

Sura 4: Al-Nisaa (The Women)

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

This Sura was revealed in Medina. It is the second longest Sura in the Quran. It was revealed after Surat Al-Mumtahina (Chapter 60). It has been narrated that some verses from Al-Mumtahina were revealed during the battle of Al-Hudaiybiah in the sixth year (H), while others were revealed after the conquest of Mecca in the eighth year (H). However, as we have noted before, the narrations which provide a chronological order for the revelation of the different Suras of the Quran may not be accurate. In addition, no Sura was revealed in its entirety all at once. Whenever a group of verses was revealed to the Prophet (PBUH), he used to instruct his scribes where exactly they should place these verses. Thus, the contents of many of the Suras were not finalized until the revelation of the whole Quran had been completed. It seems that the revelation of this Sura started shortly after the Prophet (PBUH) had migrated to Medina. Verses in this Sura continued to be revealed over the subsequent eight years.

This Sura reflects the efforts that were spent to establish and protect the Muslim nation, and to build and nurture the Muslim society. It presents an example of the impact of the Quran on this fledgling society, a society whose values were deeply rooted in the verses of the Quran. This is a society which was fashioned according to a divinely inspired project. The verses of the Sura portray the efforts that were involved in implementing the divine project to move humankind from the lowermost level of vain desires to the uppermost level of pure faith along a path full of obstacles of temptation and desires. The verses of the previous Sura dealt with a similar theme, but each Sura of the Quran has its own way of addressing the issues. Each Sura has its own characteristics which set it apart from other Suras.

The verses of this Sura express the serious effort that the Quran devoted to erasing the characteristics of the pre-Islamic society from which the new Muslim society emerged. The verses provided a program to cleanse the Muslim society of all the impurities of the pre-Islamic society and shape the new society according to the divinely inspired way of life. This is done by stating clearly the characteristics which set the new society apart from the old one and by exposing the attempts of the enemies of Islam which aimed at swaying the Muslims away from the straight path which they had chosen.

The verses also record the struggle between the remnants of the old society and the principles which are shaping the new society. The term "age of ignorance" applies to the pre-Islamic society and to any society which allows human beings to enslave their fellow human beings. This phenomenon exists to a varying degree in all societies controlled by man-made laws. Islam provides the only way of life which frees all people from the servitude imposed on them by their fellow human beings. In this divinely inspired way of life, human beings serve God alone, worship God alone, lower their head to God alone, and follow laws decreed by God alone. Their servitude to God frees them from any other kind of servitude. This is the criterion which differentiates an Islamic society from a society which lives in the age of ignorance. The verses in this Sura depict very clearly the demarcation line between the two societies.

It is understood that the Quranic commands addressed situations which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. The commands were meant to establish new rules or to rescind existing ones. However, the rules that the Quran decreed were meant to apply to Muslim societies in

general. It is a fundamental principle that Quranic commands provide general rulings even though they may have been revealed to address specific situations. Quranic commands were meant to apply at all times and for all places.

This may explain the choice of Arabia to be the birthplace of this message. The genius of the message can only be realized by observing how the message was able to transform the primitive idolater society into a highly civilized one. The idolater society in Arabia was a backward society in all aspects of life: religious, moral, social, and political. The message was successful in transforming the society of the idolater savages into a highly refined and civilized society. This transformation took place because of a divine project that addressed the needs and aspirations of human nature. This transformational program can be applied by any society, anywhere and at any time.

When we read this Sura, we can understand some of the oppressive practices that existed in the pre-Islamic society. The verses describe how the rights of the orphans, especially female orphans, were usurped by their guardians. These guardians, motivated by greed, were anxious to arrogate the orphans' wealth before they grew up and became able to claim their rights. Greedy guardians married female orphans under their care to seize their property. The rights of the most vulnerable, children and women, were trampled upon by powerful men who deprived them of their rightful share in inheritance. In addition, women were ill-treated and abused.

Al-Maraghi summarizes the topics which the Sura dealt with. These are:

- Commanding God consciousness.
- Stating that the whole human race was created from one soul.
- Defining permissible relations between family members.
- Stating the rules of inheritance.
- Stating the rules of war.
- Rebuttal of claims made by the People of Scripture.
- Narrating stories about hypocrites.

Verses: 1 to 14

1. People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and from it created its mate and spread from these two, many men and women; and be conscious of God, in Whose name you demand your mutual rights. Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly, God is ever watching over you.
2. And give to the orphans their property, and do not substitute worthless (things) for (their) good (ones), and do not devour their property (by mixing it up) with your own; this is certainly a major sin.
3. And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women who seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course.
4. And give women their bridal gift upon marriage graciously, but if they waive some of it willingly, then take it with satisfaction and ease.

5. And do not give away your property which God has made for you as a means of support to the weak-minded, but maintain them out of its profit, and clothe them and speak kindly to them.
6. And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, release their property to them, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily, lest they should grow up; and if the Guardian is rich, let him abstain altogether (from taking of a wage), and whoever is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable; then when you release their property to them, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence; and God is enough as a Reckoner.
7. From what is left by parents and near relatives, there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is small or large, a legal share.
8. But if at the time of the division of the legacy other relatives, or orphans or the needy, are present, give them a portion of the (property), and speak kindly to them.
9. And let those who, should they leave behind them helpless offspring, would fear for their future, be conscious of God, and let them speak justly.
10. Certainly, those who devour the property of the orphans unjustly, they only devour fire into their bellies, and they will soon endure blazing fire.
11. God commands you regarding your children: the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have one-half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherited him, then his mother shall have one-third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have one-sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt he may have incurred; your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is more beneficial to you; this is an injunction from God, certainly God is Omniscient, Wise.
12. And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child, but if they have a child, then you shall have one-fourth of what they leave after (payment of) any bequest they may have bequeathed or a debt they may have incurred; and they shall have one-fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave after (payment of) a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt you may have incurred; and if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of the inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others; this is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Forbearing.
13. These are the limits set by God, and whoever obeys God and His Messenger will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow, in which he will dwell forever; and this is the supreme achievement.
14. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger and transgresses the limits set by God, will be admitted to a fire to abide therein forever, and he shall have a humiliating torment. (4:1-14)

“People, be conscious of your Lord, Who created you from a single being and from it created its mate and spread from these two, many men and women; and be conscious of God, in Whose name you demand your mutual rights. Beware of severing the ties of the wombs; certainly, God is ever watching over you.” This is an address to the whole of humanity to remind them of the concept of the oneness of the Creator and the common root of their race. People need to reflect on these statements. How did humankind come to this world? Who brought them? Before being

created they were nothing; they came to life by God's will. They were given unique characteristics and talents to cope with life on earth. The power that brought them to existence knows everything about them. This power has the right to organize their lives and to determine the norms and principles which should govern their societies.

Human life started with a single decision from God and the whole of humanity sprung from one common root. This makes the whole of humanity a single family, and all people are related to each other. Understanding this fact should help diminish the differences that divide people and break the ties between them. The evils of race discrimination and genocide would have been avoided had humans recognized and understood this fact. All traditions that discriminate between people based on skin color, gender, or class have no real justification. The long history of discrimination based on gender should have been avoided. Souls of males and females are the same. Males and females share the same nature and the same human characteristics. They were created to complement each other. Each has a mission to fulfill, and each has been created with the appropriate aptitude to fulfill this mission.

The verse also underscores the importance of the family as the building block of human society. Humanity started with a single soul, and it was complemented with its mate; together they formed a single family from which the whole human race sprung. Had God willed, He would have created many men and women in the first instance. The idea of starting the creation with a single family highlights the important role that the family plays in enhancing the human ties between the members of human society. The social system in Islam paid great attention to developing and strengthening the means which support and protect the family structure. This is one of the major themes dealt with in this Sura as well as in many others. The family starts with two partners. A strong family structure cannot be established while one of the partners is being ill-treated, abused, or wronged in any way. Islam paid great attention to establishing women's rights as human beings and giving them their due respect.

When we reflect further on this verse, we cannot but wonder at how many different men and women sprung from one single family. People born over the centuries, since the beginning of the creation, are all different. They are different in form and shape. They are different in their aptitudes and abilities. They are different in their dispositions and feelings. Who else can do this except God, the Creator?

The verse urges people to remain conscious of their Lord in whose name they conduct their transactions and request their rights from each other. It urges them to remain conscious of God when they deal with each other. The meaning of the expression "God consciousness" is understood and it is oft repeated in the Quran. However, the expression "conscious of the wombs" is a different one; it is an amazing expression and difficult to explain. It enlivens the feelings of the human being. The expression exhorts the believer to be sensitive to the needs and rights of family relationships. It exhorts the believers to avoid hurting or committing injustice against those with whom we share a relationship through the wombs. Remember that God is ever watching over us. He is the Creator who knows His creation. There is nothing we can hide from Him. He is fully aware of our deeds and our thoughts.

"And give to the orphans their property, and do not substitute worthless (things) for (their) good (ones), and do not devour their property (by mixing it up) with your own; this is certainly a major sin." The strong beginning of the Sura lays the foundation for the social system in Islam. This is a system which is determined to protect the vulnerable, secure women's rights and dignity, establish means for the protection of society's wealth, and establish a fair system for inheritance.

It starts by commanding the guardians of orphans to return the wealth to its rightful owners when they reach the age of maturity. The wealth should be protected, and guardians should not usurp any of it or replace a property with another of lesser quality. Guardians are warned that it is a major sin not to heed these commands. Such warnings are needed to complement the legislated laws. People may break the law if they feel that they are able to get away with it, but realizing that God is ever watching provides a strong incentive not to break the law, even if they are able to escape the consequences in this life.

"And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women who seem good to you, two or three or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hand possesses; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course." 'Urwah bin Al-Zubair (RA) asked 'Aisha (RA) about this verse. She said, "Son of my sister, this is regarding wealthy female orphans whose guardians marry them for the sake of their wealth and beauty, but they do not give them their bridal gifts as they would have given other women." The verse came to abolish this unfair practice. If the guardians cannot treat their charges fairly, they should seek matrimony with other women. This removes any chance of abuse of the vulnerable charges. This tradition shows that Muslims continued to practice some pre-Islamic unfair traditions until the Quran commanded the believers to relinquish these practices and to be careful in their treatment of orphans. The verse exhorts guardians to exercise justice. Justice is a moral value in Islam that needs to be heeded in all its forms and in any circumstance.

The verse provides a license for polygamy with a certain caveat: fairness must be observed in treating the wives. When a man fears that he will be unable to treat all his wives with absolute fairness, he should not marry more than one wife. This license is a source of debate between those who are against and those who are in favor of the practice of polygamy. It has also been used as a springboard to launch attacks against Islam. We need to consider this carefully to show the rationale behind this license and the historical background for the practice.

Before the advent of Islam, the practice of polygamy was prevalent in Arabia. There was no limit on how many wives a man could have. Authentic traditions talk about men who had ten or more wives and were asked to keep only four and divorce the rest when they wanted to embrace Islam. The verse was revealed to modify an existing norm, not to establish a new one. Men are not allowed to marry more than four wives, with the caveat that they should treat them all fairly. Equal and fair treatment is a condition that needs to be fulfilled; otherwise polygamy is not permissible.

However, one can also ask why Islam allowed the practice of polygamy to continue. Islam is a system which caters to realistic, legitimate, and necessary human needs. Islam provides a

system in harmony with the initial natural disposition of humankind. It provides a system which endeavors to refine human behavior, neither ignoring the initial natural disposition nor allowing the indulgence in worldly desires without limits.

A system of polygamy which is based on the establishment of justice and the approval of all parties concerned provides a practical solution to social problems that existed in human societies since the dawn of history and will continue to exist till the end of time. These include the disparity between the number of marriageable men and women, the difference between the sexual norms of men and women, and the various situations in which polygamy represents a better alternative to divorce. Such is the choice of Islam: a system of legal and restricted polygamy that ensures the rights and preserves the dignity of all parties involved.

Those who understand the spirit of Islam recognize that Islam does not condone polygamy for its own sake, nor as a mechanism to abuse women for the sake of satisfying uncontrolled and unwarranted sexual desires. Islam recognizes polygamy as a necessary solution to certain social problems. It is the exception rather than the norm. It is not left without constraints or controls. It should only be exercised in special circumstances and not as a requirement that must be fulfilled by every man. The permission to take recourse to this solution is controlled by the requirement of fair treatment of all wives. The husband must treat all wives equally in all aspects of life. Islam recognizes that humans have no control over their feelings. So, it is not logical to create laws controlling human emotions. Thus, the scope of the treatment that requires fairness does not include feelings or emotions. This exemption has been mentioned in the verse: "And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire" (4:129). Some tried to argue that this verse is a proof that polygamy is not allowed in Islam. This is not so. We cannot imagine that the Quran allows a specific practice in one verse and prohibits it in another. The scope of fairness in treatment mentioned in the first verse encompasses material and physical aspects of life, such as maintenance, daily interactions, and intimate relationships. Fairness must be observed in satisfying the material and physical needs of the different wives. The second verse points to the inability of human beings to control their feelings. Matters of the heart lie in God's domain of control.

To reiterate, polygamy existed before the advent of Islam. Islam introduced controls and constraints to the practice of polygamy. Islam considers polygamy an exception that can be used in special circumstances, rather than the norm. The fact that some Muslims abuse this license does not warrant its abolishment. The right to marry more than one wife is conditional on the ability of the man to be fair in treating his wives. Fairness in treating all wives is a condition for the license to practice polygamy. Fairness should be observed by the husband in providing for his wives and allotting equal shares of his time and attention. This condition does not apply to feelings and emotions, since these are beyond the control of human beings.

Marrying a slave girl was one of the devices that Islam introduced to end slavery. Marrying a slave girl removes the stigma cast upon slaves. Very often a slave girl is freed upon marrying a free man. Even if she was not freed at the time of marriage, she would be freed once she gives birth or when her husband dies. Her children are born free. At the time of the advent of Islam, slavery was a well-established practice in the world. Islam instituted several ways to eradicate slavery, as has been pointed out in other places in the Quran. In the interim, Muslims had to

abide by the same rules that their enemy followed. However, Islam revolutionized the way captured slaves were treated.

The verse ends by explaining the rationale behind all these rules: "that you may not deviate from the right course." The right course is the just course. Justice is an objective of all Islamic laws, and social justice is a requirement for a sound and healthy society.

"And give women their bridal gift upon marriage graciously, but if they waive some of it willingly, then take it with satisfaction and ease. And do not give away your property which God has made for you as a means of support to the weak-minded, but maintain them out of its profit, and clothe them and speak kindly to them." This verse establishes the right of the bride to receive a wedding gift as her own property. She has the right to receive it and dispose of it as she wishes. The verse abolished practices that were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society which robbed women of their rights in receiving and disposing of their wedding gifts as they wished. A girl's guardian had a free hand in deciding whom she should marry; he had the right to receive the wedding gift on her behalf and to dispose of it according to his own will. Many of these marriages were conducted as business deals to benefit the guardians. This verse came to abolish these bad practices and give a girl the right to decide for herself. She can choose freely and under no compulsion to share her wedding gift with her husband.

The wealth that God endowed individual orphans with is also intended for the benefit of the community. It can be looked at as a property of the community entrusted to individuals to invest and enjoy the accruing benefits. Wealth must be protected, so it should be entrusted to those who are capable of managing it. Guardians should be appointed to manage the property of orphans who are weak-minded or unable to manage their property appropriately. The needs of the orphans should be satisfied using the accrued benefit. This provides protection of the orphans' wealth.

"And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage; then if you find in them maturity of intellect, release their property to them, and do not consume it extravagantly and hastily, lest they should grow up; and if the Guardian is rich, let him abstain altogether (from taking of a wage), and whoever is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable; then when you release their property to them, have (the transaction) witnessed in their presence; and God is enough as a Reckoner." When orphans reach the age of maturity, they should be tested to determine whether they are able to manage their property. If it is determined that they can manage their property, the property must be delivered to them in perfect condition. The guardians are admonished not to squander the property before the orphan reaches the age of maturity. The guardians should protect the wealth placed in their trust and do their best to grow it. If the guardian is a needy person, then he should be rewarded reasonably for his efforts, but if the guardian is wealthy then he should not seek any compensation for his efforts. Witnesses should be present at the time of the transfer of the property. Guardians should remember that God is the best of those who reckon.

These verses show the enormous care that the divine project took to eradicate the corrupt practices which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. These practices, which allowed

guardians to squander the wealth under their trust, were abolished by Islam, and rules were established to protect the vulnerable orphans.

"From what is left by parents and near relatives, there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property is small or large, a legal share. But if at the time of the division of the legacy other relatives, or orphans or the needy, are present, give them a portion of the (property), and speak kindly to them. And let those who, should they leave behind them helpless offspring, would fear for their future, be conscious of God, and let them speak justly. Certainly, those who devour the property of the orphans unjustly, they only devour fire into their bellies, and they will soon endure blazing fire." This is the fundamental principle that Islam introduced fourteen hundred years ago to establish women's right to inheritance. In the pre-Islamic society, people were given rights which were commensurate with their ability to contribute to society's production or defense requirements. Islam established the principle of basic human rights. All human beings have equal worth irrespective of their material contribution to society. Having fulfilled the basic common human rights, the special needs of people can then be addressed according to their varying societal and family responsibilities.

Rules and traditions in the pre-Islamic society allowed only a small portion of the estate of a deceased person to be given to female and child heirs because females and children did not contribute to the fighting power of the tribe. Islamic law came to give all heirs fair shares. This is consistent with the Islamic premise of protecting the family structure. Depriving some members of a fair share in the inheritance creates animosity between the members of the family. Islamic inheritance law gives a fair share to each member of the family of the deceased, taking into consideration their responsibilities in supporting other family members. Protecting the family structure is one of the objectives of the social system in Islam. Islam recognizes that a strong and healthy society can only be established if its building block, the family, is strong and healthy. Islamic laws are designed to strengthen the solidarity between family members.

The Quran addresses the hearts of the believers urging them to think of the orphan child under their guardianship as their own. It takes more than a law to protect the rights of the orphans. The Quran combines the strength of the law with the fear of God to ensure that the rights of the orphans are protected.

"God commands you regarding your children: the male shall have the equal of the portion of two females; then if they are more than two females, they shall have two-thirds of what the deceased has left, and if there is one, she shall have one-half; and as for his parents, each of them shall have one-sixth of what he has left if he has a child, but if he has no child and (only) his two parents inherited him, then his mother shall have one-third; but if he has brothers, then his mother shall have one-sixth after (the payment of) a bequest he may have bequeathed or a debt he may have incurred; your parents and your children, you do not know which of them is more beneficial to you; this is an injunction from God, certainly God is Omniscient, Wise. And you shall have half of what your wives leave if they have no child, but if they have a child, then you shall have one-fourth of what they leave after (payment of) any bequest they may have bequeathed or a debt they may have incurred; and they shall have one-fourth of what you leave if you have no child, but if you have a child then they shall have one-eighth of what you leave after (payment of) a bequest you may have bequeathed or a debt you may have incurred; and if

a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of the inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others; this is ordained by God, and God is Omniscient, Forbearing." These two verses, in addition to a third one at the end of the Sura, establish the basis for the methodology of distributing an estate among the heirs of a deceased person. Further details of these rules were provided by the Prophet (PBUH) in some cases, and by the work of the scholars in other cases. We will reflect briefly on the interpretation of these verses. More details can be found in books on Islamic jurisprudence. The verses start by stating that these are God's commands. He knows what is best for the believers. He is the Provider, and it is He who divides the shares among people. The male has twice the share of the female. When these verses were revealed, many of the Arabs who embraced Islam expressed their dissatisfaction with the new rules. They were used to the practice of giving most of the estate to those who could fight and provide protection for the tribe, and they wanted this practice to continue. These objections were neither appropriate nor warranted. God knows best what is beneficial for His servants. Thus, Islam came to change all of this; the female shall have the right to inherit. However, the female's share is half that of the male. This division is not rooted in a feeling of patriarchal supremacy. It is congruent with the obligations that males are expected to undertake. It is the husband's responsibility to provide for his wife and their children. The wife has no obligation to provide for her family. It is only fair that the male's share of the inheritance be twice the share of a female in the same category.

If the heirs were all females, then they inherit two thirds of the estate. If the deceased left behind only one daughter, then she would inherit half the estate; and the remainder goes to the nearest blood-relation of the deceased.

The verses continue to prescribe the shares of the parents of the deceased through different scenarios. Debts should be settled first before the shares are distributed among the heirs. If the deceased bequeathed a part of his/her estate, then the will has to be fulfilled before the shares are determined. Bequests are limited to one third of the estate. They are meant to address situations where the deceased would like to compensate a person who has no legal right to inherit according to the law. These bequests should not be used to deprive the rightful heirs of their rights.

People are reminded that there is a rationale behind the legislation of these laws. Heirs, whether parents or children, should be treated fairly and objectively. God knows better who of them is more deserving than the other. These are God's commands and they should be obeyed. God is Omniscient, Wise.

The share of the husband in his wife's estate and the wife in her husband's estate is described depending on whether they have children or not. The last rule is regarding a person who does not leave behind children or parents.

The verses end by reminding people not to use the right to bequest a portion of the estate to inflict any harm on any of the rightful heirs. Debts should be settled before the rules are applied. These are the commands of God the Omniscient, the Forbearing.

"These are the limits set by God, and whoever obeys God and His Messenger will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow, in which he will dwell forever; and this is the supreme achievement. And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger and transgresses the limits set by God, will be admitted to a fire to abide therein forever, and he shall have a humiliating torment." The two verses emphasize the importance of being obedient to God. Disobedience may be interpreted as rejecting faith or apostasy. The verses identify the commands that are given regarding the distribution of the estate as limits set by God. Those who obey God and His Prophet (PBUH) are rewarded with an eternal abode in paradise. This is certainly a great achievement. Those who disobey will be destined to Hellfire and a humiliating torment. These are grave consequences. The consequences may seem to be disproportionate to such infractions of the details of the law. But are they? The answer to this question is dealt with in different places of this Sura. We will deal with it in the appropriate places. However, we will address this very briefly here in connection with the above two verses. The fundamental question, in this religion as well as in all divinely revealed religions sent to guide humankind since the time of Adam (PBUH), is who has the right to control people's lives, and who has the right to legislate the laws that organize people's lives? A believer's answer to both questions is God. The Lord has the right to legislate laws that organize people's lives and the right to set the limits that should not be transgressed; trespassing these limits for any reason represents a breach of the belief in the Oneness of God and His right to be in control. So, the verses refer to grave transgressions of the law, not mere infractions of the details.

