

# SŪRAH 35

## Fāṭir

(The Originator)

### Prologue

This Makkan *sūrah* possesses a special character both in its subject and style. It perhaps best compares with *Sūrah* 13, Thunder, in the way in which it addresses the human heart, using, from start to finish, a fascinating rhythm employing various beats. It moves us into contemplation of the great universe and the numerous signs to be found in every nook and cranny. Man thus remembers God's blessings and appreciates the grace and favour He bestows on all His creatures. He also visualizes the end suffered by earlier communities and their fate on the Day of Judgement. He thus feels humility as he looks at the countless marvels that constitute God's work. He also recognizes that there is only one truth and one law running through all existence, and that this is controlled by God's hand. The *sūrah* imparts all this in a style and rhythm that leaves a profound and powerful effect on our minds.

The *sūrah* is a complete unit with interlinked rings, making it hard to divide into parts addressing separate subjects. In fact it has only one subject, but it plays its rhythm on the strings of the human heart so as to fill our souls, calling us to believe and submit ourselves to God.

The most distinctive feature of the *sūrah* is that it puts all these strings in God's hand, showing how they work, being pulled or stretched, separated or combined, without restriction or influence. We note this distinctive feature at the outset, and it runs through the *sūrah* to its very end.

The great universe, with its limitless expanse, has been brought into existence by God, according to His design: "All praise is due to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who assigns angels to be messengers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four.

*He adds to His creation what He pleases. Indeed God has power over all things.*" (Verse 1)

This strong hand of God opens up to send us flowing mercy without restriction, and then clinches to stop it at source. No one can alter this: *"Whatever grace God opens up to man, none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, none other than Him can release. He alone is Almighty, Wise."* (Verse 2)

To follow guidance and to be in error are two opposite ends of the mercy spectrum: the first is flowing, the other withheld: *"God lets go astray him that wills Ito go astray!, just as He guides him that wills Ito be guided]."* (Verse 8) *"God can make hear whoever He wills, whereas you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you. You are only a warner."* (Verses 22-23)

It is this very able hand that makes life in the first place, and then brings the dead back to life in the hereafter: *"It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they raise clouds, and We drive them to a dead land and thereby give life to the earth after it had been lifeless. Thus shall resurrection be."* (Verse 9)

Power and glory belong to Him alone. Whoever wants any of this must derive it from Him alone: *"Whoever desires might and glory should know that all might and glory belong to God alone."* (Verse 10)

Creation and giving shape and form to creatures, giving them offspring and determining their life duration are all within God's grasp, never let loose: *"It is God who creates you all out of dust, then out of a gamete. He then makes you into two sexes. No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge. No one attains to old age or has his life cut short unless it be thus laid down in [Gods] decree. All this is easy for God."* (Verse 11)

Also in His grasp are all the controls to the heavens, the earth, and other celestial bodies: *"He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for an appointed term. Thus is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion, while those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own even the skin of a date-stone."* (Verse 13)

God's able hand works in this universe according to its own inspiring fashion, adding colour to man, animals, plants and inanimate objects: *"Are you not aware that God sends down water from the skies, with which We bring forth fruits of different colours? In the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as others jet-black. Similarly, human beings, beasts and cattle have various colours."* (Verses 27-28)

The same hand puts human beings on the move, making one generation succeed another: *"We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We chose."* (Verse 32) *"It is He who made you inherit the earth."* (Verse 39) It holds this universe, protecting it lest it deviate: *"It is God alone who holds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their courses]. If they should ever deviate, no one else could uphold them after Him."* (Verse 41) He holds everything in control, nothing stands in defiance of His will: *"God can*

*never be foiled by anything whatever in the heavens and the earth.” (Verse 44)*

Throughout the *sūrah* God’s different attributes are emphasized. He is the One who has power over all things; the Almighty; the Wise; to whom all things return; who knows all that they do; to whom all dominion belongs; who is free of all wants, worthy of all praise; with whom all journeys end; much-forgiving; most appreciative; all-aware; all-seeing; who knows all that is hidden in the heavens and earth; fully aware of what is in people’s hearts; ever-forbearing; infinite in His power and who has all His servants in His sight.

These verses and the comments at the end of each create the special ambience of the *sūrah* and the overall effect it has on our hearts. Despite its being a single whole, with continuous beats, we have chosen to divide it into six sections to enable easier discussion.

# 1

## Giving All Grace

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

*All praise is due to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who assigns angels to be messengers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four. He adds to His creation what He pleases. Indeed God has power over all things. (1)*

*Whatever grace God opens up to man, none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, none other than Him can release. He alone is Almighty, Wise. (2)*

*People! Remember the blessings God has bestowed upon you. Is there any creator other than God who can give you sustenance from heaven and earth? There is no deity other than Him. How can you turn away? (3)*

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أجنحةٍ  
مثنى وثلاث ورباع يزيد في الخلق ما  
يشاء إن الله على كل شيء قدير ﴿١﴾

مَا يَفْتَحِ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا  
مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ  
مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢﴾

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ أَدْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ  
هَلْ مِنْ خَلْقٍ غَيْرِ اللَّهِ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنْ  
السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَانْفِرُوا  
تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣﴾

### The Originator

*All praise is due to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who assigns angels to be messengers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four. He adds to His creation what He pleases. Indeed God has power over all things. (Verse 1)*

The sūrah begins by offering all praise to God, as its whole purpose is to make our

hearts turn to Him, contemplate His signs, appreciate His mercy, and look at the wonders of His creation. We are made to fully appreciate these wonders so that our hearts overflow with His praise and glorification: *"All praise is due to God."*

Next comes God's attribute indicating creation and His bringing it into being: *"the Originator of the heavens and the earth."* It is He who has originated all these great bodies, some of which we see around us. We know only a little about the smallest and nearest to us of all these bodies, i.e. our mother earth. Yet they are all subject to one law of nature that keeps them in harmony, despite the huge distances separating them, which we can only imagine with great difficulty. Despite their great sizes and endless spaces separating their orbits, there exists certain relations between them which, if disturbed even by just a little, could lead to a major catastrophe.

We often pay little attention to Qur'ānic references to the creation of the heavens and the earth, or to its scenic descriptions of the universe. This is because our senses have been blunted by familiarity. Therefore, these scenes do not elevate us to the same level of inspiration that they give a heart that remembers God always, and thus remains sensitive to what His able hand produces. Only such a heart feels the awe these scenes impart.

An alert heart which maintains its bond with God does not need accurate information about the exact positions of stars, their sizes, relations to each other in position or movement, the thickness of the atmosphere around each, or the orbits they follow in order to appreciate the awesomeness of this great, wonderful and beautiful creation. It is enough for such a heart that these scenes play their precisely stringed music. It is enough for it to look at the stars shining across the dark night sky; or the light reflected by a full moon; or the dawn breaking through the darkness giving a feeling of new life; or the sunset heralding the darkness that brings a feeling of farewell; or the earth with its endless vistas; or indeed a single flower with its colour and shape that takes us long to contemplate.

The Qur'ān gives us inspiring directives so that we contemplate these creatures, large and small. Looking at only one of them is enough evidence of the greatness of its Creator and makes us address our glorification, praise and prayer to Him alone.

*"All praise is due to God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, who assigns angels to be messengers, endowed with wings, two, or three, or four."* (Verse 1) This *sūrah* dwells long on God's messengers, revelation and the truth it contains. The angels are God's messengers to His chosen servants on earth. The message they bring is the greatest thing in life. Hence God follows the reference to His creation of the heavens and the earth by mentioning the role of the angels whereby it is they who make contact between heaven and earth, fulfilling the greatest task of all as they deliver His message. It is a message from the Originator of the heavens and the earth to His

prophets whom He sends as guides to mankind.

For the first time in the Qur'ān we have a physical description of the angels. Previously we were given descriptions of their nature and role, such as *“Those that are with Him are never too proud to worship Him and never grow weary of that. They extol His limitless glory by night and day, tirelessly.”* (21: 19-20) *“Those who are near to your Lord are never too proud to worship Him. They extol His limitless glory, and before Him alone prostrate themselves.”* (7: 206) Here, however, we have a reference to their physical appearance. They are *‘endowed with wings, two, or three, or four.’* This description does not, however, help us imagine how they look, because we do not know anything about their physique or about the form their wings take. We can do no more than take this description as it is, without adding anything from our imagination, for anything we may imagine could be wrong. We do not have any definite description of how the angels look from a reliable source. What we do have though in the Qur'ān is this description and a reference to the angels in charge of hell: *“Over it are appointed angels who are stern and severe: they do not disobey God in whatever He has commanded them, but always do what they are bidden to do.”* (66: 6) Again this description does not give any physical delineation. It is reported in a *ḥadīth* that *‘the Prophet saw Gabriel in his natural form twice.’* One report mentions that Gabriel *‘has 600 wings’*. [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.] Again we do not have here a physical description, so we must leave it at the level God has imparted to us, accepting that all knowledge belongs to Him.

Wings are specified as being in twos, threes and fours, but man knows only a two-winged form in all birds. Therefore, the opening verse states that God *‘adds to His creation what He pleases,’* thus making it clear that God’s will is free, unlimited to any one form of creation. We know and see countless forms of creation, but the ones we do not know about are far more numerous. *“Indeed God has power over all things.”* This comment is broader and more comprehensive than the statement before it. Its import applies to all forms of creation, origination, transformation and alteration.

### **Unrestricted Grace**

*Whatever grace God opens up to man, none can withhold it; and whatever He withholds, none other than Him can release. He alone is Almighty, Wise. (Verse 2)*

What we have in this second verse of the *sūrah* is an aspect of God’s power mentioned at the end of the first verse. When this aspect is instilled in a person’s heart and mind, he undergoes a complete transformation in his concepts, feelings, values, standards and life generally. It invalidates any thought of any other power having any control over the heavens and earth, and puts him in touch with God’s

own power. It makes him abandon any thought of receiving grace from anyone else and links all to God's grace. It closes before him every door and way in the universe yet opens for him the door and the way leading to God.

God's grace can be reflected in countless aspects. Indeed man cannot even begin to record these. They are within him and the way he is created; the position of honour he is given; the blessings that are all around him from every side and from above and beneath him. It is also to be found in the favours showered on him.

God's grace is reflected in what man has been denied just as much as it is reflected in what he has been granted. When God opens it up to anyone, that person finds it in every situation, thing, condition and place. He even finds it within himself, his feelings, all around him, wherever and however he happens to be, even though he may be deprived of everything people consider to be important. Conversely, should God withhold His grace from anyone, that person will miss it in every thing, situation, place and condition, even though he may have at his disposal everything people associate with wealth and happiness.

Whatever favour a person is granted becomes a hardship if it is associated with the withholding of God's grace; and whatever hardship or trial he undergoes becomes a favour once it is coupled with His grace. A man may lie on a bed of thorns, but, with God's grace, he finds it very comfortable; while silk mattresses and cushions feel like hard nails if that grace is denied him. With divine grace the most difficult problem becomes easy and danger becomes safety, but without it, what is normally easy becomes insoluble and safe roads and ways lead to ruin.

Should you be granted God's grace, you will not feel miserable even though you may be in solitary confinement, enduring torture or facing danger; while misery will be your lot if it is withheld, even though you are in the most luxurious and splendid of surroundings. It is from deep inside that happiness, contentment and reassurance flow by God's grace, and deep inside you feel misery, worry and affliction when it is denied.

