

SŪRAH 57

Al-Ḥadīd

(Iron)

Prologue

This *sūrah*, in its totality, is an address to the Muslim community, calling upon it to fulfil faith within its own society. The community should become an embodiment of the truth of faith, enabling hearts to become so dedicated that they are ready to sacrifice all, life and property, feelings and emotions, for it. With this truth, human souls are elevated to a divine level while they still live on earth. Thus, their standards are those that God has established, and their values are those that are given weight on God's scales. This truth enables hearts to feel the presence of God, to humble themselves when He is mentioned and to discard everything that may hinder them from turning to Him in complete dedication.

On the basis of this truth of faith, the *sūrah* calls upon the Muslim community to sacrifice life and property for God's cause: "*Believe in God and His Messenger, and give [in charity] of that of which He has made you trustees. Those of you who believe and give [in charity] will have a great reward. Why should you not believe in God when the Messenger calls upon you to believe in your Lord, and He has already taken a pledge from you, if you are true believers? It is He who bestows from on high clear revelations to His servant, to lead you out of the deep darkness into light. God is indeed most compassionate to you, ever merciful. Why should you not spend freely*

in the cause of God, seeing that God's alone is the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Those of you who gave and fought [for God's cause] before the victory are not like others: they are higher in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards, although God has promised the ultimate good to all of them. God is well aware of all that you do." (Verses 7–10)

The Muslim community is also called upon to humble themselves at the remembrance of God and the truth He has bestowed. This so that their sacrifices are the result of this humble acceptance of the truth of faith: *"Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of God and the truth that has been bestowed from on high, and not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time? Many of these are now transgressors!"* (Verse 16)

The *sūrah* puts the values of this world against those of the next world in the balance of the truth. It invites the Muslim community to choose the clearly preponderant scale and to uphold the true value: *"Know that the life of this world is but a play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, a cause of boasting among you and a quest for more riches and children. It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers. Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow, and in the end it crumbles into dust. In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure. Vie with one another in seeking to attain your Lord's forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. Such is God's bounty which He grants to whomever He pleases. God's bounty is great indeed."* (Verses 20–21)

It is clear from the *sūrah's* drift that it addresses a real situation within the Muslim community, one that existed at the time of its revelation. This situation existed in Madīnah during the period stretching from the fourth year after the Prophet's immigration up to the time after Makkah had fallen to Islam. In Madīnah at that time were the early Muslims, the Muhājirīn who had migrated from Makkah, and the Anṣār who had welcomed them into their city. Both groups set the highest example ever in human history in translating the truth of faith into practical reality. They hastened to sacrifice life and property in total dedication to their

cause, undeterred by any worldly consideration, personal desire or temptation. Yet besides these there was within the Muslim community a second group that did not attain the same high level of faith, particularly after Makkah had fallen to Islam. By then Islam was clearly triumphant and people flocked to it in large groups. Many of these new converts did not yet fully understand the basic truth of faith, nor did they dedicate their lives to it as the first group did.

People belonging to this second group found it difficult to make sacrifices of self and property for God's cause. Such duties seemed too hard, while the comforts of this worldly life were too appealing and impossible to resist. It is to those in particular that the *sūrah* makes its inspiring address so that their souls eradicate such temptations and elevate them to the level required by the great truth of faith.

There was also in Madinah at this time a third group consisting of hypocrites. These were unseparated from the body of the Muslim community, especially so once Islam's power became clearly apparent. These hypocrites were forced to hide themselves, pretending to be Muslims when deep in their hearts there was doubt. They also looked for opportunities to create problems for the Muslim community and contributed to any cause of strife. The *sūrah* describes their situation when they are called out and separated from the Muslim community: *"On the day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right, [they will be told], 'The good news for you today is that you shall for ever abide in gardens through which running waters flow. This is indeed the supreme triumph.'* On that day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the believers, 'Wait for us! Let us have a ray of your light!' They will be told: 'Turn back and seek some other light.' A wall with a gate will be raised between them: within it will be mercy, and outside will be suffering. [Those without] will call out to those [within], 'Were we not with you?' They will reply, 'Yes, but you allowed yourselves to be led into temptation, you wavered, you doubted, and you were deceived by false hopes until God's command came to pass, and indeed you let your deceptive thoughts about God delude you. Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from the unbelievers. The fire shall be your home: it is where you belong; and how evil a destination!" (Verses 12–15)

There were, in addition, a number of Jews and Christians who still lived in Arabia. The *sūrah* refers to their situation and some of their past and present attitudes. We have already quoted the verse that requires the believers “*not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time.*” (Verse 16) This reference was most probably to the Jews. A reference to the Christians is given towards the end of the *sūrah*: “*We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After these We sent Jesus, son of Mary. We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who truly follow him. As for monastic asceticism, We did not enjoin it upon them. They invented it themselves out of a desire for God's goodly acceptance. Even so, they did not observe it as it should properly be observed. So We gave those of them who truly believed their due reward, but many of them were transgressors.*” (Verse 27)

In establishing the great truth of faith in people's hearts the *sūrah* follows an inspiring course, akin to Makkan *sūrahs* in aligning a host of influences that captivate hearts and feelings. Its opening in particular strikes a combination of highly inspiring notes, presenting a number of God's attributes that emphasize the Islamic concept of Him. This includes a subtle but captivating invitation to dedicate oneself totally to God as a result of understanding the true meaning of His oneness, His total control of the universe, the fact that everything eventually returns to Him, His knowledge of what people harbour in their hearts and the fact that all beings submit to Him and extol His glory: “*Everything in the heavens and earth extols God's limitless glory. He is the Almighty, the Wise. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He grants life and causes death; and He has power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. He has full knowledge of all things. It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and established Himself on the throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; all that descends from the skies and all that ascends to them. He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God. He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts.*” (Verses 1–6)

This very opening is enough to strongly shake people's hearts, inspiring them with awe and strengthening their desire to dedicate themselves to God. They should turn to God after discarding all that constitutes a hindrance to sacrifice for His cause. The rest of the *sūrah*, however, includes a number of elements that reaffirm this call to sacrifice, such as the bright picture it paints of believing men and women, who are seen "*with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right.*" (Verse 12) Another image shows this life and its value as trifling, compared with those of the life to come.

The *sūrah* also portrays how God's will is in complete control of the whole world: "*No incident can take place, either on earth or in yourselves, unless it be recorded in a decree before We bring it into being – that is easy for God – so you need not grieve for what you miss or be overjoyed at what you gain. God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; [nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly. Those who turn away should remember that God alone is self-sufficient, worthy of praise.*" (Verses 22–24) These verses give our hearts and souls all the necessary reassurance, no matter what befalls us of good or evil as we proceed along the way seeking His acceptance. We will neither despair nor be mad with joy when either eventuality happens to us; nor will we attribute whatever happens to any cause, event or circumstance. All takes place by God's will, in accordance with what He has planned. All ultimately return to Him.

The *sūrah* may be divided into two closely interrelated parts, each of which we will now deal with separately.



Who Gives God a Loan?

Al-Ḥadīd (Iron)

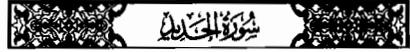
*In the Name of God, the Lord of
Grace, the Ever Merciful*

Everything in the heavens and
earth extols God's limitless glory.
He is the Almighty, the Wise.
(1)

His is the dominion over the
heavens and the earth. He grants
life and causes death; and He has
power over all things. (2)

He is the First and the Last, the
Outer and the Inner. He has full
knowledge of all things. (3)

It is He who created the
heavens and the earth in six
days and established Himself on
the throne. He knows all that
goes into the earth and all that
comes out of it; all that descends



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١﴾

لَهُ مَلِكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُمْسِكُ
وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢﴾

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ
وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يَعْلَمُ
مَا يَلِيهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ

from the skies and all that ascends to them. He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. (4)

مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَرْجُحُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God. (5)

لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٥﴾

He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts. (6)

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَهُوَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٦﴾

Believe in God and His Messenger, and give [in charity] of that of which He has made you trustees. Those of you who believe and give [in charity] will have a great reward. (7)

ءَامِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَأَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا جَعَلَكُمْ مُسْتَحْلِفِينَ فِيهِ فَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَأَنْفَقُوا لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

Why should you not believe in God when the Messenger calls upon you to believe in your Lord, and He has already taken a pledge from you, if you are true believers? (8)

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ وَقَدْ أَخَذَ مِيثَاقَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾

It is He who bestows from on high clear revelations to His servant, to lead you out of the deep darkness into light. God is indeed most compassionate to you, ever merciful. (9)

هُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ ءَايَاتٍ يُبَيِّنُ لِيُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُمْ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٩﴾

Why should you not spend freely in the cause of God, seeing that God's alone is the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Those of you who gave and fought [for God's cause] before the victory are not like others: they are higher in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards, although God has promised the ultimate good to all of them. God is well aware of all that you do. (10)

وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ
مِيرَاتُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا يَسْتَوِي
مَنْكُم مَّنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَتْلَ
أُولَئِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا
مِّنْ بَعْدُ وَقَتَلُوا وَكَلَّا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ
الْحَسَنَىٰ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Who will offer God a generous loan, which He will repay in multiples and will generously reward him? (11)

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا
فِيضِعِفَهُ لَهُ، وَلَهُ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

On the day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right, [they will be told], 'The good news for you today is that you shall for ever abide in gardens through which running waters flow. This is indeed the supreme triumph.' (12)

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى
نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ بُشْرَانُكُمْ الْيَوْمَ
جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

On that day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the believers, 'Wait for us! Let us have a ray of your light!' They will be told: 'Turn back and seek some other light.' A wall with a gate will be raised between them: within it will be mercy, and outside will be suffering. (13)

يَوْمَ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا انظُرُونَا نَقْتِسِ مِنْ نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ
ارْجِعُوا وَرَاءَكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ
بَيْنَهُمْ سُورٌ لَهُ بَابٌ بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ
وَوَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ ﴿١٣﴾

[Those without] will call out to those [within], 'Were we not with you?' They will reply, 'Yes, but you allowed yourselves to be led into temptation, you wavered, you doubted, and you were deceived by false hopes until God's command came to pass, and indeed you let your deceptive thoughts about God delude you. (14)

يُنَادُوا وَنَهُمُ الْمَنُوكُنْ مَعَكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ
وَلَكِن كُنْتُمْ فَنَنْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتَرَبَّصْتُمْ
وَأَرْبَبْتُمْ وَعَزَّيْتُمْ الْأَمَانِي حَتَّىٰ جَاءَ
أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَعَزَّيْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْعُرُورُ ﴿١٤﴾

Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from the unbelievers. The fire shall be your home: it is where you belong; and how evil a destination!' (15)

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْكُمْ فِدْيَةٌ وَلَا مِنَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مَا وَدَّكُمْ النَّارُ هِيَ
مَوْلَانَكُمْ وَيُقْسُ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٥﴾

All Glorify God

Everything in the heavens and earth extols God's limitless glory. He is the Almighty, the Wise. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He grants life and causes death; and He has power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. He has full knowledge of all things. It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and established Himself on the throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; all that descends from the skies and all that ascends to them. He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God. He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in every heart. (Verses 1–6)

This opening brings together a number of the attributes of Godhead as they manifest themselves in action. We see clearly that it is God who originates all, encompasses all, controls all and knows all. We see the hand of God as it works throughout the heavens and earth, tackles

innermost feelings, brings out deeply-buried secrets and looks from above on the universe and all who abide there. This powerful opening strongly shakes our hearts as it takes us on a round through the universe where we find, see and hear none other than God. We realize that we cannot escape His will, hide from His knowledge, seek refuge with, or appeal to anyone other than Him.

“Everything in the heavens and earth extols God’s limitless glory. He is the Almighty, the Wise.” (Verse 1) Thus the *sūrah* begins and the entire universe echoes God’s glorifications. Everything in the universe joins in so that every open heart, no longer shielded by preoccupations with the transitory life of this world, hears this glorification. We do not need to dig for any further meaning to the text other than the apparent significance of its words. We do not know anything about the nature of the universe that is truer and more accurate than what God tells us. Therefore, when God says that everything in the universe *‘extols God’s limitless glory,’* then this is exactly what this sentence means. No other words highlight this meaning better or closer. We may understand from this that everything in the heavens and earth has a soul that turns to God and glorifies Him. This is the verse’s closest meaning, confirmed by a number of authentic *aḥādīth*. It is also the experience of some people, who at moments when their hearts and souls were at a high point of clarity, related to the truth inherent in everything and who could see beyond apparent shapes and forms.

In the Qur’ān, we read about the Prophet David: *“We said: You mountains, sing with him God’s praises! And likewise you birds!”* (34: 10) And that is what happened: the mountains and the birds sang God’s praises with David who himself had a pleasant and melodious voice. In his anthology of authentic *aḥādīth*, Muslim relates, on the authority of Jābir ibn Samurah: “The Prophet said: ‘There is in Makkah a rock that used to greet me during the early days of my mission. I can identify it now.’” ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib reports: “I was with the Prophet in Makkah when we went out in a certain direction. Every tree or mountain he faced said to him: ‘Peace be to you, Messenger of God’.” [Related by al-Tirmidhī.] Al-Bukhārī relates on the authority of Mālik ibn Anas: “The Prophet used to give his sermons leaning on the branch of a tree. When the pulpit was made for him to stand on and he stood there delivering

his sermon, the branch yearned like a she-camel. The Prophet went down and rubbed it with his hand and it stopped.”

There are many Qur'ānic verses that clearly express this universal fact, such as: “*Are you not aware that it is God whose limitless glory all creatures that are in the heavens and earth extol, even the birds as they spread out their wings? Each of them knows how to pray to Him and to glorify Him.*” (24: 41) “*Are you not aware that to God bow down in worship all those who are in the heavens and on earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees and the beasts, and a great number of human beings?*” (22: 18) “*Indeed every single thing extols His glory and praise, but you cannot understand their praises.*” (17: 44) There is no need to try to explain these clear texts in a way that suits our own preconceptions of the nature of things when these are not based on the Qur'ān. Whatever ideas or thoughts we entertain about the universe should rely, first and foremost, on what is stated by God, the Creator and Originator of the universe, who bestowed the Qur'ān from on high.

“*He is the Almighty, the Wise.*” (Verse 1) His glorification by everything in the heavens and earth is a result of His surpassing power and wisdom. He is the One who has power over everything and who controls everything according to His flawless wisdom.

Absolute Dominion

We hardly catch our breath after this first verse has portrayed this great universal festival of God's glorification. The *sūrah* immediately takes us on another round in the universe: “*His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. He grants life and causes death; and He has power over all things.*” (Verse 2) We have learnt that everything in the heavens and earth extols God's glory, as He is the sole owner of the universe who has no partner in His dominion. It is, thus, a case of glorifying the Owner by His property. It is He who creates life and death, granting life to every living thing and then determining its death. Nothing happens other than what He wills.

Life continues to be a secret in its nature and source. No one can tell where it came from or how. Indeed, no one knows what life truly is. The Qur'ān says that it is God who grants life to every living entity. No

one can deny this or prove anything contrary to it. Likewise, death is a deeply hidden secret whose nature is unknown to all. No one can cause it because none can take life away other than the One who granted it in the first place. Both life and death are aspects of His absolute dominion over the heavens and the earth.

“He has power over all things.” (Verse 2) His power is absolute, unrestricted by anything. God’s will operates without any restriction whatsoever. Any limitation, of any type, form or colour, our minds try to apply to God’s will, according to our own logic, is false as it is conceived by man’s finite mind. The fact that God’s will determines and operates the laws that operate in the universe is part of the overall picture of His free, unrestricted will. The choice is made without restriction, and the operation of these laws does not impose any limitation on God’s will to make it operate within these laws. God’s choice remains free and unrestricted.

The Qur’ān lays much emphasis on this fact, reiterating it on every occasion in a way that accentuates that God’s will is absolutely free, unrestricted even by the results of its own actions. Thus, this fact remains clear, uncoloured by any alien conception. For example, God has promised the people of heaven that they will abide there forever, and the same promise is given to the people of hell. This promise is issued by His will, but His will is kept free beyond the very promise He has chosen to give. Therefore, He says about both groups that they will *“abide [there] as long as the heavens and the earth endure, unless your Lord wills it otherwise.”* (11: 107 and 108) This is repeated on every occasion so as to make it clear that no exception can be made. Human logic has no say on this other than what is stated in the Qur’ān.

In this way, we can appreciate the significance of this verse that states God’s absolute power in His dominion in which He has no partner, where everything rightly extols His praises.

The One and Only

We are then introduced to another truth that may be greater and more profound than the previous ones: it is the truth that the only true entity is God – limitless is He in His glory. Therefore, He encompasses

everything and knows everything: “*He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner. He has full knowledge of all things.*” (Verse 3) He is the First, which means that nothing was before Him; and He is the Last, which means that nothing remains after Him. He is the Outer, which means that nothing is above Him; and He is the Inner, which means that nothing is beyond Him. The first two attributes encompass the nature of time, and the other two the nature of place. The human mind may look everywhere, but it will find that nothing has any entity except God. Indeed all qualities of existence apply to Him alone. The very existence of the human mind materializes only through God's existence, which is the only true existence. Everything else receives its existence from Him. This is the basic truth that gives everything its nature. Nothing has an independent existence beyond this truth.

“*He has full knowledge of all things.*” (Verse 3) His is the knowledge of the truth absolute. Since every existence is derived from God, it is included in His absolute knowledge, which belongs to Him alone. No one shares in God's knowledge, much as people may get to know some aspects of the nature of their own world. Still, they will only know about what appears to them.

If this great truth is well established in a person's heart, why should he give any consideration to anything in the universe other than God? Nothing, including that very heart, has any true existence other than what it derives from that great truth. Everything else is a transitory delusion. Only God remains, as He is the only One who is eternal. Until this great truth is firmly established in our hearts, we should look at this Qur'ānic verse, contemplate and truly appreciate its message.

Sufis upheld this truth and went far and wide with it. Some of them said they could see God in everything in the universe, while others said they saw God beyond everything, and others still said that as they saw God, they could see no one else in the universe. These statements, inadequate as they are, simply point to the truth. What the Sufis are generally criticized for is that their concept led them to neglect life. Islam though is a balanced way of life. It wants the human heart to appreciate this truth, live with it and for it, while at the same time discharging all incumbent duties as vicegerents of this earth. Each person should work hard to implement the divine code of life on earth. Such implementation

is the result of a balanced appreciation of this great truth, consistent with the nature of man and the nature of the universe as created by God.

Creation, Knowledge and Dominion

Now the *sūrah* tells us how other truths branched out from that great one:

It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days and established Himself on the throne. He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; all that descends from the skies and all that ascends to them. He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do. His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God. He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts. (Verses 4–6)

These verses mention several truths: God's creation of the heavens and the earth; His establishing Himself on the throne; His knowledge of particular matters about His creation; His presence with everyone wherever they happen to be; the return of everything to Him; His conduct of the affairs of this world; and His knowledge of what is in people's hearts. All these spring out of the first great truth, but their presentation against this universal background gives them special effect. The heavens and the earth strike awe in our hearts by their expanse, beauty, harmony, accuracy of position and movement and in the consistency of their phenomena. Like the human heart, they are God's creatures. Thus, they too relate to man's heart. They strike some heavenly tunes on it when man looks and reflects on their creation. They say to man that they are all created by God, and that they extol His praises. Man should do the same. Like them, he should derive the truth of his existence from God's existence.

The six days in which God created the heavens and earth are known only to God. Our own days are accidental results of the earth's rotation in relation to the sun. This earth day came into existence after the creation of the earth and the sun. Therefore, we cannot apply this earth day to the

creation of the universe. We, therefore, leave such knowledge to God. He gives us such information in due course, if He so pleases.

The same applies to the throne. We believe in it as God has mentioned it, but we do not know its nature. As for God 'establishing' Himself on the throne, we can say that it is an expression that stresses God's control of all His creation. This is based on what the Qur'ān says and, as a result, we know for certain that God does not change situation or position. He is not unestablished on the throne in one situation and then in another established. To say, as some scholars do, that we believe in God's establishing Himself on the throne without knowing how does not give us an adequate explanation of the phrase "*and established Himself on the throne.*" It is preferable to say that this refers to God's absolute control of all creation. To so explain this does not depart from our method of abstaining from personal views about the meaning of things that do not belong to our world. Instead, we are relying on what the Qur'ān states and the impression it gives of God and His attributes.

Added to creation and control is absolute and careful knowledge. The Qur'ān describes the extent of this knowledge in a marvellous way, one that captures our minds as we try to follow it against the great expanse of the universe in a never-ceasing movement. This is far more than mere knowledge. It is an inspiring image that captures imaginations: "*He knows all that goes into the earth and all that comes out of it; all that descends from the skies and all that ascends to them.*" (Verse 4)

At every moment, countless numbers of creatures and things enter the earth, and countless others go out from it. Likewise, at every moment, unimaginable numbers of raindrops, rays, meteors, comets, angels, secret objects, etc. come down from the skies and similar numbers of visible and invisible creatures ascend to them. This short Qur'ānic statement refers to this ever-continuous multi-way movement and to great events that are beyond count. It leaves our minds looking everywhere, watching what goes into the earth or out of it, and what comes down from the skies or goes up into them. In this way we can have a glimpse of God's perfect knowledge as He is aware of everything that takes place everywhere. Our minds can thus roam in God's universe while we are still placed on earth. We travel on with alert senses, shuddering at the majesty of what we experience.

As our minds continue looking at the great expanse of the universe, the Qur'ān brings us back to ourselves and touches our inner feelings. We learn that God is with us, looking at us and seeing our actions. He is so close: "*He is with you wherever you may be; and God sees all that you do.*" (Verse 4) This is a factual statement, not a figurative one. God is with everyone and everything, at all times and in all places. He sees everything every creature does. This is a great truth. When we fully understand it, we experience a sense of awe together with a sense of joy as we learn that He is with us. This true statement is enough, when fully understood, to elevate us above earthly considerations, while keeping us all the time on our guard, wary of indulgence in what is unbecoming.

Once more the *sūrah* mentions God's dominion, putting it in a different context: "*His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God.*" (Verse 5) This was mentioned the first time in the context of granting life, causing death and absolute power. Here, it is mentioned in the context of the return of everything to God. Such return closely relates to dominion over the universe. Appreciating this truth ensures that our hearts and minds never turn to anyone other than God in any situation or for any matter, at any time. Whatever we ask, we ask of God, and whatever we do will be done only to please God. Thus we are sure to follow the right way in public and private, in action and rest, in feelings and leanings, always knowing that none other than God can provide any help or protection against any adverse eventuality.

This opening concludes with a reference to a gentle aspect of God's power we see around us in the universe, and within us in our inner feelings: "*He causes the night to pass into the day, and the day to pass into the night; and He has full knowledge of what is in people's hearts.*" (Verse 6) The passing of the night into the day and the day into the night is a continuous and gentle movement. This may mean that the night extends taking part of the day at one stage and the day extends at another stage taking part of the night. Or it may mean the actual penetration of the night into the day at the time of sunset and the penetration of the day into night at the time of sunrise. A similarly gentle action is the knowledge of what is in people's hearts, which means their guarded

secrets that are told to no one. The feeling of God's hand pushing the night into the day and the day into the night, in a very subtle and gentle way, makes our minds sensitive and reflective. The same can be said about feeling that God is fully aware of inner thoughts and feelings.

