

SŪRAH 39

Al-Zumar

(The Throngs)

Prologue

This *sūrah* deals almost exclusively with the issue of God's oneness. It varies its address to the human heart, striking the full range of tones on its instrument so as to produce a sustained and profound effect. This it does to firmly establish the roots of the principle of God's oneness, purging the heart of anything that could mar its image. Thus, from start to finish, the *sūrah* variously deals with just one subject.

From the very outset, this issue is given immediate prominence: *"This book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise. It is We who have bestowed on you this revelation from on high, stating the truth. Therefore, worship God alone, sincere in your faith in Him. True devotion is due to God alone."* (Verses 1-3) It comes again with regular frequency, either expressly stated or as a concept to contemplate. Examples of the first type are: *"Say: I am commanded to worship God, sincere in my faith in Him alone; and I am commanded to be the first to submit myself to Him." Say: 'Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day.' Say: 'God alone do I worship, sincere in my faith in Him alone. You can worship whatever you please instead of Him.'"* (Verses 11-15) *"Say: 'You ignorant people! Would you bid me worship anyone other than God?' It has been revealed to you, and to those before you, that if you ever associate partners with God, all your works shall certainly come to nothing, and you shall certainly be among the lost. You shall worship God alone, and be one of those who give thanks to Him]."* (Verses 64-66) Two examples now follow of the second type: *"God cites the case of a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other, and a man belonging wholly to one person? Can they be deemed equal? All praise is due to God alone, but most of them do not understand"* (Verse 29) *"Is not God sufficient for His servant. Yet they would try to frighten you with those [they worship] other than Him. He whom God lets go astray can never find*

any guide; whereas he whom God guides aright can never be led astray. Is God not mighty, capable of inflicting retribution?" (Verses 36-37)

Alongside stating the truth of God's oneness the *sūrah* provides numerous guidelines and inspiring touches to alert our hearts. This serves to fine tune our responses so that we can make the right response to the divine address. For example: *"There is good news for those who shun the worship of false deities and turn to God, so give good news to My servants, who listen carefully to what is said and follow the best of it. These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance, and these are the ones endowed with insight." (Verses 17-18) "God has bestowed from on high the best of all teachings: a book that is consistent within itself repeating its statements [of the truth] in manifold forms. It causes the skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord to shiver, but then their skins and hearts soften at the mention of God. Such is God's guidance.. He guides with it him that wills, whereas the one whom God lets go astray can never find any guide." (Verse 23) "When man suffers affliction, he cries out to his Lord, turning to Him for help; but once He bestows upon him a favour by His grace, he forgets what he cried and prayed for earlier, and claims that others are equal to God, thus leading others astray from His path. Say [to him]: 'Enjoy yourself for a while in your disbelief for you are one of those destined to the fire.'" (Verse 8)*

A prominent feature of the whole *sūrah* is the way in which the air of the life to come spreads over it. Every short passage takes us there. Indeed, the hereafter is its stage. Again, a few examples suffice by way of illustration: *"How about one who devoutly worships God during the hours of the night prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord's mercy?" (Verse 9) "Say: Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day." (Verse 13) "How about one on whom God's sentence of punishment has been passed? Can you rescue those who are already in the fire?" (Verse 19) "How about one who shall have nothing but his bare face to protect him from the awful suffering on Resurrection Day." (Verse 24) "Yet much greater will be the suffering of the life to come, if they but knew it." (Verse 26) "Is not there in hell a proper abode for the unbelievers?" (Verse 32) "If the wrongdoers possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it all as ransom from the awful suffering on the Day of Resurrection. For God will have made obvious to them something they have never reckoned with." (Verse 47) "Turn towards your Lord and submit to Him before the suffering comes upon you, for then you cannot be helped. Follow the best that has been revealed to you by your Lord before the suffering comes upon you of a sudden, without your being aware of it, lest anyone should say: 'Woe is me for having neglected what is due to God, and for having been one of those who scoffed [at the truth]'; or lest he should say: If God had but guided me, I would surely have been among the God-fearing; or lest he should say, when faced by the suffering [that awaits him]: If only I could have a second chance in life, I will be among those who do good.'" (Verses 54-58) Moreover, a large part of the *sūrah* draws complete scenes of the hereafter, thereby adding to its overall ambience.*

Scenes of the universe which are varied and frequent in Makkan *sūrahs* are few

here. We have one at the opening: *"He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth. He causes the night to flow into the day, and the day to flow into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws]: each running its course for a set term. He is indeed the Almighty, the All-Forgiving."* (Verse 5) One more such scene is given in the middle of the *sūrah*: *"Have you not considered how God sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth to form springs? He then brings with it vegetation of different colours; and then it withers and you can see it turning yellow. In the end He causes it to crumble to dust. In all this there is indeed a reminder for those endowed with insight."* (Verse 21) Apart from these expressions we have a number of other quick references to the creation of the heavens and the earth.

The *sūrah* also includes references to practical life and human nature. Thus, early in the *sūrah* there is a reference to the origins of humanity: *"He has created you all from a single soul, and from it He fashioned its mate; and He has bestowed on you four kinds of cattle in pairs; and He creates you in your mothers' wombs, one act of creation after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion. There is no deity other than Him. How, then, can you lose sight of the truth?"* (Verse 6) On the nature of human reactions in situations of both adversity and pleasant ease there are the following two examples: *"When man suffers affliction, he cries out to his Lord, turning to Him for help; but once He bestows upon him a favour by His grace, he forgets what he cried and prayed for earlier."* (Verse 8) *"When man suffers affliction, he cries out to Us; but once We bestow upon him a favour by Our grace, he says: I have been given all this by virtue of my knowledge.' By no means! It is but a test."* (Verse 49) The fact that people's souls are always in God's grasp is also highlighted: *"God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time. In all this there are signs for people who reflect."* (Verse 42)

However, the ambience of the *sūrah* is derived from its discourse on the Day of Judgement and the life to come. This permeates the *sūrah* until its conclusion with a scene of devoted worship giving us a clear impression of the atmosphere on that day: *"You will see the angels surrounding the Throne, extolling their Lord's glory and praise. Judgement will have been passed on all in justice, and it will be said: All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds."* (Verse 75)

This impression fits perfectly with the ambience of the *sūrah* and the effect it has on our hearts. It emphasizes feelings of awe, fear of God and apprehension over one's fate in the hereafter. Hence, the images it presents to us are those of a trembling, anxious and apprehensive heart. Take for example the image in verse 9 painting a devout worshipper spending hours at night in prayer with his mind fixed on his destiny in the life to come, hoping for God's mercy. Or take the image in verse 23 depicting good believers listening to the Qur'ān, yet they are shivering, though it is not long before their hearts and skins soften at the mention of God. The *sūrah* is full

of directives drawing people's attentions to the need to fear God and to be fully aware of what may happen to them on the Day of Resurrection: "*You servants of Mine who believe! Fear your Lord!*" (Verse 10) "*Say: Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day.*" (Verse 13) "*Above them there shall be layers of fire, and layers of fire shall be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts: My servants! Fear Me!*" (Verse 16) Additionally there are scenes of the Day of Judgement which emphasize our feelings of awe and apprehension.

The *sūrah* deals with its main theme in quick, short rounds, each one of which concludes with an image of the Day of Resurrection. We will discuss these separately, as they are presented in the *sūrah*, because it is difficult to break this down into main passages. Indeed every few verses can be treated as a distinct entity for all address one major truism, God's oneness.

1

The Diversity of God's Creation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

This book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise. (1)

It is We who have bestowed on you this revelation from on high, stating the truth. Therefore, worship God alone, sincere in your faith in Him. (2)

True devotion is due to God alone. Those who take others besides Him as their protectors say: 'We worship them for no reason other than that they would bring us nearer to God.' God will judge between them concerning all matters on which they differ. God will not grace with guidance anyone who is an ungrateful liar. (3)

Had God wished to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen anyone He wanted from whatever He creates. Limitless is He in His glory: the One God who conquers all. (4)

تَنْزِيلِ الْكِتَابِ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ
فَاعْبُدِ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ الدِّينَ ﴿٢﴾

أَلَا لِلَّهِ الدِّينُ الْخَالِصُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا
مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا
لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ
بَيْنَهُمْ فِي مَا هُمْ فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ كَفَّارٌ ﴿٣﴾

لَوْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَتَّخِذَ وَلَدًا لَأَصْطَفَىٰ مِمَّا
تَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ ۗ سُبْحٰنَهُ ۗ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ
الْقَهَّارُ ﴿٤﴾

He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth. He causes the night to flow into the day, and the day to flow into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws]: each running its course for a set term. He is indeed the Almighty, the All-Forgiving. (5)

خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ يُكَوِّرُ
الَّيْلَ عَلَى النَّهَارِ وَيُكَوِّرُ النَّهَارَ عَلَى
الَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ
يَجْرِي لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۗ أَلَا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ
الْغَفُورُ ﴿٥﴾

He has created you all from a single soul, and from it He fashioned its mate; and He has bestowed on you four kinds of cattle in pairs; and He creates you in your mothers' wombs, one act of creation after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion. There is no deity other than Him. How, then, can you lose sight of the truth? (6)

خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلَ مِنْهَا
زَوْجَهَا وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَنِيَّةً
أَزْوَاجًا ۚ تَخْلُقُكُمْ فِي بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ
حَلَقًا مِّنْ بَعْدِ حَلْقٍ فِي ظُلُمَاتٍ ثَلَاثٍ
ذَٰلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ ۗ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
هُوَ ۗ فَآَنِيَ تُصِرُّونَ ﴿٦﴾

If you disbelieve, God has no need of you; nor is He pleased with disbelief by His servants. If you give thanks, He is pleased with you. No soul will bear the burden of another. In time, to your Lord you all must return, and then He will tell you the truth of all you did. He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts. (7)

إِن تَكْفُرُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا
يَرْضَىٰ لِعِبَادِهِ الْكُفْرَ ۗ وَإِن تَشْكُرُوا يَرْضَهُ
لَكُمْ ۗ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ
رَبِّكُمْ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ
تَعْمَلُونَ ۗ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٧﴾

Maintaining Sincerity in Faith

The sūrah begins with a clear, emphatic statement: "This book is bestowed from on high by God, the Almighty, the Wise." (Verse 1) As He is Almighty, He is able to bestow it from on high, and as He is wise, He knows the purpose of bestowing it, ensuring that it is all done in accordance with wise and elaborate planning.

The sūrah, however, does not dwell on this fact. It is only a prelude to its main

theme, which this book has been revealed to establish, namely, God's oneness, addressing all worship to Him alone, ensuring sincerity in faith, eliminating all traces of any alleged partnership with God and establishing direct contact with Him without any intermediary or need for intercession.

"It is We who have bestowed on you this revelation from on high, stating the truth." (Verse 2) The essence of the truth with which the book has been revealed is the absolute oneness of God, which forms the foundation of all existence. In verse 5 the *sūrah* states: *"He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth."* It is all the same truth that makes up the foundation of the universe and provides the purpose for revealing the Qur'ān. It is a single, consistent truth confirmed by the unity of the system that controls the heavens and the earth, and expressed in human language through this book. It is the truth that puts the seal on everything made by the only Creator.

"Therefore, worship God alone, sincere in your faith in Him." (Verse 2) The address here is to the Prophet, the recipient of the book as it is bestowed from on high. It embodies the constitution which he advocates, calling on all mankind to adopt it: to worship God alone, sincere in our devotion, and to conduct human life, in all spheres, on this basis. These are not mere statements. It is a complete system, starting with a firm belief that is translated into an all-embracing way of life for both the individual and the community.

