

SŪRAH 36

Yā Sīn

Prologue

This Makkan *sūrah* is characterized by short verses and a fast rhythm. Composed of 83 verses, it is slightly shorter in overall length than the preceding *sūrah* which contained only 45 verses. Such short verses together with the fast rhythm give the *sūrah* a special outlook. Its rhythm sounds successive beats, the effect of which is increased by the numerous images it draws, all leaving a profound impression.

It shares the same main themes of all Makkan *sūrahs*, aiming to lay the foundation of faith. At the very outset it dwells on the nature of revelation and the truth of the message: *“Yā Sīn. By the Qur’ān, full of wisdom, you are indeed one of God’s messengers, pursuing a straight way. It is a revelation by the Almighty, the Ever Merciful.”* (Verses 1-5) It relates the story of the people of the township to which messengers were sent, using the story to warn against rejection of the message and denial of the revelation. It shows the end that befell the people of the township to emphasize the message the *sūrah* wants to deliver. Towards the end, the *sūrah* picks up this point again: *“We have not taught the Prophet poetry; nor is it fitting for him to be a poet. This is but a reminder and a Qur’ān making all things clear, to warn everyone who is alive, and that the word of God be proved against the unbelievers.”* (Verses 69-70)

The *sūrah* also discusses the oneness of the Godhead, giving the voice of denunciation of polytheism to the man who came from the farthest end of town. It is he who argues with his people about their denial of God’s messengers: *“Why should I not worship the One who has brought me into being? It is to Him that you will all return. Should I worship other deities beside Him? If the Lord of Grace should will that harm befall me, their intercession will avail me nothing, nor will they save me. Indeed, I should clearly be in error.”* (Verses 22-24) The same point is emphasized again towards the end of the *sūrah*: *“Yet they have taken to worship deities other than God, hoping for [their] support.*

They are unable to support them; yet their worshippers stand like warriors to defend them.”
(Verses 74-75)

The issue that is most strongly emphasized in the *sūrah* is that of resurrection. Mention of this is first made at the very outset: *“It is We who will bring the dead back to life. We record whatever Needs] they send ahead, as well as the traces they leave behind. We keep an account of all things in a clear record.”* (Verse 12) Resurrection is further alluded to in the story of the township as it mentions the reward given to the man arguing the case of faith: *“He was told- Enter paradise. He said Would that my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me my sins, and has placed me among the highly honoured!”* (Verses 26-27) In the middle of the *sūrah* resurrection is once again referred to: *“They also ask: ‘When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say be true?’ All they are waiting for is a single blast that will overtake them while they are still disputing. No time will they have to make bequests, nor will they return to their own people.”* (Verses 48-50) And at the end of the *sūrah*, it is stated in the form of dialogue: *“He comes up with arguments against Us, forgetting how he himself was created. He asks: ‘Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?’ Say: He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life again. He has full knowledge of every act of creation.”* (Verses 78-79)

These fundamental issues of faith are repeatedly discussed in Makkan *sūrahs*. Each time though they are tackled from a different angle, brought under new focus, and given effects that fit the overall ambience of the *sūrah*, maintaining harmony with its rhythm, images and impressions.

These effects vary in this *sūrah*. Some derive from the scenes of the Day of Judgement, the scenes in the story and the positions taken in it and the dialogue it includes as also the end suffered by earlier communities. Other effects are derived from the numerous images given of the universe, each of which imparts its own message. The dead land as life begins to emerge in it; the night stripped out of the day to spread total darkness; the sun running its course up to its point of destination; the moon moving from one phase to another until it becomes like an old date stalk; the boats laden with the offspring of old human generations; the cattle made subservient to man; the gamete being transformed into a human being who argues and quarrels; and the green tree made into a fire from which they light their own fires. It is by using all these scenes and images that the *sūrah* emphasizes its message.

Alongside these there are other effects made to touch our hearts and alert our minds. One of these is the image of those who deny the truth when God’s judgement befalls them. No longer can they derive any benefit from the signs and the warnings given them: *“Around their necks We have put chains, reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up. And We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, and We enshrouded them in veils so that they cannot see.”* (Verses 8-9) Another is the fact that whatever they harbour inside their hearts and whatever they leave open are

known to God; nothing is hidden from Him. A third effect is the description of the mechanism of creation as involving nothing but one short word: *“When He intends something to be, He only says to it, Be,’ and it is.”* (Verse 82)

The *sūrah* can be divided into three parts. The first begins with an oath God makes by the expression of two separate letters, *Yā Sīn*, and by the Qur’ān, which is full of wisdom, to emphasize the truth of the Prophet’s message and that he follows a straight path. This is followed by describing the miserable end of those who pay no heed to the message and deny its truth. They will never find a way to guidance because this is God’s judgement. It explains that the warning only benefits those who follow the revelations given by God and who fear Him despite the fact that their faculties of perception cannot reach Him. Such people open their hearts to receive the evidence of divine guidance and the pointers to the path of faith. In this part, the Prophet is asked to cite the example of the people of the township who denied God’s messengers and the end they suffered. It also shows the nature of faith and how it affects the heart of the man arguing its case.

The second part begins with a call of sorrow for those people who continue to deny every messenger God sends them, ridiculing them and their message, paying no heed to what happened to earlier communities who denied the truth, or to the great many signs God has placed all around them. This part includes the universal images we have already mentioned as well as a long and detailed scene from the Day of Judgement.

The third and final part sums up all the themes of the *sūrah*, starting with a denial that what Muḥammad recited was poetry, and emphasizing the fact that the Prophet never had anything to do with poetry. It portrays a number of images confirming God’s oneness. It decries the unbelievers’ practice of having deities to which they pray to give them victory over their enemies, when in fact they themselves have to protect those alleged deities. It discusses the issue of resurrection, reminding them of their origin and how their creation starts with a gamete. This should enable them to understand that giving life to bones that have crumbled into dust is barely different from their first creation from a gamete. It reminds them of the green trees and how they become fire fuel, although the two concepts seem to be far apart. The creation of the heavens and the earth is also mentioned as a reminder that God is able to create them in both stages of their life. Finally, the last beat that concludes the *sūrah* is: *“When He intends something to be, He only says to it, Be,’ and it is. Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things, and to Him you all will be brought back.”* (Verses 82-83)

1

Appeal to Reason

Yā Sīn. (1)

By the Qur'ān, full of wisdom, (2)

you are indeed one of God's messengers, (3)

pursuing a straight way. (4)

It is a revelation by the Almighty, the Ever Merciful, (5)

so that you may warn people whose forefathers had not been warned, and who therefore are unaware [of the truth]. (6)

The verdict has been passed against most of them, for they will not believe. (7)

Around their necks We have put chains, reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up. (8)

And We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, and We enshrouded them in veils so that they cannot see. (9)

يس ﴿١﴾

وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٣﴾

عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

تَنْزِيلَ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٥﴾

لِتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أُنذِرَ ءَابَاؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ غَافِلُونَ ﴿٦﴾

لَقَدْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى أَكْثَرِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٧﴾

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلَالًا فَهِيَ إِلَى الْأَذْقَانِ فَهُمْ مُقْمَحُونَ ﴿٨﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا

It is all the same to them whether you warn them or you do not warn them: they will not believe. (10)

You can truly warn only such a one as follows this reminder and who stands in awe of the Lord of Grace although He is beyond the reach of human perception. To such, then, give the happy news of God's forthcoming forgiveness and a generous reward. (11)

It is We who will bring the dead back to life. We record whatever [deeds] they send ahead, as well as the traces they leave behind. We keep an account of all things in a clear record. (12)

Cite for them, as a case in point, the people of a township to which messengers came. (13)

We sent them two messengers, but they rejected them; so We reinforced them with a third, and they said: 'We are messengers who have been sent to you.' (14)

They replied: 'You are nothing but mortals like ourselves. Moreover, the Lord of Grace has never revealed anything; you do nothing but lie.' (15)

They said: 'Our Lord knows that we have indeed been sent to you. (16)

Our only duty is to clearly deliver the message [entrusted to us]. (17)

Said [the others]: 'We augur evil from you. Unless you desist, we will surely stone you and inflict on you a painful suffering.' (18)

يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنْذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ بِالْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَءَاثَرَهُمْ ۚ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾

وَأَضْرَبَ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ مُّرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

قَالُوا مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَمَا أَنْزَلَ الرَّحْمَنُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِن أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

قَالُوا رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ لَمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٨﴾

قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ ۖ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنْتَهُوا

[The messengers] replied: 'The evil you forebode is within yourselves. [Why do you take this as an evil omen] when you are only being reminded of the truth? Truly, you are going too far.' (19)