Degrees of Believers

Having softened our hearts with this opening, the *sūrah* calls on all people to believe and be ready to sacrifice money and property. The opening has made us ready to listen and pay full attention. Yet the address also brings its own inspiring touches and encouraging tones:

Believe in God and His Messenger, and give [in charity] of that of which He has made you trustees. Those of you who believe and give [in charity] will have a great reward. Why should you not believe in God when the Messenger calls upon you to believe in your Lord, and He has already taken a pledge from you, if you are true believers? It is He who bestows from on high clear revelations to His servant, to lead you out of the deep darkness into light. God is indeed most compassionate to you, ever merciful. Why should you not spend freely in the cause of God, seeing that God's alone is the heritage of the heavens and the earth? Those of you who gave and fought [for God's cause] before the victory are not like others: they are higher in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards, although God has promised the ultimate good to all of them. God is well aware of all that you do. (Verses 7–10)

Here, God is addressing the hearts He has created. He knows them, knows what influences them, as well as what feelings they harbour. He knows that for faith to be pure and well established in our hearts so that it gives results in practical life is very hard. He knows how hard and long the struggle is for hearts to be ready to sacrifice purely for His sake. Therefore, the *sūrah* brings in such a host of factors and puts before us a number of universal truths. Their combined effect makes us measure things with the accurate measure of the great truth. The Qur'an deals with these hearts time and again, step after step. It is not satisfied with a single address or influence presenting the case. Hence advocates of

the divine faith are well advised to reflect on the way the Qur'ān treats people's hearts, so that they can follow its guidance.

The beat at the *sūrah's* opening is so powerful and profound that it shakes and softens hardened hearts, making them sensitive. The Qur'ān, however, does not use only those influences as it calls on people to believe and to be charitable: "*Believe in God and His Messenger, and give [in charity] of that of which He has made you trustees.*" (Verse 7) The addressees now are Muslims, yet they are called upon to believe in God and His Messenger. This means that they are called upon to ensure that the truth of faith, in its full meaning, takes hold of their hearts. This is a fine touch. They are also called upon to spend in charity, and this call is also coupled with an inspiring touch. They do not spend out of their own property, but rather out of the portion of God's kingdom that He has given them on trust. It is He who has the '*dominion over the heavens and the earth,*' which means that it is He who made the human race generally trustees over a part of His property. It is He who '*grants life and causes death.*' In this way He passes the trust from one generation to another.

Thus, this instruction is linked to what the opening of the *sūrah* said of universal facts, before it makes people ashamed of their behaviour before God. It is He who has given them all they have. What then will they say when He asks them to give in charity some of what He has given them? It is God who gives everything, and what He has will never end. What, then, stops them giving in charity when what they have depends on what God granted them. The *sūrah* does not merely give them this reminder, with all its connotations of shame, kindness and hope. Instead, it also gives them another incentive, making them aspire to more of what God bestows: "*Those of you who believe and give [in charity] will have a great reward.*" (Verse 7) How can anyone abstain from belief and giving in charity when they are shown such limitless kindness and generosity?

The *sūrah* goes further presenting more incentives to believe and accept the divine message. This time it highlights facts from people's own lives and what takes place in their very midst: "*Why should you not believe in God when the Messenger calls upon you to believe in your Lord,*

and He has already taken a pledge from you, if you are true believers? It is He who bestows from on high clear revelations to His servant, to lead you out of the deep darkness into light. God is indeed most compassionate to you, ever merciful." (Verses 8–9) The *sūrah* asks: what stops them from being truly believers when the Prophet calls on them to believe, and when they have already given him pledges of allegiance? What stops them from higher degrees of faith in God when it is He who bestows on His servant clear revelations that are sure to replace their error, doubt and anxiety with the light of faith and certainty? These are indeed aspects of God's compassion and mercy that He bestows on all.

The fact that the Prophet was among those people, calling on them to believe, addressing them with God's own words, establishing a link between them and God which they felt within their own souls was a great blessing, one that we now find difficult to imagine. That period of revelation when the Prophet was living among the Muslims was indeed remarkable. It was a time when God – limitless is He in His glory – addressed man, whom He created, through His servant, (peace be upon him), in a kindly and compassionate way. He said to them: 'Take this and leave that. This is My way, so follow it. You have slipped here, so pick up this rope leading to Me. You have erred and sinned, so repent; My door remains open, so come forward and never let despair creep into you, for My grace will erase all. You man! You said this and that which is wrong; or intended such and such which is a sin; or committed that, which is an act of disobedience. Therefore, come now before Me, declare your repentance, purging yourself of all that and return to My fold. And you man! Here is the solution to the problem you have been struggling with; or this is the answer to the question that has been troubling you; or this is the value of the deed you have committed.'

It is God who says this to people. They live under His care, feeling that He is truly and actually with them, listening to their complaints in the middle of the night and providing their solutions, guiding their every step.

This is something too great to imagine by a person who did not live during that period. The people these verses address actually lived through it, and yet they needed this treatment and these compassionate touches and reminders. This is another aspect of God's grace added to the first

aspect. Both can be appreciated by us who did not have the blessing of living during that remarkable period. “The Prophet said once to his Companions: ‘Which believers do you think most remarkable?’ They said: ‘The angels.’ He said: ‘Why would they not believe when they are with their Lord?’ They rejoined: ‘The prophets, then.’ He said: ‘Why would they not believe when revelations were given to them from on high?’ Said they: ‘Then we ourselves.’ He said: ‘Why would you not believe when I am in your midst? The most remarkable of believers are people who come after you, look at scriptures and believe in what is in them.’” [Related by al-Bukhārī.]

It is true what the Prophet says. It is true that the gulf is indeed wide. The pointers and incentives to faith in their case were great and remarkable. Hence the *sūrah* asks: ‘Why would you not believe?’ Then, it requires them to translate their faith into reality, if they are truly believers.

Classes of Actions

The *sūrah* then adds the incentive to spend in charity, putting this in an emphatic way: “*Why should you not spend freely in the cause of God, seeing that God’s alone is the heritage of the heavens and the earth?*” (Verse 10) This reference takes us back to the fact already mentioned in the opening verses: “*His is the dominion over the heavens and the earth. Everything goes back to God.*” (Verse 5) The heavens and the earth are His own property and they revert back to Him. What has been assigned to people on trust will also go back to Him as part of this inheritance. Why should they, then, not be charitable when He is asking them to spend in charity? When this is put into perspective, there can be no justification for stinginess.

The elite community of the early believers, the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār, came forward with what they could of sacrifice, in life and property, during a very hard time, before the great triumph was achieved. The victory mentioned here may refer to either the fall of Makkah to Islam, or to the signing of the peace treaty at al-Ḥudaybiyah. Both were events that greatly consolidated the position of Islam at a time when it was still besieged by enemies on all fronts. These people offered their

sacrifices to God, entertaining no thought of worldly gain or currying favour with a powerful Muslim state, for there was none. Their sacrifice was the result of a choice they made for God's sake. It was in support of a faith they wholeheartedly accepted and loved, valuing it dearer than their lives and properties. Yet what they sacrificed was, in quantity, much less than what those who flocked to Islam after its victory were able to sacrifice. Some of these offered sacrifices, stopping at the amount they heard the early Muslims gave. Therefore, the Qur'ān gives these offerings their true values, making it clear that it is not the quantity that determines the value; rather, it is the motive pointing to the truth of faith: *“Those of you who gave and fought [for God's cause] before the victory are not like others: they are higher in rank than those who gave and fought afterwards.”* (Verse 10)

A person who makes financial sacrifices and fights when the faith he believes in is struggling against great odds, able to call on the support of only a few, and when there is little hope of personal gain is totally different from the one who makes such sacrifices and fights at the time of security, when supporters are plentiful and victory is assured. The first is totally dedicated to his faith, placing his complete trust in God, with no quick gains to be hoped for. Nothing but faith urges him to make such sacrifices. The other always finds those who encourage him to do good deeds, even when his intention is right and he is totally dedicated to faith. Anas reports: “Some verbal disagreement occurred between Khālīd ibn al-Walīd and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf. Khālīd said to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān: ‘You take pride against us because of the period you had ahead of us.’¹ We heard that this was mentioned to the Prophet. He said: ‘Leave my Companions alone. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, should any of you spend the like of Mount Uḥud, [or he might have said, ‘the weight of mountains’] in gold, he would not achieve the like of their deeds’.” [Related by Aḥmad.] The Prophet is also authentically quoted as saying: “Do not curse my Companions. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, should any of you spend the like of Mount Uḥud

1. Khālīd, who believed in Islam shortly before the conquest of Makkah but after the peace treaty of al-Hudaybiyah, meant that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān’s position in the Muslim community was only due to his being among the early Muslims. In fact, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf was one of the first ten people to accept Islam. – Editor’s note.

in gold, he would not achieve the measure of any one of them, not even half that measure.”²

Having established the true measure of both groups in God’s sight, the *sūrah* now states that they will all reside in heaven: “*Although God has promised the ultimate good to all of them.*” (Verse 10) Despite their difference in degree, they have all done well. This difference in rank and the promise of the great reward to all are due to God’s knowledge of their respective situations, intentions, determination and actions: “*God is well aware of all that you do.*” (Verse 10) This is a reference to real intentions beyond apparent actions. It is after all the intention that determines the value of any action.

A Breathtaking Scene

The *sūrah* goes a stage further in motivating addressees to be true believers and to make financial sacrifices. It provides further incentives and inspiration:

Who will offer God a generous loan, which He will repay in multiples and will generously reward him? On the day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right, [they will be told], ‘The good news for you today is that you shall for ever abide in gardens through which running waters flow. This is indeed the supreme triumph.’ On that day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the believers, ‘Wait for us! Let us have a ray of your light!’ They will be told: ‘Turn back and seek some other light.’ A wall with a gate will be raised between them: within it will be mercy, and outside will be suffering. [Those without] will call out to those [within], ‘Were we not with you?’ They will reply, ‘Yes, but you allowed yourselves to be led into temptation, you wavered, you doubted, and you were deceived by false hopes until God’s command came to pass, and indeed you let your deceptive thoughts about God

2. These *ahādīth*, and similar ones, provide a definite meaning to the group that formed the Prophet’s Companions. They are those who accepted Islam in its early days. The Prophet used to say to the Muslims around him, who ranked among his Companions: ‘Leave my Companions alone...’ This indicates that he was referring to a special companionship. Referring to Abū Bakr, he once said: ‘Leave my Companion alone.’

delude you. Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from the unbelievers. The fire shall be your home: it is where you belong; and how evil a destination!' (Verses 11–15)

This address is not merely inspiring; it is captivating. It says to those who are always in need of help, *'Who will offer God a generous loan?'* The mere thought that he, a poor, little human being, can offer a loan to God should make a Muslim rush to do so. People normally compete to lend to someone who is rich – when they, including the rich, are all poor – because they know that repayment is certain. They are proud to lend money to such a wealthy person. So how would they feel when they make a loan to the One who is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise?

The *sūrah*, however, does not leave it at this, but instead promises to repay such a goodly loan, given purely to Him without any thought of pleasing anyone else, in double or multiples. In addition, it promises a very generous reward: *"Who will offer God a generous loan, which He will repay in multiples and will generously reward him?"* (Verse 11) The *sūrah* then presents a brilliant image of this generous reward in a scene of the day when this is granted: *"On the day when you see all believers, men and women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and to their right."* (Verse 12)

The scene presented here is unique both in framework and detail. It is a scene brought to life by a dialogue that enhances the clearly delineated image. As we read, a lustrous image is drawn before us in which we see believing men and women and a gently shining light radiating through them and flowing to their right. These human bodies are beaming with a light that spreads from them so that it can be seen both before them and to their right. It is the light into which God brought them out of darkness; the light that beamed into their souls to overshadow their original nature. Or is it, perhaps, that the light from which God created this universe and all who live in it,³ now appears in this group of people who have been true to their nature?

3. It is now believed that the original substance from which the universe was created is light, and that it is composed of atoms, and that the atom is, in essence, radiation. This theory may be the closest to the truth because it appears to be in line with the Qur'ān.

We then listen to the address made to believers, men and women, combining honour with good news: “*The good news for you today is that you shall for ever abide in gardens through which running waters flow. This is indeed the supreme triumph.*” (Verse 12)

The scene does not end with this pleasant image. We have a contrasting one in which we see the hypocrites, men and women, lost in error, abandoned and humiliated. They try to cling to the believers: “*On that day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the believers, ‘Wait for us! Let us have a ray of your light!’*” (Verse 13) Wherever the believers look, their gentle, transparent light spreads before them. How can hypocrites, who have spent all their lives in darkness, enjoy even a ray of that light? A voice coming from where they do not know tells them: “*Turn back and seek some other light.*” (Verse 13) This seems to be said in a sarcastic way, reminding them of what they used to do in their first lives when they engaged in hypocrisy, conspiring in the dark. They are told to go back to this world where light is sought through good action. On this Last Day, no light can be sought.

Immediately a barrier is erected to separate the believers from the hypocrites. These two groups were mixed in their first lives, but now they are sorted out: “*A wall with a gate will be raised between them: within it will be mercy, and outside will be suffering.*” (Verse 13) It appears that they cannot see through this wall, but it does not stop the people on both sides talking to and hearing each other. Now the hypocrites call out to the believers asking them: “*Were we not with you?*” (Verse 14) Were we not living with you at the same place, and were we not resurrected with you on the same plane? The believers confirm this, but their ways were different: “*They will reply, ‘Yes, but you allowed yourselves to be led into temptation.’*” Thus you turned yourselves away from divine guidance. “*You wavered.*” You did not make the right choice. “*You doubted.*” You could not bring yourselves to have certainty of faith and make the right choice. “*And you were deceived by false hopes.*” You were always deluding yourselves thinking that by holding the stick in the middle would ensure your safety in all situations. “*Until God’s command came to pass,*” and all was lost. “*Indeed you let your deceptive thoughts about God delude you.*” (Verse 14) These thoughts were whispered by Satan who deceived you by raising false hopes before your eyes.

The believers go on with this reminder and statement, as if they are the ones assigned to make the judgement: “*Today no ransom will be accepted from you or from the unbelievers. The fire shall be your home: it is where you belong; and how evil a destination!*” (Verse 15) Or perhaps this is said by angels, or maybe by God Almighty.

From an artistic point of view, the image of light in this particular instance is most appropriate. The *sūrah* is speaking about hypocrites, men and women, who conceal their feelings and intentions, giving false appearances. They live in darkness, engage in hypocrisy and conspiracy and cause trouble. Light will expose what has been carefully hidden. Moreover, it provides a bright image that contrasts with the grimly dark one of hypocrisy. It is the best image to radiate the whole scene, and to flow before the believers and to their right while the hypocrites remain lost in what amounts to double darkness.

What heart would not aspire to have that sort of light on that day? What heart would not respond to the call to donate in plenty when listening to such an inspiring discourse? Thus, the Qur'ān deals with human hearts in a steady, consistent way, basing its address on perfect knowledge of their nature, how they are influenced and how they respond.

The second part of the *sūrah* continues this same line of address and inspiration.



A Race to Forgiveness

Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of God and the truth that has been bestowed from on high, and not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time? Many of these are now transgressors! (16)

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ
قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنْ
الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمْ
الْأَمَدُ فَفَسَقَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَكَثُرَ مِنْهُمْ
فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Know that God restores the earth to life after it has been lifeless. We have made Our revelations clear to you so that you may use your reason. (17)

أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا قَدْ
بَيَّنَّا لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Those who give generously in charity, men and women, and thus offer a goodly loan to God, [their loan] will be repaid in multiples, and they will have a generous reward. (18)

إِنَّ الْمُسْتَضْفِينَ وَالْمُسْتَضْفَاتِ وَأَقْرَضُوا
اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يُضَاعَفُ لَهُمْ وَلَهُمْ
أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

Those who believe in God and His messengers are the ones who uphold the truth, and who will bear witness to it before their Lord. They will have their reward and their light. Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are the dwellers of the blazing fire. (19)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الصَّادِقُونَ وَالشَّهَادَةُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ لَهُمْ
أَجْرُهُمْ وَنُورُهُمْ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
وَكَذَّبُوا آيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٩﴾

Know that the life of this world is but a play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, a cause of boasting among you and a quest for more riches and children. It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers. Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow, and in the end it crumbles into dust. In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure. (20)

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ
وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي
الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ
أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَهُ
مُضْفَرًا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَمًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ
عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ
وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَمْتَعٌ
الْفَرُورِ ﴿٢٠﴾

Vie with one another in seeking to attain your Lord's forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. Such is God's bounty which He grants to whomever He pleases. God's bounty is great indeed. (21)

سَابِقُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّنَ رَبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ
عَرْضُهَا كَعَرْضِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ
أُعِدَّتْ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ
ذَٰلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن يَشَاءُ
وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢١﴾

No incident can take place, either on earth or in yourselves, unless it be recorded in a decree before We bring it into being – that is easy for God – (22)

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ
مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى
اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

so you need not grieve for what you miss or be overjoyed at what you gain. God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; (23)

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَى مَا فَاتَكُمْ
وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ وَاللَّهُ
لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

[nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly. Those who turn away should remember that God alone is self-sufficient, worthy of praise. (24)

الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ وَيَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ
بِالْبَخْلِ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ
الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٤﴾

We sent Our messengers with clear evidence of the truth, and through them We bestowed the book from on high, setting the balance, so that people could uphold justice. We have also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind. Thus God may mark out those who would stand up for Him and His messengers, even though He is beyond the reach of human perception. God is indeed powerful, almighty. (25)

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا
مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ
النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ
بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنْفَعٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ
اللَّهُ مِنْ نَصْرِهِ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

And We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and revelation to their descendants. Among them there are some who were rightly guided, but many who were transgressors. (26)

We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After these We sent Jesus, son of Mary. We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who truly follow him. As for monastic asceticism, We did not enjoin it upon them. They invented it themselves out of a desire for God's goodly acceptance. Even so, they did not observe it as it should properly be observed. So We gave those of them who truly believed their due reward, but many of them were transgressors. (27)

Believers, remain God-fearing and believe in His Messenger. He will then give you a double measure of His mercy, and will provide you with a light to walk in, and will forgive you. God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. (28)

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي
ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا النُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ فَمِنْهُمْ
مُهْتَدٍ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

ثُمَّ قَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَرِهِم بِرُسُلِنَا
وَقَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ
الْإِنْجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ
الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَافَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهَابِنَةٌ
أَتَدْعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهَا
إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا
حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ
فَاسِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
وَءَامِنُوا بِرِسُولِهِ ۚ يُوَفِّقْكُمْ كَفَالَيْنِ
مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۚ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمْ نُورًا
تَسْلُونَ بِهِ ۚ وَيَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

The people of earlier revelations should know that they have no power whatever over any of God's bounty. All bounty is in God's hand: He grants it to whomever He wills. God's bounty is limitless. (29)

لَتَلَّيَعْمَرَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ أَلا يَفْقَهُونَ
عَلَى شَيْءٍ وَمِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ
اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ
الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٩﴾

Overview

This part continues with the main theme of the *sūrah*: fulfilment of the true meaning of faith in people's hearts so that they come forward with financial sacrifice purely for God's sake. It includes inspiring touches similar to those found in the first part. It begins with a note of remonstrance addressed to the believers who had not at that time attained the standard God wanted them to attain. It puts before them the situation of communities from among the people of earlier revelations whose hearts had hardened as time went by and, as a result, transgressed. The believers are warned against ending up in the same position, but a pleasant prospect is also put before them, telling them that God gives hearts a fresh life in the same way as He restores life to the earth after it has been lifeless.

Then we take a look at the next world. This is coupled with a repeat call to offer a generous loan to God, one that promises multiple repayment and a generous reward. This, thus, mirrors what was stated in the first part of the *sūrah*.

All values of this present life are then put on God's scales and weighed against the values of the life to come. The first seem like small and light playthings while the others appear serious, capturing our attention. Believers are, therefore, invited to hasten to those real values so that they can enjoy their results in a heaven that is immeasurably vast. Furthermore, this heaven has been made ready to receive those who believe in God and His messengers.

The believers are then brought back to their present condition in this life and its events. They realize that whatever happens, good or bad, is by God's will. Thus, financial sacrifice becomes easy for them and the

luxuries of this world are of no consequence. Instead, all their thoughts and feelings aspire to heaven.

The *sūrah* then presents an aspect of the history of the divine message, reflecting its unity of approach and direction. Those who deviate from this line, no matter what generation they belong to, are transgressors. Again, an image of what people who were given scriptures in the past did is shown to the believers. This concludes with a final address to them to remain God-fearing and to truly believe in Him and His Messenger so that He will then give them a double share of His grace, provide them with light in their lives and forgive them their slips. God's bounty is not limited to the people of earlier revelations, as such people allege. It is limitless and remains in God's hands, who grants it to whom He wills.

We thus see that from start to finish the *sūrah* is closely knit. It follows a consistent line playing varying and similar notes and using repetition to the extent that is needed. All to make a strong impression on our hearts.

A Higher Degree of Faith

Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of God and the truth that has been bestowed from on high, and not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time? Many of these are now transgressors! Know that God restores the earth to life after it has been lifeless. We have made Our revelations clear to you so that you may use your reason. (Verses 16–17)

This profoundly touching remonstrance by God, the Ever Merciful, urges a complete response from hearts that have been slow to bask in His grace after He has sent them His Messenger calling on them to believe. He granted him revelations that are sure to take them out of darkness into light. He has also shown them enlightening signs in the universe around them and in all His creation. This note of remonstrance overflows with tenderness as it arouses in them feelings of His majesty so that they humble themselves when He is mentioned. In this way can they receive the truth bestowed from on high with what it deserves of

obedience, submission and obedience to God. This is coupled with a touch of criticism for their slow response: *“Is it not time for believers that their hearts should feel humble at the remembrance of God and the truth that has been bestowed from on high.”* (Verse 16)

To this note of urging and encouragement is added a warning against slackening and negligence. It tells them how hearts harden when time passes without refreshment provided by remembrance of God and His truth: *“And not to be like those who were granted revelations before them and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time? Many of these are now transgressors.”* (Verse 16) When hearts harden, all they produce is sin and disobedience. The human heart is subject to quick changes, it easily forgets. When it brightens up it is like a ray of light spreading life. Should it stay long without reminders, it becomes blunted, hardened and loses its light. Therefore, it requires constant reminders so that it remains soft and enlightened. It must always be alert so as not to harden.

