

# SŪRAH 10

## Yūnus

(Jonah)

### Prologue

In this *sūrah*, we return to those parts of the Qur'ān revealed in Makkah, the two preceding *sūrahs* both being Madinan revelations. Although the Makkan revelations share the common Qur'ānic features and the uniqueness that separates the Qur'ān, in subject, style and mode of expression, from any human discourse, they also have their own ambience.<sup>1</sup> This is generated by their subject matter and the way in which it is tackled. The *sūrahs* revealed in Makkah mainly concentrate on the nature of Godhead, servitude, and relations between God and man; providing a full understanding of who the true Lord is so that people may worship and submit to Him alone implementing His law; purging the true faith of all deviation and confusion, and charting the way for people to return to the true faith based on self-surrender to God alone. The way these themes are tackled in Makkan revelations is especially inspiring, adding as they do effective rhythms, powerful speech, and even sound effects. These we explained in the Prologue to *Sūrah* 6<sup>2</sup>, and we will make further reference to them throughout the present *sūrah*.

The last Makkan revelations discussed in this work were *Sūrahs* 6 and 7, Cattle and The Heights. Although these two *sūrahs* are placed together in their Qur'ānic order, they did not have the same sequence in the chronological order of revelation. They are followed in the Qur'ān by *Sūrahs* 8 and 9, The Spoils of War and The Repentance, which feature the special characteristics and themes of the later part of the Qur'ān revealed in Madinah. Now, however, we have two Makkan *Sūrahs*, Jonah and Hūd, which have the same sequence in both chronological order and Qur'ānic arrangement. We note a remarkable similarity between the two earlier Makkan

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, reference may be made to the Introduction to Volume I, and to the Prologue to *Sūrah* 3 in Volume II.

<sup>2</sup> See the Prologues to *Sūrahs* 6 and 7 in Volumes V and VI respectively.

*sūrahs* and the two present ones, both in subject matter and presentation. *Sūrah* 6, Cattle, concentrates on the essence of faith, confronting the unbelievers with it and refuting all erring beliefs and practices. *Sūrah* 7, The Heights, on the other hand, speaks about the practical implementation of faith in human life and its confrontation with *jāhiliyyah* during different periods of history. The same is true of the two *sūrahs* in this volume, Jonah and Hūd. However, *Sūrah* 6 is distinguished from *Sūrah* 10 by its very powerful rhythm, quick pulse and sophistication of scene and movement. *Sūrah* 10, on the other hand, has a more relaxed rhythm and easy flow of scene and movement. *Sūrahs* 7 and 11, The Heights and Hūd display great similarity in theme, presentation and rhythm. Nevertheless, every *sūrah* in the Qur'ān has its own character, special features and distinctive properties.

*Sūrah* 10 follows its own distinctive approach to the subject matter of the Makkan revelations, and this reflects its character and features. In this Prologue we will do no more than provide a brief introduction to the themes the *sūrah* tackles.

- It first addresses the idolaters' attitude to the fact that the Prophet received revelations from on high, and to the Qur'ān itself. It makes clear that there is nothing to wonder about with regard to revelation. It further asserts that the Qur'ān could not have been invented by anyone who might have then attributed it to God.

*These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom. Does it seem strange to people that We have inspired a man from their own midst: 'Warn all mankind, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing with their Lord?' The unbelievers say: 'This is plainly a skilled enchanter.' (Verses 1-2)*

*When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, those who have no hope of meeting Us say: 'Bring us a discourse other than this Qur'ān, or else alter it.' Say: It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. I dread the torment of an awesome day if I should disobey my Lord!' Say: 'Had God so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. I spent a whole lifetime among you before it [was revealed to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?' Who is more wicked than one who attributes his lying inventions to God or denies His revelations? Indeed those who are guilty shall not be successful. (Verses 15-17)*

*This Qur'ān could not have been devised by anyone other than God. It is a confirmation of [revelations] that went before it, and a full explanation of God's Book, about which there is no doubt. It certainly comes from the Lord of all the worlds. If they say: 'He has invented it,' say: 'Produce, then, one sūrah like it, and call for help on all you can other than God, if what you say is true.' Indeed they*

*disbelieve what they cannot grasp, particularly since its inner meaning has not become clear to them. Likewise did those who lived before them disbelieve. But see what happened in the end to those wrongdoers. (Verses 37-39)*

- It also addresses the unbelievers' demand to be shown some supernatural sign – other than the Qur'ān – and their suggestion to hasten the fulfilment of the Qur'ānic warnings. The *sūrah* makes clear to them that the basic evidence of the truth of the Islamic faith is the Qur'ān itself which embodies, through its superior qualities, evidence of its divine nature. Hence, the challenge to all unbelievers to produce a single *sūrah* similar to the Qur'ān. It also explains that signs and evidence are given by God and subject to His will. The time when they receive their reward is determined by God alone. The Prophet has no say in this, as he is only a servant of God, like the rest of God's creation. All this contributes to the expostulation on the Islamic concept of Godhead and people's submission to Him.

*Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave. (Verses 13-14)*

*They ask: 'Why has no sign been sent down to him by his Lord?' Say: 'God's alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.' (Verse 20)*

*To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement is passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged. They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?' Say: 'I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself except as God may please. For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.' Say: 'Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten?' 'Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?' (Verses 47-51)*

- The *sūrah* also addresses the unbelievers' confused ideas about God and people's relation to Him. This is essentially what the Prophet talked to them about, but they denied the truth of revelation, expressed doubts about it, demanding at times that the Prophet should produce a different Qur'ān, and

at other times that he should produce a physical miracle. Meanwhile they continued to worship things that they claimed to be God's partners, things which would cause them neither benefit nor harm. They falsely claimed that such alleged partners could intercede with God on their behalf. They also falsely claimed that God had a son. The *sūrah* explains to them the attributes of God, the true Lord of the universe, and how His power is manifested in the universe, and within themselves, as well as in a multitude of universal phenomena. It reminds them of how they appeal to Him alone when things go wrong and they find themselves powerless in the face of danger. This is the central issue which takes up large portions of the *sūrah* and leads to its other themes. (Verses 3-6; 18; 22-23; 31-36; 66-70)

*Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and established Himself on the Throne, regulating and governing all that exists. There is none who may intercede with Him unless He first grants leave for that. That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone. Will you not then keep this in mind? To Him you shall all return. This is, in truth, Gods promise. He originates all His creation, and then brings them all back to life so that He may reward, with equity, those who have believed and done good deeds. As for the unbelievers, they shall have a scalding drink and a grievous suffering for their unbelief He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and determined her phases so that you may know how to compute the years and measure [time]. God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth. He makes plain His revelations to people of knowledge. Indeed in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for people who are God fearing. (Verses 3-6)*

*They worship, side by side with God, what can neither harm nor benefit them, and say: 'These will intercede for us with God.' Say: Do you presume to inform God of something in the heavens or on earth that He does not know? Limitless is He in His glory, and exalted above whatever they may associate with Him.' (Verse 18)*

*He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. Then when they are on board ships, and sailing along in a favourable wind, they feel happy with it, but then a stormy wind comes upon them and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe they are encompassed [by death]. [At that point] they appeal to God, in complete sincerity of faith in Him alone: 'If You will save us from this, we shall certainly be most grateful.' Yet when He has saved them, they transgress in the land, offending against all right. Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound. [You care only for] the enjoyment of this present life, but in the end you will return to Us when We will tell you the truth of what you were*

doing [in this life]. (Verses 22-23)

*Say: 'Who is it that provides for you from heaven and earth? Or, who is it that has power over hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive? Who regulates all affairs?' They will say: 'God.' Say, then: 'Will you not, then, fear Him?' 'Such is God, your true Lord. Apart from the truth, what is left but error? How is it, then, that you turn away?' Thus is the word of your Lord proved true with regard to those who do evil: they will not believe. Say: Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] originate creation, and then bring it back [to life] again?' Say: 'It is God alone who originates creation and then brings it back [to life] again. How is it, then, that you are so misled?' Say: Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] guide to the truth?' Say: 'God alone guides to the truth. Who is more worthy to be followed: He that guides to the truth, or he who cannot find the right way unless he is guided? What is then amiss with you? How do you judge?' Most of them follow nothing but mere conjecture. But conjecture can in no way be a substitute for truth. God has full knowledge of all that they do. (Verses 31-36)*

*Indeed, to God belong all those who are in the heavens and earth. Those who invoke other beings beside God do not follow any real partners with Him. They follow mere conjecture, and they utter nothing but falsehood. It is He who has made the night for you, so that you may have rest, and the day, so that you may see. In this there are certainly signs for those who listen. They say: 'God has taken unto Himself a son.' Limitless is He in His glory. Self-sufficient is He. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. No evidence whatever have you for this. Would you say about God something which you do not know? Say: 'Those who invent falsehood about God shall not be successful. They may have a brief enjoyment in this world, but then to Us they must return, and We will then make them suffer severe torment for their unbelief' (Verses 66-70)*

- The *sūrah* also illustrates for the unbelievers God's presence in all that has a bearing on human life, and in all that people themselves do. This fills us with awe and keeps us on our guard. To give but one example of this we may quote: "In whatever business you may be engaged, and whatever part you may recite of the Qur'ān, and whatever deed you [mankind] may do, We will be your witnesses from the moment you are engaged with it. Not even an atom's weight [of anything whatsoever] on earth or in heaven escapes your Lord, nor is there anything smaller or larger than that, but is recorded in a clear book. " (Verse 61)

- A sense that God's punishment may come at any moment is imparted to people in order to help them shake off the false sense of security that results from enjoying an abundance of riches and luxuries.

*This present life may be compared to rain which We send down from the sky, and which is then absorbed by the plants of the earth from which men and animals eat. Then, when the earth has been clad with its fine adornments and well embellished, and its people believe that they have full mastery over it, Our command comes down upon it, by night or by day, and We make it like a field that has been mowed down, as if it did not blossom but yesterday. Thus do We spell out Our revelations to people who think. (Verse 24)*

*Say: Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten?' 'Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?' (Verses 50-51)*

- Furthermore, the *sūrah* points out that the unbelievers often have a false sense of security in this life, overlooking the hereafter and denying man's inevitable meeting with God on the Day of Judgement. It warns them against such indulgence, showing them that it is a raw deal that they choose for themselves when they neglect the life to come in preference for this life and its enjoyments. It explains to them that this present life is only a test and the outcome is determined on the Day of Resurrection. It adds a number of scenes of that day, particularly in relation to the alleged partners of God who will disown those who worship them. It also makes clear that no offering will be accepted from anyone on the Day of Judgement to release them from their deserved punishment.

*Those who entertain no hope of meeting Us, but are content with the life of this world, and feel well at ease about it, and those who pay no heed to Our revelation, shall have the Fire as their abode in requital for what they used to do. Those who believe and do righteous deeds will be guided aright by their Lord by means of their faith. Running waters will flow at their feet in the gardens of bliss. There they will call out: 'Limitless are You in Your glory, God,' and their greeting will be, 'Peace!' Their call will conclude with the words: All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds!' (Verses 7-10)*

*Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the*

*truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave. (Verses 13-14)*

*God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that -wills to a straight path. For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for paradise, where they will abide. As for those who have done evil, an evil deed is rewarded with its like. Ignominy will overshadow them – for they will have none to protect them from God – as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night's own darkness. Such are destined for the fire, where they will abide. One day We shall gather them all together, and then We shall say to those who associated partners with God: 'Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners.' We will then separate them from one another. Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: 'It was not us that you worshipped.' 'God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us.' There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past; and all will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them. (Verses 25-30)*

*On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another. Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance. (Verse 45)*

*Should every wrongdoer possess all that the earth contains, he will gladly offer it all as ransom. They will harbour feelings of remorse when they see the suffering. Judgement will be passed on them in all fairness; and they will not be wronged. (Verse 54)*

- The *sūrah* deals with the consequences of the unbelievers' confused concept of Godhead, denial of the resurrection and the life to come, and also their denial of divine revelations and disbelief of the Prophet's warnings. Such confusion led them to claim for themselves some of God's attributes, such as the authority to legislate for themselves, making things lawful or forbidden just as their pagan beliefs allowed them to do. Thus, they allocated certain things to their deities which they claimed to be God's partners. Such allocations included priests issuing decrees of prohibition and permissibility as they deemed fit. The priests then take for themselves what they claimed to be allocated to God: "Say: Do but consider all the means of sustenance that God has bestowed on you! Some of it you then made unlawful, and some lawful.' Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?' But what will they

*think, those who invent lies against God, on the Day of Resurrection? God is truly bountiful to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful.” (Verses 59-60)*

In order to present and establish such facts and ensure their proper effect on the hearts and minds of its audience, the *sūrah* employs a wide variety of special effects that are characteristic of the Qur’ānic style. Profound and moving as these inspiring effects are, they are of a type that suits the special nature of this *sūrah*. For example:

- The *sūrah* portrays a variety of universal scenes that impress on our minds the truth of Godhead, His elaborate planning of the universe and conducting of its affairs. These scenes highlight the fact that a multitude of factors need to come together in perfect balance so as to allow for the emergence of life and the support of human life in particular. The Qur’ān presents the basic theme of Godhead in such an inspiring fashion, without resort to any philosophical argument or logical treatise. God knows that it is sufficient to direct human nature to contemplate the universe and its visible aspects in order to awaken its receptive faculties and interact with them. Hence, the Qur’ān employs this particular address to human nature in a language it readily understands. Here are some such inspiring examples:

*Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and established Himself on the Throne, regulating and governing all that exists. There is none who may intercede with Him unless He first grants leave for that. That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone. Will you not then keep this in mind? (Verse 3)*

*He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and determined her phases so that you may know how to compute the years and measure [time]. God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth. He makes plain His revelations to people of knowledge. Indeed in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for people who are God-fearing. (Verses 5-6)*

*Say: ‘Who is it that provides for you from heaven and earth? Or, who is it that has power over hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive? Who regulates all affairs?’ They will say: ‘God.’ Say, then: ‘Will you not, then, fear Him?’ ‘Such is God, your true Lord. Apart from the truth, what is left but error? How is it, then, that you turn away?’ (Verses 31-32)*

*It is He who has made the night for you, so that you may have rest, and the day, so*

*that you may see. In this there are certainly signs for those who listen. (Verse 67)*

*Say: 'Consider all that there is in the heavens and the earth.' But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe? (Verse 101)*

- This *sūrah* is full of scenes portraying events that people witness and participate in, even though they remain unaware of their full significance and elaborate planning. The Qur'ān presents them with pictures of their own lives as these develop. It raises a mirror before people's eyes so that they can see themselves for what they truly are. A couple of examples follow:

*When affliction befalls man, he appeals to Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve his affliction, he goes on as though he had never appealed to Us to save him from the affliction that befell him. Thus do their deeds seem fair to those who are given to excesses. (Verse 12)*

*Whenever We let people taste grace after some hardship has afflicted them, they turn to scheme against Our revelations. Say: More swift is God's scheming. Our messengers are recording all that you may devise.' He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. Then when you are on board ships, and sailing along in a favourable wind, they feel happy with it, but then a stormy wind comes upon them and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe they are encompassed [by death]. [At that point] they appeal to God, in complete sincerity of faith in Him alone: If You will save us from this, we shall certainly be most grateful.' Yet when He has saved them, they transgress in the land, offending against all right. Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound. [You care only for] the enjoyment of this present life, but in the end you will return to Us when We will tell you the truth of what you were doing [in this life]. (Verses 21-23)*

- The *sūrah* includes a host of information about the fate suffered by earlier communities. At times this is given in the form of a report, while at others an account of the history of earlier messengers is given. Such information portrays a very powerful picture of the destruction of those who denied the truth in the past. Thus, it gives a warning against suffering a similar fate. People must not be deluded by the comforts of this present life, for it is merely a brief test, lasting no more than an hour in which people get to know one another before reaching their final abode, either in long-lasting suffering or in eternal bliss.

*Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave. (Verses 13-14)*

*Relate to them the story of Noah. He said to his people: My people! If my presence among you and my reminders to you of God's revelations are repugnant to you – well, in God have I placed my trust. Decide, then, what you are going to do, and [seek the help of] those whom you associate as partners with God. Be clear about your course of action, leaving no room for uncertainty, then carry out against me whatever you may have decided and give me no respite. But if you turn away, [remember that] I have asked of you no reward whatsoever. My reward rests with none but God. I have been commanded to be one of those who surrender themselves to Him.' But they disbelieved him. So We saved him and all those who joined him in the ark, and made them inherit the earth. And We drowned the others who denied Our revelations. Reflect on the fate of those who were forewarned. (Verses 71-73)*

*Then after those [prophets] We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his nobles, but they persisted in their arrogance, for they were hardened offenders. When the truth came to them from Us, they said: 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery. 'Moses replied: Do you say this to the truth when it has come to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers will never be successful.' (Verses 75-77)*

*And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression. But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said. I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself' [But God said:] 'Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs.' (Verses 90-92)*

*What are they waiting for except a repetition of the days [of calamity] experienced by those who have gone before them? Say: 'Wait, then, if you will. I am also waiting.' Thereupon, We save Our messengers and those who believe. Thus have We willed it upon Ourselves: We save those who believe. (Verses 102-103)*

- The *sūrah* also portrays scenes of the Day of Resurrection when both unbelievers and believers will receive their wages for their deeds in this life. The presentation here is effectively animated, leaving a profound effect on our

hearts. Along with the scenes of destruction that overwhelms the guilty ones and the salvation of the believers, we are presented with two contrasting scenes of life in the hereafter, and two more of the beginning and the end:

*For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for paradise, where they will abide. As for those who have done evil, an evil deed is rewarded with its like. Ignominy will overshadow them – for they will have none to protect them from God – as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night's own darkness. Such are destined for the fire, where they will abide. (Verses 26--27)*

*One day We shall gather them all together, and then We shall say to those who associated partners with God: 'Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners. ' We will then separate them from one another. Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: 'It was not us that you worshipped.' 'God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us.' There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past; and all will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them. (Verses 28-30)*

*Should every wrongdoer possess all that the earth contains, he will gladly offer it all as ransom. They will harbour feelings of remorse when they see the suffering. Judgement will be passed on them in all fairness; and they will not be wronged. (Verse 54)*

- Another special effect is that of challenging the unbelievers who denied the very idea of revelation to produce a single *sūrah* like the Qur'ān. When the challenge is made, the Prophet is instructed to leave them to their fate, which is the same as that of earlier wrongdoers. He should follow his own way, paying no attention to what may happen to them. The whole sequence of the challenge followed by the Prophet leaving them and carrying on with his mission is bound to impress on them the fact that he was absolutely certain of the truth of his message, and assured of the care he was promised by his Lord. Such confidence was bound to shake them violently.

*This Qur'ān could not have been devised by anyone other than God. It is a confirmation of [revelations] that went before it, and a full explanation of God's Book, about which there is no doubt. It certainly comes from the Lord of all the worlds. If they say: 'He has invented it,' say: 'Produce, then, one *sūrah* like it, and call for help on all you can other than God, if what you say is true.' Indeed they*

*disbelieve what they cannot grasp, particularly since its inner meaning has not become clear to them. Likewise did those who lived before them disbelieve. But see what happened in the end to those wrongdoers. (Verses 37-39)*

*Say: Mankind, if you are still in doubt as to what my faith is, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship beside God, but I worship God alone who will cause all of you to die. I have been commanded to be one of those who believe. And adhere exclusively and sincerely to the true faith, and do not be one of those who associate partners with God. Do not invoke, instead of God, anything that can neither benefit nor harm you. For if you do, you will surely be among the wrongdoers.' Should God afflict you with any hardship, none other than He can remove it; and if He wills any good for you, none can withhold His bounty. He bestows it on whomsoever He wills. He is truly Forgiving, truly Merciful. Say: Mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. I am not responsible for your conduct. ' Follow whatever is revealed to you, and be patient in adversity, until God shall give His judgement. He is the best of all judges. (Verses 104-109)*

With such clarity, the *sūrah* is concluded.

## **Error and Challenge**

This *sūrah*, number 10, was revealed after *Sūrah* 17, The Night Journey, at a time when the unbelievers were engaged in a heated debate concerning the truth of revelation, the Qur'ān and its denunciation of their erroneous beliefs and ignorant practices. The Qur'ān exposed the fundamental contradictions in their beliefs. From the old divine religion of Abraham and Ishmael, the Arabs retained the belief that God was the Creator, Sustainer, who gives life and causes death, and who has power over all things. In stark contradiction to these, they claimed that God had children and that the angels were His daughters, representing them as idols and appealing to them to intercede with God on their behalf. Needless to say this confusion in beliefs had far-reaching effects on their life, most important among which was the authority claimed by their chiefs and monks to pronounce certain types of cattle and fruits as lawful and others as forbidden. They also allocated a portion of these to God, and another portion to their false deities.

They countered the Qur'ānic criticism of their absurd beliefs and contradictory concepts by rejecting the Prophet, his message and revelations, and by accusing him of being a sorcerer. They demanded that he should show them some miracle to prove that he received revelations from on high. They made different demands, as related

in Sūrah 17, in which God says: *“They say: ‘We shall not believe in you till you cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or [till] you have a garden of date trees and vines, and you cause rivers to flow through it, or till you cause the sky to fall upon us in pieces, as you have threatened, or till you bring God and the angels face to face before us, or till you have a house of gold, or you ascend to heaven. Indeed we shall not believe in your ascent to heaven until you bring us a book for us to read.’ Say, ‘All glory belongs to my Lord. Surely I am only a man and a messenger.’ Nothing has ever prevented people from believing [in God] whenever guidance has come to them except for their saying: ‘Can it be that God has sent a human being as His messenger?’”* (17: 90-94) Also in this sūrah, God says: *“They ask: ‘Why has no sign been sent down to him by his Lord?’ Say: ‘God’s alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.’”* (Verse 20)

They also demanded that the Prophet bring them a different Qur’ān which contained no criticism of their idols, beliefs and practices. They Promised that they would then believe in him. The sūrah states: *“When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, those who have no hope of meeting Us say: ‘Bring us a discourse other than this Qur’ān, or else alter it.’ Say: ‘It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. I dread the torment of an awesome day if I should disobey my Lord!’ Say: Had God so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. I spent a whole lifetime among you before it [was revealed to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?’ Who is more wicked than one who attributes his lying inventions to God or denies His revelations? Indeed those who are guilty shall not be successful.”* (Verses 15-17)

It was in such an atmosphere that the sūrah was revealed. It is clearly apparent from its flow that it is all a single unit. In fact it is difficult to try to divide it into sections and passages. This disproves the argument that verses 40 and 94-96 were revealed later in Madinah. These verses are closely linked to the rest of the sūrah. Indeed, if we were to leave out any verse, we cause a disruption in the flow of the sūrah.

The unity of purpose in the sūrah is clearly apparent as we see when we compare its opening and its end. It opens with the verses saying: *“Alif. Lām. Rā. These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom. Does it seem strange to people that We have inspired a man from their own midst: ‘Warn all mankind, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing with their Lord?’ The unbelievers say: ‘This is plainly a skilled enchanter.’* (Verses 1-2) Its final verse reads: *“Follow whatever is revealed to you, and be patient in adversity, until God shall give His judgement. He is the best of all judges.”* (Verse 109) Thus, the theme of revelation is brought up at the beginning and the end, as it is frequently highlighted throughout the sūrah.

The same unity is noticed in the different special effects employed in the *sūrah*. For example, the unbelievers who opposed the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) try to hasten the punishment they have been warned against. But they are told here that such punishment occurs suddenly, when no repentance or declaration of acceptance of the true faith will be of any avail. When historical accounts are later given in the *sūrah* we see the same scene as it took place in earlier communities and their sudden punishment.

In answer to their request to speed up their punishment, the *sūrah* has the following to say: *"They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?' Say: 'I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself, except as God may please. For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.' Say: Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten?' 'Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?' Then it will be said to the wrongdoers: 'Taste the long-lasting torment. Is this requital anything other than the just due for what you used to do?'"* (Verses 48-52)

When the story of Moses and his encounter with Pharaoh is given later in the *sūrah*, it concludes with a scene that may be taken as the physical implementation of the earlier warning: *"And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression. But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself' [But God said:] 'Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs.'"* (Verses 90-92)

Throughout the *sūrah* we are given several scenes of how communities which stubbornly denied the truth were taken unawares as God's punishment overwhelmed them. All this provides clear links between themes, scenes and modes of expression.

Similarly, at the beginning of the *sūrah* the unbelievers' accusation against the Prophet is reported: *"This is plainly a skilled enchanter."* (Verse 2) When the encounter between Moses and his opponents is told later, we read: *"When the truth came to them from Us, they said: 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.'"<sup>3</sup>* (Verse 76)

Although the *sūrah* is named after the Prophet Jonah, there is no more than a very brief reference to Jonah and his people as follows: *"Had it believed, every community*

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<sup>3</sup> Although different words, 'enchanter' and 'sorcery', are used in translation, the same word is used in the original Arabic text. The translation tries to capture the particular connotations emphasized in each instance. — Editor's note.

would have profited by its faith. It was so only with Jonah's people. When they believed, We lifted from them the suffering of disgrace in this life, and allowed them to enjoy things for a while." (Verse 98) The case of Jonah's people is the only clear example of a community which saved themselves before being overwhelmed by God's punishment. They believed in God when there was still time for them to do so. Moreover, they provided the only instance among those receiving God's messages of an entire community accepting the faith after having first given a negative response. Hence, they were saved from the punishment their Prophet warned them against.

All these examples demonstrate the *sūrah's* complete unity. It is a single unit which is difficult to divide into sections.

### Human Dignity and Divine Faith

It is clear from the texts we have quoted in this Prologue that the main issue the *sūrah* centres around is that of explaining the true concepts of Godhead and people's position in relation to God, and how these influence human life. The other themes in the *sūrah*, such as revelation, the hereafter, and earlier divine messages, are used to illustrate the main issue and to explain its influence on people's lives, beliefs, worship and action.

In fact, this is the central issue of the Qur'ān as a whole, particularly those parts revealed in Makkah. Defining God and His position as the Lord, the Sovereign who controls all, and the meaning of being a servant of God and the limitations of that position, so as to make people submit to Him alone, acknowledging His Lordship and sovereignty is indeed what the Qur'ān is all about. Whatever else is given by way of emphasis, illustration, and re-emphasis.

When carefully considered, this fundamental issue of Godhead deserves such profound explanation. It equally deserves that God should send all His messengers to advocate it, and that all His messages explain it: "*Before your time We never sent a messenger without having revealed to him that there is no deity other than Me. Therefore, you shall worship Me alone.*" (21: 25)

Human life on earth will not be set on the right track unless this fundamental truth is absolutely clear in people's minds, and finds its full implementation in their lives.

Without this fundamental truth, human life will not take its rightful position in relation to the universe we live in and interact with. When people are confused about this issue they begin to ascribe divinity to animate and inanimate objects, and indeed to ghosts and fantasies. They enslave themselves in a ludicrous, but miserable way to these false deities. On the instigation of clerics and con men who will always try to deceive people for their own personal gain, they make offerings to their false deities,

sacrificing some of their earnings given to them by God, their only Lord and Sustainer. Yet these things and beings have no power whatsoever; they cannot cause people any harm or benefit. They live either in fear of these false deities, or try to curry favour with them, when like them, these beings are subject to God's power. This is how God describes their situation:

*Out of the produce and the cattle He has created, they assign a portion to God, saying: 'This is for God' – or so they pretend – 'and this is for the partners we associate [with Him].' Whatever they assign to their partners never reaches God, but that which is assigned to God does reach their partners. How ill they judge! Thus have the partners they associate [with God] made the killing of their own children seem goodly to many idolaters, seeking to bring them to ruin and to confuse them in their faith. Had God willed otherwise, they would not have done so. Leave them, then, to their false inventions. They say: 'Such cattle and crops are forbidden. None may eat of them save those whom we permit' – so they falsely claim. Other cattle they declare to be forbidden to burden their backs; and there are cattle over which they do not pronounce God's name, inventing [in all this] a lie against Him. He will surely requite them for their inventions. They also say: 'That which is in the wombs of these cattle is reserved to our males and forbidden to our women.' But if it be stillborn, they all partake of it. He will requite them for all their false assertions. He is Wise, All-knowing. Losers indeed are those who, in their ignorance, foolishly kill their children and declare as forbidden what God has provided for them as sustenance, falsely attributing such prohibitions to God. They have gone astray and they have no guidance.<sup>4</sup> (6: 136-140)*

These are merely some examples of serving deities other than God with property and children being made offerings for some creatures, without any sanction granted by God.

Similarly, human life will not be set straight in the way people deal with each other unless they hold the right concepts of God and man, and until they reflect these in their practices and general code of living. Man will not maintain his full dignity and realize complete freedom under any system that does not assign all Lordship and sovereignty to God alone. Such a system must be based on the belief that life, both in this world and in the life to come, in public and private, is subject to God who alone has the authority to legislate.

This is a fact borne out by human history. Every time people deviated from the true faith that required them to submit themselves to God alone in belief and practice, law-making and worship, they suffered the loss of their humanity, dignity and freedom.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full explanation of these verses, see Volume V, pp. 278-286.

The Islamic reading of history attributes the humiliation of the masses by tyranny to the basic factor of deviation by the masses from the divine faith based on attributing Godhead, Lordship, sovereignty and all authority to God alone. Speaking of Pharaoh and his people, God says: *"Pharaoh issued a call to his people, saying: My people! Does not the dominion over Egypt belong to me, since all these running waters flow at my feet? Can you not see? Am I not better than this contemptible man who can hardly make his meaning clear? And then, why have no golden armlets been given to him, and why have no angels come together with him?"* Thus he incited his people to levity, and they obeyed him; for they were a community of transgressors." (43: 51-54) Thus the fact that Pharaoh was able to incite his people and get his way with them is attributed to the fact that they were transgressors. No tyrant can get his people to do his bidding and incite them to do what is frivolous if they truly believe in God alone, acknowledging no Lordship or sovereignty to anyone else.

What happened with those who rebelled against submission to God alone, allowing some of their numbers to rule over them implementing a law other than God's law, is that they ended up enduring the misery of submission to others. Such submission, however, squanders away their dignity and freedom, regardless of the type of government, even though they may think that some forms of government ensures such dignity and freedom.

