

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 Abraham (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 these are the successful.*
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 do not perceive it.*
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 spread corruption on earth," they say, "Why, we are only mending things."*
12. *Indeed, they are the ones who are spreading corruption, but they do not perceive it.*
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 not rightly guided.*
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, so 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 away 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 who spread corruption 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 do not perceive it. 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 spread corruption on the earth,’ they say, ‘Why, we are only mending things.’ Indeed, they are the ones who are spreading corruption, but they do not perceive it. 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 are not rightly guided.”* 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 are not rightly guided."*

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 away 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 has commanded to be joined, and who spread corruption 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 not spread corruption on earth, these are the losers."* Corruption has different forms. The root of all forms of corruption 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 spread corruption 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 spread corruption 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 spread corruption 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 spread corruption 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 the unseen 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 spouse 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 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 to 74

- 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 transgressed (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 not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.*
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 (miser), and you shall find what you want." And ignominy 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 an admonition 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 your 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 there be leaders)?' He answered, 'My covenant 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 revealed, 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 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 yet 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 transgressed (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 not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption.

” 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 ignominy 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 an admonition 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 an admonition 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 corpse with a piece of the cow's flesh.

When the murdered person's corpse 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 recompense 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 denied, 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 grace 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 through 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 recompense 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 denied, 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 grace 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 (the 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 ignominy 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 devoutly obedient 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 grace that God bestowed upon the Muslims, *"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."* 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 ignominy 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 devoutly obedient 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 covenant 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 covenant 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 covenant 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 covenant “*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, and 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 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.'"* 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 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. Certainly, 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 do not perceive it.*
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 do not perceive it.”* 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 Hurairah (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 some 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 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 prophets; 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, the Lord of Mercy, the 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 prophets; 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, O possessors of intellect, 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, O possessors of intellect, 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

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 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." 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 recompense 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, transgression, 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, O possessors of intellect.*
198. *It is no sin for you that you seek the grace 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 recompense 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 sacred 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 ‘Agrah (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 Iharm 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 transgression 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, O possessors of intellect.”* 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 transgression nor angry conversation during the pilgrimage."* Lewdness refers to intimate relationship with women, while transgression refers to crossing the limits which Allah (SWT) has decreed not to be crossed. 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 grace 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 grace 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 'Ukaz, Mejnah, 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) servants.*
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 deeds will bear no fruits 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 be mindful.*
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, to admonish you. 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 believes 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 devoutly obedient to Him.*
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 to the Fire. But God beckons by His Grace to paradise and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to humankind, that they may be mindful.” 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 people. 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, to admonish you. 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 devoutly obedient to Him. 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. 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, *“Fight in the cause of God, and know that God is 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, 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.” 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. 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 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 people by others the earth would have been corrupted. But God is Gracious to all 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 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.’” 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 be mindful of this but those who are possessors of intellect.*

270. *Whatever you spend or you vow to spend in charity, 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 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.” 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 be mindful of this but those who are possessors of intellect.” 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 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.” 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, whereas He will bless deeds of charity with manifold increase. 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 be suffered by neither a scribe nor a witness. If you do such harm, it will be a transgression 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*

a transgression 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.