The inheritance system in Islam is based on a fair methodology for the distribution of shares among the rightful heirs. The methodology is congruent with the initial natural disposition of the human being, the realities of family life, and the responsibilities of the different members of the family. It aims at the preservation of family unity. The system does not exclude any family member from having a share. This includes females as well as young children. The difference in the shares allotted to males and females is justified based on the requirement that males are required to provide for their families while women are exempt from such obligation. The system takes into consideration the initial natural human disposition and its innate bias towards its progeny. The children of the deceased are given priority over other relatives. The system also considers the interest of the community at large. Its methodology aims at the redistribution of wealth from one generation to the next. This prevents the concentration of wealth in few hands. The system provides a solution to economic and social problems without the interference of the state. Redistribution of wealth may not be acceptable if it is mandated by the government, but it may be easily accepted if it is God's command.

Verses: 15 to 23

15. If any of your women are guilty of immoral conduct, call to witness four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness to the truth of the allegation, confine them to the houses until death claims them or God ordains some other way for them.

16. If two men are guilty of lewdness, punish them both; then if they repent and amend, leave them alone; certainly, God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy.

17. God only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them God will turn mercifully, and God is ever Omniscient, Wise.
18. Repentance is not accepted from those who go on doing evil deeds until death faces one of them, then he says, "Now, I repent;" nor (for) those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful torment.
19. You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor should you treat your wives harshly in order that you may take back part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest immoral conduct; and treat them kindly, for if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it.
20. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then do not take back anything from it; would you take it by slandering (her) and (doing her) manifest wrong?
21. And how can you take it when you have become so intimate with each other, and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?
22. And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already been done in the past; this was certainly an immoral act, a hateful act, and an evil way.
23. You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers and your daughters and your sisters and your paternal aunts and your maternal aunts and your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters and your mothers that have suckled you and your sisters by suckling and the mothers of your wives and the stepdaughters who are under your guardianship, born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage, then there is no blame on you, and the wives of your sons who are of your own loins and that you should marry two sisters at the same time, except what has already been done in the past; certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. (4:15-23)

This group of verses deals with two topics. The first topic is the abolishment of indecent practices which were prevalent in the pre-Islamic society. The second topic is the prohibition of certain types of consanguineous marriages.

"If any of your women are guilty of immoral conduct, call to witness four (witnesses) from among you; then if they bear witness to the truth of the allegation, confine them to the houses until death claims them or God ordains some other way for them. If two men are guilty of lewdness, punish them both; then if they repent and amend, leave them alone; certainly, God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy." The verse outlines the ways which Islam has devised to cleanse and purify the society of various indecencies. Initially, Islam opted to isolate women who are guilty of lewdness from society and to punish men who commit homosexual acts; however, the punishment was not stated at first. The punishment for adultery for both men and women was later detailed in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24) and in the Prophetic tradition as flogging and stoning. The objective of the punishment is to maintain the purity of the society and to protect it against the practice of lewd and indecent acts.

Islam ensures that only the guilty is punished. The legal process is designed with great care and encompasses provisions which guarantee error-free convictions. The verses carefully identify who are the women to which this ruling applies and the procedure that should be followed to deal with an accusation. The ruling applies only to Muslim women. Four eyewitnesses are required to prove the guilt. Four Muslim men should testify that they have personally witnessed

the act while it was being performed. These Muslim men are members of the Muslim society; they know its rules, obey its laws, and care for its welfare. If they testify, then the guilty woman is confined to her house. She is not allowed to mingle in society, get married, nor seek employment until death claims her or God ordains a way for her. The reference to a decree from God indicates that house confinement was not meant to be the final punishment for this crime. This was a transitional sentence that was replaced by the permanent punishment which was expounded in Surat Al-Noor (Chapter 24). Only the punishment was changed, but the guarantees to ensure an error-free conviction remained.

The second verse deals with male homosexuality. The Quran discourages the practice and admonishes men not to practice it. Methods suggested for dealing with those who engage in such practice include chiding or even beating. However, if they desist and repent, then the punishment should be stopped and they should be accepted in society.

There are two lessons to be gleaned from ending the verse by, "certainly God is an acceptor of repentance, Giver of Mercy." God is the One who legislated the punishment and He is the one who determines its extent. People should not take matters into their own hands; they should only apply God's law. God accepts repentance and He is Merciful. The second lesson is exhorting people to build their characters around the beautiful attributes of God. One of these attributes is mercy, so people should be merciful to each other. Society should forgive and forget once a person repents and makes amends. Repentant sinners should be helped to integrate into society once they acknowledge their mistakes and take steps towards correcting them.

The punishment for homosexuality was later modified. It has been narrated by Ibn 'Abbas (RA) that the Messenger of God (PBUH) told his companions that men who practice homosexuality should be punished by death (The chain of the narrators of this tradition was not connected directly to Ibn 'Abbas (RA)).

These verses and others show that the Islamic project's intention from the start was to cleanse the society of any indecent practices. These verses were revealed before the establishment of a Muslim state. Muslims had no government to legislate laws preventing such practices. So these verses came to set the stage for abolishing indecent practices by raising awareness of the devastating consequences of such behavior on society. However, such a goal cannot be achieved by admonition alone; laws had to be legislated and enacted for abolishing such practices.

"God will only accept the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them God will turn mercifully, and God is Omniscient, Wise." Islam does not close the door in the face of sinners nor excommunicate them if they wanted to repent. On the contrary, sinners were encouraged to repent. The verse gives a promise to accept the repentance of those who are sincere in their repentance.

Repentance was discussed before in Surat Al-'Imran (Chapter 3), however the present verse addresses another aspect of repentance. The verse addresses the kind of repentance that God has promised to forgive. It is a repentance that is rooted in the regret that fills the heart of the sinner

once he/she realizes the consequence of what they have committed. This is a repentance which changes the whole life of the sinner and pushes him/her to purify themselves and to seek God's forgiveness.

Most scholars agree that the word "ignorance" used in the verse applies to those who commit a sin while they are misguided. It does not matter how long the state of misguidance continued, as long as it ended before the final signs of death approach the person. Those who "repent soon afterwards" are those who repent well before they realize that they are on the verge of death. In this case, it is repentance that is motivated by remorse and a desire to make amends. It is a rebirth for the person. God promised to forgive them and give them a second chance to return to a life of piety.

"Repentance is not accepted from those who go on doing evil deeds, until death faces one of them, then he says, 'Now, I repent;' nor (for) those who die while they are disbelievers. For them We have prepared a painful torment." Repentance is accepted because it is a way to change the life of sinners and rehabilitate them into society. Repentance is of no use for those who seek it when they realize that they are on the verge of death. They repent because they are no longer able to commit sins. Repentance in this case is not motivated by remorse, nor will it result in a change of lifestyle for the sinner. Those who die while rejecting faith severed all ties between themselves and repentance and they missed all chances of being forgiven. For them, a painful torment has been prepared.

"You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will, nor should you treat your wives harshly in order that you may take back part of what you have given them, unless they are guilty of manifest immoral conduct; and treat them kindly, for if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it. But if you decide to take one wife in place of another and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then do not take anything back from it; would you take it by slandering (her) and (doing her) manifest wrong? And how can you take it when you have become so intimate with each other and they have taken from you a solemn covenant? And marry not women whom your fathers married, except what has already been done in the past; this was certainly a lewd, hateful act, and an evil way."

Women were treated badly in pre-Islamic Arabia. Some women were treated like chattel. A woman was considered part of the estate of her deceased husband to be inherited by his family. If one of the heirs wished, he could marry her. Alternatively, they could give her in marriage to someone else and take her wedding gift, or they might confine her to the house until she ransomed herself with a certain amount of money. In another practice, a man would divorce his wife and force her to marry someone he chose. She could avoid this by paying her ex-husband a ransom. There were other similar bad practices, all of which point to the degraded status of women and the abuse they used to suffer at the hands of men.

This was changed by Islam when it decreed that men and women are created from the same soul and that the relationship between the two should be based on mutual love and respect. These verses came to abolish several evil practices that were prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia and to establish family life on the basis of love and kindness. Islam banned the practice which

allowed a woman to be inherited as a part of the estate of her deceased husband. Islam banned the practice which allowed the husband to abandon his wife and, in the meantime, prevent her from marrying someone else of her choice.

The verse addresses the situation when the relationship between a husband and his wife becomes precarious. Men are reminded that there is a connection between the marriage relationship and the relationship between them and their Lord. Islam considers the family home a refuge where husband and wife find peace and security. The house should provide an environment full of love, kindness, and friendship. The intimate relationship between husband and wife should be rooted in understanding, compassion, and love. Therefore, marriage should be based on the free will of both husband and wife. No one should be forced into a marriage relationship against their will. God also reminds men that, "if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing while God brings about abundant good through it." Men should be patient and do their best to keep the family intact. 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab (RA) has been quoted to have said to a man who wanted to divorce his wife because he did not love her anymore, "Is love the only reason for a family life? What happened to the duty to care?"

But if family life is impossible to continue, then parting ways should be done in a way that does not inflict harm on the wife. The verse reminds the man of the intimate relationship that once existed between him and his wife. The intimacy that was both physical and emotional should be treasured. The verse inspires the imagination of the husband to remember the good times he spent with his wife. It also reminds men of the sanctity of the marriage contract. Usurping the rights of the wife is a clear violation of the marriage contract that was struck between the two at the time when the wedding took place. A marriage contract is a sacred contract that should be respected.

The final command in these verses addresses another evil practice that was prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia: a son was allowed to marry his widowed stepmother. The verses decree that this is a lewd and hateful act for various reasons. A stepmother plays the role of a mother to her stepchildren. A son is prohibited from marrying his mother. The Quran described this marriage as, "an immoral act, a hateful act, and an evil way." Marriages of this kind which had been consummated before the advent of Islam were forgiven.

The following group of verses deals with certain types of consanguineous marriages which Islam prohibited. "You are forbidden to take as wives your mothers and your daughters and your sisters and your paternal aunts and your maternal aunts and your brothers' daughters and your sisters' daughters and your mothers that have suckled you and your sisters by suckling and the mothers of your wives and the stepdaughters who are under your guardianship, born of women with whom you have consummated marriage, but if you have not consummated the marriage, then there is no blame on you, and the wives of your sons who are of your own loins and that you should marry two sisters at the same time, except what has already been done in the past; certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." Various cultures shunned certain types of marriages for different reasons. This verse, in addition to the one before and the one after, lists the consanguineous marriages that Islam prohibited. The reasons for the prohibitions vary. They include marriages prohibited because there is a certain blood relationship between the man and the woman, because there is a marriage relationship between the families of the

man and the woman, or because the man and the woman were breastfed by the same woman (the man and woman in this case become siblings by virtue of being breastfed by the same woman). On the other hand, Islam does not espouse the view that race, culture, language, or the color of skin are acceptable reasons for preventing a man and a woman from being united in matrimony.

One can categorize the prohibited marriages which are based on blood relationship in four classes:

- Marriage between a man and his mother, or grandmothers (paternal or maternal).
- Marriage between a man and his daughters or granddaughters.
- Marriage between a man and his sisters or nieces.
- Marriage between a man and his aunts (paternal and maternal), and the aunts of his uncles or his aunts.

Marriages prohibited on the basis of an existing marriage relationship between the families of the man and the woman include five cases:

- Marriage between a man and his wife's mother or grandmothers. This prohibition comes into play once the original marriage contract has been signed whether the marriage has been consummated or not.
- Marriage between a man and his wife's daughters or granddaughters. This prohibition applies only after the original marriage has been consummated.
- Marriage between a man and the wives of his father or grandfathers.
- Marriage between a man and the wives of his sons or grandsons. This does not apply to the wife of an adopted son.
- A man is not allowed to marry two sisters at the same time.

Marriages prohibited on the basis of a breastfeeding relationship include:

- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who breastfed him, her mother, or grandmother.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breastfed by the man's wife, or her daughters.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breastfed by a woman who breastfed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry the sister or the sister-in-law of a woman who breastfed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who breastfed his wife.
- A man is not allowed to marry a woman who was breastfed by his wife (before she married him).
- A man is not allowed to marry the second wife of a man whose first wife breastfed him.
- A man is not allowed to marry the wife of a man who was breastfed by his wife.
- A man is not allowed to marry two women who were breastfed by the same woman at the same time.

The first and second groups of prohibited marriage relationships listed above have been prohibited by Quranic verses. The third group of marriage relationships was made unlawful by a prophetic tradition. It has been reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said that relationships resulting from breastfeeding are similar to blood relationships regarding the allowable and prohibited marriages.

These were the marriage relationships which were rendered unlawful by Islam. The Quran does not provide the rationale behind these prohibitions. Many scholars attempted to infer the rationale behind these prohibitions. However, these attempts remain in the realm of personal opinions. These laws have to be accepted by Muslims irrespective of whether we understand the rationale behind them or not.

All these relationships were traditionally prohibited in the pre-Islamic society except for two: a man was allowed to marry the widow of his father and to marry two sisters at the same time. These two forms of marriage were allowed by the pre-Islamic traditions; however, they were not widely accepted. In deciding what is lawful and what is prohibited in the area of marriage relationships, as in all other areas of human interactions, Islam provides its own rules regardless of what existed before its advent. It is God's authority to determine what is lawful and what is prohibited for people. Deciding the lawful and forbidden is one of the basic foundations of religion, rather than a mere formality. Only God has the authority to decide what is allowable and what is forbidden. No one other than God can claim such authority; claiming such authority is synonymous to claiming to be god.

Verses: 24 to 35

24. Women who are already married are also prohibited, except those whom your right hand possesses. This is what God has decreed for you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided that you seek them with gifts from your property in honest wedlock, not committing illegal sexual intercourse. Those whom you wish to enjoy through marriage, you are obligated to give them their bridal gift. But if after you have fulfilled the obligation, you mutually agree to do otherwise, you will not be blamed; certainly, God is Omniscient, Wise.

25. And whoever among you does not have the means to marry free believing women, let him marry from the believing maids whom your right hand possesses; and God knows best your faith, you are (sprung) one from another; so marry them with the permission of their folk, and give them their bridal gifts kindly, they being chaste, not committing illegal sexual intercourse, nor receiving paramours; and when they are honorably married, then if they are guilty of immoral conduct, they shall suffer half the punishment which is prescribed upon free women. This permission is for those among you who are afraid to sin. But it is better for you to persevere and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

26. God wishes to make His laws clear to you, and to guide you into the ways of those before you, and to turn to you in mercy, and God is Omniscient, Wise.

27. And God wishes to turn to you in mercy, and those who follow their lusts wish that you go tremendously astray.

28. God wishes to lighten your burden, for the human being was created weak.

29. You who believe, do not devour your property among yourselves falsely, but trade by your mutual consent; and do not kill one another; certainly, God is Merciful to you.

30. And whoever does this through aggression and injustice, We will soon cast him into fire; and this is easy for God.

31. If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden to do, We will absolve you of your minor sins and cause you to enter at a noble gate.

32. And do not covet that which God has favored some of you over the others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace; certainly, God knows all things.

33. And to everyone We have appointed heirs of what parents and near relatives leave; and as to those with whom your right hands have ratified agreements, give them their due portion; certainly, God is a witness over all things.

34. Men should take full care of their wives by virtue of the bounties God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their property; and the righteous women are the obediently devout ones, guarding in secret that which God has guarded; and as for those whom you fear rebellion, admonish them first, refuse to share their beds, and beat them lightly; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; certainly, God is Most Exalted, Great.

35. And if you fear a breach between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people; if they both desire amendment, God will bring about reconciliation between them; certainly, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware. (4:24-35)

"Women who are already married are also prohibited, except those whom your right hand possesses. This is what God has decreed for you. Except for these, all others are lawful, provided that you seek them with gifts from your property in honest wedlock, not committing illegal sexual intercourse. Those whom you wish to enjoy through marriage, you are obligated to give them their bridal gift. But if after you have fulfilled the obligation, you mutually agree to do otherwise, you will not be blamed; certainly, God is Omniscient, Wise." The verse continues to list the prohibited marriage relationships. A man cannot marry a woman who is already married. This ruling strengthens the role of the family in Islam as the building block of society. This building block has to be protected, and the transparency of the lineage has to be maintained. The family in Islam is based on a man and a woman joined in wedlock. Family provides a protection against adultery and is the logical answer to the needs of the initial natural human disposition.

It is observed that the human baby needs a longer period to grow up and become independent than the period required by a baby from any other species. Education of human children takes even longer. The objective of sexual relationship between couples in the animal species is the preservation of the species. The objective of the relationship in humans goes far beyond procreation and sexual pleasure. The relationship between human couples is a long-term relationship to provide care and education for the children and prepare them to become active participants in the human society. The life between human couples does not revolve around sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure has been ingrained in the initial natural human disposition to facilitate bringing couples together in the first instance to start a long-term relationship. Thus, for humans the relationship between a man and woman is controlled by the "duty to care," the duty to care for the vulnerable progeny, rather than mere desire. These considerations support the notion of building the relationship between couples on the foundation of the concept of family. The sanctity of the institution of family should be protected. The practice of polyandry threatens this concept and confuses the transparency of lineage; therefore, it is not acceptable in Islam.

An exception is made in the case of married women who were captured in wars between the believers and non-believers and were made slaves according to the norms of the human society

at that time. These women lost all relationship with their first husbands when they were captured and became legally unmarried. They must wait until they have one menstruation to make sure that they are not pregnant before they can engage in a sexual relationship. These women could gain their freedom upon accepting Islam and becoming legally married; otherwise, they would continue to be captives and they were allowed to engage in sexual relationship with their masters according to the norms of the society at that time.

The issue of slavery has been addressed in different places in the Quran. It has to be noted that rules regarding enslavement of captured enemy were well established before the advent of Islam. Islam made giant steps towards abolishing slavery as has been pointed out in other places in the Quran. In the interim, Muslims had to abide by the same rules that their enemy followed. However, Islam revolutionized the way the captured slaves were treated.

The rules which determine the lawful and the forbidden were decreed by God and they should be followed. The marriage relationship is based on honest and decent wedlock between the partners; neither prostitution nor illegal sexual intercourse is allowed. The woman gets her bridal gift as a part of the marriage contract. This is her right. However, once the condition has been fulfilled and she received her gift, she can do whatever she wants with it, including giving part of the gift back to her husband.

If a man is unable to marry a free woman, then an alternative is given. "And whoever among you does not have the means to marry free believing women, let him marry from the believing maids whom your right hand possesses; and God knows best your faith: you are (sprung) one from another; so marry them with the permission of their folk, and give them their bridal gifts kindly, they being chaste, not committing illegal sexual intercourse, nor receiving paramours; and when they are honorably married, then if they are guilty of immoral conduct, they shall suffer half the punishment which is prescribed upon free women. This permission is for those among you who are afraid to sin. But it is better for you to persevere, and God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." The verse organizes marriage relationships that involve slave girls. The verse implies that it is preferable for a man to seek marriage from a free woman. However, if it was not feasible for a man to marry a free woman and he is unable to wait for a change in circumstances, then he is allowed to marry a believing (slave) girl on the condition that she receives her wedding gift. The relationship is a marriage relationship with all its characteristics and conditions. It is important to point out how the Quran dealt with the relationship between free people and slaves in the Islamic society at that time. First, the Quran calls the slave girls "believing girls" and calls their masters their "family," which shows how Islam was preparing people for the eradication of slavery. The verse points to the fact that Islam does not treat masters and slaves as two different races; it reminds them that they all belong to the same human race. It reminds them that they are connected through humanity and faith: "God knows best your faith: you are (sprung) one from another." Second, all marriage rules that apply to a free woman apply also to a slave woman. The wedding gift is given to her personally and she cannot be forced to engage in extra-marital sexual relationships. But if the married slave girl was tempted somehow and succumbed to the temptation to commit adultery, then she only gets half the punishment that a free woman would suffer for the same crime. The ruling recognizes the vulnerability of slave girls, even after they get married, and this consideration is reflected in the reduction of the punishment. The verse ends by reiterating the preference of marrying a free

girl, while allowing an exception for those who are unable to exercise self-restraint, though exercising self-restraint is better.

God wishes to make His rules clear to His believing servants and He wants to explain the rationale behind these rules. These rules are not an expression of senseless desire for control. The rules aim at elevating the status of humankind. They are part of a divine project that has been decreed for all believers since the beginning of time. God wants to guide the believers, turn to them in mercy, and forgive their sins. These rules are meant to guide people to the straight path, the path of mercy and forgiveness, while those who follow their lust wish to sway people away from the path of God. God wishes to lighten the burden of humankind by making rules that take into consideration human weaknesses.

Many people think that following these rules, especially the ones that deal with the organization of sexual relationships, places a burden on them and limits their freedom to satisfy their needs. They want to remove all restrictions on these relationships. They are seeking a hedonistic lifestyle. These people are in fact pursuing a mirage. The type of freedom they are seeking is not in the best interest of the human society and will result in catastrophic consequences for the society.

"You who believe, do not devour your property among yourselves falsely, but trade by your mutual consent; and do not kill one another; certainly, God is Merciful to you. And whoever does this through aggression and injustice, We will soon cast him into fire; and this is easy for God. If you avoid the major sins which you are forbidden to do, We will absolve you of your minor sins and cause you to enter at a noble gate." The verses present another lesson in the series of lessons for educating people as well as for introducing legislation. Education and legislation complement each other. Legislation considers real life conditions and the best way to implement laws. This is achieved through educating and training people to be conscious of God. Education connects the heart of the believer to God, the source of laws, and instills in it the will to obey these laws.

These verses establish the fundamental principle which governs financial transactions. The verses provide a mixture of Islamic education and laws. This methodology has been used extensively by Islam because education and law go hand in hand. Education prepares people to accept the law and to believe that it is in their best interest to follow the law. However, there will always be a person who will not obey the law voluntarily. Hence, law enforcement is needed.