When Europe rebelled against a Church that tyrannized under the false guise of religion, it tried to run away from God. People in Europe thought that they could best preserve their freedom, dignity and humanity under democratic government. They pinned their hopes on the guarantees provided by democratic constitutions, parliamentary systems, a free press, judicial and legal checks, majority rule, and similar ideals. But what happened in practice? Capitalism managed to exercise tyrannical power reducing all checks and institutions into little more than slogans or myths. The great majority of the people became subservient to the powerful minority that owned the capital which enabled it to control the parliamentary majority, the constitution, the press and all other checks and balances that people imagined would guarantee their freedom and other rights.

Certain groups turned away from individualistic or democratic systems which usher in a tyranny of capital or class and established 'collective' systems. But what has this meant in practice? They simply replaced subservience to the capitalist class with subservience to the working class. Or we may say, they replaced subservience to capitalists and big companies with subservience to the state which controlled capital and enjoyed total power. This made the tyranny of the state an even worse tyranny.

In every situation or regime where some people are subservient to others, a heavy tax is paid to different deities, in cash and kind. Submission is inevitable. If it is not

made to God, then it is made to others. When submission is purely to God, it sets people free, and preserves their dignity and honour. By contrast, submission to other beings destroys people's humanity, dignity, freedom and all their good qualities, wastes their money and ruins their material interests.

Hence, the central issue of Godhead and people's relation with Him is given such careful and detailed attention in all divine messages and Scriptures. This *sūrah* is an example of this care. The basic issue here is not concerned with the worship of statues in the ignorant societies of the ancient past; its concerns are man throughout all generations, and all forms of *jāhiliyyah*, past and present. Indeed, *all jāhiliyyah* systems are based on making people subservient to others.

This is the reason why the central issue in all divine Scriptures is to make clear that all Godhead and Lordship belong to God alone: *"Before your time We never sent a messenger without having revealed to him that there is no deity other than Me. Therefore, you shall worship Me alone."* (21: 25)

Hence, the conclusion of this *sūrah* runs as follows: *"Say: 'Mankind, if you are still in doubt as to what my faith is, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship beside God, but I worship God alone who will cause all of you to die. I have been commanded to be one of those who believe. And adhere exclusively and sincerely to the true faith, and do not be one of those who associate partners with God. Do not invoke, instead of God, anything that can neither benefit nor harm you. For if you do, you will surely be among the wrongdoers. Should God afflict you with any hardship, none other than He can remove it; and if He wills any good for you, none can withhold His bounty. He bestows it on whomsoever He wills. He is truly Forgiving, truly Merciful.' Say: 'Mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. I am not responsible for your conduct.' Follow whatever is revealed to you, and be patient in adversity, until God shall give His judgement. He is the best of all judges."* (Verses 104-109)

# 1

## A Book Full of Wisdom

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

*Alif. Lām. Rā. These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom. (1)*

*Does it seem strange to people that We have inspired a man from their own midst: Warn all mankind, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing with their Lord? The unbelievers say: 'This is plainly a skilled enchanter.' (2)*

*Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and established Himself on the Throne, regulating and governing all that exists. There is none who may intercede with Him unless He first grants leave for that. That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone. Will you not then keep this in mind? (3)*

الرَّ تِلْكَ ءَايَاتُ الْكِتَابِ الْحَكِيمِ ﴿١﴾

أَكَانَ لِلنَّاسِ عَجَبًا أَنْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَى رَجُلٍ  
مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ أَنْذِرِ النَّاسَ وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ  
ءَامَنُوا أَنَّ لَهُمْ قَدَمَ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ  
قَالَ الْكٰفِرُونَ إِنَّ هَذَا لَسِحْرٌ

مُبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ  
وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوٰى عَلَى  
الْعَرْشِ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ ۗ مَا مِنْ شٰفِعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ  
بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ ۗ ذٰلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ  
فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۗ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

To Him you shall all return. This is, in truth, God's promise. He originates all His creation, and then brings them all back to life so that He may reward, with equity, those who have believed and done good deeds. As for the unbelievers, they shall have a scalding drink and a grievous suffering for their unbelief. (4)

He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and determined her phases so that you may know how to compute the years and measure [time]. God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth. He makes plain His revelations to people of knowledge. (5)

Indeed in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for people who are God-fearing. (6)

Those who entertain no hope of meeting Us, but are content with the life of this world, and feel well at ease about it, and those who pay no heed to Our revelation,

إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ حَقًّا إِنَّهُ  
يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ  
ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ بِالْقِسْطِ  
وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ  
وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٤﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ ضِيَاءً  
وَالْقَمَرَ نُورًا وَقَدَرَهُ مَنَازِلَ لِتَعْلَمُوا  
عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابِ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ  
ذَٰلِكَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ يُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ  
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

إِنَّ فِي آخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ  
فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ  
يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا وَرَضُوا  
بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَأَطْمَأَنُّوا بِهَا وَالَّذِينَ  
هُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا غَافِلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

(7)

shall have the Fire as their abode in requital for what they used to do. (8)

Those who believe and do righteous deeds will be guided aright by their Lord by means of their faith. Running waters will flow at their feet in the gardens of bliss. (9)

There they will call out: 'Limitless are You in Your glory, God,' and their greeting will be, 'Peace!' Their call will conclude with the words: 'All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds!' (10)

If God were to hasten for mankind the ill [they have earned] as they would hasten the good, their end would indeed come forthwith. But We leave those who have no hope of meeting Us in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro. (11)

When affliction befalls man, he appeals to Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve his affliction, he goes on as though he had never appealed to Us to save him from the

أُولَئِكَ مَاؤُهُمُ النَّارُ بِمَا كَانُوا  
يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٨﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ  
يَهْدِيهِمْ رَبُّهُم بِأَيْمَانِهِمْ تَجْرَى مِنْ  
تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٩﴾

دَعْوُهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّاتُهُمْ  
فِيهَا سَلَامٌ وَأَخْرُ دَعْوُهُمْ أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ  
رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

﴿١١﴾ وَلَوْ يُعَجِّلُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ الشَّرَّ  
اسْتَعْجَالَهُمْ بِالْخَيْرِ لَفُضِيَ إِلَيْهِمْ أَجْلُهُمْ  
فَنَذَرُ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا فِي  
طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ الضُّرُّ دَعَانَا لِجَنبِهِ  
أَوْ قَاعِدًا أَوْ قَائِمًا فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُ  
ضُرَّهُ مَرَّ كَأَن لَّمْ يَدْعُنَا إِلَىٰ ضُرِّ مَسَّهُ  
كَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ مَا كَانُوا  
يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

affliction that befell him. Thus do their deeds seem fair to those who are given to excesses. (12)

Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. (13)

Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave. (14)

When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, those who have no hope of meeting Us say: 'Bring us a discourse other than this Qur'an, or else alter it.' Say: 'It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. I dread the torment of an awesome day if I should disobey my Lord!' (15)

Say: 'Had God so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. I spent a

وَلَقَدْ أَهَلَكْنَا الْقُرُونَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَمَّا  
ظَلَمُوا<sup>١٢</sup> وَجَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَمَا  
كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا<sup>١٣</sup> كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْقَوْمَ  
الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خَلَائِفَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ  
بَعْدِهِمْ لِنَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

وَإِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ قَالَ  
الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا أَتَأْتِنَا بِقُرْآنٍ  
غَيْرِ هَذَا أَوْ بَدِّلْهُ<sup>١٤</sup> قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ  
أُبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تَلْقَائِي نَفْسِي<sup>١٥</sup> إِنْ أَتَّبِعُ إِلَّا مَا  
يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ<sup>١٥</sup> إِنِّي أَخَافُ إِنْ عَصَيْتُ رَبِّي  
عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٥﴾

قُلْ لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا تَلَوْتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا  
أَدْرَأَكُمْ بِهِ<sup>١٦</sup> فَقَدْ لَبِثْتُ فِيكُمْ عُمُرًا  
مِن قَبْلِهِ<sup>١٦</sup> أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

whole lifetime among you before it [was revealed to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?' (16)

Who is more wicked than one who attributes his lying inventions to God or denies His revelations? Indeed those who are guilty shall not be successful. (17)

They worship, side by side with God, what can neither harm nor benefit them, and say: 'These will intercede for us with God.' Say: 'Do you presume to inform God of something in the heavens or on earth that He does not know? Limitless is He in His glory, and exalted above whatever they may associate with Him.' (18)

All mankind were once but one single community, and then they disagreed among themselves. Had it not been for a decree from your Lord that had already gone forth, all their differences would have been resolved. (19)

They ask: 'Why has no sign been sent down to him by his Lord?' Say: 'God's alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.' (20)

Whenever We let people taste grace after some hardship has afflicted them, they turn

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ  
كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ ۗ إِنَّهُ لَا  
يُفْلِحُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

وَيَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا  
يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ هَؤُلَاءِ  
شَفَعَتُونَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ ۗ قُلْ أَتُنَبِّئُونَ اللَّهَ  
بِمَا لَا يَعْلَمُ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ  
سُبْحٰنَهُ ۗ وَتَعٰلٰى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

وَمَا كَانَ النَّاسُ إِلَّا أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَاخْتَلَفُوا  
ۗ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَقَضَىٰ  
بَيْنَهُمْ فِيمَا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

وَيَقُولُونَ لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَةٌ مِّن  
رَّبِّهِ ۗ فَقُلْ إِنَّمَا الْغَيْبُ لِلَّهِ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي  
مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

وَإِذَا أَذَقْنَا النَّاسَ رَحْمَةً مِّن بَعْدِ ضَرَّآءٍ  
مَسَّتْهُمْ إِذَا لَهُم مَّكْرٌ فِي آيَاتِنَا ۗ قُلِ اللَّهُ  
أَسْرَعُ مَكْرًا ۗ إِنَّ رُسُلَنَا يَكْتُبُونَ مَا  
تَمَكُرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

to scheme against Our revelations. Say: 'More swift is God's scheming. Our messengers are recording all that you may devise.' (21)

He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. Then when you are on board ships, and sailing along in a favourable wind, they feel happy with it, but then a stormy wind comes upon them and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe they are encompassed [by death]. [At that point] they appeal to God, in complete sincerity of faith in Him alone: 'If You will save us from this, we shall certainly be most grateful.' (22)

Yet when He has saved them, they transgress in the land, offending against all right. Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound. [You care only for] the enjoyment of this present life, but in the end you will return to Us when We will tell you the truth of what you were doing [in this life] . (23)

This present life may be compared to rain which We send down from the sky, and

هُوَ الَّذِي يُسِيرُكُمْ فِي الْأَبْرِ وَالْبَحْرِ حَتَّىٰ  
 إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ وَحَرَبِينَ بِهِمْ بِرِيحٍ  
 طَيِّبَةٍ وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا جَاءَتْهَا رِيحٌ عَاصِفٌ  
 وَجَاءَهُمُ الْمَوْجُ مِنْ كُلِّ مَكَانٍ وَظَنُّوا  
 أَنَّهُمْ أُحِيطَ بِهِمْ دَعَوُا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ  
 الدِّينَ لَئِنِ أَنْجَيْتَنَا مِنْ هَذِهِ لَنَكُونَنَّ  
 مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

فَلَمَّا أَنْجَاهُمْ إِذَا هُمْ يَبْغُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
 بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّمَا بَغْيُكُمْ  
 عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِكُمْ مَتَّعَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ  
 إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَنُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ  
 تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ  
 مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَأَخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ  
 مِمَّا يَأْكُلُ النَّاسُ وَالْأَنْعَامُ حَتَّىٰ

*which is then absorbed by the plants of the earth from which men and animals eat.*

*Then, when the earth has been clad with its fine adornments and well embellished, and its people believe that they have full mastery over it, Our command comes down upon it, by night or by day, and We make it like a field that has been mowed down, as if it did not blossom but yesterday. Thus do We spell out Our revelations to people who think. (24)*

*God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to a straight path. (25)*

إِذَا أَخَذَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُخْرُفَهَا وَأَزْيَنْتَ  
وَوَظْنَ أَهْلِهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَدِירוْنَ عَلَيْهَا  
أَتْنَهَا أَمْرُنَا لَيْلًا أَوْ نَهَارًا فَجَعَلْنَاهَا  
حَصِيدًا كَأَن لَّمْ تَغْنَ بِالْأَمْسِ ۚ  
كَذَلِكَ نُفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ



وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُوهُ إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ  
يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

## Preview

This *sūrah* is a single unit, difficult to divide into sections and subunits. In this respect it is similar to *Sūrah* 6, Cattle, which takes up Volume V of this work. However, each of the two *sūrahs* has its own distinctive character. This *sūrah* also flows in successive waves to inspire our hearts, choosing various rhythms for its address. It wonders at the outset how the unbelievers received the Qur'ān, the new revelation from on high, and follows this with scenes of the universe which reflect the truth of God's creation and His control of the universe. This is followed with scenes of the Day of Judgement. It reflects on how people react to the events they witness and on the fate of earlier communities. Its other themes have already been referred to in the Prologue.

If we have to divide the *sūrah* into sections, then the first one occupies more than its first half and this flows with perfect ease. This is followed by a short account of the Prophet Noah and his mission, and a brief reference to the prophets sent after him, before giving an account of the history of the Prophet Moses and a reference to the Prophet Jonah and his community. These accounts and references form another section. The final verses in the *sūrah* form a section of their own.

In view of the nature of this *sūrah*, we will attempt to discuss it in groups of waves addressing related themes.

This first section begins with three individual letters, *Alif, Lām, Rā*, in the same way as *Sūrahs* 2, 3 and 7 discussed in Volumes I, II and VI respectively. We explained in our commentary on these earlier *sūrahs* our view about why these *sūrahs* begin with such individual letters.<sup>1</sup> To recap, from a linguistic point of view, these three individual letters form a subject while the predicate is the sentence that follows: '*These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom.*' (Verse 1)

The *sūrah* then refers to a number of things which reflect the wisdom to which reference is made in the description of this book, the Qur'ān. These start with a revelation to God's Messenger so that he could warn all people and deliver a piece of happy news to the believers. It refutes the objection voiced by some people that God has chosen a human being to be the recipient of His revelations. It also refers to the creation of the heavens and the earth and how their affairs are conducted and regulated, as well as making the sun a source of bright light while the moon reflects light. Mention is also made of the stages the moon goes through and how people use these to calculate the years and measure time. The alternation of the night and day is also mentioned by way of reference to the wisdom involved in such alternation.

After presenting these scenes, the *sūrah* moves on to speak of those who do not reflect on such miracles and who do not expect to meet with their Lord, who creates and regulates all things. It refers to the black end that awaits those who choose to remain unaware of the import of God's creation and, by contrast, the perfect happiness that is in store for believers. The *sūrah* also refers to the wisdom behind delaying the punishment till its appointed day. Had God decided to speed up the awful result of their work, they would immediately face their end.

The *sūrah* then reflects on the attitude of human beings to good and evil. It shows how they appeal earnestly to God to lift their suffering, and how they forget Him after He has responded to their appeals: they unhesitatingly go back to their old,

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<sup>1</sup> It is useful to summarize our view here: these individual letters are simply an implicit reference to the fact that this divine revelation, the Qur'ān, is composed of letters of the same nature as those which some *sūrahs* open with. They are the same letters of the language of the Arabs, the first community to be addressed by the Qur'ān. Yet they form this Book which is of a miraculous nature. Those Arabs, masters of eloquence and poetic description, cannot produce a single *sūrah* similar to the Qur'ān. This miraculous excellence appears clearly in everything God makes. The earth is composed of particles of different elements with well-known characteristics, but the utmost that people can make of them is a brick, a tool, a machine, etc. On the other hand, from these very particles and elements God makes life, which no one else can do. From these letters and sounds, people make words and sentences in prose or verse, but God makes of them the Qur'ān which provides the infallible criterion to distinguish the truth from falsehood. The difference between people's language and the Qur'ān is the same as the difference between a lifeless object and a creature full of life. — Editor's note.

errant ways. In short, they take no lesson from what happened to earlier communities who met their doom.

Although the fate of those communities was clear to the Arabs whom the Prophet Muḥammad addressed, calling on them to accept God's message, the unbelievers asked the Prophet to bring them a different Qur'ān or change parts of it. They would not consider that the Qur'ān was revealed by God, and as such admits no change or modification. They worshipped idols which could bring them no benefit and cause them no harm, and they relied on no sound proof to support their beliefs. At the same time they denied God in spite of the revelations they received from on high supporting the call to believe in Him alone.

Furthermore, they demanded miracles, ignoring the clearly miraculous nature of the Qur'ān itself, and turning a blind eye to all signs scattered in the world around them confirming that God is the Lord of the universe.

This first passage then portrays a vivid example of how people receive God's grace and how they react when hardship or disaster befalls them. This is given in a scene that is full of life, with people boarding ships that go easily in the sea before they face a raging storm that brings them into contact with ferocious waves from every direction.

This passage then draws another scene which describes the deceptive fleeting nature of this life, and how all its glitter vanishes in an instant, while people are dazzled by its brightness, unaware of the impending doom. At the same time, God calls on them to seek the life of peace, security and reassurance which does not end suddenly, like the present life. He states that all these signs are explained for a definite purpose: *'Thus do We spell out Our revelations to people who think.'* (Verse 24) It is such people who understand God's wisdom in His creation and the way He conducts and regulates all matters.

### **Something to Marvel at**

*"Alif. Lām. Rā. These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom."* (Verse 1) These are three letters of the Arabic alphabet from which all the verses of this divine book that is full of wisdom are composed. The unbelievers deny that God revealed this book to His Messenger. Furthermore, whilst they realize that these are the letters of their language, they are unable to produce a single verse similar to what the Qur'ān contains. In fact the *sūrah* includes a challenge to them to do so. Yet their inability to take up that challenge does not lead them to reflect that the thing which God's Messenger has and they lack is the revelation he receives from on high. Had it not been for revelation, he would have had the same difficulty, and would have been

unable to compose out of these letters that are available to all a single verse like the Qur'ān.

*“These are verses of the divine book, full of wisdom.”* (Verse 1) It is indeed a wise book which addresses human beings with what suits human nature. It portrays in the present *sūrah* some aspects that are always true of human nature, reflected across every generation. In its wisdom it calls on those who remain unaware to wake up and reflect on the signs they see all around them in the wide universe, in the heavens and the earth, in the sun and the moon, in the night and day, in the fate of earlier communities and how they had responded to the appeals of their messengers, and in everything that points to the great power that conducts and regulates all existence.

*“Does it seem strange to people that We have inspired a man from their own midst: ‘Warn all mankind, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing with their Lord?’ The unbelievers say: ‘This is plainly a skilled enchanter.’”* (Verse 2) This is a rhetorical question which wonders at the attitude which considers the very concept of revelation strange.

Every one of God’s messengers was received with the same disbelieving question: *“Has God sent a human being as His messenger?”* (17: 94) This question stems from the fact that people do not appreciate the value of ‘humanity’ which they themselves represent. They find it hard to believe that a human being could be chosen as God’s messenger and that God sends down to him revelations, commanding him to make the way of guidance for others clear. They imagine that God would send an angel or some other creature belonging to a category superior to mankind. They do not realize how God has honoured man, and part of that honour is that man is well qualified to bear God’s message, and that God chooses certain human beings with whom He has this special relationship.

At the time of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), this was the main point of contention among the unbelievers who refused to believe in his message. The same was true of the unbelievers of earlier generations and communities. In this modern age of ours, some people invent a similarly absurd doubt. They wonder: how does contact happen between a human being with his limited physical nature and God who is totally unlike everything else and whose nature is unlike the nature of everything He has created?

Such a question cannot be asked except by one who fully comprehends the nature of God Himself with all its aspects, and who also understands all the characteristics God has given to man. No one in his right mind, aware of the limitations of his reason, would make such a claim. Such a person knows that the characteristics of human nature are still being discovered today, and that scientific discovery has not

come to an end. Beyond the reach of human perception and understanding there will always remain worlds unknown to man.

What this means is that human beings have latent potential known only to God. God certainly knows best to whom to assign His message. Knowing this ability is beyond all people and it may even be unknown to the person who is chosen for the task, until that choice is made. God, who has breathed of His soul into man knows every little detail of every nature. He can endow any human being with the ability to undertake this unique contact and bond in a way which can be appreciated only by those who experience it.

A number of contemporary commentators on the Qur'ān have endeavoured to prove the fact of revelation through scientific means so as to make it easier to understand. We however object to this approach. Science has its own scope and domain, and it has certain tools to suit its domain and to move within its scope. Science has not even claimed to have arrived at any certainty with regard to the spirit and human soul, because it is well beyond its domain. The spirit is not subject to the sort of material experiment which science can make. Therefore, those scientific disciplines that work within recognized scientific principles have avoided discussion of anything relating to the spirit. So-called 'spiritual studies' are merely attempts that have doubtful methods and very suspicious aims. The only way to arrive at any certainty in this area is to refer to the only sources of certainty which we have, namely, the Qur'ān and the *Ĥadīth*. We take any statement in these two sources at its face value, without adding anything to it or modifying it in any way and without drawing any conclusion on the basis of analogy. Addition, modification and analogy are all mental processes, but in this area the human mind is outside of its domain, and has no suitable tools to work with.

*"Does it seem strange to people that We have inspired a man from their own midst: Warn all mankind, and give those who believe the glad tidings that they are on a sound footing with their Lord?"* (Verse 2) This is in a nutshell the purpose of revelation: to warn people of the consequences of their disobedience and to deliver happy news to the believers as to the outcome of their obedience. This inevitably includes an outline of the duties that are to be fulfilled and the prohibitions to be avoided. The warning is addressed to all mankind, because it should be conveyed to all people, who must be made aware of the consequences of their actions. The happy news though is given only to the believers.

Indeed all human beings need to be warned so that they are aware of what may happen to them when they reject God's message and refuse to follow His guidance. On the other hand, only the believers receive the happy news of reassurance and of being on firm ground. The connotations generated here by the Arabic text all point to a general atmosphere of warning. The believers are '*on a sound footing*' which means

that they are sure of their steps, unhesitating, unshakeable even during the most worrying of times. They are “*on a sound footing with their Lord,*” in a presence where believers find reassurance and safety while others worry as they contemplate their impending doom.

### **Why a Human Messenger?**

God’s wisdom is clearly apparent in choosing to send down His revelations to a man from among themselves and one whom they knew well. Thus they could give and take from him without difficulty or embarrassment. His wisdom in sending messengers is even clearer. By his very nature, man can accept and follow good or evil. His tool to distinguish between the two is his reason. This reason needs to have an accurate criterion to which it can refer whenever things become doubtful and unclear, or whenever temptations or immediate interests affect his judgement. He needs a measure which is totally unaffected by anything that influences the human body, mentality or temperament, so as to give him the right answer concerning any uncertainty. This measure and criterion is nothing other than God’s guidance and His law.

This requires that divine faith should provide a firm basis to which the human mind refers all its concepts and ideas in order to determine which of them are correct and which are false. To say, by contrast, that divine faith always reflects how people conceive this faith which is, consequently, liable to evolve and develop, is to make his basis subject to influence by human concepts and logic. This undermines the whole basis and leaves no proper measure or criterion to evaluate human concepts.

Such a view is not much different from saying that religion is of human making. The ultimate result is the same. The risk is too strong and the trap is very dangerous. Hence it is imperative that we always be on our guard against its short and long term results.

Although the question of revelation is so clear, the unbelievers receive it as though it is very strange: “*The unbelievers say: ‘This is plainly a skilled enchanter:’*” (Verse 2) They describe him as an enchanter or a sorcerer because what he says is beyond the power of human beings. Yet they should acknowledge the fact of revelation on account of this, because sorcery is incapable of including statements about universal facts or of delivering a complete code of living, laws and moral principles which make for a highly civilized society. They tended to confuse revelation with sorcery because in all pagan beliefs, sorcery was a part of religion. They did not have the clarity that a Muslim possesses with regard to the nature of divine faith. This realization saves Muslims from all the legends and superstitions of pagan beliefs.

*Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and established Himself on the Throne, regulating and governing all that exists. There is none who may intercede with Him unless He first grants leave for that. That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone. Will you not then keep this in mind? To Him you shall all return. This is, in truth, God's promise. He originates all His creation, and then brings them all back to life so that He may reward, with equity, those who have believed and done good deeds. As for the unbelievers, they shall have a scalding drink and a grievous suffering for their unbelief. He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and determined her phases so that you may know how to compute the years and measure [time]. God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth. He makes plain His revelations to people of knowledge. Indeed in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for people who are God-fearing. (Verses 3-6)*

This, the question of Lordship, is the main issue of faith. The unbelievers did not seriously deny the concept of Godhead. They acknowledged God's existence – for human nature cannot entirely reject the basic concept of God except in few highly unusual cases – but they associated other deities with Him and to these they addressed their worship. In some cases, the unbelievers considered their false deities to be intermediaries who could bring them closer to God. Others thought they could give themselves certain powers which belong to God alone, thereby enacting legislation which God had not sanctioned.

The Qur'ān does not enter into any cold philosophical argument, of the type introduced in Muslim cultural circles by the influence of Greek philosophy, concerning the questions of Godhead and Lordship. Instead it resorts to the simple, straightforward logic of human nature. It states that God is the One who created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. He is the One who has made the sun a source of radiant light and given the moon its quality to reflect light, determining its stages. He also made the day and night alternate. All these natural phenomena can awaken man's heart and mind if he would only contemplate them and reflect on the power that controls them. God who has created all this and controls its movement is the One who deserves to be the Lord to whom people address their worship, assigning to Him no partners from among His creation. This is a simple logical conclusion which does not need any long argumentative debate based on cold deductive reasoning that touches no heart and awakens no mind.

This vast universe, with its heavens and earth, sun and moon, night and day, and all that is created in the heavens and the earth and lives in them of plants, birds, animals and other communities, follow the laws of nature God has set in operation.

The deep dark night with its still silence, disturbed only by the movement of phantoms; the dawn that opens up into it like a smiling, happy babe; the movement that the early breath of the morning brings to start a new day full of life; the calm shades that seem still to the beholder when they are in fact moving along gently; the birds that hop and fly here and there in never ending movement; the emerging plants that look forward to continued growth; the countless creatures that come and go everywhere; the unending cycle of birth and death; and the life that continues along its way determined by God, are all countless images, forms, types, movements that start and finish; cycles that take people to old age or to start young lives, to invigoration and fading away, to birth and death, and so on through a continuous life cycle that never stops. All this calls on every sense and atom in human beings to pause and reflect. It only takes an alert mind and an open heart to contemplate such signs as are everywhere in the universe. The Qur'ān directly awakens hearts and minds so that man can so reflect.

### **The Lord to Be Worshipped**

*"Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six days."* (Verse 3) Your Lord who deserves to be worshipped alone is the Creator of all that is. It is He who created the heavens and the earth according to an elaborate plan of creation and to wise purpose. He did all this *'in six days'*. We will not delve into any argument about these six days, for they are mentioned here only to point to the wisdom behind the elaborate planning of creation and how the affairs of the universe are conducted so as to suit God's purpose. Anyway, these six days belong to the realm that God has kept to Himself. We cannot find what they are unless He chooses to inform us. Hence, we do not go beyond what is stated about them in the Qur'ān.

*"And established Himself on the Throne."* (Verse 3) This expression indicates a position of a firm, overall authority exercised by a higher being. It gives a physical image in the inimitable style of the Qur'ān. The conjunction, 'and', is used in the Arabic text in the form of 'then', but it does not indicate any chronological order. It only indicates a mental dimension. Time has no significance in this context. There is simply no state or form applicable to God which came into existence after it was not there. Limitless is God in His glory. He is not subject to an event taking place, and all that events entail of time and location.<sup>§</sup> Hence we emphatically say that 'and', in the present context, indicates a mental dimension.

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<sup>§</sup> For further discussion on the *Istiwā'* attribute, please refer to section 1.1 of *A Critique of 'In the Shade of the Qur'ān'*.

*“Regulating and governing all that exists.”* (Verse 3) He determines the beginning and the end, the shape and the form, the preliminaries and the conclusions, and chooses the laws that govern its stages and its final place.

*“There is none who may intercede with Him unless He first grants leave for that.”* (Verse 3) All decisions and judgements belong to Him alone. There are no intercessors who may bring anyone closer to Him. No one of His creatures may intercede with Him unless He grants him permission to do so, in accordance with His wise planning. Intercession may be earned through firm belief and good deeds, not by appealing to false intercessors. This answers what the Arabs used to say about the angels: that statues of them which they worshipped enjoyed an inalienable right of intercession. How absurd!

What all this means is that the Creator has the absolute authority to govern and regulate all matters, and no one may intercede without His permission. *“That is God, your Lord’* who is worthy of having His Lordship acknowledged by all. *‘So worship Him alone.”* (Verse 3) For He is the One to whom all submission should be addressed. *“Will you not then keep this in mind?”* (Verse 3) The whole thing is so clear and so firmly established that it only requires a mere admonition for the truth to be well engraved in people’s minds.

We need to pause a little to reflect on the statement that follows all the universal phenomena pointing to God and His Lordship: *“That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone.”* (Verse 3) As we have already said, the unbelievers among the Arabs did not seriously deny the existence of God. They acknowledged that He is the Creator who gives sustenance, initiates life, causes death, regulates all matters and is able to do whatever He wills. This acknowledgement though was not followed by its logical consequence of acknowledging His Lordship over their lives. That would have been reflected by submitting to Him alone in all matters, addressing all worship rituals to Him and accepting His rule in all their affairs.

That is precisely the meaning of the statement: *“That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone.”* Worship means submission, obedience and acknowledging all these attributes as belonging to God alone.

In all structures based on *jāhiliyyah*<sup>1</sup> the concept of Godhead is drastically narrowed down. People begin to think that by merely acknowledging the existence of God, they have attained to faith, and that once people make that acknowledgement they have then done all that is required of them. They thus avoid

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<sup>1</sup> *Jāhiliyyah* is an Islamic term that refers in the first instance to the state of affairs that prevailed in Arabia in the period immediately before the advent of Islam. The word is derived from a root that signifies ‘ignorance’. In its broader usage it refers to any situation that is not based on belief in God’s oneness, implying that such a situation is generated by, or based on, a state of ignorance. — Editor’s note.

the natural consequence of that acknowledgement, which requires submission to God alone, who is the overall Sovereign and ruler, and against whom no one has any authority unless it comes from Him.