If a heart does become hardened, this must not, however, lead to despair. It can be brought back to life and revived with divine light. God restores the earth to life. After it has been lifeless for long, it quickens and produces plants, flowers, fruits and rich varieties in plenty. The same applies to hearts, by God’s will: *“Know that God restores the earth to life after it has been lifeless.”* (Verse 17) This Qur’ān has plenty of what brings hearts back to life, supplying them with proper nourishment, just like lifeless earth is restored to life: *“We have made Our revelations clear to you so that you may use your reason.”* (Verse 17)

In the Highest Position

A new incentive to sacrifice now follows:

Those who give generously in charity, men and women, and thus offer a goodly loan to God, [their loan] will be repaid in multiples, and they will have a generous reward. Those who believe in God and His messengers are the ones who uphold the truth, and who will bear witness to it before their Lord. They will have their reward and their light. Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are the dwellers of the blazing fire. (Verses 18–19)

Those who give generously in charity do not couple their action by pressing for favours from the recipients of that charity. In all this, they do not deal with people. They deal directly with God, offering Him a loan. What better incentive for charity! Can there be a more profound feeling for a charitable believer than that he is giving a loan to God who has no need of anyone and who repays good deeds in multiples. Can he hope for anything better than dealing with the One who has dominion over the entire universe, and that whatever he spends in charity will be given back in multiples together with a generous reward?

Those who uphold the truth enjoy a very high status, as indicated by several statements made by the Prophet. Yet this high status is, by the grace of God, easy to achieve. It is not reserved for any individual or group. Whoever truly believes in God and His messengers can aspire to this height. God's grace is without limit: "*Those who believe in God and His messengers are the ones who uphold the truth.*" (Verse 19) This is the distinctive characteristic of this religion. It is a way open to all people, a lofty standard to which all can aspire. There is no privileged position for anyone in particular. Only good action elevates people to the highest level. There is no class system in this religion.

Imām Mālik reports on the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī that the Prophet said: "The people of heaven look up to those in lofty mansions above them as you would try to locate a bright star moving away in the far horizon to the east or the west." People asked him whether these are mansions reserved for prophets and whether none other than a prophet achieves them. He said: "By Him who holds my soul in His hand, others achieve them: people who believe in God and in his messengers." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

This speaks about belief, which is followed by a reference to sacrificing one's life, speaking about those who 'bear witness', which is a reference to martyrs. In Arabic, the term 'shahīd' carries both meanings: "*And who will bear witness to it before their Lord. They will have their reward and their light.*" (Verse 19) The high position given to martyrs is mentioned several times in the Qur'ān, and in numerous statements made by the Prophet. This religion cannot be properly established in human life without having a guarding force, and without a hard struggle. The struggle aims to secure the faith, protect its followers when they face

testing times, and preserve its code from corruption. Therefore, martyrs for God's cause, who are the only ones to deserve this name and to bear witness, have their special status and position close to their Lord.

In an authentic *ḥadīth* the Prophet says: "The spirits of martyrs are in the craws of green birds which fly in heaven unrestricted. They ultimately home back to these lanterns. God looks at them and asks what they wish for. They say: 'We would love to go back to the world so that we can fight again for your cause and be killed like we were the first time.' He will say to them: 'I have already decreed that people will never return there.'" [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.] Anas quotes the Prophet as saying: "None of the people of heaven would ever like to return to this world even though he would have all that the earth contains, except for martyrs who wish to return and be killed ten times fighting for God's cause. This is because of the honour that is given to them." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

Thus life seemed too trivial for those who listened to all this and realized what position God grants to martyrs. Imām Mālik reports on the authority of Yaḥyā ibn Sa'īd: "God's Messenger encouraged people to fight for God's cause and he mentioned the garden of heaven. A man from the Anṣār who was eating a few dates as he listened said: 'If I continue sitting here and eating these dates, I am certainly of those who are eager to stay in this life.' He then threw his dates away and pushed forward in the fighting until he was killed."

Having mentioned the positions of those who uphold the truth and those who bear witness to it, the *sūrah* refers to the unbelievers who deny God's revelations: "*Those who disbelieve and deny Our revelations are the dwellers of the blazing fire.*" (Verse 19) Who would wish to abandon a position of honour in order to be among the dwellers of hell?

A Life of Trivialities

The next touch comments on this call to a high standard of faith and the sacrifice of life and property. It shows the life of this world to be too trivial to have any value for people who aspire to heaven.

Know that the life of this world is but a play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, a cause of boasting among you and a quest for more

riches and children. It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers. Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow, and in the end it crumbles into dust. In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure.
(Verse 20)

When evaluated by its own measures and standards, this world appears great indeed. However, when it is looked at against the life to come and its standards, it appears trivial. In the picture drawn in this verse, it looks like children's toys compared to the seriousness of the life to come where people's fates are decided. A play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, mutual boasting, and a quest for riches; this is the truth behind all our apparent hard work and preoccupation. An animated picture gives an example of what this life is like: "*It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers.*" (Verse 20) The word used in this verse for 'sowers' is 'kuffār' which primarily means 'unbelievers'. The choice is deliberate as it provides a clear hint to the fact that unbelievers are delighted by the riches of this world. "*Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow.*" (Verse 20) It is ready for harvest. It is all temporary, lasting but for a short while. It attains its fullness "*and in the end it crumbles into dust.*" Thus the film of life, shown in a host of lively and familiar images, comes to an end as it all crumbles into dust.

The life to come has a totally different appearance. People should not only take this into account but also prepare themselves for it: "*In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance.*" (Verse 20) It does not end in a moment, like this present world. It does not crumble into nothing like those withered plants. It involves reckoning, accountability, and continuity. "*The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure.*" (Verse 20) Its pleasure has no real substance. Its attraction is based on illusions that make people overlook reality.

When we think carefully about all this, it immediately appears true. As the Qur'ān states this truth, it does not want us to ignore the life of this world altogether, or to forget the duty requiring us to build human

life on earth.⁴ Rather, it aims to rectify our standards and values so that we rise above the temptation of worldly pleasures, for these are transitory in nature. Rising above such temptations was needed by those addressed by the *sūrah* in order that they make faith their reality. It is also needed by anyone with faith if he wants his faith to become reality. This is not an easy task; it may also ultimately require sacrifice of one's life for it.

A Great Prize to Compete for

The *sūrah* calls the believers to compete in the proper field for the one and only worthwhile prize that will define their permanent status in the everlasting world:

Vie with one another in seeking to attain your Lord's forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who believe in God and His messengers. Such is God's bounty which He grants to whomever He pleases. God's bounty is great indeed. (Verse 21)

Competing in play, pastimes and delightful pursuits, and seeking more riches and offspring are not worthy of adults who have outgrown childish play. The real race aims to win the greatest of all prizes, 'a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth.' In the past, before the facts about the vastness of this universe were discovered, people might have thought this verse and similar statements made by the Prophet to be figurative. Today, with observatories indicating the great, endless dimensions of the universe, the reference to the widths of heaven and the lofty mansions seen over the horizon sound factual and need not be treated as figurative. The distance between the earth and the sun, for example, seems insignificant when set against other distances in the universe.

This great prize in the garden of heaven is there for anyone to achieve. All are invited to strive for it. The only requirement to taking part is to believe in God and His Messenger: "Such is God's bounty which He grants to whomever He pleases. God's bounty is great indeed." (Verse 21) God's bounty is not restricted in any way. It is available to all. This is

4. This is discussed in detail in the commentary on verse 51 of *Sūrah* 56 in this volume.

the prize to compete for. A believer must deal with this great existence, not limiting himself or restricting his concerns and feelings to life in this little earthly world. He needs to do this if he is to fulfil the role worthy of a person who has faith, the role that is in conflict with the petty greed of ordinary people, and with erring thoughts, deviant ideas and twisted minds. He will face stiff resistance by falsehood and its exponents, all of whom will defend their positions aggressively. No one can withstand this except a believer who looks at an existence that is greater than this life, bigger than the earth and everlasting.

Earthly standards and values do not represent truth that should be established in a believer's consciousness. In relation to the truth, earthly standards and values are as small as the earth in relation to the universe, and as short as the earth's lifespan to immortality. The difference is simply immeasurable by any earthly standard.

Thus a believer who looks up to the great horizon of the truth rises above the trifling reality of this earth, no matter how large or extensive it appears. Instead, he deals with this great immortal truth, one that belongs to the life to come, and he upholds the values of faith that cannot be swayed by any thing. Such is the role of faith in the life of its advocates.

The Will That Will Be Done

The *sūrah* now adds a profound note about God's will, which will always be done:

No incident can take place, either on earth or in yourselves, unless it be recorded in a decree before We bring it into being – that is easy for God – so you need not grieve for what you miss or be overjoyed at what you gain. God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; [nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly. Those who turn away should remember that God alone is self-sufficient, worthy of praise. (Verses 22–24)

This universe is so perfectly designed that nothing happens in it unless it has been preordained and pre-planned. Nothing occurs as a

result of coincidence or blind accident. Prior to the creation of the earth and those who live and have lived on it, God's perfect and accurate knowledge encompassed every happening seen at its appropriate time. As far as God's knowledge is concerned, there is no past, present or future. Such time demarcations serve a purpose for us, who are mortal, so as to put things within suitable frameworks. We cannot comprehend and distinguish things without limits. In particular, humans need time and place limits. We cannot go beyond these to touch the absolute except in certain flashes when our spirit receives such contact in some way other than that which we normally use to comprehend what is around us. God Almighty is the absolute truth who looks at life and existence in its totality, without boundaries, limits or restraints. This universe, its events and the stages it goes through from its beginning to its end exists in God's knowledge as one complete whole, with no limits or separations of time and place. Every event has its place in an overall design known only to God. Every incident, good or bad, occurring in any part of the earth or to people generally or those addressed at the time of the *sūrah's* revelation in particular, is entered in that eternal record prior to the earth's creation or people in the form they have been created in: "*That is easy for God.*" (Verse 22)

When our minds contemplate the great truth of existence, we realize that this is the inevitable fact resulting from it. Hence, it gives us peace and reassurance about whatever may happen, good or bad. Thus, we are not overwhelmed with grief when suffering terrible misfortune, nor are we too overjoyed with life's pleasantries: "*So you need not grieve for what you miss or be overjoyed at what you gain.*" (Verse 23) When we look with a broad perspective, remember eternity, and see events in their respective positions as defined in the design of the universe and determined by God's knowledge, this gives us a steadier outlook on passing events. Man panics when he separates himself from the universe and looks at events as though they are accidents that collide with his own small existence. Conversely, when he realizes fully that he and the events that occur to him or to anyone else or to the whole earth are merely molecules in a great body, which is the universe, and that these molecules are all in their right positions in this perfect design, and that they are all mutually complementary, he feels reassured and comfortable. He does not grieve

for what he has missed, nor is he overly joyed with what he gains. He accepts God's will with comfort, realizing that what takes place is what actually should take place.

This is a level to which only the elite few can rise. Other believers are only required not to let their feelings of grief at misfortune or joy at good fortune take them away from their duty to remember God in both situations, attributing everything to Him. They must moderate their feelings in either case. 'Ikrimah says: "Everyone experiences joy and sorrow. Therefore, make your joy an occasion for thanksgiving and your sorrow one for showing patience." Such is the balanced attitude Islam encourages.

"God does not love those who are arrogant and boastful; [nor] those who are niggardly and bid others to be niggardly." (Verses 23–24) The link between what we have been discussing and arrogance and boastfulness on the one hand, and being niggardly and encouraging niggardliness on the other, is that a person who truly feels that whatever befalls him, good or bad, comes from God will not show any of these feelings. It is the one who does not feel this that thinks that the wealth, position or honour he has is of his own making and, therefore, he boasts and behaves arrogantly. He is the one who then becomes niggardly, unwilling to give away any of what he has. He also encourages others to be similarly niggardly in a demonstration that his is the right approach.

"Those who turn away should remember that God alone is self-sufficient, worthy of praise." (Verse 24) When a person spends money in charity, he does so to his own good; when he responds to God's call, he serves his own interest. God needs none of His creatures. He is worthy of all praise, but in need of none.

Far Back in History

The third part of the *sūrah* briefly outlines the history of the divine message, starting with Noah and Abraham. It states its aims and objectives in people's lives, referring briefly to the conditions of the people of earlier revelations, particularly those who followed Jesus (peace be upon him).

We sent Our messengers with clear evidence of the truth, and through them We bestowed the book from on high, setting the balance, so that people could uphold justice. We have also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind. Thus God may mark out those who would stand up for Him and His messengers, even though He is beyond the reach of human perception. God is indeed powerful, almighty. And We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and revelation to their descendants. Among them there are some who were rightly guided, but many who were transgressors. We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After these We sent Jesus, son of Mary. We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who truly follow him. As for monastic asceticism, We did not enjoin it upon them. They invented it themselves out of a desire for God's goodly acceptance. Even so, they did not observe it as it should properly be observed. So We gave those of them who truly believed their due reward, but many of them were transgressors. (Verses 25–27)

In essence, the divine message is the same. All messengers preached it, equipped with clear evidence of the truth it teaches. Most of them were also given miracles of a preternatural kind. Some were given books of scripture. In reference to this, the *sūrah* says, '*through them We bestowed the book from on high,*' making them all one unit in the same way as all divine revelations are one. This confirms the unity of the divine message. The divine message also sets '*the balance,*' because all divine messages were given to establish a proper balance in human life to which people should refer in their evaluation of actions, events, people, indeed in everything. It is this balance that keeps human life safe from conflicting desires and interests that pull in different directions. The balance does not give special favour to anyone because it works for all on the basis of divine truth. It does no injustice to anyone because God is the Lord of all.

This balance or standard bestowed by God is the only guarantee of safety for humanity in the midst of tempests, earthquakes and other turmoil that overwhelms it as it finds itself in the middle of an ocean of conflicting desires and sentiments, competition and selfishness. Hence it is imperative that people should have an accurately balanced and

steady standard that points them to the truth, justice and fairness with no favouritism whatsoever. The purpose of this balance, then, is "*that people could uphold justice.*" (Verse 25) This accurate balance that is an essential part of divine law is indispensable. Without it, people would not be able to recognize justice. Even if they recognized it, it would not remain steady and consistent in their hands.

"*We have also sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind. Thus God may mark out those who would stand up for Him and His messengers, even though He is beyond the reach of human perception.*" (Verse 25) The phrase, '*We have also sent down iron,*' is similar to the statement, '*He has bestowed on you four kinds of cattle in pairs.*' (39: 6) Both refer to God's will and planning as He creates things and events. Thus, they are all sent down, or bestowed from on high, by God's will and wisdom. Use here of the expression '*sent down*' in reference to iron ensures harmony within the verse which speaks of sending down, or bestowing from on high, the book setting the balance. Likewise, everything God creates is according to His accurate planning.

So, God has sent down iron which gives strength in war and peace. In addition to its '*mighty strength*', iron provides '*diverse uses for mankind.*' Indeed the present human civilization is based primarily on iron and its uses. "*Thus God may mark out those who would stand up for Him and His messengers, even though He is beyond the reach of human perception.*" (Verse 25) This is a reference to using arms in *Jihād*, or striving for God's cause. This is the appropriate place to refer to such striving in the *sūrah* that speaks of sacrifice of life and property for God's cause. The comment at the end of the verse explains the meaning of people '*standing up*' for Him and His messengers. It means standing up for and advocating His message. God Himself is in no need of support from any quarter: "*God is indeed powerful, almighty.*" (Verse 25)

The *sūrah* then speaks of the unity of the divine message in the men who advocated it, i.e. His messengers. They are all descendants of Noah and Abraham. "*And We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and revelation to their descendants.*" (Verse 26) They form a single tree, with interlinked branches stretching wide, bearing prophethood and receiving divine revelations, stretching from the dawn of humanity at the time of Noah. When it reached the time of Abraham, it branched

out further. Thus all prophethood belonged to that main branch that has become a root in its own right.

The offspring to whom prophets and messengers were sent were not of the same type: “*Among them there are some who were rightly guided, but many who were transgressors.*” (Verse 26) Towards the end of the line, Jesus was sent with his message: “*We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After these We sent Jesus, son of Mary.*” (Verse 27) He followed in the footsteps of earlier messengers from among the descendants of Noah and Abraham, making the divine message a continuous chain, with one coming after another, up to Jesus’ own time.

At this point, the *sūrah* mentions a prominent characteristic of those who followed Jesus: “*We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who truly follow him.*” (Verse 27) These are the natural fruits of his message that emphasizes spiritual purity. Indeed such compassion and mercy are clearly noticed among those who truly believe in Jesus’ message and who properly follow him. Other verses in the Qur’ān refer to these qualities. History has given us some images of these, with reports about Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, and the Christian delegation from Najran who came to the city of Islam willing to accept it, motivated by the truth established in their hearts, since they truly followed Jesus, son of Mary.

The *sūrah* mentions another phenomenon that prevailed among the followers of Jesus: “*As for monastic asceticism, We did not enjoin it upon them. They invented it themselves out of a desire for God’s goodly acceptance.*” (Verse 27) The weightier explanation of this statement is that monastic asceticism, well known in Christian history, was a personal choice, an invention made by some of Jesus’ followers who sought to win God’s acceptance. Through it, they sought to steer themselves away from the burdens of this life and its many attractions. It was not something that God imposed on them in the first place. Yet when they made this choice, binding themselves to it, they were committed before God to observe its requirements such as purity, contentment, chastity, worship and piety; this so as to dedicate themselves to God’s cause. However, such asceticism lost its grip on reality, and ended up as mere rituals devoid of spirituality. Many are those who make a show of it, without real substance. The fact is that only the very few are capable of rigorously

fulfilling its requirements: “*Even so, they did not observe it as it should properly be observed. So We gave those of them who truly believed their due reward, but many of them were transgressors.* (Verse 27) God does not value people by appearances and rituals; He assigns their value on the basis of their actions and intentions. He holds them to account on the basis of what they truly feel and how they actually conduct themselves. He alone knows the reality of what they harbour in their hearts.

Twice the Mercy

Now, the *sūrah* makes its final address to the believers in Islam. They are the last chain of believers in the divine message in its long history. They will continue to be the custodians of the heritage of this divine message until the Day of Judgement:

Believers, remain God-fearing and believe in His Messenger. He will then give you a double measure of His mercy, and will provide you with a light to walk in, and will forgive you. God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. The people of earlier revelations should know that they have no power whatever over any of God's bounty. All bounty is in God's hand: He grants it to whomever He wills. God's bounty is limitless. (Verses 28–29)

Addressing them as ‘believers’ touches their hearts tenderly. It arouses in them their sense of belief and reminds them of their duty to give their faith its due. It brings alive their bond with their Lord who addresses them by this quality that is so dear to them. It is on the basis of this bond that they are called upon to be God-fearing and to believe in His Messenger. Thus, such belief possesses a special meaning, one that reflects true faith and all its practical manifestations.

“*Believers, remain God-fearing and believe in His Messenger. He will then give you a double measure of His mercy.*” (Verse 28) This is an unusual expression speaking of a double measure of God's mercy, which is indivisible. It is enough that God's mercy should touch a person for that person to receive it in full. The wording here gives a feeling of extended mercy and kindness.

“*And will provide you with a light to walk in.*” (Verse 28) This is a reference to a divine gift which God bestows on hearts that are truly conscious of Him, fear Him, and truly believe in His Messenger. This gift makes those hearts beam with light so as to see the truth, see beyond appearances shedding the covers and barriers that try to screen it. Thus, they are not prone to confusion, nor do they follow divergent ways. They have the ‘*light to walk in.*’ “*And will forgive you. God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful.*” (Verse 28) No matter how much light a person has, he remains human: he may slip despite knowing the way. Hence, he needs God’s forgiveness and mercy.

“*Believers, remain God-fearing and believe in His Messenger,*” so that you may receive a double measure of His mercy, be granted light to walk in, and benefit by God’s mercy when you slip or fail in your duty. “*The people of earlier revelations should know that they have no power whatever over any of God’s bounty. All bounty is in God’s hand: He grants it to whomever He wills.*” (Verse 29) Peoples of earlier revelations claim that they are God’s chosen people, or that they are God’s sons and beloved ones. “*They say, ‘Follow the Jewish faith – or, follow the Christian faith – and you shall be rightly guided.’*” (2: 135) “*They declare, ‘None shall enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.’*” (2: 111) God, therefore, calls on believers to act so that they become well deserving of His mercy, forgiveness and admittance to His heaven. In this way, those people of earlier religions will realize that they cannot monopolize God’s bounty or even a measure of it. It is all in His hands, and He grants it to whomever He wills. His bounty is not reserved for any community or group, nor is it limited or scanty. Indeed, “*God’s bounty is limitless.*” (Verse 29)

The *sūrah* concludes with this address to the believers that is full of encouragement to compete for the great prize of God’s mercy and heaven. It is a fitting conclusion to a *sūrah* that repeatedly calls on believers to fulfil the requirements of their faith, humble themselves before God and make the necessary sacrifices of self and property, in complete dedication to Him.

In conclusion, we say that this *sūrah* is a clear example of the Qur’ānic method of addressing human hearts in a profound and effective way. In its opening, flow and conclusion, in its music, images and connotations, in its handling of its subject matter and how it develops it stage after

stage, the *sūrah* provides a highly effective lesson to advocates of the divine message. It teaches them how to address people and how to bring human nature and hearts alive. It is a lesson taught by the Maker of hearts, the author of the Qur'ān, and the Creator of everything in due measure. It is from this school that successful advocates of God's message graduate.



SŪRAH 58

Al-Mujādalah

(The Pleading)

Prologue

In this *sūrah*, as in several that follow, we are invited to witness some of the events that the first Islamic society experienced as it began to take shape in Madīnah. In this way, we see how it was moulded and prepared to undertake its role in the world. It was a huge undertaking, starting with the development of a new, complete and comprehensive concept of life that continues to serve as the basis for how the Muslim community conducts its practical affairs. That first Muslim community, however, was to present this concept to the world; it was its responsibility to establish a new foundation for life based on this concept.

That first Muslim community, which was being prepared for this great role, consisted of ordinary human beings. Its elite were the Muhājirīn and Anṣār whose concept of their new faith had matured and who now dedicated themselves to it completely. They understood the truth of their existence as part of the existence of the universe. Thus, they realized that they were part of God's will manifested in the universe. They neither deviated from it nor lagged behind in their march with it. They were, in fact, as they are described in the last verse of the *sūrah*: "*You shall not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day on friendly terms with those who contend against God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or kindred. These are the people in whose*

hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with a spirit of His own. He will admit them into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide. Well pleased is God with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. It is the partisans of God that will be truly successful." (Verse 22)

This elite group formed a minority in the ever-increasing numbers that swelled the Muslim community's ranks, particularly after it came to be held in awe, and this before Makkah had fallen to Islam. People flocked to the Muslim community but without having received enough Islamic education or having lived long enough in an Islamic environment. Moreover, hypocrites found their way into the Muslim community, trying to serve their own interests or avoid personal trouble. These vacillated between the Muslim community and its still powerful opponents, whether idolaters or Jews.

To educate this community in preparation for its great and important role in the world at large required strenuous effort, patience and slow but sure treatment in small and serious matters alike. All in all, it was a major social engineering project that Islam and the Prophet undertook. It sought to build individuals who could establish an Islamic society and an Islamic state based on the divine constitution. Each person had to understand this code of living, implement it and carry it to the world at large in the form of a vibrant society. It was not therefore a mere theory devoid of substance.