This principle establishes the basis of Islamic financial dealings to guarantee the purity of transactions. It establishes the principle that profit should always be sought through lawful means. The verse addressed the believers and pointed to a methodology to eradicate the remnants of the pre-Islamic bad practices and to emphasize the relationship between faith and practice. The principle outlawed all bad financial practices including cheating, fraud, gambling, and usury, etc. The verse specifically excludes fair business practices based on mutual agreement of all parties involved. These fair practices are allowed. It is not clear whether usury was prohibited before this verse was revealed or not, but either way, the Quran is clear on usury dealings. Usury is the worst form of financial dealings. The verse alluded to a link between the

disastrous impact that bad financial practices can have on society and committing suicide. Bad financial practices cause the death of the society exactly as committing suicide puts an end to human life. God is merciful; He wishes to save human society from the devastating consequences of bad financial dealings. Those who do not heed this principle are deemed transgressors and will be punished in Hellfire. On the other hand, those who avoid capital sins are promised forgiveness for all other sins which they may have committed and will be admitted through a noble gate. This is a fair faith with an easy program for a better life. This is a program that attempts to purify the human soul and to establish a sound society. It provides a balance between the undertaking and the capacity, between what is desired and what is necessary, between the incentive and the drive, between what to do and what not to do, and between threats of punishment and promises of life in paradise. It offers a clear promise from God to forgive all sins, if one avoids the capital sins. The criterion is to try sincerely to avoid these capital sins. If a person tried sincerely to avoid these sins but succumbed to the temptation and committed one of the major sins, he/she can still repent and ask for forgiveness. There are a number of Prophetic traditions which list some of the major sins. It should not be difficult for Muslims to recognize which sins are major and which are not. The important thing is to be sincere in the intent to obey God's commandments and to try hard to follow these commands. God knows that we will commit mistakes, and He promised to forgive these mistakes.

"And do not covet that which God has favored some of you over the others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn, and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace; certainly, God knows all things. And to everyone We have appointed heirs of what parents and near relatives leave; and as to those with whom your right hands have ratified agreements, give them their due portion; certainly, God is a witness over all things." This is a general statement which forbids coveting the grace of God that has been bestowed on others. One should ask God for a similar favor rather than coveting a position, a status, a talent, or wealth which God bestowed on others. Coveting will only result in creating bad feelings, envy, jealousy, and hatred. Asking God from His grace, on the other hand, generates feelings of security and hope, and will induce the believers to seek the lawful means to achieve what they aspire to. This is a statement that applies in general, but its mention at this point gives it also a special significance. It deals with the apparent variance in the portions allotted to men and women in accordance with inheritance laws. The verse aims at reconciling the relationship between the two partners in the human society. The Islamic methodology for building a human society is based on the recognition that males and females are partners in the society, and they are created to play different but complementary roles. Their relationship should be based on collaboration rather than competition. The methodology aims at realizing the interest of the society, favoring neither gender over the other.

The early Quranic commentaries mentioned that the verse was revealed in response to a question posed by Um Salmah (RA) to the Prophet (PBUH). She said, "Messenger of God, we don't participate in Jihad and therefore we are deprived of the opportunity of martyrdom." God neither prescribed Jihad for women nor prohibited them from participating in Jihad. Some women participated in battles against the enemy of Islam. Some participated by carrying food and water or as nurses and supporters. But there were also women who participated as fighters. Women's role as fighters was the exception rather than the rule, as dictated by situation.

The other source for coveting between men and women is the variance in inheritance rules. This may seem unfair on the surface but if we consider the matter more carefully, we find that this variance reflects the requirements for an integrated scheme for building an Islamic society. The male has double the share of a female. This addresses the obligations that are placed on males in the society. A man is obliged to give his bride a wedding gift. A man is obliged to support his nuclear family and the needy members of his extended family. A man is obliged to support his divorcee. Women are exempt from all these obligations, even if they are wealthy and even if they can afford to participate in these financial obligations.

The verses continued to establish women's financial rights. Women have the right to engage in financial transactions and to own property the same way men do. This was a change in the status quo. The pre-Islamic society did not recognize women's right to own property. Great injustice was inflicted on wealthy women to deprive them of their wealth through crooked means. Islam came to rectify this. This verse established the equal rights of men and women to own property.

Finally, a reference is made to a number of contracts which were recognized in the pre-Islamic society, and which were phased out by Islam. These contracts were known as "loyalty contracts." They included four types:

- Loyalty contracts for a freed slave: this was a contract between a slave and his master that resulted in the slave being freed and adopted into the family of the master. The adopted member of the family enjoyed all the rights of the original members including inheritance rights.
- Loyalty contracts between an Arab and a non-Arab: this contract involved the adoption of a non-Arab into the family of an Arab. Consequently, the new member of the family enjoyed all the rights that the other family members enjoyed including the right of inheritance.
- Brotherhood pacts: these were pacts that the Prophet (PBUH) formed between the migrants (Muhajereen) and the supporters (Ansar) just after the migration of the Prophet (PBUH) from Mecca to Medina. According to this pact a man from Medina adopted a man from Mecca as his brother. This brotherhood was treated as a blood relationship and allowed the two brothers to inherit one another.
- Pre-Islamic adoption contract: this was a contract between two men to inherit one another.

Islam respected the contracts which were solemnized before the inheritance rules were revealed. However, it gradually phased out all these types of contracts and restricted the right of inheritance to members of the family who share blood or marriage relationships.

"Men should take full care of their wives by virtue of the bounties God has given to some more than others and with what they spend out of their property; and the righteous women are the obediently devout ones, guarding in secret that which God has guarded; and as for those whom you fear rebellion, admonish them first, refuse to share their beds, and beat them lightly; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; certainly, God is Most Exalted, Great. And if you fear a breach between the two of them, then appoint an arbiter from his people and an arbiter from her people; if they both desire amendment, God will bring about reconciliation between them; certainly, God is Omniscient, Totally-Aware." Before we deal with these verses,

let us consider Islam's philosophy regarding the family as an institution and the measures it took to protect it and preserve its integrity.

God created the whole universe on the concept of duality: "and from each thing We created a pair, if you remember," (51:49). As a part of the universe, the human race is created on the basis of the concept of duality as well. So, living in pairs satisfies the initial natural human disposition. God created this pair from a single soul. God made each member of this pair to be a cause of tranquility, security, comfort, and protection to one another. He made their union a source for sustaining life on earth. Because they were created from the same soul, they stand equal in the sight of God. They are treated equally by God in matters of reward and punishment. They are equal in a court of law when they are involved in a civil dispute. They have equal rights in owning property.

Men and women have equal worth as human beings, but they were created to fulfill different roles. God created each with the appropriate physical and psychological form suitable for the achievement of their respective roles. Along with the appropriate capabilities came a fair distribution of responsibilities. It is the woman's responsibility to bear children, and it is the man's responsibility to support his family. The verse alluded to the physical and psychological preparation of men and women to be able to carry out their respective tasks and referred to the man's responsibility in providing financial support to his family.

This verse organized family life and allocated responsibilities to each of the two human beings who are necessary for the establishment of a family in the first place. Allocation of responsibilities removes potential friction and competition between the partners and establishes the basic rule that any dispute should be settled by referring to God's rules. The verse established the principle that males are responsible for taking full care of their wives. Males have been given this leadership role because of their intrinsic characteristics and because they are responsible for maintaining the family. The verse also prescribed a procedure for dealing with family disputes. These organizational rules were necessary to maintain the integrity of family life.

The division of responsibilities between the male and the female in a family setting is imperative if fairness is to prevail. Each has a role to play, and each has been prepared for that role. Females are given the responsibility of childbirth and childcare. These are major responsibilities, but females have been created with biological and psychological characteristics which enable them to undertake such responsibilities. It is only fair that the other partner in the family organization be given the responsibility of providing the financial necessities needed to maintain the family. Males are given biological and psychological characteristics which prepare them to fulfill their prescribed roles as well.

The rationale for asking men to be in charge and to take full care of their wives rests on two fundamental elements: the characteristics that they were given and the requirement of providing for the family.

The verse continued to describe the characteristics of believing women. The righteous woman is truly devout as well. A devout person is one who obeys God willingly and voluntarily. The

verse did not use the term obedient because obedience may be imposed by external forces. The word devout indicates obedience based on belief and choice. A devout woman obeys God because she is convinced that this is the right thing to do. Another characteristic of righteous believing women is their ability to guard the sanctity of marriage as has been dictated by God. It is interesting to note that the verse was phrased to indicate that devotion comes naturally with righteousness, rather than worded as a command imposed on women. The verse continued to outline the procedure for dealing with a rebellious woman, a shrew. The Arabic word used to describe this situation refers to mutinous behavior which challenges the natural order. Islam uses a proactive approach to deal with family problems. This proactive approach consists of three steps or phases. The intent of this approach is to deal with the early signs before they develop into a situation that cannot be remedied. This is a gradual approach which aims at protecting the integrity of the family and bringing back stability and order to family life, rather than humiliating or punishing wives. Before talking about the procedure recommended for dealing with rebellious wives, we need to remember that God bestowed honor on the two partners in the human race. Women have God-given rights that should be respected. Entrusting man with a leadership role in the family does not take away from a woman her right to choose her partner and to manage her personal and financial affairs independently. The verse laid the foundation to understand the rationale behind this procedure. It also provided an understanding of the way it should be implemented.

The steps are first to admonish, then refuse to share their beds, and finally to beat them lightly. These are measures to be followed when means for a discussion or a civil discourse have been exhausted. Several prophetic traditions commanded men to deal kindly with their wives. One of the Prophet's (PBUH) companions asked him about the rights that a wife has. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "You feed her as you feed yourself, you dress her as you dress yourself, do not hit her on the face, do not call her names, and if you have to abandon her bed, do not leave the house." He also has been quoted to have said, "Do not hit God's women servants." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "The best among you is the one who treats his wife the best way, and I treat my wives the best way."

The verse continued to admonish men not to oppress their wives when they seek reconciliation. The reconciliation sought by a rebellious wife should be based on understanding and not on oppression. The verse reminded men that God is most Exalted and Great. This should eliminate any feelings of pride or any desire for oppression.

When the means to mend the relationship between the husband and wife have been exhausted, two arbiters, one from the husband's family and the other from the wife's family, are convened to mediate between the two. If the couple is interested in mending things, then God will guide their steps towards reconciliation.

Verses: 36 to 43

36. And worship God and do not associate anything with Him and be good to parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of your kin and the neighbor who is

not kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and those whom your right hand possesses; certainly, God does not love him who is arrogant and boastful.

37. Those who are niggardly and command people to be niggardly and hide what God has bestowed upon them from His Grace; and We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating torment.

38. And those who spend of their wealth to be seen and praised by people and do not believe in God nor in the Last Day; and whoso takes Satan for a comrade, what a dreadful comrade he is.

39. And what harm would it have done them if they had believed in God and the Last Day and spent benevolently of what God had bestowed upon them? And God has full knowledge of them.

40. Certainly, God does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of an atom, and if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives the doer from His own presence an immense reward.

41. What will they do, when We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness against these?

42. On that Day, those who disbelieve and disobey the Messenger will wish that they were level with the ground, and they shall not hide any word from God.

43. You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say, nor when you are in a state of ritual impurity, unless you are passing through on the road, until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy (toilet) or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then take for yourselves clean earth, and wipe your faces and your hands; certainly God is Ever Pardoning, All-Forgiving. (4:36-43)

All Islamic laws are rooted in the belief in the Oneness of God. "And worship God and do not associate anything with Him and be good to parents and to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbor of your kin and the neighbor who is not kin, and the fellow traveler and the wayfarer and those whom your right hand possesses; certainly, God does not love him who is arrogant and boastful." These verses outline commands and directives to Muslims. All commands and directives in Islam are rooted in the belief in the Oneness of God. This basic principle provides the framework that brings all commands and guidelines into one cohesive structure. These verses list a number of commands and it is logical that the first command is to worship God. The second command prohibits associating partners with God. It is a very strong command not to associate anything with God. This is followed by a command to be kind to one's parents in particular and to all kin in general. It is interesting to note that commands to be kind to parents are more prevalent in the Quran than commands to be kind to the progeny. Parents by nature are kind to their children, while children may not always be kind to their parents; hence came the emphasis in the Quran on being kind to parents. This is a directive from the Giver of Mercy, the Compassionate who does not forget anybody. He takes care of all His creation.

Another point to note is that in this verse and in many similar verses in the Quran, the command starts with those who are nearest of kin then branches out to include people who have varying degrees of closeness to the person. This is congruent with the initial natural human disposition. People tend to care more about those who are closest to them, then the next of kin, then their friends and so forth. So, the verse lists people to whom one should be kind according to their priority. It starts first with the parents, then members of the family, followed by the needy and

poor, then the neighbor who is kin, then the neighbor who is not kin, then the fellow traveler, then the traveling person who is away from his land and family, and finally the slaves. This is a reminder that slaves are our brothers in humanity whose misfortune deprived them of their freedom and made them slaves. The verse closes by disparaging boasting and arrogance. These are traits which tend to prevent people from being kind.

Those "who are niggardly and command people to be niggardly and hide what God has bestowed upon them from His Grace; and We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating torment. And those who spend of their wealth to be seen and praised by people and do not believe in God nor in the Last Day; and whoso takes Satan for a comrade, what a dreadful comrade he is." Once again, the relationship between the belief in the Oneness of God and human behavior is reiterated. Believing in God promotes kindness and generosity for the sake of receiving the pleasure of God alone. Knowing that whatever we spend is from the grace of God and is spent for the sake of God eliminates the hateful traits of being boastful and arrogant. The verse puts human behavior in perspective. The belief in God and the sincere desire to seek His pleasure are strong incentives to behave nicely. Deeds are dedicated solely to God with no expectations for a reward from other human beings. These values are based on the belief in God and the Hereafter. These are standard values that are unchangeable. Values determined by human beings are "relative" values that change from one place to another and from one generation to the other. The verse says, "God does not love." God's love is not like the love that human beings experience. The expression is used to denote the consequences of "God does not love." The consequences of boasting and arrogance are punishment and disgrace. What is more disgraceful than being associated with Satan?

"And what harm would it have done them if they had believed in God and the Last Day and spent benevolently of what God had bestowed upon them? And God has full knowledge of them. Certainly, God does not wrong anyone by as much as the weight of an atom, and if there is a good deed, He multiplies it and gives the doer from His own presence an immense reward. What will they do?" And why don't they believe in God and the Last Day? And why don't they spend of that which was bestowed on them by God? Don't they know that God knows all that they do and what motivates their deeds? Because of this knowledge, God does not wrong anyone. On the contrary, if they do any good deed, they will be rewarded several fold and they will be recompensed nicely by God. The choice to believe brings security and gain, both in this life and in the Hereafter.

"When We bring from every people a witness and bring you as a witness against these? On that Day, those who disbelieve and disobey the Messenger will wish that they were level with the ground, and they shall not hide any word from God." This verse laid the ground rules for how people will be treated on the Day of Judgment: God does not inflict even the magnitude of a small atom of injustice on people; His is absolute justice. He will multiply the reward for good deeds and will give more from His grace. He will exercise His mercy and His blessing for those who believed, looked forward, and worked hard for this day. As for those who rejected faith and did not work for this day, how will they feel when they face the messenger of God who came to them? God will bring all messengers as witnesses, and He will bring Muhammad (PBUH) as a witness over them. Some scholars indicated that the word "these" refers to the pagans of Quraish. The verse paints a vivid image of the Day of Judgment. People from each nation will

be crowded in a huge space. Each nation is faced with the messenger of God who was sent to them. Each messenger is a witness. All those who were arrogant and belied their messenger will be there. All their deeds will be declared. Their hypocrisy, their niggardliness, and their selfishness will become apparent. They will stand in front of God with all their sins feeling guilty and humiliated.

This group of verses started with the command to worship God. Prayer is one of the most important rituals in Islam and it is a fundamental part of worship. Hence, the verses continued with a description of some of the rules regarding the preparation for and the conduct of prayers. "You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say, nor when you are in a state of ritual impurity, unless you are passing through on the road, until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy (toilet) or you have touched women, and you cannot find water, then take for yourselves clean earth, and wipe your faces and your hands; certainly God is Ever Pardoning, All-Forgiving." This was a step in the spiritual education for Muslims to prepare them for the impending change of rules regarding drinking alcohol. Drinking alcohol was one of the oldest and most deeply rooted traditions of the Arabic society before Islam. Drinking was a hallmark of the Arabic society before Islam as it was the hallmark of other societies: the Roman, the Persian, as well as western societies of the present day. Islam introduced a progressive program to abolish this bad habit. The program consisted of several stages that were revealed in various verses of the Quran over a period of time. This was Islam's approach to eradicate the drinking habit which was so entrenched in the pre-Islamic society. The implementation of the plan went smoothly without waging wars or requiring major sacrifices. When the verse which brought the final decree prohibiting drinking alcohol was revealed, Muslims spilled the alcohol they had and they even spat out what was in their mouths. In the beginning, the Quran hinted that there is a difference between alcohol and good provision: "And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get wine and wholesome food: behold, in this also is a sign for those who reason." (16:67). This was an indirect way to state that there is a difference between wine and wholesome provision. This was a slight nudge to the fledgling Islamic consciousness to raise its awareness. Drinking was a strong tradition in the pre-Islamic society, and it was also a flourishing industry. More than just a nudge was needed to convince people of its bad impact on society. The second step came in Medina at a time when Muslims were in authority, but the prohibition needed more than enacting and enforcing a law. It needed a psychological preparation. So, the Quran provided a lesson to be heeded by Muslims in the form of a question-and-answer style: "They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say to them, 'In them is great sin, and some profit, for people; but the sin is greater than the profit.'" [2:219]. This was a direct and loud call alerting people to the dangers of drinking and its adverse effects on society. The third stage aimed at limiting the amount of alcohol that a Muslim could consume. This was a transient stage to move from awareness of alcohol's mixed effects to complete prohibition: "You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say." [4:43]. The implementation of this verse limited the use of alcohol greatly, because keeping regular prayers requires one to pray five times every day. It became a challenge for those who wanted to keep up the regular prayers to find the time for drinking. Finally, and when people were ready to accept the change, the final verse came to completely prohibit drinking: "You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows, are an abomination, of Satan's handwork; eschew such

(abomination), that you may prosper." [5:90]. This verse brought an end to the tradition of drinking alcohol in Arabia. The Quranic plan succeeded without a civil authority to enact the law. This is a miracle which was only possible because the plan understood the human psyche and addressed its needs. The plan depended on instilling the love of God and the knowledge that He is ever watching in the hearts of people. It depended on filling the vacuum in people's lives with serious thoughts and interests and filling their hearts with a faith that freed them from the servitude of their worldly pleasures and desires.

After this slight digression we come back to the verse at hand: "You who believe, do not approach prayers while you are intoxicated until you know well what you say." There is some difference in opinion about what is meant by the two terms, "passing through" and "approach prayers." One opinion states that those who are ritually unclean are not allowed to enter or stay in a mosque until they perform the ritual wash. However, they would be allowed to pass through a mosque. This brought relief to some of the Prophet's companions who had houses which opened into the mosque, and they had to pass through the mosque to get in or out of their houses. Another opinion states that a person who is ritually unclean is not allowed to pray, unless he was traveling, in which case he can head to the mosque, perform Tayamum, and perform his prayer. It seems that the first interpretation makes more sense, since the state of travel was mentioned in the verse under the category of "on a journey." This implies unnecessary repetition of the same verdict.

Thus, those who are traveling, sick, or have just satisfied a call of nature should not pray until they perform a ritual wash. If they are unable to perform a ritual wash, for the lack of water or because of fear of harm (for example, if the water was very cold), then they could perform Tayamum.

There is also a difference of opinion on the meaning of the term "touched women." Some say that this is a metaphor for sexual intercourse, which would require a ritual wash before one can perform prayers. Another opinion takes the word to mean literally touching women, meaning that one has to perform a ritual wash after touching any part of a woman's body.

We summarize the opinions of the different schools as follows:

- Touching a woman's body requires performance of ritual wash (ablution).
- Ablution is required if a man who can be easily aroused by touching a woman touches a woman who is sexually desirable.
- Ablution is required if the man felt that he was aroused as a result of the touch.
- Neither touching a woman nor hugging nor kissing one's wife requires ablution.

These are opinions of the different schools of jurisprudence. Each school has its evidence and interpretation of the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH). However, we are of the opinion that "touching" here refers to the act of sexual intercourse which requires a major ritual wash (Ghusl).

The verse also introduces the concept of Tayamum as an alternative for minor ritual wash (ablution) or major ritual wash (Ghusl) when water is not available or when the use of water may cause harm to the person. This involves tapping the clean dust (or any object that may be

covered with enough dust such that the dust will blow away when the object is touched), rubbing the palms together to get rid of the dust, and then using the palms to wipe the face. The whole process is repeated again but this time the palms are used to wipe the hands. This is a convenient alternative when the use of water is not possible. The ending of the verse conveys the message that God wants to make things easy for people. He forgives our shortcomings.

We need to reflect on the rationale behind the concept of ritual wash and the concept of Tayamum. One may suggest that the objective behind requiring ritual wash is maintaining physical cleanliness. This may be true, but it does not explain the use of Tayamum as an alternative. I am not absolutely certain of the rationale behind replacing the ritual wash with Tayamum. However, it seems to me that these rituals provide two functions. The first is preparing the person psychologically to engage in the prayers. Prayers are a meeting with God that requires such a preparation. The rituals provide a transition for the state of mind from a state completely absorbed in the regular daily activities to a state wholly devoted to a meeting with God. The other function may be that it allows the Muslim to establish prayers under any condition and in all circumstances, so that the communications between the person and his Lord continue whether he is sick or traveling and whether water is available or scarce.

Verses: 44 to 57

44. Do you not see those who were given a portion of the Scripture? They purchase error and desire that you should go astray from the right way.

45. And God knows best your enemies; and God suffices as a Protecting Guardian, and God suffices as a Helper.

46. Of those who are Jews, there are those who distort the meanings of words and say, "We have heard and we disobey and hear, may you not be made to hear, and, 'Ra'ina,'" distorting the word with their tongues and slandering the faith; and if they had said (instead), "We have heard and we obey, and do hear, and do look at us," it would have been better for them and more upright; but God has cursed them on account of their disbelief, so but few of them will believe.

47. You who have been given the Scripture, believe in that which We have revealed, confirming what you have, before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or curse them as We cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and the command of God shall be executed.

48. Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed fabricated a great sin.

49. Have you not considered those who attribute purity to themselves? Nay, God will purify whom He pleases; and they shall not be wronged even as much as the thread upon a date-stone.

50. See how they fabricate a lie against God? That of itself is a flagrant sin.

51. Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Scripture has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve, "These are better guided than the believers."

52. Those are they whom God has cursed, and whomever God curses you shall not find any helper for him.

53. Or have they a share in the dominion? But then they would not give people even what fills the groove on a date-stone.

54. Or do they envy people for what God has given them out of His grace? But indeed, We have given the House of Abraham the Scripture and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom.

55. Some of them believed, and some turned away from it. And nothing can burn like Hell fire.

56. Those who reject Our revelations, We shall soon cast them into fire; as often as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment; certainly, God is Eminent, Wise.