If the door of God's grace is open, you will not care if all doors and windows are locked: you will find ease, comfort and happiness; and if it is closed, you will benefit nothing if all other doors and windows are left wide open.

God may give anyone plentiful wealth, and that person will find it a source of enjoyment, comfort and a means to a good position in the life to come, provided that it is coupled with God's grace. If that grace is withheld, his wealth becomes a source of worry, envy and hatred. It may also mean deprivation, if the wealthy person is stingy or ill; and it may bring ruin if he is wasteful and careless.

The same can be said about children, health and high position. With God's grace, any of these can be a source of goodness, enjoyment, delight, happiness and joy, as

also a means to increase one's reward in the life to come. Should God's grace be denied, any of these will bring misery, distress, sleepless nights, or expose their owner to other people's envy, hatred and hostility. Likewise, knowledge, long life and comforts can be associated with either situation of happiness or misery. Yet little knowledge could bring about beneficial effects; a short period of life could enjoy much blessing; and little comfort may mean happiness and delight. In all these respects, communities are like individuals, in all conditions, situations and circumstances.

One aspect of God's grace is to feel it. God's grace abounds for every one of us, but it is your feeling that it is bestowed on you, your expectation, hope and trust that it is coming that is mercy and grace. By contrast, to doubt or despair of it is pure misery, but this is something that a believer will not suffer: *"None but unbelievers can ever despair of God's mercy."* (12: 87)

God's grace will not be denied anyone who seeks it at any place and in any condition. Abraham found it when he was thrown in the fire; Joseph found it in the well where his brothers threw him and later in prison; Jonah found it in the whale's belly, under three covers of darkness; Moses found it in the river when he was a helpless infant, as also in Pharaoh's palace when Pharaoh sought to kill him. The young men who retreated to a cave, as told in *Sūrah 18*, found it there in the cave when it was not to be found in homes and palaces. They said to *one* another: *"Now that you have withdrawn from them and all that they worship instead of God, take refuge in the cave. God may well spread His grace over you and make fitting arrangements for you in your affairs."* (18: 16) The Prophet Muḥammad and his Companion, Abū Bakr found it in the cave of Mount Thawr, where they hid from their pursuers. Indeed no one who sought it to the exclusion of everything else, aware that only God grants strength, power and mercy, has been left lacking.

It is also important to realize that when God opens the gates of His grace to anyone, nothing can withhold it; and when He withholds it, nothing can release it. Therefore, no one and nothing should be feared, while hope should never be pinned on anyone or anything. We should never fear to miss out on something, and never trust to any means. It all depends on God and what He wills. Whatever He determines will be done. It is He who is Almighty, Wise'. Nothing He determines is without clear purpose.

*"Whatever grace God opens up to man, none can withhold it."* (Verse 2) All that people need to be assured of God's mercy is to request it from Him directly, without intermediaries: *"And whatever He withholds, none other than Him can release."* (Verse 2)

This single verse paints a totally different picture of life. It gives a new set of values and standards that are unaffected by any consideration or pressure, be it light



or heavy. When this vision is firmly settled in a person's heart, that person can stand firmly in the face of all events, people, situations, powers and considerations. Even if all people on earth as well as the *jinn* were to range themselves against him, he would be able to resist them all knowing that they cannot control God's grace.

It was with verses and images like this that the Qur'ān produced that unique community of believers in the early days of Islam. It was a community moulded under God's own care, and through the Qur'ān, so as to function as a means of God's will and establish on earth the faith, values and systems He wanted to establish. In that first community we have a unique example of human life that seems to us today to belong to the realm of legends and dreams. That community did not deal with the Qur'ān as words, sentences and verses with superb meanings, but dealt with the truth those verses represented. Furthermore, they practised it in real life. Yet, still today, the Qur'ān is able to produce, by means of its verses, individuals and communities that can achieve, by God's leave, whatever God wills them to achieve. All of us can read the Qur'ān seriously, implement it fully and live its meanings as though they are a tangible reality.

### **A Personal Experience**

It behoves me personally to praise God and record here my gratitude to Him for the grace He bestowed on me in relation to this verse of the Qur'ān. This verse was present with me at a time when I was in great, compounded difficulty, experiencing spiritual dryness, psychological hardship and much affliction. It was this verse that came to my support, for God facilitated for me that I should see its truth, which poured into my spirit like a cool drink passing through the limbs of an extremely thirsty person. That was not a meaning I understood; rather, it was a reality I experienced. Thus, it was in itself an act of grace. It presented itself to me as a real interpretation of the verse, opening up to me like flower buds on a spring day. I had read and heard it many times before, but at that moment, it delivered its meaning as a sweet reality, showing me its inner self and saying: 'I am here, a sample of God's grace when He opens it.'

Nothing changed around me, but everything underwent a fundamental change in my appreciation. It is a great blessing that our hearts should open to receive a great truth of existence, such as the one the present verse states. It is a blessing one can experience and appreciate, but can seldom impart to others. I lived that moment and went through the experience. It was perhaps the hardest time of my life. Yet suddenly I found all difficulty disappear, and I was released of all trouble and hardship. I was experiencing a spiritual thrill, while I was still in the same place. That is God's grace which He opens to anyone He chooses and makes it overflow in just

one verse of the Qur'ān. One verse opens up a window of light, lets a spring of divine grace gush through, charts a way to contentment and reassurance and all in a split second. My Lord, You have bestowed this Qur'ān from on high to provide guidance and grace to believers. My Lord, I praise You with my tongue and heart, and my gratitude to You is without limit.<sup>9</sup>

### Who Else?

The third verse in this short passage confirms the import of the first two, reminding people of God's blessings, emphasizing that God is the only One who creates and provides sustenance for His creation, and wondering at how people lose sight of this truth when it is so clear and obvious:

*People! Remember the blessings God has bestowed upon you. Is there any creator other than God who can give you sustenance from heaven and earth? There is no deity other than Him. How can you turn away? (Verse 3)*

Nothing is needed more than the mention of God's blessings for people to see, feel and recognize them. Nevertheless, they do forget them. The earth around them and the skies above them give them abundant blessings and unlimited sustenance, in every step and at every moment. It is God the Creator who gives all this. They are asked here whether there is a different creator who provides them with all the good things in their hands. Obviously, they cannot say this. Indeed, they did not even claim this during their worst period of idolatry, associating all sorts of partners with God. Since there is none other than God to create and provide, why do they not remember and express gratitude? Why do they not address their gratitude to Him alone and express their thanks by praises and prayers? Indeed "*There is no deity other than Him.*" How is it that they turn away from this indisputable truth? "*How can you turn away?*" (Verse 3) It is most singular that anyone should turn away from this clear truth, evidenced by the constant sustenance they are provided with from heaven and earth. Even more singular is for a person to turn away from it all while admitting that all sustenance comes from God alone.

Just these three verses constitute the first section of the *sūrah*. In each we have an image that gives man rebirth. All that is needed is for him to firmly establish God's truth in his heart and conscience.

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<sup>9</sup> Although the author does not specify the time and the occasion that he is describing here as the most difficult in his life, he is most probably referring to a specific experience during his second imprisonment (1954-64). I believe what caused him most difficulty was to see a great number of men of all ages being severely tortured, and many dying under torture, for no crime any of them had committed, with no end to their plight in sight. This was bound to weigh heavily on a man with a sensitive and compassionate nature like the author. — Editor's note.

## 2

# The Lurking Enemy

*If they accuse you of lying, other messengers, who had gone before you, were similarly accused. It is to God that all things return. (4)*

وَإِنْ يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كُذِّبَتْ رُسُلٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ ۖ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٤﴾

*People! God's promise is true indeed. So do not let the life of the present world delude you, and do not let deceptive thoughts about God delude you. (5)*

يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ فَلَا تَغُرَّنَّكُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَلَا يَغُرَّنَّكُم بِاللَّهِ الْغُرُورُ ﴿٥﴾

*Satan is your enemy, so treat him as an enemy. He only calls on his followers so that they will be among those destined for the blazing fire. (6)*

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا ۗ إِنَّمَا يَدْعُوا حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٦﴾

*For the unbelievers there is severe suffering in store; while for those who believe and do righteous deeds there is forgiveness of sins and a great reward. (7)*

الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ ۗ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ ۗ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

*How about the one whose evil deeds seem alluring to him so as to regard them as good? God lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], just as He guides him that wills [to be guided]. Therefore, do not waste yourself sorrowing for them. God has*

أَفَمَنْ زُيِّنَ لَهُ سُوءُ عَمَلِهِ فَرَآهُ حَسَنًا ۗ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٨﴾

*full knowledge of all that they do. (8)*

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## **Overview**

The first section highlighted three major truths of the Islamic faith: the oneness of God, the Creator of all; the grace that He alone bestows; and that He is the only One who provides sustenance for all His creation. In this second section, the *sūrah* addresses the Prophet, comforting him because his people's rejection of his message and their false accusations of his lying caused him much pain. It stresses that all matters are in God's hand. It also addresses us all, confirming that God's promise is a true promise and warning us against Satan's schemes which aim to divert us from recognizing the major truths already outlined. What Satan, our avowed enemy, wants is to lead us to hell and its torment. It shows us the types of requital that await the believers and unbelievers in the life to come. Finally it enjoins the Prophet not to worry about what might happen to them. Both belief and rejection are in God's hand, and He knows all that people do.

## **The True Promise**

The first address is aimed at the Prophet: *"If they accuse you of lying, other messengers, who had gone before you, were similarly accused. It is to God that all things return."* (Verse 4) With all these truths easily and clearly recognizable, you need not worry that they accuse you of lying. The same thing happened to earlier messengers. All matters eventually return to God who determines every end the way He pleases.

Then the address is made general, to all people:

*People! God's promise is true indeed. So do not let the life of the present world delude you, and do not let deceptive thoughts about God delude you. Satan is your enemy, so treat him as an enemy. He only calls on his followers so that they will be among those destined for the blazing fire. (Verses 5-6)*

God's promise is true: there is no doubt that it will come; it is a reality that will not fail; it is the truth. Nothing can cause it to disappear, lose its way or change. Nevertheless this present life can delude people, as can Satan. Therefore, do not let anything get the better of you: *"do not let the life of the present world delude you, and do*

*not let deceptive thoughts about God delude you.”* (Verse 5) Satan has declared his hostility to you and that he will never be anything but an enemy to you. Therefore, *“treat him as an enemy.”* (Verse 6) Do not befriend him, listen to his advice, follow in his footsteps, for no rational person would follow in his enemy’s footsteps. Moreover, you should realize that he does not call you to anything good, nor does he want you to be safe: *“He only calls on his followers so that they will be among those destined for the blazing fire.”* (Verse 6) Can anyone with reason and clear thinking answer a call that would put him in the fire?

This is a sincere, heartfelt address. When man remembers the eternal battle he has to fight against his avowed enemy, Satan, he will muster all his strength, defending himself and ensuring his own safety. He will do his utmost not to fall to any temptation, keep himself on guard, evaluate every thought by the scales God has given him. He is alert to the fact that any seemingly innocent thought may involve clever deception by his old enemy.