Then a man came from the farthest end of the city at speed. He said: 'My people! Follow these messengers. (20)

Follow those who ask you for no reward, and are themselves rightly guided. (21)

Why should I not worship the One who has brought me into being? It is to Him that you will all return. (22)

Should I worship other deities beside Him? If the Lord of Grace should will that harm befall me, their intercession will avail me nothing, nor will they save me. (23)

Indeed, I should clearly be in error. (24) I do believe in the Lord of you all; so listen to me.' (25)

He was told: 'Enter paradise.' He said: 'Would that my people knew (26)

how my Lord has forgiven me my sins, and has

لَنرْجُمَنَّكُمْ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

١٨

قَالُوا طَئِيرُكُمْ مَعَكُمْ أَإِن ذُكِّرْتُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ

١٩

وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى
قَالَ يَبْقَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ

٢٠

اتَّبِعُوا مَنْ لَا يَسْئَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ
وَمَا

٢١

لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

٢٢

ءَأَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِهِ ءَالِهَةً إِنْ يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَنُ
بِضُرٍّ لَّا تُغْنِ عَنِّي شَفَعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا
يُنْقِذُونِ

٢٣

إِنِّي إِذَا لَفِيَ ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

٢٤

إِنِّي ءَأَمَنْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَاسْمَعُونِ

٢٥

قِيلَ ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ ط قَالَ يَلِيَّتْ قَوْمِي
يَعْلَمُونَ

٢٦

بِمَا غَفَرَ لِي رَبِّي وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

placed me among the highly honoured!" (27)

*After that, We did not send an army from
heaven against his people; nor do We send any.
(28)*

*Nothing was needed but one single blast, and they
fell down lifeless. (29)*



﴿ وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ مِن بَعْدِهِ ﴾

﴿ جُنْدٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ ﴾

﴿ إِن كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ

﴿ خَامِدُونَ ﴾

A Book Full of Wisdom

"Yd Sin. By the Qur'ān, All of wisdom." (Verses 1-2) God says an oath by these two letters and by the Qur'ān. This combination endorses the view we have expressed elsewhere about the mention of separate letters at the beginning of many *sūrahs*, and the relation between mentioning these letters and the Qur'ān. The proof that God is the source of the Qur'ān is obvious from these letters which are available to all Arabs to use yet they are incapable of producing with them anything like the thoughts and modes of expression contained in the Qur'ān. Yet seldom do they consider such confirmation.

As He swears by the Qur'ān, God Almighty describes it as being full of wisdom. In fact, a literal translation should be 'By the wise Qur'ān.' Wisdom is a quality of rational beings, which suggests that the oath is phrased in this way to impart to the Qur'ān the qualities of life, having a purpose and a will, which are essential for a wise being.

Although this is allegorical, nonetheless it describes a fact, bringing it closer to our minds' eye. This Qur'ān has a soul of its own, giving it qualities similar to those of a living person with whom you have mutual responses and feelings. This takes place when you pay full attention to it and listen to it with your heart and soul. Whenever you open your faculties up to it, the Qur'ān reveals to you more of its secrets. When you have lived for a while in the company of the Qur'ān, you will long for its distinctive features, just as you long for the features of a close friend. God's Messenger used to love to listen to the Qur'ān being recited by other people. He would even stop by people's doors if he overheard someone inside reciting the Qur'ān, just like a lover listens to a conversation about the one he loves.

The Qur'ān is certainly wise. It addresses everyone according to their ability; touching heart strings, speaking in a measured way, and using a wisdom that suits each person. Furthermore, the Qur'ān is full of wisdom. It educates people wisely, according to a straight logical and psychological system that releases all human potential and directs people to what is good and beneficial. It establishes a code of living that allows every human activity within the limits of its wise system.

God Almighty swears by the two letters, *Yā* and *Sīn*, and by the Qur'ān to confirm the truth of revelation and the message delivered by the Prophet: *"You are indeed one of God's messengers, pursuing a straight way."* (Verses 3-4) Limitless in His glory, God does not need to express an oath, but this oath by the Qur'ān and its letters gives the subject of the oath added greatness. God would not swear by anything unless it were great indeed, worthy of being sworn by.

"You are indeed one of God's messengers." (Verse 3) The way this verse is phrased imparts a feeling that sending messengers is a well recognized fact, with many past cases. This is not what is being proved here. Instead, what is being emphasized is that Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is one of these messengers. The oath is addressed to Muḥammad himself, not to those who deny his message, so as to place the oath, the Messenger and the message above argument or discussion. It is a fact being stated by God about His Messenger.

"You are indeed one of God's messengers, pursuing a straight way." (Verses 3-4) This explains the nature of the message after the truth about the Messenger has been stated. By nature, this message is straightforward. It is as straight as the edge of a sword. It admits no crookedness, deviation, or prejudice. The truth it contains is clear, free of ambiguity, and does not bend to serve any interest or to satisfy any desire. Whoever wants this truth will find it pure, simple and accurate.

Because it is straight, this truth is simple, free of complexity and problems that beset controversial issues. It states the truth in the simplest and most direct way that needs the least amount of explanation and interpretation. It does not give words and sentences any special colour or overtone. As such, it is readily understood by people of all standards of education and civilization: each finds in it what they need for their lives to take an easy course, being also properly organized and well regulated.

Moreover, the Qur'ānic message is consistent with the nature of the universe and its system, as well as the nature of all that is around man. Hence, it neither conflicts with any thing in existence nor requires man to be in conflict. It follows its own way benefiting from, and cooperating with the laws that govern the universe and all creatures living in it.

As such, the Islamic message pursues its straight way to God, sure to reach Him. Its adherents do not fear that they may lose their way to Him, or take a path away

from Him. They know that they are on a straight path leading to His pleasure. The Qur'ān is the guide along this way. As long as man takes up the Qur'ān, he will find a consistent concept of the truth, outlining detailed values, each having a clear and well defined role.

"It is a revelation by the Almighty, the Ever Merciful." (Verse 5) We note how God identifies Himself in such situations so that people will understand the true nature of what has been revealed to them. God is the Almighty who does what He pleases, yet He is Merciful to His servants. Whatever He does to them is born out of His mercy.

The purpose of this revelation is to warn people and give them God's message: *"so that you may warn people whose forefathers had not been warned, and who therefore are unaware [of the truth]."* (Verse 6) To be unaware is the worst form of corruption. Unawareness makes a heart unable to respond or interact. It sees the pointers to the truth yet is unable to respond, unable to feel their presence. Therefore, a warning is the best thing that can be given to such people who remain unaware, having gone for generations without anyone to alert them to the truth. They were the descendants of Ishmael, and they had had no messenger from God since his time. A strong warning may, then, alert people who have long been unaware.

The *sūrah* then speaks of the fate of these people, and the judgement that is certain to befall them, considering that God knows all there is in their hearts and minds, and all that they did in the past or will do in the future: *"The verdict has been passed against most of them, for they will not believe."* (Verse 7) Judgement has been passed, as God knows that they will not believe. Hence, this is the fate of the majority of them because they will not see divine guidance for what it is nor will they interact with it.

At this point, the *sūrah* draws an image of their psychological condition, and we see them with chains around their necks, barriers separating them from divine guidance, and with a cover over their eyes depriving them of the ability to see: *"Around their necks We have put chains, reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up. And We have set a barrier before them and a barrier behind them, and We enshrouded them in veils so that they cannot see."* (Verses 8-9) Their hands are fastened with chains to their necks, placed under their chins, which has the effect of lifting up their heads such that they cannot see what is in front of them. Moreover, there are walls and barriers both in front of and behind them, which means that even if they were released from these chains, they still could not see through the barriers. Furthermore, the covers placed over their eyes makes it even more impossible for them to see.

Although this image is fierce and sharp, we actually do encounter people of this ilk. When you see them overlooking the plain truth that is in front of them, you feel as if there is a wall separating them from it. Although their hands are not chained

and nor are their heads forced up, you nonetheless feel that their souls and minds are turned away from the truth, unable to see guidance. It is as if there are barriers preventing them from approaching it. Such were the people who turned deaf ears to the Qur'ān and who received it with irrational denial as it put before them its argument and proof. This is when the Qur'ān is itself irrefutable proof.