In this *sūrah*, and several *sūrahs* that follow, we are shown some practical examples of this great endeavour as well as some aspects of the Qur'ānic method of building the Islamic character and dealing with events, personal whims and habits. We also see some aspects of the long conflict between Islam and its opponents: Jews, idolaters and hypocrites.

This *sūrah* in particular gives us an inspiring image of the care God took of this fledgling Muslim community as He provided it with a sound education and purged its unwanted streaks, developing His presence within its consciousness. He showed the Muslim community that He was with them looking after even their most private affairs and minor events, protecting it from its enemies' schemes, whether subtle or apparent. God had placed it fully under His care and, therefore, He moulded

its morality, manners, habits and traditions. Those Muslims formed His party in human society and they carried His banner, identifying themselves as His people on earth.

Thus the *sūrah* draws right at the start a picture from that unique period of human history, characterized by direct contact between heaven and earth, and with heaven's direct involvement in the daily life of this particular group of people: "*God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all.*" (Verse 1) What we see here is the involvement of heaven, providing judgment, in the ordinary affair of a small, poor family. God listened to the woman's argument as she pleaded with the Prophet, yet 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife who was nearby, could hardly hear her. This picture fills us with the pleasure of feeling God to be near us, taking care of our concerns.

The *sūrah* then confirms that those who contend with God and His Messenger, i.e. enemies of the Muslim community, are destined to be the losers on earth and to endure humiliating suffering in the life to come. They will be punished for their evil deeds which God reckons but they forget, even though these are their own deeds: "*God is witness to all things.*" (Verse 6)

This is followed by a reminder that God is present when any group of people, three or more, engage in secret discussion, thinking that they are totally unobserved. God is with them wherever they happen to be: "*On the Day of Resurrection He will tell them the truth of what they used to do. God has full knowledge of everything.*" (Verse 7) Our feelings of God's presence are here enhanced by the realization that He is fully aware of all that takes place.

This reminder of God's presence serves as preparation for the warning issued to those who in their secret conversations conspire to harm the Muslims and cause them grief. They are warned that God sees all their scheming and records all their conspiring. He knows what they intend of sin, aggression and disobedience of God's Messenger. They are told that God will take them to account for all this. He will punish them as they deserve to be punished. The Muslims are also issued with a command not to speak in secret about anything that is in conflict with righteousness and God-consciousness.

The *sūrah* continues with its purpose of educating the Muslim community, urging the believers to adopt good and friendly manners, showing their obedience, when they attend the Prophet's circle or any circle of study or worship. It lays down some rules for discussion with the Prophet, highlighting the seriousness of such discussion.

The remainder of the *sūrah* speaks about the hypocrites who befriend the Jews and conspire with them, and who then try to conceal this with false swearing before the Prophet and the Muslim community. It depicts an image of them in the life to come when they are also quick to repeat their false oaths, trying thus to avoid God's punishment. They think that since their swearing in this world spared them the anger of the Prophet and his followers, it may spare them God's anger on the Day of Resurrection. The *sūrah* re-emphasizes that those who contend with God and His Messenger are the ones to suffer humiliation; they are the losers. This is something that God has decreed, just as He decreed that He and His messengers will prevail. This is stated in order to show the weakness of any hostile position. Yet at the time, some Muslims thought such people to be too strong and tried to maintain good relations with them. They did not realize the importance of the Muslim community having an independent stand under God's banner, and feeling safe under His care.

As the *sūrah* draws to its end, it paints a bright picture of God's party, represented at that time by the elite community of Muhājirīn and Anṣār. This is the situation that the Qur'an wants the Muslim community to end up with.



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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all. (1)

قَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّتِي تُجَادِلُكَ فِي زَوْجِهَا
وَتَشْتَكِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَسْمَعُ تَحَاوُرَكُمَا
إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

Even if any of you say to your wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not your mothers; their only mothers are those who gave them birth. What they say is iniquitous and false. Yet God pardons and forgives. (2)

الَّذِينَ يُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ
مَا هُنَّ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ إِنْ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ إِلَّا الَّتِي
وَلَدْنَهُمْ وَأُمَّهَاتُهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ مِنْكُمْ كَرًا
مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَزُورًا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُوفٌ
غَفُورٌ ﴿٢﴾

Those who separate themselves from their wives by saying, 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother,' and then go back on what they have said, must atone by freeing a slave before the couple may resume their full marital relation. This is an admonition to you, and God is fully aware of all that you do. (3)

وَالَّذِينَ يُظَاهِرُونَ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ ثُمَّ
يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُوا فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ
مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَتَمَاسًا ذَلِكَ كُرْهُ
تَوْعُظُونَ بِهِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ ﴿٣﴾

However, he who does not have the means shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may resume their full marital relation; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy people; this, so that you may prove your faith in God and His Messenger. Such are the bounds set by God. Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe. (4)

Those who contend against God and His Messenger shall be brought low as those who lived before them were brought low. We have bestowed from on high clear revelations. Shameful suffering awaits the unbelievers (5)

on the day when God will raise them all from the dead and tell them exactly all that they did in life. God will have taken it all into account, even though they may have forgotten it. God is witness to all things. (6)

Are you not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth? Never can a secret conversation take place between three people where He is not the fourth; nor between five where He is

فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامَ شَهْرَيْنِ مُتَتَابِعَيْنِ
مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَتَمَاسَا فَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ
فَأِطْعَامَ سِتِّينَ مِسْكِينًا ذَلِكَ لِتُؤْمِنُوا
بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ
وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٤﴾

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحَادِّثُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ كِتُوبًا
كَكَاتِبَاتِ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا
آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ
مُهِينٌ ﴿٥﴾

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ
بِمَا عَمِلُوا أَحْصَاهُ اللَّهُ وَنَسُوهُ
وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٦﴾

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى
ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ

not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them, wherever they may be. On the Day of Resurrection He will tell them the truth of what they used to do. God has full knowledge of everything. (7)

Have you not seen how those that have been forbidden to hold secret conversations still revert to what they have been forbidden? They conspire with one another with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience of God's Messenger. When these people come to you they greet you with words God does not use to greet you. They say to themselves, 'Why does God not punish us for what we say?' Hell will be punishment enough for them. They will burn there. How vile a journey's end! (8)

Believers, when you converse in secret, do not do so with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience of God's Messenger, but rather hold counsel to promote righteousness and God-consciousness. Always remain God-fearing; to Him you will be gathered. (9)

سَادِ سُهُمٌ وَلَا آدَىٰ مِنْ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرُ
إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا ثُمَّ يَنْتَقِبُهُمْ
يَوْمَ يَعْمَلُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ
عَلِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

الَّذِينَ تَرَىٰ إِلَى الَّذِينَ نُهَوُا عَنِ النَّجْوَىٰ ثُمَّ
يَعُودُونَ لِمَا نُهَوُا عَنْهُ وَيَتَنَجَّوْنَ
بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَمَعْصِيَتِ
الرَّسُولِ وَإِذَا جَاءُوكَ حِيَّوْكَ بِمَا لَمْ
يُحِبَّكَ بِهِ اللَّهُ وَيَقُولُونَ فِي
أَنْفُسِهِمْ لَوْلَا يُعَذِّبُنَا اللَّهُ بِمَا نَقُولُ
حَسْبُكُمْ جَهَنَّمُ يَصَلُّونَهَا فَيَنْسُ
الْمُصِيبِ ﴿٨﴾

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا تَنَجَّيْتُمْ فَلَا تَنَجَّوْا
بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَمَعْصِيَتِ الرَّسُولِ
وَتَنَجَّوْا بِالْبِرِّ وَالْتَّقْوَىٰ وَأَنْقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي
إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

[All other kinds of] secret conversation is the work of Satan, designed to cause grief to the believers. Yet he cannot harm them in the least, unless it be by God's leave. In God, then, let the believers place their trust. (10)

إِنَّمَا النَّجْوَى مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ لِيَحْزُنَ
الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَلَيْسَ بِضَارِّهِمْ شَيْئًا
إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

Believers, when you are told to make room for one another in your gatherings, then do so, and God will make room for you. If you are told to rise up, then do so. God will elevate, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge. God is fully aware of all that you do. (11)

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ
تَفَسَّحُوا فَاذْهَبُوا فَتَفَسَّحُوا
فَأَنْشُرُوا وَإِذَا قِيلَ أَنْشُرُوا
فَأَنْشُرُوا يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا
مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ
وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

Believers, when you wish to speak to God's Messenger in private, offer something in charity before you speak to him. That is better for you and more conducive to purity. If you do not have the means, God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. (12)

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا نَجَّيْتُمُ الرَّسُولَ
فَقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ جُحُودِكُمْ صَدَقَةً ذَلِكَ
خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Do you hesitate to offer charity before you speak with the Prophet? Since you did not offer charity, and God has turned to you in His mercy, attend regularly to prayer and pay your *zakāt* [i.e. obligatory charity] and obey God and His Messenger. God is well aware of your actions. (13)

مَا أَشْفَقْتُمْ أَنْ تُقَدِّمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ جُحُودِكُمْ
صَدَقَةً فَإِذَا لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَتَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ
فَأَقِمْوُا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِيعُوا
اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

Have you not seen those who would be friends with people who have incurred God's anger? They belong neither to you nor to them. They knowingly swear to falsehood. (14)

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ تَوَلَّوْا قَوْمًا غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مَا هُمْ مِنْكُمْ وَلَا مِنْهُمْ وَيَحْلِفُونَ عَلَى الْكَذِبِ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

God has prepared for them grievous suffering. Evil indeed is what they do. (15)

أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا إِنَّهُمْ سَاءَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

They use their oaths as a cover [for their falseness], and they turn people away from the path of God. Hence, shameful suffering awaits them. (16)

أَتَّخَذُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ جُنَّةً فَصَدُّوا عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿١٦﴾

Neither their wealth nor their children will be of the least avail to them against God. They are destined for the fire, where they will abide. (17)

لَنْ نُنْفِئَهُمْ مِنْهُمُ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

On the day when God will raise them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear now before you, thinking that they have something to stand upon. It is they who are indeed liars. (18)

يَوْمَ يَبْعَثُهُمُ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا فَيَحْلِفُونَ لَهُ كَمَا يَحْلِفُونَ لَكَ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ عَلَى شَيْءٍ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

Satan has gained mastery over them and thus caused them to remain oblivious of the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. It is the partisans of Satan who will truly be the losers. (19)

اسْتَعْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخٰسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Those who contend against God and His Messenger will be among the most abject. (20)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَحَادُّونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ
فِي الْأَذَلِّينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

God has thus ordained: 'I shall most certainly prevail, I and My messengers.' God is indeed powerful, almighty. (21)

كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَغْلِبَنَّ أَنَا وَرُسُلِي ۗ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢١﴾

You shall not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day on friendly terms with those who contend against God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or kindred. These are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with a spirit of His own. He will admit them into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide. Well pleased is God with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. It is the partisans of God that will be truly successful. (22)

لَا يَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ
وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ
أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ
عَشِيرَتَهُمْ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي
قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُمْ
بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ
تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ
فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ
أُولَٰئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ
اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

A Personal Case in Dispute

God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all. Even if any of you say to your wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not your mothers;

their only mothers are those who gave them birth. What they say is iniquitous and false. Yet God pardons and forgives. Those who separate themselves from their wives by saying, 'You are as unlawful to me as my mother,' and then go back on what they have said, must atone by freeing a slave before the couple may resume their full marital relation. This is an admonition to you, and God is fully aware of all that you do. However, he who does not have the means shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may resume their full marital relation; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy people; this, so that you may prove your faith in God and His Messenger. Such are the bounds set by God. Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe. (Verses 1-4)

In pre-Islamic days, a man who became angry with his wife might say to her, "You are to me like the back of my mother", and thereafter she was forbidden to him. She was not divorced however, but rather in a state of suspense. She could neither have normal marital relations with her husband nor be free to find some other arrangement for herself. This was yet another aspect of the unfair treatment of women in pre-Islamic Arabia.

These verses speak of one such event that took place before the ruling on this problem, known as *zihār*,¹ had been laid down. The details of the case are related in the following *hadīth* quoting the woman at the centre of the case, Khuwaylah bint Tha'labah:

It was concerning me and Aws ibn al-Ṣāmit that God revealed the opening verses of the *sūrah*, The Pleading. I was married to him and he had grown old, with a quick temper. He came in one day and I questioned something he had said. He was angry as a result and said to me, 'You are to me like my mother's back'. He then went out and sat with his people for some time. He came back later and he indicated that he wanted to have sex. I said: "In no way! By Him who holds Khuwaylah's soul in His hand, you cannot approach me

1. The word *zihār* is derived from *zahr*, which means 'back', in reference to the formula used in these cases when a man would tell his wife that she was to him as unlawful as his mother's back. – Editor's note.

when you have said what you said until God and His Messenger have ruled in our case. He tried to force me, but I overpowered him in the way a woman can overpower a weak old man. I left him and went to one of my neighbours to borrow a dress from her.

I went to the Prophet and sat in front of him. I told him what had happened and complained strongly about my husband's bad manners. The Prophet said to me: "Khuwaylah! Your cousin is an old man; so be kind and God-fearing in your treatment of him." Before I left, revelations were bestowed from on high concerning me. The Prophet experienced what he usually experienced when revelations were given to him. Then he came to and said: "Khuwaylah! God has revealed Qur'ānic verses concerning you and your mate." He then read to me the verses starting with "*God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all,*" up to "*grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe.*"

The Prophet then said to me: "Tell him to free a slave." I said: "Messenger of God! He does not have the means to do so." He said: "Then let him fast two consecutive months." I said: "He is certainly an old man who cannot fast." He said: "He should then feed sixty poor people with a *wisq*² of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! By God, he cannot afford that." The Prophet then said: "We will help him, then, with a sack of dates." I said: "Messenger of God! I, too, will help him with another sack." The Prophet said: "That is good and kind of you. Go and give this to charity on his behalf, and take good care of your cousin." I did as the Prophet told me. [Related by Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.]

This, then, is the case of the woman whose argument with the Prophet God in His majesty heard and listened to. It is on the basis of this case that God pronounced His ruling from on high, giving this woman her right so that she and her husband could be free of worry. He thus showed the Muslims what to do if such a family problem occurred.

2. A *wisq* is a measure of volume estimated to weigh about 130 kilogrammes of wheat. – Editor's note.

This is the personal situation that opens a *sūrah* of the Qur'ān, God's book, whose words are echoed by the universe as they are bestowed from on high. It opens with the statement, '*God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband...*' We see here that God is present in this private case of a woman who is a mere individual in the community at large. God is not so preoccupied with conducting the affairs of the universe as not to listen to an individual's case and give His ruling on it.

It was indeed a serious matter that such an event should take place and that a community of people should feel that God was present with them as they went about their daily business. He, in His majesty, the Supreme, the Overpowering, to whom belong the heavens and the earth, responds to such ordinary problems; how compassionately overwhelming!

Ā'ishah says: "All praise is due to God who hears all sounds. The pleading woman, Khawlah, came to the Prophet and spoke to him in a corner of my home. I could not hear what she said. Then God revealed that '*God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband...*'" [Related by al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā'ī.]

As given by Khawlah – or Khuwaylah, which is a form of endearment – this report and how she went to the Prophet and argued with him, then the verdict given in the Qur'ān gives us a picture of the life of this unique community during that amazing period of history. People in that community felt their direct bond with heaven and awaited directives from on high regarding its ordinary affairs. The response was soon forthcoming, often given as people were waiting. Thus the whole community felt that they were God's dependents: He took care of them and they looked for His care just as young children expect to be cared for by their parents.

Education Through Practice

When we look at the Qur'ānic report of this case, we cannot miss that elements of education and guidance are given side by side with the verdict and the comment on it. This is the usual method of the Qur'ān, providing all that is necessary.

“God has heard the words of the woman who pleads with you concerning her husband, and complained to God. God has heard what you both had to say. God hears all and sees all.” (Verse 1) This is an amazing opening that says, you have not been alone; God was present, listening to you. He heard what the woman said, pleading with you and complaining to Him. He already knew the whole story and was fully aware of what discussion had taken place. He hears all and sees all. In this highly inspiring way the Qur'ān presents all that occurred but without the involvement of a third party.

The *sūrah* then states the principle that governs such cases: *“Even if any of you say to your wives, ‘You are to me like my mother’s back,’ they are not your mothers; their only mothers are those who gave them birth. What they say is iniquitous and false. Yet God pardons and forgives.”* (Verse 2) This deals with the case in its entirety. *Zihār* does not rely on any solid basis. A wife is not a mother so as to become forbidden like one. Somebody’s mother is the woman that gave birth to that person. A wife cannot become a mother at the utterance of a word or a few words. Such a statement lacks all substance, it is utter nonsense. In life, all relations should be based on what is true, clear and solid so as to prevent any muddle or confusion. *“Yet God pardons and forgives”* what has passed of such incidents.

Having laid down the principle so clearly, the verdict is stated in detail: *“Those who separate themselves from their wives by saying, ‘You are as unlawful to me as my mother,’ and then go back on what they have said, must atone by freeing a slave before the couple may resume their full marital relation. This is an admonition to you, and God is fully aware of all that you do.”* (Verse 3) God has made freeing a slave a way of atonement for various offences. This is one way Islam freed those who had fallen into slavery in consequence of the system prevalent at the time, which allowed for the enslavement of prisoners of war. Various views have been stated with regard to the phrase, *“then go back on what they have said.”* We choose the view that says that they resume marital relations which they had earlier forbidden themselves by *zihār*. The freeing of a slave should occur before it becomes permissible for them to so go back. A comment is added here: *“This is an admonition to you.”* (Verse 3) The atonement required is an admonition and a warning against reverting

to this totally unacceptable practice. “*God is fully aware of all that you do.*” (Verse 3) He knows its nature, how it happens and your intention in doing it.

This comment is given before the verdict is completed. It serves to keep hearts alert and to strengthen discipline, reminding people of God’s authority and His knowledge of whatever is apparent or concealed. The *sūrah* then states: “*However, he who does not have the means shall fast instead for two consecutive months before the couple may resume their full marital relation; and he who is unable to do it shall feed sixty needy people.*” (Verse 4) This is followed by a comment and a directive: “*This, so that you may prove your faith in God and His Messenger.*” (Verse 4) These people were indeed believers. However, this clarification and these penalties provide a direct link between their affairs and God’s order. This makes belief operative in ordinary life, giving faith real authority in society. “*Such are the bounds set by God.*” (Verse 4) He has set these bounds so that people will not transgress them. He is also angry with those who do not observe these bounds. “*Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe,*” because of their transgression, lack of faith and going beyond the limits He has defined.

In Contention Against God

The last sentence in the verse, ‘*Grievous suffering awaits those who will not believe,*’ is certainly a fitting ending as it completes the discussion of the woman’s situation, while also providing a bridge to the theme of the next verse that speaks about those who contend against God and His Messenger. This is characteristic of the superb Qur’ānic method as it smoothly moves from one theme to another:

Those who contend against God and His Messenger shall be brought low as those who lived before them were brought low. We have bestowed from on high clear revelations. Shameful suffering awaits the unbelievers on the day when God will raise them all from the dead and tell them exactly all that they did in life. God will have taken it all into account, even though they may have forgotten it. God is witness to all things.
(Verses 5–6)

The opening passage of the *sūrah* provided an aspect of the care shown to the Muslim community, while this second passage provides an aspect of antagonism to the opposite group who contend against God and His Messenger. The Arabic term, *yuhāddūn*, translated here as 'contend' is derived from the same root as the word used earlier, *hudūd*, which means 'boundaries'. Thus, this group are defined as taking a stand at the other boundary, confronting God and His Messenger. This gives an image of two parties in contention and confrontation. As such, it serves to show their action in a very bad light. How miserable for a creature to be in open hostility to his Creator when it is He who provides him with sustenance.

These people who are in contention "*shall be brought low as those who lived before them were brought low.*" The way this sentence is phrased in Arabic may be understood as a prayer against them. A prayer by God is a sentence of judgement that makes it inevitable since it is He who pronounces this sentence, and His will is always done. The phrase, '*those who lived before them,*' refers either to earlier communities who were punished by God, or to the then unbelievers who suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of the Muslims prior to the revelation of this *sūrah*, as happened, for example, at the Battle of Badr.

"*We have bestowed from on high clear revelations.*" This sentence separates the two fates suffered by the unbelievers in this life and in the life to come, in order to point out that both fates are clearly stated in these verses. It also tells us that these unbelievers do not face these fates as a result of ignorance or any ambiguity in the truth. Indeed, the truth has been put to them clearly and lucidly in these revelations, which they too have been given.

As the *sūrah* refers to their fate in the hereafter, it adds an inspiring comment that serves an educational purpose: "*Shameful suffering awaits the unbelievers on the day when God will raise them all from the dead and tell them exactly all that they did in life. God will have taken it all into account, even though they may have forgotten it. God is witness to all things.*" (Verses 5–6) They are made to suffer shame in punishment for their arrogance. This shameful suffering will take place on the day when all will be resurrected. Thus, it will be seen by all. Besides, the suffering is determined on the basis of a true account of their deeds. If they have

forgotten these, God has recorded them all, as nothing escapes His knowledge: “*God is witness to all things.*”

The opposite cases of care and antagonism take place in God’s presence and with His knowledge. He witnesses the help and care granted to the believers as well as the hostility shown to the other group. The believers should be reassured by His presence, while the unbelievers should take heed.

Whispers and Conspiracies

The *sūrah* then portrays God’s presence in an inspiring image that leaves a telling effect on our hearts:

Are you not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth? Never can a secret conversation take place between three people where He is not the fourth; nor between five where He is not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them, wherever they may be. On the Day of Resurrection He will tell them the truth of what they used to do. God has full knowledge of everything. (Verse 7)

The verse begins by stating God’s knowledge that takes in everything in the heavens and earth. Our imagination is left to roam across the wide horizons and the remote corners of the earth, drawing a picture of this knowledge that leaves out nothing large or small, apparent or hidden, in this vast universe. It then draws gradually closer touching its addressees’ hearts, presenting an image of God’s knowledge that shakes them strongly: “*Never can a secret conversation take place between three people where He is not the fourth; nor between five where He is not the sixth, nor between less or more than that without Him being with them, wherever they may be.*” (Verse 7)

This is a true statement, but it is expressed in a profoundly effective way. It leaves our hearts with two contrasting feelings, trembling with awe on the one hand and reassured on the other as we amazedly feel the friendly presence of the Almighty. Thus, wherever three people meet in secret they feel that God is their fourth, and if they are five, they

realize that He is their sixth. Indeed, wherever two people whisper in secret, God is with them as He is with any larger group. Whenever we contemplate this image we are overwhelmed with awe. It is true that God's presence gives us a feeling of friendly reassurance, but it is at the same time very awesome. It is the Almighty who is present "*wherever they may be.*"

"*On the Day of Resurrection He will tell them the truth of what they used to do.*" (Verse 7) This statement sends a shudder of fear into people's hearts. The mere presence of God and His hearing of all conversations is ominous. Now they look at the consequences of this presence in the form of punishment. What happens when that which people say in secret is publicized in the presence of all on the Day of Resurrection, when all mankind of all generations are witnesses!