A believer in God's oneness submits only to God, bowing his head to none other, and asking nothing from others. For him only God is powerful and holds sway. Indeed, all other creatures are weak, unable to do him, or themselves, either harm or good. It is God alone who gives, bestows favours or withholds them. What is the use, then, of turning to anyone other than God for help when all are weak and God alone holds all power?

A true believer recognizes the unity of the system that conducts all affairs in the universe, realizes that the code of living God has chosen for mankind is part of that system, specially moulded to achieve harmony between human life and the universe. Hence, a believer does not choose any system or legal code other than that which God has laid down. A believer in God's oneness also feels that there is a bond between him and all that God has created in this universe, and that all creatures are friendly towards him. He feels that all around him have been put in place by God's hand. Hence, he warms to everything that comes his way of God's creation. He does not hurt, destroy or waste anyone or anything, or use it in any way other than what God has sanctioned.

Similarly, the effects of believing in God's oneness are apparent in believers' concepts and feelings just as they are reflected in their actions and behaviour. Thus,

belief in God's oneness is not merely a verbal utterance. Hence why it is given such emphasis in God's book, and hence why it is repeated and explained in a great variety of ways. Each and everyone of us needs to study and reflect upon God's oneness so that this truth is perfectly ingrained in our own essence.

"True devotion is due to God alone." (Verse 3) In Arabic this statement has added emphasis provided by certain characteristics of the sentence structure, which is peculiar to Arabic and difficult to capture in translation. It gives the statement the sense of a declaration producing a loud but clear echo. Thus sound, structure and meaning combine to strongly emphasize this basic truth upon which all life, throughout the universe, is based.

Who Deserves Guidance?

Then a refutation of the complex superstition the idolaters presented in opposition to belief in God's oneness follows: *"Those who take others besides Him as their protectors say: We worship them for no reason other than that they would bring us nearer to God.' God will judge between them concerning all matters on which they differ. God will not grace with guidance anyone who is an ungrateful liar."* (Verse 3)

Although they declared that God created them and the heavens and earth, they would not carry this belief to its natural and logical consequence which required that they devote all their worship and submission to Him alone. Instead they invented the superstition that the angels were God's daughters and even carved statues representing angels so that they could worship these. They then claimed that their worship of these statues, such as al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā and Manāt, was not in essence devotion to them. It was merely a gesture to bring them closer to God, in the hope that these statues or what they represented would eventually intercede with God on their behalf.

Thus, deviation from simple, natural logic landed them in such a medley of falsehood: for the angels are not God's daughters, nor do the idols represent angels. God does not accept such deviation. He neither accepts intercession on people's behalf nor allows them to draw closer to Him in this way. Humanity deviates from the logic of its own nature whenever it moves away from the simple faith of God's oneness, which is the essence of Islam, as it was the essence of divine religion, preached by every messenger of God. Nowadays, we see in different parts of the world worship of saints, which is similar in essence to the practice of the Arabs of old who worshipped angels, or statues representing angels, to draw closer to God. God, in His limitless glory, defines the way that brings people close to Him: this is belief in God's oneness without intermediaries or intercessors of any sort.

"God will not grace with guidance anyone who is an ungrateful liar." (Verse 3) They lie

to God when they allege that the angels are His daughters. They also lie to Him when they claim that such worship of the angels will plead with Him on their behalf. In fact this worship makes them unbelievers, disobedient of God's express orders. Needless to say, God does not give His guidance to one who lies to Him, let alone disbelieves in Him. Guidance is granted as a reward for turning to Him, sincerity in worship, and diligently seeking the right way.

The *sūrah* then shows their belief to be erroneous, indeed otiose: *"Had God wished to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen anyone He wanted from whatever He creates. Limitless is He in His glory: the One God who conquers all."* (Verse 4) This is a supposition made for the sake of argument and to correct concepts. Had God wished for a son, He could have chosen any of His creatures. His will is free, unrestricted. However, He, in His limitless glory, has made Himself free of any such need. Hence, no one can attribute to Him a son. Such is His will and determination: *"Limitless is He in His glory: the One God who conquers all."* (Verse 4)

Why would He need a son when He is the Creator and Originator of all who controls everything. Indeed everything in the universe belongs it to Him and He can do with it all whatever He wants: *"He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth. He causes the night to flow into the day, and the day to flow into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws] each running its course for a set term. He is indeed the Almighty; the All-Forgiving."* (Verse 5) This reference to the great universe and the phenomena of night and day, and the subjecting of the sun and moon to God's law, puts the truth of the One God clearer before human nature. The One who creates all this from nothing does not need a son or a partner.

Clear evidence of God's oneness is seen in the way the heavens and the earth are created, and in the law controlling the universe. Indeed, to merely look at the skies and the earth gives us a clear sense of the oneness of the will that has created all and controls all. It has now become clear that the entire world known to man is composed of atoms made of the same matter, consisting of rays that have the same nature. It is also known that all atoms and the bodies composed of such atoms, including the earth in which we live and all planets and stars, are in perpetual motion dictated by a consistent law that operates without fail in the tiny atom as well as in the huge star. Furthermore, it has now been clearly established that this perpetual motion is in accordance with another constant law that further stresses the unity of creation and the unity of control. Every day, man discovers something new testifying to the unity of design throughout the universe.

"He has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth." (Verse 5) Likewise, He bestowed His book from on high to state the truth. It is the same truth in the universe and in this book, the Qur'ān. Both originate from the same source, and both are evidence of the oneness of their Maker, the Almighty, the Wise.

"He causes the night to flow into the day, and the day to flow into the night." (Verse 5) This is indeed an amazing statement that forces anyone who carefully looks at it to consider what has now been established of the earth's nature and its circular shape. Throughout this commentary on the Qur'ān, I have been keen not to look at its verses and statements from the angle of any theory science advances, because such theories may be right or they may be wrong. They may be proven today to be true but something may be discovered tomorrow to render them false. By contrast, the Qur'ān is the word of truth, and it carries its own proof. It needs no supporting evidence from what human beings may or may not discover. Yet the statement included in this verse forces me to relate it to the fact that the earth is circular, because it describes a fact we all notice. As the earth rotates, the part of it facing the sun receives its light and this is daytime. However, this part is not stationary because the earth continues to rotate. As it does, the night begins to spread over the part that had had the day. This part is in a rounded shape, and the day spreads over it in a flowing movement, followed by the night also in a flowing movement.

After a while the day begins to flow again over the night from the other side, in never-ceasing motion: *"He causes the night to flow into the day, and the day to flow into the night."* (Verse 5) The statement draws the design, defines the position and specifies the nature of the earth and its movement. Its circular shape and rotation give this statement its most accurate interpretation.

"He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws]: each running its course for a set term." (Verse 5) The sun and the moon run in their respective orbits. They are under God's control. No one claims to set them in motion. By natural logic, they cannot run without someone setting them to do so, controlling them by a system that does not deviate by a hair's breadth across countless centuries. Yet both the sun and the moon continue to run their courses *'for a set term,'* which is known only to God.

"He is indeed the Almighty, the All-Forgiving." (Verse 5) His might and power are coupled with His forgiveness of anyone who turns to Him. Thus, those who lie to Him, disbelieve in His oneness, attribute partners to Him or allege that He has a son are made aware that the way is open to them to return to the right way and to believe in the One who is Almighty, Much-Forgiving.

Three Depths of Darkness

The *sūrah* then seeks to touch people's hearts. It refers them to the evidence of life close by them, and in fact derived from their own creation and from the animals made subservient to them:

He has created you all from a single soul, and from it He fashioned its mate; and He

has bestowed on you four kinds of cattle in pairs; and He creates you in your mothers' wombs, one act of creation after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion. There is no deity other than Him. How, then, can you lose sight of the truth? (Verse 6)

Let man look at his own self. He has not created himself, nor does he know who created the human entity except for what God has told him. Yet we all originate from one soul, with one nature and the same characteristics that distinguish us from the rest of creation. Moreover, every human individual shares in these characteristics, because the human soul is one in the countless millions of humans across all generations and all communities. Moreover, its mate or spouse is also made from the same essence. Thus, despite all differences of detail between men and women, they share all these characteristics. This again confirms the unity of the original design for mankind, male and female, and the unity of the Will that created this single soul with its two manifestations.

The reference to the fact of human spouses is coupled by a reference to the same phenomenon in cattle, which in turn suggests that it applies to all living creatures: *"He has bestowed on you four kinds of cattle in pairs."* The Arabic phrase states 'eight *'zawj,'* but this word means both 'couple' and 'spouse'. Hence, the way it is rendered in translation. The eight are made up of a male and a female of sheep, goats, bovine and camels. The verse mentions that they have been bestowed by God, which means that it is God who has made them subservient to man. It is their subservience that is bestowed from on high and effected in man's world. Thus, man is given God's permission to use cattle for the benefit of human life.

The verse continues its discussion of man's creation, referring to various growth stages of the embryo: *"He creates you in your mothers' wombs, one act of creation after another."* These stages of creation begin with the gamete, then a clinging cell mass, then an embryo, then the bones, and then to a creation that indicates its human status. *"in threefold depths of darkness."* (Verse 6) There is the darkness of the placenta in which the embryo grows, the darkness of the uterus, and the darkness inside the mother's body. It is God's hand that takes the single cell through these stages of creation, one after another, looking after it and giving it the ability to grow and develop until it is formed in a complete human being as God has determined.

Anyone who looks carefully at this journey, which covers a huge gulf traversed in a short period of time, and who reflects on these stages of development, and on how this simple cell is guided along its remarkable journey in these depths of darkness, beyond man's knowledge, will inevitably recognize the Creator and His handiwork. How, then, is man turned away from the true faith: *"Such is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion. There is no deity other than Him. How, then, can you lose sight of the truth?"* (Verse 6)

Having outlined this clear vision of the signs testifying to God's absolute oneness and all encompassing power, the *sūrah* shows people's positions at the parting of the ways between belief and disbelief. It makes it clear that responsibility rests with each individual. It tells them about the end of their lives' journey and the reckoning that awaits them. It will be administered by the One who created them under three depths of darkness and who knows their innermost thoughts and feelings:

If you disbelieve, God has no need of you; nor is He pleased with disbelief by His servants. If you give thanks, He is pleased with you. No soul will bear the burden of another. In time, to your Lord you all must return, and then He will tell you the truth of all you did. He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts. (Verse 7)

The journey inside the mother's belly is merely one stage of a long journey. The second stage is life in this world and the final stage is that of reckoning and reward. All this takes place according to God's design who knows all. He does not need any of His servants. They are essentially weak and powerless, but He bestows on them an abundance of His grace.