57. But those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow; this will be their eternal home. They shall have therein pure mates, and We shall admit them to cool refreshing shade. (4:44-57)

"Do you not see those who were given a portion of the Scripture? They purchase error and desire that you should go astray from the right way. And God knows best your enemies; and God suffices as a Protecting Guardian, and God suffices as a Helper." Those who were given the Scripture had every reason to be guided by it, but when they were called to guidance, they chose misguidance. They would rather pay for misguidance than follow the free guidance given to them. Buying misguidance implies a predetermination on their part. This is a state of affairs that is both surprising and deplorable. They even go further by asking those who are guided to abandon guidance. They try to confuse people so that they do not follow guidance. It is therefore important that Muslims know their enemies so that they would not be deceived by these attempts which aim at making them swerve away from the straight path. The verse alludes to the conflict that was going on between the Muslims and some of the Jews in Medina and alerted the Muslims to the danger of the attempts of their enemy: "God knows best your enemies." God further assures the believers of His support and help: "God suffices as a Protecting Guardian, and God suffices as a Helper."

The verses continue to name those enemies and to describe how they misbehaved in dealing with the Prophet (PBUH). "Of those who are Jews, there are those who distort the meanings of words and say, 'We have heard and we disobey and hear, may you not be made to hear. And, 'Ra'ina,' distorting the word with their tongues and slandering the faith; and if they had said (instead), 'We have heard and we obey, and do hear, and do look at us,' it would have been better for them and more upright; but God has cursed them on account of their disbelief, so but few of them will believe." Some of the Jews of Medina distorted the meaning of the word of God in the Torah which predicted the coming of a new revelation. They said to the Prophet (PBUH), "We listened to what you said, but we will disobey, and we will not believe or follow you." They play on the words they say, saying words with double meaning. On the face of it, they speak to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in a polite way saying, "Hear, but you are not obliged to hear." However, what they really mean is "Hear, may you not be able to hear." They also use the word "Ra'ina" which may be understood as if they are asking for a special consideration because they are People of the Scripture, while what they really mean is to describe the Prophet (PBUH) as stupid. So, on the face of it, the dialogue sounds polite while in fact it embodies insults. The verse then stated that it would be better to use straight talk rather than words which have double meaning.

"You who have been given the Scripture, believe in that which We have revealed, confirming what you have, before We obliterate faces then turn them on their backs, or curse them as We

cursed the violators of the Sabbath, and the command of God shall be executed." This is an invitation and a warning from God to those who were given the Scripture before, to believe in the new Book which came to support the Scripture which they already have. This is a reasonable request since they were given a similar revelation. Refusing to comply called for a strong threat: to obliterate their faces and turn them on their backs. There are different opinions about whether the warning should be considered physical or metaphorical. God's command will certainly be executed.

"Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases." Al-Bukhari and Muslim both mentioned a prophetic tradition narrated by Abu Dharr (RA). Abu Dharr (RA) narrated that he was walking one night and saw the Prophet (PBUH) walking alone. Abu Dharr (RA) thought that the Prophet (PBUH) wanted to walk alone, so he followed him but did not approach him. However, the Prophet (PBUH) felt that there was someone following him so he called and Abu Dharr (RA) came to him. They walked together for a while then the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Those who have much will get little on the Day of Judgment, except those who spend freely out of that which God gave them." Then he sat Abu Dharr (RA) in a place and went to a spot out of sight. When the Prophet (PBUH) came back after a while, Abu Dharr (RA) heard him saying, "And even if he stole and committed adultery." Abu Dharr (RA) asked him, "Prophet of God, what were you saying?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "On my way back, the Archangel Gabriel came to me and said, 'Muhammad, bring glad tidings to your people; whosoever dies without associating partners with God will be admitted to heaven.'" The Prophet (PBUH) asked Gabriel, "Even if the person committed the crimes of theft or adultery?" Gabriel said, "Even if he stole, committed adultery, or drank alcohol."

Ibn Abi Hatem documented a tradition narrated by Jaber ibn 'Abd-Allah (RA), quoting the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, "Any soul dies not associating anything with God has earned God's forgiveness. It will be punished or forgiven according to God's will. God forgives everything except associating partners with Him."

On the authority of Al-Tabarani, Ibn 'Abbas (RA) quoted the Prophet (PBUH) to have said, "God said, 'Whosoever recognized that I have the power to forgive sins will be forgiven unless he associates partners with Me.'" This last tradition evinces the power of the deep inner feelings in the heart of a believing person. A person who recognizes the extent of the power of God will enjoy a mixture of feelings that include security, hope, fear, and love. These are feelings which promote God consciousness and open the door for forgiveness.

"Have you not considered those who attribute purity to themselves? Nay, God will purify whom He pleases; and they shall not be wronged even as much as the thread upon a date-stone. See how they fabricate a lie against God? That of itself is a flagrant sin."

The Jews claimed that they were the chosen people. This is true; they were chosen by God to carry the trust and to deliver God's message to people. God favored them over all people. God destroyed Pharaoh and his chiefs and saved them. God gave the Jews the holy land but they deviated away from the divine project and they became tyrants, committing sins, and spreading mischief in the land.

One wonders at the audacity of such people to claim purity for themselves. Similarly, one wonders at the situation of Muslims. Those who have Muslim names and live on Muslim land, however, they abandon the way of life dictated by Islamic principles. How can such Muslims call to Islam while Islam is absent from their lives? They only distort the image of Islam. I think this verse applies to Muslims today who claim that they believe in God and His messenger while Islam and the divine project are strangers in our land. These Muslims "See how they fabricate a lie against God? That of itself is a flagrant sin." Islam is a way of life; we can obey God only if we adopt this way of life. Obedience to God brings us closer to Him. Let us look at our situation and ask where we stand with respect to the standard enunciated by this verse.

"Have you not seen those to whom a portion of the Scripture has been given? They believe in idols and false deities and say of those who disbelieve, 'These are better guided than the believers.' Those are they whom God has cursed, and whomever God curses you shall not find any helper for him. Or have they a share in the dominion? But then they would not give people even what fills the groove on a date-stone. Or do they envy people for what God has given them out of His grace? But indeed, We have given the House of Abraham the Scripture and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom. Some of them believed, and some turned away from it. And nothing can burn like Hell fire." Don't you wonder at those who claim that they are purified while they believe in falsehood? They follow rules that contravene God's laws and they consider those who associate partners with God better guided than those who believe in the Oneness of God. Those who were given previous Scripture should have recognized the truth. They should have recognized the falsehood of associating partners with God. They should have followed God's law rather than man-made unjust laws. This refers to some of the Jewish tribes in Medina which sided with Quraish when they attacked Medina in the battle of the Ahzab.

They envy people for the blessings that God bestowed on them but when they have a share of the blessings, they behave niggardly. They do not give out even something as small as that which fills the groove on the back of a date-stone.

"Those who reject Our revelations, We shall soon cast them into fire; as often as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment; certainly, God is Eminent, Wise. But those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow; this will be their eternal home. They shall have therein pure mates, and We shall admit them to cool refreshing shade." What a horrifying image for those who will end up in Hellfire. As the skin burns, it will be replaced by new skin so they can taste the torment. In contrast to this, those who believed and did good deeds will abide in gardens under which rivers flow forever. They will enjoy purified spouses and will be covered with refreshing shades.

Verses: 58 to 70

58. Certainly, God commands you to render back the trusts to their owners and when you judge between people you judge with justice; certainly, God admonishes you with what is excellent; certainly, God is All-Seeing, All-Hearing.

59. You who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you; then if you have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; this is better and more seemly in the end.

60. Have you not seen those who claim that they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, how they would go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray.

61. And when it is said to them, "Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger," you will see the hypocrites turning away from you with utter aversion.

62. But how will it be when misfortune befalls them as a result of what their hands have committed before. Then they will come to you swearing by God, "We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation."

63. God knows what is in their hearts; therefore, turn aside from them and admonish them, and speak to them about themselves in an effectual way.

64. And We did not send a messenger but to be obeyed in accordance with God's will; and had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and asked for God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

65. But no, by your Lord, they will not be true believers until they make you a judge in all disputes between them, and then they find no resistance in their hearts to what you have decided, and submit entirely.

66. If We had ordered them, "Lay down your lives or forsake your homes," they would not have done it except for a few of them; if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and more affirming for their faith.

67. Then We would certainly have given them from Ourselves a great reward;

68. And We would certainly have guided them to a straight path.

69. All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom God has bestowed His blessings; of those are the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous. The best company they are.

70. This is a grace from God, and God suffices as the Omniscient. (4:58-70)

"Certainly, God commands you to render back the trusts to their owners and when you judge between people you judge with justice; certainly, God admonishes you with what is excellent; certainly, God is All-Seeing, All-Hearing." These are commands for a Muslim nation. These commands form a framework for ethical behavior; a trust must be returned back to its rightful owner and people should be judged fairly according to the divine project.

The first most important trust is the trust that God has entrusted humankind with. This is the trust that heavens, earth and mountains refused to undertake but humankind accepted. It is the trust of guidance, knowledge and belief in God willingly and purposely. This is the trust that God inculcated in the initial natural human disposition. Only humankind was given the choice to believe or not to believe. Humankind was given initial natural disposition, intellect, knowledge, and free will to help in pursuit of the truth. He was asked to strive to reach God

with the help of God: "But We shall be sure to guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause." (29:69)

This is the basic trust that humankind must fulfill. It is the foundation of all other trusts that humankind was asked to undertake. One of these trusts is the trust to be a witness for the faith of Islam, by striving against one's own desires and leading an Islamic way of life. The Muslim should be a living example of the ethical behavior that Islam promotes, for all people to see. The second level of being a witness for the faith of Islam is to convey its message to people. A third level of being a witness for this faith is to promote the Islamic way of life for the whole of humanity.

The trust of dealing honestly with people is another trust. One should be honest in dealing with people in all aspects of human activities whether financial or social. Other trusts include raising children and protecting people's lives and property. Muslims are commanded to be fair in their judgments. This is a comprehensive justice; it applies to all people whether Muslims or non-Muslims. Enjoying justice is a human right. All human beings have the right to be treated justly irrespective of their faith, ethnic origin, language, or color. The Muslim nation must uphold justice whenever possible. The verse ends with a reminder that God's commands are the best commands and that He is ever watching. It is interesting to note the correspondence between the command and the attributes of God used at the end of the verse. God listens and sees. To be just, one must listen and use one's insight to arrive at a just rule.

"You who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you; then if you have a dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day; this is better and more seemly in the end." What are the standards of honesty and justice? And how can they be determined and implemented? Do we leave the definitions of honesty and justice to be determined according to human whim, human intellect, and societal norms? It is true that human intellect is a valuable tool for gaining and articulating knowledge which can help humankind in its quest for guidance. But human intellect is a product of the environment in which it lives and the collective experience of the individuals living in this environment. The values that such human intellect produces are relative; they will vary from one place to another and from one society to another. But the values should be absolute. The verse outlines the source of all values and rules that should govern human life. God is the one who sets the standards and the values for the human society.

Obedience to God and His Messenger is a fundamental feature of the Muslim society. It is the criterion which defines the belief in God. The verse established the fundamental principle that God is the only source for legislation. God alone has the right to legislate for people and the Quran embodies God's law. God sent a messenger to illustrate how this law can be applied. The Messenger (PBUH) behaved according to the revelation. So, the Messenger's tradition is a component of God's law. Obeying the Messenger (PBUH) is an integral part of obeying God.

The verse indicates that obedience to those who are in authority is conditional on their obedience to God and His Messenger. It also indicates that those who are in authority should be believers. Obedience to those who are in authority is not mandated when they transgress and make evil commands. Authentic traditions expand on this point by stating that obedience is only

mandated when those in authority make commands which are in compliance with the fundamentals of Islamic practices. No obedience is mandated when a command to commit a sin is given. This leaves individuals with a responsibility to examine commands issued to them by those in authority. Islam does not mandate blind obedience. Those who perform a command have a responsibility to ensure that these commands are not meant to inflict harm.

A standard protocol to arrive at a verdict is stated. Obedience is mandated when there is a clear and unequivocal verdict given in the Quran or an authentic tradition. Difference in opinion regarding issues which emerge as a result of the changing needs of the society and local culture should be settled through referring it to "God and the Messenger." Reference should be made to the verses that may apply to this issue. However, if there are no verses dealing with the issue at hand then a verdict may be sought which abides with the general principles of Islamic law. This methodology should be followed by those who believe in God and the Hereafter; this is better for them in this life and in the Hereafter.

This methodology is beneficial for humankind because it is devised by the Creator of humankind. The Creator is Totally Aware of His creation. This methodology is free of the ills that can accrue through humankind's weaknesses, desires, whims, and ignorance. It is a fair methodology that does not favor an individual, a class, a people, a race, or a generation.

"Have you not seen those who claim that they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, how they would go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them? Satan wants to lead them far astray. And when it is said to them, 'Come to what God has revealed and to the Messenger,' you will see the hypocrites turning away from you with utter aversion. But how will it be when misfortune befalls them as a result of what their hands have committed before. Then they will come to you swearing by God, 'We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation.' God knows what is in their hearts; therefore, turn aside from them and admonish them, and speak to them about themselves in an effectual way." It seems that these verses were revealed to address the situation of the hypocrites in Medina during the first few years after Hijra. The verses also outline a fundamental criterion for a person to be deemed a believer. Those who want to "go for judging their disputes to unjust tyrants when they have been commanded to reject them" are not considered believers. They will not be true believers until they ask the Prophet (PBUH) to be the judge in all their disputes and accept his judgment willingly, feeling comfortable with whatever judgment he decrees.

The hypocrites claimed they believed in what was revealed to the messengers who came before the Prophet (PBUH) as well as in what has been revealed to the Prophet (PBUH), but at the same time they contravened this claim by seeking unjust tyrants as judges. The judgments of these false deities were based on their whims and desires, not on the revelations of God. Moreover, the hypocrites were admonished not to use unjust tyrants as judges, but they chose deliberately to ignore this command and they succumbed to the deception of Satan who wanted to lead them far astray. They refused to let the Prophet (PBUH) judge according to God's revelations in their disputes; what a contradiction.

Symptoms of hypocrisy became apparent when an adversity befell the hypocrites. They came hurrying to the Prophet (PBUH), "swearing by God, 'We did not seek anything except goodness and conciliation.'" It was a humiliating situation. They were unable to declare their true intentions, so they lied to the Prophet (PBUH). This is an image of what will happen to all who choose not to refer to the laws of God to settle their affairs. These people hid their intentions, but God knew what was in their hearts. He told His Prophet (PBUH) that He knew what was in their hearts; however the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to treat them kindly and to advise them to abandon their crooked behavior. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to educate them, in the hope that they might relinquish their crooked ways and join the ranks of the believers.

"And We did not send a messenger but to be obeyed in accordance with God's will; and had they, when they wronged themselves, come to you and asked for God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had (also) asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." This is an important rule. The mandate of God's messengers was to be obeyed and to establish a living example of the way of life that God has ordained, with the power to do so. Religion is a way of life. It encompasses institutions, values, behavior, and rituals. For this way of life to be established, it must be supported by power. God sent His messengers to be obeyed, by His leave and within the constraints that He delineated. God ordained that His messengers should be obeyed so that the way of life that God has ordained can be established.

God is All-Forgiving; He accepts the repentance of those who seek God's forgiveness. He is Merciful for those who return to Him. When this verse was revealed, the Prophet (PBUH) was accessible for those who were mentioned earlier in the previous verses; they could have availed themselves of the opportunity of asking the Prophet (PBUH) to seek God's forgiveness for them. This opportunity is no longer available, since the Prophet (PBUH) is no longer among us, but the door to God remains open and it will never be closed in the face of those who seek His forgiveness. The promise for forgiveness is still available to anyone who seeks God's forgiveness.

"But no, by your Lord, they will not be true believers until they make you a judge in all disputes between them, and then they find no resistance in their hearts to what you have decided, and submit entirely."

This is the criterion that needs to be met by true believers. It is stated with an oath from God. The true believers are those who accept the Prophet (PBUH) as their judge and accept his ruling with hearts full of contentment. Some may argue that this criterion was meant only for the time during which it was revealed or that it was meant only for people living at the time of this revelation. This is an argument of someone who does not know much about Islam and has little understanding of the language of the Quran. The criterion was stated in unequivocal terms in the form of an oath by God. It means that Islamic jurisprudence should be used to settle the disputes between people. It does not mean that the Prophet (PBUH) personally should act as a judge. A similar argument was made by the apostates after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). They used this argument to challenge the right of the state to collect the Poor-Dues (Zakat). The first Caliph, Abu Bakr (RA), had to fight them over this.

Public acceptance of Islamic law and the Prophet's (PBUH) traditions as the standard in settling disputes may be sufficient for a person to be considered a Muslim, but to be a believer this acceptance has to come from a heart secure in its contentment and satisfaction with whatever judgment is made.

"And if We had ordered them, 'Lay down your lives or forsake your homes,' they would not have done it except for a few of them; and if they had done what they were admonished, it would have certainly been better for them and more affirming for their faith; then We would certainly have given them from Ourselves a great reward. And We would certainly have guided them to a straight path." After posing the criterion that needs to be satisfied by people to be true believers, a reassurance is given that the way of life that they are asked to follow is actually a simple, easy, and merciful way of life. No one is burdened beyond his/her ability, and no one is asked to offer a dear sacrifice. God knows the ability of each person and He is Merciful. God also knows that if people were asked to perform difficult tasks, only few would be able to comply. He, therefore, does not burden people with tasks beyond their ability. God does not want people to lead a tough life, nor does He want to charge them with arduous duties. Had people met the reasonable obligations they were asked to do, they would have received God's great help.

Asking people to lay down their lives or forsake their homes are examples of arduous tasks that many people would not have been able to comply with had they been mandated. But God mandates only tasks which are within the reach of everyone. In addition, God promised to extend His help and support to those who make the first step on the straight path. However, the ease built into this way of life does not mean that one should follow the path of least resistance. The Islamic way of life allows for exemptions that can be applied when extenuating circumstances do occur. One should try to perform the duties the best way one can and take recourse to the exemptions when it is absolutely necessary to do so.

"All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom God has bestowed His blessings; of those are the prophets and the truthful and the martyrs and the righteous. The best company they are. This is a grace from God, and God suffices as the Omniscient." This is a gesture that arouses a feeling of anticipation in the hearts of all whose hearts are yearning to be in the company of those who were honored by God. This status can only be achieved by the blessings of God. It is appropriate to live a few moments with the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) who entertained these feelings. Said Ibn Jubair (RA) narrated that, "A man from Al-Ansar (people of the Medina) came to the Prophet (PBUH) and he looked sad. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him, 'Why do I see you sad?' The man said, 'Prophet of God, something crossed my mind and made me feel sad.' The Prophet (PBUH) asked, 'What is it that made you sad?' The man said, 'We are used to having you among us, we look at your face and we sit with you but tomorrow you will die and leave us.' The Prophet (PBUH) did not answer the man. Then Gabriel came down with this verse, 'All who obey God and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom God has bestowed His Blessing.' The Prophet (PBUH) sent for the man who came to him earlier and gave him the glad tiding of being in his company."

Another tradition was narrated by Abu Bakr ibn Mardaweih (RA). He said, "A man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, 'Messenger of God, I love you more than I love myself, my family,

and my child. Sometimes, when I am home, I remember you, so I could not wait until I come to see you. I worry that after death you will be with the other prophets and I may not be able to see you again.' The Prophet did not answer him until the above-mentioned verses were revealed."

A tradition given in Sahih Muslim states that Rabeah ibn Kaab Al-Aslam (RA) said, "I used to stay overnight at the house of the Messenger of God (PBUH) to serve him. The Messenger of God (PBUH) asked me to name a reward. So, I said that I would like to accompany him in heaven. The Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Would you ask something else?' I said no, this is what I want. The Prophet (PBUH) then said, 'Prostrate yourself often (meaning pray often).'" A well authenticated (Mutawater) tradition narrated by a group of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and cited by Al-Bukhari stated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "After death, a person will be with those whom he loves." Muslims were extremely happy to hear this.

Verses: 71 to 86

71. You who believe, be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together.

72. Certainly, among you is he who would certainly tarry behind. If then a misfortune befalls you, he says, "Certainly, God did bless me that I was not present with them."

73. And if God bestows a grace on you, he would certainly say, as if there had not been any affection between you and him, "Had I been with them, then I would have attained a mighty achievement."

74. Therefore, let those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter, fight in the way of God. Whoever fights in the way of God, then whether he is slain or victorious, We shall grant him a great reward.

75. And why should you not fight in the way of God and for the sake of the oppressed among the men and the women and the children, who say, "Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Your grace a protecting guardian and a helper."

76. Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who rejected faith fight in the way of Satan. Fight therefore the allies of Satan; certainly, Satan's scheme is ever weak.

77. Do you not see those to whom it was said, "Restrain your hands from fighting, and establish regular prayers and pay the poor-dues;" but when fighting was prescribed for them, a party of them feared people as, or even more than, they should have feared God. They said, "Our Lord, why did You ordain fighting for us? If only You give us a respite for a while." Say to them, "The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the thread on the back of a date-stone."

78. Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you may be in lofty towers. If a benefit comes to them, they say, "This is from God;" and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, "This is from you." Say to them, "All is from God," but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?

79. Whatever benefit comes to you (humankind), it is from God, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself, and We have sent you (Prophet), to humankind as a messenger; and God is sufficient as a witness.

80. Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys God, but whoever turns away, We have not sent you as a keeper over them.

81. And they say, "We obey you," but as soon as they leave you, a party of them spend the night plotting to do other than what you say; and God writes down what they plot by night. Therefore, ignore them and put your trust in God; God is sufficient as a Guardian.
82. Do they not then reflect on the Quran? And if it were from any other than God, would not they have found in it many a discrepancy.
83. And when there comes to them news of some matter touching upon public security or fear, they spread it around. If they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those among them who are able to reach a correct conclusion would have resolved it. Were it not for the grace of God upon you and His mercy, you would have certainly followed Satan save a few.
84. Fight then in God's way; this is only imposed on you, and urge the believers; maybe God will restrain the might of those who disbelieve. God is strongest in might and in punishment.
85. Whoever intercedes for a good cause shall have a share of it, and whoever intercedes for an evil cause shall have a share of its consequences; God is the Controller of all things.
86. And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it; certainly, God is a Reckoner of all things. (4:71-86)

It is likely that these verses were revealed during the period between the two battles of Uhud and the Trench. The verses deal with the unity of Muslims. They allude to the existence of various groups among the Muslim community. Some of these groups may not have had a full understanding of the true meaning of Islam, or they may not have truly believed but pretended to be among the believers. The verse touches upon the great effort that was needed to bring all these groups together as a united community in the face of the challenges that the community was encountering. These were challenges related to the true understanding of the faith and the need to defend the fledgling community against threats posed by its enemies. This may describe the condition of the community as a whole; however, it does not preclude the presence of Muslims who were shining examples and who strived hard and reached the top.