This is the sort of sensitivity Islam wants its followers to have. They need to be on the alert so as to reject any temptation Satan presents. This entails the mobilization of all one’s responses against evil, both its inner appeal and surface attraction. Thus, one is always on red alert, prepared to engage in this battle which rages persistently throughout this present life.

Such single-mindedness demanded from believers is followed by an outline of the fate of those who responded to Satan’s call. To reinforce the contrast, the situation of the believers who reject him and drive him away is reiterated: *“For the unbelievers there is severe suffering in store; while for those who believe and do righteous deeds there is forgiveness of sins and a great reward.”* (Verse 7)

## **The Key to Evil**

This is followed by an explanation of what makes people go astray, the nature of Satan’s work, the door through which all evil flows. It shows the route that takes people astray and why, when a person goes far along it, he cannot turn back:

*How about the one whose evil deeds seem alluring to him so as to regard them as good? God lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], just as He guides him that wills [to be guided]. Therefore, do not waste yourself sorrowing for them. God has full knowledge of all that they do.* (Verse 8)

*“How about the one whose evil deeds seem alluring to him so as to regard them as good?”* This is the key to all evil: Satan makes evil deeds seem fair to people, and they will then admire themselves for what they do. Such a person will not review his work to

identify what is right or where he has gone wrong, because he feels he cannot go wrong. He is so preoccupied with self-admiration that he does not give a thought to self-criticism. Needless to say, he likes accountability to others much less. He does not permit anyone to question him about anything he does, because he feels it is good and, therefore, above criticism. This is the worst curse Satan invokes on man, and can be likened to a yoke he puts around his neck taking him far into error and its inevitable results.

A person who follows God's guidance is one who is careful, wary and alert. He knows that feelings change, that weakness may creep into one's heart, and that a short fall may occur. He is, therefore, always looking at his own work, wary of yielding to Satan's temptation and praying for God's help. This is indeed the point of difference between right and wrong, success and failure. It is a fine psychological point which the Qur'an describes in a few succinct words: "*How about the one whose evil deeds seem alluring to him so as to regard them as good?*" (Verse 8)

No answer is given in the *sūrah*, so as to allow every answer, such as: His is a hopeless case; How can such a person be on the same level as one who is always taking stock of his actions to ensure that he is on the right track; Can he be compared with a humble, God-fearing person. This sort of style is often used in the Qur'an.

The Qur'anic verse adds a statement that can be taken as implying a reply: "*God lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], just as He guides him that wills [to be guided]. Therefore, do not waste yourself sorrowing for them.*" (Verse 8) It is as if we are told that such a person is doomed to be in error as a result of Satan making his evil deeds seem fair to him. It is in the nature of error and guidance that the former makes an evil action seem fair and that the latter keeps a person on the alert ensuring good work.

Therefore, "*do not waste yourself sorrowing for them. God has full knowledge of all that they do.*" (Verse 8) This question of going astray or following guidance does not belong to any human being, not even God's Messenger. It belongs to God alone. It is He who changes hearts as He pleases. As He states this fact, God comforts His Messenger so that his tender heart does not sorrow too much for the unbelievers. The Prophet always grieved when he saw his people's persistence in going astray, knowing where that would lead them. Therefore, God tells him not to let his desire to make them follow guidance and recognize the truth overburden him with sorrow. God wanted him to know that this is none of his concern.

The same desire is felt by advocates of Islam. The more sincere they are in their advocacy, and the more they appreciate the goodness and beauty of their way, the keener they are that other people should see the truth for what it is and follow it. These advocates, however, would be better advised to understand what God says

here to His Messenger and to act on the same. They should do their best to present their message, but they must not grieve for those who remain blind to it.

*“God has full knowledge of all that they do.”* (Verse 8) He sets them on the road to His guidance or lets them go astray according to what He knows of their work. He knows the truth about all their deeds and what they involve even before they do them. He determines their lot in accordance with His absolute knowledge, but he does not hold people to account until they have actually done their deeds.

## Fashioning All Creation

*It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they raise clouds, and We drive them to a dead land and thereby give life to the earth after it had been lifeless. Thus shall resurrection be. (9)*

*Whoever desires might and glory should know that all might and glory belong to God alone. To Him ascends all good words, and He exalts the good deed. For those who plot evil there is severe suffering in store. All their plotting will come to nothing. (10)*

*It is God who creates you all out of dust, then out of a gamete. He then makes you into pairs (males and females). No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge. No one attains to old age or has his life cut short unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree. All this is easy for God. (11)*

*The two great bodies of water on earth are not alike: one is palatable, sweet and pleasant to drink, and the other is salty and bitter. Yet from each you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments to wear. You also see there ships that plough their course through them so that you may go in quest*

وَاللَّهُ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ الرِّيحَ فَتُثِيرُ سَحَابًا  
فَسُقْنَاهُ إِلَى بَلَدٍ مَيِّتٍ فَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ  
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا كَذَلِكَ النُّشُورُ ﴿٩﴾

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعِزَّةَ فَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ جَمِيعًا إِلَيْهِ  
يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ  
يَرْفَعُهُ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ يَمْكُرُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ لَهُمْ  
عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَكْرُ أُولَئِكَ هُوَ يُبْورُ

﴿١٠﴾

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ  
جَعَلَكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَمَا تَحْمِلُ مِنْ أُنْثَىٰ وَلَا  
تَضَعُ إِلَّا بِعِلْمِهِ ۚ وَمَا يُعَمَّرُ مِنْ مُعَمَّرٍ  
وَلَا يُنْقَصُ مِنْ عُمُرِهِ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ  
ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْبَحْرَانِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ  
سَائِغٌ شَرَابُهُ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ وَمِنْ كُلِّ  
تَأْكُلُونَ لَحْمًا طَرِيًّا وَتَسْتَخْرِجُونَ  
حِلْيَةً تَلْبَسُونَهَا وَتَرَى الْفُلْكَ فِيهِ مَوَاحِرَ  
لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۚ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ  
تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾



*of some of His bounty and be grateful. (12)*

*He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course for an appointed term. Thus is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion, while those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own even the skin of a date-stone. (13)*

*If you invoke them they cannot hear your call. Even if they could hear, they would not respond to you. On the Day of Resurrection they will utterly disown your having associated them with God. None can give you information like the One who is all-aware. (14)*

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي  
اللَّيْلِ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلًّا  
لِيَجْرِيَ لِأَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ذَلِكُمُ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ  
لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ  
دُونِهِ مَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قِطْمِيرٍ ﴿١٣﴾

إِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ لَا يَسْمَعُوا دُعَاءَكُمْ وَلَوْ  
سَمِعُوا مَا اسْتَجَابُوا لَكُمْ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
يَكْفُرُونَ بِشِرْكِكُمْ ۗ وَلَا يُنَبِّئُكَ مِثْلُ  
خَبِيرٍ ﴿١٤﴾

## Overview

This third section takes us on several rounds in the great universe where the Qur'an depicts a variety of phenomena and imagery which all confirm faith and provide irrefutable proof in support of it. This follows from the earlier discussion about guidance and going astray, and comforting the Prophet so he would not grieve over the unbelievers' constant rejection. Whoever wants to look for the truth, its evidence is available with glorious clarity everywhere in the universe. Anyone who chooses to go astray does so against such irrefutable evidence.

The image of life springing up from a dead land is clear evidence that also serves to confirm resurrection. Similar evidence can be deduced from man's creation from dust and his progression to the highly sophisticated form we know. Every stage of his creation and life goes according to predetermined measures. We see the image of the two great bodies of water, clearly distinct, yet they provide man with endless blessings for which he should show gratitude. The night and day move in a cycle that always brings one into the other, and they get longer or shorter as time moves round. The sun and the moon are also controlled within the same accurate system. All these images provide evidence about the great universal stage. All are created and controlled by God. He owns it all. The false deities that unbelievers worship own

nothing whatsoever. They neither hear nor respond. On the Day of Judgement they even disown the very people who worshipped them.

### **The Source of All Power**

*It is God who sends forth the winds, so that they raise clouds, and We drive them to a dead land and thereby give life to the earth after it had been lifeless. Thus shall resurrection be. (Verse 9)*

This phenomenon is frequently mentioned within the context of evidence to the truth derived from the universe. It shows the wind raising clouds. In fact hot winds make sea water evaporate, then cold winds in the atmosphere condense the vapour making clouds which are then driven in different directions by winds in the upper strata of the atmosphere. Then they arrive at the destination God has determined for them, which may be a dead land which He wants to quicken by means of the rain carried by these clouds. Indeed, water is the source of all life on this planet. “We thereby give life to the earth after it was lifeless.” Thus the miracle occurs. It happens at every moment, but people are oblivious to its significance. Yet despite this miracle of life springing up at every moment, they continue to deny resurrection which they see happening in their world all about them. Simply and without argument, the Qur’ān says: “Thus shall be the resurrection.”

This scene is used frequently in the Qur’ān for two reasons: first it provides tangible, undeniable evidence and secondly it has a strong influence on people’s hearts and minds when they contemplate it without hindrance. Moreover, it is a beautiful image, particularly in the desert, which looks barren and lifeless today, and then gushes with life the next. In this way the Qur’ān uses the inspiration of things people see all around them. They may ignore them because of familiarity, but when they contemplate them with an alert mind and heart, they appreciate just how miraculous they are.

There is here a sudden jolt as the *sūrah* moves on to speak of might, power and dignity, linking this with good words that are welcome by God and good action that is blessed by Him. The opposite is also shown, whereby wicked scheming leads to ruin:

*Whoever desires might and glory should know that all might and glory belong to God alone. To Him ascends all good words, and He exalts the good deed. For those who plot evil there is severe suffering in store. All their plotting will come to nothing. (Verse 10)*

Perhaps the link between life starting in what is lifeless and a good word and

action is the fact that there is good life in all. There is certainly a strong relation between life and the universe. Allusion to this relation is stated in *Sarah* 14, Abraham: *“Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its roots are firm and its branches reach to the sky. It yields its fruits at all times by its Lord’s leave. Thus does God set parables for people so that they may reflect. And an evil word is like a corrupt tree, torn up onto the face of the earth. It cannot have a stable position.”* (14: 24-26) The relation is almost real in the nature of both the word and the tree: both live and grow.

The idolaters used their idolatry to retain their religious position in Makkah, one which gave them leadership of the Arabian tribes, and which facilitated various privileges. Needless to say, the most important of these were power and glory. Hence they used to say to the Prophet: *“If we were to follow the guidance along with you, we would be torn away from our land.”* (28: 57) Therefore, God tells them: *“Whoever desires might and glory should know that all might and glory belong to God alone.”* (Verse 10)

When this fact is well established in people’s hearts and minds, it ensures that values, standards, as well as means and methods undergo a complete change. The truth is that might and glory belong totally to God. No one else possesses a shred of either. Therefore, if anyone wants them, and they are incidentally expressed in one Arabic word, *‘izzah*, which combines both and adds connotations of dignity, then they should seek them from their only source: God Almighty. They cannot be found with anyone else.