Similarly the meaning of 'worship' is seriously curtailed in any *jāhiliyyah* society. It becomes synonymous with offering worship rituals. People then think that once they address these rituals to God, they are worshipping Him alone. The fact is that the term 'worship', *ʿibādah* in Arabic, is derived from the root *ʿabada* which signifies submission. Worship rituals are only one aspect of submission, which remains much wider in import.

*Jāhiliyyah* is not a period of history or a particular stage of development. It is a state characterized by the curtailment of the concepts of Godhead and worship on the above lines. Such curtailment leads people to associate partners with God while they imagine that they are following His faith, as is the case today in all parts of the world. This includes those countries whose populations have Muslim names and address their worship to God, but who have Lords other than God. Yet the Lord is the One whose authority over us all should be acknowledged, whose law should be implemented, to whom we should submit, carry out His orders and refrain from what He forbids, and whom we should obey in all matters. This is how the Prophet explained worship to his companion, *ʿAdiy ibn Ḥātim*, as he told him: 'They obeyed their [rabbis and monks who legislated for them as they pleased], and that is how they worshipped them.'<sup>1</sup>

## Justice for All

To emphasize this meaning of worship, a later verse in this *sūrah* states: "Say: 'Do but consider all the means of sustenance that God has bestowed on you! Some of it you then made unlawful, and some lawful.' Say: 'Was God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?'" (Verse 59) Our situation today is not at all different from what prevailed during that period of ignorance and to whose people God clearly states: "That is God, your Lord: so worship Him alone. Will you not then keep this in mind?" (Verse 3) So, worship Him, associating no partners with Him. For to Him you shall return to face the reckoning when He gives each one, believer or unbeliever, his or her fitting reward: "To Him you shall all return. This is, in truth, God's promise." (Verse 4) You return to none of the partners or the intercessors you claim. He has promised that you will return to Him and His promise is certain to be fulfilled. For resurrection is the completion of creation.

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<sup>1</sup> A full treatment of this *ḥadīth* is given in Volume VIII, pp. 108-111. – Editor's note.

*“He originates all His creation, and then brings them all back to life so that He may reward, with equity, those who have believed and done good deeds. As for the unbelievers, they shall have a scalding drink and a grievous suffering for their unbelief.”* (Verse 4) Administering justice to all is in itself one of the aims of original creation and bringing all creatures back to life. Similarly, giving pure happiness and enjoyment without any unwelcome consequences to spoil its effects is another aim of the process of creation and resurrection. This is the utmost point of perfection which humanity can reach. Such a zenith cannot be attained in this life on earth which is always mixed with worry and distress. No happy experience in this life is free of a hiccup or an unwelcome aftermath, except perhaps for pure spiritual happiness which is very rarely experienced by human beings.

Had the inevitable termination of the happiness of this world been the only feeling people acknowledge, it would have been enough to make it imperfect and incomplete. In this life, humanity does not attain its highest potential, which implies getting rid of its weaknesses, shortcomings, and their consequences, as well as an enjoyment that is free of fear, worry, and apprehension of quick termination. Such happiness, graphically described in the Qur’ān, is attained in heaven. As such, it is only proper that one of the aims of creation and resurrection is to enable those human beings who follow divine guidance, implementing the right code of living, to attain the highest standard of humanity.

The unbelievers have put the divine code of living aside and have chosen not to move along the way that leads to the attainment of human perfection. According to the laws of nature that never fail, their deviation keeps them well short of that level of perfection. As Shaikh Rashīd Riḏā’ says, they will have to suffer the consequences of their errant ways just like one who violates the rules of health: he suffers disease and debility and they suffer distress after distress. The end result will be unmitigated misery, in contrast to the pure happiness the believers enjoy: *“As for the unbelievers, they shall have a scalding drink and a grievous suffering for their persistent disbelief”* (Verse 4)

The *sūrah* then highlights some of the cosmic phenomena which are next to the creation of the heavens and the earth in their magnificence: *“He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light and the moon a light [reflected], and determined her phases so that you may know how to compute the years and measure [time]. God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth. He makes plain His revelations to people of knowledge.”* (Verse 5) These are two very clear scenes which we take for granted because of our long familiarity with them and their continuous repetition. Who could imagine the awesome feelings of majesty and magnificence of a person who sees the sun rising and setting for the first time, or the full moon making its first appearance followed by its first setting? The Qur’ān reminds us of these two very familiar scenes

so as to bring them back to us anew. It awakens in our hearts a desire to look and reflect over such great phenomena.

The Qur'ān draws our attention to the elaborate design clearly seen in their creation: *"He it is who made the sun a source of radiant light."* (Verse 5) We feel that it is almost ablaze. *"And the moon a light [reflected]."* It shines and illuminates. *"And determined her phases."* (Verse 5) It stands every night in a new position which gives it a corresponding shape. This is seen by all of us when we look at the moon, night after night. We do not need to have any specialized knowledge of astronomy to realize this. The purpose is clear: *so that you may know how to compute the years and measure time.'* (Verse 5) Today, we all still calculate time on the basis of the sun and the moon's movements.

Is all this a pastime, a coincidence or something false? Certainly not. Such an elaborate system, providing such perfect harmony and accuracy which never fail, could not be without purpose. It is neither false nor a coincidence: *"God has not created this otherwise than in accordance with the truth."* (Verse 5) The truth is its tool, substance and objective. The truth is constant and firmly rooted, and these phenomena which point to the truth are also clear, constant and permanent. *"He makes His revelations plain to people of knowledge."* (Verse 5) Knowledge and learning are needed to understand the elaborate planning behind these magnificent scenes.

The heavens, the earth, the blazing sun, and the illuminating moon combine to produce the succession of day and night. This is a telling phenomenon which inspires anyone who opens his heart and mind to the messages contained in the universe: *"Indeed in the alternating of night and day, and in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for people who are God-fearing."* (Verse 6) The Arabic term used for the 'alternating of night and day' refers both to their succession and their varying length. Both are well-known aspects which lose their significance with familiarity, except in those moments when man's soul and conscience are awakened and he begins to contemplate the rise and setting of different stars and planets like a man reborn, responding to every aspect and every phenomenon. Only in such moments does man truly live, shaking away the rust of familiarity and repetition which becloud his vision and blunt his responses.

*"And in all that God has created in the heavens and the earth."* (Verse 6) If man just stood for a moment watching what 'God has created in the heavens and the earth' and looked at the countless number of species, forms, situations and material conditions, he would have sufficient material for a life of reflection and contemplation. For in all this, *'there are signs for people who are God-fearing.'* (Verse 6)

It is only such people who have a conscience, sharpened by their fear of God, who are alert and responsive to the evidence of God's great might. For it is all clearly apparent in the perfection of His creation.

### **Addressing Human Nature**

To appeal to human nature is a central part of the Qur'ānic approach. The Qur'ān utilizes the signs that are seen everywhere around us in the universe to point to God as the Lord Creator. God knows that these address human nature in a clear and telling way. The Qur'ān does not employ the argumentative style of later philosophers, for God knows that this does not appeal to people's hearts. It remains instead within its area of cold reasoning which neither generates motivation nor contributes to building human life.

The proofs presented by the Qur'ān remain the most convincing to hearts and minds alike. The very existence of the universe, its harmonious movement, and whatever changes and transformations that take place in it – according to laws that were set in operation long before they were discovered by man – cannot be explained without acknowledging the existence of an able hand that controls it all. Those who dispute this fact do not offer any plausible alternative. They merely say that the universe has long existed with its operative laws, and that its existence does not need any explanation. Anyone who finds such argument acceptable or reasonable may please himself.

Such arguments were made in Europe when breaking away from the tyranny of the Church led people to deny God altogether. Now they are also said in our countries as a means of getting away from the practical implications of belief in God. Most people in the unbelieving communities of times gone by acknowledged God's existence, but disputed His Lordship, as was the case in Arabian *jāhiliyyah*, where the Qur'ān made its first address to mankind. The Qur'ānic proof refuted their belief in God's existence and His attributes, and demanded that they should take their beliefs to their natural conclusion and so acknowledge God's Lordship. In other words the Qur'ān demanded that they submit to Him alone in laws and worship alike. The state of ignorance that prevails in our own time tries to rid itself of this powerful logic by denying God's existence altogether.

What is strange is that even in countries claiming to be Islamic, this is promoted in a variety of ways under the guise of science. Thus we hear that what is 'metaphysical' has no place in 'scientific' methodology. Everything that is related to God is thus considered 'metaphysical'. Those running away from God try to use this back door, only because they fear and try to deceive others. As for fear of God, this is a quality of which they are devoid.

Nevertheless, the very existence of the universe and its meticulously accurate and harmonious systems remains a proof too strong for the unbelievers to face. Human nature, in heart, mind and soul, responds to this proof. The Qur'ānic approach addresses human nature as a whole in the broadest and most direct way. *'Fire for their abode in requital for what they used to do.'* (Verse 8) This is a fitting end.

The believers by contrast realize that there is something much superior to this present life. Their deeds are righteous because their faith motivates them to obey God's commands and expect His generous reward in the hereafter. These are the ones who *'will be guided aright by their Lord by means of their faith.'* (Verse 9) Having faith establishes a relationship between them and God who guides them to do what is right. As a result of this guidance, their hearts are alive, fully aware of the straight path they have to follow. Their conscience is alert, directing them always to do what is good and what earns God's pleasure. These are the ones who are admitted into heaven where *'running waters will flow at their feet.'* (Verse 9) The reference here to running waters in heaven is at the same time a reference to water generally which is always associated with growth, fertility and life.

What are their preoccupations once in heaven? What do they wish for? They have no need for wealth, position, or personal gain. What God gives them is far better than any such concern which is in any case now behind them. Instead, their preoccupation, their top priority, is described as their 'appeal' or 'call' to glorify God in the beginning and praise Him in the end. In between times they greet one another and are greeted by the angels: *"There they will call out: 'Limitless are You in Your glory, God,' and their greeting will be, Peace!' Their call will conclude with the words: 'All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds!'"* (Verse 10)

All the concerns and worries of this life are over. Its needs are no longer of any value. They enjoy an atmosphere of perfect bliss where God is praised and glorified. This is when man attains perfection.

### **Man's Changing Attitude**

The *sūrah* then picks up the challenge posed by the pagan Arabs to God's Messenger, whereby they required him to deliver forthwith the punishment he warned them against. They are told that postponing such punishment to a specified time is an aspect of God's mercy. A scene is then drawn to demonstrate how they behave when they suffer some affliction. At that moment, their nature returns to its purity and they appeal to God, their Lord. When the affliction is relieved, those who habitually go beyond the limits revert to their erring ways. They are then reminded of the fate of earlier communities who also transgressed. This serves as a warning to

stop them exceeding their limits. After all, this present life is a test which determines their destiny.

*If God were to hasten for mankind the ill [they have earned] as they would hasten the good, their end would indeed come forthwith. But We leave those who have no hope of meeting Us in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro. When affliction befalls man, he appeals to Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve his affliction, he goes on as though he had never appealed to Us to save him from the affliction that befell him. Thus do their deeds seem fair to those who are given to excesses. Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave. (Verses 11-14)*

The pagan Arabs used to challenge the Prophet, asking him to immediately deliver God's punishment. They asked him to do so in different ways. For example, in this *sūrah* it is stated: "They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?'" (Verse 48) In another *sūrah*: "They challenge you to hasten evil rather than good, although exemplary punishments have come to pass before their time." (13: 6). Or in similar vein, they say: "God, if this be indeed Your revealed truth, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict grievous suffering on us." (8: 32)

All this describes their stubborn attitude to God's guidance. In His wisdom, God chose not to inflict a collective punishment on them as He did with earlier communities. Instead, He knew that the great majority of them would eventually accept the faith and that they would work to establish its roots firmly in the land. This took place after Makkah had fallen to the Prophet. At the time they made their ignorant challenge, it was not conceivable that such a change would come to pass. But this was the real good which God wanted for them, which was infinitely better than the type they wanted to experience quickly. He also warns them against ignoring His purpose behind delaying their fate. Yet those who entertain no expectation of meeting with God continue in their arrogance until they eventually meet their fate.

In connection with the challenge to hasten evil, the *sūrah* portrays the situation of those who suffer affliction. Here we have a clear case of contradiction with people asking for evil to be brought forthwith when they are unable to endure modest affliction. Yet when such affliction is removed, they revert to those practices which caused the affliction in the first place: "When affliction befalls man, he appeals to Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting, or standing, but as soon as We relieve his affliction, he

*goes on as though he had never appealed to Us to save him from the affliction that befell him. Thus do their deeds seem fair to those who are given to excesses.”* (Verse 12)

It is an ingeniously drawn picture of a frequently occurring situation. Man may move along in life, committing all types of sin and excess. He pays little attention to what is permissible and what is not, as long as he is in good health and enjoying comfortable conditions. Only those who are conscious of God remember in such a situation, that after health and strength there will be illness and weakness. Affluence makes people forget and power leads to excess. But when affliction overtakes man he is worried, vulnerable and helpless. He appeals earnestly to God, unable to endure the hardship, eager to have his affliction replaced with comfort. When his appeal is granted and the affliction removed, he does not reflect on the lessons of this experience. Instead, he reverts to his old ways, heedless of the consequences.

The *sūrah* co-ordinates this image with the psychological condition it describes and the type of person it delineates. Thus the affliction is shown to last a long time. *‘When affliction befalls man, he appeals to Us, whether he be lying on his side, sitting, or standing.’* (Verse 12) All such situations are described so that we have a feeling of how man stops when the energy he derives from his health, wealth or power is cut off. It is just like something moving by impetus suddenly hitting a block. When the block is removed, it dashes along. Here we have the verb, ‘goes on’, describing man’s violent movement which leaves no time for reflection, learning or gratitude: *‘As soon as We relieve his affliction, he goes on as though he had never appealed to Us to save him from the affliction that befell him.’* (Verse 12)

It is this kind of nature – i.e. remembering God when suffering affliction, but not once it is removed – which makes those people who exceed their limits think that their excesses are only normal and fair. *‘Thus do their deeds seem fair to those who are given to excesses.’* (Verse 12)

It is only right that people should reflect on what happened in the past to those who indulged in excesses: *‘Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty.’* (Verse 13) Their transgression beyond the limits, which is another way of describing their disbelief in God’s oneness and their association of partners with Him, led to their ruin. Their fate was clear for the Arabs to see in those areas which were once inhabited by the `Ād and the Thamūd and in Sodom and Gomorra where the people of Lot dwelt. Their fate should be a sufficient lesson to all people.

Having been shown the fate of those who turned away from God’s guidance after it had been explained to them by their prophets, the unbelievers are reminded that they are now their successors, having power in the land so that they can show

themselves worthy of God's trust: *"Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave."* (Verse 14) This is a powerful statement. They now enjoy something that once belonged to others but from whom it was removed. They too will leave it after their test is over, and they will be rewarded in accordance with what they do.

Thus Islam shows man the facts as they are so that he is not deceived by appearances. This creates in the human heart an alertness based on consciousness and fear of God. This alertness works as a safety valve for both the individual and the community. When man realizes that he is being tested in this earthly life and that everything he possesses or enjoys during this life is a part of this test, such realization gives him immunity against arrogance and delusion. He no longer seeks abundance of enjoyment at any cost, because he realizes that he will have to account for what he enjoys. There is, in essence, a constant feeling of being watched. This is clear in God's statement: *'so that We might see how you behave.'* (Verse 14) This should make man extra careful, keen to do well, and pass his test.

Here we have the basic difference between the way Islam nurtures a believer's mind and philosophies which give no place to God's watchfulness over man or reckoning in the hereafter. A believer in Islam and a follower of any philosophy will never share common ground in respect of their views, morality, or lifestyle.

### **A Demand to Change the Qur'ān**

Once they have been made aware that they are the successors to earlier guilty communities, the *sūrah* then provides examples of their deeds: *"When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, those who have no hope of meeting Us say: 'Bring us a discourse other than this Qur'ān, or else alter it.' Say: 'It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. I dread the torment of an awesome day if I should disobey my Lord!' Say: Had God so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. I spent a whole lifetime among you before it [was revealed to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?' Who is more wicked than one who attributes his lying inventions to God or denies His revelations? Indeed those who are guilty shall not be successful. They worship, side by side with God, what can neither harm nor benefit them, and say: 'These will intercede for us with God.' Say: Do you presume to inform God of something in the heavens or on earth that He does not know? Limitless is He in His glory, and exalted above whatever they may associate with Him.' All mankind were once but one single community, and then they disagreed among themselves. Had it not been for a decree from your Lord that had already gone forth, all their differences would have been resolved. They ask: 'Why has no sign been sent down to him by his Lord?' Say: 'God's alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.'"* (Verses 15-20)

Such was their attitude to God's Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), when they were given power in the land. *"When Our revelations are recited to them in all their clarity, those who have no hope of meeting Us say: 'Bring us a discourse other than this Qur'ān, or else alter it.'"* (Verse 15) This is a very strange request which betrays a lack of seriousness and a total ignorance of the role of the Qur'ān in human life and the reason for its revelation. Those who expect to meet God would never entertain such a request.

The Qur'ān is a complete constitution for human life. It is so well formulated that it satisfies all human needs at both individual and community levels. It takes human life along the road to perfection, in as much as man can achieve this in this world, then to complete perfection in the life to come. Those who realize the nature of the Qur'ān would not even think of asking for a different one let alone changing some of it.

Most probably those who did not have any expectation of meeting God tried to be too clever. They looked on the matter as a kind of literary challenge. All that Muḥammad needed to do was to accept the challenge and compose a different discourse, or to replace some parts of it. Here he receives clear instructions: *"Say: 'It is not for me to alter it of my own accord. I only follow what is revealed to me. I dread the torment of an awesome day if should disobey my Lord!'"* (Verse 15) The matter is not one of a competition, demonstrating skills or poetic talent. The Qur'ān is a constitution outlining a complete code of living devised by the One who controls the whole universe. He is the One who has created man and knows what suits him best. The Prophet cannot alter it on his own initiative. He only conveys God's message and follows what is revealed to him. Any change in the Qur'ān represents a very serious act of disobedience to God, and such a person is liable to severe punishment on the Day of Judgement. That is indeed a prospect to dread.

*Say: 'Had God so willed, I would not have recited it to you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. I spent a whole lifetime among you before it [was revealed to me]. Will you not, then, use your reason?'* (Verse 16)

The Qur'ān is a revelation given by God. That it must be conveyed to you is also an order issued by God, and one which must be obeyed. Had God willed that the Prophet not recite it to you, he would not have done so, and had He willed not to bring it to your knowledge, He would have kept it from you. Its revelation and recitation to people so that they become aware of its message are all matters decided by God alone. The Prophet is commanded to say all this to people and to further say that he had spent a lifetime among them, forty full years, without ever telling them anything about the Qur'ān, because it had not yet been bestowed to him from on

high. Had it been within his power to produce something similar to it, or even like some parts of it, why would he have waited a whole lifetime to do so? It again boils down to the fact that the Qur'ān is God's revelation. The role of the Prophet is simply to convey it to mankind.

The Prophet is further instructed to make it clear that he would never have invented a lie and attributed it to God. Far be it from him to do anything of the kind. He would never have claimed to have received revelations unless that were absolutely true. For the one who attributes a fabrication to God and the one who denies His revelations go too far in the wrong: *"Who is more wicked than one who attributes his lying inventions to God or denies His revelations?"* (Verse 17) As the Prophet warns them strongly against committing the second of these two very grave wrongs, he himself would not even commit the first by inventing fabrications and attributing them to God. *"Indeed, those who are guilty shall not be successful."* (Verse 17)

### Knowing Something Unknown to God

The *sūrah* continues with its account of what they said and did after they had succeeded earlier communities. So what comes after their absurd request for a new Qur'ān? *"They worship, side by side with God, what can neither harm nor benefit them, and say: 'These will intercede for us with God.' Say: Do you presume to inform God of something in the heavens or on earth that He does not know? Limitless is He in His glory, and exalted above whatever they may associate with Him."* (Verse 18)

When people deviate from the truth, there is no end to their absurdity. The numerous deities to whom they address their worship can neither harm nor benefit them in any way. Nevertheless, they think they have a role to play, claiming that they *'will intercede for us with God.'* (Verse 18)

In reply, the Prophet is instructed to say to them: *"Do you presume to inform God of something in the heavens or on earth that He does not know?"* (Verse 18) God does not know anyone who can intercede with Him. Do you then presume to know what is unknown to God Himself? Are you, by implication, informing Him of the existence, in the heavens or on earth, of beings He is unaware of? Here the Qur'ān adopts sarcasm as the means to best counter their unrivalled absurdity. But this is followed with a statement of God's glorification which makes it clear that all their claims are absolutely false: *"Limitless is He in His glory, and exalted above whatever they may associate with Him."* (Verse 18)

Thereafter, the Qur'ān clarifies that the claim that God has partners is an incidental development. Originally, human nature believed in God's oneness. Only later did people begin to disagree about this: *"All mankind were once but one single community, and then they disagreed among themselves."* (Verse 19) In His wisdom, God

has determined to let all of them be until their appointed time. His will is done, and His purpose is accomplished: *“Had it not been for a decree from your Lord that had already gone forth, all their differences would have been resolved.”* (Verse 19)

Then the account of what those new generations given power on earth said is continued: *“They ask: ‘Why has no sign been sent down to him by his Lord?’ Say: ‘God’s alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.’”* (Verse 20) All the signs that this great revelation includes do not seem to be enough for them. Nor are they satisfied with all the signs that they see in the universe. They appeal for a miracle like the ones shown to earlier communities. Their request shows them to be totally oblivious to the nature of the Prophet’s message and its own great miracle. That is not a temporary miracle which is over and done with once a community has seen it. It is the Qur’ān, a permanent miracle which addresses our hearts and minds from one generation to another.

In reply to this request, God directs His Messenger to refer them to Him, for He alone knows what He has in store, and He alone will determine whether He shows them some miracle or not: *“Say: ‘Gods alone is the knowledge of what is beyond the reach of human perception. Wait, then, if you will: I too am waiting.’”* (Verse 20) This reply implies a delay and a warning. It also provides, by implication, an outline of the limitations of God’s servants. Muḥammad (peace be upon him), who was the greatest of all God’s prophets and messengers, had no knowledge of what God chose to keep to Himself. He had no influence over what would happen to people, for that is determined by God alone. Thus the distinction between God and His servants is clearly delineated.

### **When All Are Powerless**

Now the *sūrah* goes on to speak of human nature when people are shown God’s grace after having experienced misfortune and hardship. It gives them an example of what actually takes place in real life. The scene so depicted is vivid and powerful.

*Whenever We let people taste grace after some hardship has afflicted them, they turn to scheme against Our revelations. Say: More swift is God’s scheming. Our messengers are recording all that you may devise.’ He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea. Then when you are on board ships, and sailing along in a favourable wind, they feel happy with it, but then a stormy wind comes upon them and waves surge towards them from all sides, so that they believe they are encompassed [by death]. [At that point] they appeal to God, in complete sincerity of faith in Him alone. If You will save us from this, we shall certainly be most grateful.’ Yet when He has saved them, they transgress in the land, offending against all right. Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound. [You care only for] the enjoyment*

*of this present life, but in the end you will return to Us when We will tell you the truth of what you were doing [in this life]. (Verses 21-23)*

Strange indeed is this human creature, for he does not remember God except in times of hardship and affliction. He does not remove from his nature all the bad influences that distort it, bringing it back to its purity, except when he feels the pressure of misfortune weighing heavily upon him. But when he feels safe and secure, he either forgets or transgresses. The only exceptions are those who follow God's guidance. Their nature remains pure and responsive all the time. It enjoys the purity of faith which keeps it clean and shining. *"Whenever We let people taste grace after some hardship has afflicted them they turn to scheme against Our revelations."* (Verse 21) Thus did Pharaoh's people with Moses. Whenever they were overwhelmed by God's punishment, they cried out, sending their earnest appeals for its lifting, and promising to change and mend their ways. Once they were shown God's mercy, they started to scheme against God's revelations, giving them wrong interpretations. They even claimed different reasons for the lifting of their afflictions. The Quraysh, the Arab tribe living in Makkah at the Prophet's time, did the same. When they experienced drought and feared for their lives, they came to the Prophet, appealing to him by their ties of kinship, to pray to God on their behalf. He did and God answered his prayers, sending rain in abundance. But the Quraysh did not fulfil their pledges. They schemed against God's revelations and persisted in their erring ways. Indeed this is a constant phenomenon, unless man accepts the divine faith and follows God's guidance.

*"Say: 'More swift is God's scheming. Our messengers are recording all that you may devise.'" (Verse 21)* God is certainly more able to plan and make their scheming ineffective. All that which they scheme is laid open before Him. When their scheming is known in advance, it is very easy to foil. *"Our messengers are recording all that you may devise."* Nothing of it is overlooked or forgotten. As for the identity of those messengers and how they record and write, all we know is that which we can glean from statements like the present one. We accept these statements as they are, without trying to interpret them further.

Then we are given a very vivid scene which is portrayed as if it is happening before our eyes. We react to it with feeling and emotion. It begins with establishing the fact of God's power that controls both what is moving and what is motionless: *"He it is who enables you to travel on land and sea."* (Verse 22) The whole *sūrah* emphasizes the fact of God's limitless power which controls the whole universe and the destiny of all creatures that live in it.

The full scene then unfolds before us: *"Then when you are on board ships..." (Verse 22)* As we look we see the ships moving on their way: *"and sailing along in a favourable*

*wind...*" (Verse 22) We also learn about the feelings of those who are on board: *"they feel happy with it..."* (Verse 22) In the midst of this atmosphere of complete serenity, and the happiness that it spreads, everyone is suddenly jolted: *"a stormy wind comes upon them..."* (Verse 22) What a calamity! *"And waves surge towards them from all sides..."* (Verse 22) The ships start to shake violently, and the waves hit against them time and again, and they spin like a feather in the air. Those on board are overtaken with fear, feeling that there is no escape: *"and they believe they are encompassed [by death]..."* (Verse 22) There is simply nowhere to turn.

At that moment, and in the midst of all this furore, their nature sheds all the filth it accumulated, blunting its reactions. Their minds rid themselves of all erring thoughts. Their nature reverts to its original condition, undistorted. It acknowledges God as the only Lord in the universe and submits to Him alone: *"[At that point] they appeal to God, in complete sincerity of faith in Him alone: 'If You will save us from this, we shall certainly be most grateful.'"* (Verse 22)

Then the winds subside, and the waves die down. The people on board begin to catch their breath, and their pounding hearts slow down. Soon the ships reach the shore, and the people feel secure. When they step on land, feeling its firmness, they are sure that they are not about to perish. They have their lives ahead of them. Then what?

### **A Description of Life in This World**

*"Yet when He has saved them, they transgress in the land, offending against all right."* (Verse 23) This also comes as a complete surprise.

This in itself is a whole scene, and we miss none of its totality and fine detail. Nor do we miss any feeling or reaction it induces. In essence we are given a picture of a real event, but it is also a mental scene describing the nature of many people regardless of the generation they were born into. Hence the *sūrah* follows it with comments addressed to mankind throughout history.

*"Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound."* (Verse 23) Whether these offences are committed against oneself, by sending it on the way to perdition, letting it indulge in disobedience that is certain to make it the loser, or offences against all humanity since humanity represents one soul, the offenders will suffer the consequences. These consequences will also be shared by those who allow them to offend.

The worst type of offence is that which represents an aggression against God Himself, usurping His Lordship and sovereignty, claiming these for the usurpers themselves. When people are guilty of this type of offence, they suffer its wretched

consequences in this present life before they endure its punishment in the hereafter. These consequences are manifested in corruption that spreads into the whole life. All mankind are miserable because of it. No human dignity, freedom or virtue is left untouched by it.

The basic point here is that people should submit themselves purely to God, or else they will find themselves submitting to tyrants who try to impose their authority on them. The struggle to establish the principle of God's oneness in human life and to acknowledge God as the only Lord is a struggle for human dignity, freedom and morality, and indeed for every value which helps man to break his shackles, and lift himself to the high standards that befit him.

*"Mankind, it is against your own souls that your offences rebound. [You care only for] the enjoyment of this present life." (Verse 23) That then is all that you will have. "In the end you will return to Us when We will tell you the truth of what you were doing [in this life]." (Verse 23) That is the reckoning and reward that take place in the hereafter, when all the misery and suffering of this life is clearly over.*

So how much are the pleasures of this life worth? What is the reality of their enjoyment? This is described in the *sūrah* in a Qur'ānic scene that portrays aspects of everyday activity, but to which most people pay little attention: *"This present life may be compared to rain which We send down from the sky, and which is then absorbed by the plants of the earth from which men and animals eat. Then, when the earth has been clad with its fine adornments and well embellished, and its people believe that they have full mastery over it, Our command comes down upon it, by night or by day, and We make it like a field that has been mowed down, as if it did not blossom but yesterday. Thus do We spell out Our revelations to people who think. God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to a straight path." (Verses 24-25)*

This is the reality of the life of this world, where people have only its pleasures which they are content with, seeking no higher aspiration and hoping for no better abode. Rain comes down from the sky and is soon absorbed by plants which grow and blossom. The earth takes on its finest adornments, as if she were a bride preparing for her happiest night. People take pleasure in looking on, feeling that its fine appearance is the result of their own efforts. In the back of their minds they think they control everything on earth and that nothing can change this.

Yet in the midst of all this pleasure and fine celebration, their confidence is suddenly shattered. What has happened? The answer is simple: *"Our command comes down upon it, by night or by day, and We make it like a field that has been mowed down, as if it did not blossom but yesterday." (Verse 24)* It all happens in a moment. It is all expressed in a sentence. Such mode of expression is a deliberate contrast to the detailed description which paints the land's fertility and beauty, as well as people's pleasure and confidence.