"It is all the same to them whether you warn them or you do not warn them: they will not believe." (Verse 10) Their case is settled. God knows that faith will not penetrate their hearts. No warning will ever benefit a heart that has steeled itself against divine guidance, and barracked its approach. Warnings do not create hearts; it only alerts a heart that is alive, ready to receive guidance: *"You can truly warn only such a one as follows this reminder and who stands in awe of the Lord of Grace although He is beyond the reach of human perception. To such, then, give the happy news of God's forthcoming forgiveness and a generous reward."* (Verse 11)

Most probably, the 'reminder' in this instance refers to the Qur'ān. A person who follows the Qur'ān and fears God despite not seeing Him is the one who benefits by the warning. It is as if the warning has been given to such people only and the Prophet directed it to them alone, even though he addressed it to all people. Since the others are prevented from receiving the warning, it looks as if it is given only to those who follow the Qur'ān and fear God. Such people deserve to be given good news. Hence the Prophet is told to give them *'the happy news of Gods forthcoming forgiveness and a generous reward.'* (Verse 11) They need the forgiveness of any sin they commit providing they do not persist in doing it, and they deserve the generous reward for fearing God and following what He has revealed. These two aspects go hand in hand: when a person truly fears God, he or she is certain to follow His guidance and implement the system He has laid down.

At this point, the truth of resurrection is emphasized, together with the reckoning that ignores nothing: *"It is We who will bring the dead back to life. We record whatever (deeds] they send ahead, as well as the traces they leave behind. We keep an account of all things in a clear record."* (Verse 12) Bringing the dead back to life has always been an issue fraught with argument, of which we will see several types in this *sūrah*. They are warned here that whatever they do and whatever effects their deeds cause are written down, and nothing is forgotten. It is God Almighty who brings the dead back to life, records their actions and reckons everything. All this, then, is done in the perfect way that fits anything done by God. As for the 'clear record' and similar descriptions such as 'the imperishable tablet', these are most probably references to God's perfect knowledge that transcends time and place.

A Historical Case

Having presented the issues of revelation and resurrection in the form of a factual statement, the *sūrah* now presents them again in narrative form so as to touch hearts with a story about the fate of those who persist in denying the truth:

Cite for them, as a case in point, the people of a township to which messengers came. We sent them two messengers, but they rejected them; so We reinforced them with a third, and they said: 'We are messengers who have been sent to you.' They replied: You are nothing but mortals like ourselves. Moreover, the Lord of Grace has never revealed anything; you do nothing but lie.' They said: 'Our Lord knows that we have indeed been sent to you. Our only duty is to clearly deliver the message [entrusted to us]. Said [the others]: 'We augur evil from you. Unless you desist, we will surely stone you and inflict on you a painful suffering.' [The messengers] replied: 'The evil you forebode is within yourselves. [Why do you take this as an evil omen] when you are only being reminded of the truth? Truly, you are going too far' (Verses 13-19)

The Qur'ān does not mention which township this was or who were its people. Different reports suggest different towns and cities, but there is no real benefit in trying to establish its identity. The fact that the Qur'ān neither identifies it nor mentions its location does not detract from the import of the story. It is a city to which God sent two messengers, just as He sent Moses and his brother Aaron to Pharaoh and his nobles. The people of the city rejected their message, accusing them of lying. God supported His two messengers with a third, confirming that they were truly His messengers. All three of them again presented their message, saying to the people: *"We are messengers who have been sent to you."* (Verse 14)

At this point, the people of the city aired the same objections that were given to God's messengers throughout history: *"They replied: You are nothing but mortals like ourselves. Moreover, the Lord of Grace has never revealed anything; you do nothing but lie."* (Verse 15) This oft-repeated objection to the fact that God sends human messengers to human communities betrays a naive understanding and ignorance of the nature of the messenger's role. People expected that both the personality and the life of the messenger should entail some deep secret which could feed their imaginations. In other words, they expected the unusual in such a way as attracted legend. Was he not a messenger sent from the heavens to the earth? How come, then, that he is just a simple ordinary person with no puzzling secrets surrounding him? He is no different from anyone else, no different from the multitude to be found everywhere.

Such thinking is certainly naive. Secrets and enigmas are not essential qualities for prophethood and divine messages; not in this childish way of thinking. There is indeed a great secret involved, but it is epitomized in the plain fact that an ordinary person is given the ability to receive revelations from on high once God has chosen him for that task. This is something of far greater wonder than sending an angel as

God's messenger, as unbelievers suggest.

The divine message is a code of living for a human community. The messenger's life represents a practical example of how this code is implemented. It is given as a model for people to follow. Since they are human, the messenger showing them this example must be human like them so that he sets the sort of example they can emulate.

Therefore, the Prophet's life was held open before his followers. The Qur'ān records the main features of his life in their minute detail, so as to make it clear and available for future generations. These details include aspects of his home and personal life, and even, at times, his thoughts and feelings. In this way, even future generations would recognize the man behind the Prophet's personality.

Yet it was this simple and clear fact that invited people's objections. In this *sūrah*, those who lived in the city said to their three messengers: "*You are nothing but mortals like ourselves,*" which meant that they were not truly messengers from God. They also said: "*The Lord of Grace has never revealed anything,*" of what you claim. They further added: "*You do nothing but lie,*" when you claim to be messengers from God.

Certain that they said nothing but the truth, and knowing the remit of the mission assigned to them, the messengers replied: "*Our Lord knows that we have indeed been sent to you. Our only duty is to clearly deliver the message [entrusted to us].*" (Verses 16-17) It is sufficient that God knows. The task assigned to God's messengers is to deliver their message, and they did just that. People are then free to choose what they wish for themselves, and what burden their choices represent. Once the messengers have delivered their message, the matter is left to God to determine.

However, those who persist in denying the truth do not take matters in such a simple and easy way. They cannot tolerate the advocates of faith's presence. They resort to rough tactics in rejecting sound argument. The point is that falsehood is impatient, aggressive: "*Said [the others]: We augur evil from you. Unless you desist, we will surely stone you and inflict on you a painful suffering.*" (Verse 18) We view your call with gloom, expecting it to bring evil upon us. Unless you stop, we will no longer tolerate you: '*we will surely stone you and inflict on you a painful suffering.*' Thus falsehood declares its intentions, threatening those advocating divine guidance and resorting to heavy handed tactics in answering the quiet word of truth.

However, the task assigned to God's messengers requires them to proceed along their way: "*[The messengers] replied: The evil you forebode is within yourselves.*" (Verse 19) Forebodings of evil as a result of a message being delivered or a face being encountered is nothing but ignorant superstition. The messengers tell them so, and make clear to them that their share of good or evil comes from within themselves. In other words it relates to their actions and intentions. It is up to them to increase their

share of goodness or evil. What God wills for people comes from within themselves and from their own choices and actions. This is the truth based on a firm foundation. To associate bad omens with faces, places or words is superstitious nonsense.

The messengers also said to them: “[*Why do you take this as an evil omen*] when you are only being reminded of the truth?” (Verse 19) Would you stone us and torture us only because we remind you of the truth? Is this how you reward reminders? “[*Truly, you are going too far.*” (Verse 19) You certainly exceed the limits of judgement if you reward a mere reminder with threats and punishment, and requite advocacy of the truth with stoning and torture.

Welcome Support

Such was the response of hearts that would not open to God’s message. It is such people that were mentioned at the outset of the *sūrah*. The other type, who follow the reminder and fear God despite their inability to see Him, also have here a behavioural example to emulate:

Then a man came from the farthest end of the city at speed. He said: My people! Follow these messengers. Follow those who ask you for no reward, and are themselves rightly guided. Why should I not worship the One who has brought me into being? It is to Him that you will all return. Should I worship other deities beside Him? If the Lord of Grace should will that harm befall me, their intercession will avail me nothing, nor will they save me. Indeed, I should clearly be in error: I do believe in the Lord of you all; so listen to me.’ (Verses 20-25)

This is the response of sound human nature to the straightforward message of the truth: it reflects sincerity, simplicity, warmth and correct understanding. It shows us a man giving a positive response to the message, once he has recognized the elements of truth and sound logic in it. He points out these elements to his people as he addresses them. When he felt the truth of faith in his heart, he could not stay quiet or sit at home caring nothing while the truth was being rebuffed and falsehood upheld all around him. Instead he actively advocated the truth among his people, among those who were threatening the messengers with severe punishment. He travelled from the furthest end of the city to fulfil his duty, to call on his people to espouse the truth and to stop their opposition to it and aggression against God’s messengers.

It is apparent that the man did not command a position of honour, power or influence among his people. He was an ordinary person motivated by faith to travel from one end of the city to the other to make his stand clear. “[*He said: My people! Follow these messengers. Follow those who ask you for no reward, and are themselves rightly*

guided." (Verses 20-21) Anyone who advocates such a message, seeking no gain or reward, must be honest and sincere. What else could motivate him to undertake such trouble, enduring such opposition, unless he was required to do so by God? Why would he bear such a burden, confronting people with a faith that is unfamiliar to them, exposing himself in the process to threats, ridicule and persecution when he stood to make no gain nor earn any benefit?