"You who believe, be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together. And certainly, among you is he who would certainly tarry behind. If then a misfortune befalls you, he says, 'Certainly, God did bless me that I was not present with them.' And if God bestows a grace on you, he would certainly say, as if there had not been any affection between you and him, 'Had I been with them, then I would have attained a mighty achievement.'" This was advice to the believers, advice from the high command which plans the strategy and explains the tactics. One cannot but feel amazed at the Quran's holistic approach to life. In one verse the general strategy for combating the enemy is explained: "You who believe, fight the disbelievers near you and let them find you standing firm; be aware that God is with those who are conscious of Him." (9:123) In the verse at hand, the tactics of dealing with the enemy are outlined: "Be on your guard, whether you go to war in small detachments or you go all together." In a third verse a new tactic is explained: "If you gain the upper hand over them in war, use them to disperse those who follow them, that they may remember." (8:57) This shows that Quranic verses were not limited in scope to teaching Muslims how to worship God, how to perform rituals, or how to behave, but their scope encompassed all aspects of life. Islam looks at life as a whole and requests the believers to adopt a way of life that is consistent with the divine project. The Quran provides a code of conduct for the individuals which explains the rituals, the acts of worship, and the ethical expectations. In addition, the Quran formulates the

basic fundamentals upon which the social, economic, and political systems to be adopted by the Muslim community should be established. Details of the systems may differ depending on the time and place but they have always to emanate from the same basic fundamentals.

The verse explains that when Muslims go to war they should go out in small or large groups depending on the situation, but not as individuals. It is easy to eliminate individuals, especially when there are hypocrites around. They should always be on the alert, watching both the enemy's activities and the actions of the defeatists among their ranks. The verse stressed the danger of the defeatists who were trying to hold back the progress of the army. Those defeatists were hypocrites who wanted to maximize their profits. They did not participate in the campaign, fearing death on the battle ground. They did not hide their happiness when a disaster befell the fighting believers. But when the believers won, they were full of regret at having lost their share in the spoils of war. Their sole concern was how much material gain they could accumulate. True believers loved to win and also to be safe; they prayed to God to make them safe and victorious. However, when they were requested to fight in the way of God, they answered the call without hesitation. They knew that they would win one of the two best rewards: martyrdom or victory.

The verse painted a despicable image of the defeatists to warn the rest of the Muslim community against falling into this category. The verse alerted the Muslim community to be aware of both the dangers that may come from within and the dangers that may come from outside the community. This is a typical situation that can be seen repeatedly over time. The strategy in dealing with inside dangers is to try to rehabilitate the defeatists to overcome their weakness and to find a way to integrate them into the community.

"Therefore, let those who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter, fight in the way of God; and whoever fights in the way of God, then whether he is slain or victorious, We shall grant him a great reward." Islam does not recognize any other motive for fighting other than fighting in the way of God. Fighting to gain spoils of war, fighting to control land or people, or fighting to build personal or national glory are illegitimate motives for fighting. The only legitimate motive for fighting in Islam is to fight to proclaim the word of God and to give people the freedom to adopt a way of life of their choice. It is divine justice that dictates that people should have the chance to examine the word of God and to have the free will to adopt a way of life which they believe in. When a Muslim is killed in the course of fighting in the way of God, he/she becomes a martyr. But if he/she is killed fighting for any other reason, he/she would not be considered a martyr.

"And why should you not fight in the way of God and for the sake of the oppressed among the men and the women and the children, who say, 'Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Your grace a protecting guardian and a helper.'" How can you not fight in the way of God to save those who are being persecuted from among the men, women and children? A question which paints an emotive image of the persecuted who need help, in an attempt to arouse feelings of chivalry in the hearts of the believers. It urged them to defend those who were persecuted by the Meccan Arabs because they chose to adopt Islam and to help them escape the persecution at the hands of the unjust.

"Those who believe fight in the way of God, and those who rejected faith fight in the way of Satan. Fight therefore the allies of Satan; certainly, Satan's scheme is ever weak." The verse paints an image of two different groups of people, fighting under two different banners. Those who fight in the way of God fight to proclaim the sovereignty of God's law and to establish justice among people under the banner of God. They proclaim God as the only deity to be worshiped and, therefore, He is the Ruler. Those who fight in the way of Satan are trying to establish a way of life that is based on values which are deemed improper by God. Those who fight in the way of God get His support and protection. Those who fight in the way of Satan seek Satan's protection. Believers are commanded to fight the allies of Satan and never fear them because Satan's scheme is ever weak.

Thus, Muslims stand on firm grounds in their battle against those who are protected by Satan. They have strong support from God because they have the strong belief that they are fighting in His way. They are not fighting for personal, tribal, or national gains. It is a battle between the truth and falsehood. The truth is exemplified in the values and discipline deemed good by God, while falsehood is brought about by various programs and methodologies based on the whims and desires of human beings. Establishing the truth provides an environment in which justice is established. Muslims should not fear Satan because Satan's strategy is weak.

"Do you not see those to whom it was said, 'Restrain your hands from fighting, and establish regular prayers and pay the poor-dues;' but when fighting was prescribed for them, a party of them feared people as, or even more than, they should have feared God. They said, 'Our Lord, why did You ordain fighting for us? If only You give us a respite for a while.' Say to them, 'The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the thread on the back of a date-stone.' Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you may be in lofty towers. If a benefit comes to them, they say, 'This is from God;' and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, 'This is from you.' Say to them, 'All is from God,' but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?"

God wonders at the behavior of a group of people who were anxious to fight in the beginning, before Muslims were allowed to fight back those who were persecuting them, but when the time came and Muslims were allowed to fight back, they became overwhelmed with fear. They feared people more than they feared God. They asked in humiliation why they were commanded to fight. They even asked for a respite to prepare themselves for carrying out the command.

The verse indicates that initially, Muslims were not allowed to fight back those who were persecuting them in Mecca; then the strategy changed and a command allowing the Muslims to fight back was issued. In the early days after the advent of Islam, Muslims were asked to persevere, establish prayers, and pay the poor dues. What was the wisdom behind the change in strategy? There is no certain and specific knowledge of the reasons behind the change in strategy, one can only speculate. Speculations may be right, may be wrong, or may provide only a partial explanation. The true reasons are only known to God and we have no way to be certain of the real reasons behind the change in the strategy. Our speculations are as follows:

- The Meccan period may have been considered a period for education and preparation of the Muslims for the task of establishing a Muslim community.
- The unarmed struggle may have been more effective in this period. The Arabs of Quraish were obstinate by nature. Armed struggle may have motivated even the moderates among them to become staunch enemies of Islam and would have closed the door in front of anyone who wanted to become a Muslim.
- Armed struggle may not have been practical, since there was no single identified army to fight against. Persecution was practiced by individuals and armed struggle may have turned many houses in Mecca into battle grounds. Armed struggle that takes place in individual households may have caused a great deal of destruction and chaos and would have reinforced the claim of the Arabs of Mecca that Muhammad's message commands the father to kill his son and the son to kill his father.
- There may have been hopes that those who persecuted the Muslims in the beginning may turn around and adopt Islam and become its sincerest supporters. An example of this group was 'Umar (RA), the second caliph.
- The strategy of the unarmed struggle did arouse the feelings of chivalry in the hearts of the non-Muslims and motivated them to save Muslims from persecution and torture. Some examples support this opinion. When Ibn Al-Daghna came to know that Abu Bakr (RA) was going to migrate from Mecca to flee the persecution, he felt ashamed. It was shameful, in his view, that someone like Abu Bakr (RA) was forced to leave his home in the face of persecution, and he offered Abu Bakr (RA) his protection. Another example was shown when the gallantry of some non-Muslim men drove them to lift the boycott which was imposed on the Prophet's (PBUH) tribe when they realized how much devastation the boycott had caused.
- The Muslims were a minority in Mecca. All the tribes outside Mecca considered what was happening between the Muslims and non-Muslims in Mecca as an internal conflict. An armed struggle between the Muslims and non-Muslims may have ended in wiping out the Muslim minority.
- The priority at that time may have been for the call to Islam to continue. This was being achieved in spite of the price that was being paid.

These considerations may have helped in shaping the strategy of the unarmed struggle. Muslims were commanded to persevere, establish prayers, and pay the poor dues.

Then the command was given, and those who were most anxious to participate in the armed struggle started to have second thoughts; fear of facing people on the battle ground filled their hearts. The presence of such a group could break up the unity of the community. The whole community should be ready to take up their responsibility and undertake the command to participate in the armed struggle with fearless hearts full of confidence and security. The Quran addressed this situation by educating this group: "The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for him who is conscious of God; and you shall not be wronged as much as the thread on the back of a date-stone. Wherever you are, death will overtake you, even though you are in lofty towers." They feared death and wanted to live. They wished that they had more time to enjoy life before they faced death on the battle ground. The Quran told them that the enjoyment of this life is little. So, how long do they hope to live: days, weeks, months, or years? Life will end some day and the enjoyment of the whole worldly life is little. This worldly life is only one of the stages of the life of a human being. Death is a bridge to the second stage,

the everlasting life, rather than the end of the journey. The enjoyment in the Hereafter is everlasting, and it is also better for those who remain conscious of God. God consciousness involves fearing God. It is appropriate to mention the fear of God here because it is God that one should fear, not people. Those who are God conscious have nothing to fear. God will not treat them unjustly. If one misses the worldly enjoyment, then there is the fullest reward in the Hereafter. No one will be wronged.

Death overtakes everyone at the appointed time; no one can escape. Death is certain whether one engages in war or lives in peace; it is certain whether one is protected within the confines of a secure place or lives in the open. Delaying the undertaking of armed struggle will not then change the time of death.

"If a benefit comes to them, they say, 'This is from God;' and if a misfortune befalls them, they say, 'This is from you.' Say to them, 'All is from God,' but what is the matter with these people who fail to understand what was said to them?" They may have said this for one or more of the following three reasons:

- They may have considered the Prophet (PBUH) to be a bad omen. If the land did not yield the crops they expected, the cattle did not multiply as they had hoped, or if they were touched by an adversity, then it must have been the Prophet's (PBUH) fault. But if everything is fine then it is God who bestows the grace.
- Or they may have wanted to berate the Prophet (PBUH) so that they would have the excuse to relieve themselves from the responsibilities which he commanded them to undertake, especially if the responsibility included taking up arms. This may have been their way of deflecting the blame from themselves to the Prophet (PBUH). Rather than blaming themselves for being weak and fearful, they blamed the Prophet (PBUH) for the evil he commanded them to do.
- Or they may not have understood the reality of life and the role of God's will in what happens to them and to the others. They may not have understood the role of the Prophet (PBUH) and the nature of the relationship between God and His Messenger.

These verses deal with one of the aspects of the concept of free will and predestination. The Quran has a simple approach in dealing with this concept. God is the only doer for what happens in the universe and what befalls people. A person can attempt to do something but it will only happen if God willed it to happen. The Prophet (PBUH) is a creature of God; he has no power to make things happen. The fact that they blame him for their misfortune shows how little their understanding is. The point is people can try, using all the tools that God made available to them, to accomplish a certain task whether good or bad, but ultimately it is the will of God that determines whether or not the task will be achieved. It is the will of God which controls all things happening in this universe.

Then we come to the subsequent verse: "Whatever benefit comes to you (humankind), it is from God, and whatever misfortune befalls you, it is from yourself, and We have sent you (Prophet), to humankind as a messenger; and God is sufficient as a witness." There is no contradiction between this verse and the previous one. God has established a clear way to be followed and He pointed out the way to goodness and warned people not to follow the way that leads to evil. God's way guides people to what is good and keeps them away from what is evil. Those who

chose to follow God's way will be helped further by God: "But We shall certainly guide to Our ways those who strive hard for Our cause." (29:69). When one follows this way, he/she will get the benefit. It may not look like a benefit in the eyes of many. But the true benefit is that which will be beneficial in God's balance because it is He who has drawn the way and it is He who sets the standard for good and evil. Those who choose not to follow the way of God, refrain from doing good, and indulge in committing evil will gain the recompense for their evil deeds in this life, in the Hereafter, or in both. This is what they have gained as a consequence of their own deeds. There is no contradiction between the two statements. Thus, the Prophet (PBUH) was sent as a messenger to deliver God's message and not to control goodness or evil.

"Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys God, and whoever turns away, We have not sent you as a keeper over them." Whoever obeys the Prophet (PBUH) indeed obeys God, because the Prophet (PBUH) is simply delivering God's message. The Prophet (PBUH) was not sent to force people to believe or to compel them to be guided. Forcing people to believe was neither the Prophet's (PBUH) mandate, nor was he prepared for doing it. Those who turn away should be left to God. God will deal with them as He chooses.

"And they say, 'We obey you,' but as soon as they leave you, a party of them spend the night plotting to do other than what you say; and God writes down what they plot by night; therefore ignore them and put your trust in God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian." There are two possible interpretations for this verse. The first is that the verse refers to a group of Muslims who expressed their unconditional acceptance of whatever the Prophet (PBUH) commanded them to do, as long as they were in his company. Once they parted company with the Prophet (PBUH) they started plotting to obviate his commands.

An alternative interpretation is also plausible. When the Muslims were with the Prophet (PBUH) they expressed their obedience, but once they parted company, a smaller group (the hypocrites) among them started plotting for disobedience. These plots jeopardized the unity of the Muslim community. Such threats could have been catastrophic since the danger of an outside enemy was imminent. God, however, assured the Prophet (PBUH) and the sincere Muslims that He is ever aware of those who plot and scheme against them. He also sent a warning to the hypocrites that they would not be successful in their plots.

The strategy that the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to adopt in dealing with the hypocrites was to take what they say at its face value and not to try to dig deeper for their real intentions. This plan worked in the end and left them disgraced and weak. So, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to leave them alone and to put his trust in God. God is sufficient for those who put their trust in Him. They will be saved from those who plot evil against them.

"Do they not then reflect on the Quran? And if it were from any other than God, would not they have found in it many a discrepancy." This is a criterion that they could have used to find out for themselves whether the Quran is God's word: a criterion that respects humankind and honors his ability to think and understand. The criterion is to find for themselves whether there is any inconsistency in the Quran. Those who read and reflect on the Quran will discover that the Quran is a consistent book. There are different levels for this characteristic which are suitable for all generations and all different levels of intellectual attainment. Each generation is

requested to reflect on the Quran and discover for themselves the consistent nature of the Quran.

"And when there comes to them news of some matter touching upon public security or fear, they spread it around; and if they had referred it to the Messenger and to those in authority among them, those among them who are able to reach a correct conclusion would have resolved it. Were it not for the grace of God upon you and His mercy, you would have certainly followed Satan save a few." The verse depicts a scene of a group of people within the Muslim community who were lacking in self-discipline. They did not appreciate the danger of spreading rumors among a community getting ready for a battle. It may have been that they really did not care about the impact of their actions on the welfare of the community. Spreading rumors may have had serious repercussions on the preparations for war. Rumors spread very quickly from one person to another and may have had a devastating effect on the morale of the army and its readiness for combat. This is a typical example of an army which is lacking in discipline, in loyalty to its command, or in both. It seems that the verse is describing a real situation which the army was experiencing at that time. The verse directed the Muslims to the correct approach in dealing with such situations. Rather than spreading rumors, they should have gone back to the Prophet (PBUH) or to their commanders. Those who were in command should have been able to help in sorting out the situation. God's blessings are great and it is the only protection against Satan's temptation.

"Fight then in God's way; this is only imposed on you and urge the believers; maybe God will restrain the might of those who disbelieve. God is strongest in might and in punishment." Reading this verse and remembering the previous ones, leads us to make the following comments:

- The verse alludes to the shaky condition of the Muslim community. Rumors frustrated the unity of the Muslim ranks. God commanded His Prophet (PBUH) to fight, even if he had to fight alone. In the meantime, he should urge the believers to join him. In addition, the verse reiterates a fundamental principle that obeying God's command is a personal responsibility.
- The verse emphasizes how difficult it was for the Muslim community to take up arms against the polytheists. The verse indicates that the ultimate hope of the Muslims was that God would support them against the polytheists. The verse brings a sense of security to the Muslims by reminding them of the superiority of God's power.
- The verses also outline the natural reluctance of people to undertake difficult tasks. Seeking the support of God and putting their trust in Him are the only tools to ease the burden of these difficult tasks and responsibilities.

"Whoever intercedes for a good cause shall have a share of it, and whoever intercedes for an evil cause shall have a share of its consequences, and God is the Controller of all things." Those who encourage and urge people to fulfill their responsibilities will have a share in the reward, and those who hesitate in carrying out their responsibilities and dampen the drive of others will be recompensed for the consequences of their actions. This is a general rule that applies to all situations. The specific circumstances which constituted the subject of these verses were used to produce this general rule. This is one of the general features of the Quran. The verse ends by stating that God is ever watching over everything; all power and provision is His.

"And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better (greeting) than it or return it; certainly, God is a Reckoner of all things." Answering the greetings offered by people is a social etiquette that helps in improving the relationships between people in the society. Islam has its own unique greeting. The greeting can be any one of the three forms: peace be with you; peace and mercy of God be with you; or peace, mercy, and blessings of God be with you. The second form is used to respond to the first form and the third form is used to respond to the second and the third forms. This way the response is either better or equal to the original greeting.

Verses: 87 to 94

87. There is no god but Him; He will most certainly gather you together on the Day of Resurrection, there is no doubt about that. And who is truer in His speech than God?

88. Why should you be divided into two parties regarding the hypocrites? When God Himself has cast them back (to disbelief) because of what they have earned? Do you wish to guide those whom God has left to go astray? And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for them.

89. They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be (all) alike. Therefore, take no protecting guardians from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way. If they turn their back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them.

90. Except those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a treaty, or who come to you, their hearts restraining them from fighting you or fighting their own people; and if God had pleased, He would have given them power over you, so that they should have certainly fought you; therefore, if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God has not given you a way against them.

91. You will find others who wish to obtain security from you, as well as from their people, but every time they are back in a situation where they are tempted (to fight you), they succumb to it; therefore, if they do not withdraw from you, and offer you peace and restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; and against these We have given you a clear authority.

92. It is not for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to the victim's people unless they remit it as a charity, but if he be from a tribe hostile to you and he is a believer, then set free a believing slave, and if he is from a tribe with whom you have a treaty, the blood-money should be paid to the victim's people along with the freeing of a believing slave; but he who does not have the means should fast for two months successively: a penance from God, and God is Omniscient, Wise.

93. And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell; he shall abide in it, and God will send His wrath and curse on him and prepare for him a dreadful torment.

94. You who believe, when you go to war in God's way, be careful to discern; and do not say to someone who offers you peace, "You are not a believer." Do you seek the chance profit of this life? God has abundant gains; you too were such before, then God conferred His favor on you; therefore, take care to discern; certainly, God is Totally-Aware of what you do. (4:87-94)

"There is no god but Him; He will most certainly gather you together on the Day of Resurrection, there is no doubt about that. And who is truer in His speech than God?" The belief in the Oneness of God is the foundation of the divine project to educate individuals and to establish a Muslim society. It is also the basis of the Muslim society's laws and institutions. These laws and institutions organize life within the society as well as the relationships between the Muslim society and other societies and organizations. It is appropriate to use this verse as an introduction to the subsequent verses which delineate basic rules that govern the relationships within the Muslim society as well as the relationships between the Muslim society and other societies.

"Why should you be divided into two parties regarding the hypocrites when God Himself has cast them back (to disbelief) because of what they have earned? Do you wish to guide those whom God has left to go astray? And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for them. They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be (all) alike. Therefore, take no protecting guardians from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way; but if they turn their back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them." The verse deplored the difference in opinion that existed between two groups of Muslims regarding how to deal with the hypocrites. It placed the issue in perspective, setting up the grounds for dealing with the hypocrites. To build a unified front regarding the hypocrites, the Quran explained that the bad situation in which the hypocrites found themselves was brought upon themselves as a result of their own deeds. A rhetorical question is posed to the Muslims who wanted to adopt a lenient position towards the hypocrites, thinking that this might rectify the situation: "Do you wish to guide those whom God has left to go astray?" The answer is, "And whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall by no means find a way for him." God leaves those who deliberately choose to be led astray to continue on the path of misguidance. They lose any hope of coming back to the straight path. They lost the way, and they also wish that the believers be led astray as well: "They desire that you should reject faith as they have rejected faith, so that you might be (all) alike." They recanted after they had adopted Islam. Their tongues proclaimed the testament of faith but their deeds confirmed their disbelief. They supported the enemy of Islam, and they also worked very hard to sway the Muslims from the straight path, so that they would be all alike. The verse removed all doubts about who can be called a true Muslim. The deeds of a true Muslim should be a true reflection of his/her words. The verse excited the feelings of the believers, who had recently tasted the sweetness of faith and appreciated the change in their lifestyle which was brought about by the new faith, and urged them to abhor what the hypocrites did.

Then the command was issued: "Therefore take no protecting guardians from their ranks until they migrate (to Medina) in God's way; but if they turn back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them." We sense from this command that at the time these verses were revealed, there were still close family and tribal ties as well as economic and business transactions between the Muslims and the idolaters of Mecca. The command alluded to the type of bonds that should be observed by the members of the Muslim community. It explained that the Muslim community should not be built on tribal, family, or other interests. The common bond that should hold the Muslims together in a single entity is the belief in the Oneness of God. This means that no friendship can exist between the

two warring parties: Muslims in Medina and the idolaters in Mecca. Those who adopted the faith of Islam but still lived in Mecca should migrate to Medina and become an integral part of the new Muslim community. Their migration should be in the way of God. Their sole purpose would be to flee with their faith and to contribute to the establishment of a community whose members lead an Islamic way of life. The verse stated clearly that if they migrate then they can be considered members of the Muslim community, but if they do not migrate and remain in Mecca then their Islam is only a lip service. In this case, "Seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take no ally or a helper from among them." We believe, on the basis of this statement, that this verdict did not apply to the hypocrites in Medina.

Islam is tolerant towards people of different faiths. It is not Islam's way to force people to abandon their faiths and convert to Islam. Non-Muslims living in a Muslim state have the right to practice their faith as long as they do not attack Islam or try to convert Muslims to their religion. They are treated as full citizens of the society enjoying the same rights that Muslims enjoy. They are allowed to use laws based on their faith to settle their own disputes in matters that are not part of national interest.