"If you disbelieve, God has no need of you." (Verse 7) If you believe, you will not increase His kingdom in any way. If you disbelieve, this too will not affect His kingdom in any adverse way. He, however, does not like people to disbelieve: *"nor is He pleased with disbelief by His servants."* (Verse 7) By contrast, *"If you give thanks, He is pleased with you."* He will accept this from you and reward you generously for it. Everyone is accountable for their own deeds, and none will be held responsible for another, nor will he be allowed to take upon himself part of another's burden: *"No soul will bear the burden of another."* (Verse 7) The ultimate end of the journey is to God. There can be neither escape from Him nor refuge with anyone else: *"In time, to your Lord you all must return, and then He will tell you the truth of all you did."* (Verse 7) You can hide nothing from Him: *"He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts."* (Verse 7)

2

As Comfort Replaces Affliction

When man suffers affliction, he cries out to his Lord, turning to Him for help; but once He bestows upon him a favour by His grace, he forgets what he cried and prayed for earlier, and claims that others are equal to God, thus leading others astray from His path. Say [to him]: 'Enjoy yourself for a while in your disbelief, for you are one of those destined to the fire.' (8)

How about one who devoutly worships God during the hours of the night prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord's mercy? Say: 'Can those who know and those who do not know be deemed equal?' Only those who are endowed with insight will take heed. (9)

Say: '[Thus speaks God:] You servants of Mine who believe! Fear your Lord! Those who do good in this world will have a good reward. Wide is God's earth. Those who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond reckoning.' (10)

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا
إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا حَوَّلَهُ نِعْمَةً مِّنْهُ نَسِيَ مَا
كَانَ يَدْعُوًا إِلَيْهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَجَعَلَ لِلَّهِ
أُنْدَادًا لِّيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ قُلْ تَمَتَّعْ
بِكُفْرِكَ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ ﴿٨﴾

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَنِيتُ ءَانَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا
تَحَذِّرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُوا رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ قُلْ
هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٩﴾

قُلْ يَاعِبَادِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمْ
لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ
وَأَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةٌ إِنَّمَا يُوَفَّى الصَّابِرُونَ
أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Overview

The first passage touched people's hearts by telling them about their existence,

how they are all created from a single soul and how its mate was also created from it. It told them about the creation of animals in pairs, and how man is created in three depths of darkness inside the mother's belly. It touched on how God's hand gave them their human characteristics and their ability to grow and develop.

Now the *sūrah* touches their hearts again as it shows them their conditions in times of hardship and times of ease. It shows them how they boast and how, in their weakness, they swing from one condition to another. They are consistent only when they maintain their bond with God and humble themselves before Him. They will then know the truth and know their way. They will also then be able to benefit from their human characteristics.

Brief Enjoyment

When man suffers affliction, he cries out to his Lord, turning to Him for help; but once He bestows upon him a favour by His grace, he forgets what he cried and prayed for earlier, and claims that others are equal to God, thus leading others astray from His path. Say [to him]: Enjoy yourself a while in your disbelief; for you are one of those destined to the fire.' (Verse 8)

Human nature appears naked when man suffers affliction. Masks are torn off, covers are removed and disillusionment disappears. At this point, human nature turns to its Lord alone knowing that only He can remove affliction. It realizes that all its claims about God having partners are false.

When affliction is gone and man finds himself enjoying an abundance of God's favours, he again burdens his nature with heaps of false influences. He forgets his earnest pleas to God during the time of his affliction, choosing now to overlook his acknowledgement of God's oneness and that it is He alone who can relieve his hardship. He forgets all this and begins to claim that others are equal to God. These alleged equals may be deities man worships just like in the early days of *jāhiliyyah*, or they may be in the shape of values, persons, or situations to which he gives in his consciousness a share of what belongs exclusively to God. We see this in many of the *jāhiliyyah* situations we encounter everywhere. Thus man may worship his desires, inclinations, hopes, fears, wealth, children, rulers and chiefs in the same way as he worships God or even in greater devotion. In fact, he may love them more than he loves God. Polytheism can take different forms, some of which are subtle. People may not think of these as polytheism because they do not take the familiar form of acknowledging multiple deities; yet they are essentially polytheistic.

The result is to go astray, moving away from God's way which has one form, namely, acknowledging His oneness and addressing worship and love to Him alone.

Believing in God does not admit any partnership in man's heart, be that a partnership of wealth, children, home country, land, friend or relative. Should such a partnership be found in man's heart, it means acknowledging some beings as equal to God. Thus it allows a brief enjoyment in this life and ends in the fire of hell: "*Say to him]: Enjoy yourself for a while in your disbelief for you are one of those destined to the fire.*" (Verse 8) Every enjoyment in this life is small no matter how long it endures. Furthermore, anyone's span of life is brief no matter to what old age he attains. Indeed, the life of the entire human race on this earth is merely a brief enjoyment when compared to God's days.

Juxtaposed with this depressing picture of man is another showing him standing in awe, remembering God in all situations, pleasant or distressing. He goes through his life on earth without ever losing consciousness of the Day of Judgement. He always looks up to his Lord, hoping for His grace. It is from such a bond with God that true knowledge emerges, providing full awareness of the truth:

How about one who devoutly worships God during the hours of the night prostrating himself or standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, and hoping for his Lord's mercy? Say: 'Can those who know and those who do not know be deemed equal?' Only those who are endowed with insight will take heed. (Verse 9)

All the elements provided here, sincere devotion, the dread of what may happen in the life to come, the hope for God's grace, the purity of heart that opens the locks that prevent understanding, giving our hearts the blessing of clear perception all draw a bright picture which is the opposite of the one drawn in the previous verse. Hence, it is necessary to draw the comparison: "*Can those who know and those who do not know be deemed equal?*" (Verse 9) True knowledge is that which understands the truth and opens one's mind to the need to be in touch with the fundamental truths in the universe. True knowledge is not a host of pieces of information that clutter the mind without leading to any understanding of the fundamentals of existence.

The way to true knowledge and enlightened information then is devout worship, a sensitive heart, being mindful of the life to come, entertaining strong hopes of benefiting from God's mercy and of being conscious of God. Those who limit themselves to individual experiences and superficial vision are no more than collectors of information. They will never attain the rank of people with knowledge. "*Only those who are endowed with insight will take heed.*" (Verse 9)

It's a Wide Earth

The *sūrah* then addresses the believers, requiring them to remain God-fearing and to ensure that they always do good. They should use their life on earth, short as it is,

as a means to earn everlasting reward in the life to come:

Say: [Thus speaks God] You servants of Mine who believe! Fear your Lord! Those who do good in this world will have a good reward. Wide is God's earth. Those who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond reckoning. (10)

It is important to note here how the Arabic text is phrased. The words between brackets, *'thus speaks God'*, are not in the text. They are added to remove confusion. The text should originally read: "Say to My servants," but the Prophet is made to address them, because an address alerts the addressees and makes them more aware of what is to come. When the Prophet addresses them, he does not call them as his servants, because they are God's servants, not his. This means that he is addressing them in God's name, making the address from God directly to them. The Prophet is merely the means by which the address is given.

"Say: [Thus speaks God:] You servants of Mine who believe! Fear your Lord" (Verse 10) To fear God means to have a sensitive heart and to look up to Him cautiously and with apprehension, hope, wary lest one should incur His displeasure and keen to earn His pleasure. It is seen in the bright picture drawn in the previous verse of a devout worshipper, full of humility.

"Those who do good in this world will have a good reward." (Verse 10) What a great reward: a good deed in this present life, which is short and flimsy, is repaid with something good in the life to come, which is everlasting. This is certainly an act of God's grace. He knows man's weakness and small effort, so He repays him generously and takes care of him.

"Wide is God's earth." (Verse 10) Your love of your land where you have relatives and friends should not prevent you from seeking a different abode if your own area is hostile to your faith and you cannot do well there. To stick to your place of habitat in such a case could present an opening for Satan. It could become a form of attributing equals to God, even though it might not be felt in this way. This is a fine point indicating that polytheism can subtly creep into our hearts. It is given within the context of belief in God's oneness and fearing Him. It should be seen as evidence of the source of the Qur'ān. No one can deal in this way with the human heart except the One who created it and knows what has an effect on it and how.

God, the Creator of mankind, knows that leaving one's land is hard. It involves abandoning one's relatives and the people with whom one has close ties, leaving the place where one can easily find work and earn a living, to go to a new place where one is a stranger. This is not an easy thing for anyone. Hence, the *sūrah* refers here to patience in adversity and how it is generously rewarded by God: *"Those who are patient in adversity will be given their reward in full, beyond reckoning."* (Verse 10) Thus,

God's servants feel His care and are touched as they see that when they have to undertake something hard God turns to them with care and grace. He opens for them what compensates for land, country, family and relatives, giving them a reward without count.

All praise is due to God who knows all that affects a human heart and is fully aware of every thought that finds its way into his mind.

3

The Losers

Say: 'I am commanded to worship God, sincere in my faith in Him alone;' (11)

قُلْ إِنِّي أُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ
الدِّينَ ﴿١١﴾

and I am commanded to be the first to submit myself to Him.' (12)

وَأُمِرْتُ لِأَنْ أَكُونَ أَوَّلَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿١٢﴾

Say: 'Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day.' (13)

قُلْ إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي عَذَابَ
يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

Say: 'God alone do I worship, sincere in my faith in Him alone.' (14)

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْبُدُ مُخْلِصًا لَهُ دِينِي ﴿١٤﴾

You can worship whatever you please instead of Him.' Say: 'True losers indeed are those who shall have lost their own selves and their families on Resurrection Day. Such is the ultimate loss.' (15)

فَاعْبُدُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۗ قُلْ إِنَّ
الْخَاسِرِينَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَأَهْلِيهِمْ
يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ أَلَا ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ
الْمُبِينُ ﴿١٥﴾

Above them there shall be layers of fire, and layers of fire shall be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts: 'My servants! Fear Me!' (16)

هُم مِّنْ فَوْقِهِمْ ظُلَلٌ مِّنَ النَّارِ وَمِن تَحْتِهِمْ
ظُلَلٌ ۗ ذَلِكَ يُخَوِّفُ اللَّهَ بِهِ عِبَادَهُ
يَعْبَادِ فَاتَّقُونِ ﴿١٦﴾

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false deities and turn to God, so give

وَالَّذِينَ اجْتَنَبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ أَنْ يَعْبُدُوهَا
وَأَنَابُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ ۗ فَبَشِّرْ عِبَادِ
﴿١٧﴾

good news to My servants, (17)

who listen carefully to what is said and follow the best of it. These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance, and these are the ones endowed with insight. (18)

How about one on whom God's sentence of punishment has been passed? Can you rescue those who are already in the fire? (19)

As against this, those who are God-fearing will have lofty mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow. This is God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise. (20)

الَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ الْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ
أَحْسَنَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ
وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْأُولَىٰ ۝۱۸

أَفَمَنْ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ أَفَأَنْتَ
تُنقِذُ مَنْ فِي النَّارِ ۝۱۹

لَٰكِنِ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ هُمْ غُرَفٌ مِّنْ
فَوْقِهَا غُرَفٌ مَّبْنِيَّةٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
وَعَدَ اللَّهُ لَا تُخْلَفُ ۗ اللَّهُ الْمَبِيعَادَ ۝۲۰

Overview

This passage has the air of the hereafter stamped on it from start to finish: it highlights the fear of its punishment and the hope for its reward. It begins by a directive to the Prophet to declare God's oneness fully and without a trace of ambiguity. He further declares that he, a Prophet and a Messenger of God, dreads the consequences of any deviation from it. He unequivocally states his determination to follow his course, leaving the unbelievers to choose whatever method they want to follow, outlining the results to which each of the two ways leads.

The First to Submit to God

Say: I am commanded to worship God, sincere in my faith in Him alone; and I am commanded to be the first to submit myself to Him. Say: Indeed I would dread, were I to disobey my Lord, the suffering of an awesome day. (Verses 11-13)

This declaration by the Prophet outlining what he is commanded to do with regard to worship, devotion and submission is very important in keeping the belief in God's oneness pure, as Islam wants it to be. In this respect, the Prophet is one of God's servants. He does not exceed that position. In their servitude to God, all people

stand in one rank, while God has His sublime position over all creation.