"Follow those who ask you for no reward, and are themselves rightly guided." (Verse 21) That they are guided aright is obvious: they advocate belief in the One God, following a clear system, and a faith that is free of ambiguity and superstition. Their way is clearly straight.

The man then speaks about himself, outlining the reasons that motivated him to believe, and appealing to sound human nature: *"Why should I not worship the One who has brought me into being? It is to Him that you will all return. Should I worship other deities beside Him? If the Lord of Grace should will that harm befall me, their intercession will avail me nothing, nor will they save me. Indeed, I should clearly be in error."* (Verses 22-24) The question is posed by sound human nature which feels the presence of its Creator and the source of its existence: *"Why should I not worship the One who has brought me into being?"* Why would I deviate from this natural way which is the first to present itself to human nature? Needless to say, man is by nature attracted to his Creator and only deviates from Him under the pressure of some outside element. To turn to the Creator is the right and appropriate course, requiring no alien element or a pull from outside. The man here strongly feels this and states it clearly and simply.

The man also feels by nature that a created being must in the end return to its Creator, in the same natural law that brings everything homing to its originator: *"It is to Him that you will all return."* He wonders why he should not worship his Creator when he is bound to return to Him, as will we all. It is He who creates, and it is He who should he worshipped.

The man then looks at the opposite way, which is contrary to sound nature, only to find that it is nothing but manifest error: *"Should I worship other deities beside Him? If the Lord of Grace should will that harm befall me, their intercession will avail me nothing, nor will they save me."* (Verse 23) Can anyone be in greater error than the one who abandons the way of sound nature which requires that a created being worship its Creator? Why would anyone choose to worship someone or something else unnecessarily? Indeed, the one who turns his back on the Creator, resorting instead to weak deities that cannot protect him, has gone far into error: *"Indeed, I should clearly be in error."* (Verse 24)

Now that the man has stated his case, speaking for sound human nature that is aware of the truth, he declares his own final decision, confronting his people who

had threatened God's messengers. The voice of sound nature in his heart was clearer and stronger than any threat: *"I do believe in the Lord of you all; so listen to me."* (Verse 25) He wants them to witness his stand on the side of truth, implying that they too should follow his suit and declare themselves believers.

Killing an Innocent Man

The drift of the story suggests that the unbelievers then killed the man. The *sūrah*, however, does not mention this clearly. Instead, it lets the curtain drop to cover this city, its people and their preoccupations. When the curtain rises again we see the martyr who spoke out clearly and loudly for the truth, confronting those in power. We see him in the next world and see the honour granted him by God, as fits a brave believer who does not hesitate to stand up for the truth: *"He was told: Enter paradise. He said: Would that my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me my sins, and has placed me among the highly honoured!"* (Verses 26-27)

Thus this present life is connected to the life to come: death is merely a transfer from this transitory world to the one that is everlasting. It is but a step that takes a believer from the narrowness of the earth to the expanse of heavens, from the tyranny of falsehood to the security of the truth, and from the darkness of ignorance to the light of certainty. When the man sees what God has in store for him in heaven, he good-naturedly remembers his people, wishing that they could see the happiness and honour God has granted him so that they would know and accept the truth.

Such is the reward of faith. As for tyranny, it is too weak to require that God should send angels to destroy it: *"After that, We did not send an army from heaven against his people; nor do We send any. Nothing was needed but one single blast, and they fell down lifeless."* (Verses 28-29) The *sūrah* does not speak in detail about how these people were destroyed. They are too insignificant to deserve such mention. They needed no more than one blast and no further trace of life was to be seen from them.

2

Signs Galore

Alas for mankind! Whenever a messenger comes to them, they level ridicule on him. (30)

Are they not aware of how many a generation We have destroyed before them, and that they [who have perished] will never return to them? (31)

Yet, they all will be brought before Us. (32)

There is a sign for them in the lifeless earth: We give it life and produce out of it grain for them to eat. (33)

We place in it gardens of date palms and grapes, and cause springs to gush out of it, (34)

so that they may eat of its fruit. It was not their own hands that made all this. Will they, then, not give thanks? (35)

Limitless in His glory is He who created all things in pairs: whatever the earth produces, their own human kind and other creatures of which

يَحْسِرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ ۗ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ
رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِّنَ الْقُرُونِ
أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

وَإِنْ كُلُّ لَمَمٍ لَدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

وَأَيُّهُ هُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيِّتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا
وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا جَنَّاتٍ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ
وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْعُيُونِ ﴿٣٤﴾

لِيَأْكُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ ۚ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ
أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا
تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

they have no knowledge. (36)

Another sign for them is the night: We strip the daylight from it, and they are plunged in darkness. (37)

The sun also runs its set course: that is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. (38)

And for the moon We have determined phases until it finally becomes like an old date stalk. (39)

Neither the sun can overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day. Each floats in its own orbit. (40)

And yet another sign for them is that We carry their offspring in laden ships, (41)

and that We create things of similar kind for them to ride in. (42)

If such be Our will, We may cause them to drown, with none to respond to their cries for help, and then they cannot be saved, (43)

unless it be by an act of mercy from Us, leaving them to enjoy life for a while. (44)

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمْ أَلَيْلٌ نَسَلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُمْ مُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ ﴿٣٧﴾

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَّرْنَاهُ مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ ﴿٣٨﴾

لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ ۚ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ الْمَشْحُونِ ﴿٤٠﴾

وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

وَإِنْ نَشَاءُ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلَا صَرِيحَ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنقَذُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَمَتَاعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٤٣﴾

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّقُوا مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَمَا خَلْفَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

When they are told: 'Beware of that which lies before you and behind you, so that you may be graced with His mercy,' [they pay no heed]. (45)

Every single sign that comes to them from their Lord do they ignore. (46)

And when they are told: 'Give [in charity] out of what God has provided for you,' the unbelievers say to those who believe: 'Are we to feed those whom God could have fed, had He so willed? Clearly, you are lost in error.' (47)

They also ask: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say be true?' (48)

All they are waiting for is a single blast that will overtake them while they are still disputing. (49)

No time will they have to make bequests, nor will they return to their own people. (50)

The Trumpet will be sounded, and out of their graves they will rise and hasten to their Lord. (51)

They will say: 'Woe betide us! Who has roused us from our resting place? This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the

وَمَا تَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ آيَةٍ مِّنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا
كَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْطَعِمُ مَنْ
لَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ أَطَعَمَهُ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي
ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

مَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ
وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً وَلَا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ
يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَإِذَا هُمْ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ
إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَنْسِلُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

قَالُوا يَنْوِيلُنَا مَنْ بَعَثَنَا مِنْ مَرْقَدِنَا هَذَا
مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَصَدَقَ
الْمُرْسَلُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ
جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

truth.' (52)

It takes nothing but one single blast, and they will all have been brought before Us. (53)

Today, no one shall be wronged in the least: you will be requited for nothing other than that which you did in life. (54)

Those who are destined for paradise are today happily occupied. (55)

Together with their spouses, they will be in shady groves seated on soft couches. (56)

There they have fruit and whatever they ask for. (57)

peace and fulfilment through the word of the Lord of mercy. (58)

But stand aside today, you guilty ones! (59)

Children of Adam! Did I not enjoin on you that you should not worship Satan, as he is your open foe, (60)

and that you should worship Me alone? This is the straight path. (61)

He had already led astray a great many of you. Could you not, then, use your reason? (62)

This, then, is the hell that you were repeatedly

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا
تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

إِنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ الْيَوْمَ فِي شُغْلٍ
فَكَهُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلِّ عَلَى الْأَرْبَابِ
مُتَّكِنُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

هُمْ فِيهَا فَكِيهَةٌ وَهُمْ مَا يَدْعُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ ﴿٥٨﴾

وَأَمْتَنُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمَجْرُمُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

﴿٦٠﴾ أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَبْنَىءَ آدَمَ أَنْ لَا
تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿٦١﴾

وَأَنْ أَعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ
تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

أَصَلَوْهَا الْيَوْمَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَى أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا
أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا

warned against: (63)

endure it today for your persistent rejection [of the truth].) (64)

On that day We shall set a seal on their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have done. (65)

Had it been Our will, We could have blotted their eyes. They would have striven to find the way, but how could they have seen it? (66)

And had it been Our will, We could have paralysed them, right in their places, so that they could not move forward or backward. (67)

