

SŪRAH 112

Al-Ikhlāṣ

(Purity of Faith)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Say: He is God, the One and only God (1)

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ﴿١﴾

the Eternal, the Absolute. (2)

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ﴿٢﴾

He begets none, nor is He begotten, (3)

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ﴿٣﴾

and there is nothing that could be compared to Him. (4)

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ﴿٤﴾

God's Absolute Oneness

This short *sūrah* is equivalent to one-third of the Qur'ān, as authentic *aḥādīth* confirm. Al-Bukhārī, the leading *Ḥadīth* scholar, relates a *ḥadīth* which mentions the case of one who had heard another man reciting this *sūrah* repeatedly. He went to the Prophet the following morning and told him disapprovingly about what he had heard, as though he felt that it was too little. The Prophet commented, "I swear by Him who holds my soul in His hand that it [i.e. this *sūrah*] is equivalent to one third of the Qur'ān."

And, indeed, there is nothing surprising in that. For God's oneness which the Prophet was ordered to declare to the whole world is a belief to be ingrained in our minds, an explanation of human existence and a way of life in itself. From this standpoint, the *sūrah* can be said to have embraced, in the clearest of terms, the

principal and most fundamental ideas of the great truth of Islam.

The Arabic term, *aḥad*, used here to refer to God's oneness is much more precise than the more frequently used term, *wāḥid*, which means 'one'. *Aḥad* has the added connotations of absolute and continuous unity and an absence of equals.

God's oneness is such that there is no reality and no true and permanent existence except His. Moreover, every other being acquires whatever power it may possess from God who rules over this world. Nothing else whatsoever plans anything for the world nor, for that matter, decides anything in it.

This is the belief that should be entrenched in us. It gives us a full explanation of human existence. Once this belief is clear and the explanation has established itself in our minds, our hearts are purified of all falsities and impurities. They are thus released from all bonds except their bond with the Unique Being to whom alone the reality of existence belongs and who is the only effective power in this world. Thus, the human heart is released from bondage to anything in this world, even if it cannot shirk the notion that other beings exist. Indeed, why should our hearts aspire to anything that has neither a permanent reality, nor any independent power to function in this world? The only real existence is that of the Divine Being and the truly effective power is Divine Will.

When a human heart releases itself from believing in anything but the one truth of God, and upholds this everlasting truth, it begins to enjoy its freedom from all shackles, false ideas, evil desires, fears and confusions of any sort. Indeed, when a human heart finds God, it benefits much and loses nothing. o why should it desire anything but God's pleasure? Why should it fear anything, since there is no absolutely effective power but that of God?

When a concept that sees nothing in the world but the reality of God establishes itself in our hearts and minds, we begin to see this genuine and permanent reality in everything He has made. This is when our hearts feel the hand of God in everything. There is only one level beyond this and that is when our hearts feel nothing but God's reality in the whole universe.

Thus, every event and every movement in this life and in the universe is attributed to the first and only cause; that is, God who brings other causes into play and influences their effectiveness. The Qur'ān takes great care to establish this truth. It has always put aside apparent causes, associating events directly with God's will. It says: "*When you threw [a handful of dust] it was not your act, but God's.*" (8: 17) "*For victory comes only from God.*" (8: 10 and 3: 126) "*You have no will except as God wills.*" (76: 30)

By disregarding all apparent causes and connecting matters directly with God's will, a feeling of relief gently penetrates our hearts so that we recognize the only

Saviour from whom we can ask whatever we may wish, and by whom we are rescued from all fear. We are no longer impressed by apparent influences, reasons and causes that bear no reality or true existence in themselves.

These are the steps of the way some mystics, or Sufis, tried to climb, but they deviated too far from it. For Islam wants people to follow this route struggling with the realities of life, and leading a human life in which they exercise the role God has assigned to human beings on earth, using all their resources and fulfilling all the obligations laid upon them.

From this concept of God's oneness stems a perfect way of life based on an explanation of human existence and whatever outlooks, feelings, and traits it stimulates. This way of life is based on the worship of God alone whose will is the only effective power in the world. Thus, people seek refuge with Him in times of need and fear, happiness and discomfort, ease and hardship. For what is the use of turning towards a non-existent or powerless being? This way of life looks to God alone as its benefactor. From Him we receive our beliefs, outlooks, values, criteria, legislation, institutions, systems, ethics and traditions.