Such is the life of this world which some people regard as their utmost aspiration, and for the pleasures of which they sacrifice their future life. It is a life in which there is no settlement or security. People's control over it is very limited indeed. The *sūrah* then contrasts this image with the other world: "*God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to a straight path.*" (Verse 25) The contrast is remarkable. In one place there is no security. Even the most perfect of enjoyments can be replaced with complete misery in a matter of seconds. The other is the home of peace to which God invites people. It is reserved for those who keep their hearts and minds receptive of God's guidance and who endeavour to attain the happiness of the life to come, which is indeed the life of peace.

## 2

# Addressing the Human Mind

*For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for paradise, where they will abide. (26)*

*As for those who have done evil, an evil deed is rewarded with its like. Ignominy will overshadow them — for they will have none to protect them from God — as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night's own darkness. Such are destined for the fire, where they will abide. (27)*

*One day We shall gather them all together, and then We shall say to those who associated partners with God: 'Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners.' We will then separate them from one another. Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: 'It was not us that you worshipped. (28)*

﴿ لِّلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ ۗ وَلَا يَرْهَقُ وُجُوهَهُمْ قَتَرٌ وَلَا ذِلَّةٌ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴾

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ كَسَبُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ جَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ بِمِثْلِهَا وَتَرَهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۗ مَا لَهُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ مِن عَاصِمٍ ۗ كَأَنَّمَا أُغْشِيَتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ قِطْعًا مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ مُظْلِمًا ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴾

﴿ وَيَوْمَ نَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ نَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا مَكَانَكُمْ أَنْتُمْ وَشُرَكَاءُكُمْ ۖ فَزَيَّلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَقَالَ شُرَكَاءُهُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ إِيَّانَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴾

God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us.' (29)

There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past; and all will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them. (30)

Say: 'Who is it that provides for you from heaven and earth? Or, who is it that has power over hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive? Who regulates all affairs?' They will say: 'God.' Say, then: 'Will you not, then, fear Him?' (31)

Such is God, your true Lord. Apart from the truth, what is left but error? How is it, then, that you turn away? (32)

Thus is the word of your Lord proved true with regard to those who do evil: they will not believe. (33)

Say: 'Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] originate creation, and then bring it back [to life] again?' Say: 'It is God alone who originates creation and then brings it back [to life] again. How is it, then, that you are so misled?' (34)

فَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ إِنْ كُنَّا

عَنْ عِبَادَتِكُمْ لَغْفِيلِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

هُنَالِكَ تَبْلُغُوا كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا أَسْلَفَتْ ۗ

وَرُدُّوْا إِلَى اللَّهِ مَوْلَاهُمُ الْحَقُّ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ

مَّا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ

أَمْ مَنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَمَنْ يُخْرِجُ

الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ

الْحَيِّ وَمَنْ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ ۗ فَسَيَقُولُونَ اللَّهُ

فَقُلْ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

فَذَلِكُمْ اللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ الْحَقُّ فَمَاذَا بَعَدَ الْحَقِّ

إِلَّا الضَّلَالُ فَأَنَّى تُصْرَفُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

كَذَلِكَ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ

فَسَقُوا أَنَّهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

قُلْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَبْدُوا الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ

يُعِيدُهُ ۗ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَبْدُوا الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ۗ

فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

Say: 'Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] guide to the truth?'  
 Say: 'God alone guides to the truth. Who is more worthy to be followed: He that guides to the truth, or he who cannot find the right way unless he is guided? What is then amiss with you? How do you judge?'  
 (35)

Most of them follow nothing but mere conjecture. But conjecture can in no way be a substitute for truth. God has full knowledge of all that they do. (36)

This Qur'an could not have been devised by anyone other than God. It is a confirmation of [revelations] that went before it, and a full explanation of God's Book, about which there is no doubt. It certainly comes from the Lord of all the worlds. (37)

If they say: 'He has invented it,' say: 'Produce, then, one sūrah like it, and call for help on all you can other than God, if

قُلْ هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى  
 الْحَقِّ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي لِلْحَقِّ أَفَمَنْ يَهْدِي  
 إِلَى الْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُتَّبَعَ أَمْ لَا يَهْدِي  
 إِلَّا أَنْ يُهْدَىٰ ۗ فَمَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ



وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلَّا ظَنًّا ۚ إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا  
 يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا  
 يَفْعَلُونَ

وَمَا كَانَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ أَنْ يُفْتَرَىٰ مِنْ  
 دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ تَصْدِيقَ الَّذِي بَيْنَ  
 يَدَيْهِ وَتَفْصِيلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِنْ  
 رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۗ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ  
 وَادْعُوا مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ  
 كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

what you say is true.’ (38)

Indeed they disbelieve what they cannot grasp, particularly since its inner meaning has not become clear to them. Likewise did those who lived before them disbelieve. But see what happened in the end to those wrongdoers. (39)

Some of them do believe in it, while others do not. But your Lord is fully aware of those who spread corruption. (40)

If they disbelieve you, then say: ‘I shall bear the consequences of my deeds, and you your deeds. You are not accountable for what I do and I am not accountable for your doings.’ (41)

Yet some of them [pretend to] listen to you; but can you make the deaf hear you, incapable as they are of using their reason? (42)

And some of them [pretend to] look towards you; but can you show the way to the blind, bereft of sight as they are? (43)

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا بِمَا لَمْ يُحِيطُوا بِعِلْمِهِ وَلَمَّا  
يَأْتِهِمْ تَأْوِيلُهُ ۚ كَذَلِكَ كَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِن  
قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ  
الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِهِ ۖ وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ لَا  
يُؤْمِنُ بِهِ ۚ وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُفْسِدِينَ  
﴿٤٠﴾

وَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ لِي عَمَلِي وَلَكُمْ عَمَلُكُمْ  
أَنتُمْ بَرِيئُونَ مِمَّا أَعْمَلُ وَأَنَا بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا  
تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَ ۚ أَفَأَنْتَ تُسْمِعُ  
الْصُّمَّ وَلَوْ كَانُوا لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْكَ ۚ أَفَأَنْتَ تَهْدِي  
الْأَعْمَى وَلَوْ كَانُوا لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَظْلِمُ النَّاسَ شَيْئًا وَلَكِنَّ  
النَّاسَ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves. (44)

On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another. Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance. (45)

Whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We cause you to die, it is to Us that they shall return. God is witness of all that they do. (46)

To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement was passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged. (47)

They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?' (48)

Say: 'I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself, except as God may please. For every community a term has

وَيَوْمَ تَحْشُرُهُمْ كَأَن لَّمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا سَاعَةً  
مِّنَ النَّهَارِ يَتَعَارَفُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ قَدْ خَسِرَ  
الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِلِقَاءِ اللَّهِ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ

٤٥

وَأَمَّا نُرِيكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ  
نَتَوَفِّيكَ فَأَلَيْنَا مَرْجِعَهُمْ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ

عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ

٤٦

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولٌ فَإِذَا جَاءَ رَسُولُهُمْ  
قُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

٤٧

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنْتُمْ

صَادِقِينَ

٤٨

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا إِلَّا مَا  
شَاءَ اللَّهُ لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ إِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ  
فَلَا يَسْتَعْجِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ

٤٩

been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.’ (49)

Say: ‘Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten?’ (50)

Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?’ (51)

Then it will be said to the wrongdoers: ‘Taste the long-lasting torment. Is this requital anything other than the just due for what you used to do?’ (52)

They will ask you: ‘Is all this true?’ Say: ‘Yes, by my Lord. It is most certainly true, and you will never be beyond God’s reach.’ (53)

Should every wrongdoer possess all that the earth contains, he will gladly offer it all as ransom. They will harbour feelings of remorse when they see the suffering. Judgement will be passed on them in all fairness; and they will not be wronged. (54)

Indeed, to God belongs all that is in the

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُهُ بَيِّنًا أَوْ  
نَهَارًا مَّاذَا يَسْتَعْجِلُ مِنْهُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

أَنْتُمْ إِذَا مَا وَقَعَ ءَامَنْتُمْ بِهِ ءَأَلْسَنَ وَقَدْ  
كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

ثُمَّ قِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْخُلْدِ  
هَلْ تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

وَيَسْتَنْبِئُونَكَ أَحَقُّ هُوَ قُلْ إِي وَرَبِّي  
إِنَّهُ لَحَقُّهُ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

وَلَوْ أَنَّ لِكُلِّ نَفْسٍ ظَلَمَتْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ  
لَافْتَدَتْ بِهِ وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا  
الْعَذَابَ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْقِسْطِ وَهُمْ  
لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

أَلَا إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَلَا  
إِنَّ وَعْدَ اللَّهِ حَقٌّ وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا  
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥٤﴾

heavens and earth. God's promise always comes true, but most of them do not know it. (55)

He alone gives life and causes death, and to Him you shall all return. (56)

Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers. (57)

Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.' (58)

Say: 'Do but consider all the means of sustenance that God has bestowed on you! Some of it you then made unlawful, and some lawful.' Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?' (59)

But what will they think, those who invent lies against God, on the Day of Resurrection? God is truly bountiful to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful. (60)

In whatever business you may be engaged, and whatever part you may recite of the

هُوَ تَحْيَىٰ ۖ وَيُمِيتُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

قُلْ بِفَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَبِرَحْمَتِهِ ۖ فَبِذَلِكَ فَلْيَفْرَحُوا هُوَ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا تَجْمَعُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ مِّن رِّزْقٍ فَجَعَلْتُم مِّنْهُ حَرَامًا وَحَلٰلًا قُلْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُوٰٓ

أَذْنٍ لَّكُمْ ۗ أَمْ عَلَى اللَّهِ تَفْتَرُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

وَمَا ظَنُّ الَّذِينَ يَفْتَرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ يَوْمَ الْقِيٰمَةِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُوٰٓ

فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا

يَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾

وَمَا تَكُونُ فِي شَأْنٍ وَمَا تَتْلُوا مِنْهُ مِنْ قُرْءَانٍ وَلَا تَعْمَلُونَ مِنْ عَمَلٍ إِلَّا كُنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ شُهُودًا إِذْ تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ ۚ

*Qur'an, and whatever deed you [mankind] may do, We will be your witnesses from the moment you are engaged with it.*

*Not even an atom's weight [of anything whatsoever] on earth or in heaven escapes your Lord, nor is there anything smaller or larger than that, but is recorded in a clear book. (61)*

*For certain, those who are close to God have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve; (62)*

*for they do believe and remain God-fearing. (63)*

*Theirs are the glad tidings in the life of this world and in the life to come: there is no changing the word of God. This is the supreme triumph. (64)*

*Be not grieved by what they say. All might and glory belong to God alone. He alone hears all and knows all. (65)*

*Indeed, to God belong all those who are in the heavens and earth. Those who invoke other beings beside God do not follow any*

وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي  
الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَا أَصْغَرَ مِنْ

ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرَ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٦١﴾

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ  
وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

لَهُمُ الْبُشْرَىٰ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي  
الْآخِرَةِ ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِكَلِمَاتِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَلِكَ  
هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٦٤﴾

وَلَا يَحْزَنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ الْعِزَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا  
هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦٥﴾

أَلَا إِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ  
فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ الَّذِينَ  
يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ شُرَكَاءَ ۚ إِنْ  
يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا  
يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

real partners with Him. They follow mere conjecture, and they utter nothing but falsehood. (66)

It is He who has made the night for you, so that you may have rest, and the day, so that you may see. In this there are certainly signs for those who listen. (67)

They say: 'God has taken unto Himself a son.' Limitless is He in His glory. Self-sufficient is He. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. No evidence whatever have you for this. Would you say about God something which you do not know? (68)

Say: 'Those who invent falsehood about God shall not be successful. (69)

They may have a brief enjoyment in this world, but then to Us they must return, and We will then make them suffer severe torment for their unbelief.' (70)

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ لَيْلًا لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهَا وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَسْمَعُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ۗ سُبْحٰنَهُ ۗ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ ۗ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ إِنَّ عِنْدَكُمْ مِّنْ سُلٰطٰنٍ بِهٰذَا أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

قُلْ إِنَّا الَّذِينَ يَفْتُرُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ لَا يُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾

مَتَّعٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا مَرْجِعُهُمْ ثُمَّ نُذِيقُهُمُ الْعَذَابَ الشَّدِيدَ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

## Preview

This new passage touches the human conscience with a flow of observations that aim to put human nature face to face with clear evidence of God's oneness, the

truthful address of His Messenger and the concept of the Day of Judgement, the reckoning and justice that are certain to be administered to all on that day. These touches work on the whole of the human soul, taking it on a grand tour of the universe, opening up for it the broad horizons of its own world. It moves from ancient times to the present, and from this life to the real one beyond. The previous passage contained similar aspects, discussed in Chapter 1, but the present ones are clearer, certain to receive the right response from any person with an uncorrupted nature. The unbelievers genuinely feared that the Qur'ān would weaken them considerably. Hence they urged one another not to listen to it because they wanted to continue with their erring beliefs and practices.

### **When Deities Quarrel with Their Worshippers**

*For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides. Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces. These are destined for paradise, where they will abide. As for those who have done evil, an evil deed is rewarded with its like. Ignominy will overshadow them – for they will have none to protect them from God – as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night's own darkness. Such are destined for the fire, where they will abide. (Verses 26-27)*

The last verse in the preceding passage said: “God calls to the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to a straight path.” (Verse 25) Here we have an outline of the rules that determine the reward of those who follow God’s guidance and those who turn away from it. It shows God’s grace, mercy, fairness and justice in both types of reward.

Those who do well in their choice of belief and practice, recognizing the right path and understanding the universal law which leads to the ‘abode of peace’ will have a goodly reward which is the fair outcome of what they do. But they will also have something more of God’s unlimited bounty: ‘For those who do good there is a good reward, and more besides.’ (Verse 26) They will be spared the misery of the Day of Resurrection, and the stress experienced by others before judgement is passed on all creatures: “Neither darkness nor any disgrace will overcast their faces.” (Verse 26) The Arabic phrase incorporates two words for darkness and disgrace. The first denotes dust, darkness and a pale colour that comes as a result of unhappiness or distress. The other denotes humiliation, shame and subjection to insults. They are free of all this. The verse portrays a dense crowd, afflicted with misery, fear, and humiliation, as evidenced by the marks on people’s faces. To be spared all this is a great gain, an act of grace which is added to the expected reward.

Such people who enjoy this high position *“are destined for paradise.”* (Verse 26) They are its owners and dwellers, and there *“they will abide.”* (Verse 26)

*“As for those who have done evil.”* (Verse 27) A more literal translation of this phrase would be ‘those who have earned evil’. The earnings they have made out of the transaction of this life are simply evil. They will have their fair reward, which means that they will not have their punishment increased or doubled. They are simply given their reward, like for like. *“An evil deed is rewarded with its like.”* (Verse 27) They are the ones to endure humiliation which weighs down heavily on them: *“Ignominy will overshadow them – for they will have none to protect them from God.”* (Verse 27) There is simply no one to provide them with protection against the inevitable workings of divine law which metes out punishment to those who choose the path of evil.

The *sūrah* then paints an image of the mental darkness that overshadows them and leaves its impact on their terrified faces. They look *‘just as if their faces have been covered with patches of the night’s own darkness.’* (Verse 27) The whole atmosphere is dark, causing much fear and apprehension. People’s faces are made to look as if they are wearing the cover of the dark night.

Those who are abandoned in the midst of all this darkness *‘are destined for the fire.’* (Verse 27) They are its owners and dwellers, and there *‘they will abide.’* (Verse 27)

But where are those whom they claimed to be God’s partners and the ones they thought would intercede on their behalf? How come they could not provide them with any protection? What is happening to them on this fearful Day of Resurrection: *“One day We shall gather them all together, and then We shall say to those who associated partners with God: ‘Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners.’ We will then separate them from one another. Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: ‘It was not us that you worshipped. God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us. ‘There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past; and all will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme. All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them.”* (Verses 28-30)

What we have here is a scene depicting one aspect of the Day of Judgement. It is painted in such a way that makes it far more effective than a clear statement to the effect that the partners they associate with God and their intercessors will not protect their worshippers against God, and can avail them of nothing. They are all brought together: the unbelievers and the false deities they associated as partners with God. The Qur’ān describes the latter as ‘their partners’ in a sarcastic manner which also denotes that they are of their own invention, and hence never partners with God.

To all these, unbelievers and partners, an order is given: *“Keep to your places, you and those you associated with God as partners.”* (Verse 28) Stop where you are. That is

the order. They must stand still the moment the order is issued, for an order given on that day is complied with immediately, without question. Then one group is set apart from the other: *"We will then separate them from one another."* (Verse 28)

At this point the unbelievers do not speak. It is their claimed partners that speak to exonerate themselves from the crime committed by the unbelievers when they worshipped them in place of God, or in association with Him. They speak to make it clear that they were totally unaware of their being worshipped. As such, they have had no role in the crime. They appeal to God to be their witness: *"Then those whom they associated as partners with God will say: 'It was not us that you worshipped. God is sufficient as a witness between us and you. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshipping us.'"* (Verse 29)

Thus is the status of those who were worshipped. They are weak, appealing to be exonerated of the sinful practices of their worshippers.

They seek to be absolved of an offence in which they took no part, and want God to be their witness.

At this point when everything is laid open, every soul will know the true nature of the deeds it did, realizing its inevitable outcome: *"There and then every soul will realize what it had done in the past."* (Verse 30) What is abundantly clear to all at that moment is the fact that there is only one God to whom all shall return. Everything else is false: *"All will be brought back to God, their true Lord Supreme."* (Verse 30)

There the idolaters will find nothing of what they used to claim and fabricate. All prove to have no real existence. *"All their invented falsehood will have forsaken them."* (Verse 30) It is a vivid scene which is raised before our eyes so that we can examine all its details and the truth it reflects. It is painted in a few words which have an effect far superior to what a mere statement of facts supported by clear arguments would have produced.

### **Giving Life and Causing Death**

The first round in this passage took us to the gathering of all on the Day of Resurrection when all false claims and fabrications are shown to have no validity whatsoever. God's is the only power on that day. Now the *sūrah* speaks of matters human beings see in their lives, and in their own souls, admitting that they are only done by God and subject to His control.

*Say: 'Who is it that provides for you from heaven and earth? Or, who is it that has power over hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive? Who regulates all affairs?' They*

*will say: 'God.' Say, then: 'Will you not, then, fear Him?' Such is God, your true Lord. Apart from the truth, what is left but error? How is it, then, that you turn away? (Verses 31-32)*

The pagan Arabs, as has been explained, did not deny God's existence, nor did they deny that He is the One who creates, provides sustenance for His creation and controls the whole universe. They simply ascribed divinity to other beings whom they considered to be God's partners. They claimed that these were able to bring them nearer to God or that they had their own power, independent of God's. Here the *sūrah* addresses them taking their own beliefs as its starting point. It aims to alert their consciousness and make them reflect, so that they can discard their ill-conceived ideas. "*Say: 'Who is it that provides for you from heaven and earth?'"* (Verse 31) Who brings down the rain which quickens the land and brings up the plants? Who produces all the crops, birds, fish and animals? Who provides people with everything they get from the heavens and earth for their own and their animals' food? This is what they used to understand when reference was made to the provisions from heaven and earth. Reality however is much greater than this. Today, we can still discover new provisions that He gives us, and we can still uncover more and more about the laws of nature. People can use what God provides for them in beneficial or harmful ways, in line with their sound or false beliefs. They get their provisions from the surface or bottom of the earth; from water running in its courses on the surface of the earth or stored underground; from the sun with its heat and the moon and its light. Even the putridity of organic material contains something that is used in medicine to produce cures for diseases.

*"Or, who is it that has power over hearing and sight?"* (Verse 31) Who is it that gives these organs their power or deprives them of it; who makes them healthy or malfunctioning? Who is it that makes them see and hear what they like or dislike? Although that was then the limit of their understanding of the functioning of these senses, it was enough to enable them to understand the significance of such a question. However, we are still learning something new about the nature of hearing and sight, and the fine complexity of both these senses, to make the question wider in implication. The structure of the eye and the optic nerve, and how the whole system works to define what is seen, and also the structure of the ear, its different parts and how it captures sound frequencies are extraordinary wonders, particularly when they are compared to the most sophisticated machines of our modern scientific achievements. Yet although man-made machines are insignificant as compared with God's work, people still ignore the miracles of creation which are all around them in the universe and in their own souls.

*“Who brings forth the living out of that which is dead, and brings forth the dead out of that which is alive?” (Verse 31)* People considered everything that was motionless to be dead. On the other hand, motion and growth indicated life. Therefore the drift of the question was clear to them: it was no different from seeing a plant coming out of a seed and a seed contained in a plant; a chick coming out of an egg and an egg produced by a bird; and numerous other cycles of creation. To them this was especially remarkable, and it remains remarkable even though we have come to know that the seed and the egg should be classified among the living on account of the potential life they contain. Indeed life potential, with all its hidden qualities, hereditary characteristics and unique features, is one of the most remarkable and wonderful things made by God’s will.

A pause to consider the phenomenon of a seed and a stone bringing forth a plant and a date tree, and also an egg and a cell bringing forth a chick and a human being, may lead to a whole lifetime of thinking and reflecting. Let us just consider where in the seed the roots, sticks, leaves and fruits lie hidden? Where in the date stone does the core, the bast, the tall trunk and fibres we see in the date tree hide? Where are the taste, flavour, colour and smell stored, and how do we account for what we see of the great variety of dates? Where in the egg do the bones, meat, feathers, colour, flapping of the wings and the singing of the bird hide? Even more remarkably, where in the female cell does the human being with all its complex characteristics hide? Where are a person’s features stored until they are transmitted by genes that gather their qualities from past and distant generations? Where do the distinctive qualities of every human being come from: the way he talks, looks, turns his head, feels things around him, etc. and the features and qualities that he inherits from his parents, family and race, as well as those that give him his unique personality?

Is it sufficient to say that this endless world of creation lies hidden in a seed, a stone, an egg and a female cell? Is this sufficient to end our wonder? There is no escaping the recognition that it is all done by God’s will and produced by His power.

Human beings continue to uncover some of the secrets of life and death, and how the living is brought forth out of the dead and the dead out of the living. At different stages, elements experience death or come back to life. All this adds to the great significance of the question asked here and its broader perspective. The food we eat dies as a result of cooking and exposure to heat, but it is then transformed inside the living body into blood, which in turn becomes dead waste as a result of body processes. The more we learn about this process the more remarkable it appears, and yet it continues during every moment of the night and day. Indeed life continues to be a great exciting mystery that poses for man a question he cannot answer unless he admits that it is God the Creator who gives life.

*“Who regulates all affairs?”* (Verse 31) This question applies to all that has just been mentioned and to everything else, whether it relates to the affairs of the universe or to human affairs. Who regulates the great universal system that conducts the movement of all worlds in such a fine and elaborate manner? Who regulates the cycle of life and sets it along its finely tuned system? Who regulates the social laws that govern human life, without the slightest deviation from its course? The list of such questions is endless.

*“They will say: ‘God.’”* They, i.e. the Arabs who were the first to be addressed by the Qur’ān did not deny God’s existence, or His control of these great issues. But as they deviated from the path of the truth, they began to associate partners with God, and to address worship rituals to such partners. Furthermore, they put into operation laws that God had not sanctioned.

*“Say: ‘Will you not, then, fear Him?’”* (Verse 31) Since He is the One who provides sustenance, controls hearing and sight, brings the living out of the dead and the dead out of the living, and regulates all matters and affairs, should you not fear Him? The One who has all these attributes is indeed the true Lord who has no partners to be associated with Him.

### **Who Guides to the Truth**

*“Such is God, your true Lord.”* (Verse 32) Since the truth is one and cannot be present in more than one form at the same time, then whoever goes beyond it is in fundamental error. *“Apart from the truth, what is left but error? How is it, then, that you turn away?”* (Verse 32)

When the truth is clearly evident, how can anyone look elsewhere for guidance?

The outcome of the unbelievers’ deliberate denial of the truth, despite their acknowledgement of its basis, is that God has made it a law of human nature that those who deviate from the sound logic of nature and the overall laws of creation will not be believers: *“Thus is the word of your Lord proved true with regard to those who do evil: they will not believe.”* (Verse 33) He does not prevent them from believing. Indeed the pointers to the truth and true faith are everywhere in the universe, and its logical basis is acknowledged by them. It is simply because they themselves refuse to take the way leading to faith and deliberately turn their backs on the logical conclusion of the premise they accept. It is an outcome they choose by disregarding the logic of nature.

The *sūrah* then resumes its line of drawing attention to aspects of God’s power and asks whether any of the partners the unbelievers associate with Him have any share in such power: *“Say: ‘Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] originate*

*creation, and then bring it back [to life] again?’ Say: ‘It is God alone who originates creation and then brings it back [to life] again. How is it, then, that you are so misled?’ Say: ‘Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] guide to the truth?’ Say: ‘God alone guides to the truth. Who is more worthy to be followed: He that guides to the truth, or he who cannot find the right way unless he is guided? What is then amiss with you? How do you judge?’” (Verses 34-35)*

The questions now addressed to them, concerning re-creation and guidance to the truth, are not taken for granted like the first group. These are posed on the basis of what they accept as true. They relate to conclusions they should arrive at with reflection. No answer is required of them. The answer is placed in front of them, outlining the conclusions to the premises they have accepted: *“Say: ‘Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] originate creation and then bring it back [to life] again?’”* (Verse 34)

They accept that God has initiated creation, but they do not acknowledge that He will bring it back to life. They refuse to believe in the resurrection, reckoning and reward. Yet God’s purpose is not complete by simply originating creation, giving creatures their span of life, letting them die without receiving their reward for doing well and following divine guidance, or their punishment for deliberately following falsehood. That would be a journey cut short, and that would not be designed by a Creator whose attributes include deliberate planning and perfect wisdom. Indeed believing in the Day of Judgement is a logical requirement of believing in the wisdom, justice and mercy of the Creator. This fact needs to be stated clearly to them, since they believe that God is the Creator, and acknowledge that He is the One who brings the living out of the dead. In fact the second life is closely similar to the process of bringing what is alive out of what is dead: *“Say: ‘It is God alone who originates creation and then brings it back [to life] again.’”* (Verse 34) It is singularly strange that they should turn away from this fact when they accept its premise: *“How is it, then, that you are so misled?”* (Verse 34) How is it that you choose error and accept false beliefs?

*“Say: ‘Does any of your partners [whom you associate with God] guide to the truth?’”* (Verse 35) Does any such partner reveal scriptures, send messengers, lay down a law and a code of living, give warnings and direct people to the truth? Does any of them explain the signs and pointers that are available in the universe and within human nature, awakening minds that have been left in deep slumber and alerting disused faculties? They were aware of all this since God’s Messenger presented it to them for their guidance. This was not something that they had already known and accepted, but rather something that actually took place before their very eyes. The Prophet was among them fulfilling the task God had assigned to him. Hence it is put to them as

evidence of the truth they are called upon to acknowledge. “Say: ‘God alone guides to the truth.’” (Verse 35)

This leads to another question with a ready answer: “Who is more worthy to be followed: He that guides to the truth, or he who cannot find the right way unless he is guided?” (Verse 35) There can only be a single answer to this question. Naturally, the one who guides mankind to the truth is the one to be followed, in preference to the one who is in need of guidance. This applies whether those who are worshipped are made of stone or trees, or whether they are stars or human beings. In fact it applies to Jesus Christ [peace be upon him]. Although God sent him to give guidance to people, being himself human, he too was in need of God’s guidance. It therefore applies even more to those who are falsely claimed to be God’s partners.

“What is then amiss with you? How do you judge?” (Verse 35) What has come over you that you clearly misjudge matters and deviate so badly from the truth?

When the questions put to them are completed, and the answers dictated by natural logic and accepted premises are clearly stated, the *sūrah* points out what they actually do in respect of reflection, arriving at conclusions, and formulating beliefs. They have no certainty in anything that relates to belief or worship. They do not base their arguments and beliefs on any fact that human nature and reason can accept as true. They indulge in conjecture, and that has nothing to do with the truth.

“Most of them follow nothing but mere conjecture. But conjecture can in no way be a substitute for truth. God has full knowledge of all that they do.” (Verse 36) They think that God has partners, but they do not try to test such thoughts either by reasoning or in practical terms. They think that their forefathers would not have worshipped idols unless those idols had something to deserve worship. But they do not question this false premise, nor do they free their minds from the shackles of following such thoughts blindly. They assume that God would not reveal anything to a man from among them, but they do not question why God would not do so. They also assume that the Qur’ān is authored by Muḥammad, but they do not try to verify whether Muḥammad is capable of authoring the Qur’ān, when they themselves, human beings like him, are totally incapable of producing a *sūrah* similar to the Qur’ān. Thus they go about life nourishing a host of assumptions and thoughts that have no foundation. As the Qur’ān describes it, they thrive on conjecture but this does not give them anything of substance. It is God alone who knows fully what they do. “God has full knowledge of all that they do.” (Verse 36)

### **A Book of God’s Own Devising**

The *sūrah* now begins a new round speaking of the Qur’ān itself. It starts with a categorical statement that there is no way that the Qur’ān could have been invented

by anyone, followed by a challenge to the unbelievers to produce a single *sūrah* like it. It then shows their judgement to be hasty, lacking solid ground. This is followed by stating the nature of their attitude to the Qur'ān, coupled with encouragement to the Prophet to remain steadfast regardless of the response he receives from them. The round concludes with a reference to the destiny awaiting those who are stubborn in their erroneous beliefs. It is a just and fitting destiny, determined by their deeds.