The verse ends in the same way as it started, giving a general image: "*God has full knowledge of everything.*" (Verse 7) Thus the notion of God's full and comprehensive knowledge, which is stated in various ways in this verse, is driven home to everyone. This inevitably leaves a profound effect on our hearts and minds.

This awesome picture of God's knowledge serves as an introduction to a warning issued to the hypocrites who held secret conversations, conspiring against the Prophet and the Muslim community in Madinah:

Have you not seen how those that have been forbidden to hold secret conversations still revert to what they have been forbidden? They conspire with one another with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience of God's Messenger. When these people come to you they greet you with words God does not use to greet you. They say to themselves, 'Why does God not punish us for what we say?' Hell will be punishment enough for them. They will burn there. How vile a journey's end! (Verse 8)

The verse suggests that the Prophet's initial policy in dealing with the hypocrites was to advise them to be clear and sincere in their attitude, and to stop conspiring with the Jews against Islam. Yet still they persisted in their deviant ways, scheming against the Muslim community, trying in every way possible to disobey the Prophet and cause disruption.

The verse also suggests that some of them used to offer their greeting to the Prophet in a twisted way, giving it a bad meaning: “*When these people come to you they greet you with words God does not use to greet you.*” (Verse 8) They might have used the same means as the Jews did when they pronounced the greeting *assalām ‘alaikum*, which means ‘peace be to you’, as, *assām ‘alaikum*, which means ‘death to you’. They might have used some other way that appeared innocent but which nonetheless concealed an ill wish. They even thought that had Muḥammad been truly a prophet, then God would have punished them for what they said by way of greeting or in their whispers and secret conversations.

It is clear from the way the *sūrah* opens then unfolds that God had told the Prophet of what they said and schemed. The *sūrah* began with the announcement that God heard the woman pleading with the Prophet, and then it stated that God is witness with any group, large or small. All this suggests that He informed the Prophet of the hypocrites’ schemes and the thoughts they harboured.

An answer is given to their ill-conceived thoughts: “*Hell will be punishment enough for them. They will burn there. How vile a journey’s end!*” (Verse 8)

What to Say in Secret

The *sūrah* then addresses the believers by their very quality of having accepted the faith. It tells them that they must not indulge in the sort of secret whispers the hypocrites resorted to, encouraging each other to commit sin, aggression and disobedience of the Prophet. It reminds them to remain God-fearing and tells them that such whispers as the hypocrites engage in is inspired by Satan who aims to cause grief to the believers. Hence, it is totally unbecoming of those who have faith:

Believers, when you converse in secret, do not do so with a view to sinful doings, aggressive conduct and disobedience of God’s Messenger, but rather hold counsel to promote righteousness and God-consciousness. Always remain God-fearing; to Him you will be gathered. [All other kinds of] secret conversation is the work of Satan, designed to cause grief to the believers. Yet he cannot harm them in the least, unless it

be by God's leave. In God, then, let the believers place their trust.
(Verses 9–10)

It seems that some in the Muslim community had not fully absorbed the sense of Islamic discipline. Such people met when times were hard to consult among themselves, and this was unknown to their leadership. This is something contrary to the nature of the Muslim community and the spirit of Islamic discipline, which together require that every view or suggestion first be presented to the leadership, not to fringe groups. It also appears that some of these fringe groups might have stirred up trouble that could have had negative effects on the Muslim community. These people may also not have had any intention of causing harm or difficulty for the Muslim community, but by raising certain subjects and discussing them without having a full picture of the matter this could cause such harm.

The *sūrah* addresses them as believers, using their quality that establishes their bond with God. This makes the address especially effective. It tells them that should they converse in private, then their conversation must not involve anything that connotes sin, aggressive conduct or disobedience of the Prophet. The only subjects that are fitting for believers are those that '*promote righteousness and God-consciousness,*' with the aim of facilitating them and bringing about their results, which are always good. The *sūrah* reminds them that they should remain God-fearing, for they will certainly be gathered to Him and He will hold them to account for their deeds; these He knows no matter how hard they try to conceal them.

A man stopped 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar as he was walking with a friend and asked him: "What did you hear the Prophet say about secret conversations on the Day of Judgement?" He answered: 'I heard the Prophet when he said that God will bring a believer close to Him and shield him with His cover, so that he will not be seen by others. He will ask him about his sins, naming them one after one. When the man has acknowledged all his sins and feels that he will be doomed, God will say to him: 'I have kept these sins secret for you during your life on earth; now I forgive you them.' He will then be given the record of his good deeds. As for the unbelievers and the hypocrites, the witnesses

will point to them and say: ‘These are the ones who have lied about their Lord. God’s curse befalls the wrongdoers.’” [Related by Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

In this way, such people are put off secret conversations and side whispers unknown to the Muslim community to which they belong and whose interests are the same as their own. In other words, they must not think themselves separate from the Muslim community in any way. The *sūrah* tells them that when other Muslims see such side whispering and secret conversations, they are hurt by them. They feel apprehensive, concerned that a lack of trust has crept into the community. Satan always tries to tempt whisperers to go further in order to cause worry and grief to others. However, the *sūrah* reassures the believers that Satan will not achieve his purpose: “*Secret conversation is the work of Satan, designed to cause grief to the believers. Yet he cannot harm them in the least, unless it be by God’s leave. In God, then, let the believers place their trust.* (Verse 10) Believers place their trust in God and in no one else.

The Prophet repeatedly advised against secret conversations whenever such talk caused doubt, anxiety and apprehension. He is quoted by Ibn Mas‘ūd as saying: “When there are only three of you, let there be no discussion between two of them to the exclusion of the third, for this is bound to grieve him.” [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

This is an aspect of fine manners, and a wise precaution against what causes suspicion. Sometimes, however, there is need for a private discussion in order to keep a secret, or to avoid a scandal. This is acceptable and it normally takes place among community leaders. It must never, however, be through a side group with the rest of the community unaware of what is going on. Such a practice is divisive and leads to friction and grief, which is Satan’s aim. God’s promise is definitive. Satan will not achieve his purpose by such means, because God will protect the Muslim community. He is fully aware of every secret conversation, every conspiracy against the Muslim community. Satan can never harm the believers “*unless it be by God’s leave.*” (Verse 10) This exception is added to emphasize that God’s will is absolute and free of restriction in any situation to which His promise applies.

“*In God, then, let the believers place their trust.*” (Verse 10) He is the Guardian who protects the believers. He is the Almighty who knows all,

the Witness to all things. Nothing in the universe escapes His knowledge. Nothing occurs unless it be by His will. He has promised to protect the believers. Could there be anything more reassuring?

Refined Manners

The believers are encouraged to maintain another aspect of good behaviour and fine manners:

Believers, when you are told to make room for one another in your gatherings, then do so, and God will make room for you. If you are told to rise up, then do so. God will elevate, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge. God is fully aware of all that you do. (Verse 11)

Reports speaking about the revelation of this verse suggest that it actually related to the hypocrites, which makes it more relevant to the flow of the *sūrah*. Qatādah mentions that this verse speaks about gatherings for voluntary worship. When those who were already sitting with the Prophet saw someone coming to join them, they were obviously keen to retain their own positions close to the Prophet. Here, God orders them to make room for each other.

Muqātil ibn Ḥayyān reports:

This verse was revealed on a Friday, when the Prophet was at al-Ṣuffah where the place was rather narrow. He used to honour those who attended the Battle of Badr from among the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār. Some people who fought at Badr came to join him but the place was already taken up. They stood facing the Prophet and greeted him. He replied to their greeting. Then they greeted the people sitting with the Prophet and those replied. They continued to stand, hoping that those present would make room for them. The Prophet realized why they remained standing and that nobody had made room for them. He was displeased. Therefore, he said to some of those from the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār who did not take part in Badr to stand up, choosing them by name. He asked to stand up as many as there were standing. Those who were thus asked to

stand felt this to be hard. The Prophet noticed that they looked upset. Some hypocrites exploited this, saying to the believers: 'Do you not say that your man is fair to all people? We certainly saw him being unfair to these. Here were some people who had already sat in their places, eager to be close to their Prophet, yet he asked them to stand up, giving their places to ones who came late...' The Prophet is reported to have said a prayer: 'May God have mercy on one who makes room for his brother.' After that, people used to quickly rise in order to make room for their brothers.

If this report is authentic, it should be understood as not being in conflict with other *ahādīth* that forbid someone to ask his brother to stand up so as to sit in his place, such as that which says: "Let no man make another rise from his position so as to sit in his place. Rather, move closer and make room for others." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.] Other instructions by the Prophet make it clear that a person who is joining a sitting group should sit at the end. He must not walk over people's shoulders so as to be in front. The Qur'ānic verse urges those who are sitting to make room for those joining them. It also urges obedience, requiring the one who is seated to rise if he is asked to do so. This order, however, is given by the leader responsible for organizing the group, not by the newcomer.

The purpose behind all this is to instil into people the feeling of welcome towards the newcomer before actually making room for him to sit. When that feeling is genuine, people are pleased to see others joining them, and those seated receive the newcomers warmly, willingly making room for them. However, if the person in charge thinks that a particular place should be given to a newcomer for a special reason, his instructions should be readily and happily complied with, observing at the same time the overall rules of not walking over people's shoulders or making one person stand to let another sit in his place. It should all be done with mutual tolerance.

Again we note the Qur'ānic method of making people willing to comply with every instruction. The *sūrah* promises those who make room for others that God will make good room for them: "*Believers, when you are told to make room for one another in your gatherings, then*

do so, and God will make room for you." (Verse 11) It also promises those who were instructed to leave their place so as to give it to others that they will enjoy an elevated position with God: *"If you are told to rise up, then do so. God will elevate, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge."* (Verse 11) This, in recompense for their obedience and accommodating attitude.

The occasion was one of being close to the Prophet in order to learn from him. The *sūrah* teaches believers that good faith, which makes people accommodating and obedient, and knowledge, which refines hearts and manners, will ensure a higher position with God. This as a reward for willingly vacating a position close to the Prophet, obeying his order given for a particular purpose he had in mind: *"God is fully aware of all that you do."* (Verse 11) He rewards people according to what He knows of their feelings and intentions.

This is yet another example of the Qur'ānic method of educating Muslims, teaching them to be kindly, accommodating and helpful by bringing out their better feelings. Religion does not work by giving firm instructions that must be literally obeyed; rather, it relies on changing people's feelings and sensitivities.

The Qur'ān also teaches them to refine their manners when dealing with the Prophet. It appears that people were eager to talk to the Prophet privately, each seeking his advice concerning his own private matter, or merely to have the pleasure of being alone with him. People did not seem to appreciate the demands on the Prophet's time, with all his social and public responsibilities, or they did not realize that a matter for which they wanted a private conference with the Prophet must be a serious one. Therefore, God wanted them to understand that it was necessary to impose a tax, for the benefit of the community, to be paid by the person who wanted the Prophet to attend to his personal problem because he was taking up some of the Prophet's time which was devoted to the community. This tax took the form of a charity which should be paid before attending the Prophet:

Believers, when you wish to speak to God's Messenger in private, offer something in charity before you speak to him. That is better for you and more conducive to purity. If you do not have the means, God is Much-Forgiving, Ever Merciful. (Verse 12)

'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib was the one who acted on the instructions given in this verse. According to reports, he set aside a number of dirhams, i.e. the silver currency of the time. Whenever he wanted to speak alone to the Prophet he gave one dirham in charity. This requirement was nonetheless difficult for the Muslims, as they were generally poor. The instruction, however, fulfilled its purpose, making them aware of the value of a private conference with the Prophet. God lightened their burden, revealing the next verse which abrogated the requirement of paying to charity before such a conference took place. The verse also directed the Muslims to attend better to their various aspects of worship:

Do you hesitate to offer charity before you speak with the Prophet? Since you did not offer charity, and God has turned to you in His mercy, attend regularly to prayer and pay your zakāt [i.e. obligatory charity] and obey God and His Messenger. God is well aware of your actions. (Verse 13)

These two verses and the reports we have about the occasions in which they were revealed provide an aspect of the educational efforts that aimed to cultivate the manners and social approach of the Muslim community, even in matters of detail that were not particularly serious.

False Swearing

The *sūrah* speaks anew about the hypocrites who befriended the Jews in Madīnah, describing their true position and attitude. It threatens to expose their hypocrisy and to inflict a terrible end upon them. It makes clear that Islam will be triumphant, despite all their schemes and conspiracies:

Have you not seen those who would be friends with people who have incurred God's anger? They belong neither to you nor to them. They knowingly swear to falsehood. God has prepared for them grievous suffering. Evil indeed is what they do. They use their oaths as a cover [for their falseness], and they turn people away from the path of God. Hence, shameful suffering awaits them. Neither their wealth nor their children will be of the least avail to them against God. They are destined

for the fire, where they will abide. On the day when God will raise them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear now before you, thinking that they have something to stand upon. It is they who are indeed liars. Satan has gained mastery over them and thus caused them to remain oblivious of the remembrance of God. They are the party of Satan. It is the partisans of Satan who will truly be the losers. (Verses 14–19)

This strong denunciation of the hypocrites who befriended those who had incurred God's anger, i.e. the Jews, suggests that these hypocrites were very active in scheming against the Muslim community, conspiring with its avowed enemies. It also suggests that the authority of Islam had now been consolidated so as to strike fear into the hypocrites' hearts. Thus, when the Prophet and the believers confronted them with what God might have exposed of their scheming, they resorted to swearing falsely, denying what was attributed to them, knowing, however, that they lied as they swore. They hoped that by thus forswearing they would spare themselves any punishment for scheming against the Muslim community: *"They use their oaths as a cover [for their falseness], and they turn people away from the path of God."* (Verse 16)

Repeated warnings are issued to them in this passage: *"God has prepared for them grievous suffering. Evil indeed is what they do."* (Verse 15) *"Hence, shameful suffering awaits them. Neither their wealth nor their children will be of the least avail to them against God. They are destined for the fire, where they will abide."* (Verses 16–17) The *sūrah* describes their abject and miserable position on the Day of Judgement when they will swear to God as they used to swear to people: *"On the day when God will raise them all from the dead, they will swear before Him as they swear now before you."* This description suggests that hypocrisy had become so entrenched in their hearts that it would remain with them on the Day of Judgement, in the presence of God who knows people's deepest secrets and innermost thoughts: *"Thinking that they have something to stand upon,"* when they actually stand on nothing, not even thin air.

The *sūrah* brands them as confirmed liars: *"It is they who are indeed liars."* (Verse 18) It then explains the cause of their condition: *"Satan has gained mastery over them and thus caused them to remain oblivious of the*

remembrance of God." (Verse 19) A heart that forgets to remember God becomes corrupt and given to evil: "*They are the party of Satan.*" (Verse 19) They stand under his banner, act in his name, obey his instructions, work for his objectives. This situation of unmitigated evil ends in total loss: "*It is the partisans of Satan who will truly be the losers.*" (Verse 19)

Such a strong denunciation certainly fits the evil and the harm those hypocrites intended towards the Muslim community. It also reassures the Muslims that God is with them, exposing their hidden enemies.

Such hypocrites were intimate with the Jews, thinking that they were a power to be reckoned with. Hence they always sought their help and advice. Therefore, God makes it clear to them that His enemies will always suffer defeat and humiliation, while His cause and His messengers will be victorious:

Those who contend against God and His Messenger will be among the most abject. God has thus ordained: 'I shall most certainly prevail, I and My messengers.' God is indeed powerful, almighty. (Verses 20–21)

This is indeed a true promise made by God: it came true in the past and will always come true, despite appearances that may suggest that it will not be so fulfilled. What actually happened was that the message of God's oneness overpowered unbelief and idolatry. The Islamic faith was well established on earth and humanity accepted its supremacy after a long struggle against unbelief, polytheism and atheism that ended in the total defeat of these evil forces. There were periods in which atheism or polytheism managed to gain power in certain areas, as happens today with some states that are openly atheist or polytheistic, yet belief in God generally remains dominant in the world. Besides, atheism and polytheism will always be short lived, because they are not fit to survive.³ Humanity discovers every day new evidence guiding it to believe in God and to the consolidation of faith and belief in His oneness.

A believer treats a promise by God as a confirmed and undoubted fact. Should what be on the ground at any time or place be contrary to this, then that which is on the ground is false and transitory. It occurs on

3. Future events, viz. the collapse of Communism, confirmed the author's view. He wrote this in the early 1960s when Communism was in its heyday. – Editor's note.

earth for a limited period and for a purpose only God knows. It may be there to awaken faith in people's hearts, so that it takes over and God's promise is fulfilled at its appointed time.

When we look today at the determined onslaught against the people of faith, in its numerous forms of suppression, pressure and scheming, we remember God's true promise. The onslaught has been so ferocious that large numbers of believers have been killed, tortured, left destitute and deprived of their livelihoods. Yet faith remained firm in believers' hearts, protecting them from yielding and protecting their communities from loss of identity and annihilation by attacking forces. It has also saved these communities from submitting to tyranny except for short periods during which they rallied their forces to defeat such oppression. When we look at this across the generations we realize that God's promise will undoubtedly come true. We find this now in the present situation without need to wait for long.

Anyhow, a believer will never entertain any doubt that God's promise is the truth and that this will certainly take place. Those who contend against God and His Messenger will be the most abject of people, for God and His messengers will triumph. A believer is absolutely certain that all this is inevitable, that it will be done, regardless of appearances to the contrary.

The Measure of Faith

As the *sūrah* draws to its close, it outlines the constant rule that believers apply, or the accurate measure of faith as it settles in people's hearts:

You shall not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day on friendly terms with those who contend against God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or kindred. These are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with a spirit of His own. He will admit them into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide. Well pleased is God with them, and they with Him. They are the party of God. It is the partisans of God that will be truly successful. (Verse 22)

This provides complete comparison between God's party and the party of Satan. It is a question of taking one's final and unhesitating position with the party of distinction, after discarding all burdens and temptations, so as to uphold the one and only tie. "*You shall not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day on friendly terms with those who contend against God and His Messenger.*" (Verse 22) Never has God put two hearts in one man's body. Never can anyone harbour two loves in his heart: one love for God and His Messenger and one for their enemies. It is all a question of faith or unfaith; the two can never meet.

"*Even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or kindred.*" (Verse 22) All bonds of kinship and blood relations are severed when they come into conflict with faith. These bonds may however be maintained and respected if there is no contention or dispute between the two camps. The Qur'ān instructs believers to maintain good relations with parents if they are unbelievers, provided that there is no war going on between God's party and Satan's party. Should there be contention, war and conflict, these bonds are to be totally severed. Abū 'Ubaydah killed his father during the Battle of Badr; Abū Bakr wanted to kill his son 'Abd al-Rahmān; Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr killed his brother 'Ubayd ibn 'Umayr; and 'Umar, Ḥamzah, 'Alī and 'Ubaydah ibn al-Hārith all killed their relatives. All discarded ties of blood and kinship, opting for the bond of faith. This was the best implementation of the standard of bonds and values as classified in God's measure.

"*These are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith.*" (Verse 22) Faith is confirmed in their hearts by God's hand, written in their breasts by His right hand. It cannot be erased or be subject to ambiguity or confusion. "*And whom He has strengthened with a spirit of His own.*" (Verse 22) They cannot achieve such resolve without the support of a spirit of His own making. Their hearts cannot beam so brightly without the light that emanates from this spirit, gives them strength and binds them to the only true source of strength and light.

"*He will admit them into gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide.*" (Verse 22) This is their reward for abandoning every tie and bond, and discarding all desire for worldly temptation. "*Well pleased is God with them, and they with Him.*" (Verse 22) This is a pleasant picture that radiates contentment and reassurance. It shows

us the situation of these believers in their lofty position and pleasant surroundings. They bask in their feeling of mutual pleasure with their Lord. They maintain their links with Him and discard all others. He then accepts them, admits them to His presence and makes it clear to them that He is pleased with them. They are gratified by this closeness to Him.

"They are the party of God." They rank under His banner, move under His leadership, follow His guidance, implement His code of living, and do on earth what He has willed, as they are part of His will. *"It is the partisans of God that will be truly successful."* (Verse 22) Who will be successful if God's partisans are not?

Thus humanity is split into two groups: God's party and Satan's party, raising two banners: the banner of the truth and the banner of falsehood. Every person must choose to either belong to God's party and support the truth or to side with Satan, standing under the banner of falsehood. The two parties are clearly separated. They can neither meet nor mix.

There is no room for ties of kinship, marriage, clan, community, country, race or nation. The only admissible tie is that of faith. Whoever chooses it will find that all those who stand under its banner maintain a tie of brotherhood. They might belong to different races, colours, countries, tribes and families, but they all share in the tie that forms God's party. Thus all differences between them disappear. Anyone who stands under the banner of falsehood will not enjoy a tie or bond with any among God's party. The main tie, to which all other ties are secondary, has been severed, so all ties are severed.

This verse suggests that there were some people within the Muslim community who still felt the strength of ties of blood, kindred and friendship. It thus seeks to put things very clearly. It also shows that others in the ranks of the Muslim community had managed to achieve the required standard, discarding all bonds other than that of faith.

This picture provides the finest possible ending to this *sūrah*. It started by portraying the care God takes of His community of believers, outlining the case of a poor woman who pleaded with the Prophet about her husband, stating that God listened to her concerns. With such care granted by God, placing the tie with Him above all else is the natural response. Opting for God's party is the only course acceptable from the community God has chosen to fulfil the role He has assigned to it.

SŪRAH 59

Al-Ḥashr

(The Gathering)

Prologue

This *sūrah* was revealed shortly after the Muslims' encounter with the Jewish tribe of al-Naḍīr, which took place early in the fourth year following the Prophet's migration to Madīnah. It describes how the event occurred and why, and what regulations were put in place in the Muslim community once it was over. All this is reported in the unique style of the Qur'ān. Comments are added so as to educate the Muslim community and refine its attitudes, and the events themselves are used to highlight certain aspects and to give directives.

Before we discuss the *sūrah* in detail, we will look at some of the reports concerning the encounter that provided the occasion for its revelation. This will enable us to appreciate how the Qur'ān presents the story, firstly summing up its details and then looking far beyond these particular events to a much broader purpose.

These events took place after the Battle of Uḥud but before the Battle of the Moat. The Prophet along with ten leading figures from among his Companions, including Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Alī, had gone to the al-Naḍīr's quarters to request them to contribute to the blood money the Muslims had to pay for the accidental killing of two innocent men by 'Amr ibn Umayyah, one of the Prophet's Companions. The Prophet asked for their help on the basis of the covenant signed between the

Muslim community and the Jews of Madīnah soon after the Prophet's settlement there. The elders of al-Naḍīr received the Prophet well and asked him to wait while they raised the money. In actual fact, it occurred to them that this was their opportunity to assassinate the Prophet as he sat against the wall of one of their homes. Some of them said: "You will never find the man as easy prey as he is now. Let a strong person go onto the roof of the house next to which Muḥammad is sitting and drop a large stone or rock over his head and rid us of him." One of them, 'Amr ibn Jihāsh ibn Ka 'b, volunteered to commit this treacherous crime, and went on to the roof of the house to throw such a stone on the Prophet's head. The Prophet, however, had been informed by God of the al-Naḍīr's design and so he had left his Companions where they were, giving the impression that he would shortly return. Instead, he had gone straight back to Madīnah. When the Prophet's Companions who were with him felt that he had been absent for too long, they started to worry and went looking for him. Soon they met a man on his way from Madīnah who told them that he had seen the Prophet entering the city.