The Quraysh sought to enjoy might and glory among the Arabs through idolatrous beliefs that lacked real substance. They feared to follow divine guidance, even though they acknowledged that it was guidance, because they feared for their own status. Yet those people, the Arabian tribes and clans, were not a source of might and glory. They could not give or deny these to anyone: *“all might and glory belong to God alone.”* (Verse 10) If they enjoyed any measure of power and might, it was only because God gave them this. Therefore, anyone who wishes to have these should go to the original source, not to a recipient of that source. Recipients can only give what they have in excess. Besides, recipients are also weak and in need.

This is an essential truth of Islamic faith which establishes values, standards, judgement, behaviour, ways and means. When this truth is firmly rooted in one’s heart, one does not hesitate to stand up in dignity and glory to the rest of the world, knowing from whom one derives might and glory. Such a person does not bow before any despot, storm, calamity, state, or worldly force whatsoever. Why would they when all might and glory belong to God alone, and when no one receives any portion of it without His leave?

This is the reason good words and right actions are mentioned here: *“To Him*

*ascends all good words, and He exalts the good deed.*" (Verse 10) This is mentioned here for a purpose: it is a reference to the means by which might and glory are assured for those who seek it from God. Good words and good deeds which are allowed to ascend to God where they are received with honour that reflects on the speaker who says the good word and does the good work.

True *`izzah*, combining all connotations of dignity and glory, is first established in one's heart before it takes any form in the outside world. When it is so established, the person concerned rises above all considerations that cause humiliation and prostration before anyone other than God. He rises first of all above his own fears, desires and ambitions that may be gratified by others. When he has done this, no one will ever be able to humiliate or subjugate him. People are only humbled by their desires, fears and ambitions. Should these be held in check, that person will retain his glory and dignity in all situations and with all people. This is indeed true might, glory and dignity.

True *`izzah* is not stubbornness that seeks strength through falsehood, or tyranny that uses brutal force to silence others, or an overwhelming upsurge motivated by desire, or a blind force that pays no heed to right and justice. It is none of this. It is the ability to rise above one's own desires, rejecting fetters and humiliations, and refusing to submit to any other than God. It also means submitting only to God, fearing Him alone and obeying Him in all situations. It is through submission to God alone that our heads are raised high, and through fearing Him that we can stand up to whatever He disapproves of. Our watching Him also means that we care nothing for anything other than earning His pleasure. This then explains the relation between the good word and deed on the one hand and might, glory and dignity on the other.

The opposite picture is then given: *"For those who plot evil there is severe suffering in store. All their plotting will come to nothing."* (Verse 10) Such people will see that their plots and schemes yield no fruit and end in failure, and that they will endure severe suffering as a result. We note here the contrasting image which brings life to a lifeless land.

These people plot evil because they are after false power and imagined glory. They may appear to have power at their command, but it is the good word and deed that ascend to God and through which we receive *'izzah* in its full sense. Evil schemes and plots cannot achieve this, even though they may occasionally be coupled with physical power. Their assured end, however, is ruin and severe suffering. This is God's promise that never fails.

## **Man's Creation**

Having referred to the fact that all life starts with water, the *sūrah* now refers to the

start of man's own life, beginning with pregnancy and followed by a term in this world, which can be long or short as God determines:

*It is God who creates you all out of dust, then out of a gamete. He then makes you into a couple. No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge. No one attains to old age or has his life cut short unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree. All this is easy for God. (Verse 11)*

Reference to man's origin as a creature made from dust in the first place is often mentioned in the Qur'ān, as is the first element in producing a pregnancy, namely the gamete. While a gamete is something that carries the potential of life, dust has no trace of life. The first miracle is life' itself, and no one knows where it came from or how it was mixed with the first element. This remains a closed book as far as humanity is concerned. Yet it is a fact we all see and have no option but to accept and recognize. The evidence it provides, pointing to the Creator who gives life, is irrefutable.

The transformation that gives life to what is lifeless represents a bridge over a gap that is far greater than any distance in time and place. Contemplating such transformation will never tire a mind that looks at the great secrets of the universe. Again, the gap separating the stage of one cell, a gamete, from that of a fully formed embryo, when a male is distinguished from a female, is again too wide to imagine. It is to this latter stage that the Qur'ān refers in the sentence, "He makes you into pairs (males and females)," whether this is a reference to a couple, male and female, in the embryo stage, or to married couples after they have become adults. How far removed is the one-cell gamete from the greatly complex human constitution which includes numerous systems and functions, and also from a human being with its many characteristics?

Look at the senseless fertilized egg as it divides and multiplies, and then each group of cells it produces joining together to form a particular organ with a specific nature and function. Look how all these organs fit together and group to make a single creature which is remarkably distinct from all other creatures of the human race, including those who are most closely related to him. Thus, no two human beings are exactly and completely identical. Yet all of them come from gametes that carry no distinctive mark of any sort, or at least that we can make out. Then look at these cells and follow their way until they become couples able to restart the cycle once more, with new gametes that follow the same line and the same stages, without deviation. All this is amazing, truly wonderful. This is the reason for the repeated references in the Qur'ān to this miraculous process, or indeed processes, involving unknown secrets. People should listen to these references and set their minds thinking about this process of creation. It may awaken their spirits to its message.

Next comes an image of God's absolute knowledge, which is akin to the images given in the preceding *sūrah*, Sheba: "No female conceives or gives birth without His knowledge." (Verse 11) The reference here is not merely to women, but to all females, including animals, birds, fish, reptiles, insects and others which we may or may not know about. All of them conceive and give birth, including those which lay eggs. An egg is an embryo which does not fully develop inside its mother's body. It is laid in the form of an egg, and is then incubated, either by its mother or in an incubator, until it completes its development, and breaks its shell to continue its growth. God's knowledge includes every conception, of every form, and every birth throughout the universe.

Describing God's absolute knowledge in this way is not something a human mind normally follows, neither in conception nor expression.

By itself it is proof that the Qur'ān is revelation from God: it confirms its divine source thereby.

The same applies to the reference to age in the same verse: "No one attains to old age or has his life cut short unless it be thus laid down in [God's] decree. All this is easy for God." (Verse 11) Let our imagination follow every living thing in the universe, including trees, birds, animals, humans and others, with their different shapes, sizes, kinds, races, abodes and times. No one can imagine the total number of all these. Yet imagine that every single one of them may be allowed to attain to old age, or may have its life cut short, and that whatever happens is according to specific knowledge concerning this individual, and indeed concerning every part of every individual. A leaf in a tree may be allowed to remain green, extending its life span, or it may dry up and fall. A bird's feather may remain in its wing or fall and be blown by the wind. A horn may remain in an animal or get broken in a quarrel. A human *eye*, or a hair, may stay or be removed. Yet all this occurs in accordance with specific knowledge which is 'laid down in God's decree' that is part of His comprehensive knowledge. It neither requires an effort nor constitutes a burden: "All this is easy for God." (Verse 11)

If we let our imagination follow this line and look at what it entails, our amazement is endless. It is a line that human imagination does not normally follow, nor does it normally try to understand or describe facts in this way.

The Arabic verb *nu`ammir*, which is translated as 'attain to old age', also connotes blessing someone's life so as to use one's days and years in what is useful and beneficial, as well as filling it with feelings, actions and lasting benefits. Likewise, cutting one's life short may mean giving that person a shorter number of years to live or making his life devoid of blessing so as to spend his days producing nothing of real value. A blessed hour that is full of useful action, ideas and feelings may be equal to a complete lifetime, while a whole year may be spent without recording

anything of value either in human life's measure or in God's scales. Yet everything any human being thinks or does anywhere in the universe is recorded by God.

Nations and communities are the same as individuals: they may live long or have their lives cut short. Hence, the Qur'ānic statement includes them, as indeed it includes inanimate objects, such as rocks, caves and rivers which could have a long or short life span. Likewise, man-made things, such as buildings, machines and appliances, clothes, etc., may all live long or short lives. Every life duration, of every creature and every thing, is recorded in God's book. This belongs to His absolute and infinite knowledge.

When we look at things in this light, we feel we want to contemplate the universe in a new way. Anyone who feels that God's hand and eye controls everything in such a meticulous manner will hardly ever forget or go astray. He will see God's hand, power and care in everything around him. This is the effect the Qur'ān has on people's hearts and minds.

### **Different Waters**

The *sūrah* then focuses on a different phenomenon we all see, which is water and its varieties. One type of water is sweet and palatable while the other is bitter and salty. They go their separate ways, or meet together, by God's will, serving man's needs:

*The two great bodies of water on earth are not alike: one is palatable, sweet and pleasant to drink, and the other is salty and bitter. Yet from each you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments to wear. You also see there ships that plough their course through them so that you may go in quest of some of His bounty and be grateful. (Verse 12)*

That God wanted water to be of different types is clear. That such variety serves a definite purpose is also something we should be clear about. We know some aspects of the wisdom behind providing sweet, palatable water, since we use it for different purposes. It is indeed essential for life. As for the other type of water, which is bitter and salty, filling seas and oceans, we may quote a few lines from a famous scientist explaining this immaculate design:

In spite of all the gaseous emanations from the earth of all the ages, most of them poisonous, the atmosphere remains practically uncontaminated and unchanging in its balanced relationship necessary to man's very existence.

The great balance wheel is that vast mass of water, the sea, from which have come life, food, rain, temperate climate, plants, animals, and ultimately man

himself. Let him who comprehends this stand in awe before its majesty and gratefully acknowledge his obligations.<sup>10</sup>

This is some of what we have been able to understand of the purpose behind the diversity of creation. It is clear that it is all done for a specific reason aiming to achieve harmony and balance, which allows the overall system of the universe to function. This can only be done by the Creator of the universe and everything that lives in it. Such a meticulously accurate system cannot come about by sheer coincidence. The reference to the difference in the two great bodies of water suggests that, like every other variation, it is done deliberately. Later on, the *sūrah* refers to some aspects of this variety in the realm of feelings, values and standards.

The two different bodies of water are shown as united in being subjected to man: *“Yet from each you eat fresh meat and extract ornaments to wear. You also see there ships that plough their course through them.”* (Verse 12) The fresh meat refers to fish and the great variety of marine animals, while the ornaments refer to pearls and corals. Pearls are found in the body of certain bivalve molluscs. It is a hard smooth round iridescent mass, formed of layers of calcium carbonate deposited around a foreign body in the shell of these molluscs. After a while it solidifies in the form of a pearl, which is valued as a gem for its lustre. Coral is a sort of plant made by marine polyps which can become extensive reefs stretching over an area of several miles. It can also present a hazard to shipping and to any foreign creature that falls within it. It can be cut by special methods and is often used in jewellery and ornamentation.

Ships plough their way through rivers and seas, benefiting by what God has given every creature of characteristics and qualities. The density of the water and the substances used in shipbuilding is a factor in making ships float and move. Another factor is wind. Other forces may be used to achieve this useful condition, such as electric and steam power. All are subjected to man’s will by God.

*“So that you may go in quest of some of His bounty and be grateful.”* (Verse 12) Thus you may use both bodies of water to travel and do business, as also find food and nourishment. It behoves you to be grateful to God for all this bounty, which is made available to you.