If We grant long life to a human being, We also cause him to decline in his powers. Will they not use their reason? (68)

يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَىٰ أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَاسْتَبَقُوا

الصِّرَاطَ فَأَنَّىٰ يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَكَاتَتِهِمْ

فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مُضِيًّا وَلَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

﴿٦٧﴾

وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا

يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

Overview

The first passage spoke about the idolaters who opposed the message of Islam and cited the case of the people of the township who rejected their three messengers and how it took no more than one blast for them to fall down lifeless. In the present passage the *sūrah* speaks generally of all people who oppose every divine religion. It shows mankind straying in error across the generations. It calls with sorrow on all people to take heed of what happened to earlier communities who passed before them and who will not return until the Day of Resurrection, when “they all will be brought before Us.” (Verse 32)

The *sūrah* then presents a number of universal signs which people see constantly without paying any attention to the message they impart. These signs are within themselves and all around them, while others have passed into history, yet still they pay no heed, and when they are reminded, they choose not to remember: “Every single sign that comes to them from their Lord do they ignore.” (Verse 46) Indeed, they hasten their own punishment, believing that it will never happen: “They also ask:

When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say be true?" (Verse 48)

The passage also presents a long scene from the Day of Judgement, showing the fate that they hasten. This is done in such a way that it appears to happen before their very eyes.

A Sorrowful Condition

Alas for mankind! Whenever a messenger comes to them, they level ridicule on him. Are they not aware of how many a generation We have destroyed before them, and that they [who have perished] will never return to them? Yet, they all will be brought before Us. (Verses 30-32)

The first phrase expresses reaction to a sorrowful situation. This situation cannot be changed though sorrow and pain about it can be expressed. God Almighty does not experience such a feeling Himself, but He states that the situation these people are in deserves such reaction by others. Theirs is a depressing condition that leads to great misery.

"Alas for mankind!" They are offered a chance to save themselves but they turn away. This even though they see how earlier communities perished, yet they benefit nothing by the lessons they present. God opens wide the doors of His mercy to them, time after time, as He sends them messengers, but they ignore His mercy and behave with insolence and ill manners: *"Whenever a messenger comes to them, they level ridicule on him. Are they not aware of how many a generation We have destroyed before them, and that they [who have perished] will never return to them?"* (Verses 30-31) The fact that earlier communities, over countless generations, perished should provide a clear lesson to anyone who reflects. People, however, do not pay heed, even though they realize that they are going to meet the same end. What could invite greater sorrow? An animal shudders to see its fellow animal perish, and it will inevitably try to avoid the same fate. How come that man sees so many communities suffering and meeting the same end, and yet he continues to follow in their footsteps? Arrogance blinds him to the result which he will inevitably reach.

While those who had already gone will not return to their successors, they will not be ignored or left without reckoning. They will all face that at the proper time: *"Yet, they all will be brought before Us."* (Verse 32)

Only Look Around

There is a sign for them in the lifeless earth: We give it life and produce out of it grain for them to eat. We place in it gardens of date palms and grapes, and cause springs to

gush out of it, so that they may eat of its fruit. It was not their own hands that made all this. Will they, then, not give thanks? Limitless in His glory is He who created all things in pairs: whatever the earth produces, their own human kind and other creatures of which they have no knowledge. (Verses 33-36)

Everything around them in the universe speaks to them about God, giving evidence of His presence. They only need to look at the land in front of them and how they see it dead, lifeless, lacking a drop of water. Then they see it quicken, producing grain and adorned with gardens replete with dates and grapes. Springs of water gush through it; and in no time, it is full of life.

Life is a miracle which no man can produce. It is God's hand that produces miracles, initiating life in what has been dead. The sight of growing plants, flowering gardens and ripening fruit should open people's eyes and hearts to appreciate the wonderful work engendered by God's hand. It splits the earth to allow the shoot to appear, longing for freedom and light, gives vigour to the stem which is eager to enjoy sunlight, loads the branches with leaves and fruit, opens up flowers and gets the fruit ready for picking, *"so that they may eat of its fruit. It was not their own hands that made all this."* (Verse 35) It was God's dextrous hand that enabled them to achieve all this; it was He who made the plants grow and yield their harvest: *"Will they, then, not give thanks?"* (Verse 35)

Having given them this gentle and inspiring touch, the *sūrah* then turns away from them a little to glorify God who gave them the flourishing gardens, making all plants in pairs, male and female, like men and women and countless other species known only to God: *"Limitless in His glory is He who created all things in pairs: whatever the earth produces, their own human kind and other creatures of which they have no knowledge."* (Verse 36)

With this glorification of God, voiced at exactly the right place and time, a great fact of the universe is brought to the fore; that is, the oneness of creation, the rule that applies to it and the way it is made. God has created all living things in pairs, and this applies to plants in the same way as it applies to man, and everything else: *'and other creatures of which they have no knowledge.'* This unity points to the fact that the Creator is one. It is He who put in place the oneness of creation, despite the great varieties of shape, size, kind, race, features, etc. in all these creatures which are known only to Him. This rule of creating things in pairs may apply to everything in the universe, including inanimate objects, but this is knowledge that rests with God alone. It has now, for example, been established that the atom, which is the smallest unit of matter we know includes a pair of electric charges, positive and negative. Moreover, thousands of pairs of stars have been observed: each pair of stars move together in the same orbit, as if they are playing the same tune.

That was the sign given by the dead land quickening to produce life. We now look at the sign presented by the skies and the phenomena people see with their own eyes as God's hand produces miracles:

Another sign for them is the night: We strip the daylight from it, and they are plunged in darkness. The sun also runs its set course: that is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing. And for the moon We have determined phases until it finally becomes like an old date stalk. Neither the sun can overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day. Each floats in its own orbit. (Verses 37-40)

When the night comes, light disappears and darkness spreads: this is something everyone sees every day in every corner of the world, except for polar areas. Despite its daily occurrence, it is a remarkable sign that deserves contemplation. The Qur'ānic description here is unique as it shows the day intertwined with the night and then God strips the day off the night to let darkness spread. We may perhaps further appreciate the unique way the Qur'ān uses to express this image when we remember how it actually happens. As the earth rotates facing the sun, every spot of it actually comes face to face with the sun when the day spreads over it. When the rotation of the earth changes and that spot no longer faces the sun, the day is stripped off it so as to plunge it into darkness. The same thing happens over every little part of the earth in progression, as if the light of day is pulled away or stripped to allow darkness to replace it. Thus the wording here accurately describes the reality.

"The sun also runs its set course." (Verse 38) It was generally believed that the sun stays in its position but turns around its axis, but it has recently been confirmed that it moves in a single direction in the great universal space, and astronomers have calculated the speed of its movement as being 12 miles per second. God Almighty, who knows its movement and destination, says that it moves along its course to a particular destination which is known only to Him. He alone knows when and what this is.

When we remember that the sun is around a million times bigger than the earth we live on and imagine this great mass running its set course in space, unsupported, we appreciate what power controls and conducts the affairs of the universe and the sort of might and knowledge that power commands: *"that is laid down by the will of the Almighty, the All-Knowing."* (Verse 38)

"And for the moon We have determined phases until it finally becomes like an old date stalk." (Verse 39) People see the moon in these phases, as it is born a thin crescent then grows every day until it takes its shape as a full moon before it begins to decrease until it looks like an old date stalk. If you observe the moon night after night, you will appreciate this remarkable way of expression, particularly the use of

the word 'old In the early and final nights of its cycle, the moon has a crescent shape, but whereas it reflects freshness and vigour in the early days, it rises in the latter part of its cycle as if it is weighed down by a heavy burden and looks worried and pale; the same paleness as an old date stalk. Hence, the inspiring Qur'ānic description.

Observing the moon night after night gives us fresh, rich and profound feelings. Furthermore, we perceive that it is all the work of the able hand that combines beauty with majesty while operating an accurate celestial system. We feel all this whether we know why the moon has such phases or not: it is sufficient to observe the moon for our hearts to overflow with feelings and for our minds to be deep in reflection.

The *sūrah* then makes it clear that the system regulating all these great celestial bodies is most accurate, and that this controls its resulting phenomena: *"Neither the sun can overtake the moon, nor can the night outrun the day. Each floats in its own orbit."* (Verse 40) Indeed every planet and star has its own orbit which it follows accurately. Stars and planets are so far apart that the distances separating them are huge. Our planet earth is approximately 93 million miles away from the sun, while the moon is around 240,000 miles away from us. Hardly imaginable as these distances are, they are nothing compared to the distance between our solar system and the nearest star to us outside it, which is estimated to be four light years. We should remember that light travels at a speed of 186,000 miles per second.