A Complete Way of Life

On this basis a complete way of life is formulated, in which people perform all their activities and make sacrifices absolutely and only for God, hoping always to be nearer the truth. This way of life strengthens bonds of love, brotherhood, mutual sympathy and care between all beings and human hearts. For when we speak of liberation from complete submission to these feelings we are by no means suggesting that people should despise or hate them or escape from practising them. Instead they arise from the creative hand of God and they all owe their existence to Him. They are a gift to us from God who loves us and whom we love. Therefore, they deserve our love.

It is a sublime and lofty way of life that looks at this earth as small, life as short, its enjoyments and luxuries as worth little; and the breaking away from hindrances as humanity's great aim. In Islam, however, this release does not mean seclusion, isolation and neglect, nor does it mean contempt for, or escape from life. Instead it simply means a continuous and sincere endeavour and an everlasting struggle to lead humanity towards submission of everything in human life to God alone. Consequently, it is the fulfilment of man's role as God's vicegerent on earth with all its obligations, as we have already explained.

Liberation of the soul through a life of isolation and extreme spiritualism is easy to achieve but Islam does not approve of it, because it wants its followers to fulfil man's role assigned to him by God who placed him in charge of the earth and to provide

the leadership humanity needs. This is the harder way that guarantees man's elevation and achieves the victory of divine will within him. This is real liberation, for it urges the human soul to fly to its divine source and achieve its sublime status within the scope God, the wise Creator, has defined for it.

For the sake of all this, the first address the Islamic message made was devoted to the establishment of the reality of God's oneness in people's hearts and minds. In this form, the Islamic message is seen by the soul, heart and mind, as a full explanation of human existence, a way of life and not merely a spoken word or an inert belief. It is life in its entirety and religion in its totality. Whatever details are later put in place are no more than the natural fruits of its establishment in people's hearts and minds.

All the deviations that afflicted the followers of earlier divine religions, and which corrupted their beliefs, ideas and lives arose, in the first place, from a deterioration of the concept of God's absolute oneness in their minds. But what distinguishes this concept in the Islamic faith is the fact that it is deeply rooted throughout human life. Indeed, it forms the foundation of a realistic and practical system for human life, clearly reflected in both legislation and belief.

To say, "*He is God, the One and only God,*" (Verse 1) means that "*He is the Eternal, the Absolute,*" (Verse 2) and that "*He begets none, nor is He begotten, and there is nothing that could be compared to Him.*" (Verses 3-4) But the Qur'ān states it all in detail for added emphasis and clarification.

"*The Eternal, the Absolute*" also means the Lord to whom all creation turns for help, and without whose permission nothing is decided. God is the One and only Lord. He is the One God and Master while all other beings are but His servants. To Him and Him alone are addressed all prayers and supplications. He and only He decides everything independently. No one shares His authority.

"*He begets none, nor is He begotten,*" means that the reality of God is deep-rooted, permanent and everlasting. No changeable circumstances ever affect it. Its quality is absolute perfection at all times. Birth is descent and multiplication and implies a developed being after incompleteness or nothingness. It requires espousal which is based on similarity of being and structure. All this is utterly impossible in God's case. So the quality of 'One' includes the renouncement of a father and a son.

"*There is nothing that could be compared to Him,*" means that no one resembles Him in anything or is equivalent to Him in any respect, either in their reality of being, in the fact that He is the only effective power, or in any of His qualities or attributes. This is implied in the statement of his being 'One' made in the first verse, but it is repeated so as to confirm and elaborate upon that fact. It is a renunciation of the two-god belief which implies that God is the God of Good while Evil has its own lord who, as the belief goes – is in opposition to God, spoils His good deeds and

propagates evil on earth. The most well-known two-god belief was that of the Persians, who believed in a god of light and a god of darkness. This belief was known to the people in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, where the Persians once had a state and exercised sovereignty.

This *sūrah* firmly establishes and confirms the Islamic belief in God's oneness just as *Sūrah 109, The Unbelievers*, is a denunciation of any similarity or meeting point between the Islamic concept of God's oneness and any belief that ascribes human form, attributes, or personality to God. Each *sūrah* deals with God's oneness from a different angle. The Prophet used to start off his day reciting these two *sūrahs* in the *sunnah*, or voluntary prayer before the obligatory dawn or *fajr* prayer. This, surely, was immensely significant.