In Madīnah, the Prophet had ordered his Companions to ready themselves to fight the al-Naḍīr because of their treachery, breaching the treaty between the two parties. Prior to that, one of their leading figures, Ka 'b ibn al-Ashraf, had gone too far in abusing the Prophet and raising enemies against the Muslims. It had been reported to the Prophet that Ka 'b ibn al-Ashraf and others from al-Naḍīr were in contact with the Quraysh aiming to forge an alliance with them so as to undermine the Muslim community; this despite the treaty they had with the Prophet. Hence why the Prophet gave Muḥammad ibn Maslamah permission to assassinate Ka 'b ibn al-Ashraf, which he did.

As the Jews of al-Naḍīr tribe took treacherous steps against the Prophet and the Muslim community, it was necessary to revoke the treaty with them, in accordance with the Islamic rule that says: "*If you fear treachery from any folk, cast [your treaty with them] back to them in a fair manner. God does not love the treacherous.*" (8: 58)

When the Prophet and his Companions were ready, they laid siege to the al-Naḍīr in their quarters, giving them three days' notice to vacate and leave their homes. Some reports suggest that the notice gave them ten days. They were allowed to take all their possessions with them

and to appoint agents to manage their fields and farms on their behalf. However, the hypocrites in Madīnah, led by ‘Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salīl, sent word to them encouraging them to resist and pledging their support. They assured them that they would fight alongside them, and should they be made to leave, they promised to leave with them. It is in reference to these assurances that the *sūrah* says: “*Are you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations, ‘If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid?’ God bears witness that they are indeed liars. If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help. You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding.*” (Verses 11–13)

The al-Naḍīr withdrew to their forts. The Prophet ordered that their palm trees should be cut and burnt. They called out to him, saying: ‘Muḥammad! You have always criticized those who destroy places and lay land to waste. How come that you are now felling palm trees and burning them?’ In reply, the *sūrah* states: “*Whatever of their palm trees you [believers] may have cut down or left standing on their roots, it was done by God’s leave, so that He might disgrace the transgressors.*” (Verse 5)

After 26 nights of siege, the al-Naḍīr despaired that the promises of their hypocrite friends would ever come true. God had cast terror in their hearts. They sent to the Prophet requesting him to allow them to leave on the same terms as the Qaynuqā’ Jews who had earlier been evacuated.¹ This would afford them safe conduct and they would be allowed to take what their camels could carry of their possessions, except their arms. The Prophet accepted this. Thus, they loaded their camels with their possessions. They also destroyed their own homes so that these would not be taken over by Muslims. During the siege, the Muslims had destroyed some of the walls of their fortifications. In reference to this, the *sūrah* says: “*It is He who drove the unbelievers among the people*

1. The details of that evacuation are given in our commentary on *Sūrah* 33, Volume XIV, pp. 52–54.

of earlier revelations out of their homes at the first gathering. You never thought they would go; while they thought that their fortifications would protect them against God. God came upon them from where they had not expected, casting terror into their hearts. Thus, they destroyed their homes by their own hands, as well as the hands of the believers. Learn from their example, you who are endowed with insight. Had it not been for God's having decreed exile for them, He would surely have inflicted [greater] suffering on them in this world. In the life to come they will still endure suffering through the fire because they have defied God and His Messenger. Whoever defies God – well, God is severe in retribution.” (Verses 2–4)

Some of the al-Naḍīr went to Khaybar, others headed for Syria. Among their leading figures who headed for Khaybar were Sallām ibn Mishkam ibn Abū al-Ḥuqayq, his cousin Kinānah ibn al-Rabī' ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq and Ḥuyayy ibn Akhtab to whom reference is made in *Sūrah* 33; these managed to raise an alliance against the Muslim community, leading to the Battle of the Moat. Some of them are also referred to in *Sūrah* 48, in connection with the Battle of Khaybar.

The property left behind by the al-Naḍīr tribe was a free gain for the Prophet. The Muslims had not had to spur a horse or a camel in order to achieve that gain. Therefore, it belonged purely to God and His Messenger. The Prophet divided it among the Muhājirīn, his Companions who had migrated from Makkah, and two from among the Anṣār, Sahl ibn Ḥanīf and Abū Dujānah ibn Simāk, both of whom were poor. The Muhājirīn had no property in Madīnah, having had to abandon everything they had in Makkah. The Anṣār welcomed them and accommodated them in their own homes, showing a very high degree of generosity and hospitality. As this occasion presented itself, the Prophet wanted to set things right within the Muslim community, so that the poor would have their own property. Thus, wealth would not circulate only among the rich in society.

Some people – most probably hypocrites – spoke out, criticizing the Prophet's action. God states in this *sūrah*: “*Whatever gains were taken from them God has turned over to His Messenger; you did not have to spur horse or riding-camel for its sake. God gives His messengers mastery over whomever He wills. God has power over all things.*” (Verse 6) The Prophet said to the Anṣār: “If you wish, you may give a share of your property

and your homes to your brethren, the Muhājirīn, and then you will share with them this gain. On the other hand, if you prefer, you keep your property and your homes for yourselves but you will have no share of this gain.” True to their generous character, the Anṣār said: “We will give them a share of our property and homes and we will leave this gain to them, taking no share of it.”

Commenting on this, the *sūrah* says: “*[Such gains are for] the poor migrants who have been driven out of their homes and possessions, seeking God’s favour and His goodly acceptance, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the ones who are true. And to those who were already firmly established in their homes and in faith, those who love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given. They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want. Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful.*” (Verses 8–9)

Such were the events that led to the revelation of this *sūrah*, and to which its statements and rules refer, including the verses close to its end which address the believers who witnessed these events. This is in line with the Qur’ānic method of educating believers and refining their Islamic sense as it comments on events and demonstrates the link between them and fundamental truths. The last note in the *sūrah* mentions a number of God’s attributes that have a direct bearing on the universe and its affairs. When these are fully understood, belief in God becomes enlightened, based on full awareness of the truth.

The *sūrah* begins and ends with glorification of God, to whom the heavens and the earth belong, the Almighty, the Wise. Thus, the beginning and end are in perfect harmony with the subject matter of the *sūrah* and the call to the believers to remain God-fearing and to reflect on God’s planning.



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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Everything in the heavens and everything on earth extols God's limitless glory. He is the Almighty, the Wise. (1)

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١﴾

It is He who drove the unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations out of their homes at the first gathering. You never thought they would go; while they thought that their fortifications would protect them against God. God came upon them from where they had not expected, casting terror into their hearts. Thus, they destroyed their homes by their own hands, as well as the hands of the believers. Learn from their example, you who are endowed with insight. (2)

هُوَ الَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ
الْكِتَابِ مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ لِأَوَّلِ الْحَشْرِ
مَا ظَنَنْتُمْ أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ
مَانِعَتُهُمْ حُصُونُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ فَأَتَتْهُمْ
اللَّهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَمْ يَحْتَسِبُوا وَقَذَفَ فِي
قُلُوبِهِمُ الرُّعْبَ يُخْرِبُونَ بُيُوتَهُمْ
بِأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَيْدِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَاعْتَبِرُوا
يَا أُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ ﴿٢﴾

Had it not been for God's having decreed exile for them, He would surely have inflicted [greater] suffering on them in this world. In the life to come they will still endure suffering through the fire (3)

وَلَوْلَا أَنْ كَتَبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْجَلَاءَ
لَعَذَّبُوهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
عَذَابُ النَّارِ ﴿٣﴾

because they have defied God and His Messenger. Whoever defies God – well, God is severe in retribution. (4)

Whatever of their palm trees you [believers] may have cut down or left standing on their roots, it was done by God's leave, so that He might disgrace the transgressors. (5)

Whatever gains were taken from them God has turned over to His Messenger; you did not have to spur horse or riding-camel for its sake. God gives His messengers mastery over whomever He wills. God has power over all things. (6)

Whatever gains God turns over to His Messenger from the people of the townships belong to God, the Messenger, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy and the traveller in need. Thus, they would not just circulate among those of you who are rich. Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it. Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution. (7)

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَاقُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ. وَمَنْ يُشَاقِ اللَّهَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٤﴾

مَا قَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ لِينَةٍ أَوْ تَرَكْتُمُوهَا قَائِمَةً عَلَىٰ أُصُولِهَا فَبِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيُخْزِي الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٥﴾

وَمَا أَفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ مِنْهُمْ فَمَا أَوْجَفْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ خَيْلٍ وَلَا رِكَابٍ وَلَا كُنَّ اللَّهُ يَسِطُرُ رُسُلَهُ عَلَىٰ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾

مَا أَفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ رَسُولِهِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَىٰ فَلِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ وَلِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ كَنْ لَا يَكُونَ دُولَةً بَيْنَ الْأَغْنِيَاءِ مِنْكُمْ وَمَا آتَاكُمْ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٧﴾

[Such gains are for] the poor migrants who have been driven out of their homes and possessions, seeking God's favour and His goodly acceptance, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the ones who are true. (8)

And to those who were already firmly established in the Home and in faith, those who love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given. They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want. Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful. (9)

Those who come after them pray: 'Our Lord! Forgive us and forgive our brethren who preceded us in faith. Leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe. Lord, You are compassionate, ever merciful.' (10)

Are you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations, 'If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ الَّذِينَ أُخْرِجُوا مِنْ
دِيَارِهِمْ وَأَمْوَالِهِمْ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ
اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا وَيَنْصُرُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ
أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ ﴿٨﴾

وَالَّذِينَ تَبَوَّءُوا الدَّارَ وَالْإِيمَانَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِمْ يُحِبُّونَ مَنْ هَاجَرَ إِلَيْهِمْ
وَلَا يَجِدُونَ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ حَاجَةً
مِمَّا أُوتُوا وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ
وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ وَمَنْ يُوقِ شُحَّ
نَفْسِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٩﴾

وَالَّذِينَ جَاءُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ
رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا وَلِإِخْوَانِنَا الَّذِينَ
سَبَقُونَا بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ فِي قُلُوبِنَا
غِلًّا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٌ
رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا يَقُولُونَ
لِإِخْوَانِهِمُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ
الْكِتَابِ لَئِنْ أُخْرِجْتُمْ لَنَخْرُجَنَّ

never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid? God bears witness that they are indeed liars. (11)

مَعَكُمْ وَلَا نَطِيعُ فِيكُمْ أَحَدًا أَبَدًا وَإِن
قُوْتَلْتُمْ لَنَنْصُرَنَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَشْهَدُ إِنَّهُمْ
لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١١﴾

If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help. (12)

لِئِن أُخْرِجُوا لَا يَخْرُجُونَ مَعَهُمْ وَلِئِن
قُوْتِلُوا لَا يَنْصُرُوهُمْ وَلِئِن نَّصَرُوهُمْ
لَيَوَلُنَّ الْأَدْبُرَ لَمَّا يَنْصُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding. (13)

لَا تَسْرَآسُدْ رَهْبَةً فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِّنَ
اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

They will never fight you even in a body except from within fortified strongholds or from behind walls. Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another, because they are people who will not use their reason. (14)

لَا يَفْقَهُونَ لَكُمْ جَمِيعًا إِلَّا فِي قَرْيٍ
مُحَصَّنَةٍ أَوْ مِن وَرَاءِ جُدُرٍ بَأْسُهُم بَيْنَهُمْ
سَدِيدٌ تَحْسَبُهُمْ جَمِيعًا وَقُلُوبُهُمْ شَتَّىٰ
ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَوْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Like those who, a short while before them, had to taste the evil that came from their own doings. Painful suffering is in store for them. (15)

كَمَثَلِ الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ قَرِيبًا ذَاقُوا
وَيَا لَأَمْرِهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٥﴾

Like Satan, who says to man, 'Reject the faith!' Yet when man disbelieves, Satan says, 'I here and now disown you. I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.' (16)

كَمَثَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِذْ قَالَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ اكْفُرْ
فَلَمَّا كَفَرَ قَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنكَ إِنِّي
أَخَافُ اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

Both will end up in the fire, where they will abide. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers. (17)

فَكَانَ عَاقِبَتُهُمَا أَنَّهُمَا فِي النَّارِ خَالِدِينَ
فِيهَا وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow. Remain God-fearing, for God is fully aware of all that you do. (18)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَتَسْتَظِرُّ
نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ لِغَدٍ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

Be not like those who forget God, so God causes them to forget their own souls. They are the transgressors. (19)

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنسَاهُمْ
أَنفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

Not equal are the ones destined for the fire and the ones destined for paradise. Those who are destined for paradise are indeed the ones who will triumph. (20)

لَا يَسْتَوِي أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ وَأَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ
أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Had We brought down this Qur'an upon a mountain, you would have seen it humble itself and break asunder for fear of God. We put such images before people so that they may reflect. (21)

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهُنَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ
خَاشِعًا مُّصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ
وَيَتَلَكَ الْأَمْتَلُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

He is God: there is no deity other than Him. It is He who knows all that is beyond the reach of anyone's perception, as well as all that which can be witnessed. He is the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful. (22)

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَلَيْهِ
الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ
الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٢٢﴾

He is God: there is no deity other than Him, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Source of Peace, the Giver of Faith, the Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, to whom all greatness belongs. Exalted is God in His limitless glory above anything they associate as partner with Him. (23)

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ
الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ
الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ
سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

He is God: the Creator, the Maker who gives shape and form to all. His are the most gracious names. Everything in the heavens and earth extols His limitless glory. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise. (24)

هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ
الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ
الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٤﴾

God's Direct Action

Everything in the heavens and everything on earth extols God's limitless glory. He is the Almighty, the Wise. (Verse 1)

This opening verse states a truth that takes place in the universe, where everything in the heavens and earth extols God's glory and praises Him alone. This is how the *sūrah* that relates the events leading to the evacuation of the unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations and

giving their land as a free gain to the believers who extol His glory and praise Him with His attributes begins. It is He who is the Almighty, able to give victory to those who believe in Him and destroy His enemies, the Wise who plans everything in accordance with a definite purpose.

The *sūrah* then gives us an account of the events leading to its revelation:

It is He who drove the unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations out of their homes at the first gathering. You never thought they would go; while they thought that their fortifications would protect them against God. God came upon them from where they had not expected, casting terror into their hearts. Thus, they destroyed their homes by their own hands, as well as the hands of the believers. Learn from their example, you who are endowed with insight. Had it not been for God's having decreed exile for them, He would surely have inflicted [greater] suffering on them in this world. In the life to come they will still endure suffering through the fire because they have defied God and His Messenger. Whoever defies God – well, God is severe in retribution. (Verses 2–4)

From these verses we learn that it was God who drove those unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations out of their homes, which is described here as the first gathering. God is indeed the doer of whatever takes place, but the way the statement is phrased lays direct emphasis on this fact, implying that God undertook to drive them out, without putting it under the cover of human action. It was He who drove them to the land from where they will be gathered, which means that they could not return to the land from which they were evacuated.

God's direct action is further emphasized in the following sentences in the verse: "You never thought they would go; while they thought that their fortifications would protect them against God." (Verse 2) You did not expect them to leave, and they could not have imagined that this would happen to them. Within their fortifications, so they believed, they were just too strong to be driven out. They felt themselves secure, forgetting God's power that cannot be stopped by mere fortifications.

"God came upon them from where they had not expected, casting terror into their hearts." (Verse 2) He came upon them from within themselves,

not from within their fortifications. He struck fear in their hearts, and so they opened the gates to their fortifications with their own hands. He showed them that they were not in possession of their own souls, and could not control their hearts. They could not defy God with their willpower, let alone with buildings and forts. They reckoned with every possibility except that they would be attacked from within themselves. Thus is the case when God wills something to happen. He approaches it as He knows best and from where He can; He certainly knows everything and is able to accomplish what He wants. There is no need, then, for the means people resort to. Instead, the means for Him are always there, ready to use. All means and causes are of His own making; none is difficult for Him to employ. He is indeed the Almighty, the Wise.

Those unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations sought to shield themselves from attack by staying within their fortifications, but God came upon them from where they least expected, scaring them to the bone. They thought they had protection within their homes, but God made them destroy their own homes themselves and He allowed the believers to partake in this destruction: "*Thus, they destroyed their homes by their own hands, as well as the hands of the believers.*" (Verse 2) Thus the account of what happened to those people is complete, portrayed in a telling image.

Here the *sūrah* adds the first comment: "*Learn from their example, you who are endowed with insight.*" (Verse 2) This instruction comes at the right moment, when minds are ready to receive a lesson and learn from it.

The next verse establishes that since God willed to take them to task for their treachery, they could not escape some form of punishment in this life, in addition to what awaits them in the life to come: "*Had it not been for God's having decreed exile for them, He would surely have inflicted [greater] suffering on them in this world. In the life to come they will still endure suffering through the fire.*" (Verse 3) That they would be made to suffer in this life, in some form or another, was a foregone conclusion. Had God not chosen their evacuation, He would have punished them in some other way, and whatever punishment they would have suffered in this life was in addition to what they will receive in the hereafter.

They merited both, “*because they have defied God and His Messenger. Whoever defies God – well, God is severe in retribution.*” (Verse 4) The Arabic word, *shāqqū*, translated here as ‘defied’, means to take a side other than God’s. As He explains why they merited such punishment, God made His Messenger’s side His own. Therefore, in the second half of the verse He mentions their being in defiance of Him only, as this automatically includes defying the Prophet. When defiant people take a side opposite to God’s, they behave insolently. Rather stupidly, such small, powerless creatures expose themselves to God’s anger and incur His severe retribution.

Thus, as we look at what happened to those unbelievers of the people of earlier religions, we understand the fate that is bound to overtake those who defy God at any time and place. We should not fail to notice that the *sūrah* repeatedly refers to them as ‘*unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations*’. This is certainly true because they disbelieved in the divine faith in its final and complete form revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Those Jews were expecting his message. Moreover, referring to them in this way explains why they were punished. It also reassures the believers of the correctness of what they did to them.

The *sūrah* then reassures the believers that all that they did to those who defied God and His Messenger, such as cutting and burning their palm trees, was right. It thus gives God’s verdict on it, particularly because some Muslims were rather unsure about their actions:

Whatever of their palm trees you [believers] may have cut down or left standing on their roots, it was done by God’s leave, so that He might disgrace the transgressors. (Verse 5)

Prior to this event and subsequently, the Muslims were and are not permitted to cause such destruction. This case, then, provided an exception, and it needed explanation and reassurance. It is thus explained in this verse that both what they did or did not do in respect of the palm trees was by God’s permission. It is He who handled this encounter, putting His will into effect. All that happened was by His leave, for the purpose of bringing disgrace upon the transgressors. Cutting their trees

caused the al-Naḍīr grief, while leaving some standing similarly grieved them because they had to leave these behind.

Thus the believers were reassured that they were only the tool for God's will to be fulfilled.

Gains Achieved Without a War

The second part of the *sūrah* lays down the rules concerning gains that were granted by God to the Muslim community in this encounter and in similar ones, where the Muslims achieved victory without having to fight. These rules apply to any conflict where God's hand works directly, without human cover:

Whatever gains were taken from them God has turned over to His Messenger; you did not have to spur horse or riding-camel for its sake. God gives His messengers mastery over whomever He wills. God has power over all things. Whatever gains God turns over to His Messenger from the people of the townships belong to God, the Messenger, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy and the traveller in need. Thus, they would not just circulate among those of you who are rich. Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it. Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution. [Such gains are for] the poor migrants who have been driven out of their homes and possessions, seeking God's favour and His goodly acceptance, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the ones who are true. And to those who were already firmly established in the Home and in faith, those who love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given. They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want. Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful. Those who come after them pray: 'Our Lord! Forgive us and forgive our brethren who preceded us in faith. Leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe. Lord, You are compassionate, ever merciful. (Verses 6–10)

These verses include a description of the conditions prevailing for the Muslim community at that time. They also state the nature and

distinctive features of the Muslim community that make its strong bonds survive from one generation, race and individual to another, across the centuries and throughout the world. This is a great truth that we should reflect upon.

“Whatever gains were taken from them God has turned over to His Messenger; you did not have to spur horse or riding-camel for its sake. God gives His messengers mastery over whomever He wills. God has power over all things.” (Verse 6) This verse mentions that these gains left over by the al-Naḍīr Jews were taken by the Muslims without them having to ride a horse or a camel, let alone fight in order to lay their hands upon them. Hence, it is not to be treated like war booty. Only one fifth of what the Muslims gain in war is reserved for God, His Messenger, his own kinsfolk, orphans, the needy and travellers in want. The rest, i.e. four-fifths, is distributed among those who take part in the war itself. This rule concerning war gains was laid down in *Sūrah* 8, The Spoils of War, revealed shortly after the Battle of Badr. Here, however, the present *sūrah* rules that these new gains, made without a fight, belong only to God, His Messenger, his own kinsfolk, orphans, the needy and travellers in want. It is God’s Messenger who undertakes the spending of these gains in this way and for these purposes.

The Prophet’s own kinsfolk are singled out here as beneficiaries of such gains because the poor among them are not allowed to take *zakāt* money or charity. Moreover, the Prophet was not to be inherited by his relatives. Whatever he left behind was to be given to charity, charity in which his relatives had no share.² Since there were poor people among his relatives, God gave them a share of any war gains as well as gains made without war. They were included among the beneficiaries of enemy gains that God had assigned to His Messenger: one fifth of war gains and all gains without war. The other beneficiaries of these gains are well known.

This ruling is clearly stated in the *sūrah*. However, it does not stop at stating the immediate reason for this ruling, but rather opens our eyes

2. Scholars differ as to whether only the poor among the Prophet’s relatives received this share, or whether it was given to all of them, even those who were not poor. The weightier view is that they all received a share.

to an important truth: "God gives His messengers mastery over whomever He wills." (Verse 6) It is all by God's will, and His messengers are part of that will, giving them power over anyone or any community He chooses: "God has power over all things." (Verse 6)

Thus the role of God's messengers is seen to be closely linked to God's direct will. Although they are ordinary human beings, they have a special link with God's will, giving them a particular role in how God brings about what He wants to happen on earth. They do not act at their own behest; nor do they take or leave anything for their own interest. When they go to war, face anyone in conflict, or make peace with any one, they only do so to fulfil an aspect of God's will that has been made dependent on their own actions. It is God who is the actor behind all this. It is He who has power over all things.