Thus the two concepts of Godhead and servitude are well established and clearly distinguished. There can be no confusion between the two. Oneness is clearly seen as an attribute of God alone, in which no one else has any share. When Muḥammad (peace be upon him) stands in the position of God's servant making this clear declaration, fearing to commit any disobedience of God, there can be no room for any claim of intercession by idols or angels granted through addressing worship to them instead of God.

The declaration is made once more, with the Prophet's announcement that he will stick to his way, leaving the idolaters to their way and the painful end to which that leads:

Say: God alone do I worship, sincere in my faith in Him alone. You can worship whatever you please instead of Him. Say: True losers indeed are those who shall have lost their own selves and their families on Resurrection Day. Such is the ultimate loss. (Verses 14-15)

Once more the Prophet announces: I am unwavering in following my way, addressing all worship to God and submitting myself to Him alone. As for you, you can follow any way you want, worship whomever you wish, but this will lead you to the worst imaginable loss: a loss of oneself as one goes to hell, and the loss of family and kin, be they believers or unbelievers. If those relatives are believers, the idolaters will have lost them as each group goes their separate ways, and if they are unbelievers, the loss is the same as they all will have lost themselves in hell: "*Such is the ultimate loss.*" (Verse 15)

We then have a picture showing the extent of the loss: "*Above them there shall be layers of fire, and layers of fire shall be beneath them. In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts: My servants! Fear Me!*" (Verse 16) It is a scene that strikes real fear in people's hearts, showing the fire in layers that engulfs people from above and below. They are seen within these layers as they close in on them from all sides. Yet these layers are fire. God shows this picture to His servants while they are on earth and still have the chance to change their ways: "*In this way God puts fear into His servants' hearts.*" (Verse 16) He calls on them warning them so that they may choose the way to safety: "*My servants! Fear Me!*" (Verse 16)

On the other side stand those who are safe, having feared this fate and done what is necessary to avoid it:

There is good news for those who shun the worship of false deities and turn to God, so give good news to My servants, who listen carefully to what is said and follow the best

of it. These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance, and these are the ones endowed with insight. (Verses 17-18)

'False deities' are referred to here by the word *ṭāghut*, which implies an exaggerated sense of exceeding the bounds. Those who shun the worship of *ṭāghut* are the ones who reject the worship of anyone other than God in any form whatsoever. They are the ones who turn to God, stand in front of Him and worship Him alone. These have good news issued to them directly from on high. The Prophet is giving them this good news by God's order: "So give good news to My servants." The fact that this news comes from on high and is delivered by the noble Messenger is in itself a great blessing.

One quality of such people is that they listen to whatever is being said, but their hearts and minds pick up only the best of it and discard the rest. Thus, the only words that they actually receive are the best words that improve and purify people's hearts and souls. A good soul is always ready to receive good words and respond to them, while the one which is foul receives only what is foul. "These are the ones whom God has graced with His guidance." (Verse 18) He knows that they are genuinely good in their hearts and souls and He, therefore, guided them to listen and respond to the best of what is said. Guidance comes only from God.

"And these are the ones endowed with insight." (Verse 18) It is a sound mind that leads a person to self-purification and safety. Anyone who does not follow the way that ensures such safety appears to be deprived of a sound mind and insight, which are blessings given by God.

Before showing us the blessings these people enjoy in the life to come, the *sūrah* states that those who worshipped false deities have already reached hell. Who can save them from its fire, then? "How about one on whom God's sentence of punishment has been passed? Can you rescue those who are already in the fire?" (Verse 19) This address is made to the Prophet (peace be upon him). If he cannot save them from the fire, who else can?

They are pictured here as if they are already in the fire, since the sentence of punishment has been passed on them. Juxtaposed with this is the image of those who truly feared God:

As against this, those who are God-fearing will have lofty mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow. This is God's promise. Never does God fail to fulfil His promise. (Verse 20)

The scene depicts mansions raised upon high mansions, with streams flowing below. All this contrasts with the image of layers of fire engulfing the other group

from above and below. Drawing such contrasts is a characteristic of the Qur'ānic style. Such is God's promise, which will always come true.

Those Muslims who were the first to receive the Qur'ān interacted with these scenes in their practical lives. To them, they were not mere promises or threats issued from afar, speaking about a distant future; they were a reality they saw and felt. Hence, they were truly influenced by them. Their lives on earth reflected the reality of the Hereafter which they felt and almost experienced while still extant in this life. It is in this way that a Muslim should receive God's promise.

The Best of All Discourses

Have you not considered how God sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth to form springs? He then brings with it vegetation of different colours; and then it withers and you can see it turning yellow. In the end He causes it to crumble to dust. In all this there is indeed a reminder for those endowed with insight. (21)

How about one whose heart God has opened to Islam, and thus receives light from his Lord? Woe, then, betide those whose hearts harden at the mention of God. These are most obviously in error. (22)

God has bestowed from on high the best of all teachings: a book that is consistent within itself, repeating its statements [of the truth] in manifold forms. It causes the skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord to shiver, but then their skins and hearts soften at the mention of God. Such is God's guidance: He guides with it him that wills, whereas the one whom God lets go astray can never find any guide. (23)

How about one who shall have nothing but his bare face to protect him from the awful suffering on Resurrection Day? It will be said to the wrongdoers: 'Taste now what you have earned.' (24)

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً
فَسَلَكَهُ يَنْبِيعٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ مَخَّرَ
بِهِ زَرْعًا مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَهُ
مُضْفَرًا ثُمَّ يَجْعَلُهُ حُطْمًا ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
لَذِكْرًا لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢١﴾

أَفَمَنْ شَرَحَ اللَّهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ فَهُوَ
عَلَى نُورٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ ۚ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبِهِمْ
مِّن ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُّتَشَابِهًا
مَّثَانِي تَقْشَعِرُّ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ تَخْشَوْنَ
رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ
اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ ۚ مَنْ يَشَاءُ
وَمَنْ يُضَلِّلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

أَفَمَنْ يَتَّقِي بِوَجْهِهِ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ وَقِيلَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنْتُمْ
تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Those who lived before them also disbelieved, and so suffering befell them from where they could not perceive. (25)

God gave them a taste of humiliation in this world. Yet much greater will be the suffering of the life to come, if they but knew it! (26)

We have set for people in this Qur'an all sorts of illustrations, so that they may reflect. (27)

It is an Arabic Qur'an, free from distortion, so that people may become conscious of God. (28)

God cites the case of a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other, and a man belonging wholly to one person. Can they be deemed equal? All praise is due to God alone, but most of them do not understand. (29)

كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَآتَاهُمُ الْعَذَابُ
مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

فَأَذَاقَهُمُ اللَّهُ الْحَزْنَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا
وَالْعَذَابِ الْأَخْرَى أَكْبَرَ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
﴿٢٦﴾

وَلَقَدْ ضَرَبْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ
كُلِّ مَثَلٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيْرَ ذِي عِوَجٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ
﴿٢٨﴾

ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ
مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ
يَسْتَوِيَانِ مَثَلًا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

Overview

In this passage the *sūrah* draws attention to the life of plants after rainfall, and then how the water courses to its end. The Qur'an often draws a comparison between the life of plants and this present life of ours, highlighting the fact that it is of short duration. It urges people with insight to reflect on this comparison. In connection with the water being poured from the skies, the *sūrah* also refers to the Qur'an, the book sent down from heaven to breathe life into people's hearts and souls. It gives an inspiring description of the response of those whose hearts are open to it, and how they experience a mixture of awe, fear, comfort and reassurance. It then describes the respective fates of those who respond to God's message and those whose hearts are hardened. At the end of the passage, the *sūrah* cites examples of one who worships

the One God, and the one who worships multiple deities. The two cannot be equal and cannot hold the same position, in the same way as two slaves one serving one master and the other having several masters, who are in dispute with one another cannot be considered the same.

Rain Bringing Life

Have you not considered how God sends down water from the skies, and then causes it to travel through the earth to form springs? He then brings with it vegetation of different colours; and then it withers and you can see it turning yellow. In the end He causes it to crumble to dust. In all this there is indeed a reminder for those endowed with insight. (Verse 21)

The Qur'ān draws attention to a phenomenon that takes place everywhere on earth. Its familiarity, however, tends to make people overlook it. Yet it is remarkable in every step. The Qur'ān directs us to look at how God's hand directs it step by step to produce its desired effects. The water that comes down from the sky: what is it, and how does it descend? This is a remarkable phenomenon, but we tend not to reflect on it because it is so familiar. The very creation of water is indeed a miracle. We know that it comes into existence when two hydrogen atoms combine with one oxygen atom under certain conditions. Our knowledge, however, should alert us to the fact that it is God's hand that made the universe, allowing the hydrogen and the oxygen to be available and to provide the conditions that allow them to combine and produce water, which is essential for life to emerge. In fact, without water, no life could have emerged. Thus we see how a series of measures culminated in the existence of water and the emergence of life. All this is of God's own making. Moreover, the very fall of rain, after the creation of water, is in itself a miraculous phenomenon, brought about by the system that operates the universe and the earth, allowing the formation of water and its fall by God's will.

That which follows such rainfall is described thus: God "*causes it to travel through the earth to form springs.*" (Verse 21) This applies to the rivers running on the surface of the earth as well as the rivers that run underneath its surface when water seeps underground. It then forms springs or wells. It is God's hand that prevents it from going too far into the earth making it impossible to bring up again.

"He then brings with it vegetation of different colours." (Verse 21) The emergence of vegetation after rain is again a miraculous phenomenon that man can never emulate, no matter how hard he tries. Look at the young shoot as it splits the earth and removes the heavy layers above it, seeking space, light and fresh air, and growing slowly and gradually. Looking at it invites contemplation and fills our hearts with feelings of the greatness of God who "*gives everything its distinctive nature and form,*

and further guides them.” (20: 50) Plants vary in colour at the same spot, on the same plant, and indeed in just one such flower there is a great exhibition of marvellous creation. Man stands in front of this with great awe, aware that he cannot produce anything like it.

This growing, fresh plant that is full of life attains its full growth and completes its life cycle, *“then it withers and you can see it turning yellow.”* (Verse 21) It has completed its life as ordained in the system of the universe. It is now ripe for harvest. *“In the end He causes it to crumble to dust.”* (Verse 21) Its role in life is now completed as it was determined by the Giver of life. *“In all this there is indeed a reminder for those endowed with insight.”* (Verse 21) These are the ones who reflect, making use of the insight God has granted them.

Two Types of Heart

How about one whose heart God has opened to Islam, and thus receives light from his Lord? Woe, then, betide those whose hearts harden at the mention of God. These are most obviously in error. God has bestowed from on high the best of all teachings: a book that is consistent within itself repeating its statements [of the truth] in manifold forms. It causes the skins of those who stand in awe of their Lord to shiver, but then their skins and hearts soften at the mention of God. Such is God’s guidance: He guides with it him that wills, whereas the one whom God lets go astray can never find any guide. (Verses 22-23)

Just like He sends water from the skies to cause vegetation of various colours and forms to grow, God bestows from on high a reminder which is received by hearts that are alive, and that open up and react to such life. By contrast, hardened hearts receive it like a rock that cannot embrace life. God opens to Islam those hearts that He knows to be good. These hearts receive the light of Islam and they shine and radiate. The gulf between these hearts and the ones that are hardened is wide indeed: *“Woe, then, betide those whose hearts harden at the mention of God. These are most obviously in error.”* (Verse 22)

This verse depicts the nature of the hearts that receive Islam and warm to it, becoming full of life-. It describes how they blossom, becoming fresh and radiant. It also describes the other type of hearts which are hard, dark and lifeless. Needless to say, the hearts that open up to Islam, receive and reflect its light are totally different from those which are hardened at the mention of God’s name. The gap between the two is enormous.