*“This Qur'ān could not have been devised by anyone other than God. It is a confirmation of [revelations] that went before it, and a full explanation of God's Book, about which there is no doubt. It certainly comes from the Lord of all the worlds. If they say: He has invented it,' say: 'Produce, then, one sūrah like it, and call for help on all you can other than God, if what you say is true.' Indeed they disbelieve what they cannot grasp, particularly since its inner meaning has not become clear to them. Likewise did those who lived before them disbelieve. But see what happened in the end to those wrongdoers. Some of them do believe in it, while others do not. But your Lord is fully aware of those who spread corruption. If they disbelieve you, then say: I shall bear the consequences of my deeds, and you your deeds. You are not accountable for what I do and I am not accountable for your doings.' Yet some of them [pretend to] listen to you; but can you make the deaf hear you, incapable as they are of using their reason? And some of them [pretend to] look towards you; but can you show the way to the blind, bereft of sight as they are? Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves.” (Verses 37-44)*

*“This Qur'ān could not have been devised by anyone other than God.” (Verse 37)* Such unique characteristics of topic and expression; such perfection of order and harmony; such completeness of the faith it preaches and the code for human life it lays down; such a thorough concept of the nature of Godhead, as well as the nature of life, human beings and the universe could never have been designed by anyone other than God. Only He is able to combine all this, because He is the One who knows the beginnings of all things and their ends, the apparent and the hidden. No one else can devise a system that is perfect, free of shortcomings and based on perfect knowledge.

*“This Qur'ān could not have been devised by anyone other than God.” (Verse 37)* What is negated here is the very possibility that the Qur'ān could ever have been fabricated or authored by anyone other than God. This is much more comprehensive and emphatic.

*“It is a confirmation of [revelations] that went before it.” (Verse 37)* It confirms all the revelations and Scriptures given to earlier messengers. It confirms the original faith outlined by those messages and the good things they advocated. It is also *“a full explanation of God's Book.” (Verse 37)* It is the same Book, outlining the same message preached by all messengers. There may be differences of detail in these messages, but

the basic principles are the same. The Qur'ān explains God's Book fully, making clear all the methods and means of goodness it outlines and how these are to be fulfilled and followed in human life. The faith is the same and the basic substance is the same, but the methods of goodness and the legislation outlined are given each time in a degree of detail that suits human progress and development. When mankind came of age, they were addressed by the Qur'ān as adults. They were no longer addressed by physical miracles that defy human intellect.

Moreover, it is a Book *"about which there is no doubt. It certainly comes from the Lord of all the worlds."* (Verse 37) This is an assertion that the Qur'ān could never have been fabricated or attributed falsely to God. It is indeed a revelation by *'the Lord of all the worlds.'*

Having stated the truth about the Qur'ān, the *sūrah* speaks of a certain possibility: *"If they say: 'He has invented it.'" (Verse 38)* In other words, if Muḥammad is alleged to have invented it let them then mobilize their resources and invent a single *sūrah* like it, if they can. *"Say: 'Produce, then, one sūrah like it, and call for help on all you can besides God, if what you say is true.'" (Verse 38)*

The challenge is permanent, as is their inability to meet it. It continues for the rest of time and no one will ever be able to meet it. Anyone who appreciates the strength, beauty and artistic expression of the Arabic language will recognize that the Qur'ānic style is unique, and that no human being could produce anything similar to it. So will those who study human social systems and legal principles. If they study the system laid down in the Qur'ān, they will realize that its approach to the organization of the human community is absolutely unique. It enacts appropriate regulations for all aspects of human life, while at the same time allowing a sufficient degree of practicality and flexibility to meet any type of development. That is a task too great to be undertaken by a single human mind, or by the minds of any group of human beings in a single generation or throughout human history. The same applies to those who study human psychology and methods of influencing people on the one hand, and the Qur'ān and the way it addresses the human mind on the other.

It is not merely the incomparability of the Qur'ānic style and mode of expression; instead the absolutely miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is easily recognized by experts in diverse disciplines such as language, society, law and psychology.

Those who are adept at using artistic expression, and have an insight into fine literary styles are better able to appreciate the miracle of the Qur'ān in this particular aspect, while experts in the different disciplines of sociology, law, psychology are able to appreciate its superior treatment of their themes. Each will appreciate better than anyone else the miracle of the Qur'ān in their respective disciplines. I admit that

it is practically impossible to describe this miracle and its true dimensions but I will nonetheless attempt to give a glimpse of its nature.

### **An Amazing Experience with the Qur'ān**

The Qur'ān is readily distinguishable from any human expression. It has a powerful effect on people's hearts which no human style can achieve. Such an effect is sometimes felt by people who have no knowledge of Arabic. Some remarkable events, which may not be the rule, cannot have any other explanation. I am not giving any example witnessed by anyone else. I am only relating something that happened to me about 15 years ago, for which I have no less than six witnesses.<sup>8</sup>

We were seven Muslim passengers travelling on board an Egyptian ship across the Atlantic to New York. There were also 120 foreign passengers, none of whom was a Muslim. It occurred to us to hold Friday prayers on board, in the middle of the ocean. God knows that we were not that keen on the prayer itself, but we were driven to show our religious feelings when we saw a missionary exercising his mission with the passengers. He even approached us. The Captain, an Englishman, facilitated our task and allowed any of the crew and other workers, all of whom were Nubian Muslims, to join the prayer, provided that they were not on duty at the time. They were overjoyed by this, as it was, in their experience, the first time ever that Friday prayers had been held on board. I delivered the *khutbah*, or sermon, and led the prayers, while many of the foreign passengers were watching nearby.

When the prayer was over, many of them congratulated us on a 'successful service'. That was how they viewed our prayers. One particular lady, whom we were later informed was a Christian from Yugoslavia fleeing from the oppression of Tito's Communist regime, was particularly touched. In fact she could not control her feelings and her eyes were full of tears. She shook our hands warmly and said in broken English that she was profoundly touched by the discipline and spiritual calm of our prayers. She then asked which language the 'priest' was speaking. She simply could not imagine that prayers could be led by a layman, but we made sure to explain this point to her. She also said that although she could not understand a word of what was being said, the language had a remarkable musical rhythm. She then added something that was a great surprise to us all. She said that certain phrases or sentences which he used were different from the rest of his speech. They were more clearly musical with an even more profound rhythm. These phrases filled her with awe. It was as if the imām was deriving his speech from the Holy Spirit. We

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<sup>8</sup> The author is referring here to his trip to the United States, in 1950, when he was sent on a scholarship to undertake research to determine the best means of developing education in Egyptian universities. – Editor's note.

reflected on what she had said and concluded that she meant the Qur'ānic verses quoted in the *khuṭbah* and recited during the prayer. The whole thing was truly remarkable as the lady did not understand a word of Arabic.

As I have said, this is not the rule. Yet this incident, and similar ones reported by different people, confirm that the Qur'ān has some secret which enables certain hearts to react to it when they hear its recitation. It might have been that this lady had a keen religious sense which, coupled with the fact of her flight from Communist tyranny in her own country, refined her interaction with God's revelations. But why do we wonder at this when we see thousands of uneducated Muslims greatly influenced by the rhythm of the Qur'ān, despite their inability to understand it. In a sense, they are not much different from this Yugoslav lady.

I have felt it necessary to speak about this subtle power of the Qur'ān before turning to other aspects which are well known to those who are skilled in the art of expression and those who are endowed with a refined sense or who think and contemplate.

A distinctive feature of the Qur'ānic method of expression is that it tackles great issues in a space which, by human standards, is far too short. Nevertheless, it covers them in the fullest, finest, most vivid and accurate way, maintaining at the same time a perfect harmony between the words it uses, the style, rhythm, connotations and the overall feeling it generates. It combines artistic beauty with precision in a way that makes it impossible to replace one word with another, and does not allow the needs of fine style to overshadow those of precise meaning or vice versa. In this respect, it achieves a standard of excellence that surpasses anything that men of letters recognize as the zenith that can be attained by any human being.

This main feature brings about another distinctive characteristic of the Qur'ān, one which enables a single statement to provide different meanings that run side by side, with each given its fair share of clarity. There is no ambiguity or confusion between different meanings. Each aspect and each fact to which the text refers is given its full and appropriate space. Thus the same statement is quoted in different contexts but on each occasion it fits the context perfectly, as if it were only meant to express the particular issue in question. This feature is well known, and it only requires brief mention for people to appreciate it.

The Qur'ānic method of expression is also distinguished by its ability to paint pictures in a way no human expression can approximate. Anyone who tries to imitate it sounds confused and incoherent. How can people express the following ideas in the same way as the Qur'ān:

*“And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression. But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said: ‘I*

*have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself.”* (Verse 90) Up to this point, this is an account of certain events. But it is followed immediately with a direct remonstrance brought up as though it were taking place right before us: *“Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you.”* (Verses 91-92) This is then followed with a concluding comment on the scene itself: *“For a great many people do not heed Our signs.”* (Verse 92)

*“Say: ‘What is weightiest in testimony?’ Say: ‘God is witness between me and you. This Qur’ān has been revealed to me that I may thereby warn you and all whom it may reach.’”* (6: 19) So far this is an instruction received by God’s Messenger. Then immediately we see the Messenger questioning his people: *“Will you in truth bear witness that there are other deities beside God?”* (6: 19) The next moment, we see him again receiving instructions concerning the very point he is questioning his people about and receiving their answer: *“Say: ‘I bear no such witness.’ Say: He is but one God. I disown all that you associate with Him.”* (6: 19)

Note also the frequent switch of tense or address often employed in the Qur’ān, as in the following passage: *“On the day when He shall gather them all together, [He will say]: ‘O you company of jinn! A great many human beings have you seduced. ‘Those who were their close friends among human beings will say: ‘Our Lord, we have enjoyed each other’s fellowship, and we have now reached the end of our term which You have appointed for us.’ He will say: ‘The fire shall be your abode, where you shall remain, unless God wills it otherwise.’ Indeed, your Lord is Wise, All-knowing. In this manner do We cause the wrongdoers to be close allies of one another, because of that which they do. ‘O you company of jinn and humans! Have there not come to you messengers from among yourselves who related to you My revelations and warned you of the coming of this your day?’ They will reply: ‘We bear witness against ourselves.’ The life of this world has beguiled them. So they will bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers. And so it is that your Lord would never destroy a community for its wrongdoing, while they remain unaware.”* (6: 128-131)

There are numerous similar examples in the Qur’ān. Its style is thus totally different from any human style. Anyone who wishes to argue about this can try as hard as he wishes to produce something like it, but he will certainly fail. He will be totally unable to come up with any meaningful piece of writing, let alone having any degree of artistic beauty, inspiring rhythm and perfect coherence.

### **Characteristics of the Qur’ān**

The Qur’ān addresses the human entity as a whole. It does not address different faculties such as logical reasoning, pulsating hearts or excited feelings, one at a time.

It simply makes its appeal in the most direct manner, touching all human receptive faculties at once. Thus it generates feelings, impressions and concepts of the truth of existence that no other method known to mankind can ever generate. Moreover, all these are profound, comprehensive, precise, lucid and inimitably expressed.

I would like to quote here a few paragraphs from a book I am now working on<sup>9</sup> which may express this fact better. These speak of the Islamic approach in elucidating the constituent elements of the Islamic concept of life in a beautiful, comprehensive, coherent and balanced way. The most distinctive features of this approach are:

Firstly, it portrays the facts as they are using a style that reveals all their aspects, dimensions, links and consequences. Comprehensive as it is, it does not complicate any fact or make it ambiguous. It then makes its address to all humanity, at all levels.<sup>10</sup> God has not wished to make the attainment of any standard of knowledge or education a necessary requirement for the proper perception of the Islamic concept of life. Faith is the first need in human life. When it is accepted by people, it formulates in their hearts and minds a concept which defines their method of dealing with the whole universe. It also gives them a method to follow in the pursuit of any branch of knowledge. This concept provides for them a complete explanation and understanding of the universe and what happens in it. Since it is founded on the truth of faith, God wants it to be the basis of all their knowledge and scientific study. This is the most solid basis since it is the ultimate truth.

All that man learns, and all the knowledge he attains, from any source other than faith remain within the field of probability. It is neither final nor absolute, not even when it relies on scientific experiment. Empirical science relies on analogy and induction to draw its conclusions. It is not based on thorough and exhaustive investigation and universal application. That is not possible for human beings to do in any experiment, even if we assume that all human observations and final conclusions are correct. The ultimate that scientific research can achieve is to conduct a number of experiments and make observations and conclusions that are applied generally. Scientists admit that their conclusions remain within the realm of probability; they are never final. Besides, every single experiment aims to determine the degree of

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<sup>9</sup> This is the second volume of the author's work *Khaṣā'is al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī wa Muqawwimātuh*, or *Distinctive Features of the Islamic Concept and its Constituent Elements*. The first volume was published in 1963. The author wrote a few chapters of the second volume after his release from prison in 1964. These were posthumously published as the second volume. — Editor's note.

<sup>10</sup> Human expression cannot achieve this, because every author addresses a particular level of understanding. Those who belong to a different level can hardly understand him.

probability of a certain aspect. Hence, the only certain knowledge that human beings can acquire is that which they receive from the One who knows all, and is fully aware of all secrets and minute details. He is the One who speaks the truth and explains the ultimate certainty.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, it is free of any flaws of disjointedness or incoherence which are observed in scientific studies, philosophical treatises and refined artistic writings. It does not approach each aspect of a coherent, beautiful whole separately as all human styles of expression do. It portrays them all in an integrated approach which links perceptible features with the realm that lies beyond our reach. Thus it establishes a link between the truth of the universe, life and man and the truth of God; between this life and the life to come; and between our world here and the Supreme Society of angels. All this is done in a unique, inimitable style. When human beings try to imitate this characteristic, they fall far short and the outcome is incoherent, ambiguous, and ill-defined. This is the opposite of what we readily observe in Qur'ānic style.

Strong as the link is between different facts tackled in a particular Qur'ānic passage or *sūrah*, the emphasis on any one of them may frequently change, yet the link remains clear. For example, when the emphasis is placed on explaining to people who their true Lord is, we find this great truth portrayed in describing His magnificent work in the universe and within human life, in our own world which we see and feel and in the world beyond. Elsewhere the emphasis may be on elucidating the truth about the universe and its existence. Here, then, we have the nature of the relationship between Godhead and the universe clearly outlined, with frequent references to the nature of life and living creatures and also to the natural laws God has set in operation in the universe at large.

Similarly, when the nature of man is emphasized, it is portrayed with its links with God, the universe and other living creatures; and also with the present world and the world beyond. If the emphasis happens to be on the life to come, this life is also discussed, and both are related to God and to other important facts. The same applies when the truth about the present life comes in for special emphasis.

Thirdly, the Qur'ān not only portrays the truth as an integrated whole with all its aspects in perfect harmony, but it also gives each aspect in this complete whole its due share of space and importance, commensurate with

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<sup>11</sup> This is why on listening to the Qur'ān people feel it is clearly more authoritative than any other writing.

its weight on God's accurate scales. Hence the nature and qualities of God, and the question of godhead and servitude appear to be the dominant issues. Indeed explaining the facts relevant to these issues appears to be the basic theme of the Qur'ān.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the theme of the world that lies beyond the reach of human perception, including God's will, predestination and the life to come, occupies substantial space. So does the nature of man, the universe and life, with each being given mutually complementary importance that fits with the harmony and complementarity of these questions in real life. Thus no important fact is overlooked, ignored or gloated over.

We have spoken elsewhere about the Islamic concept being well balanced. It admires the accuracy of the laws governing the material world and the perfect harmony between its various components. However, this admiration does not lead to making the material world a deity, as did some communities of old. In fact this is still done by some people in modern times when they ascribe divinity to material worlds or to stars and planets. Nor does the admiring look at the miracle of life and how it defines its functions and fulfils them, or its harmony with the universe around it, lead to giving it the position of a deity, as do some modern existentialists. Similarly the wonderful creation of man, his unique qualities and potential, manifesting themselves in his interaction with the universe, causes much admiration. However, this admiration does not lead to making man, or human intellect, a deity in one way or another, as the idealists generally do. On the other hand, the recognized majesty of the divine truth, or God Himself, does not lead to the discarding of the material world or to looking at it or at man with contempt, as Hindu, Buddhist and distorted Christian philosophies do. In fact, a well-balanced outlook is the main characteristic of the Islamic concept of life generally.

Similarly, the Qur'ānic method in presenting the constituent elements of this concept and the facts upon which it is based is also well balanced, giving prominence where it is due. Thus they are all clearly apparent every time the Qur'ān outlines this concept in its totality. This unique Qur'ānic quality is beyond the ability of human expression, refined as it may be.

Fourthly, the Qur'ān combines accuracy and precision with an inspirational vitality that imparts to these facts a rhythm, life and beauty unknown in any human presentation or expression. However, this accuracy does not encroach on a lively and beautiful style, nor does the demarcation spoil the rhythm and harmony.

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<sup>12</sup> The reasons for attaching special importance to the theme of Godhead are fully discussed in the Prologue to this *sūrah*.

Interaction with the Qur'ānic approach is the best way to appreciate it. Much as we try, we cannot fairly describe, in our human style, its main features so as to begin to appreciate it in the same way. Nor can our study of the main characteristics and constituent elements of the Islamic concept of life, man and the universe, be as complete as its picture given in the Qur'ān. Our attempt to present this study to people is made only because people have drawn far away from the Qur'ān. They have chosen to make their social environment vastly different from that which prevailed in the community which received the Qur'ānic revelations. They no longer experience the same circumstances and concerns of that community which established the Islamic society. Hence people are no longer able to appreciate the Qur'ānic approach and interact with it. Nor are they able to enjoy its beauty and finer characteristics.

### Areas Unfathomed in Human Writings

The Qur'ān sometimes explains the basic truisms of faith in a way that the human mind would never attempt, because, by their nature, these are not things which preoccupy or attract human attention. A clear example is the verse which describes God's infinite knowledge: *"With Him are the keys to what lies beyond the reach of human perception: none knows them but He. He knows all that the land and sea contain; not a leaf falls but He knows it; and neither is there a grain in the earth's deep darkness, nor anything fresh or dry but is recorded in a clear book."* (6: 59) These broad places and situations, visible and hidden, are not normally frequented by human thought in this way, when it tries to express knowledge that embraces everything. Let us quote here a few paragraphs of what we stated in our commentary on this verse.

Every time we look at this short verse, we cannot fail to recognize its miraculous style which tells of the author of the Qur'ān. One look at its subject matter is sufficient to make us absolutely certain that this is something no human being would say. Human intelligence does not stretch to limitless horizons when it describes perfect, unfailing knowledge. Instead, the human intellect has different characteristics and certain set limits, because its images reflect its own concerns. Why should human beings care about the number of leaves falling from trees all over the globe? Why should they bother about grains buried in the deep dark recesses of the earth? What concern is it to them to know everything that is fresh or dry? People simply do not care about falling leaves, let alone about counting them. They care about the seeds they plant, hoping to have a good harvest. Otherwise, they would not care about the grains buried in the earth. They certainly like to use what they have of fresh and dry things, but none of these matters is thought of as evidence of

perfect knowledge. It is only the Creator who knows and cares about every falling leaf, buried grain and the like, as He does about other things, fresh or dry.

No human being could ever contemplate that each falling leaf, buried grain, every fresh object and also every dry one should be recorded in a clear book. They cannot see any benefit to them from keeping such a record. But the Sovereign of the whole universe is the One who has all that recorded because everything in the whole universe, large or small, visible or hidden, distant or close, apparent or unknown, is part of His dominion and, as such, is accounted for.

This is an expansive scene, one which leaves a profound effect on the human mind. The human intellect does not even try to paint such a scene comprising the leaves falling from every tree throughout the world and every grain hidden in the soil and every fresh and dry thing on earth. Indeed, neither our eyes nor our imagination care to visualize it in the first place. Nevertheless, it is a powerful scene that tells us much about God's knowledge, reminding us that God oversees and records everything. His will takes care of what is large or small, highly important or infinitely insignificant, visible or hidden, distant or close, apparent or unknown.

Those of us who react to what we experience and have the talent of expression are keenly aware of our human limitations to visualize and express things. We know from personal experience that it does not occur to any human mind to paint such a scene and that no human being can use such a mode of expression. I invite anyone who disputes this to look into everything that human beings have ever written in an attempt to see if human literary talent has ever ventured in this direction. Indeed, this verse and similar ones in the Qur'ān are sufficient for us to know the Author of this glorious book.

If we look at the artistic excellence in this verse, we soon realize that it surpasses everything that human beings have ever attempted: *"With Him are the keys to what lies beyond the reach of human perception: none knows them but He."* (Verse 59) The verse takes us first into the unfathomable reaches of the world beyond, stretching into time and place, as well as the past, present and future and into what takes place both in this life and in our imagination.

*"He knows all that the land and sea contain."* (Verse 59). The picture here is of the seen world, stretching infinitely over the horizon so that the world we see is stretched into an infinite existence to provide harmony with the limitless nature of the world beyond.

*"Not a leaf falls, but He knows it."* (Verse 59). This depicts the movement of death, the fall from above and disappearance after the end of life.

*“Neither is there a grain in the earth’s deep darkness.”* (Verse 59). This depicts the movement of growth and life, starting in the deep and going up onto the surface. We see how the dead quickens and the idle moving forward with vigour.

*“Nor anything fresh or dry but is recorded in a clear book.”* (Verse 59) This is an overall generalization that comprises both life and death, the thriving and the withering away of everything that lives on earth. Who other than God would begin with such material in order to paint such an expansive scene? And who would give it such beauty and harmony to add to its excellence? Who other than God can do that?<sup>13</sup>

Let us now take another example expressing the same idea: *“He knows all that enters the earth, and all that comes out of it, as well as all that descends from the skies, and all that ascends to them. And He alone is the Most-merciful, Truly forgiving.”* (34: 2)

Reflect for a moment on this image drawn with the use of only a few words and you will see an endless number of things, movements, shapes, sizes, forms and abstractions that defy the imagination. Should all the people on earth dedicate their entire attention throughout their lives to monitoring and enumerating what takes place in a single moment, of all that to which this verse refers, they would not be able to compile a comprehensive list of which they would be certain.

How many things enter the earth in a single moment? How many grains are buried into all corners of the earth, and how many find their way into them? Think for a moment of the number of worms, insects, particles and crawlers that go underneath the surface of the earth throughout the globe. Think of the number of drops of water, gas molecules as well as rays and radiation that go into the earth at every point of its vast expanse. Think of all this and remember that it is all watched by God whose eyes never blink.

Then how many things come out of the earth? How many plants shoot up, springs issue forth, volcanoes erupt, and gases spread out? How many buried things reveal themselves, and how many insects come out of their hiding places? How many are those things, visible or invisible, known to humans or unknown, that come out of the earth in a single moment? The number is beyond human reckoning.

Reflect on the number of things that come down from the skies: the drops of rain, the meteors, the blazing rays and other rays that bring us light. Think also of every divine command brought down to accomplish God’s will, and the mercy God bestows on the whole universe or on particular creatures; and think of all the provisions God grants to His servants in abundance or in restricted measure. All this comes down from the skies, as do numerous other things known only to God Himself.

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<sup>13</sup> Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’ān*, Leicester, 2002, Vol. V. pp. 147-149.

Reflect also on what ascends to the skies: how many breaths of air come out of every plant, animal, human or other creature? How many supplications are addressed to God in public or in private, heard only by God? Think of the spirits of creatures that are gathered to God; the angels carrying God's orders, and other spirits that go about totally unknown to anyone other than God. Think also how many particles of vapour ascend from the seas, and how many gas molecules ascend from different types of creation.

How many of all these take place in a single moment? How much knowledge do human beings need to make a record of all that takes place in a single moment? Would they come close even if they devoted a lifetime to such counting and recording? But God's knowledge, which is complete and perfect, encompasses all that at every moment and every place. Indeed every heart and mind, every intention and thought, every movement and stoppage is under God's watchful eye. Yet His grace ensures that they remain private, and He also often forgives, for *"He alone is the Most-merciful, Truly forgiving."* (34: 2)

Indeed many similar verses of the Qur'ān indicate that it is not of human writing. Such cosmic thoughts do not occur to human beings, because there is nothing in human nature that gives rise to them. Moreover, the simple touches that serve to encompass a universal expanse indicate that they come from the Maker of the universe, whose style no one can emulate.

Certain things and happenings which appear to us to be of little significance are often used by the Qur'ān to prove great concepts. Here they are portrayed in a different light showing them to be very important indeed, and most fitting to prove the concepts in question. For example: *"It is We who have created you: why, then, do you not accept the truth? Have you ever considered that seed which you emit? Is it you who create it, or are We the source of its creation? We have indeed decreed that death shall be ever-present among you; but there is nothing to prevent Us from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being anew in a manner as yet unknown to you. And since you are indeed aware of the miracle of your coming into being in the first instance, why, then, do you not bethink yourselves of Us? Have you ever considered the seed which you cast upon the soil? Is it you who cause it to grow, or are We the cause of its growth? For, were it Our will, We could indeed turn it into chaff; and you would be left to wonder and to lament, 'Indeed we are ruined! Nay, but we have been deprived of our livelihood!' Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who cause it to come down from the clouds or are We the cause of its coming down? Were it Our will, We could make it burningly salty and bitter: why, then, do you not give thanks? Have you ever considered the fire which you kindle? Is it you who have brought into being the tree that serves as its fuel, or are We the cause of its coming into being? It is We who have made it a means to remind [you of Us], and a comfort for all who are lost and hungry in the wilderness [of their lives]. Extol, then, the limitless glory of your Lord's mighty name."* (56: 57-74)

The Qur'ān makes of such familiar phenomena universal issues of great importance, revealing the great laws in the universe, and formulating the basis of a profound faith and a complete way of existence. At the same time, it makes these familiar happenings the centre of thought and contemplation, a tool that refreshes hearts and souls and awakens feelings and sensitivities. It alerts people to phenomena which they tend to overlook although they are in front of them morning and evening. It makes them sensitive to the wonderful and miraculous events that take place in the universe. It does not leave them in need of special, preternatural and infrequent events. Nor does it require them to look for miracles and signs that are alien to them and to their lives, or to look far beyond the laws of nature that affect their own world. It does not lead them to dig into complex philosophies, entangled questions of logic, or scientific experiments that may not be comprehensible to all, in order to formulate in their minds a faith and a concept of life based on it.

They themselves are made by God, and the natural phenomena functioning all around them are set in operation by His will. Everything that He creates is miraculous. Moreover, the Qur'ān is His own book. Hence, it turns their minds to the miracles that are within them or present in their own world. It leads them by the hand to reflect on the miracles that are familiar to them, but because of this familiarity are overlooked and ignored. It opens their eyes to make them see the great secret that is embodied in their existence. It is the secret of the creative power and God's absolute oneness, and the secret of the eternal divine law that operates in their own selves and in the universe around them. This law embodies all the pointers to, and proofs of, the truth of faith. These are brought alive within their human nature.

This is the method followed in the Qur'ān as it portrays aspects of God's power seen in people's own creation, in the plants they grow, the water they drink and the fire they kindle. These are among the most basic things that they see all the time. It also portrays the moment when life on earth comes to its end, and the life of the other world begins. This is the moment which will be faced by everyone, when nothing within human power is of any avail. Thus the Qur'ān brings all human beings face to face with God's absolute power which controls the whole universe. There is no room for any argument. No excuse is valid. The truth stares people in the eye.

The Qur'ānic method of addressing human nature is itself a proof of its source. It is indeed the same source that has given the universe its existence. Its very structure follows the same method of building the universe. The most simple of material is used to produce the most sophisticated shapes and forms, as well as the largest and greatest of creatures. It is thought that the atom is the matter from which the universe is built, and the cell is the matter from which life is formed. Minute as it is, the atom

is itself a miracle. Similarly, the tiny cell is a great wonder. In the Qur'ān, the most simple and familiar things are used to formulate the most profound religious beliefs and the broadest universal philosophy. The scenes portrayed are those known and experienced by everyone. They are concerned with offspring, plants, water, fire and death. Even the most primitive man, in his old cave has witnessed the inception of embryonic life, the shoot of a plant, the fall of water, the kindling of fire and the moment of death. On the basis of these scenes, familiar as they are to all human beings, the Qur'ān formulates its ideological beliefs. In this way, the Qur'ān is able to address its message to every human being in every community. But these simple and familiar scenes epitomize the great truth of the universe, and most profound secrets of God's ability. Simple as they are, they address human nature in general, and their greatness remains the central preoccupation of the most knowledgeable of scientists and scholars to the end of time.

### **Conjecture Preferred to Fact!**

*"If they say: 'He has invented it,' say: 'Produce, then, one sūrah like it, and call for help on all you can other than God, if what you say is true.'" (Verse 38)* At this point, with the sūrah presenting this challenge, all argument is stopped and a clear statement is made to establish the fact that they rely only on conjecture, judging what they do not know.

Right judgement must be preceded by thorough knowledge, and not rely on personal preferences or unproved views. What they are judging is the revelation of the Qur'ān and the truth of its promises and warnings. They have denied all these without having any firm knowledge to justify their denial, and without waiting for its true interpretation: *"Indeed they disbelieve what they cannot grasp, particularly since its inner meaning has not become clear to them."* (Verse 39) In this they have followed in the footsteps of former communities who rejected God's revelations and associated partners with their Lord. They should consider the fate of those earlier communities in order to know what awaits them if they continue to reject the faith. *"Likewise did those who lived before them disbelieve. But see what happened in the end to those wrongdoers."* (Verse 39)

Although most of them deny something of which they do not have certain knowledge, and instead follow conjecture and caprice, there are those who do believe in the truth of this revealed book: *"Some of them do believe in it, while others do not. But your Lord is fully aware of those who spread corruption."* (Verse 40) These spreaders of corruption are the unbelievers. Corruption on earth is certainly caused and mostly spread by turning away from belief in the true Lord. Indeed all corruption starts by submission to beings other than God, including the evil that

follows such submission. This is the root cause of following one's desire in what affects oneself or others. It is this which leads to the rise of false gods which corrupt everything so that they can maintain their false lordship. They corrupt people's morals, spirits, thinking, concepts, as well as their interests and property, seeking only to preserve their own power. The history of mankind, old and new, is full of examples of such corruption spread by those who are devoid of faith.

Having explained their attitude to the Qur'ān the *sūrah* addresses the Prophet, telling him not to let himself be affected by their rejection of the truth. He is to disown them and their deeds, declaring that he has nothing to do with them, and by sticking to the truth, stating it clearly and decisively: *"If they disbelieve you, then say: 'I shall bear the consequences of my deeds, and you your deeds. You are not accountable for what I do and I am not accountable for your doings.'"* (Verse 41)

This directive to the Prophet is also meant to touch their consciences. They and their actions are disowned by the Prophet. Now they can face the fate they have been told about without his support. It is yet another way of awakening their hearts, just like a child stubbornly refusing to walk with his parents being left alone to face the consequences of having lost their support in an unexpected eventuality. Such warnings are often successful.