Money Circulation

"Whatever gains God turns over to His Messenger from the people of the townships belong to God, the Messenger, kinsfolk, orphans, the needy and the traveller in need. Thus, they would not just circulate among those of you who are rich. Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it. Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution." (Verse 7) This verse gives the details of the ruling before stating a major rule of the Muslim community's economic and social system: thus, money "would not just circulate among those of you who are rich." (Verse 7) This is followed by a major constitutional rule: "Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it." (Verse 7) Although these two rules are stated in connection with the gains made in this encounter and how they were to be distributed, both rules go beyond the immediate event to state fundamental principles for the Islamic social system.

The first of these two rules defines a major aspect of the Islamic economic system which approves private ownership but makes it subject to this rule that excludes the possibility of wealth being circulated only among the rich in society. Whatever situation leads to the poor being outside the general circulation of wealth, keeping it only in the hands of

the rich, is contrary to the Islamic economic system and works against one of its major social organization objectives. All transactions in the Muslim community must be so organized so as not to allow such a situation to develop, and to dismantle it if it does exist.

The Islamic system is actually based on this rule. Thus, it makes *zakāt* an essential duty. Its revenue consists of 2.5% of money including financial assets, 5% or 10% of all agricultural produce, a similar percentage of cattle and one-fifth of mineral resources.³ These are substantial shares. In addition, Islam gives 80% of war gains to those who so fight, whether they are rich or poor, but gains made without war are paid totally to those in need. The system Islam approves of for renting agricultural land is based on sharing the produce between the owner and the renter. Moreover, the Islamic system allows the Islamic government, in periods of hardship, to take all surplus the rich have to distribute to the poor. If it happens that the state treasury runs out of funds, such surplus may be invested for the public interest. Islam strictly forbids monopoly and usury, which are the two main tools that lead to money being circulated purely among the rich. This shows that the whole economic system Islam lays down is geared to implementing this most important rule. Furthermore, whilst this constitutes a major check on private ownership, Islam also places other checks on it as well.⁴

Thus, we see that the Islamic system allows for private ownership, but it is not a capitalist system. Nor is capitalism borrowed from the Islamic economic system. No capitalist system can function without monopoly or usury. The Islamic system is unique, laid down by the One who is Wise, All-Aware. It started on its own, developed on its own and remains unique, well balanced between rights and duties. It maintains the same balance as the rest of the universe, because it is made by the Creator of the universe.

3. The author mentions that the *zakāt* revenue from mineral resources is taxed at the same percentage as money. This is either a mistake or based on a certain scholar's view. The consensus is rather that one-fifth of mineral resources is paid to *zakāt*. – Editor's note.

4. This is explained in detail in a chapter on 'monetary policy' in our book *Social Justice in Islam*, which is available in English.

The Only Source of Legislation

The second rule laid down in the verse defines the only source of legislation: "*Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it.*" (Verse 7) This rule sums up the Islamic constitution. The authority of the law in the Islamic system is based on the fact that legislation is given to us by the Prophet in the form of the Qur'an or the *Sunnah*. The entire community, including the ruler and government machinery, cannot enact any law that is contrary to what is given to us by the Prophet. Should it enact such a law, that law is devoid of authority, because it lacks the very basis of authority. This system is contrary to all man-made theories, including those which make the community, or the nation, the source of all authorities, giving the nation the right to enact whatever legislations it chooses. Under Islam, authority belongs to God's legislation as stated and explained by His Messenger. The Muslim community's role is to keep Islamic law intact and to implement it. The ruler and the government undertake this task on behalf of the community. These are the limits of the Muslim community, and it cannot act contrary to what the Prophet has stated in any aspect of the law.

In any area where no legislation is stated, the community may enact what it deems to be suitable, provided that it is not contrary to any principle stated by the Prophet. This is part of the Islamic system. Any legislation to be enacted must follow what the Prophet taught, if there is a statement about it, and must not be in conflict with any Islamic principle if no such statement is available. The authority of the Muslim community, and its government, remains within these limits. This is a unique system, unlike any man-made system. It ensures harmony between the legislation for human society, which is from God, and the law that governs the universe, which is set by God. Should there be conflict between human law and universal law, man would be in utter misery.

The Qur'anic verse inspires believers' hearts to see the link between these two major rules and their original source, i.e. God, calling on them to remain conscious of Him: "*Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution.*" (Verse 7) This is the best guarantee that cannot

be evaded. Believers realize that God knows their inner thoughts and feelings, is aware of all actions, and that to Him all will return. They also know that His punishment is severe indeed. They are aware that God wants them to ensure that wealth does not circulate only among the rich in the community. They further know that it is their duty to accept willingly and obediently whatever the Prophet gives them and to discard whatever he forbids them.

The distribution of the gains made from the al-Naḍīr among the Muhājirīn only and two people from the Anṣār was a special measure that applied only in this case, to achieve the purpose of the main rule that states that wealth “*would not just circulate among those of you who are rich.*” (Verse 7) The general rule is that it should be divided among the poor generally, from among the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār, and also those of later generations. This is stated in the verses that follow. However, the Qur’ān does not state its rulings in abstracts. It puts them in a context that interacts with people. Hence, it gives each one of the three groups qualities that mirror its true nature.

Three Groups of Distinction

“*[Such gains are for] the poor migrants who have been driven out of their homes and possessions, seeking God’s favour and His goodly acceptance, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the ones who are true.*” (Verse 8) This is a true picture highlighting the main features of the Muhājirīn. They were certainly forced to flee their home town, Makkah, under much pressure and persecution by their own kinsfolk and tribesmen. They committed no offence other than believing in God alone. They abandoned their homes and possessions “*seeking God’s favour and His goodly acceptance.*” (Verse 8) They realized that they had no helper or protector other than Him. Although they were few in number, chased everywhere, they “*help God and His Messenger,*” with their hearts and swords, even at the hardest and most critical of times. Hence, they have earned the good description given to them in the Qur’ān: “*These are the ones who are true.*” (Verse 8) They said the word indicating their belief and confirmed it with their actions. They were true to their claim that they had chosen Him above all else, and true to their pledge to God’s

Messenger that they would follow him. They were true to the truth, making of themselves a living version of it.

“And to those who were already firmly established in the Home and in faith, those who love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given. They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want. Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful.” (Verse 9) This is again a bright, true picture showing the Anṣār's main distinctive features. These were a unique group of people. They achieved, in practice, standards which most people would think too idealistic to be true and rose to levels that were too high even for our imaginations.

“And to those who were already firmly established in the Home and in faith.” (Verse 9) The Home means the town, Yathrib, to which the Prophet and his followers in Makkah migrated. Thereafter, it has been known as Madīnah, meaning The City, or the Prophet's own city. The Anṣār were firmly settled there, long before the arrival of the Muhājirīn. They were also firmly established in faith, as if faith had become a part of their own dwelling place. The image here has clear connotations, yet it is the closest description of the Anṣār's attitude towards faith. It became their place of living where their hearts and souls settled in peace. They flocked to it like homing pigeons.

The Anṣār *“love the ones that seek refuge with them and harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given.”* (Verse 9) We do not find in human history an event similar to the reception given by the Anṣār to the Muhājirīn: it reflected genuine love and unparalleled generosity. The Anṣār happily shared their possessions with their immigrant brethren, competing with each other in offering them their homes and shouldering the burden of hospitality. It is reported that in every case, lots were drawn to decide where each one of the Muhājirīn would settle, because the numbers of the Anṣār offering their homes were more than the numbers of the Muhājirīn needing to be settled. They *“harbour no desire in their hearts for whatever the others may have been given.”* (Verse 9) The Muhājirīn are, at times, given an exceptionally high position, but the Anṣār harbour no feeling of envy as a result. They may be given special treatment, as in the case of the gains made in this encounter. Again the Anṣār accept this willingly.

We note that the verse does not say that they ‘harbour no grudge’, but rather it uses the word ‘desire’, which adds to the impression we have of the Anṣār’s pure hearts.

“*They give them preference over themselves, even though they are in want.*” (Verse 9) To give preference to others when one is in need oneself is a high summit to reach, one which the Anṣār scaled in a way unknown anywhere else in human history. This was their true description in every case. They always exceeded what is normal in people’s lives.

“*Those who are saved from their own greed are truly successful.*” (Verse 9) It is personal greed that hinders every good thing. Goodness means giving in one way or another: one gives away money, love, emotions, effort and indeed one gives one’s life when necessary. A person with greed cannot do what is good, because he always wants to take and not give. Therefore, a person saved from his own greed is spared the need to overcome this obstacle. He moves on to give generously with a feeling of gratification. This is true success.

“*Those who come after them pray: ‘Our Lord! Forgive us and forgive our brethren who preceded us in faith. Leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe. Lord, You are compassionate, ever merciful.’*” (Verse 10) This is the third bright picture that brings into sharp relief the features of the generation that was to follow, as well as the features of the Muslim community at all places and times.

When this *sūrah* was revealed, this group that was to follow on the heels of the Muhājirīn and the Anṣār had not yet come into existence. They were there in God’s knowledge, which is free of restrictions of time and place. The main feature of this group is that they would appeal to God for forgiveness, not only for themselves but also for those believers who went ahead of them. They would also appeal to be free of all grudges against all believers, with whom they share the bond of faith. They recognized that God is most compassionate and merciful, so they would appeal to Him by these two qualities: “*Lord, You are compassionate, ever merciful.*” (Verse 10)

The true nature and wonder of the Muslim community is clearly depicted in these verses. We recognize the strong bond that unites all generations of believers generating feelings of love and compassion between them, as well as a feeling of closeness that transcends time, place,

race and family. It is a bond that takes precedence over all else, stirring pleasant feelings across generations. A believer remembers another who lived many centuries earlier, just like he remembers one who lives next door, and warms to him with love and honour. The present generation of believers takes into account the needs of future generations, and the ones still to come will follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. They all constitute one rank, in the same brigade, across generations, despite belonging to countries and times that may be very wide apart. They all march steadily, under God's banner, trying to achieve the high standards expected of them, looking up to their Lord, the Compassionate, the Ever Merciful.

It is a wonderful, amazing picture, yet it represents a reality as well as the best ideal cherished by noble hearts. The beauty and nobility of this picture of humanity can be best appreciated when compared to the image of malice and rancour that Communism glorifies in Marx's gospel.⁵ That malice continues to perpetuate itself in an increasing grudge against social classes, past generations of humanity, contemporary communities that reject such social grudges, and against religion and believers of all faiths and communities.

The two situations are wide apart: they share no feature, colour or shade. One of them elevates humanity to the highest standards it can achieve, and the other takes it down to its lowest possible level. The first represents generations of humanity transcending barriers of time, place, race, country, tribe and family and promoting a bond of love and compassion, with pure hearts that are free of all grudges or selfishness, seeking only God's pleasure. The other shows humanity in conflict, with people always in strife, harbouring wicked feelings towards each other and resorting to deception, cheating and evil. It shows people doing so even when they are praying in their temples, because it looks at prayer as a trick and considers religion to be nothing but a trap set by capitalists for their workers.

“Our Lord! Forgive us and forgive our brethren who preceded us in faith. Leave no malice in our hearts towards those who believe. Lord, You

5. The author wrote this in the heyday of Communism when it was making long strides in the Third World generally, and in Egypt specifically where he was imprisoned and Communists were on the ascendancy. – Editor's note.

are compassionate, ever merciful." (Verse 10) Such is the prayer of the believers marching in the procession of faith. It is a noble prayer for a noble procession.

False Promises

The *sūrah* now turns back to discuss the event itself, painting a picture of another group that played a role in it, the hypocrites:

Are you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations, 'If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid'? God bears witness that they are indeed liars. If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help. You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding. They will never fight you even in a body except from within fortified strongholds or from behind walls. Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another, because they are people who will not use their reason. Like those who, a short while before them, had to taste the evil that came from their own doings. Painful suffering is in store for them. Like Satan, who says to man, 'Reject the faith!' Yet when man disbelieves, Satan says, 'I here and now disown you. I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.' Both will end up in the fire, where they will abide. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers. (Verses 11–17)

The *sūrah* reports on what the hypocrites said to the al-Naḍīr Jews, promising them support, but then letting them down and showing that they cared nothing for their own promises. Every sentence in these verses states a fact, touches hearts, stirs up feelings and establishes a principle of education, knowledge and unshakeable faith.

The first of these establishes a bond of kinship between the hypocrites and the unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations: "Are

you not aware of those hypocrites who say to their brethren who disbelieve among the people of earlier revelations..." (Verse 11) The ones to whom the *sūrah* refers as people of earlier revelations are unbelievers, and the hypocrites are their brethren, despite the fact that they claim to be Muslims. Then the *sūrah* gives a full and vivid picture of the hypocrites' promises and assurances to their brethren: "*If you are driven out, we shall most certainly go with you, and shall never pay heed to anyone against you; and if you are attacked, we shall most certainly come to your aid?*" (Verse 11) God, who knows what they truly are, states and confirms otherwise: "*God bears witness that they are indeed liars. If they are driven out, they will not go with them; and if they are attacked, they will not help them. Even if they come to their aid, they will most certainly turn their backs in flight; and in the end they will have no help.*" (Verses 11–12) Events confirmed that what God stated was true and what they promised their brethren was false.

The *sūrah* then states a fact explaining what those people, hypocrites and unbelievers from among the people of earlier religions, truly felt: "*You, [believers,] arouse in their hearts a fear more intense than their fear of God, because they are devoid of understanding.*" (Verse 13) They feared the believers more than they feared God. Had they truly feared God, they would not have feared anyone else. Only one type of fear can exist in a person's heart; fear of God can never exist side by side with fear of anyone else. All might belongs to God alone. All powers in the universe are subject to His will: "*There is no living creature which He does not hold by its forelock.*" (11: 56) Why, then, would a God-fearing person feel afraid of anyone else? However, the people who do not understand this truth fear God's creatures more than they fear Him. This, "*because they are devoid of understanding.*" (Verse 13)

Thus the *sūrah* exposes the truth about those people, and adds another general truth. Now, the *sūrah* goes on to describe a condition particular to the two parties, the hypocrites and the unbelievers among the people of earlier religions. This condition arises from the fact that they fear the believers more than they fear God: "*They will never fight you even in a body except from within fortified strongholds or from behind walls. Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact*

their hearts are at odds with one another, because they are people who will not use their reason." (Verse 14)

Time continues to reveal the absolute accuracy of this delineation of the true character of the hypocrites and the people of earlier revelations whenever and wherever they meet the believers in battle. Recent clashes in the Holy Land between volunteer believers and the Jews have confirmed the accuracy of this description. They would not fight the believers except in their own fortified settlements in Palestine.⁶ Whenever they were exposed, they scuttled away like rats. It is almost as if this verse was referring to what happened recently. All glory belongs to God, the All-Knowing, the All-Aware.

The verse adds other features of their mentality: "*Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another.*" (Verse 14) This picture contrasts with that of the believers who are united by the bond of faith across all generations and whose brotherhood transcends barriers of time, place, race, country and tribe. The hypocrites and unbelievers conversely are in disarray "*because they are people who will not use their reason.*" (Verse 14)

Appearances may at times be deceptive so as to give us an impression that the unbelievers among the people of earlier revelations stand in solid alliance, supporting one another. We may also see the hypocrites closing ranks in one group. However, we are told their true condition by God Himself who says that they are not truly so; it is all deception. This cover is lifted at times to reveal the truth of God's description, exposing conflicts within the same alliance, because those allies have different interests, preferences and directions. Never have the believers been true to their faith without seeing the opposite party revealing such differences and conflicts. The believers need only be determined, show perseverance in adversity, and they will inevitably see that the bonds uniting those followers of falsehood disappear to show their acute differences; this then leads them to scheme against each other.

6. The author is referring here to the battles that took place in 1948, when groups of Islamic volunteers took part in the war, trying to prevent the establishment of the state of Israel. The Jewish fighters did not fear the Arab armies as much as they feared those volunteers. – Editor's note.

The hypocrites and the unbelievers from among the people of earlier revelations are able to gain the upper hand against the Muslims when the Muslims are disunited. In this way, the Muslims no longer reflect the true conditions of believers as outlined earlier in the *sūrah*. Otherwise, the hypocrites and unbelievers are too weak to be able to gain mastery over believers. Besides, they have different leanings and interests: "*Strong is their internal hostility. You may think that they are united when in fact their hearts are at odds with one another.*" (Verse 14)

The Qur'ān wants this fact to be firmly settled in believers' minds so that they know the truth about their enemies and do not stand in awe of them. It thus seeks to influence their feelings and morale on the basis of established fact. When Muslims take the Qur'ān seriously, they think little of their enemies, who are God's own enemies. They stand united, in one line. When they do so, no worldly power can match them.

Those who believe in God must know the truth about themselves and their enemies. This is half the battle. The Qur'ān puts this truth to them in the context of an event that has already taken place, enlightening them about the true factors that were at play and explaining what it signified and the facts to which it pointed. This explanation was useful to those who witnessed that event as it unfolded. It should provide great enlightenment to future generations who should reflect on it and learn the truth from the One who knows all truth.

In Satan's Footsteps

This evacuation of the al-Naḍīr from Madīnah was not the first of its kind. It was preceded by the evacuation of the Qaynuqā' tribe, to which the following verse most probably refers:

Like those who, a short while before them, had to taste the evil that came from their own doings. Painful suffering is in store for them.
(Verse 15)

The encounter with the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqā' took place after the Battle of Badr, but before the Battle of Uḥud. The Qaynuqā' were bound by a treaty with the Prophet and the Muslims. When the Muslims won a great victory against the unbelievers in Badr, the Jews

were upset and harboured a grudge against the Muslims. They feared that their position in Madīnah would be weakened while the position of the Muslims would be strengthened. The Prophet got wind of what they were whispering to one another and learnt of their ill intentions. He reminded them of the treaty he had signed with them and warned them that their attitude might augur ill. They replied rudely to him, saying: "Muḥammad! Do not think too highly of your power. You have only encountered a group who knew little about fighting a war and you managed to score a victory against them. Should you engage us in battle, you will certainly know that we are true fighters."

They followed this with repeated provocations against the Muslims. Reports mention that a Muslim woman took some merchandise to sell at the Qaynuqā' market place, and sat close to a jeweller's shop. People there tried to get her to lift her head covering, but she refused. The jeweller held the edge of her dress and fixed it behind her back while she was unaware. When she rose, the lower part of her body was exposed. The Jews around laughed at her, while she cried out in shame. A Muslim was near by and he immediately attacked the jeweller and killed him. The Jews rushed to the Muslim and killed him. The family of the Muslim who was killed appealed to other Muslims for help, and the Muslim community was in anger. Tension rose and there was a confrontation between the Muslim community and the Jewish Qaynuqā' tribe.

The Prophet laid siege to the Qaynuqā' Jews until they gave up and declared that they would accept the Prophet's ruling. 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl, the chief of the hypocrites, argued with the Prophet on their behalf, citing the fact that for long they were allies of the al-Khazraj Anṣārī tribe. His true motive, however, was the strong bond between the hypocrites and the unbelievers among the people of earlier religions. The Prophet accepted his pleas and allowed them to leave Madīnah, taking with them all their property, except for arms. They left for Syria.

It is to this encounter that the *sūrah* refers. It cites it as a comparable case to that of the al-Naḍīr and the true facts behind the attitude they took towards the Muslim community and the reality of their collaboration with the hypocrites.

The *sūrah* also refers to how the hypocrites tried hard to persuade their brethren unbelievers, the Jews of al-Naḍīr, to put up stiff resistance, and

thus led them to their miserable fate. It compares this to a permanent situation in which Satan always lets down anyone who responds to his persuasion and disbelieves in God. Thus both end up in the worst of all situations:

Like Satan, who says to man, 'Reject the faith!' Yet when man disbelieves, Satan says, 'I here and now disown you. I fear God, the Lord of all the worlds.' Both will end up in the fire, where they will abide. Such is the reward of the wrongdoers. (Verses 16–17)

Satan's role with any human being who responds to his promptings, as described in these verses, is in line with his nature and the aim he defined for himself. It is most singular for any human being to listen to him when he is out to trick them and lead them to their ruin. Yet this is the permanent truth which the *sūrah* states as its discussion of the event progresses further. It thus links the individual event with this permanent truth, setting it in real context. The Qur'ān does not state abstract theories, true as these may be, because a truth stated in an abstract setting does not influence hearts, feelings and minds. This is the difference between the Qur'ānic method that seeks to involve people's hearts and the methods followed by philosophers and those engaged in research.

Thus the *sūrah* completes its discussion of the al-Naḍīr, having put into it a large number of images, facts and directives, linking its local events to great and permanent facts. The *sūrah* thus represents a journey taking us far into the real world and into the world of human conscience. It goes far beyond the event itself. Its reporting in God's book is so different from the way it is reported in books written by human beings. The difference is as immeasurable as the difference between anything of man's making and what God makes.

Two Unequal Groups

The *sūrah* now addresses the believers, calling them by the quality they love best, distinguishing them from all others and making it easy for them to be positive. They are called upon to remain God-fearing, to

take stock of what they prepare for their life to come, to be always alert and make sure that they do not follow in the footsteps of those earlier people who forgot God. The believers have already seen the fate that befell some of these who are destined for the fire of hell:

Believers, have fear of God. Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow. Remain God-fearing, for God is fully aware of all that you do. Be not like those who forget God, so God causes them to forget their own souls. They are the transgressors. Not equal are the ones destined for the fire and the ones destined for paradise. Those who are destined for paradise are indeed the ones who will triumph.
(Verses 18–20)

Such fear of God is a mental state that words cannot fully describe. It is a condition that makes the human heart alert, feeling God's presence at every moment. It keeps man always on the watch, fearing that God may see him in a condition that displeases Him. A believer knows that God's eye watches everyone and every heart at every moment. How and when can man be in a situation that God does not see?

"Let every soul consider carefully what it sends ahead for tomorrow." (Verse 18) Again, this is a statement that means far more than the total sum of its words. The mere thought of it places before a man's heart the record of all actions he did throughout his life. He looks carefully at every line, adding up his total sum after looking at every detail. When he has done so, he knows what he has sent ahead of him for his future life. This alerts him to his weaknesses and shortcomings, even though he has done much good. How would he feel if his net balance shows little in the way of good actions? This is bound to keep the human heart always awake, looking always for ways and means to improve its record of good deeds.

This verse, which excites all these feelings among believers, adds further notes to increase their sensitivity and strengthen their feelings of awe as they look at their position with God: *"Remain God-fearing, for God is fully aware of all that you do."* (Verse 18)

The next verse warns them against a totally different situation: *"Be not like those who forget God, so God causes them to forget their own souls."*

(Verse 19) This is a very strange situation, but a true one. Anyone who forgets God will remain in this present life without a bond that pulls him towards a higher horizon. He lives without a goal that gives his life a meaning higher than that of grazing cattle. In such a situation man becomes oblivious of his own humanity. This fact leads to another whereby such a person forgets his own soul. He makes no preparation for his next life, which is long-lasting, permanent. He does not take account of it when he looks at the balance of his deeds. *"They are the transgressors."* (Verse 19)

The following verse states that such people are the dwellers of the fire. It advises the believers to take a route different from theirs. After all, the believers are the ones going to heaven and their route is bound to be different: *"Not equal are the ones destined for the fire and the ones destined for paradise. Those who are destined for paradise are indeed the ones who will triumph."* (Verse 20)

The two groups are different in nature, condition, way of life, direction and destiny. They are set on two different courses, which cannot meet in line, feature, plan, strategy or method of action. They cannot be in the same camp, neither in this present life nor in the future one. *"Those who are destined for paradise are indeed the ones who will triumph."* (Verse 20) Thus their fate is clearly stated, but that of the ones destined for the fire of hell is not even mentioned. It is too well known to deserve mention.