The next verse describes how the believers receive the Qur’ān, a book that is fully coherent in nature, direction, message and characteristics. Thus, it is *‘consistent within itself’* and it *‘repeats its statements of the truth in manifold forms,’* giving consistent

directives and varying the ways it presents its images and stories without causing any contradiction. They are repeated at different places for a purpose that can be best served through such repetition. Such repetition does not detract from the harmony and consistency of the basic truth stated throughout the Qur'ān.

Those who stand in awe of God maintain an attitude that mixes fear of God with hope of His mercy. They are the ones who are very strongly influenced when they receive God's word to the extent that their skins shiver. They later soften and their hearts find reassurance as they listen to God's words. This is a very vivid image giving in words a description that is full of movement and action.

"Such is God's guidance: He guides with it him that wills." (Verse 23) Hearts do not shiver in this way unless God's guidance prompts them to respond. God knows the true feelings of these hearts and rewards them with either His guidance or by letting them go astray: *"whereas the one whom God lets go astray can never find any guide."* (Verse 23) He allows such people to go astray because He knows that they have gone so far into error that they will never respond to guidance.

The *sūrah* then shows what awaits those who chose to go astray on the Day of Judgement. It paints a very depressing picture at the time when results are given:

How about one who shall have nothing but his bare face to protect him from the awful suffering on Resurrection Day? It will be said to the wrongdoers: 'Taste now what you have earned.' (Verse 24)

Normally a person uses his hands and body to protect his face from fire or harmful objects. In this case, however, he cannot use his hands or legs to save himself from the fire; instead, he uses his face for protection, which describes a case of great confusion and hardship. In the midst of all this difficulty and suffering they are faced with strong censure and given the results of their lives' actions. What a terrible result they have to face: *"It will be said to the wrongdoers: Taste now what you have earned."* (Verse 24)

The *sūrah* then speaks about the unbelievers who stood in opposition to the Prophet, showing them what happened to the unbelievers of earlier communities, so that they may save themselves from a similar fate:

Those who lived before them also disbelieved, and so suffering befell them from where they could not perceive. God gave them a taste of humiliation in this world. Yet much greater will be the suffering of the life to come, if they but knew it! (Verses 25-26)

Such is the outcome faced by the unbelievers in both lives, in this world and the next. In this life, God made them taste humiliation, and in the life to come they will

face a greater suffering. God's law will continue to operate, the fates of past generations remain witnesses to the truth, God's warnings concerning the Day of Judgement remain in force, their chance to save themselves continues, and this Qur'an remains available to those who will heed the warnings.

Unequal Situations

We have set for people in this Qur'an all sorts of illustrations, so that they may reflect. It is an Arabic Qur'an, free from distortion, so that people may become conscious of God. God cites the case of a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other, and a man belonging wholly to one person. Can they be deemed equal? All praise is due to God alone, but most of them do not understand. (Verses 27-29)

God draws an analogy citing the examples of two of His servants: one believes in His Oneness and one ascribes divinity to others beside God. He compares them to two slaves: one is owned by several people who are at odds with each other about who owns him; he is caught between them, while each of them requires him to do certain things. He is at a loss, not knowing which way to turn and cannot manage to satisfy them all because of their contradictory orders. The other is owned by one master, and he knows what his master wants and is clear about his desires and requirements.

"Can they be deemed equal?" (Verse 29) They are definitely unequal. The one who has one master enjoys consistency and knows what is expected of him. His energy is spent in a consistent way and the road ahead of him is clear. The other, who has several masters, is always suffering anxiety and worry. He does not feel settled. He is unable to satisfy even one of his masters, let alone them all.

This comparison accurately describes the nature of believing in God's oneness as opposed to the nature of idolatry. The one who believes in God's oneness goes along his earth's journey equipped with clear guidance, because his eyes are looking up to one guiding star in the sky. Thus his way is straight. He knows one source for life, strength and sustenance; harm and benefit; grace and deprivation. He sets on his straight way to this source, strengthening his ties with it. He is assured of his single goal and does not lose sight of it. Thus, his energy is streamlined, assured of his work's objective. His feet are set firm on the ground while his gaze looks to God in heaven.

This telling analogy is followed by a comment praising God who has chosen for His servants what gives them comfort, safety, security and contentment. Yet they deviate from the truth, and most of them do not even know it.

This is but one of the numerous examples the Qur'an gives people so that they

may reflect. It is a clear Qur'ān in the Arabic tongue. It addresses human nature with simple logic. In it there is no ambiguity, equivocation or deviation.

The People of the Truth

Indeed you are bound to die, and they too are bound to die; (30)

and then on the Day of Resurrection you all will dispute with one another in the presence of your Lord. (31)

Who could be more wrong than one who invents a lie about God and rejects the truth when it comes to him? Is not there in hell a proper abode for the unbelievers? (32)

It is the one who brings the truth and the one who accepts it as true that are God-fearing. (33)

They will have all that they wish for with their Lord: such is the reward of those who do good. (34)

God will expunge the worst of their deeds and will give them their reward in accordance with the best that they did. (35)

إِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ وَإِنَّهُمْ مَيِّتُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ
تُخْتَصِمُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

﴿ فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَذَبَ عَلَى اللَّهِ
وَكَذَبَ بِالصِّدْقِ إِذْ جَاءَهُ ۗ أَلَيْسَ فِي
جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى لِّلْكَافِرِينَ ﴾ ﴿٣٢﴾

وَالَّذِي جَاءَ بِالصِّدْقِ وَصَدَّقَ بِهِ ۗ
أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

هُم مَّا يَشَاءُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ ذَٰلِكَ
جَزَاءُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

لِيُكَفِّرَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ أَسْوَأَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا
وَيَجْزِيَهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ الَّذِي كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Widely Different Rewards

Commenting on the preceding passage, the *sūrah* states that the dispute between

the Prophet and his opponents is left to God for judgement, which will occur after they have all died. He will requite the liars as they deserve and give generous reward to the people of the truth.

Indeed you are bound to die, and they too are bound to die; and then on the Day of Resurrection you all will dispute with one another in the presence of your Lord. (Verses 30-31)

Death is the end of every living thing. Only God remains. In death all people share the same end, including Muḥammad, God's last Messenger. Mention of this fact here comes within the framework of the great truth the *sūrah* emphasizes, namely, God's absolute oneness. This is followed by stating what comes after death, because death is not the final end: it is a link in the chain of life that has been so ordained that no part of it passes in vain. On the Day of Judgement people will stand in front of God disputing with one another over what they used to claim, and how they reacted to the guidance God sent them.

Who could be more wrong than one who invents a lie about God and rejects the truth when it comes to him? Is not there in hell a proper abode for the unbelievers? (Verse 32)

These are facts stated in the form of questions. None is more wrong than the person who makes false claims about God, alleging that He has daughters and partners, and who then rejects the truth preached by God's Messenger, refusing to believe in God's oneness. This is unbelief, and in hell there is a proper abode for all unbelievers. The interrogative form given to these two statements makes them clearer and more emphatic.

This is one party to the dispute. The other party is the one who brings the message of truth given him by God, believes in it and delivers it fully convinced of its truth. That is God's Messenger. Sharing with him in this description are all earlier messengers of God, as well as everyone who advocates this message, fully convinced that it is true. These are indeed God-fearing.

The *sūrah* speaks further about these people and the reward God has in store for them: *"They will have all that they wish for with their Lord: such is the reward of those who do good."* (Verse 34) This is an all-embracing statement that includes all the desires that a believing soul may entertain. The verse states that this is theirs, ready for them with their Lord. This means that they have a rightful claim to it which will not be lost or denied: *"Such is the reward of those who do good."* (Verse 34)

Thus God gives them all that He wishes to give them of honour and blessing,

which is in excess of their fair reward. Thus, He bestows on them an abundance of His grace: *“God will expunge the worst of their deeds and will give them their reward in accordance with the best that they did.”* (Verse 35) Fairness requires that good deeds are set against bad ones and reward is determined on that basis. God’s grace, however, is that which God grants to His servants who feared Him: He writes off the worst of their deeds, so that they are not taken into account when their deeds are reckoned, and then He rewards them on the basis of the best they ever did. Thus their good deeds are made to grow and become preponderant.

Such is God’s grace which He bestows on whomever He wills. He has committed Himself to do this, giving a promise to this effect. Thus, it is a fact of which the God-fearing are certain.

Signs to Reflect Upon

Is not God sufficient for His servant? Yet they would try to frighten you with those who are inferior to Him. He whom God lets go astray can never find any guide; (36)

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِكَافٍ عَبْدَهُ ۚ وَخُوفُونَكَ
بِالَّذِينَ ۚ مِنْ دُونِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ يُضَلِّ اللَّهُ
فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ ۖ ﴿٣٦﴾

whereas he whom God guides aright can never be led astray. Is God not mighty, capable of inflicting retribution? (37)

وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُضِلٍّ ۗ أَلَيْسَ
اللَّهُ بِعَزِيزٍ ذِي انْتِقَامٍ ۖ ﴿٣٧﴾

If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will answer: 'God.' Say: 'Consider these beings you invoke beside Him: if God wills harm to befall me, could they remove the harm He has inflicted? Or, if He wills that mercy should be bestowed on me, could they withhold His mercy?' Say: 'God is enough for me: In Him place their trust those who have a trust to place.' (38)

وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ ۗ قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا
تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ
هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَاتُ ضُرِّهِ ۚ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي
بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَتُ رَحْمَتِهِ ۚ
قُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ
الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ ۖ ﴿٣٨﴾

Say: 'My people! Do all that may be in your power, and I will do what I can. You shall come to know (39)

قُلْ يَنْقُومِ أَعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي
عَمَلٌ ۖ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ۖ ﴿٣٩﴾

who will be visited with humiliating suffering and who shall be smitten by long-lasting suffering.

مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ
عَذَابٌ مُّقِيمٌ ۖ ﴿٤٠﴾

(40)

We have bestowed on you this book from on high, setting out the truth for mankind. Whoever follows its guidance does so for his own good, and whoever goes astray shall do so at his own peril. You are not responsible for them.' (41)

God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time. In all this there are signs for people who reflect. (42)

Have they chosen others besides God to intercede for them? Say: 'Why, even though they have no power over anything and no understanding?' (43)

Say: All intercession belongs to God alone. His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and to Him you will all in the end return.' (44)

Whenever God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who will not believe in the life to come shrink with aversion; but when others are mentioned side by side with Him, they rejoice. (45)

Say: 'God! Originator of the heavens and the earth! You have knowledge of all that is

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ لِلنَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ
فَمَنْ أَهْتَدَىٰ فَلِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ
فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۖ وَمَا أَنْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٤١﴾

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ
تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ
عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ
مُّسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ
يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُفَعَاءَ ۚ قُلْ أَوْلَوْ
كَانُوا لَا يَمْلِكُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَعَةُ جَمِيعًا ۗ لَهُ مُلْكُ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ
تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ اشْمَأَزَّتْ قُلُوبُ
الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَإِذَا ذُكِرَ
الَّذِينَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِذَا هُمْ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ فَاطِرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ عَلِمْتَ
الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ أَنْتَ تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ عِبَادِكَ
فِي مَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

imperceptible and all that is present. It is You who will judge between Your servants concerning all that over which they differ.' (46)

If the wrongdoers possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it all as ransom from the awful suffering on the Day of Resurrection. For God will have made obvious to them something they have never reckoned with. (47)

Obvious to them will have become the evil of what they had - done; and they will be overwhelmed by that which they used to deride. (48)

When man suffers affliction, he cries out to Us; but once We bestow upon him a favour by Our grace, he says: have been given all this by virtue of my knowledge.' By no means! It is but a test, yet most of them do not understand. (49)

Those who lived before their time said the same, but of no avail to them was all that they had ever done: (50)

for the very evil of their deeds recoiled upon them. Similarly, the wrongdoers among these present people will have the evil of their deeds recoil upon them. They will never be able to frustrate [God's purpose]. (51)

Are they not aware that it is God who grants sustenance in abundance, or gives it sparingly, to whomever He wills? In this there are signs to

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
جَمِيعًا وَمِثْلَهُ مَعَهُ لَافْتَدَوْا بِهِ مِنْ سُوءِ
الْعَذَابِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ وَبَدَا لَهُمْ مِنَ
اللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يَكُونُوا يَحْتَسِبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

وَبَدَا لَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ
مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

فَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَانَا ثُمَّ إِذَا
خَوَّلْنَاهُ نِعْمَةً مِنَّا قَالَ إِنَّمَا أُوتِيتُهُ عَلَى
عِلْمٍ ۚ بَلْ هِيَ فِتْنَةٌ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

قَدْ قَالُوا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَمَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُمْ
مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَالَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا مِنْ هَؤُلَاءِ سَيُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا
كَسَبُوا وَمَا هُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٥١﴾

أَوَلَمْ يَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ
يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ
يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

those who believe. (52)

Overview

This is the longest passage in the *sūrah*. It tackles the issue of God's oneness from several angles, starting with a statement about the attitude a believer adopts towards all earthly powers, relying only on the one true power, caring little for anything else. Therefore, he disregards all such imaginary forces, trusting to God's judgement between him and those who dispute with him. He goes along his way firm and reassured about his destiny.

This is followed by a clear statement about the role and responsibility of God's Messenger, making it clear that he is not responsible for others, whether they choose to follow divine guidance or go astray. It is God who has power over them in all situations. They have no one to intercede with Him, for it is to God alone that all intercession belongs. His is the kingdom of the heavens and earth, and with Him all journeys end.

The *sūrah* then describes how the idolaters feel depressed when God's oneness is mentioned, while they delight when idolatry is discussed. This is followed by an invitation to the Prophet to declare God's oneness in the clearest of terms, leaving the idolaters to God. It describes how they will gladly give all that the earth contains, and twice as much, if only it will be accepted from them. This is how they feel once they realize how God may deal with them.

Such is the case, yet they still appeal to God alone when they are in a situation of distress. Should God grant them a favour, they make all sorts of wild claims. Any of them could say about God's favours: "I have been given this through my knowledge." This echoes what was said by others in former times, but God Almighty took them to task, and He is able to deal with these present unbelievers in the same way. They cannot defy God. Whether God gives provisions in abundance or in stinted measure in accordance with His wisdom and will: "*In this there are signs to those who believe.*" (Verse 52)

To Do All in One's Power

Is not God sufficient for His servant? Yet they would try to frighten you with those

who are inferior to Him. He whom God lets go astray can never find any guide; whereas he whom God guides aright can never be led astray. Is God not mighty, capable of inflicting retribution? If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will answer: 'God.' Say: 'Consider these beings you invoke beside Him: if God wills harm to befall me, could they remove the harm He has inflicted? Or, if He wills that mercy should be bestowed on me, could they withhold His mercy?' Say: 'God is enough for me: In Him place their trust those who have a trust to place.' Say: My people! Do all that may be in your power, and I will do what I can. You shall come to know who will be visited with humiliating suffering and who shall be smitten by long-lasting suffering.' (Verses 36-40)

These five verses epitomize the logic of faith: simple, clear, forceful and profound. Thus it was in the Prophet's heart, and thus it should be in every heart that advocates a cause. These verses represent the line that such a believer should follow. They provide his light as he goes along his clear and straight way.

It is reported that these verses were revealed as a result of the unbelievers trying to scare the Prophet, claiming that their deities, which he described in disrespectful terms, would be sure to harm him. They warned him that unless he desisted, their gods would cause him much trouble. However, the significance of these verses is far broader than this. They describe the true nature of the battle between an advocate of the truth and all the forces that line up against him. They show the confidence and reassurance a believer feels as he gives these forces their true measure.

"Is not God sufficient for His servant?" (Verse 36) Yes, indeed. So, what can scare him when God is with him? What can generate any feeling of fear in him after he has taken the position of a servant of God and fulfilled the responsibilities that such a position confers? Who can doubt God's sufficiency for His servants when He is the Almighty who holds sway over all His creation?

"Yet they would try to frighten you with those who are inferior to Him." (Verse 36) How could he be frightened when those inferiors do not frighten one who is protected by God? Is there anyone on earth who is not inferior to God? It is a very simple issue. It requires no argument or hard thinking. It is God opposed by some who are inferior to Him. This leaves no room for doubt concerning the outcome.

God's will is the one that is done. He determines everything for His servants, including what takes place within them, their inner thoughts and feelings: *"He whom God lets go astray can never find any guide; whereas he whom God guides aright can never be led astray."* (Verses 36-37) He knows who deserves to go astray and who deserves to be guided. He lets them have what they deserve. When He has made His judgement, no one can alter it.

"Is God not mighty, capable of inflicting retribution?" (Verse 37) Yes, indeed, He is. He

requires everyone as they deserve, inflicting retribution on those who deserve it. When anyone fulfils the duties incumbent on God's servants, He extends His protection to them. How can such a person, then, fear anyone?

The same truth is then re-emphasized in a different way, using their own logic and what they, by their very nature, acknowledge of God's attributes: *"If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will answer: 'God.'* Say: *'Consider these beings you invoke beside Him: if God wills harm to befall me, could they remove the harm He has inflicted? Or, if He wills that mercy should be bestowed on me, could they withhold His mercy?' Say: 'God is enough for me: In Him place their trust those who have a trust to place.'"* (Verse 38)

Whenever they were asked, they would readily state that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. No human nature could say anything else. No rational being could explain the existence of the heavens and the earth except through a supreme will. Therefore, the *sūrah* uses this natural acceptance to ask every reasonable human being: since God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, can anyone anywhere in the heavens and the earth remove harm from anyone if God wills that harm afflict that person? By the same token, can anyone withhold mercy from anyone if God wishes it to be bestowed on that person? The clear and decisive answer to these questions is in the negative. So, why should an advocate of God's cause fear anything?

What can he fear, and what can he hope for, when no one can remove harm from him or withhold grace?

When this notion is firmly planted in a believer's heart, the matter is settled. There is no more argument. The only fear or hope such a believer may have is centred on what comes from God. It is He who is sufficient for His servants, and in Him all trust is placed: *"Say: God is enough for me: In Him place their trust those who have a trust to place."* (Verse 38)

This gives believers all they need of trust and reassurance, leaving no room for worry or fear of anything. They go along their way in full confidence as to the end they will meet: *"Say: My people! Do all that may be in your power, and I will do what I can. You shall come to know who will be visited with humiliating suffering and who shall be smitten by long-lasting suffering."* (Verses 39-40) Do what you can, the way you wish. I am going my way entertaining no desire to change or deviate even slightly from it, free from worry or anxiety. You will come to know who will suffer humiliation in this life and everlasting punishment in the life to come.

Once this simple truth testified by both human nature and the universe at large has been presented, confirming that God is the Creator of the heavens and earth, and that the message advocated by prophets and their followers comes from Him, who in

the whole universe can affect anything? Who can protect others from harm or withhold mercy from them? Since no one has any power to do so, what would they fear, and what would they hope for?

What Intercession?

Such is the reality of the situation between God's messengers and all earthly forces opposing them. The question then is what is their message, and how should they react towards those who deny them?

We have bestowed on you this book from on high, setting out the truth for mankind. Whoever follows its guidance does so for his own good, and whoever goes astray shall do so at his own peril. You are not responsible for them. God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time. In all this there are signs for people who reflect. Have they chosen others besides God to intercede for them? Say: 'Why, even though they have no power over anything and no understanding?' Say: All intercession belongs to God alone. His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and to Him you will all in the end return.' (Verses 41-44)

"We have bestowed on you this book from on high, setting out the truth for mankind." (Verse 41) The truth is the nature of this book: it is clear in the law it sets out and in its system: it is on the basis of this truth that the universe is sustained; the truth that links the code of human life outlined in this book to the system of the universe. This truth has now been bestowed on mankind giving them guidance on how to live by its provisions. You, Prophet, are only the means to deliver it to them. It is up to them to choose what they wish for and how to deal with it. Each one of them can choose either guidance or error, and each will define his or her own fate. No responsibility attaches to you for what they choose: *"Whoever follows its guidance does so for his own good, and whoever goes astray shall do so at his own peril. You are not responsible for them."* (Verse 41)

It is God who has power over them. They are in His hands when they are asleep or awake, or indeed in all situations and conditions. He determines what to do with them: *"God takes away people's souls upon their death, and the souls of the living during their sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained and sends back the others until their appointed time."* (Verse 42) God gathers the souls of those who die, and He also takes away people's souls when they are asleep, even though they are not dead. During sleep, these souls are temporarily removed. If the term of some is over, God will retain their souls and they cannot wake up. Those whose term of life continues will have their souls returned and they will wake up. Thus, people's souls

are in God's hands whether they are asleep or awake: *"In all this there are signs for people who reflect."* (Verse 42)

Such being the case, with the Prophet having no responsibility for others, it is up to each of them individually: if they follow divine guidance, they benefit themselves; and if they choose error, they bear the responsibility for their choice. They will have to face the reckoning, for they will not be left unaccountable. What hope, then, do they have for salvation? *"Have they chosen others besides God to intercede for them? Say: Why, even though they have no power over anything and no understanding? Say: All intercession belongs to God alone. His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and to Him you will all in the end return."* (Verses 43-44) The question here is sarcastic, referring to their claims that they worship the statues of angels in order that these bring them closer to God. They are asked: *"Why, even though they have no power over anything and no understanding?"* The question is followed by an emphatic statement that all intercession belongs to God: it is He who permits whomever He wishes to intercede. Do they think that attributing partners to God is the way to achieve intercession?

"His alone is the dominion over the heavens and the earth." (Verse 44) No one can defy His will in His kingdom, where all dominion belongs to Him alone. *"And to Him you will all in the end return."* (Verse 44) There is no escape, simple.

The *sūrah* then describes how strongly they dislike any statement about God's oneness, while they delight in the attribution of partners with Him, when everything around them in the universe rejects such polytheism:

Whenever God alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who will not believe in the life to come shrink with aversion; but when others are mentioned side by side with Him, they rejoice. (Verse 45)

The verse describes a real situation during the Prophet's time, when the unbelievers delighted at the mention of their false deities, but showed clear dislike when God's oneness was asserted. Yet the verse also describes a state of affairs that takes place in all environments. Some people do express dislike when they are asked to believe in God alone and to implement His law and code of living. When other systems and laws are mentioned, they demonstrate happiness and delight. Only then are they ready to discuss and argue. It is these very people that God is describing in this verse: they are the ones, in all communities and generations, who trample over sound human nature, choose deviation, go and lead others astray.