The *sūrah* goes on to portray how they behave with the Prophet. They listen to him and look at him, but they have already sealed their hearts and minds. Hence their faculty of perception cannot make any sense of what they hear and see: *"Yet some of them [pretend to] listen to you; but can you make the deaf hear you, incapable as they are of using their reason? And some of them [pretend to] look towards you; but can you show the way to the blind, bereft of sight as they are?"* (Verses 42-43)

Those who cannot use their reason to understand what they hear or appreciate what they see are always present in large numbers everywhere. The Prophet (peace be upon him) cannot do anything for them because they refuse to learn how to discern and reason. The Prophet cannot make the deaf hear or the blind see. Only God can do that. He, however, has set a law in operation and left His creatures to reap the results of their dealings according to this law. He has given them ears, eyes and minds to hear, see and reason with, so that they may follow the true guidance He has sent them. If they decide to put these faculties out of order, they will reap the consequences according to His law. Such consequences are their fair reward, for God does not treat anyone with injustice: *"Indeed, God does not do the least wrong to mankind, but it is men who wrong themselves."* (Verse 44)

These last few verses are meant to reassure the Prophet and relieve his sorrow at their stubborn rejection of the truth. God reassures him that their rejection is not the result of any lack of effort on his part, or lack of conviction on the part of his

message. It is simply that they behave as though they were deaf and blind. It is only God who gives ears and eyes their faculties. It has nothing to do with the message itself or the person who preaches it. These verses also provide a clear definition of the nature of servitude to God. The Prophet himself is a servant of God, and all his abilities remain within the limits of God's servants. The final say belongs to God alone.

### When God Is the Witness

The next verses quickly touch the hearts of the unbelievers, portraying as they do a scene from the Day of Judgement. In this scene the whole of life which is so heavily present in their consciousness, and which encompasses all their concerns and preoccupations appears to be no more than a short trip which people undertake before returning to their permanent abode: *"On the Day when He will gather them together, [it will seem to them] as though they had not sojourned in this world more than an hour of a day, getting to know one another. Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance."* (Verse 45)

In this very fast round, we see those who are gathered on the Day of Judgement to be totally bewildered. It all comes to them as if by total surprise. It is as if their journey through this life has been a very short one, lasting barely an hour in which they get to know one another before it is all over. Or we may take this as an analogy showing how we spend our whole lives just meeting and getting to know one another. Although it is given by way of example, it is a completely true statement. Do people ever complete the process of getting to know one another? We come and go, and each individual or group barely gets to know the rest.

Reflect, if you will, on individuals who are in conflict with one another all the time: have they got to know one another as they should do? And then those warring nations which constantly fight over material and petty gains, hardly able to finish one quarrel before starting another. Do they get to know each other? The comparison is drawn here in order to emphasize the fact that this present life is very short.

In this way the loss of those who give this momentary trip all their attention is highlighted. They deny the fact of their forthcoming meeting with God, and instead turn away from Him. They make no preparations for their meeting with God or for their much longer stay in the life to come: *"Lost indeed will be those who [in their lifetime] disbelieved in meeting God and did not follow the right guidance."* (Verse 45)

This is followed by an address to the Prophet concerning the warnings God gives to those who deny the truth of His revelations. It is a clear warning wrapped in a cover of mystery. They do not know whether it will come to pass within a day or so, or whether they will have to wait until the Day of Judgement. Thus it remains a

constant threat to them, so that they may take heed and mend their ways. Gradually the passage which begins with a warning moves on to conclude with a description of the situation when nothing is of any use, and no one can buy his escape from God's punishment, not even if he had the whole world to offer. On the Day when God sits in judgement, no one shall suffer any injustice. Again we find here an example of the Qur'ānic method which links this life with the life to come, in just a few touching words. But it also describes the link between the two lives as it is in reality, and as they should always be viewed from an Islamic standpoint.

*Whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We cause you to die, it is to Us that they shall return. God is witness of all that they do. To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement was passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged. They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?' Say: 'I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself except as God may please. For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.' Say: Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten? Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?' Then it will be said to the wrongdoers: 'Taste the long-lasting torment. Is this requital anything other than the just due for what you used to do?' They will ask you: 'Is all this true?' Say: 'Yes, by my Lord. It is most certainly true, and you will never be beyond God's reach.' Should every wrongdoer possess all that the earth contains, he will gladly offer it all as ransom. They will harbour feelings of remorse when they see the suffering. Judgement will be passed on them in all fairness; and they will not be wronged. (Verses 46-54)*

This passage begins with a clear statement reaffirming the fact that such people will undoubtedly return to God, whether they experience some of what the Prophet has warned them against in his life or after his death. The return in both cases is to God who is a witness of all they do at all times, during the lifetime of the Prophet or afterwards. Nothing of what they do will ever be lost. The Prophet's death will not exempt them from facing the reckoning.

*"Whether We show you some of what We have promised them or We cause you to die, it is to Us that they shall return. God is witness of all that they do."* (Verse 46) Everything takes place according to deliberate planning. Nothing is lost or changed on account of any emergencies or special circumstances. Every community is left to wait until its messenger comes to warn them and explain all the facts to them. Thus they are given their rights in accordance with the condition God has imposed upon Himself that He would not punish any community until He has sent them a messenger with a clear

message. When this has taken place, they will have no excuse. They will be judged fairly, on the basis of their response to the messenger: *“To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement was passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged.”* (Verse 47)

The last two verses should be taken as the basis of a proper understanding of the nature of Godhead and servitude to Him. The Qur’ān is keen to explain it at every occasion, in different ways and methods. Here the Prophet is told that what is to become of this faith and the people to whom it is addressed belongs entirely to God. The Prophet himself has no say in it. His role is that of conveying the message he has been given. Anything beyond that belongs to God alone. His lifetime may end and he may not see the end of those people who stubbornly opposed him or who tried to cause him harm. It is not imperative that God should let him see the fate of his opponents or how God will punish them. That is something determined by God alone. Every one of God’s messengers should fulfil the task assigned to them of conveying God’s message. When a messenger has done that, he then leaves everything to God to determine. Thus all creatures know their positions. The advocates of faith will not then be hasty trying to precipitate God’s judgement, no matter how long they may take in advocating the message or how much hardship they are made to endure.

### **Why Precipitate God’s Punishment?**

*“They say: ‘When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?’”* (Verse 48) The question was asked by way of a challenge. They were actually demanding that whatever the Prophet warned them against be fulfilled, and that God’s judgement be made just as it had been on earlier communities which denied God’s messengers. But the answer the Prophet is instructed to give makes all issues succinctly clear: *“Say: ‘I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself except as God may please. For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.’”* (Verse 49)

If God’s Messenger does not have any power to bring harm or benefit to himself, he certainly cannot bring such harm or benefit to them either. It should be pointed out here that harm is mentioned before benefit because they were precipitating harm. In a different context, benefit is mentioned first because it is more fitting to the situation. This occurs in *Sūrah 7, The Heights, or Al-A`rāf*, when he says: *“Had I possessed knowledge of what lies beyond the reach of human perception, I would have availed myself of much that is good and no evil would have ever touched me.”* (7: 188)

*“Say: ‘I have no power over any harm or benefit to myself except as God may please.’”* (Verse 49) It is all, then, by God’s will. He brings His word to pass and He puts His

warnings into effect whenever He pleases. His law will never fail, and the term He has set will fall due as He has determined: *“For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.”* (Verse 49) The term may end with physical destruction, as happened to earlier communities, or it may take a metaphorical form, which leaves a community lost, vanquished. This may last for some time and the community may then rise again, or it may be permanent and the community continues its decline. Individuals may remain but its existence as a community is over. All this takes place in accordance with God’s law which never changes. There is no element of coincidence, favouritism or prejudice. Only those communities which fulfil the requirements of vigorous existence will live, and those which abandon them will decline or die. It is clearly established that the Muslim community will lead an active and solid life if it follows God’s Messenger who calls on it to take what ensures its continued life. Belief in the Prophet and his message is not sufficient on its own. Action is needed as clearly defined by Islam in all fields of life. The code of living laid down by God must be followed and the values He has set must be adhered to. Otherwise, the term set will come to pass as per God’s law.

The *sūrah* then adds a surprising touch. The unbelievers are led from a position where they challenge and ridicule to one where they are threatened: *“Say: ‘Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten?’”* (Verse 50) God’s punishment will come at a time and place unknown to human beings. It may come during the night when people are asleep, or in the day when they are awake and alert. Yet their alertness will not prevent it. So why should they wish to hasten it when it brings them no good?

While they are still in shock at the idea that their punishment may be very close, the next verse delivers an even greater shock, showing that punishment as having actually occurred when it has not. This is done to alert people’s consciences and heighten their feelings to its reality. *“Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?”* (Verse 51) The image shows the punishment as having been inflicted, and they as having believed in it. It is as if they are being rebuked now for not believing when they had every reason to do so before they were punished. To complete this future scene, painted as if it is happening now, the next verse says: *“Then it will be said to the wrongdoers: ‘Taste the long-lasting torment. Is this requital anything other than the just due for what you used to do?’”* (Verse 52) Thus the *sūrah* takes us to the moment of reckoning and punishment while a few moments and a couple of verses earlier we are still in this life, listening to God’s address to His Messenger, telling him of the fate of those who persist in denying his message.

The scene concludes with the unbelievers asking the Prophet about whether the warning and punishment are really true. Deep inside, they are shaken. The answer is emphatic, asserted with an oath that it is most certain: *"They will ask you: 'Is all this true?' Say: 'Yes, by my Lord. It is most certainly true, and you will never be beyond God's reach.'" (Verse 53)* That is a remarkable reply indeed: *'Yes, by my Lord.'* I know my Lord and His power, and I do not make a false oath. I only swear to assert the truth in a most serious manner: *"It is most certainly true, and you will never be beyond God's reach."* (Verse 53) He can always gather you and bring you to the reckoning and then administer His reward or punishment, as you deserve.

While we are still following this question and answer, the *sūrah* suddenly takes us deep into the time when people are made to account for their deeds and their fate is determined. First a supposition is made: *"Should every wrongdoer possess all that the earth contains, he will gladly offer it all as ransom."* (Verse 54)

But such a ransom will not be accepted, even should it be offered. But before the verse is concluded, we see that what was supposed has come to pass and the whole matter is done and finished with: *"They will harbour feelings of remorse when they see the suffering."* (Verse 54) It has all come as a great surprise which leaves them powerless. The image here is one of gloomy faces, full of sadness, their lips unable to utter a word: *"Judgement will be passed on them in all fairness; and they will not be wronged."* (Verse 54) The whole scene which started only half a verse earlier as a supposed probability is concluded as a reality and a foregone conclusion. This is an example of how the Qur'ān paints impressive scenes that penetrate into our consciousness.

### **A Cure for What is in People's Hearts**

To emphasize the concept of resurrection and reckoning the *sūrah* gives us yet another image of God's power as it appears in the heavens and the earth, life and death. It is a quick scene serving to reassert that what God promises will come to pass. This is followed by an appeal to all mankind to make the best use of, and receive the maximum benefit from the Qur'ān, which brings them an admonition, guidance and a cure for all that their hearts may harbour. *"Indeed, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. God's promise always comes true, but most of them do not know it. He alone gives life and causes death, and to Him you shall all return. Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers. Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.'" (Verses 55-58)*

We have first a clear and loud proclamation: *"Indeed, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and earth."* (Verse 55) The One to whom everything in heaven and on earth belongs is certainly able to make His promise come true. No barrier or impediment

can prevent Him from fulfilling it: *"God's promise always comes true, but most of them do not know it."* (Verse 55) In their ignorance, they doubt this or deny it altogether. Then another of His great attributes is mentioned: *"He alone gives life and causes death."* (Verse 56) The One who controls life and death is able to bring His creation back to life and hold them to account: *"To Him you shall all return."* (Verse 56) This is a passing comment added to a scene of resurrection, reckoning, reward and punishment.

Then follows a comprehensive address to all people: *"Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers."* (Verse 57) It is in this very book, about the origin of which you entertain doubts, that you have an admonition from your Lord. It is neither a fabricated hook nor are its contents written by a human being. This admonition is meant to revive your hearts and cure you of all superstition, doubt and worry. It is given by way of reassurance, security and peace. Whoever has faith will find in it guidance along the road that leads to success, and a mercy from all error and punishment: *"Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.'"* (Verse 58)

They should rejoice at the favours and grace which God has given them in abundance. Wealth and other worldly riches deserve no rejoicing because they all come to an end. Rejoicing should be subliminal, releasing people from the lure of worldly comforts and riches. Such items are here to serve people in life, not be served, to be controlled and not in control. Islam does not despise worldly comforts, nor does it encourage people to turn away from them. It only gives them their proper position, so that people enjoy them whilst retaining their free will, setting for themselves higher goals. For such people, having faith is God's grace, and the fulfilment of what faith prescribes is their goal. Beyond this, believers feel that they own the world, while it has no control over them.

An authentic report mentions that when the tax levied on the land and farms of Iraq arrived at the outskirts of Madinah, `Umar went out to have a look at it, accompanied by a servant. `Umar started counting the camels that the tax included, but they were too numerous. `Umar repeated the words: 'Praise be to God; Thanks to God.' His servant said: 'This is indeed part of God's bounty and grace.' `Umar said: 'You are wrong. It is not to such matters that the Qur'ānic verse refers when it commands: *"Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.'"* (Verse 58)

Those early Muslims had a different sense of values. They realized that the greatest aspects of God's grace were admonition and guidance. Money, wealth and even victory over their enemies were all matters that came as a result. Hence, victory was assured to them, and wealth came to them with no effort on their part. The way

the community of believers must follow is very clear. It is the one clearly marked out by the Qur'ān, and easily followed by the early Muslims who developed a thorough understanding of Islam. It is the only way to follow.

Neither wealth and property, nor material values determine people's status and position in this present life, let alone the life to come. Material provisions, facilities and values may be the cause of human misery, not only in the next world, but also in our present life. Hence, it is necessary to have different values to guide human life. These values assign to material provisions and facilities their proper position in people's lives. It is values that can make such material comforts the source of real happiness. Moreover, it is the system that regulates the life of a certain community that determines the value of material provisions in the life of that community, making them either a source of happiness or a cause of misery; a means of elevation or a cause of downfall. Hence the emphasis on the value of their faith to the believers: *"Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers. Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.'"* (Verses 57-58)

### **Rejoice at God's Grace**

Those who were first to receive the Qur'ān recognized this superior value. Hence `Umar denied that the camels and cattle he, as the ruler of the Muslim state, received in land tax were aspects of the bounty and grace God bestowed on them, and for which they should rejoice. `Umar had a keen insight into the Islamic faith. Hence, he realized that the most important aspects of God's grace and bounty were what God had revealed to them: an admonition from their Lord, a cure for what is in people's hearts, as well as guidance and mercy for believers. Material wealth had nothing to do with it. They appreciated the great change which Islam had brought about in their lives. They were able to remove themselves from the abyss of ignorance to something far superior.

Islam brings about people's freedom from enslavement to others, and ensures their submission to God alone. This determines that their concepts, values, morals and manners are placed on a much higher level. Their whole life is transformed from bondage to freedom. Material provisions, facilities and power all come as a result of such freedom, as happened in the history of the early Muslims. When they gained power and became the undisputed masters, they showed the rest of humanity how to believe in God, so that they too would enjoy what God bestows of His grace.

Those who lay too much emphasis on material values are the enemies of humanity. What they advocate is not promoted with good intent. Rather, what they want is to destroy the values inculcated by faith and the belief which makes people

aspire to something higher than animal needs, without overlooking their own human needs. It gives them further necessities which they seek to fulfil together with their needs for food, shelter and sex.

Much fuss is being made of material values and production, making them people's central preoccupation. Thus human beings become no more than machines, whilst spiritual and moral values are lost and trampled on. Yet this does not come about by itself; it is all according to an elaborate plan which seeks to replace old idols with new ones, and treat these as the supreme power that controls all values.

When material production is thus transformed into an idol around which people turn in reverence, all values and considerations, including morality, family, honour, freedom and security, are sacrificed for its sake. Nothing is allowed to have a negative effect on material production. If anyone disputes that this is a worshipped idol, let him tell us what a worshipped idol is like. It is not necessary that idols be made of stone or wood. An idol may take the form of a certain value, a concept or principle.

The supreme value then must continue to be assigned to God's bounty and grace, epitomized in His guidance which cures people's hearts, gives them their freedom and attaches more importance to human values. Under this supreme value, people can continue to enjoy, and benefit from, the provisions God has given them and the material comforts generated by industrialization. They will feel their burden lightened by such comforts, but they will be free of the pressures characteristic of *jāhiliyyah* societies.

Without such a supreme value, material provisions, facilities and production become a curse that brings misery and distress to all humanity. In the absence of this supreme value, these are used to enhance animal values and needs at the expense of human ones. God certainly tells the truth as He says: "*Mankind, there has come to you an admonition from your Lord, a cure for all that may be in your hearts, and guidance and grace for all believers. Say: 'In God's bounty and grace, in this let them rejoice; for this is better than all that they may amass.'*" (Verses 57-58)

### **God's Grace and People's Ingratitude**

Having highlighted God's bounty and grace, represented by His revelations and the guidance and cure they provide, the *sūrah* now speaks of people's practices that are at variance with God's guidance.

These are nothing less than an assault on God's authority whereby He makes things lawful or unlawful.

*Say: 'Do but consider all the means of sustenance that God has bestowed on you! Some of it you then made unlawful, and some lawful.' Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?' But what will they think, those who invent lies against God, on the Day of Resurrection? God is truly bountiful to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful. (Verses 59-60)*

The Prophet is instructed to ask them about the sustenance God has given them, especially in light of the fact that everything they have has been bestowed on them by Him. All this they should use in accordance with what He has legislated. Instead, though, they use it as they desire. Furthermore, without sanction from God, they make some of it lawful and some unlawful. In effect, an enactment of legislation, which is a manifestation of sovereignty. Yet sovereignty belongs to God alone. Hence they do what God has not given them permission to do. *"Say: 'Has God given you leave to do so, or do you fabricate lies against God?'" (Verse 59)*

This issue is frequently raised in the Qur'ān, because, next to believing in God's oneness, it is the most important issue.

Indeed it is the main aspect of translating belief into reality. To acknowledge that God is the One who creates and sustains entails that He is the One to be worshipped and the One who determines all matters relating to human life. These include the means of sustenance God has provided. The unbelievers in Arabia acknowledged God as the Creator and the Provider of sustenance,-as do some who call themselves Muslims today. Like these latter-day self-styled Muslims, those unbelievers also gave themselves the authority to prohibit part of what God gave them and to make others lawful. In this way then the Qur'ān paints them as both contrary and idolaters. The same description applies to all who are guilty of such contradiction, no matter what labels they give themselves. Islam is not a title that people attach to their names; it is a belief with practical implications.

Also like today's self-styled Muslims, the pagan Arabs used to claim that they had God's sanction for their actions, or what they even described as God's law. In *Sūrah 6, Cattle*, God mentions some of their claim: *"They say: 'Such cattle and crops are forbidden. None may eat of them save those whom we permit' – so they falsely claim. Other cattle they declare to be forbidden to burden their backs; and there are cattle over which they do not pronounce God's name, inventing [in all this] a lie against Him. He will surely requite them for their inventions."* (6: 138) As is clear from this verse, they used to falsely claim that God wants this and not that, just as some Muslims today claim that what they legislate is God's own law.

God puts the whole issue clearly in front of them. He asks what they think His attitude will be like on the Day of Judgement when they make these false claims against Him: *"But what will they think, those who invent lies against God, on the Day of*

*Resurrection?"* (Verse 60) This verse refers to all those who are guilty of fabrication against God. What do such people think their destiny will be on the Day of Judgement? It is a question to test even the most stubborn and hardened of unbelievers.

### **A Cure for Hearts**

*"God is truly bountiful to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful."* (Verse 60) God is always bountiful to mankind. He has placed on earth and in the universe the means of man's material sustenance. He has further given man the ability to know its sources as well as the natural laws that affect those sources, and to know how to enrich its variety of shapes and forms through analysis and synthesis. Indeed everything in the universe and every talent and potential people have is provided by God. Moreover, His bounty is epitomized in the code of living He has laid down, providing guidance for mankind and a cure for anything that may trouble their hearts and minds. When they implement this, they tap their highest potential and follow a way that brings about the best in the life of this world and in the life to come. They establish harmony between their human life and the life of the universe around them.

But most people do not show any gratitude for God's bounty. Instead they digress from His code, and ascribe partners to Him. This leads to their distress and misery, because they make no use of what God has revealed as a cure for what may trouble their hearts.

This is a profound truism. The Qur'ān is a cure for people's hearts in every connotation of the word 'cure'. It penetrates into people's hearts and minds just like a cure penetrates into a body weakened by illness. It makes its way through with its powerful rhythm and instructions which alert the natural human receptive mechanism, to open up and respond. It also penetrates into people's minds with its laws and regulations which guarantee the minimum conflict between groups and communities. It generates reassurance that justice will be done, that goodness will triumph and that the end will be good. Furthermore, it embraces numerous meanings and connotations that no human expression can imply. Yet they are all made clear in this remarkable verse.

Most people do not show any gratitude. They remain ungrateful although God is aware of everything, whether apparent or hidden. Nothing in the heavens or on earth escapes His knowledge. This is added here in order to awaken people's hearts and consciousness. It is followed by reassurance to the Prophet and his followers of God's care: the unbelievers who associate partners with God will not be able to cause them any harm.

## Confusion Compounded

*In whatever business you may be engaged, and whatever part you may recite of the Qur'ān, and whatever deed you [mankind] may do, We will be your witnesses from the moment you are engaged with it. Not even an atom's weight [of anything whatsoever] on earth or in heaven escapes your Lord, nor is there anything smaller or larger than that, but is recorded in a clear book. For certain, those who are close to God have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve; for they do believe and remain God-fearing. Theirs are the glad tidings in the life of this world and in the life to come: there is no changing the word of God. This is the supreme triumph. Be not grieved by what they say. All might and glory belong to God alone. He alone hears all and knows all. Indeed, to God belong all those who are in the heavens and earth. Those who invoke other beings beside God do not follow any real partners with Him. They follow mere conjecture, and they utter nothing but falsehood. It is He who has made the night for you, so that you may have rest, and the day, so that you may see. In this there are certainly signs for those who listen. (Verses 61-67)*

The first verse in this passage reminds us that God is with us in all situations. *"In whatever business you may be engaged, and whatever part you may recite of the Qur'ān, and whatever deed you [mankind] may do, We will be your witnesses from the moment you are engaged with it."* (Verse 61) It is a feeling that brings reassurance and awe at the same time. For how is it that God is with us, witnessing whatever we do? God in His almightiness, the Creator who controls everything in the universe with total ease, is with each human being who, without God's care, is no more than a small particle floating aimlessly in the air. This is indeed awesome, yet at the same time, reassuring, inspiring us with confidence and security. We are not alone without good care and protection. God is with us at all times: *"In whatever business you may be engaged, and whatever part you may recite of the Qur'ān, and whatever deed you [mankind] may do, We will be your witnesses from the moment you are engaged with it."* (Verse 61) It is not merely God's knowledge that is complete, but His care and watch are also total: *"Not even an atom's weight [of anything whatsoever] on earth or in heaven escapes your Lord, nor is there anything smaller or larger than that, but is recorded in a clear book."* (Verse 61)

Let our imagination think of all the particles and atoms that are on earth or in heaven, and of what is smaller and larger, then remember that God's knowledge encompasses all. We are bound to experience awe and feel our own humility, but faith will reassure us and remind us of the peace that we should feel in God's presence. With such peace and reassurance, a proclamation is made: *"For certain, those who are close to God have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve; for they do believe and*

*remain God-fearing. Theirs are the glad tidings in the life of this world and in the life to come: there is no changing the word of God. This is the supreme triumph.*" (Verses 62-64)

How could those who are close to God feel fear or experience grief when God is with them at every moment and in every action? These are the ones who watch God in all situations, trying always to do what pleases Him: *"They do believe and remain God-fearing."* (Verse 63) What could cause them to feel fear or grieve when they have been given glad tidings that apply to both their present life and to their future life? This is a true promise that is never changed and never fails, for there is no changing of God's word. Indeed, *"this is the supreme triumph."* (Verse 64)

Those whom the *sūrah* describes as being close to God are the true believers who are God-fearing. Faith is something that penetrates deep into the heart and to which credit is given by action, which, in turn means the implementation of God's commandments. This is how the concept of being close to God should be understood. By extension, those who command wealth and influence will achieve nothing: *"Be not grieved by what they say. All might and glory belong to God alone. He alone hears all and knows all."* (Verse 65)

In this instance, might and glory are attributed to God alone. In a different context in the Qur'ān, they are also said to belong to the Prophet and the believers. Here the *sūrah* is speaking of God's protection of the believers, which makes it more fitting that might and glory should be shown as belonging to God alone, as indeed they are. The Prophet and the believers derive their power and glory from Him, while other people receive nothing of them at all. The mighty Quraysh were only a group of such other people. The Prophet (peace be upon him) enjoys God's protection, so he should not be saddened by what they say. God, who hears their plotting and knows their scheming, is with him, giving him and his followers all the protection they need.

Everyone in the heavens and the earth, whether human, *jinn* or angels, obedient or disobedient, are subject to His power: *"Indeed, to God belong all those who are in the heavens and earth."* (Verse 66) The reference here is to animate creatures in order to emphasize that all of them, weak or strong, are under God's control. *"Those who invoke other beings beside God do not follow any real partners with Him."* (Verse 66) Those presumed partners have no real partnership of any kind with God. Indeed those who claim them to be God's partners are uncertain of their claims: *"They follow mere conjecture, and they utter nothing but falsehood."* (Verse 66)

This is followed by a statement portraying some aspects of God's power as reflected in the universe. These aspects are often overlooked because of familiarity: *"It is He who has made the night for you, so that you may have rest, and the day, so that you may see. In this there are certainly signs for those who listen."* (Verse 67) The One who controls all stillness and movement, who makes the night a time for rest, and gives

the day its light, enabling people to act and see, has absolute control over all people. Hence, He is able to protect those who are close to Him: *“In this there are certainly signs for those who listen.”* (Verse 67) They do not stop at the mere listening, but they also reflect and contemplate.

The Qur’ān often employs scenes from the universe when it discusses the subject of Godhead and servitude, because the universe, its existence and details, is a powerful witness which imposes its argument on human nature. The Qur’ān also addresses people drawing their attention to the harmony in their relationship with the universe. They actually feel this in their lives. The night in which they rest, and the day during which they are able to see, are two phenomena closely linked to their lives. The harmony between these phenomena and their lives is felt by all human beings, even those who are not conversant with scientific matters. Their innate nature understands the silent language of the universe.

Human beings were not deaf to the language of the universe until modern science revealed its secrets! Rather, people understand this language by their natural ability. Hence it is not surprising that God referred to this language so many centuries ago. Yet this language is self-renewing, taking into account every increase and progress in human knowledge. Indeed the richer people’s knowledge, the greater their understanding of the language of the universe, provided that their hearts are enlightened with faith, and their minds alert to its address.

### **Fabricated Claims of Divinity**

Among those who associate partners with God are those who allege that He has a son. Far be it from Him to need a son. The pagan Arabs in similar vein used to claim that the angels were God’s daughters. The verses we are now looking at tackle this type of fabrication. They begin with providing irrefutable arguments that are relevant to this world and warn against punishment in the hereafter.

*They say: ‘God has taken unto Himself son.’ Limitless is He in His glory. Self-sufficient is He. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth. No evidence whatever have you for this. Would you say about God something which you do not know? Say: ‘Those who invent falsehood about God shall not be successful. They may have a brief enjoyment in this world, but then to Us they must return, and We will then make them suffer severe torment for their unbelief’ (Verses 68-70)*

The belief alleging that God has a son is naïve, based on a faulty concept of Godhead. One that does not appreciate the huge gulf between the nature of the eternal God, and the nature of mortal humans. Nor does it appreciate the great

wisdom that allows mortals to procreate, so that they compensate for the short duration of their lives. This shortcoming does not apply to God.

Human beings die, and human life extends to an appointed time. It is God's wisdom that has allowed human life to continue until it reaches its ultimate point. Such continuity is made possible through procreation. Human beings get older and weaker. When they have children, their offspring compensate for their creeping weakness with the vitality of their youth, helping to continue the process of building human life on earth. Moreover, the young provide the necessary help to the elderly through their years of weakness. People also have to struggle within their environment, and against their enemies, whether human or animal. Hence they need support which is more likely to come from offspring. People also seek to have abundance of what they earn, and their children help them with their efforts which increase their earnings.

The same applies to all aspects that God has made necessary for the building of human life on earth, until the time appointed when God's will concerning its future is to be accomplished. None of this applies to God who does not need to have any continuity through offspring, or help in old age, or support in any endeavour. He has no need of anything. Hence there is no need for Him to have a son because His nature is such that He needs nothing to be accomplished by outside help. God has made human beings reproductive because, by nature, they have a definite need for such continuity.

Hence, the false claim that, '*God has taken unto Himself a son,*' is rebuffed by the assertion: "*Limitless is He in His glory. Self-sufficient is He. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth.*" (Verse 68)

"*Limitless is He in His glory.*" This is said by way of emphasizing that His sublime nature is far above this level of thinking. "*Self-sufficient is He.*" This is to stress that He is in no need of anything whatsoever, whether real or imaginary, which requires the presence of a son. It is well known that needs are the causes of what satisfies them. Nothing is given existence without a need or a purpose. "*To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth.*" (Verse 68) Everything belongs to Him. He does not need a son in order to gain anything whatsoever. Hence, attributing a son to Him is idle play, and far be it from Him to admit idle play.

The Qur'ān does not enter into any theoretical debate about the nature of God or man of the type that prevails in many philosophies. Instead, it deals with the subject itself. Here it only briefly mentions man's need of offspring. This does not, however, apply to God who owns all that is in heavens and earth. This should be sufficient either to convince or silence them, without any need for theoretical argument.