This part concludes on another universal beat that mentions the alternation of day and night, and the subjection of the sun and the moon to the divine system until their appointed time: *“He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has made the sun and the moon subservient [to His laws], each running its course in an appointed term.”* (Verse 13) The passing of the day and the night into each other may be a reference to the two spectacular scenes when the night creeps into the

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<sup>10</sup> A. Cressy Morrison, *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, London, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1944, p. 28.



day, with its light gradually diminishing and the darkness increasing until the sun has disappeared followed by the darkness moving in and slowly spreading its wings. The other scene witnesses the start of the day creeping into the night, with the first breath of dawn. The light then begins to gradually spread while the darkness bit by bit disappears. Then the sun rises and the day is resplendent with brightness. Alternatively, the Qur'ānic expression may refer to the night as it takes a bite out of the day, as if it is going into the day, and also the day getting longer as it takes one bite after another off the night. It could also mean both situations at the same time, describing them together. All these scenes have a profound effect on our hearts, spreading a feeling of awe and even fear as we see God's hand pulling one line here and relaxing one there in a fine, accurate and balanced system that does not miss a tick day after day, century after century.

Again making the sun and the moon subservient to God's law and setting them on their courses until the appointed term, known only to God, is another phenomenon that everyone of us sees. They appear and disappear, rise and set before everyone. Their unflinching movements do not require any knowledge or calculation to contemplate. They serve as signs for all generations to contemplate. We may know about them more than what the first people addressed by the Qur'ān knew, but this is not the point. What is important is that these phenomena give us the same inspiration as they gave them. They certainly motivate us to contemplate the work of God's hand in the universe.

### **Thus is God**

Concluding these inspiring scenes, the *sūrah* states the truth of God's Lordship over the universe. It also states the falsehood of every claim of partnership with God, and its ultimate and miserable result on the Day of Judgement:

*Thus is God, your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion, while those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own even the skin of a date-stone. If you invoke them they cannot hear your call. Even if they could hear, they would not respond to you. On the Day of Resurrection they will utterly disown your having associated them with God. None can give you information like the One who is all-aware. (Verses 13-14)*

The One who sends the wind driving the clouds, makes the dead land quicken, creates you out of dust, makes you in pairs, knows what each female bears and gives birth to, what gets a long life or a short one, has created the two great bodies of water, causes the day and night to pass into each other and makes the sun and the moon subservient to His law: that One is "your Lord: to Him belongs all dominion, while those whom you invoke instead of Him do not own even the skin of a date-stone." (Verse 13)

They do not even own such a trifling thing as a date-stone.

The *sūrah* goes further in drawing a true image of them: *“If you invoke them they cannot hear your call.”* (Verse 14) They are statues, idols, trees, stars, angels or *jinn*; and none of them actually owns the skin of a date-stone. None of them can respond to those who worship them, but, *“Even if they could hear, they would not respond to you.”* (Verse 14) This applies, for example, to the *jinn* and the angels. The *jinn* cannot respond, while the angels do not respond to those who have gone astray. All this is relevant to this present life, but on the Day of Judgement they disassociate themselves from error and those who follow it: *“On the Day of Resurrection they will utterly disown your having associated them with God.”* (Verse 14) This is stated by the One who knows everything in this life and beyond it, who overlooks nothing in the universe now or in the life to come: *“None can give you information like the One who is all-aware.”* (Verse 14)

So does this passage conclude. It only remains to be said that it gives any human mind enough to last a lifetime. Indeed, it is sufficient for any human heart to listen carefully to a single passage of any *sūrah* if he is seeking proof and searching for guidance.

## 4

# Individual Responsibility

*People! It is you who stand in need of God, whereas He alone is free of all wants, worthy of all praise. (15)*

*If He so wishes, He can do away with you and bring in your place a new creation; (16)*

*this is not difficult for God. (17)*

*No soul will bear the burden of another. If a heavily laden soul should call upon others for help, nothing of its load shall be carried by anyone, not even by a close relative. Hence, you can truly warn only those who stand in awe of their Lord, even though He is beyond the reach of their perception, and attend regularly to prayers. Whoever purifies himself does so for his own benefit. With God is all journeys' end. (18)*

*The blind and the seeing are not equal; (19)*

*nor are darkness and light; (20)*

*nor the [cooling] shade and the scorching heat; (21)*

*and neither are equal the living and the dead. God can make hear whoever He wills, whereas you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you. (22)*

﴿ يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمْ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴾

﴿ إِنْ يَشَاءُ يُدْهِبْكُمْ وَيَأْتِ بِخَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴾

﴿ وَمَا ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ بِعَزِيزٍ ﴾

﴿ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۗ وَإِنْ تَدْعُ مُثْقَلَةٌ إِلَىٰ جَمَلِهَا لَا تُحْمَلُ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَلَوْ كَانَ ذَا قُرْبَىٰ ۗ إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۗ وَمَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَتَزَكَّىٰ لِنَفْسِهِ ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ ﴾

﴿ وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ ﴾

﴿ وَلَا الظُّلُمَاتُ وَلَا النُّورُ ﴾

﴿ وَلَا الظِّلُّ وَلَا الْحَرُورُ ﴾

﴿ وَمَا يَسْتَوِي الْأَحْيَاءُ وَلَا الْأَمْوَاتُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُسْمِعُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ مَّن فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴾

*You are only a warner. (23)*

*We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of happy news and a warner. There was never a community that has not had a warner. (24)*

*If they accuse you of lying, other communities before them made similar accusations when there came to them messengers with all evidence of the truth, and with books of divine wisdom, and with light-giving revelations; (25)*

*but in the end I took the unbelievers to task: how terrible was My condemnation. (26)*

إِنَّ أَنْتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا ۚ وَإِن مِّنْ أُمَّةٍ إِلَّا خَلَا فِيهَا نَذِيرٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

وَإِن يُكَذِّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَبِالزُّبُرِ وَبِالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

ثُمَّ أَخَذْتُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۗ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٢٦﴾

## Overview

Once more the *sūrah* urges people to look at their relation with God and at themselves. It also comforts the Prophet, seeking to alleviate his distress at their rejection of his message. This is in fact a continuation of the previous passage, but the *sūrah* adds here a reference to the nature of following divine guidance and the nature of going astray. It makes it clear that the difference between them is as profound as the difference between blindness and sight, light and darkness, coolness and scorching heat, life and death. It asserts that following divine guidance, having eyesight, light, cooling shade and being alive are similar, interlinked. Likewise, blindness, darkness, excessive heat and death are similar, interlinked. The passage ends with a reference to the fate met by earlier communities, serving as a warning.

## Replaceable Creation

*People! It is you who stand in need of God, whereas He alone is free of all wants, worthy of all praise. If He so wishes, He can do away with you and bring in your place a new creation; this is not difficult for God. (Verses 15-17)*

People need to be reminded of this truth within the context of God's message, inviting them to accept and follow it, and urging them to abandon the darkness they

are in to emerge into the light of His guidance. They need to be reminded that they are in need of God, while He has no need of them or of anyone else. When they are invited to believe in God, worship Him and praise Him for His bounty and favours, they must remember that He has no need for such worship and praise, because He is the Praised One. They are not immune to whatever God wishes of them. Should He wish, He can take them away and replace them by a new creation, either of their own type or of a totally different type. It is all so easy for Him.

People need to be reminded of this so that they do not give themselves airs. They need to be reminded that God in His limitless glory takes care of them and sends them messengers who strive hard to bring them out of the darkness into the light. They should not feel themselves too important for God, or that their worship or their following His message will increase His kingdom in any way. God is indeed free of all wants and worthy of all praise. God Almighty bestows such great care and mercy on His servants, and adds to this by sending them His messengers who suffer much hardship from those who reject His divine message. It is all part of His essential attributes to give in abundance and without reckoning. The recipients, mere humans, do not contribute anything to God's kingdom by following His guidance, nor do they decrease it in any way when they turn blindly away from it. They are not irreplaceable.

What man receives of God's grace is amazing, considering how man is so small, ignorant and weak a creature. Man is then but a small creature on earth which, in turn, is a small satellite of the sun, which is one of countless stars. Gigantic as they are, stars are no more than small dots scattered in open space, the limits of which are known only to God. Yet this great space in which the stars are thus scattered is merely a small portion of God's creation. Yet man receives all this care from God: He creates him, puts him in charge of the earth, equips him with all he needs to discharge his task, be these in his own constitution or in the things of the universe available to him. Yet this creature goes astray and becomes arrogant to the extent that he denies his Lord, but God nevertheless sends him one messenger after another, giving each books of guidance as well as miracles. God's favours continue and He sends them His final message, in which He gives them accounts of what happened to earlier communities, and speaks to them about themselves, their abilities and potentials, as well as their frailties and weaknesses. He even speaks to particular individuals, saying to one, 'you did this, and you omitted that,' and saying to another, 'here is the solution to your problem, and this is how you relieve your distress.'

Man should remember his position in the universe and reflect upon the fact that he has been given all this care by God. It is He who created this universe, with all that it contains, by merely willing it to be, and He can replace it all in the same way.

People should consider this so they appreciate the extent of God's care and grace. They will then feel ashamed if they turn away from God and deny Him and His grace. Thus we see that these verses represent a confirmed truth in addition to their inspirational effect. The Qur'ān touches people's hearts with hard facts, because fact and truth have a greater effect. Moreover, the Qur'ān is the word of truth, and it was bestowed from on high to lay down this truth. In short, it states nothing but the truth.

### **Everyone on Their Own**

The *sūrah* then emphasizes individual responsibility, which means that everyone will have what they deserve. No one benefits anyone else in any way. The Prophet has no personal interest in guiding people to the truth. Everyone bears his or her own burden, alone, without help. Therefore a person who seeks to be pure will be the only one to benefit from this endeavour. The matter is ultimately left to God to determine:

*No soul will bear the burden of another. If a heavily laden soul should call upon others for help, nothing of its load shall be carried by anyone, not even by a close relative... Whoever purifies himself does so for his own benefit. With God is all journeys' end. (Verse 18)*

The fact of individual responsibility and reward has a decisive effect on morality and behaviour. When people are fully aware that they are rewarded according to their own deeds, that none will be responsible for anyone else, and that none can escape responsibility, they realize the need to take stock of their actions before they have to answer for them. At the same time, this is reassuring, because no individual needs to worry about answering for the actions of his community. As long as he has done his duty, giving advice to his community to follow divine guidance, no further responsibility is laid on him. God Almighty does not hold mankind to account for their collective actions. They account to Him individually, each for their own work. It is the duty of the individual to advise others and try hard to bring them into line. Once he has done this, however, he bears no responsibility for their wickedness or corruption. He will be credited for his own good work. Similarly, if he lives in a good community, its goodness will not benefit him if he himself is wicked.

We see, then, an image of a multitude, each person carrying his or her own burden, with none able to help others. Even if someone requests help from the closest of relatives, none will oblige. It is thus a long queue, with people carrying loads and moving towards the check-point where the load will be weighed. Everyone is tired, preoccupied with the heaviness of their load, unable to think of others, even their

own kin.

At this point, the *sūrah's* address is directed to the Prophet: *"Hence, you can truly warn only those who stand in awe of their Lord, even though He is beyond the reach of their perception, and attend regularly to prayers."* (Verse 18) It is such people that can really appreciate the warning: they are the ones who fear God even though they have not seen Him, and who attend to their worship so as to maintain relations with Him. The Prophet is told that these are the ones to benefit by admonition. Others, who have no fear of God, need not worry him.