The reply to all such deviation is taught by God to His Messenger whereby the latter says:

Say: God! Originator of the heavens and the earth! You have knowledge of all that is imperceptible and all that is present. It is You who will judge between Your servants concerning all that over which they differ. (Verse 46)

It is a simple prayer that comes from sound human nature looking at the heavens and the earth, that cannot find anyone other than God who could have created them, that acknowledges His creation, and addresses Him by the quality that fits the Originator of the universe, i.e. His knowledge of the imperceptible and all that anyone witnesses. It is He who is fully aware of what is present and what is absent, what is hidden and what is manifest. *"It is You who will judge between Your servants concerning all that over which they differ."* (Verse 46) He is the only judge and arbiter when they all return to Him, as return they must.

As Man Suffers Affliction

The *sūrah* then shows their miserable state when they return for judgement:

If the wrongdoers possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it all as ransom from the awful suffering on the Day of Resurrection. For God will have made obvious to them something they have never reckoned with. Obvious to them will have become the evil of what they had done; and they will be overwhelmed by that which they used to deride. (Verses 47-48)

The verse makes an implicit threat within a statement that strikes fear into the hearts of those described as *'wrongdoers'*, which refers to everyone who associates partners, of any type, with God. If those people had in their possession *'all that is on earth,'* including everything to which they attach high value and fear to lose should they accept Islam, indeed, if they had *'twice as much'*, they would willingly offer it all just to be spared the awful suffering they will see with their own eyes on the Day of Resurrection. Added to this is another implicit threat that is equally fearful: *"For God will have made obvious to them something they have never reckoned with."* (Verse 47) The *sūrah* does not specify what will become obvious to them, but it is clearly understood that it is terrible, to be feared. It comes from God, and He shows them what they could never have expected.

"Obvious to them will have become the evil of what they had done; and they will be overwhelmed by that which they used to deride." (Verse 48) Again this aggravates their position, because they will see for themselves how evil their deeds were, and they will find themselves engulfed with the warnings that they used to deride and ridicule.

Then follows a description of an ironic situation: they are outspoken in denying

God's oneness, yet when they suffer affliction they turn to none but Him, praying earnestly for His help. When He bestows His grace on them and removes their affliction they revert to their boastful claims and deny His favours:

When man suffers affliction, he cries out to Us; but once We bestow upon him a favour by Our grace, he says: I have been given all this by virtue of my knowledge.' By no means! It is but a test, yet most of them do not understand. (Verse 49)

This verse describes man if he does not accept the truth and turn back to his true Lord, following the path leading to Him and remaining on that path in all situations of strength or weakness. Affliction purges human nature of the desires and ambitions that blur its vision. It removes from it all alien influences that place a barrier between it and the truth. Therefore, when afflicted, it can easily recognize God and turn to Him alone. Yet when the testing times are over, and human nature again finds itself in easy and comfortable circumstances, man forgets what he said only a short while earlier. His nature is again turned away from the truth under the influence of his desires, and he looks at God's favours and provisions only to say: *"I have been given all this by virtue of my knowledge."* (Verse 49) This was said by Qārūn, or Korah, in former times, and it is said by everyone who admires what he is able to obtain of wealth or position through some sort of ability or knowledge, forgetting who grants him these, namely the One who has made causes produce their effects and who grants everyone their provisions.

"By no means! It is but a test, yet most of them do not understand." (Verse 49) It is all just a test. Man either proves himself, shows that he is grateful to God and sets himself on the right way or he denies God's favours, takes the wrong way and goes astray.

By an act of God's grace, the Qur'ān reveals this secret to us. It alerts us to the source of danger, warns us against failure in the test, and thus leaves us no excuse or argument. It reminds us of the fates of those who lived long before us, which were the result of something like the words spoken by many an unbeliever in the past: *"I have been given all this by virtue of my knowledge."* (Verse 49)

Those who lived before their time said the same, but of no avail to them was all that they had ever done: for the very evil of their deeds recoiled upon them. Similarly, the wrongdoers among these present people will have the evil of their deeds recoil upon them. They will never be able to frustrate [Gods purpose]. (Verses 50-51)

They are the same deviant words spoken by earlier peoples and which led them to ruin. Nothing of their knowledge, wealth or positions were of benefit to them. The same rule will apply to the present unbelievers, because God's law will never

change. *"They will never be able to frustrate God's purpose."* (Verse 51) Indeed, God cannot be defied by His creation who remain weak, despite any appearance of power they may enjoy. As for what God has granted them of His favours and provisions, it is all subject to His will. He gives all His creation whatever He may determine for them, according to His wisdom, making it all a test for them which ensures that His will is done: *"Are they not aware that it is God who grants sustenance in abundance, or gives it sparingly, to whomever He wills? In this there are signs to those who believe."* (Verse 52) God's signs are given to people so that they will benefit by the guidance they provide and will be led to faith. They must not turn them into causes of unbelief and rejection of the truth.

The Gates of Mercy

Say: '[Thus speaks God]: You servants of Mine who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of God's mercy: God forgives all sins; He alone is Much-Forgiving, Merciful.' (53)

Turn towards your Lord and submit to Him before the suffering comes upon you, for then you cannot be helped. (54)

Follow the best that has been revealed to you by your Lord before the suffering comes upon you of a sudden, without your being aware of it, (55)

lest anyone should say: 'Woe is me for having neglected what is due to God, and for having been one of those who scoffed [at the truth];' (56)

or lest he should say: 'If God had but guided me, I would surely have been among the God-fearing;' (57)

or lest he should say, when faced by the suffering [that awaits him]: 'If only I could have a second chance in life, I will be among those who do good.' (58)

﴿ قُلْ يَاعِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ
أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ
الرَّحِيمُ ﴾

﴿ وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِن قَبْلِ
أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ ﴾

﴿ وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن
رَّبِّكُم مِّن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ
بَغْتَةً وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴾

﴿ أَن تَقُولَ نَفْسٌ يَحْسَرْتُنِي عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَّطْتُ
فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ وَإِن كُنتُ لَمِنَ السَّخِرِينَ ﴾

﴿ أَوْ تَقُولَ لَوْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هَدَانِي لَكُنتُ
مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴾

﴿ أَوْ تَقُولَ حِينَ تَرَى الْعَذَابَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي

[God will say]: 'Yes, indeed! My revelations did come to you, but you rejected them. You were filled with false pride and had no faith at all.' (59)

On the Day of Resurrection you will see those who invented lies about God with their faces darkened. Is not there in hell a proper abode for the arrogant? (60)

But God will deliver those who are God-fearing to their place of safety: no harm shall afflict them, nor shall they grieve. (61)

كِرَّةً فَأَكُونُ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَتْكَ آيَاتِي فَكَذَّبْتَ بِهَا

وَأَسْتَكْبَرْتَ وَكُنْتَ مِنَ الْكٰفِرِينَ ﴿٥٩﴾

وَيَوْمَ الْقِيٰمَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلٰى

اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُم مُّسْوَدَّةٌ ۗ اَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ

مَثْوًى لِّلْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

وَيُنَجِّى اللّٰهُ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا بِمَفَازَتِهِمْ لَا

يَمْسُهُمُ السُّوْءُ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Overview

The previous passage included a description of the terrible situations in which the wrongdoers find themselves on the Day of Judgement: "If the wrongdoers possessed all that is on earth, and twice as much, they would surely offer it all as ransom from the awful suffering on the Day of Resurrection. For God will have made obvious to them something they have never reckoned with. Obvious to them will have become the evil of what they had done; and they will be overwhelmed by that which they used to deride." (Verses 47-48) Now the *sūrah* shows the way back leaving the gates of God's mercy wide open, requiring nothing for admittance except sincere repentance. At this point, God shows the prospect of His forgiveness and mercy available to all those who have transgressed no matter how great the sins they have committed are. He invites them all to turn back to Him with repentance, entertaining no feeling of despair. This invitation to benefit by God's grace is coupled with an image of what awaits them of suffering if they do not take this opportunity to repent before it is too late.

Mercy Available to All

Say: [Thus speaks God]: You servants of Mine who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of God's mercy: God forgives all sins; He alone is Much-Forgiving, Merciful. (Verse 53)

It is divine mercy that will erase every transgression, whatever it happens to be. It is an invitation to all those who have gone far into error and led a life that has taken them far astray, telling them hope still remains available and God's mercy and forgiveness are not far from them. God is most merciful to His servants. He knows their weaknesses and the factors that work on them, whether these are within themselves or in society. He is aware that Satan sets traps for them at every corner, using a great variety of forces, never tiring of his attempt to seduce them. Moreover, God knows that man can easily fall when he lets his bond to the truth weaken, and that his desires and aspirations can easily disturb his equilibrium, pulling him this way or that, leading him into error.

As God knows all this about man, He provides him with ample help, opening the gates of His mercy. He does not take him to task for his sin until He has facilitated for him all the ways and means to rectify his error and mend his ways. Nevertheless, when man goes deep into sin, thinking that he is totally rejected by God and that all is lost, he hears at this point of utter despair a fine address expressing the unlimited mercy available to him: *"Say: [Thus speaks God]: You servants of Mine who have transgressed against their own souls! Do not despair of God's mercy: God forgives all sins; He alone is Much-Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verse 53)

This means that despite his repeated sins, going far into disobedience of God, all he needs to receive God's grace that revives all that is good in him is to repent. All he needs to do is turn back to God through the gate that is left wide open, without a guard, and with no need for any special permission:

Turn towards your Lord and submit to Him before the suffering comes upon you, for then you cannot be helped. Follow the best that has been revealed to you by your Lord before the suffering comes upon you of a sudden, without your being aware of it. (Verses 54-55)

To turn to God in true submission and to surrender oneself once more to Him is all that is needed. No rituals, no barriers, no intermediaries, no intercessors. It is a direct link between servant and Master, creature and Creator: whoever wishes to return, stop rebellion and approach in full submission may do so. What he will receive is acceptance, a warm welcome and grace beyond measure.

Come on all of you, then! Come on *"before re the suffering comes upon you, for then you cannot be helped."* (Verse 54) Should the chance be missed, there can be no help. The chance is open now, but its duration cannot be guaranteed. In fact, it can terminate at any moment of the night and day. Therefore, come on and *"Follow the best that has been revealed to you by your Lord,"* which is this Qur'an that you now have at your fingertips, *"before the suffering comes upon you of a sudden, without your being*

aware of it." (Verse 55) Come on now before it is too late. Otherwise you will regret missing the chance and ridiculing God's promise: *"lest anyone should say: Woe is me for having neglected what is due to God, and for having been one of those who scoffed [at the truth]."* (Verse 56) Alternatively, someone may say that God condemned him to be in error: had He decreed that he would follow divine guidance, he would have been a God-fearing person: *"or lest he should say: If God had but guided me, I would surely have been among the God-fearing."* (Verse 57) This is a baseless excuse: the chance is offered to everyone, the means are available to all, and the gates are wide open. Yet people deliberately miss out: *"Or lest he should say, when faced by the suffering [that awaits him]: If only I could have a second chance in life, I will be among those who do good."* (Verse 58) This is something that will never be given. Once this life is over, no return is allowed. All people are now at the stage when they can do what they want. If they miss this chance, all is lost. They will be held to account, and they will be rebuked: *"Yes, indeed.' My revelations did come to you, but you rejected them. You were filled with false pride and had no faith at all."* (Verse 59)

At this point, when the *sūrah* has brought our feelings and hearts to the Day of Judgement, it shows us the two contrasting images of the unbelievers and the God-fearing on that momentous day:

On the Day of Resurrection you will see those who invented lies about God with their faces darkened. Is not there in hell a proper abode for the arrogant? But God will deliver those who are God-fearing to their place of safety: no harm shall afflict them, nor shall they grieve. (Verses 60-61)

This is the final end: one group have faces darkened by humiliation, sorrow and the scorches of hell. These are the arrogant who, during their lives in this world, were called to turn to God and believe in Him, and the chance was kept open for them even after they went far into sin, but they refused to pay heed. Now, on the Day of judgement, they are left in utter humiliation that shows in their faces. The other group are the winners who will not be touched by grief or affliction. These are the God-fearing who, during their lives on earth, paid heed to God's warnings and hoped for His mercy. They are the ones who will be safe: *"no harm shall afflict them, nor shall they grieve."* (Verse 61)

With all issues made abundantly clear, let everyone choose what they want. They can either respond to the call and enjoy God's grace they are certain to find just behind the open gate of repentance, or they can persist in disobedience until the suffering takes them unawares.