They are then brought face to face with the reality which shows that they have no proof to support their claims. The Qur'ānic verse uses the term '*sultan*' which means authority, in place of 'evidence' because authority provides strength, and the one who has a proof to support his claim is in a position of strength: "*No evidence whatever have you for this.*" (Verse 68) Indeed you have no argument, let alone solid proof: "*Would you say about God something which you do not know?*" (Verse 68)

To say something concerning a subject about which one knows nothing is unbecoming of intelligent human beings. When what is said is fabricated against God Himself, it becomes a terrible offence. For one thing, it contradicts all that is due to God of worship, respect and glorification, because it attributes to Him all that is associated with an event of imperfection and inability. Moreover, it is based on a faulty concept of the relationship between the Creator and His creation, leading to further errors in all relations between people, since the latter are essentially based on the former. All the authority claimed by the priests of pagan religions or by the Christian churches is based on the misconception of the relationship between God and His 'angel daughters' or between Him and Jesus Christ who is alleged to be His son. Moreover the concept of original sin, which has led to the practice of confession, and giving Christ's church an intermediary role between human beings and the One whom they describe as Christ's father, stems from a basic error in understanding the relationship between the Creator and His creation.

Hence the matter is not merely an erroneous belief, but rather, it is man's whole life that is affected. All the hostility that took place between the Church and scientists, and even between it and human intellect, is based on this fundamental error. This hostility was only brought to rest when society got shot of the Church's authority, and even of religion itself. Once the relationship between God and His creation is ill-conceived, much evil is bound to happen. Humanity has suffered this evil whenever materialistic doctrines have corrupted human life.

Hence the Islamic faith has taken extra care to make this relationship perfectly clear. God is the Creator, the Eternal, the Sustainer. The relationship between Him and all people, without exception, is that which exists between the Creator and His creation. The universe, life and the living exist according to certain laws that God has put into operation. These never fail and they apply to all people in equal measure, without favouritism or prejudice. Whoever observes these rules will be successful, and whoever puts them aside will end up the loser. All people will return to God, and He accepts no intercession. Everyone comes to Him on his or her own. They will have their individual reward for what they have done in this life. God will not treat anyone with injustice.

It is a simple faith that admits no erroneous interpretation. It does not take the human mind along any mysterious or confused way. Everyone stands in front of

God in the same position. Everyone is addressed by God's message and is required to implement it. This ensures that relations between people are set on the right footing, as a result of forging the right and solid relationship between them and God.

*"Say: 'Those who invent falsehood about God shall not be successful.'"* (Verse 69) They will have no prosperity whatsoever, whether in this life or in the life to come. True success is that which results from leading a life that is consistent with the laws God has set in operation. These lead to all goodness, elevating human beings to a higher level of humanity and setting their social structure on the right basis. Prosperity is not limited to material progress. Such progress is only superficial and temporary if it is combined with the destruction of human values, replacing them with animal values.

*"They may have a brief enjoyment in this world, but then to Us they must return, and We will then make them suffer severe torment for their unbelief"* (Verse 70) Their enjoyment is brief and temporary. It has no permanent link with the enjoyment reserved for the hereafter. Indeed, it is followed by 'severe torment' for turning away from the laws of nature which God has devised.

## Unheeded Warnings

Relate to them the story of Noah. He said to his people: 'My people! If my presence among you and my reminders to you of God's revelations are repugnant to you — well, in God have I placed my trust. Decide, then, what you are going to do, and [seek the help of] those whom you associate as partners with God. Be clear about your course of action, leaving no room for uncertainty, then carry out against me whatever you may have decided and give me no respite. (71)

But if you turn away, [remember that] I have asked of you no reward whatsoever. My reward rests with none but God. I have been commanded to be one of those who surrender themselves to Him.' (72)

But they disbelieved him. So We saved him and all those who joined him in the ark, and made them inherit the earth. And We drowned the others who denied Our revelations. Reflect on the fate of those who were forewarned. (73)

﴿ وَأَتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ نُوحٍ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ ۖ  
يَقَوْمِ إِن كَانَ كَبُرَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَقَامِي  
وَتَذِكْرِي بِبَايْتِ اللَّهِ فَعَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ  
فَأَجْمِعُوا أَمْرَكُمْ وَشُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَكُنْ  
أَمْرُكُمْ عَلَيْكُمْ غُمَّةً ثُمَّ اقْضُوا إِلَيَّ وَلَا  
تُنظِرُونِ ﴾

﴿ فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَمَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنَّ أَجْرٍ ۗ إِن  
أَجْرِي إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ  
مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴾

﴿ فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَمَن مَّعَهُ فِي الْفُلِكِ  
وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ خَلْقًا وَأَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا  
بِآيَاتِنَا فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُنذَرِينَ ﴾

Then after him We sent forth other messengers to their respective peoples, and they brought them clear evidence of the truth, but they would not believe in what they had once denied. Thus it is that We seal the hearts of those who transgress. (74)

Then after those [prophets] We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his nobles, but they persisted in their arrogance, for they were hardened offenders. (75)

When the truth came to them from Us, they said: 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.' (76)

Moses replied: 'Do you say this to the truth when it has come to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers will never be successful.' (77)

They said: 'Have you come to turn us away from what we found our forefathers believing in, so that the two of you might become supreme in the land? We will never believe in you.' (78)

Then Pharaoh commanded: 'Bring before me every learned sorcerer.' (79)

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ رُسُلًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِمْ  
فَجَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا  
بِمَا كَذَّبُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۚ كَذَلِكَ نَطْبَعُ  
عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ الْمُعْتَدِينَ ﴿٧٤﴾

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِم مُّوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ  
إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ بِآيَاتِنَا فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا  
وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾

فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِنَا قَالُوا إِنَّ  
هَذَا لَسِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٧٦﴾ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ  
أَتَقُولُونَ لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَكُمْ أَسِحْرٌ  
هَذَا وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاحِرُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَلْفِتَنَّا عَمَّا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ  
ءَابَاءَنَا وَتَكُونَ لَكُمْ الْكِبْرِيَاءُ فِي الْأَرْضِ  
وَمَا نَحْنُ لَكُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٧٨﴾

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ أَتَأْتُونِي بِكُلِّ سِحْرِ عَلِيمٍ

﴿٧٩﴾

*And when the sorcerers came, Moses said to them: 'Throw whatever you may wish to throw.'* (80)

*And when they had thrown, Moses said to them: 'What you have contrived is mere sorcery which God will certainly bring to nothing. God does not further the work of those who spread corruption.'* (81)

*By His words, God proves the truth to be true, much as the guilty may dislike it.'* (82)

*None except a few of his people believed in Moses, for they feared Pharaoh and their nobles, lest they persecute them. Surely Pharaoh was mighty on earth and was indeed given to excesses.* (83)

*Moses said: 'My people, if you believe in God, then place your trust in Him — if you have truly surrendered yourselves to Him.'* (84)

*They replied: 'In God have we placed our trust. Our Lord, do not let us suffer at the hands of evil-doing people.'* (85)

فَلَمَّا جَاءَ السَّحَرَةُ قَالَ لَهُمْ مُوسَىٰ أَلْقُوا

مَا أَنْتُمْ مُلْقُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

فَلَمَّا أَلْقَوْا قَالَ مُوسَىٰ مَا جِئْتُمْ بِهِ

السِّحْرُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَيَبْطِلُهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا

يُصْلِحُ عَمَلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٨١﴾

وَيُحِقُّ اللَّهُ الْحَقَّ بِكَلِمَاتِهِ ۗ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ

الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

فَمَا ءَامَنَ لِمُوسَىٰ إِلَّا ذُرِّيَّةٌ مِّن قَوْمِهِ

عَلَىٰ خَوْفٍ مِّن فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِمْ أَن

يَفْتِنَهُمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ لَعَالٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ

وَإِنَّهُ لَمِنَ الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٨٣﴾

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ يَتَقَوَّمُ إِن كُنْتُمْ ءَامَنْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ

فَعَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّسْلِمِينَ ﴿٨٤﴾

فَقَالُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا

فِتْنَةً لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Save us, by Your grace, from the people who disbelieve.’ (86)

And thus did We inspire Moses and his brother: ‘Take for your people some houses in Egypt, and make your houses places of worship, and be constant in prayer.’ And give glad tidings to all believers. (87)

Moses said, ‘Our Lord! You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his nobles splendour and riches in this life, with the result that they have been leading people astray from Your path. Our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts, so that they do not believe until they face the grievous suffering.’ (88)

He replied: ‘Your prayer is accepted. Continue, both of you, steadfastly on the right path, and do not follow the path of those who are devoid of knowledge.’ (89)

And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression.

وَجِنَّا بِرَحْمَتِكَ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَأَخِيهِ أَنْ تَبَوَّءُوا لِقَوْمِكُمْ مَا بَمِصْرَ بُيُوتًا وَأَجْعَلُوا بُيُوتَكُمْ قِبْلَةً وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ آتَيْتَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئَهُ زِينَةً وَأَمْوَالًا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا رَبَّنَا لِيُضِلُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِكَ رَبَّنَا اطْمِسْ عَلَىٰ أَمْوَالِهِمْ وَاشْدُدْ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُوا حَتَّىٰ يَرَوْا الْعَذَابَ الْأَلِيمَ ﴿٨٨﴾

قَالَ قَدْ أُجِيبَت دَعْوَتُكُمَا فَاسْتَقِيمَا وَلَا تَتَّبِعَانِ سَبِيلَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

﴿٨٩﴾ وَجَوَّزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ فَأَتَّبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ وَجُنُودُهُ بَغْيًا وَعَدُوًّا ۗ

*But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said: 'I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself.'* (90)

*[But God said:] 'Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land.'* (91)

*But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs.'* (92)

*We settled the Children of Israel in a most goodly abode and We provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life. It was not until knowledge was given them that they began to disagree among themselves. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that on which they differed.* (93)

*If you are in doubt concerning what We have bestowed on you from on high, ask those who read the Scriptures [revealed] before you. It is surely the truth that has come to you from your Lord. Do not, then, be among the doubters.* (94)

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَدْرَكَهُ الْغَرَقُ قَالَ ءَأَمِنْتُ أَنَّهُ

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا الَّذِي ءَأَمِنْتُ بِهِ بَنُو

إِسْرَائِيلَ وَأَنَا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ ﴿٩٠﴾

ءَالْكَفَرِ وَقَدْ عَصَيْتَ قَبْلُ وَكُنْتَ مِنَ

الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

فَالْيَوْمَ نُنَجِّيكَ بِبَدَنِكَ لِتَكُونَ لِمَنْ

خَلَفَكَ ءَايَةً ۚ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ عَنِ

ءَايَاتِنَا لَغَافِلُونَ ﴿٩٢﴾

وَلَقَدْ بَوَّأْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مُبَوَّأً صَدِيقٍ

وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ فَمَا اخْتَلَفُوا

حَتَّىٰ جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَقْضِي

بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ

مُخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٩٣﴾

فَإِنْ كُنْتَ فِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ

فَسْأَلِ الَّذِينَ يَقرءُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِنَ

قَبْلِكَ ۚ لَقَدْ جَاءَكَ الْحَقُّ مِن رَّبِّكَ فَلَا

*And do not be among those who deny God's revelations, for then you shall be among those who are lost. (95)*

*Surely, those against whom your Lord's word [of judgement] has come true will not believe, (96)*

*even though every sign should come to their knowledge, until they are faced with the grievous suffering. (97)*

*Had it believed, every community would have profited by its faith. It was so only with Jonah's people. When they believed, We lifted from them the suffering of disgrace in this life, and allowed them to enjoy things for a while. (98)*

*Had your Lord so willed, all people on earth, in their entirety, would have believed. Do you, then, try to compel people to believe? (99)*

*No human being can believe, except by God's leave. It is He who lays abomination on those who will not use their reason. (100)*

تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا بِآيَاتِ

اللَّهِ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الْخَسِرِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِمْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ

لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٩٧﴾

وَلَوْ جَاءَهُمْ كُلُّ آيَةٍ حَتَّى يَرَوْا

الْعَذَابَ الْأَلِيمَ ﴿٩٨﴾

فَلَوْلَا كَانَتْ قَرْيَةٌ ءَامَنَتْ فَنَفَعَهَا إِيمَانُهَا

إِلَّا قَوْمَ يُونُسَ لَمَّا ءَامَنُوا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ

عَذَابَ الْخِزْيِ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

وَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٩٩﴾

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ

كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا ۖ أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرَهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّىٰ

يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ

اللَّهِ ۚ وَيَجْعَلُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا

Say: 'Consider all that there is in the heavens and the earth.' But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe? (101)

What are they waiting for except a repetition of the days [of calamity] experienced by those who have gone before them? Say: 'Wait, then, if you will. I am also waiting.' (102)

Thereupon, We save Our messengers and those who believe. Thus have We willed it upon Ourselves: We save those who believe. (103)

يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

قُلْ أَنْظِرُوا مَاذَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
وَمَا تُغْنِي الْآيَاتُ وَالنُّذُرُ عَنْ قَوْمٍ لَا

يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾

فَهَلْ يَنْتَظِرُونَ إِلَّا مِثْلَ أَيَّامِ الَّذِينَ  
خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ قُلْ فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ

مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

ثُمَّ نُنَجِّي رُسُلَنَا وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ۚ  
كَذَلِكَ حَقًّا عَلَيْنَا نُنَجِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

## Preview

Reference was made earlier in the *sūrah* to ancient communities and what happened to them when they denied the messages of their prophets. Another generation was made to succeed them: "Indeed, We destroyed generations before your time when they persisted in their wrongdoing. The messengers sent to them brought them veritable evidence of the truth, but they would not believe. Thus do We reward the guilty. Then We made you their successors on earth, so that We might see how you behave." (Verses 13-14)

Another reference was made to the fact that every community had a messenger sent to them to deliver God's message. "To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement was passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged." (Verse 47)

Now the *sūrah* speaks in more detail about such earlier messages, highlighting certain aspects of the stories of Noah and Moses. The consequences of denying God's

messages are emphasized in both accounts. A brief reference is also made to Jonah, whose community accepted the faith when they were about to be overtaken by God's punishment, and they were thus saved. This serves to encourage those who deny God to stop so that they spare themselves an end similar to that experienced by Noah's people and Pharaoh and his host.

The previous passage concluded with an order to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) to declare that those who fabricate lies against God and associate partners with Him will come to an awful end: *"Say: "Those who invent falsehood about God shall not be successful. They may have a brief enjoyment in this world, but then to Us they must return, and We will then make them suffer severe torment for their unbelief"* (Verses 69-70) This declaration follows a reassurance given to the Prophet that the believers *"who are close to God have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve."* (Verse 62) The Prophet is also encouraged not to pay much attention to what the unbelievers say: *"Be not grieved by what they say. All might and glory belong to God alone. He alone hears all and knows all."* (Verse 65)

Now the Prophet is instructed to relate to them Noah's story and how he challenged his people. He was then saved with those believers who followed him, while the unbelievers who were much stronger and larger in number were destroyed.

These stories serve to emphasize the meaning of the preceding passages. In fact, all stories mentioned in the Qur'ān serve a definite purpose. They are related in different styles, highlighting different episodes as may befit the context in which they occur. Here the stories of earlier prophets highlight the absurdity of the Makkans towards the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) and his small group of believers. They also stress the fact that those believers were firm in their faith despite facing an enemy mustering far superior forces.

## Noah's Challenge

*Relate to them the story of Noah. He said to his people: My people! If my presence among you and my reminders to you of God's revelations are repugnant to you – well, in God have I placed my trust. Decide, then, what you are going to do, and [seek the help of] those whom you associate as partners with God. Be clear about your course of action, leaving no room for uncertainty, then carry out against me whatever you may have decided and give me no respite. But if you turn away, [remember that] I have asked of you no reward whatsoever. My reward rests with none but God. I have been commanded to be one of those who surrender themselves to Him.' But they disbelieved him. So we saved him and all those who joined him in the ark, and made them inherit the earth. And we drowned the others who denied Our revelations.*

*Reflect on the fate of those who were forewarned. (Verses 71-73)*

Only the end part of Noah's story is mentioned here where we see him offering his people a final challenge. He had spent a very long time preaching and warning his people, but to no avail. There is no mention of the ark here, or of those who were taken on board and so saved from the great floods. The aim here is to highlight the challenge and the believers' reliance on God, as well as the saving of a small, powerless group of believers and the destruction of the great hordes of unbelievers. The *sūrah* reduces the whole story to a single episode so as to emphasize its final end. This is what is most fitting in the present context.

*"Relate to them the story of Noah. He said to his people: My people! If my presence among you and my reminders to you of God's revelations are repugnant to you – well, in God have I placed my trust. Decide, then, what you are going to do, and [seek the help of] those whom you associate as partners with God. Be clear about your course of action, leaving no room for uncertainty, then carry out against me whatever you may have decided and give me no respite."* (Verse 71) Noah tells his people that if they are completely fed up with him, unable to tolerate his presence among them and his reminders of their duty to believe in God, then let that be as it may. He will continue along his way, unperturbed by their opposition, for *"in God have I placed my trust."* He seeks no help from anyone else. *"Decide, then, what you are going to do, and [seek the help of] those whom you associate as partners with God."* (Verse 71)

They may, for all he cares, mobilize all their forces and resources. *"Be clear about your course of action, leaving no room for uncertainty."* (Verse 71) They are further told to make their position very clear, allowing no ambiguity or hesitation, and leaving no room for return. Then when they have done that, they are told: *"carry out against me [i.e. Noah] whatever you may have decided and give me no respite."* (Verse 71)

It is a clear challenge thrown out by one who is absolutely certain of his ground and power. In fact he is inviting his opponents to attack him. What were the forces at his command facilitating such a challenge? He simply had faith, which gave him a power that is superior to everything else. Numbers, careful planning and firepower are of little use when compared to faith. He had God's support, and God does not abandon those who believe in Him. It is the challenge of one who relies on the source of real power, for faith establishes a bond between the believer and the One who has power over everything in the universe. It is neither an arrogant nor a foolhardy challenge. Rather, it is the challenge of true power.

Advocates of the divine faith have in God's messengers a fine example to follow. They should have unwavering confidence as they place their trust in God and face tyranny, whatever its source may be. Tyranny will not cause them any real or lasting damage, apart from perhaps some physical pain which God allows as a test of the

believers. God does not abandon the believers to His and their enemies, but He lets them undergo this test so that true believers come through it unharmed. The end favours the believers when God's promise is fulfilled and they are victorious.

Having made his challenge clear, Noah says to his people: *"But if you turn away, [remember that] I have asked of you no reward whatsoever. My reward rests with none but God. I have been commanded to be one of those who surrender themselves to Him."* (Verse 72). If you turn a deaf ear to what I call on you to accept, then that is your choice. I have not asked for a reward for guiding you to the right path, so I do not fear that my compensation will be reduced as a result of your turning away. *"My reward rests with none but God."* (Verse 72) Your attitude will not tempt me to change my way in the least, for my orders are such that I must surrender myself completely to God: *"I have been commanded to be one of those who surrender themselves to Him."* (Verse 72)

What happened, then? *"They disbelieved him. So We saved him and all those who joined him in the ark, and made them inherit the earth. And We drowned the others who denied Our revelations. Reflect on the fate of those who were forewarned."* (Verse 73) All that happened is given in a very brief account: his rescue with the believers who followed him; their establishment as successors to the land and subsequent power; and the drowning of the multitude of unbelievers. *"Reflect on the fate of those who were forewarned."* (Verse 73) It is indeed something to be reflected upon by all people at all times, so that they may heed the lesson and follow in the footsteps of the believers who were saved.

The outcome was not merely the destruction of the unbelievers. Instead this was preceded by the saving of the believers from all danger, and their establishment in the land to rebuild human life on a sound basis.

Such is the law God has established and such is His promise to the believers. If they feel at any time that the road seems endless, they must realize that it is the only way, and that the outcome will certainly be in their favour. They must not precipitate the fulfilment of God's promise. God does not deceive believers, nor does He abandon them to their enemies. He only teaches and equips them with what is of help to them along their way.

### **Different Communities, Same Response**

The *sūrah* then refers very briefly to a number of messengers who followed Noah, bringing clear evidence of the truth to their respective communities, and how the unbelievers received them: *"Then after him We sent forth other messengers to their respective peoples, and they brought them clear evidence of the truth, but they would not believe in what they had once denied. Thus it is that We seal the hearts of those who transgress."* (Verse 74)

These messengers were given clear proof confirming the truth they preached. They presented these proofs to their peoples, but the *sūrah* says that those peoples were not to believe in what they had earlier denied. This statement may be taken to mean that they continued to deny God's message in the same way as they denied it prior to having such clear evidence. In other words, they stubbornly held to their attitude. It may also mean that the unbelievers who deny God's messages are classified in one group despite the passage of time, because they share the same nature. This means that present-day unbelievers would not believe in what their ancestors denied, or what they themselves denied through their ancestors. All carry the same attitude to faith and the revelations confirming it. They seal their hearts and minds against it. In this they transgress and exceed all limits, because they refuse to use their God-given ability to understand. *"Thus it is that We seal the hearts of those who transgress."* (Verse 74)

This follows the divine rule that when a person turns a deaf ear and seals his mind to divine guidance, his heart and mind become totally unreceptive. It is not God who seals their hearts and minds to prevent them from accepting the faith, but the general rule applies to them as it applies in all situations.

### Truth or Sorcery

Moses' story is given in rather more detail than Noah's. It starts at the point when Moses faces the rejection of his message coupled with a challenge, and concludes with the drowning of Pharaoh and his soldiers. The account includes situations which carry strong similarity with the attitude of the pagan Arabs in Makkah to the Prophet's message, as well as the attitude of his few followers.

The part of the story related here highlights five points before making a comment elucidating the purpose of relating it in this way. The five points are given in quick succession as follows: *"Then after those [prophets] We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his nobles, but they persisted in their arrogance, for they were hardened offenders. When the truth came to them from Us, they said: 'This is clearly nothing but sorcery.' Moses replied: Do you say this to the truth when it has come to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers will never be successful.' They said: 'Have you come to turn us away from what we found our forefathers believing in, so that the two of you might become supreme in the land? We will never believe in you.'"* (Verses 7 5-78)

The signs which Moses brought to Pharaoh and his nobles are the nine mentioned in *Sūrah 7, The Heights*. They are not mentioned here in detail because the context does not require such detail. What is important in the present context is the attitude of Pharaoh and his group when they received these signs: *"They persisted in their arrogance, for they were hardened offenders."* (Verse 75)

*“When the truth came to them from Us...”* (Verse 76) The source of these signs is emphasized here, *‘from Us’*, to show clearly their terrible offence when they describe as *‘clear sorcery’* the truth sent to them by God.

It is with limitless arrogance that they thus describe the truth without any evidence to support their claim. The statement sounds as if it is a standard one reiterated by all those who deny God’s messages. As reported at the beginning of the *sūrah*, the pagan Arabs in Makkah said the same thing, despite the wide difference in time and place between the two communities and the great difference between the signs delivered by Moses and the Qur’ān.

*“Moses replied: Do you say this to the truth when it has come to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers will never be successful.”* (Verse 77) A part of Moses’ first objection is deleted because it is indicated by his second one. It is as if he said to them: “Do you say to the truth when it has come to you that it is sorcery? Can this be sorcery?” The first question expresses horror that the truth is described as sorcery, and the second wonders that anyone should actually say it is so. Sorcery does not aim to provide guidance to people, and it does not include a faith or a clear idea about Godhead and His relationship with His servants. It cannot outline a code of living. Indeed sorcery cannot be confused with God’s message. No sorcerer ever intended to work for such objectives or move in such a direction. Sorcerers’ work is all false, playing tricks on people’s imagination. Hence they cannot be successful.

At this point, the nobles supporting Pharaoh reveal their true motives for rejecting the truth: *“They said: ‘Have you come to turn us away from what we found our forefathers believing in, so that the two of you might become supreme in the land? We will never believe in you.’”* (Verse 78) They feared that the new call would destroy their inherited beliefs which formed the foundation of their political and economic systems. They feared that they would lose their power which was conferred on them by the superstitious beliefs they promoted.

This is indeed the old and new reason which motivates tyrants to oppose every call to believe in God and follow His message. Hence, they fabricate all sorts of excuses, make false accusations against the advocates of the true faith, and brutally suppress them. It is their desire to remain ‘supreme in the land’ that forms their strongest motive. Their supremacy is based on false beliefs which the tyrants are keen to preserve in people’s minds, despite their fallacy and what they may involve of superstition or deception. They know that when people’s minds are open to receive the true faith, and their hearts are illumined with the new light, then that represents a danger to their long established values and positions. Indeed it shakes their very foundation and authority as perceived by the masses.

The divine faith preached by all prophets aims to establish the truth that God is the only deity and the Lord of the universe. All false deities that usurp God's authority and claim Lordship must be removed.

Tyranny never allows the truth to be presented to the masses, because it represents a general declaration liberating mankind from servitude to any authority other than God's. Tyranny realizes that its very existence is threatened by this declaration. Hence, it suppresses it with all the power at its disposal.

This is the true reason for the suppression of the Islamic call throughout history. The intelligent people of the Quraysh could not have been blind to the truth of the Prophet's message and its sublime aspects. They could not have been unaware of the falsehood of their idolatrous beliefs. But they feared for their power and position. They realized that they could only maintain these through their false beliefs, just like the nobles in Pharaoh's court. Hence they all said: *"We will never believe in you."* (Verse 78)

### **Fear Barring Belief**

Apparently accusing Moses of sorcery sounded good to Pharaoh and his nobles. They most probably felt they could make their accusation stick in people's minds. Hence, they wanted to challenge Moses, for the signs he exhibited seemed to them to be similar to the sorcery they knew and practiced. They hoped that the challenge would show Moses to be no more than a highly skilled sorcerer. This would remove all danger to their hereditary authority, or to their monopoly of power, which was their main objective. These were, in all likelihood, the true reasons for holding this sorcery to be fair.

*Then Pharaoh commanded: 'Bring before me every learned sorcerer.' And when the sorcerers came, Moses said to them: 'Throw whatever you may wish to throw.' And when they had thrown, Moses said to them: 'What you have contrived is mere sorcery which God will certainly bring to nothing. God does not further the work of those who spread corruption. By His words, God proves the truth to be true, much as the guilty may dislike it. (Verses 79-82)*

We note here how the build-up to the challenge is given very briefly, because it is the outcome that is most relevant. When Moses said: *'What you have contrived is mere sorcery,'* he was actually replying to the accusation levelled at him. There is no real substance to sorcery. It is all tricks and deception that dazzles and bewitches people. It has no higher call, and is far from constructive. It builds nothing within the community. What Moses brought was indeed a revealed book bestowed on him from

on high. His statement that *God will certainly bring [sorcery] to nothing,* demonstrates his great trust in his Lord, who will never allow sorcery, which is wicked, to score any real success: *‘God does not further the work of those who spread corruption.’* These were the ones who used their sorcery to lead people astray from the right path and prevent them from following divine guidance.

*‘By His words, God proves the truth to be true.’* (Verse 82) The phrase, *‘His words’*, refers here either to His expression of His will to create or do something, as when He says to something *‘Be’* and it comes into being as a result, or to His revelations. *‘Much as the guilty may dislike it.’* (Verse 82) Their dislike does not disrupt or impede the realization of God’s will. This is indeed what actually took place: sorcery was shown to come to nothing, and the truth was triumphant. However, the triumph of the truth is not mentioned at this time because the purpose intended here is served in a different way.

Here the curtains are drawn, and when they are lifted again we see Moses with those who accepted his message and believed with him. They are a small group of people. This is one of the lessons to be drawn here: *“None except a few of his people believed in Moses, for they feared Pharaoh and their nobles, lest they persecute them. Surely Pharaoh was mighty on earth and was indeed given to excesses. Moses said: My people, if you believe in God, then place your trust in Him – if you have truly surrendered yourselves to Him. ‘ They replied: ‘In God have we placed our trust. Our Lord, do not let us suffer at the hands of evil-doing people. Save us, by Your grace, from the people who disbelieve.’ And thus did We inspire Moses and his brother: ‘Take for your people some houses in Egypt, and make your houses places of worship, and be constant in prayer’ And give glad tidings to all believers.”* (Verses 83-87)

The Arabic text uses the term *dhurriyyah* when it refers to those who believed with Moses. This term connotes a small number among the younger generation. What we understand here is that, among the Israelites, those who declared their belief and joined Moses were young people, not the bulk of the Children of Israel. There were fears that these young people might be put under severe pressure to revert back to their old ways. They might fear the persecution of Pharaoh and his authority, or the pressure that might be brought to bear on them by the leaders of their own community who have their own interests with those in authority. Pressure was also expected to be brought on them by the weaklings within their community, because these normally side with everyone who has any authority. This applies particularly to the Israelites. Needless to say, Pharaoh enjoyed great authority, and he was a tyrant who indulged in all sorts of excess. He did not hesitate to take any brutal action when he felt the need for it.

In such a situation the only course is to rely on faith in order to dispel worries and reassure people, helping them to stick to the truth they have recognized: *“Moses said:*

*'My people, if you believe in God, then place your trust in Him – if you have truly surrendered yourselves to Him.'*" (Verse 84) Placing one's trust in God is evidence of firm belief. Furthermore, it is the element of strength which is added to what the weaker and smaller group may have to enable it to win its confrontation with mighty tyranny. Moses mentions both faith and self-surrender, making the reliance on God and placing one's trust in Him the natural outcome of both. Those believers made the right response to their prophet's call: *"They replied: 'In God have we placed our trust.'*" (Verse 85)

They then addressed a fitting supplication to God: *"Our Lord, do not let us suffer at the hands of evil-doing people."* (Verse 85) This means that they prayed to God not to give the tyrants physical power over them, so that those tyrants and their followers do not feel that their faith is superior since they are able to win their confrontation against the believers. Such a temporary victory may take place in any situation where God wants to let people be tempted by it, so that they go deeper into error. Hence the believers pray to God not to let the tyrants have power over them even if the purpose was to lead the tyrants further astray.