*"Whoever purifies himself does so for his own benefit."* No one receives the benefit of purification except the one who does it. Moreover, purification has pleasant and transparent connotations that apply to one's heart, thoughts, feelings, behaviour and attitudes. *"With God is all journeys' end."* (Verse 18) He is the one who reckons people's actions and rewards them accordingly. Nothing good or evil is overlooked.

Needless to say, with God belief and unbelief, good and evil, guidance and error cannot be treated on an equal basis. In the same way, blindness and sight, darkness and light, coolness and heat, life and death are unequal. All have essentially different qualities:

*The blind and the seeing are not equal; nor are darkness and light; nor the [cooling! shade and the scorching heat; and neither are equal the living and the dead. (Verses 19-22)*

There is a close link between the nature of unbelief and the nature of blindness, darkness, scorching heat and death, just as there is a contrasting link between the nature of belief and that of clear sight, light, cool shade and life.

Faith is a light that penetrates into the heart, the senses and perceptions so as to give a true assessment of things, values, events and how they interact. A believer looks at things in this light, which is God's light, and determines how to approach and deal with them in an assured, confident way. Faith also provides a believer with a quality of sight that gives a clear picture of things that is neither hazy nor blurred. Furthermore, it provides a cooling shade in which a believer can take refuge from the burning heat of anxiety, doubt and worry. Faith is a light that touches hearts, feelings and purposes, and it is constructive action that never stops to build, allowing no waste.

By contrast, unbelief is blindness. It prevents people from seeing the evidence in support of faith and recognizing the true nature of the universe, its relations, values, and events. It is also a darkness: when people move away from the light of faith, they fall into different types of darkness making it difficult for them to see things with any degree of accuracy. Furthermore, unbelief is a hot desert where burning doubts and

worry over one's origin and destiny compound to eventually lead the unbeliever to the fire of hell. Finally, unbelief is death because it separates the unbeliever from the true source of life, making him unable to interact in any way that promotes life. Each type has its distinctive nature, and its special reward. The two cannot be equal in God's sight.

At this point the *sūrah* addresses the Prophet, comforting him and outlining his terms of reference. He is to do what has been assigned to him and leave matters to God. It is He who will do whatever He determines.

*God can make hear whoever He wills, whereas you cannot make those who are in their graves hear you. You are only a warner. We have sent you with the truth, as a bearer of happy news and a warner. There was never a community that has not had a warner. If they accuse you of lying, other communities before them made similar accusations when there came to them messengers with all evidence of the truth, and with books of divine wisdom, and with light-giving revelations; but in the end I took the unbelievers to task: how terrible was My condemnation. (Verses 22-26)*

Differences between opposites, whether in the universe or within the human soul, are clear and deeply rooted. Similarly genuine and firm are the differences between people and the way they receive God's message. It all refers to God's will, purpose, wisdom and power. God's Messenger, then, is no more than a warner. His human task is limited to this. He cannot make grave dwellers hear him. Those who live with dead hearts are in the same position: cold and gravelike. It is God alone who can make hear whomever He wills, in the way He chooses. Why should the Prophet, then, worry about who chooses to go astray, about who turns away from divine guidance. All he has to do is to discharge the duties assigned to him to the best of his abilities. Once he has delivered his message, let people choose whether to respond or not.

Earlier in the *sūrah*, God says to the Prophet: "do not waste yourself sorrowing for them." (Verse 8) God sent him, like his brothers the earlier messengers, with the truth. They were many, because: "There was never a community that has not had a warner." (Verse 24) If he is met with rejection and people accuse him of lying, this is all in the nature of things, and earlier messengers met the same type of reception, through no fault of theirs, or lack of supporting evidence: "If they accuse you of lying, other communities before them made similar accusations when there came to them messengers with all evidence of the truth, and with books of divine wisdom, and with light-giving revelations." (Verse 25) Such evidence could be of various types, including the miracles they demanded or were given to God's messengers in support of their messages. The hooks refer to whatever different prophets were given of wisdom, directives and admonition. The 'light-giving revelations' refer most probably to the Torah. Yet such



communities denied it all.

There was thus nothing new in how the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was received. Therefore, the *sūrah* mentions the fate of earlier communities to warn the new unbelievers: “*But in the end I took the unbelievers to task.*” (Verse 26) This is followed by a question that gives a sense of gravity and intimates the most horrible of ends: “*How terrible was My condemnation.*” (Verse 26) The condemnation was final, one whereby the unbelievers met their total destruction. Those latter day unbelievers should therefore take the warning seriously and make sure that they do not meet the same fate.

## Reciters of God's Revelations

*Are you not aware that God sends down water from the skies, with which We bring forth fruits of different colours? In the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as others jet-black. (27)*

*Similarly, human beings, beasts and cattle have various colours. It is those who are endowed with knowledge that stand truly in awe of God. Indeed God is Almighty, Much-Forgiving. (28)*

*Those who recite God's book, attend regularly to prayer, and give in charity, secretly and openly, from what We have provided for them, look forward to a bargain that can never fail, (29)*

*for He will grant them their just rewards, and give them yet more out of His bounty. He is indeed Much-Forgiving, most thankful. (30)*

*The book that We have revealed to you is the truth confirming previous scriptures. Of His servants God is well-aware, all-seeing. (31)*

*We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We choose: among them are some who wrong their own souls, some follow a middle course; and some who, by God's leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness. That is the greatest favour. (32)*

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً  
فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ ثَمَرَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَانُهَا وَمِنَ  
الْجِبَالِ جُدُدٌ بَيْضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهَا  
وَعَرَابِيبٌ سُودٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالْدَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ  
مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ  
مِنَ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ  
غَفُورٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَتْلُونَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَأَقَامُوا  
الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْفَقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ سِرًّا  
وَعَلَانِيَةً يَرِجُونَ تِجْرَةً لَن تَبُورَ ﴿٢٩﴾

لِيُؤْفِقَهُمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَيَزِيدَهُم مِّن فَضْلِهِ  
إِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٣٠﴾

وَالَّذِي أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ هُوَ  
الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ  
بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٣١﴾

*Gardens of bliss will they enter, where they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and where they will be clad in silke garments. (33)*

*They will say: All praise is due to God, who has removed all sorrow from us. Our Lord is certainly Much-Forgiving, most appreciative. (34)*

*it is He who, out of His bounty, has settled us in this abode of permanent life, where we shall endure neither toil nor fatigue.’ (35)*

*As for the unbelievers, the fire of hell awaits them. No term shall be determined for them so that they could die, nor shall its suffering be reduced for them. Thus shall We requite all unbelievers. (36)*

*There they will cry aloud: ‘Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before.’ Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? And a warner had come to you. Taste it, then. Wrongdoers shall have none to support them.’ (37)*

ثُمَّ أَوْرَثْنَا الْكِتَابَ الَّذِينَ اصْطَفَيْنَا مِنْ  
عِبَادِنَا فَمِنْهُمْ ظَالِمٌ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمِنْهُمْ  
مُقْتَصِدٌ وَمِنْهُمْ سَابِقٌ بِالْخَيْرَاتِ بإِذْنِ اللَّهِ  
ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٣﴾

جَنَّتٍ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ  
أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا  
حَرِيرٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ  
إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ ﴿٣٥﴾

الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ لَا  
يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ  
وَالَّذِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ  
فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِهَا  
كَذَٰلِكَ نُجْزِي كُلَّ كُفُورٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

وَهُمْ يَصْطَرِحُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا  
نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ  
أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَنْ تَذَكَّرَ  
وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ  
مِنْ نَصِيرٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

*God knows all that is hidden in the heavens and earth; He fully knows what is in people's hearts.*  
(38)

إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ غَيْبِ السَّمَوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٣٨﴾

## Overview

This new passage is composed of readings from the book of the universe and the revealed book. We look at the wonderful pages of this book: its great variety of colours, species and kinds; fruits of every colour; mountains with colourful passages, as also people, animals and cattle of different hues. It is a highly effective touch, drawing our attention to the wonderful and natural world of colour that we tend to overlook.

The passage adds readings from God's revealed book, confirming the truth it contains and an endorsement of what had gone before it of revelations. It speaks about how this book has been granted to the Muslim community as its rightful legacy, making it clear that the heirs are of different classes, but that they all expect to receive God's pardon and forgiveness of sins. An image of their enjoyment of God's favours in the life to come is painted to contrast with an image of what awaits the unbelievers of punishment. This round, rich in colour, is concluded by a statement that all takes place in accordance with God's knowledge.

## Colour in All Creation

*Are you not aware that God sends down water from the skies, with which We bring forth fruits of different colours? In the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as others jet-black. Similarly, human beings, beasts and cattle have various colours. It is those who are endowed with knowledge that stand truly in awe of God. Indeed God is Almighty, Much-Forgiving. (Verses 27-28)*

This is a remarkable touch confirming the source of the Qur'an. It looks at the entire world with a special focus on colour, pointing out its great variety in fruits, mountains, people, animals and cattle. It only takes a few words to group together animate and inanimate objects throughout the earth, leaving us in full amazement at this wonderful exhibition.

It all begins with water being sent down from the skies, and the fruits that it brings forth with their rich variety of hue. Because the exhibition intended here concentrates on visual imagery, the only quality given to the fruits is their colour:

*"We bring forth fruits of different colours."* (Verse 27) The colours of these fruits combine a grading that cannot be reproduced, even partially, by any painter. No two types of fruits are of the same colour. In fact, no two pieces of the same type of fruit are identical in colour. Good scrutiny will reveal variation even on such a scale.

The *sūrah* then switches, almost suddenly, to refer to the colours of mountains. A close palette study, however, shows that this is a perfectly natural switch. There is a close similarity between the richness of colour in fruits and its richness in mountain rocks. Some rocks may even resemble fruit both in shape and in size, so that they can sometimes be mistaken for fruit. *"In the mountains there are streaks of white and red of various shades, as well as others jet-black."* (Verse 27) The 'streaks' refer to lines and courses in mountains. The text here refers to a fine point: the white lines contain different shades of whiteness, while the red ones contain different red shades, and both differ in the richness of colour and in the mix of other colours that give them their special appeal. There are other streaks of very black colour.

The switch to this colour diversity in rocks, after having highlighted such diversity in fruits has a profound effect. It alerts in us a refined sense of the aesthetic which sees beauty in a rock just as it appreciates it in a fruit, despite the great difference between the two in nature and function. In this way we are reminded to better appreciate our surroundings, not least their aesthetic beauty.

The *sūrah* also mentions people's colours, which are not limited to the major categories that distinguish different racial groups. Indeed every human being has a distinctive colour separating him or her from the rest of their race. Indeed, it distinguishes each twin from the other. The same applies to animals and cattle. Cattle, which include camels, cows, sheep and goats, are mentioned as a separate category of fauna because they are much closer to man. They also demonstrate a similarly great diversity of colour.