God, the Creator, willed that such distances should separate the orbits of stars and planets, and He planned the universe according to this design in order to prevent any collision, until a time He has set and that is known only to Him. Therefore, the sun will not overtake the moon, and the night cannot outrun the day, because the cycle of day and night never fails.

"Each floats in its own orbit." (Verse 40) The movement of all these great bodies in space is similar to the movement of ships and boats in the sea. Huge as these bodies are, they are no more than little spots floating on the surface of the sea. Compare man to all this, and think of the millions of millions of stars and planets floating in space!

And yet another sign for them is that We carry their offspring in laden ships, and that We create things of similar kind for them to ride in. If such be Our will, We may cause them to drown, with none to respond to their cries for help, and then they cannot be saved, unless it be by an act of mercy from Us, leaving them to enjoy life for a while. (Verses 41-44)

There is a clear analogy between the stars and planets floating in their orbits and ships floating on water carrying human passengers. The two types are not dissimilar

in appearance or movement. Moreover, it is only through God's will and design that these two types of floating take place while He controls the entire universe ensuring the safety of all. At the same time, both are signs that we see but hardly ever contemplate. The floating of laden ships is closer to us and easier to reflect upon, if only we would open our hearts.

In the original Arabic text, the term '*laden ships*' could be read to mean 'the laden ark', which makes it a reference to Noah's ark in which Adam's offspring was carried. God then enabled mankind to make ships. In both cases, the floating was made possible by God's will, power and the laws He has set in operation and the nature of boats, water, wind, steam, and other types of energy, which combine to allow ships to float on water. All these are parts of God's creation.

"If such be Our will, We may cause them to drown, with none to respond to their cries for help, and then they cannot be saved, unless it be by an act of mercy from Us, leaving them to enjoy life for a while." (Verses 43-44) Large, heavy and carefully built as it may be, a ship in water is like a feather in the air: it can disappear and perish in a moment, unless it is protected by God's grace. People who have crossed oceans, whether in a boat with sails or in a large vessel, appreciate the danger represented by the sea and the little protection there is, should a storm ensue. They recognize that only God's grace provides protection in the midst of storms and currents that run over the sea, which is after all a creature controlled only by God's caring hand. But all this applies '*for a while,*' only until the time God has set arrives.

What Opens Sealed Hearts

Clear and inspiring as these signs are, people continue to pay little heed. Their hearts remain closed and they persist in ridicule and denial, hastening the end against which God's messengers have warned them:

When they are told: 'Beware of that which lies before you and behind you, so that you may be graced with His mercy,' [they pay no heed]. Every single sign that comes to them from their Lord do they ignore. And when they are told: 'Give [in charity] out of what God has provided for you,' the unbelievers say to those who believe: Are we to feed those whom God could have fed, had He so willed? Clearly, you are lost in error.' They also ask: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say be true?' (Verses 45-48)

Although all these signs are enough to cause an open heart to shudder and bring it in line with the universe, the unbelievers will not see them for what they are, and even if they do see them, they still do not reflect on them. Because His grace is endless, God does not leave them to themselves. He sends them messengers to warn

them and to call them to their Lord, the Creator of the universe. The messengers' role is to alert people's hearts so that they can see why they should be God-fearing, and to warn them against incurring God's displeasure, pointing out its causes and teaching them how to avoid it. Signs are constantly given them in their lives, time after time, in addition to the signs that are available in the universe around them, but they choose to remain blind: *"When they are told: Beware of that which lies before you and behind you, so that you may be graced with His mercy, [they pay no heed]. Every single sign that comes to them from their Lord do they ignore."* (Verses 45-46) If they are urged to be charitable and to give to the poor a portion of what God has provided for them, they say in ridicule: *"Are we to feed those whom God could have fed, had He so willed?"* (Verse 47) They would even be impolite in their reply to those calling on them to be charitable, saying: *"Clearly, you are lost in error."* (Verse 47)

Viewing the matter in such a mechanical way betrays their ignorance of the law God has set for human life. It is God who feeds and provides for All the provisions that people receive on earth are created by Him. They cannot create any of that; indeed, they cannot create anything whatsoever. It is God's will that people should have needs which they cannot attain to without hard work, such as planting the earth, extracting its raw material to manufacture things, transporting its produce from place to place, offering such produce in return for other products or for money, etc. It is also His will that people differ in their talents and abilities to ensure that everything needed to fulfil man's task of building human life on earth is available. The accomplishment of this task not only needs talents and abilities that earn money and produce wealth; it also requires others that can meet different human needs, without earning money. This makes for a complex human society, in which people have different lots in a bustling world, and across generations. However, the resulting differences of the means available to different people does not lead to the ruination of life and society. In fact it is a by-product of life's movement.

Therefore, Islam addresses the individual, requiring those who have plenty to relinquish a portion of their money, which is given to the poor to provide for their food and other needs. By doing so, Islam reforms a great many people, rich and poor alike. This portion is *zakāt*, which, by definition, implies purification. Islam makes it one of its acts of worship, and uses it to establish cordial and caring relations between the rich and the poor in the unique society it establishes.

Therefore, when those people, unable to see God's wisdom, say, *"are we to feed those whom God could have fed, had He so willed?"* and when they speak arrogantly to those who ask them to be charitable, saying, *"clearly, you are lost in error,"* they betray their own ignorance. They are blind to the nature of God's law, life's movement and the reasons why God gave different talents and abilities to different people, with the result that they have different means.

Islam puts in place a system that ensures fair opportunities for everyone. It then allows varied human activities, which are necessary for the fulfilment of man's role on earth, to run their course. Furthermore, it deals with any negative side effects.

Finally the *sūrah* mentions their expressed doubts about God's promise and their ridicule of the warnings given them: *"They also ask: When will this promise be fulfilled, if what you say be true?"* (Verse 48) God's promise is not brought forward or delayed because of people's pleas. With God everything has its definite measure; everything takes place at its appointed time and place, in accordance with His infinite wisdom. It is He who conducts the universe and all that happens in it according to a perfect system. The answer to this rude question is given in the form of a scene from the Day of Judgement, showing them what happens then, but not its timing.

Mercy: the Essential Quality

All they are waiting for is a single blast that will overtake them while they are still disputing. No time will they have to make bequests, nor will they return to their own people. The Trumpet will be sounded, and out of their graves they will rise and hasten to their Lord. They will say: 'Woe betide us! Who has roused us from our resting place? This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the truth.' It takes nothing but one single blast, and they will all have been brought before Us. (Verses 49-53)

Here we see the answer to the question about the time of resurrection: it comes in the form of a quick image, a single blast that ends all life. *"All they are waiting for is a single blast that will overtake them while they are still disputing. No time will they have to make bequests, nor will they return to their own people."* (Verses 49-50) It takes them suddenly, in a moment, as they argue and dispute going about their day-to-day lives, expecting nothing of the sort. Then it is all over. All perish in the situation and the condition they are in. They have no chance to make a will or to arrange something for loved ones who may stay behind. No one can return to his family to say a word to them. In fact every single person faces the same end, with all life finished.

The Trumpet is then sounded and they all rise from their graves, moving hurriedly, shocked, in fear. The question on everyone's lips is: *"Who has roused us from our resting place?"* (Verse 52) As the shock begins to wear off, it is replaced by a growing realization: *"This is what the Lord of Grace had promised. The messengers told the truth."* (Verse 52) Then comes the final blast and all those bewildered individuals, moving hurriedly and aimlessly, take their positions: *"It takes nothing but one single blast, and they will all have been brought before Us."* (Verse 53) Only a short moment and all are stationed in place, ranged in rows as if they were in a parade. The supreme decree explaining the nature of the moment as well as the forthcoming reckoning

and reward is announced to all: *“Today, no one shall be wronged in the least: you will be requited for nothing other than that which you did in life.”* (Verse 54) The quick succession of these three images forms a complete and coherent answer to those who have been voicing doubts about the Day of Resurrection.

The *sūrah* does not dwell on how the believers face the reckoning. Instead, it moves quickly on to show their happy end:

Those who are destined for paradise are today happily occupied. Together with their spouses, they will be in shady groves seated on soft couches. There they have fruit and whatever they ask for: peace and fulfilment through the word of the Lord of mercy. (Verses 55-58)

They are occupied with the comforts available to them, happy, relaxed, enjoying the fruits served to them and the shady groves providing a cool breeze. They are joined by their spouses in perfect enjoyment. Whatever they need is immediately made available to them. Above all this, they are honoured with a greeting of peace from none other than their merciful Lord.