The next verse adds a prayer which is even clearer with regard to the desired outcome: *"Save us, by Your grace, from the people who disbelieve."* (Verse 86) These prayers do not conflict with placing their trust in God and seeking His support. Indeed they make such reliance on Him clearer. A believer does not wish for hardship and does not aspire to be the victim of tyranny, but when he is tested by what tyrants do to him, he remains steadfast.

### **No Hope of a Positive Response**

Thus, the two lines were drawn and the two communities were clearly identified. Some people responded positively to Moses. God then advised him and his brother, the Prophet Aaron, to choose special houses for the Children of Israel, so that they would be ready to leave Egypt at the appointed time. He also instructed them to purify their homes and their bodies, and to trust to God: *"And thus did We inspire Moses and his brother: 'Take for your people some houses in Egypt, and make your houses places of worship, and be constant in prayer.' And give glad tidings to all believers."* (Verse 87)

This may be considered an exercise of 'spiritual mobilization', running alongside ordinary mobilization. Both are necessary for individuals and communities alike, particularly before battles and during times of hardship. Some people may dismiss spiritual mobilization as being of little consequence, but experience shows that faith continues to be the most important weapon in battle. Held by a soldier who is devoid of faith, military hardware is of little benefit when the going gets tough. This

mustering is not something only the Children of Israel should do. Instead it pertains to all hard core believers in God. It is an experience based on pure faith. Believers may find themselves persecuted in a society which is devoid of faith, where tyranny is hardened by brute force, and generally people have lost their integrity and values, and where the whole environment is rotten, as was true of Pharaoh's realm. In such a situation, God tells them to abandon the *jāhiliyyah* society, with all its evil and corruption, as much as that is practical, so that they can establish their own community and purge, train and organize themselves in waiting for the fulfilment of His promise. They should also boycott the places of worship of the unbelieving society, while making use of their own homes as places of worship. In this way they can worship God in the proper manner, and make that worship an exercise of self organization.

Having despaired of any positive response from Pharaoh and his nobles, Moses turned to his Lord with a supplication that He destroy the Egyptians' property and riches because these had lured them away from the truth, so compromising their faith. Thus they had sunk deep into error. He further prayed that the rich remain hardened in their disbelief, so that they would face a grievous punishment. God answered his supplication: *"Moses said, Our Lord! You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his nobles splendour and riches in this life, with the result that they have been leading people astray from Your path. Our Lord! Wipe out their riches and harden their hearts, so that they do not believe until they face the grievous suffering."* He replied: *'Your prayer is accepted. Continue, both of you, steadfastly on the right path, and do not follow the path of those who are devoid of knowledge.'* (Verses 88-89)

Moses begins his prayer with a statement: *"Our Lord! You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his nobles splendour and riches in this life."* (Verse 88) These riches and splendour become a means to turn people away from Your path, either by the lure that they constitute or by the power they give to those who have them enabling them to humiliate or lead others astray. There is no doubt that if the corrupt people are the ones who have all the splendour and riches, a situation is created where many people are shaken because they do not realize that these riches are no more than a test. In comparison to God's bounty, whether it is bestowed in this life or in the hereafter, they are of no value. Moses appeals to God to destroy these riches, so that the nobles no longer have the means to tempt and pressurize people away from the right path. The rest of his supplication, that Pharaoh and his nobles not believe until they witness the suffering, is the prayer of one who has despaired that any of them will ever recognize the truth. Hence, he wants them to be hardened even further until they face their due punishment. Repentance then is not acceptable, because it does not signify any real regret, or any positive change based on free choice.

*"He replied: 'Your prayer is accepted.'" (Verse 89) That then brings the matter to its due end. "Continue, both of you, steadfastly on the right path." (Verse 89) Follow that path until the end, paying no regard to anything different. "Do not follow the path of those who are devoid of knowledge." (Verse 89) Such people move along without guidance.*

Their plans are flawed, and they lack certainty. Hence they are worried about their destiny, unsure of the path they follow.

### **When Accepting the Faith Means Nothing**

The next scene depicts the event as it actually happened: *"And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression. But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said: I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself.' [But God said:] 'Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs.'" (Verses 90-92)*

This is a highly decisive point in the story of defiance and rejection of truth. It is shown here only very briefly, because the purpose of mentioning it in this *sūrah* is to demonstrate the result of the dispute. What is shown is the fact that God protects the believers and punishes those who choose to be His enemies, paying little attention to the signs and messages that call on them to believe in Him. They persist in disbelief until they are overwhelmed by God's punishment, when believing is of no avail. This was also explained earlier in the *sūrah*: *"To every community was sent a messenger. It is when their messenger had come to them that judgement was passed on them in all fairness; and never are they wronged. They say: 'When will this promise be fulfilled, if you are truthful?' Say: I have no control over any harm or benefit to myself except as God may please. For every community a term has been appointed. When their time arrives, they can neither delay it by a single moment, nor indeed hasten it.' Say: 'Do but consider. Should His punishment befall you by night or by day, what could there be in it that the guilty ones should wish to hasten? Is it, then, when it has come to pass that you will believe in it? Is it now, while so far you have been asking for it to come speedily?'" (Verses 47-51)*

*And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea; but Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression. But as he was about to drown, Pharaoh said: I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself' [But God said:] 'Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to*

*those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs. (Verses 90-92)*

The story is meant, then, to confirm and assert the warnings: *“And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea.”* (Verse 90) They managed to cross it under Our guidance and protection. This statement, coming at this point, and attributing the guidance to God alone, is highly significant. *“But Pharaoh and his legions pursued them with tyranny and aggression.”* (Verse 90) They were not chasing them to follow their suit and accept divine guidance, nor was the chasing in defence of any rightful claim they might have had, but was rather an act of aggression and tyranny. Then, in no time at all, the story moves from a scene of brute tyrannical force to one of drowning: *“But as he was about to drown,”* staring death in the eye, *“Pharaoh said. I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself”* His masks had now fallen away. He was no longer the mighty ruler whose wishes were instantly obeyed. He had shrunk and looked humiliated. Not only did he declare that he believed in God, in whom the Children of Israel believed; he went further to submit himself in total surrender. *“[But God said:] ‘Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. But today We shall save only your body, so that you may become a sign to those who will come after you; for a great many people do not heed Our signs.’”* (Verses 91-92)

But the response he received came as a total shock, as God said to him: *“Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land.”* (Verse 91) You believe now, when you no longer have any choice or means of escape? You have been arrogant in your disbelief, rejecting all messages and warnings. *“But today We shall save only your body.”* (Verse 92) His body would remain intact, uneaten by sharks or other sea creatures. It would not be allowed to drift with the waves, but would be saved so that his end would be known to all and sundry: *“So that you may become a sign to those who will come after you.”* (Verse 92) It may be that when others see your body they will take heed and realize that defying God and His warnings brings certain doom. The fact is that *“a great many people do not heed Our signs.”* (Verse 92) They do not turn to them with open hearts and minds, nor do they consider their significance, be they evident in the great universe or within their own selves.

The final scene in this tragedy of corruption, defiance, disobedience and tyranny is clearly shown and the curtains are drawn. The *sūrah* then continues with a brief statement of what happened to the Children of Israel over several generations: *“We settled the Children of Israel in a most goodly abode and We provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life. It was not until knowledge was given them that they began to disagree among themselves. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that on which they differed.”* (Verse 93)

For 'abode' the Arabic statement uses a term which signifies security, but adds to it a description of sincerity. This gives the added connotation of a secure settlement which is not easily threatened. Sincerity and truth do not experience the sort of unease that are associated with lying and invention. The Children of Israel were settled in their secure abode after several experiences that are not mentioned here because they do not relate to the purpose of the *sūrah*. They further enjoyed goodly provisions until they started to disobey God, at which time these provisions were forbidden them. The *sūrah* only states that they started to argue about matters of religion as well as worldly matters. These disputes were not the result of ignorance. They only began after knowledge of the truth had been given to them. But they used that knowledge to arrive at false interpretations of religious matters.

Since the context here is one of giving support to those who accept the faith and ensuring the defeat of tyranny, the *sūrah* does not dwell on what the Children of Israel perpetrated after that, nor does it give any account of their disputes. It turns the page, leaving judgement on all this to God alone: *"Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection regarding that on which they differed."* (Verse 93) The story thus maintains its seriousness and the effect is in no way diminished.

### **No Doubts Entertained**

Now the *sūrah* begins its comments on the accounts it gives of the stories of Moses and Noah with their peoples. At the outset, it reassures the Prophet by telling him what happened to other messengers God sent before his time. It also explains to him the real reason for his people's denial of the truth. He is told that what these people lack is not more signs and clear proofs of this truth. It is simply the fulfilment of human nature with all that God has placed in it of aptitude to follow guidance or error and to be good or evil. A brief account of the Prophet Jonah's history is then added, mentioning how his people believed in the nick of time when God's punishment was about to overwhelm them. Their acceptance of the faith ensured the lifting of that punishment. This is given by way of encouraging the Arabs who denied the truth to accept it before their time too was up. The passage concludes with outlining the basic issues which the stories of past nations given in the Qur'ān are meant to emphasize. They confirm that the laws God has set in operation will apply to later communities in as much as they applied to earlier ones. This spells doom and suffering to the unbelievers who deny God and His message, while the messengers and those who follow them shall be saved. This is a commitment God has made and a law He has set. It will always come true.

*If you are in doubt concerning what We have bestowed on you from on high, ask those who read the Scriptures [revealed] before you. It is surely the truth that has*

*come to you from your Lord. Do not, then, be among the doubters. And do not be among those who deny God's revelations, for then you shall be among those who are lost. Surely, those against whom your Lord's word [of judgement] has come true will not believe, even though every sign should come to their knowledge, until they are faced with the grievous suffering. Had it believed, every community would have profited by its faith. It was so only with Jonah's people. When they believed, We lifted from them the suffering of disgrace in this life, and allowed them to enjoy things for a while. Had your Lord so willed, all people on earth, in their entirety, would have believed. Do you, then, try to compel people to believe? No human being can believe, except by God's leave. It is He who lays abomination on those who will not use their reason. Say: 'Consider all that there is in the heavens and the earth.' But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe? What are they waiting for except a repetition of the days [of calamity] experienced by those who have gone before them? Say: 'Wait, then, if you will. I am also waiting.' Thereupon, We save Our messengers and those who believe. Thus have We willed it upon Ourselves: We save those who believe. (Verses 94-103)*

The previous passage was concerned with the attitude of the Children of Israel who had received revelations from God. They were aware of Noah and his community's story, and they were also fully aware of Moses and his experience with Pharaoh, which was given in detail in their Scriptures. The *sūrah* now addresses the Prophet telling him that if he is in doubt concerning God's revelations, including the history of past communities, then he should ask those who received revelations before his time. They have full knowledge of what they read in those Scriptures: *"If you are in doubt concerning what We have bestowed on you from on high, ask those who read the Scriptures [revealed] before you. It is surely the truth that has come to you from your Lord. Do not, then, be among the doubters."* (Verse 94)

But the Prophet (peace be upon him) was not in doubt concerning his revelations. It is reported that when this verse was revealed, the Prophet said, "I do not doubt, and I am not going to ask." Why is it, then, that he is told to ask if he is in doubt? And why is this followed by the statement that *"it is surely the truth that has come to you from your Lord?"* It is certainly more than enough for him to know that this statement is made by God.

This directive gives us an idea of the difficult situation that prevailed in Makkah after the Prophet was taken on his night journey to Jerusalem and ascended from there to heaven. Some people who had previously declared their acceptance of Islam now denied it, as they could not believe this. What aggravated the matter even more was the fact that shortly before this, the Prophet lost his wife, Khadijah, and his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who had both provided him with much-needed support. They died within a short period of each other. Moreover, the unbelievers in Makkah

increased their physical persecution of the Prophet and those who believed in his message. The new faith was practically confined to Makkah, as the Quraysh, the predominant tribe in Arabia, fought hard to stop it from spreading to other tribes. All these circumstances weighed heavily on the Prophet's heart. Hence, he needed the reassurance that God gives him with this assertion, making it clear that his message is the message of truth.

Moreover, the doubters and those who deny God's message are assigned their place: *"And do not be among those who deny God's revelations, for then you shall be among those who are lost."* (Verse 95) This exposure of the doubters serves to give them another chance to return to the truth. If the Prophet neither doubts nor asks questions when he is permitted to do so, then he must be absolutely certain that what has been given to him is the truth which admits no doubt. This serves as encouragement to others not to doubt or waver.

Moreover, this gives us an insight into the method God has laid down for the Muslim community. It must make sure of whatever remains uncertain. It can do so by asking those who have been endowed with great knowledge. It should ask even if the matter concerns something of the basic essentials of faith, because a Muslim is required to make sure of his faith and the law he implements. He must not follow anyone else unless he knows for certain that that person follows the truth.

One may well ask here whether there is any conflict or contradiction between the permission to ask others when one is in doubt and the subsequent directive not to be 'one of the doubters'? There is certainly neither conflict nor contradiction. What is to be avoided is remaining in doubt so that it becomes a permanent condition, without any attempt by the doubter to remove his doubts and reach a stage of certitude. For prolonged doubt is a very bad situation which leads to neither benefit nor knowledge.

Since what has been given to the Prophet is the truth that admits no doubt, how is it then that some people continue to deny it and adopt an unreasonably stubborn attitude? The answer is that God's law is such that when one does not seek guidance, one will not find it, and one who does not open his eyes and heart to the light will not see it. A person who wastes his perceptions will not benefit by what he perceives, and will end up in error. Whatever proofs and signs are available will remain of no use to him. Hence, the law God has set in operation will work against him, and God's word of punishment will overtake him: *"Surely, those against whom your Lord's word [of punishment] has come true will not believe, even though every sign should come to their knowledge, until they are faced with the grievous suffering."* (Verses 96-97)

At this point, acknowledgement of the truth and accepting the faith will not benefit them because it does not flow from their own choice. There is no longer any

chance to test that faith in everyday life. The *sūrah* confirmed all this earlier when it depicted Pharaoh crying out at the point of drowning: *"I have come to believe that there is no deity other than Him in whom the Children of Israel believe, and to Him I surrender myself"* (Verse 90) But he was told: *"Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land."* (Verse 91)

As we are assured of the inevitability of the operation of God's laws and that their outcome will never fail to apply in accordance with what people choose for themselves in this life, a window of hope is opened. Salvation is possible when the wrongdoers stop denying the truth and declare their belief before they are overtaken by God's punishment.

### **Even When Punishment is Due**

*"Had it believed, every community would have profited by its faith. It was so only with Jonah's people. When they believed, We lifted from them the suffering of disgrace in this life, and allowed them to enjoy things for a while."* (Verse 98) The way this verse is phrased expresses a dear wish concerning past events. This means that what was hoped for did not take place. *'Had it believed, every community'* of those that have been mentioned would have profited by accepting the faith. But these communities did not believe as whole communities. Only a minority of each community accepted the divine faith. Hence, disbelief was the predominant feature of these communities. Jonah's people were the one exception. This verse uses the term 'town' to refer to communities thereby indicating that God's messages were centred in urban areas, and not among nomadic peoples.

The *sūrah* does not provide a detailed account of the history of the Prophet Jonah and his people. It only refers to their end, because this is what is relevant here. It is sufficient that we learn that Jonah's people were about to suffer a humiliating punishment. Then, when, at the last minute, they declared their acceptance of the divine faith and believed in God and His message, the punishment was lifted and they were allowed to enjoy life for a while. Had they persisted in their disbelief, God's punishment would have overtaken them, in accordance with the law that determines consequences on the basis of people's actions.

This makes two points very clear. The first is an urgent address to those who deny the truth to save themselves if only at the last minute, as Jonah's people did. This is the immediate purpose behind the reference to their history.

The second point is that God's law was not suspended or disrupted when the punishment was lifted and Jonah's people were left to enjoy life for a further period. In fact God's law took its full course. The law meant that they would be punished if they persisted in disbelief up to the point of punishment. But Jonah's people changed

their attitude just before, and so God's law to lift the punishment was implemented. This shows that people are free to choose their line of action, but any action they do choose will have its natural consequences determined by God.

This is followed by a general rule concerning faith and its acceptance or rejection: *"Had your Lord so willed, all people on earth, in their entirety, would have believed. Do you, then, try to compel people to believe? No human being can believe, except by God's leave. It is He who lays abomination on those who will not use their reason."* (Verses 99-100)

Had God so willed, He would have created the human race in a different mould, allowing it to know only the path of faith, as He has done with the angels. Or He would have given human beings a single susceptibility leading them all to acceptance of the faith. In His wisdom, which we may or may not understand, God has created man with a dual susceptibility towards good and evil, to follow guidance or sink into error. He has given man free-will to choose his path. Furthermore, God has so willed that when any human being uses his feelings and faculties to understand the signs pointing to the way to faith, and when he reflects on the revelations and proofs given by God's messengers, he will accept the divine faith. His belief will lead him along the way to salvation. On the other hand, when man shuts his mind and faculties to faith, his heart will be hardened and his mind closed. This leads him to deny the truth and, in consequence, to suffer the punishment God has determined for all unbelievers.

This means that accepting the faith is a matter of choice. The Prophet does not compel anyone to believe, because there can be no compulsion in matters determined by reason and conscience: *"Do you, then, try to compel people to believe?"* (Verse 99) This is a rhetorical question which serves to emphasize that compulsion is not possible.

*"No human being can believe, except by God's leave."* (Verse 100) This is again in accordance with the law God has set in operation and which we have already explained. No person will attain to faith if they follow the route which does not lead to faith. This statement does not mean that anyone will ever be prevented from attaining to faith if he wants to believe and follows the road of faith. What it means is that no one reaches belief and faith without following the proper steps along the route leading to faith. When a person makes this choice, God provides His guidance to that person who will then believe, by God's leave. In other words, nothing happens except by God's will. People follow their freely chosen ways, and God determines the consequences of every type of action. The result is the sum of these consequences. They receive their reward on the basis of how conscientiously they seek to be properly guided.

This is confirmed by the ending of the same verse: *"It is He who lays abomination on those who will not use their reason."* (Verse 100) Those who choose to shut their minds

and decide not to reflect on the signs and proofs pointing to the right faith will suffer abomination, i.e. the worst type of spiritual impurity. This is what they deserve for not using their reason, which has resulted in their disbelief and denial of the truth.

This is further explained by stating that signs and warnings will be of no benefit to people who will not believe. They do not reflect on them when they see them everywhere in the world around them: *“Say: ‘Consider all that there is in the heavens and the earth.’ But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe?”* (Verse 101) Whether we take the final part of this verse as a rhetorical question or a straightforward statement, it signifies the same thing. There are numerous signs and pointers to the truth all around us in the heavens and the earth, but none of these will benefit the unbelievers, because they have chosen to close their eyes and minds to them.

### **Minds Shut to All Evidence**

Before we move further we need to reflect briefly on the verse that says: *“Say: ‘Consider all that there is in the heavens and the earth.’ But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe?”* (Verse 101)

The community which was the first to be addressed by the Qur’ān had very little scientific knowledge of what exists in the heavens and earth. But the fact is that human nature communicates with the universe in which we live in a language that is both rich and subtle at the same time. When human nature is alert and receptive, the universe has much to tell it and it listens carefully.

The Qur’ānic approach to the formulation of an Islamic concept in human consciousness makes use of what exists in the heavens and earth. It derives inspiration from the universe, and directs the human faculties of vision, hearing, perception and understanding to its discourse, without trying to disturb the balance and harmony that exist in the universe. It does not make of the universe a deity directing human life, as narrow-minded materialists claim with their ‘scientific socialism’. True science and knowledge have nothing to do with all their nonsense.

Reflection on what exists in the heavens and earth gives the human heart and mind a wealth of feelings, responses and influences, as well as meaningful interaction with the universe. All this helps man to be receptive to everything in the universe that points to God’s existence, majesty, power, planning, wisdom and perfect knowledge.

With the passage of time, human knowledge of the universe increases. A human being who sees God’s light and follows His guidance benefits greatly from increased knowledge. He is better able to know the universe and interact with it. He joins the

universe in glorifying God, for: *“There is nothing that exists but celebrates His praises, although you may not understand their praises.”* (17: 44) Only a person whose heart nurtures its bond with God understands such praises. When human knowledge is devoid of the light of faith, it increases human misery as it leads people further away from God and deprives them of the happiness that comes with faith.

*“But of what benefit could all signs and warnings be to people who will not believe?”* (Verse 101) What is the benefit of signs and warnings when hearts are hardened, minds are shut, receptive faculties are left idle and the whole human being is isolated from the universe, unable to listen to its glorification of God?

The Qur’ānic method of explaining the nature of God shows the universe and life generally as a great exhibition in which the truth of God’s existence is seen most vividly through its extensive action. Its presence overwhelms all human faculties. This method does not make of God’s existence a topic for debate. Indeed the way the Qur’ān looks at the universe and what we see in it fills our hearts with the fact of God’s existence so as to leave no room for arguing about it. The Qur’ān speaks directly of the results of this existence in the whole universe, and its influence on human conscience and human life in general.

In its method, the Qur’ān relies on a basic element in the make up of human beings. After all, it is God who has created man and He knows best what He has created: *“It is We who have created man, and We know the promptings of his soul.”* (50: 16) There is a basic need in human nature to have faith and to believe in a deity. In fact, when human nature is uncorrupted, it experiences a strong inner feeling directing it towards belief in a single God. The purpose of true faith is not to initiate this need to believe in God. That feeling is basic to human nature. True faith seeks to put man’s concept of God on a proper footing, and to make the true God, who is the only deity in the universe, known to man, with all His attributes. It is to know God properly, not to establish His existence, that the true faith works. For it also aims to make man aware of the effects on human life of God’s existence, i.e. His Lordship and Sovereignty. Indeed the mere doubt of God’s existence, let alone denying it altogether, is indicative of an imbalance in human nature, and a malfunctioning of its faculties of perception. Such malfunctioning is not rectified by argument and logic.

This universe knows God, believes in Him and submits itself to Him. Every living thing in it celebrates God’s praises, except for a few humans. Mankind lives in this universe where the echoes of faith in God and submission to Him are heard everywhere, as are God’s praises and glorification. Therefore, someone whose nature does not perceive all this is one whose natural qualities of perception are not functioning properly. Argument is not the proper way to address such a heart and mind. The correct way is to try to alert man’s faculties of perception, and awaken his nature so that it may resume its proper function. Drawing man’s attention, as well as

his heart and mind, to what exists in the heavens and the earth is one of the methods the Qur'ān uses to awaken human hearts.

Those unbelievers among the pagan Arabs, and others who adopt a similar attitude, neither responded nor reflected. What were they waiting for, then? God's law will always remain in operation. The destiny of those who deny the truth is well known, and they cannot expect that God's law will not apply to them. God may give them a chance, and may withhold their punishment for a while, but those who persist in denying Him will suffer in the end: *"What are they waiting for except a repetition of the days [of calamity] experienced by those who have gone before them? Say: 'Wait, then, if you will. I am also waiting'."* (Verse 102) This is a threat that puts an end to all argument while it fills hearts with fear.

This passage is then concluded with the final outcome of every message and every opposition to it, making plain the lessons of the histories reported in the *sūrah*: *"We save Our messengers and those who believe. Thus have We willed it upon Ourselves: We save those who believe."* (Verse 103) This is the promise God has made: the seed of faith will retain its healthy function. It will be safe after every type of persecution to which its advocates are subjected. It will survive every denial and every torture inflicted on its advocates. The stories related in this *sūrah*, and elsewhere in the Qur'ān confirm this. Hence, the believers should be reassured.

## Clarification of Issues

*Say: 'Mankind, if you are still in doubt as to what my faith is, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship beside God, but I worship God alone who will cause all of you to die. I have been commanded to be one of those who believe. (104)*

*And adhere exclusively and sincerely to the true faith, and do not be one of those who associate partners with God. (105)*

*Do not invoke, instead of God, anything that can neither benefit nor harm you. For if you do, you will surely be among the wrongdoers.' (106)*

*Should God afflict you with any hardship, none other than He can remove it; and if He wills any good for you, none can withhold His bounty. He bestows it on whomsoever He wills. He is truly Forgiving, truly Merciful. (107)*

*Say: 'Mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. I am not responsible for your conduct.' (108)*

قُلْ يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّنْ دِينِي فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنِ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ وَأُمِرْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٠٤﴾

وَأَنْ أَقِمَّ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا وَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٠٥﴾

وَلَا تَدْعُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكَ وَلَا يَضُرُّكَ فَإِنْ فَعَلْتَ فَإِنَّكَ إِذَا مِنِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٠٦﴾

وَإِنْ يَمَسُّكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يُرِدْكَ بِخَيْرٍ فَلَا رَادَّ لِفَضْلِهِ يُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٠٧﴾

قُلْ يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا

*Follow whatever is revealed to you, and be patient in adversity, until God shall give His judgement. He is the best of all judges.*  
(109)

وَمَا أَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿١٠٩﴾  
وَاتَّبِعْ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَأَصْبِرْ حَتَّىٰ تَحْكُمَ  
اللَّهُ ۚ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ ﴿١١٠﴾

## Preview

In this its final passage, the *sūrah* brings to an end our sojourn of the universe, and reflection on aspects of human constitution, and the realms of feeling and thought. It is as if we are returning home with a wealth of riches, as also looking for relaxation after a long journey. The *sūrah* has dwelt on the central theme of faith with its main issues: the oneness of God, who has no partners and who admits no mediation or mediators; His absolute sovereignty and overpowering will; the laws He has set in operation which no one can amend or change; the truth of revelation which makes the true faith clear to all; the resurrection and the reckoning and reward on the Day of Judgement. All these issues have been clarified with historical accounts and illustrated with fine examples and analogies. Now they are summed up in a short passage. The Prophet is instructed to declare these principles to mankind, making clear that he will continue along the line he has followed until God has judged between him and those who oppose him. He is indeed the best of all judges.

## Perseverance until Final Judgement

*“Say: ‘Mankind, if you are still in doubt as to what my faith is, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship beside God, but I worship God alone who will cause all of you to die. I have been commanded to be one of those who believe.’”* (Verse 104) Here the Prophet is told to address all mankind, although the address is meant in the first instance to the Arabs in Makkah who believed in a multiplicity of deities. He tells them that if they are in doubt about the truth of the faith to which he is calling, then their doubts will never turn him away from the truth which he is preaching. He is not going to change his way so as to worship their false gods. Instead, *“I worship God alone who will cause all of you to die.”* (Verse 104) He is the One who determines everyone’s span of life and the time when everyone dies. Emphasizing this aspect here is significant because it reminds them of God’s power over them. He is the One to be worshipped, not those false deities which cannot give life or cause death. He is also told to make his own instructions plain to them: *“I have been commanded to be one of those who believe.”* (Verse 104) He fulfils his orders as they are given to him, without going beyond his limits.

*“And adhere exclusively and sincerely to the true faith, and do not be one of those who associate partners with God.”* (Verse 105) Here the style changes into a direct order, which is given in such a way that it sounds as if it is being given now in front of them all. This is far more effective. *“Adhere exclusively and sincerely to the true faith,”* turning to God alone and accepting what He has revealed to you as the complete truth. *“And do not be one of those who associate partners with God.”* (Verse 105) This re-emphasizes the meaning of sincere and exclusive adherence to the true faith and being one of the believers. The emphasis takes the form of a direct prohibition of associating partners with God which follows a direct order to believe. *“Do not invoke, instead of God, anything that can neither benefit nor harm you. For if you do, you will surely be among the wrongdoers.”* (Verse 106) Do not appeal to any of those beings whom the unbelievers associate with God, for they cannot bring you any benefit or cause you any harm. If you do appeal to them, you will put yourself among the wrongdoers, because God is fair to all, and He does not show any favouritism to anyone.

*“Should God afflict you with any hardship, none other than He can remove it; and if He wills any good for you, none can withhold His bounty. He bestows it on whomsoever He wills. He is truly Forgiving, truly Merciful.”* (Verse 107) God has set certain laws in operation whereby harm and benefit inevitably affect human beings when they expose themselves to their causes. So if harm afflicts you through the operation of God’s laws, then no one can remove that harm unless you follow the right course of action. This means that you should cease to expose yourself to the causes of harm if you are aware of them or appeal to God to make them known to you if you do not know them. Similarly, if you follow His laws which generate benefit for you, no one will be able to stop that benefit. It will always be granted by God to those of His servants who decide to follow the means to achieve it. This is His general will and *modus operandi*. Furthermore, *“He is truly Forgiving, truly Merciful.”* (Verse 107) He forgives past sins when one sincerely repents. Furthermore, He is merciful to His servants, forgiving them their errors and increasing their reward for their good deeds when they adhere to the true path.

This is the sum of faith, as illustrated in this *sūrah*. The Prophet is ordered to declare it to mankind, and the order is given to him as though he is standing in front of them. The order is directed at each individual in person. It is a remarkably inspiring and effective method. The Prophet makes his declaration, facing up to material power, numerical strength, ignorant beliefs and a long history of associating partners with God. He makes his declaration, as commanded by God, with force and maximum clarity, when he has only a small number of followers in Makkah where the power is decidedly with the unbelievers. Thus he fulfils his duty towards the truth he is advocating, showing his unshakeable certainty in faith.

This brings us to the final declaration to all people: *“Say: Mankind, the truth has come to you from your Lord. Whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril. I am not responsible for your conduct.”* (Verse 108) It is the final, decisive word which makes it clear that everyone chooses his or her way as they please after the truth has been given to all by their Lord. Hence, *“whoever chooses to follow the true guidance, does so for his own good; and whoever chooses to go astray, does so at his own peril.”* (Verse 108) The Prophet is not required to force people to follow divine guidance. He only conveys to them his message and leaves them to choose freely, making it clear that everyone will bear the results of his or her choice.

The final address to the Prophet tells him to follow what he has been instructed and to persevere until God has made His judgement: *“Follow whatever is revealed to you, and be patient in adversity, until God shall give His judgement. He is the best of all judges.”* (Verse 109) The conclusion is in perfect harmony with the opening of the *sūrah* and its contents, following the unique method of the Qur’ān.