But those who said that they were Muslims and testified that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger, then refused to migrate with the Muslims to Medina and supported the enemies of Islam, do not deserve any leniency. Their actions showed that they were enemies of the Muslims. However, an exception is made: "Except those who seek refuge with a people with whom you have a treaty, or who come to you, their hearts restraining them from fighting you or fighting their own people; and if God had pleased, He would have given them power over you, so that they should have certainly fought you; therefore, if they withdraw from you and do not fight you and offer you peace, then God has not given you a way against them." The enemies of Islam who joined a group or a party that had a peace treaty with the Muslims were given the same privileges which the original subscribers to the treaty enjoyed. Muslims were not allowed to fight them. This command shows Islam's inclination towards peace. Islam opts for peace whenever there is a way to settle disputes peacefully, as long as the security and the freedom of speech of Muslims are not compromised.

Another exception is made for those who wanted to stay neutral and did not want to side with any of the warring factions. These were people who were living in Mecca and were members of the tribes that were at war with the Muslims but they chose to take a neutral position regarding the war. Islam respected their choice. The verse explained the logic behind the Quran's stance towards these people. They could have sided with their people against the Muslims. So, their choice to take a neutral stand deserved to be respected by the Muslims. It is God's will nevertheless. This is a reminder for the Muslims to incline towards peace whenever it is possible, as long as fundamental principles are not compromised.

"You will find others who wish to obtain security from you, as well as from their people, but every time they are back in a situation where they are tempted (to fight you), they succumb to it; therefore, if they do not withdraw from you, and offer you peace and restrain their hands, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them; and against these We have given you a clear authority." This was a group similar to the first one in its evil intentions towards the Muslims. They were not party to any peace treaty, and they did not want to remain neutral. So,

they were considered at war with the Muslims. Ibn Jareer quoted Mejahed who said that this verse tells the story of a group from the hypocrite Meccan Arabs. They used to come to the Prophet (PBUH) expressing their allegiance, but reverted to idolatry practices upon their return to their tribes. They wanted to hold the stick from the middle. The verse requested that these people clarify their stand. If they did not restrain their hands and offer peace, then they should be considered at war with the Muslims.

These verses outline two basic principles for Muslims: be firm at war but opt for peace whenever there is a chance for it. Being firm in dealing with serious situations does not contradict being tolerant when tolerance is required. Establishing these two principles side by side is a clear instruction for Muslims to practice moderation in their dealings. They indicate that extremism is not supported by Islam.

"It is not for a believer to kill a believer except by mistake, and whoever kills a believer by mistake, he should free a believing slave, and blood-money should be paid to the victim's people unless they remit it as a charity, but if he be from a tribe hostile to you and he is a believer, then set free a believing slave, and if he is from a tribe with whom you have a treaty, the blood-money should be paid to the victim's people along with the freeing of a believing slave; but he who does not have the means should fast for two months successively: a penance from God, and God is Omniscient, Wise." The previous verses dealt with the relationship between the Muslim community and other communities at times of war. In this verse, the discourse turns to the relationships among Muslims. The rule that Muslims should not fight each other irrespective of differences in background and nationality has been stated. There is no good enough reason to justify killing a Muslim at the hands of his fellow Muslims, with two exceptions: killing by mistake or on account of retribution as dictated by the rule of law. The verse explains three different ways for dealing with situations when a person is killed by mistake.

The first scenario is when the victim and his family are residents of a Muslim state. In this case, a believing slave should be freed, and a ransom should be paid to the victim's family. Freeing a slave is a symbolic gesture to redress the loss that the Muslim community suffered. It is like giving life to a person in lieu of the life that was taken by death. The ransom is a means to compensate the victim's family for their loss. The verse states that the victim's family has the right to forgo the ransom if they choose.

The second scenario deals with a situation where the victim is a Muslim but his family is not. The family of the deceased lives in a non-Muslim state. In this case, a Muslim slave must be freed as a compensation for the loss of the Muslim community. No ransom should be paid to the non-Muslim family, since this money may be used to support the war against Muslims.

The third scenario involves a victim whose family is not Muslim but they reside in a state which has concluded a peace treaty with the Muslim state. In this case a ransom should be paid to his family, and a slave should be freed. It is interesting to note that the verse does not mention explicitly in this last scenario whether the victim is a believer or not, as it was explicitly stated in the previous two scenarios. This motivated some scholars to conclude that this is a general verdict that applies to murder victims whether they are Muslims or non-

Muslims, if the victim is a resident of a state that has a peace treaty with the Muslim state. However, it appears to me that these three scenarios only address the cases when a Muslim is killed by mistake, as was stated in the beginning of the verse, and the three scenarios provide details of the different situations that may be encountered.

It has been reported that the Prophet (PBUH) did pay a ransom for non-Muslims who were killed by mistake, but he did not free any slaves in these cases. Thus, the conclusion of the Muslim scholars mentioned above is supported by the Prophet's (PBUH) actions rather than by the verses under discussion.

"And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is Hell; he shall abide in it, and God will send His wrath and curse on him and prepare for him a dreadful torment." Premeditated killing of a fellow Muslim is a heinous crime. It is a crime that deliberately destroys human life, as well as severing the strong relationship created by the brotherhood of faith. This is a relationship which provides the bond that holds the community together. This crime has been grouped in one category with associating partners with God in many places in the Quran. Some scholars concluded, among them Ibn 'Abbas (RA), that the perpetrator, in this case, has no chance to repent. However, others cited the verse, "Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives anything else to whomsoever He pleases," (4:48) indicating that a repentant murderer may still be forgiven.

Early Muslims used to suffer a great deal of bitterness and sadness when they encountered fellow Muslims who had murdered, before they embraced Islam, their parents, brothers, or children, but they never thought of avenging their loss or treating them badly.

This leads to the following verse which clearly instructs Muslims to be careful when they fight not to kill anyone until they have verified that this person is fighting against Islam. The word of any person who declares himself a Muslim should be taken at its face value.

"You who believe, when you go to war in God's way, be careful to discern; and do not say to someone who offers you peace, 'You are not a believer.' Do you seek the chance profit of this life? God has abundant gains; you too were such before, then God conferred His favor on you; therefore, take care to discern; certainly, God is Totally-Aware of what you do."

The verse reminded Muslims of their recent past before they adopted Islam. This was a time when a fight would start for the most trivial reason, very often motivated by greed. It also reminded them of the security that they had gained after they reverted to Islam. This is a grace from God.

Verses: 95 to 104

95. The believers who sit back, except those who are suffering an injury, are not equal to those who strive and fight in the cause of God with their wealth and their persons. God has made those who strive with their wealth and their persons a rank higher than those who sit back, and

to each class God has promised a good reward. God has distinguished those who strive above those who sit back and will grant them a great reward.

96. High ranks are especially bestowed by Him and forgiveness and mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

97. When the angels take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they shall say, "In what state were you?" They shall say, "We were weak and oppressed in the land." The angels will say, "Was not God's earth spacious, so that you could have migrated therein?" Such people will find their refuge in Hell. What an evil destination.

98. Except those who are really weak and oppressed, men, women, and children, who have no means in their power and cannot find a way (to escape);

99. For these, there is hope that God will pardon them; God is Pardoning, All-Forgiving.

100. Whoever migrates in God's way, he will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoever forsakes his home, seeking refuge with God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with God; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

101. And when you travel in the land, there is no blame on you if you shorten the prayer, if you fear that the disbelievers may attack you; certainly the disbelievers are your avowed enemy.

102. And when you are among them and standing to lead them in prayer, let a party of them stand up with you, and let them take their arms; then when they have prostrated themselves let them go to the rear, and let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, taking all precaution and bearing arms; the disbelievers wish that you may be careless of your arms and your luggage, so that they may then assault you with a sudden united attack, and there is no blame on you, if you are inconvenienced with rain or if you are sick, that you lay down your arms, and take every precaution; certainly, God has prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers.

103. When you have finished the prayer, remember God standing, sitting down, and reclining; but when you are safe from danger establish regular prayers; certainly, prayers are prescribed for the believers at stated times.

104. And be not weak-hearted in pursuit of the enemy; if you suffer pain, they too suffer pain as you suffer pain, and you hope from God that which they do not hope; and God is Omniscient, Wise. (4:95-104)

"The believers who sit back, except those who are suffering an injury, are not equal to those who strive and fight in the cause of God with their wealth and their persons. God has made those who strive with their wealth and their persons a rank higher than those who sit back, and to each class God has promised a good reward. God has distinguished those who strive above those who sit back and will grant them a great reward. High ranks are especially bestowed by Him and forgiveness and mercy; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." This verse came down to deal with a special circumstance that the Muslim community was facing. Some Muslims were lacking in the drive to fight in the way of God. Both financial support and physical participation were needed. The verse came to urge this group to actively participate in the fight in the way of God. Although the verse came to address a special circumstance, the rule stated is a general rule that can be applied to similar situations at any time as well. Muslims who actively participate in Jihad, whether physically or through providing financial support, will have a better reward than Muslims who are able but for one reason or another choose not to participate. Those who are unable to participate because of health issues or are too poor to contribute financially are exempted from this rule.

The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, "God prepared a hundred ranks in paradise for those who strive in His way. The distance between each two consecutive ranks is like the distance between heavens and earth." However, all Muslims were promised a good reward. The rule was repeated twice in the verse to emphasize the benefit of active participation.

Two facts can be deduced from this verse. The first is that the verse came to deal with the reluctance of some Muslims to participate in fighting against the enemy of Islam. The second is the importance of active participation in fighting against the enemy of Islam, whether physically or through financial support. The need for defending Muslims against their enemy extends beyond a certain phase in the history of Islam; it will continue as long as life on earth continues.

"When the angels take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they shall say, 'In what state were you?' They shall say, 'We were weak and oppressed in the land.' The angels will say, 'Was not God's earth spacious, so that you could have migrated therein?' Such people will find their refuge in Hell. What an evil destination. Except those who are really weak and oppressed, men, women, and children, who have no means in their power and cannot find a way (to escape). For these, there is hope that God will pardon them; God is Pardoning, All-Forgiving."

The Prophet (PBUH) migrated to Medina and established the new Muslim state there. However, some Muslims remained in their home towns in Mecca and other places in the Arabian Peninsula. Migration meant that people leave their homes and property behind. Some Muslims did not want to undertake this sacrifice, some were apprehensive of the experience of moving to a new place, and some were too weak to endure the hardships of moving to Medina. Many Muslims who remained behind suffered different sorts of persecution and torture at the hands of the idolaters, especially after the battle of Badr in which the idolaters suffered defeat at the hands of the Muslims. The torture and persecution forced some Muslims to revert back to idolatry to save their lives. These verses came down to deal with this situation. Those who did not migrate and chose to stay behind for one reason or another were told that they would die in sin. They had deprived themselves of a decent life in the newly established Muslim state. They preferred a life of persecution in their old homes to a life of freedom in a new home.

The verse aimed at reclaiming these souls who wronged themselves by staying behind. The verse painted a horrifying image of a dying person being questioned by the angels. Their behavior is questioned and their answers are rebutted. Why did they not flee the persecution? Why did they stay behind and accept humiliation and torture? The verse ended by reminding them of the fearful result of their deeds. However, those who were truly weak and could not migrate were exempted. They will be forgiven because they had no choice.

"And whoever migrates in God's way, he will find much refuge and abundance in the earth, and whoever forsakes his home, seeking refuge with God and His Messenger, and then death overtakes him, his reward is indeed with God; God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." This verse exemplifies the Quranic approach to relieve human anxiety for those facing the prospect of migration. The approach is honest in recognizing the natural human fear of the unknown. It provided the assurance of safety and security. Those who migrate in the way of God are

promised safe refuge and abundance of provision. The verse opened up horizons for safe and prosperous life. Earnings are not restricted to one place or one opportunity. God will provide for those who migrate in His way. Death can come at any time and it will happen at a specific time for each one irrespective of his/her place and condition. If it came on the road to Medina, then the reward is guaranteed and God's forgiveness is abundant.

"And when you travel in the land, there is no blame on you if you shorten the prayer, if you fear that the disbelievers may attack you; certainly the disbelievers are your avowed enemy." A traveler needs to be in constant contact with his Lord. This contact provides support to the traveler to overcome the obstacles on the road and to achieve the objective of the journey. Prayers are the best method of contact with God. Prayers provide the support Muslims need at difficult times: "Seek help with perseverance and prayers." (2:45) So, it is appropriate to remind those who were migrating of the benefit of prayers and provide them with a license to perform a shortened form of the prayer to maintain the connection with their Lord, while avoiding putting them in harm's way. Regular prayers involve certain movements; a person performing regular prayers may attract the attention of the enemy. The enemy may find an opportunity to attack or capture Muslims while they are performing regular prayers. The verse allows Muslims to perform a shortened prayer in lieu of the regular prayer when they are traveling if they fear the enemy.

We should differentiate between the shortened prayers mentioned here and the shortened prayers that a traveler is allowed to perform. The shortened prayers in this verse are specific for those who are afraid of being attacked by the enemy. A normal traveler is allowed to perform a prayer similar in form to the regular prayer but shorter in length. For a person who is traveling and is also afraid of being attacked by an enemy, the form of the prayer is different in addition to its length being shortened. In this case, a person may perform the prayer standing up, and forgo kneeling and prostrating, which are integral components of the regular prayer. One can also perform prayers while walking or riding in this case. Gesturing with one's head would replace kneeling and prostrating.

"And when you are among them and standing to lead them in prayer, let a party of them stand up with you, and let them take their arms; then when they have prostrated themselves let them go to the rear, and let another party who have not prayed come forward and pray with you, taking all precaution and bearing arms; the disbelievers wish that you may be careless of your arms and your luggage, so that they may then assault you with a sudden united attack, and there is no blame on you, if you are inconvenienced with rain or if you are sick, that you lay down your arms, and take every precaution; certainly, God has prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers. When you have finished the prayer, remember God standing, sitting down, and reclining; but when you are safe from danger establish regular prayers; certainly, prayers are prescribed for the believers at stated times." When one reflects on the deep meanings underlying these verses, which illustrate the Quranic approach to dealing with the human psyche, one can see the subtle touches that reach the human soul. These touches were part of the training program for Muslims. The verses addressed the mechanics of performing prayers on the battle ground, and they also emphasized the importance of prayers for a Muslim even when one is in the midst of a battle. Prayers were called the weapon of the Muslim. Early Muslims were able to prevail over their enemy because they understood the meaning and

impact of this weapon and used it effectively. They prevailed because their belief in the Oneness of God made them superior to their enemy. They prevailed because they understood the context of life and the objective of their existence. Prayers were the symbol of their faith and a guide to the route of achieving their goal.

The other interesting point that one can glean from these verses is their role in preparing the Muslims psychologically to meet their enemy on the battle ground. The verses warned the Muslims against being careless or negligent in keeping their arms. They were asked to take every precaution; however, it assured them of the demise of their enemy. A balanced combination of warning and reassurance provided the recipe for victory.

There is some difference of opinion regarding the mechanics of the "Fear prayers." It suffices to highlight the general characteristics of this prayer, without delving into the details of the different opinions. The army should be divided into two groups. While one group prays with the Prophet (PBUH), the other will keep watch in the rear, then they switch places. The first group will pray one rakk'a with the Prophet while the second group is keeping watch, then they will switch places. When the Prophet (PBUH) has finished his prayer of two rakk'as, each group would have prayed a single rakk'a with the Prophet (PBUH). Each group should then proceed to complete the second rakk'a separately. This way, both groups would have performed a part of their prayer with the Prophet (PBUH) and in the meantime, there was always a group watching and protecting the rest of the army. However, whenever you feel secure, establish prayers at the appointed times.

"And be not weak-hearted in pursuit of the enemy; if you suffer pain, they too suffer pain as you suffer pain, and you hope from God that which they do not hope; and God is Omniscient, Wise."

Few words touch upon the crux of the matter and outline the demarcation between the different situations of the believers and the non-believers. Pain will be endured by both factions, but the believers look forward to a reward from God while the disbelievers are lost.

Verses: 105 to 113

105. Certainly, We have revealed to you the Book with the truth that you may judge between people according to what God has taught you; and be not an advocate on behalf of the treacherous.

106. And ask forgiveness of God; certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

107. Do not plead on behalf of those who betray themselves; certainly, God does not love him who is treacherous, sinful;

108. They seek to hide from people but they cannot hide from God, and He is with them when they plot by night in words which do not please Him, and God is Totally-Aware of what they do.

109. There you are pleading for them in this world's life, but who will plead for them with God on the Day of Resurrection, or who shall be their guardian?

110. Whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul and then seeks God's forgiveness, he shall find God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

111. Whoever commits a sin, he is only committing it against his own soul; and God is Omniscient, Wise.

112. Whoever commits a fault or a sin and then throws the blame on to an innocent person, he indeed takes upon himself the burden of slander and a manifest sin.

113. Had it not been for God's grace upon you and His mercy, a party of them would have certainly resolved to lead you astray, but they only mislead themselves; they can do you no harm at all. God has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom. He taught you what you did not know; certainly, God's grace on you is great. (4:105-113)

It was narrated that these verses were revealed advising the Prophet (PBUH) about a certain incident that occurred in Medina. The armor of a man from the Ansar (his name was Rifa'a) was stolen while he was on an expedition with the Prophet (PBUH). Another person (by the name of Basheer ibn Obairiq) from a different clan from the Ansar was accused of the theft. When Basheer realized that he had come under suspicion, he threw the armor inside the house of a Jew (by the name of Zaid). The thief asked a member of his family to go and tell the Prophet (PBUH) that Zaid was the one who stole the armor. When the armor was found in Zaid's house, the Prophet (PBUH) announced the innocence of Basheer and apologized to him in public. At this moment the above verses were revealed and the truth became known. Basheer fled Medina to avoid being prosecuted for the theft.

Although declaring the innocence of a person who was falsely accused is a noble feat, the verses were meant to address a much graver issue. The verses established the principle of maintaining the balance of justice for all people. This is a balance that is not swayed by whims, interest, or status. The verses came down to cleanse the society of the remnants of the pre-Islamic norms and values.

The Quran could have ignored this incident. Ignoring this incident could be justified, if we were to use present day political values. The victim was a Jew. Many Jews at that time were creating a great deal of difficulty for the Muslims. The culprit was one of the Ansar who provided home and protection for the Muslims migrating from Mecca. But the Quran chose not to ignore the incident in spite of all these considerations. The issue was that the Muslim society should be built on justice for any and everyone who lives within the boundaries of this society. The only way that Muslims can promote the goodness of Islam is by maintaining a standard of absolute justice in their dealings. Everyone should be treated according to the same standard of justice.

These verses embody three general principles that outline the framework for the relationship between the individual and God. The first principle is stated as, "And whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul, then seeks God's forgiveness, he shall find God All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." This verse opens the door for God's forgiveness to everyone. God is the All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. He is there for anyone who seeks His forgiveness and knocks on the door of His mercy. The second principle is stated in the following verse, "And whoever commits a sin, he is only committing it against his own soul; and God is Omniscient, Wise." Sin is an individual responsibility. Islam does not accept the concept of the original sin and that man is born a sinner. Everyone earns his sin or reward according to his own deeds. This is a manifestation of the absolute justice of God. The third principle is stated in the verse, "And whoever commits a fault or a sin, then throws the blame on to an innocent person, he indeed

takes upon himself the burden of slander and a manifest sin." It deals with framing others with a sin that they have not committed. If a person commits a sin and then attempts to frame another, then he/she will bear the burden of his/her deed. The culprit will be punished for his/her sin as well as for the calumny he/she committed. These three principles are an integral part of the framework of justice in Islam. They also provide a gateway for hope in the mercy of God for those who want to repent and seek God's forgiveness.

"Had it not been for God's grace upon you and His mercy, a party of them would have certainly resolved to lead you astray, but they only mislead themselves; they can do you no harm at all. And God has revealed to you the Book and the wisdom. He taught you what you did not know, and certainly God's grace on you is great." The verse refers to the story told earlier about the theft of the armor and the attempt to frame a Jew to take the punishment. This is one of the many attempts that the enemies of the Prophet (PBUH) made to mislead him and to get him to make wrong or unjust decisions. But God protected him from falling into the trap that his enemies laid for him. He was saved by the grace of God who bestowed many favors on His Prophet (PBUH). God also assured the Prophet (PBUH) of His continuous protection. The greatest favor that was bestowed on the Prophet (PBUH) was the favor of entrusting the Prophet (PBUH) with the responsibility to deliver God's message. It is a favor bestowed on all members of the human race. This is a favor that gave them a new birth and gave them the opportunity to taste the sweetness of guidance after they had been immersed in the ignorance of misguidance. The Prophet (PBUH) was favored by being the first to taste and appreciate the sweetness of guidance. He was taught by his Lord that which he did not know before.

Verses: 114 to 126

114. There is no good in most of their secret counsels save him who enjoins charitable act, goodness, or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this seeking God's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward.

115. And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We shall leave him in the way he has chosen, and admit him to Hell; what an evil destination?

116. Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives other sins to whom He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed strayed far away.

117. In His place, the idolaters invoke only female idols and a rebellious Satan;

118. God has cursed him; but he (Satan) said, "Most certainly I will take a stated portion of your servants.

119. And most certainly I will lead them astray and I will arouse in them vain desires, and command them so that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most certainly I will command them so that they shall alter God's creation;" and whoever takes Satan for a protecting guardian rather than God he indeed shall suffer a manifest loss.

120. He (Satan) promises them and stirs up vain desires in them; but Satan's promises are only a delusion.

121. These are they whose refuge is Hell, and they shall not find any escape from it.

122. And those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; God's promise is the truth, and whose word can be truer than God?

123. It shall not be in accordance with your desires nor in accordance with the desires of the followers of the Scripture; whoever does evil, he shall be recompensed for it, and standing before God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper.

124. And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them, not even as much as the speck on the date-stone.

125. And who can be better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God, does good, and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and God took Abraham for a friend.

126. And to God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and God encompasses all things. (4:114-126)

"There is no good in most of their secret counsels save him who enjoins charitable act, goodness, or reconciliation between people; and whoever does this seeking God's pleasure, We will give him a mighty reward." The Quran has repeatedly admonished against secret counsel. Secret counsel is when few Muslims meet in secret to plot and make plans. The proper practice for dealing with problems, personal or otherwise, was to consult the Prophet (PBUH). This provided a legitimate avenue for resolving conflicts, establishing precedents, and shaping public policy. It also aimed at eliminating the potential for the formation of interest groups or factions within the Muslim community. Interest groups usually aspire to shaping public policy to favor their own interests, which may be against the interest of the whole community. The verse reminded Muslims who were involved in such clandestine practices that they might be successful in conducting such clandestine counsel sessions but they would not be able to escape the scrutiny of God. He is well aware of what they do.

