him from the evils that are mentioned in the Sura. Then it lists some of the evils that we should seek refuge in God from. It starts with a general statement, "*from the evil of that which He created.*" This is a comprehensive statement that includes any possible evil. Then any evil that can be covered by the intense darkness of the night. The darkness is horrifying in itself because we do not know what dangers it may cover.

*"and from the evil of those who practice witchcraft,"* We know that magicians cannot change reality and they cannot create a new reality. But they may be able to create an illusion, as has been told in the encounter between Prophet Moses (PBUH) and the magicians, "*And suddenly their ropes and staffs seemed to him from their magic that they were moving. And he sensed within himself apprehension. We said, 'Fear not. It is you who are superior. And throw what is in your right hand; it will swallow up what they have crafted.'*" (20: 66 – 69) Their ropes and staffs were not transformed into serpents, but Prophet Moses (PBUH) was under the illusion that they did. The truth was uncovered when he threw his staff and it swallowed their ropes and staffs. This is the nature of magic. We should believe that magic is an illusion. It is an evil that we should seek God's refuge from.

*"and from the evil of the envious when he envies."* Envy is an emotion that motivates its owner to wish the envied ill. This emotion, whether it remained as an inner feeling or it developed into an action, produces evil. There is a great deal of mysteries that we did not discover; and consequently we do not know the relationship between the emotions that the envious harbor and the harm that will afflict the envied. However, it is an evil that we should seek God's refuge from. The Prophet (PBUH) used to recite the three Suras, "*Say, 'He is God, the One and Only;'" "Say, 'I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak;'" and "Say, 'I seek refuge with the Lord of the people,'" three times before he goes to sleep.*

## Sura 114: Al-Nas (Humankind)

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

### Verses 1 to 6:

1. *Say, "I seek refuge with the Lord humankind,*
2. *The King of humankind,*
3. *The God of humankind,*
4. *From the evil of the sneaking whisperer,*
5. *Who whispers in the hearts of humankind,*
6. *Of the jinn and of humankind.*

We seek refuge with the Lord of humankind, the King of humankind, the God of humankind. We seek refuge from the evil of the sneaking whisperer who whispers in the hearts of people from jinn and humankind. The Lord is the Educator, the Guide, the Keeper, and the Protector. The King is the owner. God has absolute control. These attributes are the attributes of the Protector who can protect against the invisible evil, which cannot be repelled by humans because it is unseen to them.

The Sura defined the source of this evil, "*the sneaking whisperer;*" outlined his action, "*who whispers in the hearts of humankind;*" and identified his nature, "*of the jinn and of humankind.*" People should then be aware and be prepared to fight this evil back. It is an evil which sneaks surreptitiously into the hearts of people whispering evil thoughts. There are two kinds of creatures who can do this, jinn and human beings. We do not know how do the jinn whisper to people but we find its effects clearly in our daily life. The war between Satan and humankind started a long time ago. The war was motivated by Satan's arrogance and his hate of humankind. He sought God's permission to wage this war and God gave him the permission for a reason which is only known to God. However, God did not leave humankind helpless in this war. God gave humankind the faith as a protection from Satan's attacks, the remembrance of God as a tool to combat Satan, and the refuge in God as a weapon to fight Satan with. It is humankind responsibility to look after his protection, his tool, and his weapon. It has been narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "*Satan camps on the heart of the children of Adam. Satan shrinks when they remember God, but he starts to whisper when they become heedless of God.*" This tradition indicates that the remembrance of God weakens Satan and takes away his power.

We know the evil that some people can produce. We know about those who use their friendship as a way to whisper to their friends and sway them away from the straight path. We know about the evil bands of people who encircle people in power and whisper to them bad advice and turn them into tyrants. We know the backbiter, the slanderer, and the pleasure trader who whisper to people and facilitate their way to sin. Seeking God refuge is the only safeguard which protects people from these evil whisperers. The battle between goodness and evil is an eternal battle. In this battle, the agents of evil whether jinn or human beings are lurking waiting for an opportunity

to tempt people. The Qur'an tells us that evil plans are weak and that God supports those who remember Him. Our salvation is in the remembrance of God.

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