

Sura 23: Al-Muminun (The Believers)

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

This Sura is considered a Meccan Sura. The theme of the Sura can be understood from its title. The title reflects its main theme. It starts with the characteristics of the believers, then the signs which Allah (SWT) created in the universe and in the human beings which lead to the belief in God are discussed; this is followed by the true nature of faith which was explained by the different messengers of God, who came to summon people to the belief in God.

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 pay the poor-due;*
5. *And who guard their chastity;*
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 pay the poor- due; 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 chastity, 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 immorality 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 was designed to lead 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 the 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;”* 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 rules which allow ships to float, and travel over water, carrying people from one place to another.

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 his people who disbelieved 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 fabricates 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 know all what you do.*
52. *And verily this community of yours is one community, 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 his people who disbelieved 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 fabricates 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 know all what you do. And verily your religion is 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 this community of yours is one community, 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 perceive.*
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 covered with confusion over 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 corrupted. 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 become mindful?"*
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; 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 perceive."*

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 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 covered with confusion over 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 corrupted. 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 at the end He will gather all people to the Day of Judgment. God creates life and puts people to 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 become mindful?’”* 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 their lips will be twisted in pain.*
105. *(It will be said,) "Were not My revelations recited to you, but you used to deny 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 achievers (of triumph)."*
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 of whom 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 those who are Merciful." (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 their lips will be twisted in pain.”* 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 deny 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 achievers (of triumph).’”* 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 of whom 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 those who are Merciful.’*”