The verse indicated that there are exceptions. Secret consultation to help those who are in need or to establish peace between two Muslims in conflict is not considered "secret counsel," and is allowable provided that it is done with the objective of seeking the pleasure of God.

"And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, and follows other than the way of the believers, We shall leave him in the way he has chosen, and admit him to Hell; what an evil destination? Certainly, God does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and He forgives other sins to whom He pleases; and whoever associates anything with God, he has indeed strayed far away." It was mentioned that these verses were revealed to deal with the situation of Basheer ibn Obairiq, who became an apostate and reverted back to idolatry. However, the verses provided a general rule that can be applied in all similar situations. The word "opposes" implies following a way different from the way which has been chosen by the Messenger (PBUH). It is by the grace of God that people are held accountable only after they have received a message which clearly outlines the route to guidance. A person is held accountable only after he receives guidance, recognizes that it is the truth, and then deliberately chooses not to follow it. Those who choose not to follow the guidance after it has been recognized will be left to go astray and will become part of the group of disbelievers they chose to join. They will then be punished accordingly. This bad ending was earned by deliberately rejecting the truth and opting for associating partners with God. God

forgives all sins except the sin of associating partners with Him. Those who die while still in the state of associating partners with God have no hope in God's forgiveness. Any other sin may be forgiven by the will of God.

Associating partners with God has many forms. One form is to actually worship others besides God. Another form is to bestow some of God's characteristics on leaders, religious or otherwise, and follow them blindly. Associating partners with God is an unforgivable sin for those who insist on it because it is against the initial natural human disposition.

Those who associate partners with God have gone far astray. However, the door for forgiveness is always open. God will forgive them if they repent, even if they were on the death bed. But those who do not repent are doomed.

"In His place, the idolaters invoke only female idols and a rebellious Satan. God has cursed him; but he (Satan) said, 'Most certainly I will take a stated portion of your servants. And most certainly I will lead them astray and I will arouse in them vain desires, and command them so that they shall slit the ears of the cattle, and most certainly I will command them so that they shall alter God's creation;' and whoever takes Satan for a protecting guardian rather than God he indeed shall suffer a manifest loss. He (Satan) promises them and stirs up vain desires in them; but Satan's promises are only a delusion. These are they whose refuge is Hell, and they shall not find any escape from it. And those who believe and do good deeds, We will admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein forever; God's promise is the truth, and whose word can be truer than God?" The verse refers to some of the mythical traditions that the idolaters used to practice. The idolater Arabs were polytheists. They claimed that the angels are God's daughters. They worshiped statues of the angels. They called the statues names like Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza, and Manat. In the beginning they believed that the idols could intercede with God on their behalf. Over time, they gradually started worshiping the idols themselves as gods. Some idolaters practiced devil worship. Although the reference to devil worship can be taken literally, the verse can also be understood to mean a wider scope of devil worship. Practicing polytheism is a kind of support for Satan, the enemy of humankind who was cursed for disobeying God. Satan vowed to tempt humans to join him in the act of disobedience. Satan promises those who follow him happiness, fulfillment of desires, and salvation to tempt them away from the straight path. He rationalized for them some of the silly rituals like slitting the ears of the cattle to declare its sanctity. Satan convinced the idolater Arabs that God has forbidden the use of cattle with slit ears for riding or for food. Satan seduced them into changing the creation of God by mutilating human and animal bodies.

Salvation can only be achieved by taking God as the Patron and the Protecting Guardian. Doomed are those who take Satan as their patron and protecting guardian. Satan makes hollow promises that satisfy their vain desires and sway them away from the initial natural human disposition. Humankind was created with an initial natural disposition which can help human beings find the right way in life, enabling them to find their way to monotheism and protecting them from falling into the sin of polytheism. The initial natural human disposition acts like a compass to guide people to the right path. Satan tempts people by portraying evil deeds as acts of goodness. He tempts people by mapping a route for happiness that goes through a field of sin. Those who fall for the temptation of Satan will land in Hellfire. The eternal abode for those

who resist the temptation of Satan is paradise. This is God's promise, and whose promise is more truthful than God? The verse juxtaposed the absolute truth of God against the treacherous lies of Satan.

"It shall not be in accordance with your desires nor in accordance with the desires of the followers of the Scripture; whoever does evil, he shall be recompensed for it, and standing before God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper. And whoever does good deeds whether, male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them, not even as much as the speck on the date-stone. And who can be better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God, does good, and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one? God took Abraham for a friend." This verse came down to refute unsubstantiated claims by people from different faiths who misunderstood certain verses in the Torah, Bible, and Quran. Some Jews and Christians used to say, "We are the children of God and He likes us, and even if we were to be punished, it will only last for a few days." Jews say that they are the chosen people of God. Some Muslims say that they are "The best nation created by God," and God will forgive them simply because they are Muslims.

The verse came down to establish the criterion for goodness. People will be judged according to their deeds. The standard is to submit one's self to God's will and to combine that with excellence in deeds. The best faith is attained by fully submitting to God; this is the faith of Prophet Abraham (PBUH). The best deeds are the deeds that are completely dedicated purely to God. Thus, submission and excellence are the criteria for success. Submission means submitting oneself totally to the will of God and excellence means that one worships God as if one can see God, because while we cannot see God, God certainly sees us. God requested excellence in performing all deeds. Even when one slaughters an animal for food, one should let the animal lie in such a way that it does not see the cutting knife. One should use a sharp knife so that one stroke of the knife is enough to kill the animal. The idea is to make the slaughtering process as humane as possible.

The verse also emphasized the equality between males and females in responsibilities and recompense. It also emphasized that belief is a prerequisite for the acceptance of good deeds. The statement, "and whoever does good deeds whether, male or female and he (or she) is a believer, they shall enter the garden, and not the least injustice will be done to them," clearly indicates the use of the same standard for judging males and females. It is also an unequivocal statement indicating that belief in the Oneness of God is a prerequisite for the acceptance of deeds. Belief in the Oneness of God guarantees consistency in doing good deeds and ensures that they are dedicated to God alone.

When the Muslims heard the verse, "Whoever does evil, he shall be recompensed for it, and standing before God he will find for himself neither a protecting guardian nor a helper," they felt very bad because they knew that as human beings, they were bound to commit some bad deeds. Imam Ahmed narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn Numair that Abu Bakr (RA) went to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him about this verse. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "May God forgive you Abu Bakr, don't you get sick? Don't you get tired? Don't you get sad? Don't

you get afflictions?" Abu Bakr (RA) answered affirmatively, and the Prophet (PBUH) said, "This is the recompense for the bad deeds."

"And to God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and God encompasses all things." The discourse dealing with deeds, rewards, belief, and disbelief was concluded by a reminder that all that is in the heavens and earth belongs to God. God is well aware of everything. The Quran usually mentions the attributes of power and dominion in connection with the use of the word God. It reflects the concept of the belief in the Oneness and uniqueness of God, both as a God to be worshiped and as the God who controls, shapes, and maintains the universe. This belief provides an incentive for the believers to seek the pleasure of God through following His guidance and obeying His commands.

Some philosophical schools concede the Oneness and uniqueness of God but refuse to attach the attributes of will, knowledge, or dominion to Him. God becomes a mere symbol that has no role to play in people's lives. This is not the concept of God that Muslims believe in. God owns whatever is in the heavens and earth. He encompasses everything and He has the dominion over everything.

Verses: 127 to 134

127. And they ask you for a ruling about women. Say to them, "God gives you ruling concerning them, and the Book that is recited to you regarding female orphans whom you do not give what is ordained for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among children, and that you should deal towards orphans with equity; and whatever good you do, God certainly knows it."

128. And if a woman fears cruelty or desertion on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them, if they arrange a reconciliation between them, and reconciliation is better, and avarice has been made to be present in people's minds; and if you do good and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.

129. And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, leaving her in suspense; and if you arrange reconciliation and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

130. And if they separate, God will render them both free from want out of His abundant grace, and God is All-Embracing, Wise.

131. And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God and certainly, We enjoined those who were given the Scripture before you and (We enjoin) you too that you should be conscious of God; and if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is God's and God is Rich, Praised.

132. And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian.

133. If He pleases, He could destroy you, people, and bring others in your place; and God has the power to do this.

134. Whoever desires the reward of this world, then with God is the reward of this world and the hereafter; and God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (4:126-134)

"And they ask you for a ruling about women. Say to them, 'God gives you ruling concerning them, and the Book that is recited to you regarding female orphans whom you do not give what is ordained for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among children, and that you should deal towards orphans with equity; and whatever good you do, God certainly knows it.'" New Muslims were eager to learn the code that would shape their new way of life. This was a way of life that differed in many ways from what they used to practice before Islam. Old traditions and practices were abolished and new ones were instated. They were reborn anew with the adoption of Islam. Their eagerness was rewarded with a grace from God. He answered all their questions. This verse came to answer a question about orphan girls and to rectify a bad practice that was prevalent before Islam.

'Ali ibn Abi Talha (RA) narrated that he heard Ibn 'Abbas (RA) explaining this verse. He said, "Before Islam the guardian of an orphan girl had the right to throw his garment over the girl; once he had done that, she was not allowed to marry anyone else. Her guardian could marry her if he so wished. However, if he did not marry her she became a spinster. He would have control over her wealth while she was alive and he would inherit her when she died." This verse came to abolish this practice.

This tradition gives an idea of how orphan girls were treated by their guardians before Islam. Guardians were greedy. They were more interested in the wealth of the child under their care than in the child's welfare. Similarly, they deprived young children and women of their inheritance rights. The logic was that young children and women do not contribute to the fighting power of the tribe, so they do not deserve to have a share in the estate left by a deceased relative. The vulnerable had no power and they could not defend themselves against such injustices of the idolatry society. Islam came to change all these bad and unjust practices. These practices were abolished and replaced by humane and just ones. This was a complete rebirth of a nation.

It is important to note that this rebirth occurred without introductory steps that made the change logical, and it was not the result of a revolutionary change in the life of the nation. The social change in the status of women and children and the new rights that they gained did not result from any change in society's need for warriors, nor was there a change in the status of warriors. The need for warriors did not change and their status did not change. Warriors were still needed to protect the nascent Muslim society. The move from a system that awards rights on the basis of the status of a person to a system that awards rights on the basis of the human value of the members of the society was brought about by the advent of Islam. Islam established the principle of the equal worth of all members of the human race. The change occurred without a revolution but was brought about by a verse in a book. The Book gave birth to a new society. The new values were espoused by the same people who lived on the same land and under the same economic conditions. The verse reminds Muslims again of the relationship between the new values and the Originator of these values. Every good deed is recorded and no reward will be lost.

"And if a woman fears cruelty or desertion on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them, if they arrange reconciliation between them, and reconciliation is better, and avarice has

been made to be present in people's minds; and if you do good and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do." The Quran dealt in a previous verse with the situation when the wife is the cause of a family conflict. In this verse the Quran deals with the problem when the husband is the one to be blamed for the conflict. Family conflicts affect the security of the wife and children. Islam provides a realistic methodology to deal with the different aspects of life, recognizing the changes that occur to people and their feelings towards each other as time passes.

The verse established a methodology for dealing with conflicts arising as a result of a husband deserting his wife. A wife fearing the consequences of such a desertion, which may or may not lead to a divorce, can negotiate with her husband the terms of an agreement to resolve the conflict. This agreement is an alternative to divorce. If a woman does not want a divorce and wants to resume family life with her husband, then she can make some concessions to reach such an agreement. These concessions may include giving up some of her financial or physical rights. These concessions should be made out of her own free will and with no coercion from anyone.

Acrimonious family conflicts can be avoided through a negotiated agreement between the husband and wife. This is a methodology that recognizes human limitations and the realities of life. One of these realities is the ever-presence of avarice in the human heart. This can only be combated by the reminder that excellence and God consciousness are better. The reward for these is guaranteed and will not be lost because God is Totally-Aware of what you do.

"And you will never be able to do justice between wives, even though it may be your ardent desire, but do not turn away from one altogether, leaving her in suspense; and if you arrange a reconciliation and remain conscious of God, then certainly God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy. And if they separate, God will render them both free from want out of His abundant grace, and God is All-embracing, Wise." God who created the human soul knows the nature of this soul. It is in the initial natural human disposition to aspire to that which one does not have. Therefore, God provided human beings with a harness to control these desires. The harness is meant to refine, not to kill, these desires.

A man who is married to more than one wife may prefer one over the other. This is a human emotion that he may not be able to erase or control. Islam certainly does not hold people accountable for things that they have no control over. So, this is a human failing which is made clear. A man married to more than one wife will not be able to treat them fairly, even if he tried hard, because he may not be able to feel for all of them equally. Feelings are beyond human control. Men are commanded to be fair in treating their wives, in spending equal time with them, and in providing equally for them. A man has to treat all his wives fairly in all aspects of life that are under his control. Men are admonished not to deprive any wife of her stated rights. Men are again reminded to do the right thing and to be conscious of God in their treatment of women. This is how Islam deals realistically with the complexities of the human psyche. Islam tries to maintain a balance between the needs of a body that is created from dust and a soul that has wings wishing to fly in the sky.

The Prophet (PBUH), who is the perfect example of the human creation, tried hard to be fair in treating all his wives. However, he did not deny that he felt more towards one than the others. He used to pray saying, "God, I tried to be fair in what I have control over so don't blame me for that which You, not me, have control over." He meant that man has no control over the feelings of the heart.

If all measures to save the marriage fail and the marriage is dissolved, then God will provide for each one of them.

"And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God; and certainly, We enjoined those who were given the Scripture before you and (We enjoin) you too that you should be conscious of God; and if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is God's and God is Rich, Praised. And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to God, and God is sufficient as a Guardian. If He pleases, He could destroy you, people, and bring others in your place. God has the power to do this. Whoever desires the reward of this world, then with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter; and God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing." It is common in the Quran that a verse which deals with a command or a prohibition ends with a reminder that God has the dominion over everything and that He is the owner of whatever is in the heavens and on the earth. It is a reminder that the owner of the universe has the right and the power to legislate for His creation. God has the absolute power over His creation. God consciousness is the way to salvation. The power of God is emphasized by reminding people that God does not need them and if they become ungrateful, then it is easy for God to replace them with a new generation. People are advised to remain conscious of God for their own sake. God's dominion will not be affected whether people believe or disbelieve. Islam provides a way of life that guarantees the achievement of happiness both in this life and in the Hereafter. It is rather foolish that humankind would be given this opportunity but prefer the quick and fleeting gain of this world.

Verses: 135 to 147

135. You who believe, stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor, God can best protect both; therefore, do not follow your whims, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn away, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do.

136. You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Scriptures which He revealed before; and whoever denies God and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Last Day, he indeed has gone far astray.

137. Certainly, those who believe, then reject faith, then believe (again) and (again) reject faith, and go on increasing in disbelief, God will not forgive them nor guide them on the way.

138. Bring glad tidings to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful torment,

139. Those who take the disbelievers as protecting guardians instead of the believers; do they seek power at their hands? Certainly, all power is with God.

140. And indeed, He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear people reject and ridicule God's revelations, do not sit with them until they turn to a different discourse; or else

you would be like them; certainly, God will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers all in Hell.

141. Those who wait for a misfortune to befall you, then if you gain a victory from God they say, "Were we not with you?" But if the disbelievers gain success, they say, "Did we not gain an advantage over you and defend you from the believers?" So, God shall judge between you on the Day of Resurrection, and God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers.

142. Certainly, the hypocrites strive to deceive God, but it is God Who deceives them, and when they stand up to perform prayer, they perform it languidly; they do it only to be seen by people and do not remember God save a little.

143. Wavering between this and that; they belong neither to these nor to those; and whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall not find a way for him.

144. You who believe, do not take the disbelievers as protecting guardians in place of the believers; do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you?

145. Certainly, the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire and you shall not find a helper for them.

146. Except those who repent, amend, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God; these are with the believers; and God will grant the believers an immense reward.

147. Why should God torment you if you are grateful and you believe? And God is ever Thankful, Omniscient. (4:135-147)

"You who believe, stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; whether he is rich or poor, God can best protect both; therefore, do not follow your whims, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn away, then certainly God is Totally-Aware of what you do." This is an address to the believers. They are being addressed with a newly acquired attribute. This is the unique attribute that they gained when they were born again as Muslims. When they were reborn, they were given new spirits, new values, new principles, new responsibilities, and a new trust. These were the values and principles which should enable them to undertake their new responsibility as leaders whose objective is to establish justice on earth. They were commanded to stand firm for justice: absolute and comprehensive justice. They were commanded to eradicate injustice and guarantee fair treatment for all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The right to be treated fairly is a human right. Every human being, whether a believer or a non-believer, a friend or foe, poor or rich, should enjoy the right to be treated fairly in a court of law. Muslims are accountable to God, and to God alone, in fulfilling this trust. The believers are commanded to be completely objective when they act as witnesses. No desire, whim, or nepotism should affect their testimony because the testimony is given in front of God. Even when the testimony is given on behalf of themselves, their families, or their parents, they should be objective in their testimony. This is a difficult task which requires a rigorous training program for people to overcome the natural human weakness and bias towards their own families. It is also a difficult task to be objective when the culprit is poor. A poor person is usually vulnerable, and people may tend to change their testimony in favor of a poor person as an act of kindness. But the warning is given, "Do not follow your whims." The verse mentioned some specific examples of motives which may compel a person to follow one's own whims and to abandon objectivity, among them: favoring oneself, one's family, or one's friends. Absolute objectivity is commanded even when one's enemy is involved. Similarly, differences in religion, nationality,

or ethnicity should not be justification for bias. The verse ends by reminding the believers that God is aware of what they do. This is an incentive to fulfill the command.

"You who believe, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Scriptures which He revealed before; and whoever denies God and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Last Day, he indeed has gone far astray." This is a list of the articles of faith which a believer should believe in. It includes the belief in God and His Messenger, a belief that connects the believers with their Lord who created them and who sent His Messenger to guide them to the way to connect with Him. It includes the belief in the Messenger and his message and all that he brought to them from their Lord. It includes the belief in the Book, which was revealed to the Messenger, the Book that guides them to the way of life that God has chosen for them. It is a belief in the Book as a whole, not to pick and choose from it. It includes the belief in the previous Scriptures, all the Books that were revealed by God. All these Books brought a single message for humankind: to submit one's face to God alone and not to associate anything with Him.

The command to believe is followed by a warning for the disbelievers. The elements of faith are listed again in detail as a reminder that rejecting any of them constitutes an act of rejecting faith as a whole. One notes that the belief in angels was added to this second list. In the first list the belief in the angels was not mentioned explicitly. Since the angels are mentioned in the Book, a belief in the Book implies that we believe in the angels. However, when a warning is issued against rejecting faith, the list had to be exhaustive, and the angels had to be mentioned explicitly.

"Certainly, those who believe, then reject faith, then believe (again) and (again) reject faith, and go on increasing in disbelief, God will not forgive them nor guide them on the way."

In Islam, the rule is that all sins that a person committed before becoming a believer are forgiven. Faith is a light that erases the darkness of disbelief. Once the darkness is removed, a person connects with the Creator and the soul tastes the sweetness of faith. Those who oscillate between faith and disbelief stray away from the initial natural disposition of humankind. They deliberately chose to be led astray.

"Bring glad tidings to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful torment, those who take the disbelievers as protecting guardians instead of the believers; do they seek power at their hands? Certainly, all power is with God." The use of the word "bring glad tidings" instead of "warn" reflects obvious sarcasm. The reason for such sarcasm is then explained: do they think that the disbelievers have more power than God? All power belongs to God alone. Those who seek power with someone else other than God are deluding themselves. God is the only one who can provide support to people. Seeking help and support from God frees the human being from all kinds of servitude.

"And indeed, He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear people reject and ridicule God's revelations, do not sit with them until they turn to a different discourse; or else you would be like them; certainly, God will gather together the hypocrites and the disbelievers all in Hell." Some Muslims used to frequent the gatherings of powerful hypocrites looking for support or

worldly gains. Sometimes disparaging remarks were uttered against the word of God in these gatherings. The verse reminded Muslims that this is wrong. It was premature to command Muslims to boycott these gatherings altogether, so the command was given to abandon the gathering whenever they hear any disparaging remarks being uttered against the word of God. This verse reminded Muslims of a similar verse that was revealed before in Surat Al-An'aam (Chapter 6): "Whenever you witness people abusing Our verses, then turn away from them until they embark on a different discourse." (6:68) Muslims were warned that complacency puts them in the same category as the hypocrites. This will warrant great punishment on the Day of Judgment. God will gather the hypocrites and the disbelievers together in Hell.

"Those who wait for a misfortune to befall you, then if you gain a victory from God they say, 'Were we not with you?' But if the disbelievers gain success, they say, 'Did we not gain an advantage over you and defend you from the believers?' God shall judge between you on the Day of Resurrection and God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers." The verse painted a repulsive image of the hypocrites. It described the evil feelings that the hypocrites had for the believers and how they quickly changed their colors depending on the situation. When they found the Muslims winning, they would disguise their ill feelings towards the Muslims by feigning love and affection. When the disbelievers gained the upper hand over the believers, the hypocrites would declare their support for the disbelievers. However, the Islamic strategy at that time was to avoid opening a battle front against the hypocrites. The command was to turn away from them and treat them cautiously. They will be judged by God on the Day of Judgment.

There are different interpretations for the last part of the verse, "And God will by no means give the disbelievers a way against the believers." Some scholars are of the opinion that this promise will be fulfilled on the Day of Judgment. Others are of the opinion that the promise will be fulfilled in this life, in the sense that Muslims may lose some battles but God will not allow the Muslims to be decimated by the disbelievers in this world. However, it makes sense that the promise would be fulfilled both in this life and in the Hereafter. It is easy to imagine that it will be fulfilled in the Hereafter, but there may be doubts about the promise being fulfilled in this life. I strongly believe that this promise is meant to be fulfilled in this life. Historical accounts show that Muslims were only defeated when their faith was weak or when their actions did not reflect the strength of their faith. Elements of faith include the meticulous preparation of all material resources required for the battle as well as being dedicated to the cause of God.