By contrast the *sūrah* dwells on the scene of reckoning faced by the others. It is shown with all that it involves of reproach and blame:

But stand aside today, you guilty ones! Children of Adam! Did I not enjoin on you that you should not worship Satan, as he is your open foe, and that you should worship Me alone? This is the straight path. He had already led astray a great many of you. Could you not, then, use your reason? This, then, is the hell that you were repeatedly warned against: endure it today for your persistent rejection [of the truth]. (Verses 59-64)

Contempt marks the treatment they receive. They are first told to stand aside, away from the believers. They are then addressed as ‘*Children of Adam,*’ which is an address implying reproach: *“Children of Adam! Did I not enjoin on you that you should not worship Satan, as he is your open foe.”* (Verse 60) It was Satan who caused the expulsion of their father, Adam, from heaven. He has declared his permanent hostility to them, yet they continue to worship him.

They were also enjoined to do something that was certain to set them on a straight path, leading to God’s pleasure and a happy end in the life to come: *“You should worship Me alone. This is the straight path.”* (Verse 61) They are reminded that this enemy led astray many generations. Hence the rhetorical question: *“Could you not, then, use your reason?”* (Verse 62) At the end of this very hard and humiliating position, the dreaded sentence is passed, given in overtones of reproach and derision: *“This, then, is the hell that you were repeatedly warned against: endure it today for*

your persistent rejection [of the truth].” (Verses 63-64)

However, the scene does not end here. It moves on to provide a most singular image: *“On that day We shall set a seal on their mouths, but their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to whatever they have done.”* (Verse 65) Thus, they let each other down; their own bodies give witness against them; their personalities are torn apart with each part claiming that the other is lying. Each organ in their bodies returns to their Lord separately, in full submission to Him. This is a terrible scene, one that we can hardly contemplate.

The scene ends with the unbelievers in that state of tied tongues, speaking hands and legs giving witness. This is totally different from what they knew of their nature, and different from what they were expecting. Had God willed, He could have put them in a totally different situation, making them endure whatever hardship He wished to impose on them. The *sūrah* gives us here two examples of such hardships, making it clear that God could impose the same on anyone:

Had it been Our will, We could have blotted their eyes. They would have striven to find the way, but how could they have seen it? And had it been Our will, We could have paralysed them, right in their places, so that they could not move forward or backward. (Verses 66-67)

These two examples combine ridicule with contempt: the former answers those who used to pour ridicule on the believers and the divine message, and the latter answers those who were contemptuous when addressed by the message. It was they who used to ask about the time when the promise of the hereafter would be fulfilled, implying that they did not believe it would ever come about. In the first example we see them blind, yet despite their blindness, they rush to find a way, pushing one another aside and in their haste many of them fall down. How could they see? In the second example, they are frozen like statues unable to move an inch. In both examples they appear like toys, inviting ridicule after they were the ones to pour ridicule on the believers and their faith.

All this takes place when the promise they used to hasten becomes due. Should they be left to live long on earth, they will end up in a miserable situation, when they will prefer for the promise to be hastened. They attain to old age with all its weaknesses, and they suffer dementia and retardation in feeling and thought. *“If We grant long life to a human being, We also cause him to decline in his powers. Will they not use their reason?”* (Verse 68)

Old age is a second childhood, but without a child’s sweet innocence. An aged person moves backward, forgetting what he has learnt, losing physical and mental powers, unable to endure much, until he is no more than a child. However, a child is

always met with a smile when it does something silly. An aged person receives no support, unless it comes from a sense of pity and duty. He is also ridiculed whenever he betrays an element of childishness or stupidity.

Both fates await those who persist in rejecting the truth. They are the ones that deprive themselves of the blessings of faith.

3

What Prevents Resurrection?

We have not taught the Prophet poetry; nor is it fitting for him [to be a poet]. This is but a reminder and a Qur'an making all things clear, (69)

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشِّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْءَانٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦٩﴾

to warn everyone who is alive, and that the word of God be proved against the unbelievers. (70)

لِيُنذِرَ مَنْ كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧٠﴾

Are they not aware that, among all the things Our hands have made, We have created for them cattle which they control? (71)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا أَنْعَمًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَالِكُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

We have subjected these to them, so that some of them they use for riding and of some they may eat, (72)

وَذَلَّلْنَاهَا لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

and they have other benefits from them, and [milk] to drink. Will they not give thanks? (73)

وَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنفَعٌ وَمَشَارِبٌ ۖ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

Yet they have taken to worship deities other than God, hoping for [their] support. (74)

وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ءَالِهَةً لَعَلَّهُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

They are unable to support them; yet their worshippers stand like warriors to defend them. (75)

Let not their words grieve you. We know all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open. (76)

Is man, then, not aware that it is We who create him out of a gamete; and then he becomes flagrantly contentious? (77)

He comes up with arguments against Us, forgetting how he himself was created. He asks: 'Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?' (78)

Say: 'He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life again. He has full knowledge of every act of creation; (79)

He who produces for you fire out of the green tree, and from this you kindle your fires.' (80)

Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth unable to create their like? Of course He can. He alone is the supreme Creator, the All-Knowing. (81)

When He intends something to be, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is. (82)

Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things, and to Him you all will be brought back. (83)

لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُمْ جُنْدٌ مُّحَضَّرُونَ ﴿٧٥﴾

فَلَا تَحْزُنْكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظْمَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ ﴿٧٨﴾

قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٩﴾

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَدِيرٍ عَلَىٰ أَن يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ ۚ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٨١﴾

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَن يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٨٢﴾

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

Overview

In this final part, the *sūrah* reviews all the issues it tackled earlier: the nature of revelation; Godhead and its oneness, and resurrection. These are reviewed in separate sections and shown with strong effects coupled with a clear rhythm. The overall aim is to show how God's hand controls everything in the universe. This concept is summed up in the last verse of the *sūrah*: "*Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things, and to Him you all will be brought back.*" (Verse 83) His hand, strong and innovative, has created cattle and subjected them to man, and created man from a mere gamete. The same hand can also give life to bones that had broken into dust, just like it originated them in the first instance. It was this hand that produced fire from the green tree and brought the heavens and the earth into being. In the end, it has control of everything in the universe. This, then, is the gist of this final part of the *sūrah*.

No Place for Poetry

We have not taught the Prophet poetry; nor is it fitting for him [to be a poet]. This is but a reminder and a Qur'ān making all things clear, to warn everyone who is alive, and that the word of God be proved against the unbelievers. (Verses 69-70)

Right at the outset, the *sūrah* spoke about the question of revelation: "*Yā Sīn. By the Qur'ān, full of wisdom, you are indeed one of God's messengers, pursuing a straight way. It is a revelation by the Almighty, the Ever Merciful, so that you may warn people whose forefathers had not been warned, and who therefore are unaware [of the truth].*" (Verses 1-6) Now it is presented in this particular form to refute the allegation that the Prophet was a poet, and that the Qur'ān was mere poetry. The elders of the Quraysh were fully aware that all this was absolutely false, and that the Qur'ān Muhammad recited was something unknown in their language. They were not so dull as to be unable to distinguish the Qur'ān from poetry. These allegations were simply part of the propaganda they launched against the new faith and the Messenger preaching it. They simply referred to the fine, inspiring style of the Qur'ān to try to make the masses confuse it with poetry.

At this point, God in all His limitless glory denies that He taught His Messenger the art of poetry. Since God did not teach him this, he will not learn it. No one will ever get to know anything other than what God teaches them.

The *sūrah* also makes it clear that poetry is not suitable for God's Messenger: "*nor is it fitting for him [to be a poet].*" Poetry takes a different line from that of prophethood. Poetry is an interaction which may change from time to time.

Prophethood, on the other hand, means revelations bestowed from on high, outlining a firm system and a clear code that should be implemented as it conforms to God's law, which operates throughout the universe. Unlike poetry, it does not change to suit moods and desires.

Moreover, prophethood means constant contact with God, learning directly from what He reveals and an untiring attempt to mould human life in a way that pleases Him. In its highest standards, poetry expresses a human longing for what is perfect and beautiful, but it remains a human effort confined within man's capabilities and limitations. At lesser levels, poetry is an expression of reactions and desires that may be strongly carnal. Indeed, prophethood and poetry are far apart: one is at best a longing that issues from the earth while the other is true guidance from on high.