The universe is thus shown as a splendidly colourful book which the Qur'ān opens and looks through. It then says that scholars who read, appreciate and comprehend this book are the ones who have a true God-fearing sense: *"It is those who are endowed with knowledge that stand truly in awe of God."* (Verse 28) The universe is a superb hook of which the *sūrah* has shown but a few pages. It takes a good measure of knowledge to appreciate this wonderful hook and to get to truly know God through His creation and power. People who do so realize the measure of His greatness by appreciating His work. Therefore, they are truly God-fearing, and they worship Him in true submission. This is not the result of a mysterious feeling that we sometimes experience when we look at a splendid natural scene; rather, it is the product of true and direct knowledge. The pages of this universal book that the *sūrah* has shown are only a sample. The great diversity of colour it has mentioned serves only as an indicator of the great variety and meticulous harmony available

everywhere in the universe. It can however only be appreciated by people endowed with knowledge and by those who feel the value of their knowledge deep in their hearts, and who do not leave it in a cold, dry academic corner.

The aesthetic element is intentionally added into the design of the universe. Its beauty, however, is raised to perfection by the fact that different things discharge their functions through that very beauty. The splendid colours of flowers, along with their scents, attract bees and butterflies which, as far as the flower is concerned, are the means of inoculation, so as to ensure fruition. Thus the flower completes its own function through its very beauty. In sex, beauty is the main attraction which leads to the couple fulfilling their task of reproduction. Because beauty is intended, the Qur'ān draws our attentions to it in these various ways.

*"Indeed God is Almighty, Much-Forgiving."* (Verse 28) He is certainly able to create all sorts of fine and beautiful creatures, as also to requite people for their actions. At the same time, He forgives much, overlooking the mistakes of those who fall short of appreciating His beautiful work.

### **The Revealed Book**

Having looked at these pages of the book of the universe, the *sūrah* turns to the revealed book and those who recite it, their hopes and expected rewards:

*Those who recite God's book, attend regularly to prayer, and give in charity, secretly and openly, from what We have provided for them, look forward to a bargain that can never fail, for He will grant them their just rewards, and give them yet more out of His bounty. He is indeed Much-Forgiving, most thankful (Verses 29-30)*

Reciting God's book means something other than going through its words, vocalizing them or not; it means reading with reflection that leads to understanding, action and behaviour. This also entails attending regularly to prayer, giving secretly and openly in charity, as well as entertaining the hope that what is so offered will never be a failed bargain. Those who do all this know that what God has in store is far more valuable than what they give away. As they give only for God's sake, dealing with Him directly, their bargain is especially profitable. Ultimately, they will receive their reward in full, coupled with an increase of God's bounty. For, *"He is indeed Much-Forgiving, most thankful."* (Verse 30) He forgives shortfalls and appreciates good action. His being thankful refers to what is normally associated with gratitude for pleasure and fine reward. Yet the verse inspires us to be grateful to Him who bestows His favours on us. If He appreciates what His servants do and thanks them for it, should they not then show their gratitude for all He gives them?

This is followed by a reference to the nature of God's revealed book and the truth it contains, as a prelude to speaking about those who are the heirs to this book:

*The book that We have revealed to you is the truth confirming previous scriptures. Of His servants God is well-aware, all-seeing. (Verse 31)*

The evidence of the truth in this book is clear in its make up. The Qur'ān is an accurate translation of the universe in its true nature, or we can say that it is the spoken page while the universe is the silent page. Moreover, it confirms the books revealed earlier from the same source. The truth is one; it cannot be multiple. The One who revealed it to mankind knows them well, knows what suits them and improves their lot: "*Of His servants God is well-aware, all-seeing.*" (Verse 31)

Such is this book, and God has given it to the Muslim community as its heritage. He has chosen this community to be its heir, as He states in His book: "*We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We choose.*" (Verse 32) The Muslim community should know from these words that it has been given a position of honour by God. It should also realize that the responsibility it shoulders as a result is of great importance. It is a responsibility which assigns duties that have to be fulfilled. Will the Muslim community listen and respond?

God has honoured the Muslim community. He has chosen it to be the heir to His message, and He has graced it with a favourable reward, even for those who do not perform well:

*We have given this Book to such of Our servants as We choose: among them are some who wrong their own souls, some follow a middle course and some who, by God's leave, are foremost in deeds of goodness. (Verse 32)*

The group mentioned first, probably because it is the majority, are the ones who *wrong their own souls,*' by doing more bad things than good, and the second have a balance between the two, following *'a middle course,'* while the third are *'foremost in deeds of goodness,'* having a preponderance of these. However, God's grace is bestowed on all three, leading them all to heaven where they experience the bliss described in the verses that follow. We will not go into any further detail here, preferring to leave the discussion with the idea conveyed by the verse, making it clear that the Muslim community head to this end in its entirety by God's grace:

*That is the greatest favour. Gardens of bliss will they enter, where they will be adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and where they will be clad in silk garments. They will say: All praise is due to God, who has removed all sorrow from us. Our Lord is certainly Much-Forgiving, most appreciative. It is He who, out of His bounty, has*

*settled us in this abode of permanent life, where we shall endure neither toil nor fatigue. (Verses 32-35)*

These verses give us an image of material comfort and psychological bliss. They are *'adorned with bracelets of gold and pearls, and they will be clad in silk garments,'* which are aspects of the material comfort that satisfies some of what people desire. Coupled with this are feelings of security, reassurance and gratification: *"They will say: All praise is due to God, who has removed all sorrow from us."* (Verse 34) This present life, with all that it involves of worry about the future and all its struggles, counts as sorrow when it is compared to the enduring bliss in heaven. Moreover, the worry each individual experiences on the Day of Judgement concerning their fate is also a source of great sorrow. *"Our Lord is certainly Much-Forgiving, most appreciative."* (Verse 34) He has forgiven us our sins and appreciated our work, rewarding us well for it. *"It is He who has settled us in this abode of permanent life,"* where we shall permanently reside. It is all *'out of His bounty'*. We have no right to claim. It is He who gives it all by His grace. *"Where we shall endure neither toil nor fatigue."* (Verse 35) There we have all we need: comfort, bliss and reassurance.

The ambience generated here is one of ease, comfort and bliss. The words are chosen for their sound so as to enhance such feelings. Heaven is described as the *abode of permanent life'* while toil and fatigue do not come near them. In this way the music of these verses is slow and soft.

On the other side we see the unbelievers wracked with worry, lacking confidence, and unable to see an end to their troubles: *"As for the unbelievers, the fire of hell awaits them. No term shall be determined for them so that they could die, nor shall its suffering be reduced for them."* (Verse 36) Not even the comfort of death is granted them. *"Thus shall We requite all unbelievers."* (Verse 36) Then we begin to hear loud, harsh voices. The echoes are mixed, the wailing confused, and it comes from those who have been thrown into hell: *"There they will cry aloud."* What are these harsh voices saying, then? They say: *"Our Lord! Let us out and we will do good, not like what we did before."* (Verse 37) This is an expression of regret for what they did in the past, but it is all too late. Hence, the reply carries a strong reproach: *"Have We not given you lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning?"* (Verse 37) You did not benefit from the duration of your lives on earth, which was enough for anyone who wished to heed the warnings. *"And a warner had come to you."* This was in addition to the warnings. Yet you paid no heed. *"Taste it, then. Wrongdoers shall have none to support them."* (Verse 37)

These are two contrasting images: one of peace, comfort and security and the other full of worry and insecurity. The melodious sound of gratitude to God and of praying to Him is contrasted with screams and cries for help. The image of care and



honour shown to the believers is the opposite of the neglect and reproach the unbelievers experience. The soft and quiet rhythm contrasts with the violent rhythm. Thus the comparison is complete, and overall harmony is maintained both in detail and in general atmosphere.

We then have a comment on all these scenes and images, as well as what has preceded them of choosing the Muslim community for its task: *"God knows all that is hidden in the heavens and earth; He filly knows what is in people's hearts."* (Verse 38)

It is God who knows everything in the universe and what is in people's hearts. On the basis of His knowledge, He judges all matters.

## The Fate of Evil Design

*It is He who made you inherit the earth. Hence, anyone who denies the truth will bear the consequences of his unbelief. In denying Him the unbelievers will have nothing but an increase of their loathsomeness in God's sight; and in denying Him the unbelievers will only add to their loss. (39)*

*Say: 'Have you considered those beings whom you claim to be partners with God and whom you call upon beside Him? Show me what it is that they have created on earth! Or do they have a share in the heavens?' Have We ever vouchsafed them a book on which they could rely as evidence? No. What the unbelievers promise one another is nothing but delusion. (40)*

*It is God alone who holds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their courses]. If they should ever deviate, no one else could uphold them after Him. He is indeed Ever-Forbearing, Much-Forbearing. (41)*

*They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if a warner should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better than some other community, but when a warner did come to them, they turned away with increased aversion, (42)*

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
فَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَعَلَيْهِ كُفْرُهُ وَلَا يَزِيدُ  
الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا مَقْتًا وَلَا  
يَزِيدُ الْكَافِرِينَ كُفْرَهُمْ إِلَّا حَسَارًا ﴿٣٩﴾

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ شُرَكَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ  
دُونِ اللَّهِ أَرُونِي مَاذَا خَلَقُوا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ  
أَمْ لَهُمْ شِرْكٌ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَمْ آتَيْنَهُمْ  
كِتَابًا فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْهُ بَلْ إِنْ يَعِدُ  
الظَّالِمُونَ بَعْضُهُمْ بَعْضًا إِلَّا غُرُورًا ﴿٤٠﴾

﴿٤١﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ  
أَنْ تَزُولَا وَلَئِنْ زَالَتَا إِنْ أَمْسَكَهُمَا مِنْ  
أَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا ﴿٤١﴾

وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَئِنْ  
جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ لَيَكُونُنَّ أَهْدَىٰ مِنْ إِحْدَى  
الْأُمَمِ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ نَذِيرٌ مَّا زَادَهُمْ إِلَّا  
نُفُورًا ﴿٤٢﴾

*behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting evil. Yet such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors. Can they expect anything but the way of those unbelievers of old times? No change will you ever find in God's ways; no deviation will you ever find there. (43)*

*Have they not travelled in the land and seen what happened in the end to those before them, even though they were much mightier than them? God can never be foiled by anything whatever in the heavens and the earth. He is All-Knowing, infinite in His power. (44)*

*If God were to punish people [at once] for the wrongs they do, He would not leave a single living creature on the surface of the earth. However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him]. When their term comes to an end, [they realize that] God has all His servants in His sight. (45)*

أَسْتَكْبَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَكْرَ السَّيِّئِ ۚ وَلَا  
تَحِيقُ الْمَكْرُ السَّيِّئُ إِلَّا بِأَهْلِهِ ۚ فَهَلْ  
يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا سُنَّتَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ۚ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ  
لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا ۗ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّتِ اللَّهِ  
تَحْوِيلًا ﴿٤٣﴾

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ  
كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَكَانُوا أَشَدَّ  
مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً ۚ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُعْجِزَهُ مِنْ  
شَيْءٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ إِنَّهُ  
كَانَ عَلِيمًا قَدِيرًا ﴿٤٤﴾

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا  
تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهَرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ  
يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ فَإِذَا جَاءَ  
أَجَلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بَعِيدًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

## Overview

This last passage of the *sūrah* includes several rounds that go far and wide, inspiring our hearts and minds. One round looks at humanity and how one generation succeeds another. Another takes us across the heavens and earth in search of any trace of those whom the unbelievers allege to be God's partners. Then we go across the heavens and earth again to contemplate God's power as He holds the celestial bodies and the earth keeping them on their respective courses. The unbelievers are then made to face their broken promises and oaths. They swore that should they have a messenger to warn them, they would do better than past communities, but when a messenger came to them, this only increased their

deviation from the truth. A look at the fates of earlier unbelieving communities follows. This is to demonstrate to those who denied the message of Islam that they should know that God's laws are constantly in operation. Although they were aware of what happened to earlier unbelievers, they still did not take on board that the same fate could just as easily befall them. The *sūrah* concludes with a warning that should strike fear in people's hearts. It tells them that if God were to punish people immediately for what they incur, no one would remain on the face of the earth. It behoves us then, to acknowledge God's grace in allowing us time to reflect and consider our position.