Driven in Throngs

*God is the Creator of everything, and of all things
He is the Guardian. (62)*

اللَّهُ خَلِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ
شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ ﴿٦٢﴾

*His are the keys of the heavens and the earth.
Those who deny God's revelations will surely be
the losers. (63)*

لَهُ مَقَالِيدُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

*Say: 'You ignorant people Would you bid me
worship anyone other than God?' (64)*

قُلْ أَفَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَأْمُرُونِي أَعْبُدُ أَيُّهَا الْجَاهِلُونَ
﴿٦٤﴾

*It has been revealed to you, and to those before
you, that if you ever associate partners with God,
all your works shall certainly come to nothing,
and you shall certainly be among the lost. (65)*

وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكَ
لَئِن أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ
الْخَاسِرِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

*You shall worship God alone, and be one of those
who give thanks [to Him]. (66)*

بَلِ اللَّهِ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُن مِّنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

*No true understanding of God have they: on the
Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be a
mere handful to Him, and the heavens will be
rolled up in His right hand. Limitless is He in
His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything
which they associate as partner with Him. (67)*

وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ وَالْأَرْضُ
جَمِيعًا قَبْضَتُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَالسَّمَوَاتُ مَطْوِيَّاتٌ بِيَمِينِهِ
سُبْحٰنَهُ وَتَعٰلٰى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

The trumpet will be sounded, and all creatures that are in the heavens and the earth will fall down senseless, except those God wills to be spared. It will then be sounded a second time, and they will rise and look around them. (68)

The earth will shine bright with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; all the prophets and the witnesses will be brought in. Judgement will be passed on them all in justice, and they will not be wronged; (69)

for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever they have done. He is fully aware of all that they do. (70)

The unbelievers will be led to hell in throngs. When they reach it, its gates will be opened, and its keepers will ask them: 'Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves, who recited to you your Lord's revelations and forewarned you of this day?' They will answer: 'Yes, indeed.' But the sentence of suffering will have already been passed against the unbelievers. (71)

They will be told: 'Enter the gates of hell; there you will abide.' How vile an abode for the arrogant! (72)

And the believers will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it, they shall find its gates wide open; and its keepers will say to them: 'Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in; you are here to stay.' (73)

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَىٰ فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

وَأَشْرَقَتِ الْأَرْضُ بِنُورِ رَبِّهَا وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ وَجِئَءَ بِالنَّبِيِّينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

وَوُفِّيَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَتَحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا ۗ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٧١﴾

قِيلَ ادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ فَبِئْسَ مَثْوَى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ

They will say: All praise is due to God who has made His promise to us come true and given us this land as our own. Now we may dwell in paradise as we please.' How excellent is the reward of those who worked hard. (74)

You will see the angels surrounding the Throne, extolling their Lord's glory and praise. Judgement will have been passed on all in justice, and it will be said: All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds.' (75)

فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٧٢﴾
 وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ
 وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ
 حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَمَلِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾
 وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ
 الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقُضِيَ
 بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
 ﴿٧٥﴾

Overview

This final part of the *sūrah* presents its main theme, God's oneness, from the angle of the oneness of the Creator who created and controls everything. This serves to show how singular the unbelievers' offer to the Prophet was that he should join them in worshipping their idols in return for them joining him in worshipping God. Since God is the Creator and Controller of all, how could anyone be worshipped alongside Him? "No true understanding of God have they," when they associate partners with Him when He has sway over all and everything, subjecting them all to His will: "on the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be a mere handful to Him, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand." (Verse 67) As this image of the Day of Judgement is shown here, the *sūrah* presents a unique scene of that day, culminating with the angels surrounding God's throne, extolling their Lord's glory and praise. The entire universe joins them in their praises: "All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds." (Verse 75) This is, then, the decisive word on the issue of God's oneness.

False Understanding

God is the Creator of everything, and of all things He is the Guardian. His are the keys of the heavens and the earth. Those who deny God's revelations will surely be the losers. (Verses 62-63)

This is the truth that everything in the universe confirms. No one can ever claim to

create anything. No rational being can claim that this universe came into existence without a creator, when everything in it testifies to elaborate planning and a clear purpose behind creation. Nothing in it, from the very small to the very large, is left to chance: *"Of all things He is the Guardian."* (Verse 62) Into His control the heavens and the earth are placed. He conducts their affairs the way He chooses. They operate in accordance with the system He put in place for them. No will other than His interferes with anything. This is acknowledged by human nature, confirmed by practical fact and endorsed by reason and conscience.

"Those who deny God's revelations will surely be the losers." (Verse 63) They have lost the understanding that makes their lives on earth consistent and harmonious with the life of the universe. They have lost the comfort of divine guidance, the beauty of faith, the reassurance of belief and the sweetness of certainty. On the Day of Judgement they will lose their own souls and their families. Hence, the term 'losers' applies to them in all its shades and connotations.

In the light of this truth, testified to by the heavens, the earth and every creature in the universe, the Prophet is instructed in how to reply to the idolaters' offer of both parties joining together in the worship of their idols and God Almighty at the same time. It is as if the whole question is a bargain to be struck by compromise: *"Say: You ignorant people! Would you bid me worship anyone other than God?"* (Verse 64) This is the natural reaction to such a stupid offer that betrays nothing but ignorance.

This is followed with a clear warning against associating partners with God, beginning with the prophets and God's messengers who would never entertain even the slightest thought of such association. This, however, serves to alert all others to the truth that in the question of who is to be worshipped, God stands alone without partners, while in the question of offering worship, all mankind, including the prophets and God's messengers, are in the same position as God's servants: *"It has been revealed to you, and to those before you, that if you ever associate partners with God, all your works shall certainly come to nothing, and you shall certainly be among the lost."* (Verse 65)

This warning against associating partners with God concludes with an order to worship God alone. We are to show gratitude to Him for providing us with guidance to the path to certainty. We should also thank Him for all His countless favours which He bestows on us and which we all enjoy at every moment of our lives: *"You shall worship God alone, and be one of those who give thanks."* (Verse 66)

"No true understanding of God have they." (Verse 67) Indeed, they have no clear or true understanding of Him when they associate with Him some of His creatures. Nor do they worship Him as He should be worshipped. They do not appreciate His oneness, greatness, majesty and power. Therefore, the *sūrah* reveals to us an aspect of

God's great power in the normal Qur'ānic way of drawing images that place before our eyes a fundamental truth: *"On the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be a mere handful to Him, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything which they associate as partner with Him."* (Verse 67)

All that we read in the Qur'ān or in *Ĥadīth* of such images and scenes are given in order to present fundamental truths that we would otherwise not comprehend. In other words we need images we can visualize. Here we have an example of this method, portraying for us an aspect of God's absolute power that cannot be limited to one form, placed within one area or confined within certain boundaries.[§]

A Majestic Scene

We now have a scene of the Day of Judgement that begins with the first blowing of the trumpet and ends when the judgement is passed and people are being led to their respective places, either heaven or hell. God Almighty stands in His greatness while the entire universe repeats His glorification and praise. It is a unique scene which is, as it starts, full of life and movement, but one which then slows down until every movement ceases and all stand still. Thus, complete stillness covers the place where all are brought for judgement, standing humbly before God Almighty.

The first blow on the trumpet is made, and all creatures who until that moment remained alive on earth and in the heavens fall senseless, except those God spares. We do not know how much time elapses before the second blow is sounded on the trumpet: *"The trumpet will be sounded, and all creatures that are in the heavens and the earth will fall down senseless, except those God wills to be spared. It will then be sounded a second time, and they will rise and look around them."* (Verse 68) The third blow of gathering them all is not mentioned here. Nor is there mention of the bustling and the crowding, because the scene here is a quiet one, where all move very gradually.

"The earth will shine bright with the light of its Lord." (Verse 69) This is the earth where all action will take place. Needless to say, there is no light other than the light of its Lord Almighty. *"The Record of Deeds will be laid open."* It is the book in which all deeds by all creatures are entered. *"All the prophets and the witnesses will be brought in."* They will testify stating the truth they know. No argument or dispute is mentioned here so as to maintain the atmosphere of majesty and humility before God that permeates the entire scene. *"Judgement will be passed on them all in justice, and they will not be wronged; for every human being will be repaid in full for whatever they have done. He is filly aware of all that they do."* (Verses 69-70) There is no need for a word to be said or

[§] For further discussion on the *Yad* attribute, please refer to section 1.6 of *A Critique of 'In the Shade of the Qur'ān.'*

a voice to be raised. The whole picture of reckoning, questions asked and answers given, is folded without mention because it does not fit with the ambience of majesty expressed.

The Ultimate Destination

“The unbelievers will be led to hell in throngs. When they reach it, its gates will be opened.” (Verse 71) The angels keeping guard will receive them there with a statement that they deserve their lot, reminding them of the reasons why they have ended up there: *“its keepers will ask them: ‘Did there not come to you messengers from among yourselves, who recited to you your Lord’s revelations and forewarned you of this day? They will answer: ‘Yes, indeed.’ But the sentence of suffering will have already been passed against the unbelievers.”* (Verse 71) The position is one of submission, without any argument or dispute. They accept their lot and submit to their fate: *“They will be told: ‘Enter the gates of hell; there you will abide.’ How vile an abode for the arrogant!”* (Verse 72)

Such is the fate of the arrogant party, destined for hell. How about the other party, the God-fearing who are destined for heaven?

And the believers will be led to paradise in throngs. When they reach it, they shall find its gates wide open; and its keepers will say to them: Peace be to you! Well have you done. Come in: you are here to stay. (Verse 73)

It is a warm welcome, coupled with pleasant praise of the recipients and an outline of the reasons for which they deserved their reward: *Well have you done.*” You purified yourselves of sin, lived a pure life and came here with such purity. None but the pure enter heaven. Therefore, you are to remain here forever.

At this point, the voices of the people of heaven are raised high in glorifying and praising God: *“They will say: All praise is due to God who has made His promise to us come true and given us this land as our own.”* (Verse 74) This is the land worth inheriting. They live in it wherever they wish, taking from it whatever they want. *“How excellent is the reward of those who worked hard.”* (Verse 74)

The scene is given a finale that fills our hearts with awe and majesty. It too is in complete harmony with the ambience of the whole *sūrah* devoted to the theme of God’s oneness. The entire universe is in complete submission to God Almighty, and praises of God are uttered by every living soul and all existence:

You will see the angels surrounding the Throne, extolling their Lord’s glory and praise. Judgement will have been passed on all in justice, and it will be said: All praise

is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds. (Verse 75)