"This is but a reminder and a Qur'ān making all things clear." (Verse 69) Both descriptions apply to the same thing: the role of revelation is to be a reminder as it works on the mind keeping it alert, and the Qur'ān is to be recited. It has been revealed to perform a particular task: *"to warn everyone who is alive, and that the word of God be proved against the unbelievers."* (Verse 70) Here the Qur'ānic expression contrasts unbelief with life, making unbelief equal to death and propensity to faith equal to life. Thus, the Qur'ān has been revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) so as to warn those who are alive and can benefit from the warning. The unbelievers, on the other hand, are dead and cannot hear the warning. Therefore, the function of the Qur'ān, in as far as they are concerned, is to record their situation which makes them deserve punishment. God will not inflict punishment on anyone who has not received His message. Punishment is for those who did receive His message and who were determined to disbelieve in it, thereby writing their own ruin.

Just the One God

The second section of this final part of the *sūrah* addresses the question of God's oneness providing a framework for it from what people see around them and the blessings God grants them:

Are they not aware that, among all the things Our hands have made, We have created for them cattle which they control. We have subjected these to them, so that some of them they use for riding and of some they may eat, and they have other benefits from them, and [milk] to drink. Will they not give thanks? Yet they have taken to worship deities other than God, hoping for [their] support. They are unable to support them; yet their worshippers stand like warriors to defend them. Let not their words grieve you. We know all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open.
(Verses 71-76)

These verses begin with the question, *'Are they not aware...'*, which could have been literally translated as *'Do they not see how...'* The sign to which their attentions are drawn here is present before them. They do not have to look far for it. It is before their very eyes, requiring little contemplation. It is the cattle God has created and made subject to their control. Thus, they are able to ride them, use them for food, milk and draw various other benefits from them. All this is by God's law and the qualities He has given man and cattle. People could never have achieved any of this on their own. In fact, they cannot create a fly, even though they might muster all their resources for this purpose. They cannot control a fly unless God gave it the quality of being controlled by man. Hence the question: *"Will they not give thanks?"*

When we look at the matter in this Qur'ānic light we are bound to feel that God's blessings overflow from every corner around us. Thus, every time we ride an animal, eat a piece of meat, have a drink of milk, taste a piece of cheese or use fat for cooking, or wear a garment made of hide, wool or animal hair, we in our hearts feel God's endless blessings and infinite grace. This, then, applies to all things around us and everything we use, whether animate or inanimate. All our lives, then, become a continuous act of glorifying God and giving thanks to Him.

Yet people do not give thanks. Some of them would even attribute divinity to beings other than God. *"Yet they have taken to worship deities other than God, hoping for [their] support. They are unable to support them; yet their worshippers stand like warriors to defend them."* (Verses 74-75) In the past, such deities were statues, stones, trees, stars, angels or *jinn*. Such idolatry persists today in some areas of the world. Yet people today who do not worship such deities do not necessarily believe in God's oneness. They may associate partners with Him, in the form of believing in some alleged powers other than His, or relying on other things. What we need to understand here is that polytheism can take different forms at different times and places.

The unbelievers used to worship these deities seeking their help to win victory, yet it was they who protected those deities against assault from others: *"yet their worshippers stand like warriors to defend them."* (Verse 75) This was absurdity of the lowest order. However, in essence, most people have not gone far above this level of absurdity; only in form. Today, people who give tyrants the status of deities are not dissimilar to those who worshipped idols and statues. They are the warriors defending the tyrants and their tyranny, yet at the same time, they humbly bow before them. Idolatry is the same, whatever form it takes. Whenever the monotheistic faith suffers any deviation, idolatry and *jāhiliyyah* creep in. The only thing that protects humanity is belief in God's absolute oneness. He is the One God, to whom all worship must be addressed. He is the One to be obeyed and on whom all must rely.

"Let not their words grieve you. We know all that they keep secret as well as all that they

bring into the open." (Verse 76) This is an address to the Prophet as he confronted those worshipping deities other than God. He should not be concerned about them. God knows all about them and what they scheme. They represent no danger to any believer who places his trust in God.

A Second Life for All

The third section of this final passage raises the question of resurrection and reckoning:

Is man, then, not aware that it is We who create him out of a gamete; and then he becomes flagrantly contentious. He comes up with arguments against Us, forgetting how he himself was created. He asks: 'Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?' Say: 'He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life again. He has full knowledge of every act of creation; He who produces for you fire out of the green tree, and from this you kindle your fires.' Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth unable to create their like? Of course He can. He alone is the supreme Creator, the All-Knowing. When He intends something to he, He only says to it, 'Be,' and it is. (Verses 77-82)

This section looks first at man's own position, describing his origins and ends, putting it all before him so that he looks at it as a reality taking place all the time. Yet man neither appreciates its significance nor takes it as evidence confirming the realization of God's promise to resurrect all humanity. *"Is man, then, not aware that it is We who create him out of a gamete; and then he becomes flagrantly contentious."* (Verse 77) Man does not doubt that his immediate origin is a gamete. It is no more than a tiny drop of worthless fluid; a drop containing countless thousands of cells, one of which then becomes an embryo, which later grows into a contentious person, arguing with his Lord and demanding proof and evidence from Him.

It is the creative power of God that transforms that gamete into this quarrelsome, contentious person. What a gulf between origin and end! Yet man finds it difficult to believe that this power can bring him back to life after death. *"He comes up with arguments against Us, forgetting how he himself was created. He asks: 'Who could give life to bones that have crumbled to dust?' Say: He who brought them into being in the first instance will give them life again. He has full knowledge of every act of creation."* (Verses 78-79) How simple, using the logic of nature and obvious reality!

Does a gamete have greater life, power or value than a crumbled bone? Is not man originated from a gamete? Is the One who made an argumentative man out of a gamete unable to produce a new creation out of a crumbled bone? This is too easy and obvious to merit any lengthy discussion: *"He who brought them into being in the*

first instance will give them life again. He has All knowledge of every act of creation.” (Verse 79) They are then given further clarification of God’s creative power. Again the clarification uses something they always see with their own eyes: “He who produces for you fire out of the green tree, and from this you kindle your fires.” (Verse 80)

A casual look at this remarkable phenomena, to which they are often oblivious, is sufficient as convincing proof. Green trees laden with water often produce fire through friction, and then become fuel to this same fire. However, scientific understanding of the nature of the heat green trees receive as they absorb solar energy and retain it while they are full of water can only enhance the significance of this phenomena. It is God who has given trees their characteristics, and who created all things. However, we seldom look at things with such awareness. As a result, they do not reveal to us their amazing secrets nor do they point us to the Creator of the universe. We only need to open our hearts to them and they will tell us their secrets. We will then live with them in a permanent state of worship and glorification of God.

The *sūrah* then further examines the question of man’s initial creation and his subsequent resurrection: *“Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth unable to create their like? Of course He can. He alone is the supreme Creator, the All-Knowing.” (Verse 81)*

The heavens and the earth are great and wonderful creations. This earth where we live with millions of other species, and compared to which we are very little in size, and about which our knowledge remains scanty, is no more than a small satellite of the sun. Our earth depends totally on the light and heat it receives from the sun. However, the sun is only one out of a hundred million suns in this galaxy which forms our neighbouring world. The universe includes numerous other galaxies. Using their best, but limited observatories, astronomers estimate that there are one hundred million galaxies, but they could discover more if they used more powerful telescopes. The distance between our galaxy and the next is estimated at 750,000 light years. In addition, there are also vast nebula containing distant clusters of stars. But this is as far as our limited knowledge can reach.

Most of these countless stars have planets like our own star, and each planet and star has its own orbit in which it moves according to an accurate system which allows no stoppage or deviation. Otherwise, collisions would occur in outer space. We simply cannot try to describe what this great expanse contains: it is simply beyond our imagination. However, the question remains: *“Is, then, He who has created the heavens and the earth unable to create their like?”* How do people compare with such great, unimaginable creation? *“Of course He can. He alone is the supreme Creator, the All-Knowing.” (Verse 81)*

The truth is that God creates this and that, as well as other types of creation,

effortlessly. It is all the same to Him whether the creature He wants to bring into life is large or small: *“When He intends something to be, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”* (Verse 82) This *‘something’* could be a galaxy, an earth, an ant or a mosquito. It is all the same, requiring no more than a simple word, *‘Be’*, and it is there. Nothing is easier or more difficult, near or far. Once God’s will intends something, it exists whatever it may be. However, God tells us of this fact in a way we understand. This is why He expresses it in this way: saying, *‘Be’*, to His intended creation.

At this point, the *sūrah* gives its final beat, describing the relation between the universe and its Creator: *“Limitless, then, in His glory is He in whose hand rests the mighty dominion over all things, and to Him you all will be brought back.”* (Verse 83) The term *‘mighty dominion’* describes this relation in its majestic reality of absolute ownership and complete authority over everything in the universe. Then to Him all will return.