### **Lessons to Reflect Upon**

*It is He who made you inherit the earth. Hence, anyone who denies the truth will bear the consequences of his unbelief. In denying Him the unbelievers will have nothing but an increase of their loathsomeness in God's sight; and in denying Him the unbelievers will only add to their loss. (Verse 39)*

One generation of humanity inherits another; one state disappears to allow another to rise in its place; one flame is extinguished and one is lit: it is all the same continuous, progressive movement. If we contemplate this endless round, lessons clearly present themselves. Indeed, we feel that soon we ourselves will belong to the past and that future generations will look at the traces we leave behind in the same way as we read about those who passed before us. We then realize that age determination belongs to the One who allows the heirs to inherit those that have served their term. Thus everything goes its way and disappears. It is God alone who is everlasting, unaffected by the passage of time.

The person who knows that he stays for a while and goes, like a tourist on holiday, leaving those who succeed him to look at what he has done, should endeavour to make his short stay worthwhile. He should leave behind what earns for him good remembrance and do what benefits him in his ultimate destination for all return to the One who holds everyone accountable for whatever they say and do. Such too is how mankind moves from one generation to another: *"It is He who made you inherit the earth."* (Verse 39)

Then follows a reminder of individual responsibility. None will be made to bear any part of another person's burden; none will protect another in any way. This verse also refers to their persistent denial of the truth and its ultimate results: *"Hence, anyone who denies the truth will bear the consequences of his unbelief In denying Him the unbelievers will have nothing but an increase of their loathsomeness in God's sight; and in denying Him the unbelievers will only add to their loss."* (Verse 39) The Arabic word,

*maqt*, which is translated here as 'loathsomeness', indicates the highest degree of hate. If a person incurs God's hate, his loss exceeds all that we can imagine.

The second round takes us across the heavens and the earth to look for evidence of those whom they allege to be God's partners. However, neither the heavens nor the earth bare any trace of them:

*Say: 'Have you considered those beings whom you claim to be partners with God and whom you call upon beside Him? Show me what it is that they have created on earth! Or do they have a share in the heavens?' Have We ever vouchsafed them a book on which they could rely as evidence? No. What the unbelievers promise one another is nothing but delusion. (Verse 40)*

The argument is strong and the evidence is clear. This is the earth, stretched before us in all directions. Which part of it, and which creature on it, can anyone claim to have been created by other than God? Should anyone dare to make such a claim, everything on earth will rebut it loud and clear. Indeed, everything tells the same thing: all have been created by God Almighty. Everything bears the mark of the inimitable work of the Maker.

"Or do they have a share in the heavens?" (Verse 40) This is even more evident. No one claims that such alleged deities have any part in the creation or ownership of the heavens. Not a single one makes such a claim, not even for the *jinn* or the angels. All that they can claim is that they sought the *jinn's* help to bring them news from on high. All they hope for is that the angels will intercede with God on their behalf. Yet at no time did they claim that their alleged deities had a portion of the heavens.

"Have We ever vouchsafed them a book on which they could rely as evidence?" (Verse 40) Their alleged partners cannot even reach this stage of having a book given them by God and of which they are certain to be true. The question, however, admits another possibility whereby it is addressed to the idolaters themselves. Their persistence with false claims that God has partners may suggest that their faith is based on solid proof in the form of a book given to them by God. Again this is untrue, and they cannot claim it. If we take the question in this second sense, it implies that faith can only be based on a book given by God: this is the only reliable source. Again, they can make no such claim.

The Prophet, on the other hand, has a book given him by God which he presents to them. Why, then, are they turning away from it when it is the only source of true faith?

"No. What the unbelievers promise one another is nothing but delusion." (Verse 40) The wrongdoers are quick to promise each other that their methods are the correct ones and that they will eventually prevail. They are indeed deluded. Moreover, they live

in worthless delusion.

### **Sustaining the Universe**

The third round reveals the limitless nature of God's power as He is the One who holds the heavens and the earth and sustains them in place. No one else has any say or role in all this:

*It is God alone who holds the celestial bodies and the earth, lest they deviate [from their courses]. If they should ever deviate, no one else could uphold them after Him. He is indeed Ever-Forbearing, Much-Forgiving. (Verse 41)*

A glance at the heavens and the earth, and the celestial bodies moving in their orbits, without error or deviation, maintaining their speeds without the slightest increase or decrease, should open our minds to the mighty hand that holds them all in position. Should these celestial bodies or the heavens or the earth deviate from their courses and scatter no one would ever be able to hold them back. This is indeed the time frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān as signalling the end of the world: a point when the system holding all celestial bodies in position is broken, and destruction ensues. It is the time God has appointed for reckoning and reward for whatever takes place in this present life. This signals a transfer to the next world which is totally different from the world we currently live in.

Hence the statement that God holds the universe in place ends with the comment: "He is indeed Ever-Forbearing, Much-Forgiving." (Verse 41) He forbears allowing people time. He does not put an end to their world or hold them to account before the term He has appointed. He gives them chances to repent, begin the good work and prepare for their future lives. Nor does He make people account for everything they do. On the contrary, He forgives much of their wrongdoing when they show any inclination to do well. This statement, then, should make people seize the opportunity provided before it is too late.

The next round speaks about the Arab idolaters and the pledges they made to God, which they then breached, spreading corruption on earth. They are warned that God's laws will always operate, never fail:

*They swear by God with their most solemn oaths that if a warner should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better than some other community, but when a warner did come to them, they turned away with increased aversion, behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting evil. Yet such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors. Can they expect anything but the way of those unbelievers of old times? No change will you ever find in God's ways; no deviation will you ever find there.*

(Verses 42-43)

The Arabs had Jewish neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula and they realized how far the Jews had deviated from the right path. They had heard much of their history and how they had killed their prophets, turning away from the truth these prophets advocated. The Arabs used to blame the Jews, and to swear most earnestly that *“if a warner should ever come to them, they would follow his guidance better than some other community.”* (Verse 42) They deliberately made their oaths in this way, not mentioning the Jews although clearly referring to them.

Thus were their oaths, which the Qur’ān presents to everyone so as to make them witnesses to what the Arabs used to say in pre-Islamic days. The *sūrah* then reveals what they did when God gave them what they wished for, sending them a messenger to warn them: *“but when a warner did come to them, they turned away with increased aversion, behaving arrogantly in the land and plotting evil.”* (Verses 42-43)

Needless to say, only a foul people would swear so strongly and then behave with such arrogance and evil. The *sūrah* exposes them, recording their behaviour, before adding to their disgrace a warning to all who emulate such actions: *“Yet such evil scheming will engulf none but its authors.”* (Verse 43) Thus, their evil will harm none but themselves. It will engulf and ruin them.

This being the case, what are they waiting for? They cannot wait for anything other than the fate that engulfed those who rejected the truth in the past. They are well aware of that fate. Hence, they can await for nothing other than the operation of God’s law which will never change: *“Can they expect anything but the way of those unbelievers of old times? No change will you ever find in God’s ways; no deviation will you ever find there.”* (Verse 43)

### **If Only...**

Things never move haphazardly and life does not move aimlessly. There are constant laws that allow no change. The Qur’ān states this truth and wants people to learn it so that they do not look at any event in isolation, overlooking the operation of God’s law. It draws their attention to the links and relations in life and the laws of existence, making it clear that these will always remain true. This present round gives an example of how the Qur’ān draws people’s attention to this fact, after having confirmed that God’s laws remain constant:

*Have they not travelled in the land and seen what happened in the end to those before them, even though they were much mightier than them? God can never be foiled by anything whatever in the heavens and the earth. He is All-Knowing, infinite in His*

*power. (Verse 44)*

When we travel with open eyes and alert minds, looking at the fates of earlier communities and how they perished after having commanded strength and power, this should give us clear inspiration and awaken our God-fearing sense. It is for this reason that the Qur'ān often directs people to travel, look around and reflect. Unless people do so, they will remain oblivious of the truth, and they will not draw lessons from the fates of past communities. Nor will they link such events to the universal laws that apply to them. Yet this is the quality that distinguishes man from animals. By contrast, the whole of the human race is one unit *vis-a-vis* the unity of the system and the universal law that applies to all.

While they are made to contemplate the fates of earlier communities, whose greater power availed them of nothing, they are reminded of God's might. It is He who sealed the fate of those communities, for nothing can withstand His power: *"God can never be foiled by anything whatever in the heavens and the earth."* (Verse 44) This is a truism which is supported by clear explanation: *"He is All-Knowing, infinite in His power."* (Verse 44) His knowledge encompasses everything in the heavens and on earth. When His power is added to His perfect and absolute knowledge, nothing escapes Him or stands up to Him. Hence, nothing in the universe can foil His purpose. There is no way that anyone can escape His power or hide from His knowledge.

The last verse in the *sūrah* speaks of God's forbearance and compassion, juxtaposing these with His power and knowledge. It emphasizes that people are given a chance, not punished immediately, but that this does not affect the eventual accurate reckoning of their deeds or the fairness of the results at the end. All this is an aspect of His grace:

*If God were to punish people [at once] for the wrongs they do, He would not leave a single living creature on the surface of the earth. However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him]. When their term comes to an end, [they realize that] God has all His servants in His sight. (Verse 45)*

People commit all sorts of bad actions, showing ingratitude for God's favours, spreading evil and corruption on earth, committing all manner of injustices and excesses. Were God to mete out fair punishment to people for their actions, His punishment would have gone beyond them to include every living thing on the face of the earth. The whole planet would then be unsuitable for any type of life, not merely human life.

This highlights the terrible nature of what people perpetrate as a destructive force



that could end life in its entirety. However, God does not take people to task straightaway; He forbears and gives them chances: *“However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him].”* (Verse 45) He grants respite to individuals until the end of their lives on earth, and gives communities respite to fulfil their responsibility in performing the task He has assigned mankind to build human life on earth, until they hand over to the next generation. He also grants respite to the human race until the end of human life in this world when the Last Hour arrives. He provides us with all these chances so that we mend our ways and improve our actions.

*“When their term comes to an end...”* when the time for work and earning reward is over; when it is time for reckoning and administering reward; God will not begrudge them anything of their reward. On the contrary, He will be fair to all: *“God has all His servants in His sight.”* (Verse 45) The fact that He has them all in His sight ensures that they will be fairly requited for whatever they have done in their lives. Nothing serious or trivial will be discounted for or against them.

Thus ends this *sūrah* which started with praising God, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, *“who assigns angels to be messengers, endowed with wings,”* delivering His message, with its warnings and happy news to people on earth.