In the battle of Uhud, Muslims lost because some of them, motivated by their greedy interest in the booty, disobeyed the commands of the Prophet (PBUH). In the battle of Hunain, Muslims lost because of their arrogance in thinking that material power alone is enough to secure victory. Losing a battle is a trial, and trials happen for a reason. Trials help people discover their shortcomings so that they can deal with them. Defeat has a far wider dimension than losing a battle. Defeat means the conquest of the spirit and the loss of fervor and enthusiasm. Losing a battle is not considered a defeat if it does not devastate the spirit and if it acts as a catalyst for building the morale for a continued struggle. This is what the verse refers to. The verse urges Muslims to work on filling their hearts with true faith and to translate their faith into action. When Muslims perfect their faith and lead a true Islamic way of life they should be sure of

God's support. This is the promise that is given in this verse. True faith is accomplished when it rests deeply in the hearts of Muslims and is reflected in their deeds.

"Certainly, the hypocrites strive to deceive God, but it is God Who deceives them, and when they stand up to perform prayer, they perform it languidly; they do it only to be seen by people and do not remember God save a little. Wavering between this and that, they belong neither to these nor to those; and whomsoever God leaves to go astray, you shall not find a way for him." This verse painted a despicable image of the hypocrites. Believers knew that God would not be deceived. He knows all that is hidden and He is aware of all that is done in secret. Those who think they can deceive God are either fools or have no appreciation of the power of God. God will not make them face trials to alert them to the gravity of their actions. Trials that people face in life may have a silver lining because they serve as wake-up calls alerting people to the consequences of their actions and allowing them to reflect and go back to the straight path. The hypocrites have gone too far astray for these trials to be of any benefit to them.

Prayers for them are no longer a way to communicate with God. They are lazy when the prayer is called, as if they were asked to perform a difficult task. They pray only to be seen by people. Appeasing people is more important to them than the remembrance of God. They are insecure, they cannot take a firm stand, and they are unable to decide whether to side with the believers or the disbelievers. They deserved the wrath of God so they will not find anyone to help them.

"You who believe, do not take the disbelievers as protecting guardians in place of the believers; do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you? Certainly, the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire and you shall not find a helper for them, except those who repent and amend and hold fast to God and devote their religion entirely to God: these are with the believers and God will grant the believers an immense reward." The verse warns the believers not to follow in the footsteps of the hypocrites by seeking support from the disbelievers. There was a real need for this reminder at the time it was issued, because there were strong interactions between the Muslim community and the Jews in Medina on one hand and between the Muslim community and the idolaters of Mecca on the other hand. Strong personal relationships, business dealings, and family ties still existed between some Muslims and non-Muslims. These Muslims needed to be alerted to the fact that their dependence on their friends and relatives from among the disbelievers may cause them to slip to the path of the hypocrites. The verse ended with a strong warning in the form of a rhetorical question. Such a question is enough to remind the believers of the dire consequences of this practice: "do you wish to offer God a clear proof against you?"

The hypocrites will end up in the lowest level of Hellfire. Their interest in material things will pull them down to the ground. They chose the disbelievers as allies and pretended to be with the believers, but on the Day of Judgment they will not find anyone to help or support them. However, the verse indicated that the door was not completely closed. There was a chance to repent and to seek forgiveness. Those who repent and amend and hold fast to God and devote their religion entirely to God will be forgiven. In many verses reference is made to those who "repent and amend," but here the verse goes on to stress, "Repent, amend, hold fast to God, and devote their religion entirely to God." This is relevant because the verse addressed a situation that involved reluctance and hesitation on the part of the hypocrites; it was imperative then to emphasize the requirements of perseverance, steadfastness, sincerity, and devotion.

"Why should God torment you if you are grateful and you believe? And God is ever Thankful, Omniscient." Salvation lies in expressing gratitude to God and believing in Him because God is not interested in punishing and tormenting people. However, the expression that God is also thankful points to the reward that awaits the believers from God. If God the Creator, the Independent, responds to His believing creatures, should not the creatures express their gratitude to God for all the blessings that He showered them with?

Verses: 148 to 170

148. God does not love the public utterance of evil speech unless it is by one who has been wronged; and God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.

149. If you do a good deed openly or do it in secret or pardon an evil act then certainly, God is Pardoning, Powerful.

150. In the case of those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and seek to separate God from His messengers, saying "We believe in some and disbelieve in others," seeking to choose a way in between,

151. These are truly disbelievers. For the disbelievers We have prepared a humiliating torment.

152. And those who believe in God and His messengers and do not make a distinction between any of the messengers, God will grant them their rewards, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

153. The people of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from heaven; so indeed, they demanded of Moses a greater thing than that, for they said, "Show us God plainly;" so a thunderbolt overtook them on account of their injustice. Then they took the calf (for a god), after clear signs had come to them, but We pardoned this; and We gave Moses a manifest authority.

154. And We raised the Mount to tower above them at the taking of their covenant; and We said, "Enter the gate in prostration," and We commanded them transgress not in the matter of the Sabbath. And We took from them a firm covenant.

155. Then, because they broke their covenant and they rejected God's revelations and they killed the prophets wrongfully and they said, "Our hearts are covered." No, God set a seal upon them owing to their disbelief, so they shall not believe except a few.

156. And because they rejected faith and because what they uttered against Mary which was a grievous slander;

157. And that they said, "We killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of God;" but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are in doubt, with no certain knowledge, but they only follow a conjecture, for certainly they did not kill him.

158. No, God raised him up to Himself; and God is Eminent, Wise.

159. And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them.

160. Because of the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow them the good things which had been made lawful for them and because they hindered many from God's way.

161. And their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and their devouring the property of people falsely, and We have prepared for the disbelievers from among them a painful torment.

162. But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers, believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and those who establish prayers and give the poor-dues and who believe in God and the Last Day, We will give them an immense reward.

163. Certainly, We have sent you revelations as We have sent to Noah, and the prophets after him, and We sent revelations to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We gave David the Psalms.

164. And We sent messengers whom We have already mentioned to you and messengers whom we have not mentioned; and God spoke directly to Moses.

165. We sent messengers who gave good news as well as to warn, so that people should have no argument against God after the coming of messengers, God is Eminent, Wise.

166. But God bears witness by what He has revealed to you; He has revealed it to you with His full knowledge; and the angels too bear witness; and God is sufficient as a witness.

167. Those who rejected faith and hindered others from God's way, they indeed have strayed far away from the path.

168. Certainly, those who rejected faith and acted unjustly, God will not forgive them nor guide them to a path.

169. Except the path of Hell, to abide in it for ever and this is easy for God.

170. People, the Messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord, therefore believe; this is best for you; but if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and the earth is God's. God is Omniscient, Wise. (4:148-170)

"God does not love the public utterance of evil speech unless it is by one who has been wronged; and God is All-Hearing, Omniscient. If you do a good deed openly or do it in secret or pardon an evil act then certainly God is Pardoning, Powerful." The Quran tried to inculcate new values in the hearts of the believers to build a new Muslim society. One of these values is to avoid slandering people or spreading rumors about the misconduct of people. These bad practices were depicted as evil speech. Utterance of evil speech in public may have dire consequences on the society. It may sensitize people to evil practices and provide people who have certain bad tendencies with the motivation to commit evil acts. It may also involve slandering innocent people. Thus, utterance of evil speech is a sin except when it is used in self-defense by a person who was wronged. A person who suffers injustice is allowed to defend himself/herself and stand up against those who are persecuting him/her. In this case, there is no ambiguity. The person is only making a statement of the facts and the statement addresses those who are responsible for inflicting the injustice. Islam protects people against slander as long as they have not committed an act of transgression. Anyone who commits an act of transgression does not deserve protection. This rule provides a balance between the need for protecting morals in a society and the obligation of protecting individuals against injustice. The statement ended by reminding people that God knows their intentions and what is hidden in their hearts.

"Certainly those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and seek to separate God from His messengers and say, 'We believe in some and disbelieve in others,' seeking to choose a way in between, these are truly disbelievers; and We have prepared a humiliating torment for the disbelievers. And those who believe in God and His messengers and do not make a distinction between any of the messengers, God will grant them their rewards, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." The Jews believed in the prophets that were sent to them but they did not believe in Jesus (PBUH) as a prophet of God, and the Christians believed in the previous prophets and in

Jesus (PBUH) but they did not believe in Muhammad (PBUH) as a prophet of God. The Quran introduced the concept of the comprehensive religion. This is the religion which is based on the belief in God and all His messengers. This is a belief in the Oneness of God and the oneness of His Message. This is the true religion. Those who believe in this true religion will be granted God's reward. Islam emphasized the concept of the belief in the Oneness and uniqueness of God because it is the fundamental basis for the true religion.

"The people of the Scripture ask you to bring down to them a book from heaven; so indeed they demanded of Moses a greater thing than that, for they said, 'Show us God plainly;' so a thunderbolt overtook them on account of their injustice. Then they took the calf (for a god), after clear signs had come to them, but We pardoned this; and We gave Moses a manifest authority. And We raised the Mount to tower above them at the taking of their covenant; and We said, 'Enter the gate in prostration,' and We commanded them transgress not in the matter of the Sabbath, and We took from them a firm covenant. Then, because they broke their covenant and they rejected God's revelations and they killed the prophets wrongfully and they said, 'Our hearts are covered.' No, God set a seal upon them owing to their disbelief, so they shall not believe except a few. And because they rejected faith and because what they uttered against Mary which was a grievous slander; and that they said, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of God;' but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are in doubt, with no certain knowledge, but they only follow a conjecture, for certainly, they did not kill him. No, God raised him up to Himself; God is Eminent, Wise. And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them. Because of the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow them the good things which had been made lawful for them and because they hindered many from God's way. And their taking usury when they were forbidden it, and their devouring the property of people falsely, and We have prepared for the disbelievers from among them a painful torment." The bigots asked the Prophet (PBUH) to bring down a book from heaven, a book that they could touch with their own hands. However, the answer to this request came from God in the form of a narrative describing how some of the Jews dealt with their Prophet Moses (PBUH). They asked a greater feat of Moses (PBUH). They asked him to make them see God with their own eyes. God gave Moses (PBUH) several clear signs proving his prophethood. However, these signs were not sufficient to arouse the spirit of faith in them and to bring peace and security to their hearts. As a result, they were destroyed, but God forgave them and accepted the prayers offered by Moses (PBUH) and saved them. Then, they took the calf for a god. The Samaritan used the jewels, which they took from the Egyptians, to make a golden calf. They worshiped the calf while Moses (PBUH) was away receiving the Tablets from his Lord. However, God still forgave them and He gave Moses (PBUH) the Tablets which embodied the law. God gave Moses (PBUH) the authority to implement the law.

The bigots used to say to the Prophet (PBUH), "Our hearts are covered," as an excuse for not believing in the message that the Prophet (PBUH) brought. The Quran reminded them that hearts are not created with covers which prevent the truth from reaching them. Their hearts were covered as a result of the evil deeds which they committed. On the other hand, there were Jews like 'Abd-Allah Ibn Sallam (RA), Tha'alaba ibn Sa'aiya (RA), Asad ibn Sa'ayia (RA), and

Asad ibn 'Obayed-Allah (RA) and others who opened their hearts to the truth and accepted it. These were guided by God.

The verses list a number of reasons behind God's decision to deprive the bigots of His blessings in this life and to send them to Hellfire in the Hereafter. These include fabricating a lie about Mary and claiming that they killed Jesus (PBUH). Certainly, they did not kill Jesus (PBUH), nor did they crucify him; God raised him to heaven. The Quran does not give any details about how Jesus (PBUH) was raised to heaven. There is no need to speculate on how this happened.

There are different interpretations for the statement that, "And there is none of the people of the Scripture but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them." Some scholars are of the opinion that everyone from the people of the Scripture will believe in Jesus (PBUH) when he is brought back to this world before the Day of Judgment. Another group is of the opinion that the statement means that everyone from the people of the Scripture will recognize the truth of what Jesus (PBUH) brought before they die.

"But those of them who are firm in knowledge and the believers, believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and those who establish prayers and give the poor-dues and who believe in God and the Last Day, We will give them an immense reward." The verse emphasized that firm knowledge and pure faith lead to the belief in the Oneness of God and the oneness of the Message. It was mentioned in the traditional interpretations of the Quran that this verse alludes to those Jews who, among others, believed in the message that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought. But this is a general statement that applies to all those who have firm knowledge and strong faith among the people of the Scripture. They are included in the list of those who believe, establish prayers, pay the poor dues, and believe in God and the Last Day. One notes that the short vowels used in the statement, "those who establish prayers" in this verse are different from those used in the same statement in other verses of the Quran. This may have been done to underscore the importance of establishing prayers.

"Certainly, We have sent you revelations as We have sent to Noah, and the prophets after him, and We sent revelations to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon and We gave David the Psalms. And We sent messengers whom We have already mentioned to you and messengers whom we have not mentioned; and God spoke directly to Moses. We sent messengers who gave good news as well as to warn, so that people should have no argument against God after the coming of messengers; and God is Eminent, Wise." It is then a single message brought by a number of messengers sent to humankind, one after the other, over the span of human history. A single message revealed to guide humankind to the right path using an approach which combines the bringing of glad tidings and the issuing of warning. This group of chosen messengers included Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, David, Moses, and others whose names were mentioned and others whose names were not mentioned. They lived in different places, came from different ethnic origins, and were sent to different people at different times over the course of the history of humankind, but they all belonged to the same group of God's chosen people. They were all sent by God; they all carried the light to guide humankind to the straight path. Finally, Muhammad (PBUH) was sent to all people. He is the last of the messengers and the seal of the prophets.

All the messengers received revelations from God. God spoke to Moses (PBUH). This was a revelation. However, we don't know how this happened. The Quran, our only source whose authenticity cannot be disputed, did not elaborate on this. All that we know is that God spoke to Moses (PBUH). There are many questions which we cannot answer. What was the nature of the speech? How did it occur? How did Moses (PBUH) receive this speech? All these questions are part of the hidden knowledge that the Quran did not explain and we have no way of knowing the answers to them.

God in His wisdom and fairness sent these messengers to guide people. The messengers brought glad tidings of what God has prepared for those who believe, and a warning of the bad consequences for rejecting faith. This way people should have no excuse.

God gave people the intellect and the ability to think about the creation and the signs of God. The mercy of God brought about messengers to remind people, knowing that humankind's desires may overcome the wisdom that God gave them to think and to reflect. God is certainly Eminent and Wise.

"But God bears witness by what He has revealed to you; He has revealed it to you with His full knowledge; and the angels too bear witness; and God is sufficient as a witness." The verse provided moral support to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his struggle against those who rejected him and did not believe in the truth which he brought. Although God's testimony is sufficient, the angels also testified that the message that the Prophet (PBUH) brought is a revelation from God.

"Those who rejected faith and hindered others from God's way, they indeed have strayed far away from the path. Certainly, those who rejected faith and acted unjustly, God will not forgive them nor guide them to a path. Except the path of Hell, to abide in it for ever and this is easy for God." These verses carried a dire warning to the bigots who rejected the message and hindered the efforts of the Prophet (PBUH). The bigots rejected faith and also committed injustice. Rejecting faith in itself is an injustice. Denial of the truth is an injustice. Denial of the right to the freedom of faith is an injustice. The Quran described rejecting faith as an injustice in the verse, "Most certainly associating partners with God is a grievous iniquity." (31:13). These bigots denied the truth and also prevented other people from accessing the truth. They went too far astray; they have no hope in forgiveness and they are destined to Hellfire. This is easy for God to do.

"People, the Messenger has come to you with the truth from your Lord, therefore believe; this is best for you; but if you reject faith, then certainly whatever is in the heavens and the earth is God's. God is Omniscient, Wise." This is a proclamation to all people that the Messenger of God (PBUH) has brought them the truth from their Lord. Those who believe will get their good reward. Although God has full control over people, He does not need people to believe in Him. He has the dominion of the heavens and earth.

Verses: 171 to 176

171. People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak lies against God, but speak the truth; the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is only a messenger of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in God and His messengers, and do not say, "Trinity." Desist, it is better for you; God is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and God is sufficient for a Guardian.

172. The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and those who disdain His service and are arrogant, He will assemble them all before Himself.

173. Then, as for those who believe and do good deeds, He will reward them fully and will give them more out of His grace; and as for those who disdain and are arrogant, He will punish them with a painful torment. And they shall not find any besides God to protect or help them.

174. People, certainly, there has come to you clear proof from your Lord and We have sent you a clear light.

175. God will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him into His mercy and grace and will guide them to Himself on a straight path.

176. They ask you for a legal decision. Say to them, "God gives you a decision concerning the person who has neither parents nor offspring; if a man dies (and) he has no son and he has a sister, she shall have half the inheritance; if (such a deceased was) a woman, who left no child, her brother inherits her; but if there are two (sisters), they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves; and if there are siblings, men and women, then the male shall have twice the share of a female." Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows all things.

(4:171-176)

"People of the Scripture, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak lies against God, but speak the truth; the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is only a messenger of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in God and His messengers, and do not say, 'Trinity.' Desist, it is better for you; God is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and God is sufficient for a Guardian." It is a transgression and exceeding the limit to claim that God has a son and that He, the One, is three. God is glorified beyond being a member of a partnership. He is unique and He is the Creator. The miraculous birth of Jesus (PBUH), having been born without a father, was something out of the ordinary for people. However, there are many things beyond what people consider ordinary that happen in the universe. The Messiah was one of the messengers of God. These messengers included Noah, Abraham, Moses, Muhammad, and the rest of the messengers chosen by God to deliver His Message to humankind. The interpretation of "His Word" may mean that the birth of Jesus (PBUH) occurred as a result of the direct command of God, "Be and he was." God bestowed His Word on Mary, and Jesus (PBUH) was created in her womb without the need for a father's sperm as is required in normal conception. The word of God which created everything from nothing can easily create Jesus (PBUH) in his mother's womb. The spirit that was used in the creation of Jesus (PBUH) was the same spirit used to create Adam (PBUH) from mud before. God who created Adam (PBUH) without a father or a mother is certainly able to create Jesus (PBUH) without a father. People then should believe in God and His messengers, including Jesus (PBUH) as a messenger of God and Muhammad (PBUH) as the seal of the prophets, and

they should stop making these mythical claims. God is One and He is unique. God does not need to have a son because God is Eternal and He is Infinite. He has the dominion of heavens and earth. The relationship between the human being and God is a relationship between the created and the Creator. God is sufficient for His creatures; He cares for them and looks after their needs and their interests.

"The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of God, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and those who disdain His service and are arrogant, He will assemble them all before Himself. Then, as for those who believe and do good deeds, He will reward them fully and will give them more out of His grace; and as for those who disdain and are arrogant, He will punish them with a painful torment. And they shall not find any besides God to protect or help them." One of the fundamental concepts that Islam has emphasized is the concept of the Oneness of God. The fact that God is One and is unique is the cornerstone of the Islamic faith. The relationship between God and humankind is a relationship between the Creator and His creatures. This fact has been stated throughout the Quran in a way that leaves no doubt about its importance and its centrality to the message of Islam. Islam also stressed the fact that this is the message that all messengers brought to humankind. The fact of the Oneness and uniqueness of God has been emphasized in the message that each messenger of God brought before, from Noah (PBUH) to Muhammad (PBUH). Each messenger told his people, "My people, worship God, you have no deity save Him." (7:59) The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary (PBUH), knew that he is a messenger and a servant of God and he would never have entertained the notion of being himself a god or a son of god. He would have been proud of being a servant of God. This is a status that all the messengers of God were proud to attain. This is a status that God bestowed on the messengers and the angels who are close to Him. The arrogance of those who disdain to be servants of God will not protect them from the wrath of God. Everyone will be gathered on the Day of Judgment to be recompensed according to their deeds.

God does not need people to worship Him. Serving God alone is for the benefit of humankind. Knowing one's Creator and serving Him provide the basis for a healthy and happy life. Serving God alone frees humankind of all kinds of servitude, whether it is servitude to another human being or to a weakness in one's life. When all people recognize God as the Creator and that they are all equal in front of Him, no tyranny will prevail and the dignity of humankind will be preserved. Those whose arrogance prevents them from assuming the status of being servants to God become the captives of other forms of servitude.

"People, certainly, there has come to you clear proof from your Lord and We have sent you a clear light. God will admit those who believe in Him and hold fast to Him into His mercy and grace and will guide them to Himself on a straight path." The verse provided a proof from God. The language and construction of the Quran show that it could not have been composed by a human being. Those who understand the language are able to feel the beauty of the language of the Quran. The stories about the Arabs in the early days of Islam who adopted Islam after listening to the Quran are many. The Quran is a light that enables humankind to differentiate between truth and falsehood. Reading the Quran and living its spiritual environment promotes a feeling of ease, security, and clarity. It removes all the impurities that are heaped on the spirit to bring it back to its initial natural disposition. Holding fast to God is the fruit of a strong faith.

Through a strong faith one recognizes God and recognizes that all people are servants of God. This leads to holding fast to God as the only power in life. A strong faith provides safety and security for human beings and also serves as a healthy foundation on which to build a society. A strong faith and holding fast to God are rewarded with guidance to the straight path.

"They ask you for a legal decision. Say to them, 'God gives you a decision concerning the person who has neither parents nor offspring; if a man dies (and) he has no son and he has a sister, she shall have half the inheritance; if (such a deceased was) a woman, who left no child, her brother inherits her; but if there are two (sisters), they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves; and if there are siblings, men and women, then the male shall have twice the share of a female.' Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows all things." The last verse in this Sura deals with a question on one of the articles of the law of inheritance. This Sura started on a theme related to family affairs, then dealt with a number of family laws, and it ends citing the answer to a closely related question: how to distribute the estate of a deceased person in a certain situation. The verse explains the regulations regarding the term "Kalalah." This ruling was dealt with in an earlier verse, "And if a man or a woman dies leaving no parents or offspring, but he (or she) has a brother or a sister, then each of them shall have one-sixth of the inheritance, but if there are more siblings, they shall share one-third of the inheritance between them, after (payment of) any bequest that may have been bequeathed or a debt that may have been incurred with no harm done to others." (4:12) The present verse provides an answer to a question that was raised regarding this article. When a deceased person has neither children nor a father but has a sister, whether they have common parents or they only share a common father, then she inherits half his estate. If she dies first, then he inherits all her estate, after other legal heirs had their shares, if she did not have a child or a parent. If the deceased had two sisters, then each one of them inherits one third of the estate. And if the deceased had a number of siblings, then the male gets twice the share of the female. Siblings having only a common father would not inherit if the deceased had siblings who were born to the same parents as the deceased.

The Sura ended on a comprehensive note, "Thus, God makes this clear to you, lest you go astray; and God knows all things." It clearly indicated that matters of rights and duties emanate from God's law. All rules organizing inheritance, family affairs, and community affairs have been delineated in God's law. Guidance and security are achieved by following God's law, while falsehood and error are the lot of those who choose not to follow it.