The Influence of the Qur'ān

The *sūrah* now adds a powerful note that shakes hearts to the core. It portrays what effect the Qur'ān would have had on solid rocks had it been so sent down:

Had We brought down this Qur'ān upon a mountain, you would have seen it humble itself and break asunder for fear of God. We put such images before people so that they may reflect. (Verse 21)

This image reflects the truth. This Qur'ān has such weight, power and shaking influence that is absolutely irresistible when we receive it

as it truly is. ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb had such an experience when he overheard a reciter reading the opening of *Sūrah* 52: “*By Mount Sinai; by a scripture inscribed on unrolled parchment; by the much-visited House; by the vault raised high; by the swelling sea; your Lord’s punishment will indeed come to pass. Nothing can stop it...*” (52: 1–8) As he listened, he leaned on a wall nearby. He then went back home and felt ill. People kept visiting him for a month, enquiring after his health.

The moments when a person is fully receptive of some truth contained in the Qur’ān will see him shake and shudder. He will experience such changes that are best represented in the physical world by the effects of magnetism and electricity or even stronger. God, the Creator of the mountains who bestowed the Qur’ān from on high, says: “*Had We brought down this Qur’ān upon a mountain, you would have seen it humble itself and break asunder for fear of God.*” (Verse 21) Anyone who has had some experience of the Qur’ān touching their inner souls will appreciate this truth in a way that cannot be otherwise expressed. “*We put such images before people so that they may reflect.*” (Verse 21) Such an image should keep hearts thinking and reflecting.

God’s Attributes

The rest of the *sūrah* is devoted to a long glorification of God, citing a number of His names and attributes. This serves as an aspect of the influence of the Qur’ān on the universe. It is as if we see the universe as a person expressing this glorification with his mouth, and a vast kingdom echoing it in every corner. These attributes of God have clear effects on the very nature of the universe, its phenomena and interactions. As it offers this glorification, it testifies to the truth of these attributes and their effects:

He is God: there is no deity other than Him. It is He who knows all that is beyond the reach of anyone’s perception, as well as all that which can be witnessed. He is the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful. He is God: there is no deity other than Him, the Sovereign, the Holy, the Source of Peace, the Giver of Faith, the Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, to whom all greatness belongs. Exalted is God in His limitless

glory above anything they associate as partner with Him. He is God: the Creator, the Maker who gives shape and form to all. His are the most gracious names. Everything in the heavens and earth extols His limitless glory. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise. (Verses 22–24)

It is an expansive glorification that puts together a number of God's glorious attributes. It consists of three parts, with each beginning with God's oneness in the form of either, "*He is God: there is no deity other than Him,*" or, "*He is God,*" on its own. Each one of these most gracious names or attributes has its clear bearing on the universe and a felt influence on human life. Thus they bring home to the human heart their effect on life and the living. They are not negative attributes. Nor are they isolated from the universe, its situations, phenomena and events.

"*He is God: there is no deity other than Him.*" This imprints on our consciousness the truth of God's oneness in belief, worship, action and life conduct from the beginning of creation to its final end. On the basis of this oneness a whole code of living is based, regulating our way of thinking, feeling, behaviour, relations with the universe and its living creatures, as well as relations with people.

"*It is He who knows all that is beyond the reach of anyone's perception, as well as all that which can be witnessed.*" (Verse 22) This divine attribute makes us clearly conscious of God's knowledge of everything, apparent or hidden. This awakes in our consciences the need to watch out, keeping God always in our thoughts, public and private. Thus, man will go about his life feeling that he is being watched by God and that he himself is on the watch for God's sake, realizing that he does not live alone, not even when he is in seclusion or locked alone with one other in private conversation. His actions will be coloured by this feeling that keeps him always on guard.

"*He is the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.*" (Verse 22) Now a feeling of reassurance spreads within man's conscience as he feels the air of God's mercy spread over him. Feelings of awe and hope, fear and reassurance are well balanced within him. In the believer's concept, God does not chase His creatures, but watches them; He does not wish them harm, but loves that they should adhere to His guidance; He does not abandon them to struggle against evil without providing help for them.

“*He is God: there is no deity other than Him.*” (Verse 23) This is repeated at the beginning of the second part of this expansive glorification of God, because it provides the basis for all divine attributes.

“*The Sovereign.*” (Verse 23) This attribute imprints on our hearts the truth that there is no sovereignty or dominion to anyone other than God who has no partners. When there is one sovereign, those who are subject to that sovereignty will have only one master to serve. No one can serve two masters at the same time: “*Never has God put two hearts in one man’s body.*” (33: 4)

“*The Holy.*” (Verse 23) This attribute radiates absolute holiness and purity. It strikes our hearts with purity, keeps them cleansed, suited to receive the grace of the Holy Sovereign, and all to extol His limitless glory.

“*The Source of Peace.*” (Verse 23) Again, this attribute radiates peace, security and reassurance throughout the universe and in man’s own soul. Man feels that he is safe, under God’s care and protection, in peace with the world around him and all its dwellers. As man reflects on this attribute, he is reassured, regaining a feeling of peace and extending peace to all.

“*The Giver of Faith.*” (Verse 23) The very pronunciation of this attribute, *al-Mu’min*, gives a believer a clear sense of the value of faith. Here, a believer meets with God and draws on one of His attributes, rising by virtue of his faith to join the community on high.

“*The Guardian over all.*” (Verse 23) This begins a new set of attributes that contribute to our concept of Him. The previous attributes related to Him only. These new ones relate to His action as He conducts life, the universe and all affairs. These attributes imply His absolute control and watchfulness.

The same applies to the other three attributes stated in this verse, “*The Almighty, the Compeller, to whom all greatness belongs.*” (Verse 23) They all emphasize power, authority and superiority. None is more powerful or has greater authority than Him, just as no one can be in any way superior to Him. These attributes belong to God alone; none share them with Him in any way. Hence the verse ends with the statement: “*Exalted is God in His limitless glory above anything they associate as partner with Him.*” (Verse 23)

The last verse of the *sūrah* begins the third section of this expansive glorification of God, and again it begins with a statement of His oneness: “*He is God.*” (Verse 24) Whoever else is not God. He is “*the Creator, the Maker.*” The Creator stresses design and proportion, while the Maker stresses the process of bringing things into reality. The two attributes are intertwined, and the difference between them is subtle. “*Who gives shape and form to all.*” (Verse 24) This attribute is also closely related to the two before it. It means that God is the One who gives every creature its distinctive features and specific qualities that make up its personality.

The succession of these interlinked qualities, with their subtle differences, prompts us to follow the process of creation and initiation, stage by stage, as we humans conceive of it. In actual fact, there are no stages or steps. What we know of these attributes is not their absolute reality, because this is known only to God. We only know some of the effects they produce, as this is the limit of our understanding.

“*His are the most gracious names.*” (Verse 24) His names are, in themselves, most gracious. They need not be praised or admired by creatures. The Arabic adjective *al-husnā*, translated here as ‘*the most gracious*’, also means ‘beautiful, attractive, etc.’ They are the attributes a believer reflects upon in order to mould himself and his life in accordance with their meaning. He knows that God loves that he should try to live up to them so that he can elevate himself as He seeks God’s acceptance.

This long and expansive glorification of God, citing many of His most gracious attributes, with all their inspiring effects, is brought to a close with the image that God’s glorification is echoed throughout the universe, with every creature joining in: “*Everything in the heavens and earth extols His limitless glory. He alone is the Almighty, the Wise.*” (Verse 24) This is the most suitable and expected of images after the mentioning of all God’s attributes. Thus the human heart joins in with all creatures and living things in a glorification that brings the opening of the *sūrah* and its ending into perfect harmony.

SŪRAH 60

Al-Mumtaḥanah

(Women Tested)

Prologue

The present *sūrah* provides yet another episode in the cultivation of the Muslim community, its social organization and state building during the Madīnah period. It thus forms a link in the chain that is the divine system, a system laid down for the community chosen to implement it in society. With such a well-defined and distinctive system humanity would be able to strive to achieve its goals, but there would be times when its efforts would fall short of what is required. Nonetheless, humanity would always look up to it, aiming to mirror that ideal form when the first Muslim community put it into practice.

This objective required, as we have stated on more than one occasion, long preparations each involving different stages. The events that happened within or around the Muslim community provided some of the material necessary for such preparations. While the events themselves were determined according to God's knowledge, they also provided the context for their explanation and interpretation, as also for comments and directives.

In the midst of all these events, the process of building the characters of the people who undertook the task of implementing the Islamic system was completed. Thus, in its formative stage, the Muslim community separated itself from the rest of society insofar as it needed

to remain pure, free of any alien aspect. Furthermore, it should also be acknowledged that this distinctive concept of faith, Islam, represented something new, unknown anywhere else in the world, and especially not in Arabia. All this, however, did not mean that Islam isolated itself from events occurring in the larger society. Indeed the Muslims were part of these events, interacting with them as they took place. This process of interaction also meant that they might be repeatedly influenced, and in different ways, by the same event. God, who created those people, knew that they do not all respond in the same way to the first touch, and that they might need more than one such touch for a certain effect to settle in. He also knew that remnants of the past, natural attractions and tendencies, human weaknesses, practical considerations, as well as old habits and traditions might represent obstacles that could hinder the process of cultivation. To overcome such difficulties necessitated repeated reminders. Events took place in succession, as determined by God's will, providing the required admonition and the basis for issuing warnings and directives.

Sharp, alert and blessed with keen insight, the Prophet used such events and occasions wisely, at every turn, to help this process of character cultivation. He was supported in this process by revelations that directed and endorsed what he did to mould that first Muslim community.

The Process of Cultivation

This *sūrah* represents a stage in that long process of cultivation aiming to establish within the conscience of every Muslim a pure world, with faith as the pivot around which it turns. In this world, Muslims congregate around this axis of faith, having only one unseverable bond. They purge their hearts of all ties of nationality, race, country, clan or family, replacing them all with the single bond of belief in God and being members of God's party.

The world Islam wants to build is both divine and human: it is divine in the sense that it derives all its principles and values from God's directives and wisdom, and addresses all its actions to God hoping to earn His pleasure. It is human in the sense that it encompasses all humanity within the broad scope of faith. Hence, in such a world the barriers of

race, country, language, family and all that separates one person from another are removed to leave only the tie of faith. Such is the noble world that is worthy of man, a creature God has honoured, breathing of His spirit into him.

Obstacles hindering the building of such a world were numerous in the Arabian environment, as also in our world today. Attachments to family, clan, race and land accounted for some of these obstacles. Others included personal leanings and desires, such as selfishness, pride, greed, psychological preferences and prejudices, as well as many other elements that work on man's mind. Islam needed to deal with all this in the community that had been chosen to implement the divine system and provide a practical example of it. This *sūrah*, then, is a step in that long process.

Some of the Muslims who migrated to Madīnah, leaving their possessions, homes and families behind for the sake of their faith continued to feel some attachment to those they had left behind in Makkah, specifically, for example, their spouses and offspring. Furthermore, despite all the persecution they had suffered at the hands of the Makkans, some Muslims still wished for a reconciliation that would see an end to fighting against relatives and family members.

On the other hand, God wanted to purge their hearts of all these bonds, so that they dedicated themselves to His faith and the system He wanted implemented. God knew the heavy pressures of natural tendencies and old practices on people. Indeed, the Arabs valued the ties of family, clan and tribe more strongly than any other community. Therefore, the Qur'ān continued to administer its effective treatment through events and comments on those events. Thus, the treatment would be administered on the stage of reality, just at the appropriate moment.

Treasonable Action

Reports mention a particular incident that led to the revelation of the first part of the present *sūrah*. This may be so, with the incident providing the immediate reason for such revelation, but Qur'ānic texts always go much further than particular events.

Ḥāṭib ibn Abū Balta‘ah was one of the Muhājirīn who migrated with the Prophet from Makkah to Madīnah and was one of those who took part in the Battle of Badr. He had children and property he had left behind in Makkah. He did not belong to the Quraysh, but was an ally of ‘Uthmān. When the Prophet decided to march to Makkah after its people were in breach of the peace treaty he had concluded with them two years earlier, he ordered his Companions to get ready. He prayed to God that the Quraysh would remain unaware of his intentions. He did, however, tell some of his Companions what he was planning to do; Ḥāṭib was among those. Ḥāṭib then wrote a letter to the Quraysh warning them that the Prophet intended to mount an attack against them. He gave it to a woman who concealed it and managed to leave Madīnah without being detected by any of the guards appointed by the Prophet on all exits and entrances. By so doing, Ḥāṭib hoped the Quraysh would consider his action as a favour and so not harm his family. The Prophet was informed by God of Ḥāṭib’s action. He therefore sent chasers to retrieve the letter from that woman.

Al-Bukhārī relates on the authority of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib: “God’s Messenger sent me and al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām, on horseback, telling us to go as far as a place called Rawḍat Khākh, where we would find a woman unbeliever carrying a letter written by Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta‘ah to the unbelievers, which we were to retrieve. We caught up with her as she was riding her camel. We asked her to give us the letter, but she denied having any such thing. We sat her camel down and tried to find the letter but we could see none. We said to her: ‘We swear by God, the Prophet has not lied. You will either do as we tell you and give us the letter or we will undress you.’ She realized that we were serious and that she had no option but to comply. She undid her hair, which was covered and took the letter out. She gave it to us and we went straight back to Madīnah to hand it to the Prophet.”

The Prophet called Ḥāṭib in and questioned him about what he had done. Ḥāṭib appealed to the Prophet not to jump to any conclusions. He said: “I am certainly a believer in God and His Messenger. I have not changed at all. It is not that I have any doubts in matters of faith. I only thought of doing the Quraysh a favour by which God would protect my children and family. All your Companions who have families

or property in Makkah have relatives and clans there to whom God provides protection.”

The Prophet recognized that Ḥāṭib was telling the truth. He said to those around him: “What he has told you is certainly the truth. Therefore, say nothing but good about him.” ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to the Prophet: “He has betrayed God, His Messenger and the believers. Allow me to behead this hypocrite.” The Prophet said to him: “Was he not one of the people who fought the Battle of Badr? How would you know, ‘Umar, that God has not looked at the soldiers of Badr and said to them: I have forgiven you whatever you will do?” Tears sprang to ‘Umar’s eyes as he said: “God and His Messenger know better.”

Al-Bukhārī adds in another version of this story that the present *sūrah* was revealed in connection with this event. In a third version he says that the Prophet sent three men, the other being al-Miqdād, to retrieve the letter.

Lessons Derived

To reflect a little on this event and its consequences does not go beyond our purpose of looking at how the Qur’ān uses events to cultivate the Muslim community and refine its attitudes through both the Prophet and Qur’ānic instructions and commentaries.

The first thing to look at is the deed itself done by Ḥāṭib, an early Muslim who belonged to the elite of the Muhājirīn and one of the few who were informed by the Prophet of the objective behind his intended campaign. The event shows us how the human soul may experience moments of weakness, no matter how strong it may be in its faith. Only God can protect us from such moments.

Then we see the Prophet’s great attitude through it all, waiting to establish the facts before coming to any conclusion. He patiently questioned Ḥāṭib about his motives. We see the sympathy for his Companion in his moment of weakness, realizing that he told the truth. Therefore, he stopped his Companions from having a go at him, telling them: “What he has told you is certainly the truth. Therefore, say nothing but good about him.” Thus he helped him to rise after he had slipped. He did not allow anyone to taunt him. By contrast, we see

'Umar's seriousness in such a matter as he said to the Prophet: "He has betrayed God, His Messenger and the believers. Allow me to behead this hypocrite." 'Umar looked at the deed itself and his reaction reflects his uncompromising attitude. The Prophet, on the other hand, looked at it from a broader perspective, with his thorough understanding of human nature. His sympathy was that of a caring educator, with profound and comprehensive knowledge, looking at all circumstances.

We also need to reflect a little on Ḥāṭib's own words explaining his momentary weakness, even though his concept of God's will and the factors at play in worldly matters was perfectly sound. He said to the Prophet: "I only thought of doing the Quraysh a favour by which God would protect my children and family..." Thus, he knew that it is God who protects, not the favour he wanted to do the Quraysh. This is confirmed in the remainder of his explanation: "All your Companions who have families or property in Makkah have relatives and clans there to whom God provides protection." We see how he maintained that it is God who protects, not relatives or clans. They are merely the tools by which God's purpose may be done.

Perhaps the Prophet's reaction took this right concept into account. Perhaps he realized that Ḥāṭib was telling the truth. Hence, what he said to his Companions required them only to say good words to Ḥāṭib.

Another point of reflection looks at God's will as this event unfolds. Ḥāṭib was one of the few people who knew from the Prophet the true goal behind this campaign, yet here we see a moment of weakness affect one of these select few. Then, God's will ensured that this moment of weakness had no adverse consequences for the Muslims. It is as if the whole purpose was to unravel this weakness and treat it. None of the Prophet's other Companions who had not been informed of the Prophet's secret objective tried to exploit this moment, pressing their own claims of being more worthy of trust. This reflected the Muslims' attitude towards their leadership, and their own humility, as well as their desire to learn the lesson of what had happened to their brother.

The event itself is related in confirmed and authentic *ahādīth*. As for its being the direct cause of the revelation of these verses, this is mentioned in one of the versions related by al-Bukhārī. We do not exclude the possibility that this report is accurate. However, the significance of

the Qur'ānic texts goes much further than this individual case. These Qur'ānic verses deal with a psychological situation that could affect anyone. They follow the Qur'ānic method of using a particular event to press home certain instructions and directives.

The Qur'ān deals here with the question of close relations, narrow affiliations, as well as adherence to what is familiar and what one generation inherits from another. It wants to instil new bonds, values and standards into believers as well as a new outlook on the universe, life, man, their role as believers and the purpose for human existence. It was, in effect, bringing together these new plants, the believers, under God's care so that He could teach and enlighten them about their existence and role. It wanted to open their eyes to the hostilities around them and to the schemes of their enemies. God wanted them to feel that they belonged to Him, making up His party, and that He wanted them to bring about something He willed to happen. They were to be marked out as His, known among all communities as His own, both in this life and in the life to come. Let them, then, dedicate themselves to His cause, maintaining no ties other than His.

The *sūrah* in its entirety moves in this direction. Even the legislative verses at the end, which speak about how believing women who migrate to join the Muslim community should be treated, the pledge of loyalty given by women who accept Islam, separating women believers from their husbands who are not Muslim, and relations between male believers and their wives who reject the faith, all lay down regulations in line with that general direction.

The *sūrah* concludes in the same way as it started, ordering the believers not to make God's enemies, whether idolaters or Jews, their intimate friends. This ensures that the separation between believers and unbelievers is complete, and that all ties except that of faith, are abandoned.



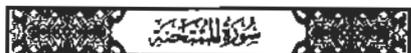
Al-Mumtahanah (Women Tested)

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

Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord. If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure, then do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal. Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path. (1)

If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers. (2)

Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you. On the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you. God sees all that you do. (3)



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي
وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ تُلْقُونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ
وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِمَا جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ الْحَقِّ يُخْرِجُونَ
الرَّسُولَ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنْ تُوْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ رَبِّكُمْ
إِنْ كُنْتُمْ خَرَجْتُمْ جِهَادًا فِي سَبِيلِي
وَأَيْعَالَةً مَرْضَاتِي تُسِرُّونَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ
وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ بِمَا أَخْفَيْتُمْ وَمَا أَعْلَنْتُمْ وَمَنْ
يَفْعَلْهُ مِنْكُمْ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ
السَّبِيلِ ①

إِنْ يَشْفَقُواكُمْ يُكَفِّرُوا عَنْكُمْ أَعْدَاءَ وَبَغِيضُوا
إِلَيْكُمْ أَيْدِيَهُمْ وَأَلْسِنَهُمْ بِالسُّوءِ وَوَدُّوا
لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ ②

لَنْ نَنْفَعَكُمْ أَرْحَامَكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادَكُمْ
يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُفَصِّلُ بَيْنَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ
بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ③

You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said to their people: 'We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you. The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone.' The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you, although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God.' 'Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination. (4)

Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers. Forgive us, Lord. You are the Almighty, the Wise.' (5)

In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise. (6)

It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies. God is all powerful; God is much forgiving, ever merciful. (7)

فَدَكَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَءُؤُا
مِنْكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا
بِكُمْ وَبِدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ الْعَدَاوَةُ
وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّى تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدُّهُ
إِلَّا قَوْلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لِأَبِيهِ لَأَسْتَغْفِرَنَّ لَكَ
وَمَا أَمْرُكَ لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَرَبَّنَا عَلَيكَ
تَوَكَّلْنَا وَإِلَيْكَ أَنْتَبَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٤﴾

رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَاعْفِرْ
لَنَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيهِمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ
يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَمَنْ سَوَّلَ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٦﴾

عَسَى اللَّهُ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَبَيْنَ
الَّذِينَ عَادَيْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَاللَّهُ قَدِيرٌ
وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

God does not forbid you to deal kindly and with full equity with those who do not fight you on account of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes. God loves those who behave equitably. (8)

God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who fight against you because of your faith, and drive you from your homes, and help others to drive you out. Those of you who turn towards them in friendship are indeed wrongdoers. (9)

Believers! When believing women come to you as migrants, test them. God knows best their faith. If you ascertain that they are believers, do not send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them. None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries. Such is God's judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise. (10)

لَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ
فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن
تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

إِنَّمَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ
وَأَخْرَجُوكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ وَظَاهَرُوا بِعَدَاوَتِكُمْ
لَا يَخْرُجُوكُمْ عَنْ دِيَارِكُمْ وَأَنْ تَبَرُّوهُمْ
وَأَنْ تَقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٩﴾

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا جَاءَكُمْ
الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ مِمَّنَّ جَرْتِ فَامْتَحِنُوهُنَّ
اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَانِهِنَّ فَإِن عَلِمْتُمُوهُنَّ
مُؤْمِنَاتٍ فَلَا تَرْجِعُوهُنَّ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ
لَا لهنَّ جِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَلَا لَهُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ
وَأَتَوْهُنَّ مَا أَنْفَقُوا وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ
أَنْ تَنْكِحُوهُنَّ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجْرَهُنَّ
وَلَا تُمْسِكُوا بِعِصَمِ الْكُفَّارِ وَاسْتَلُوا
مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ وَلَسْتُمْ بِأَنْفَقُوا عَلَيْكُمْ
حُكْمَ اللَّهِ لِيُحْكَمَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ
حَكِيمٌ ﴿١٠﴾

Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid. Fear God, in whom you believe. (11)

وَلِإِنْ فَاتَكُمْ شُرَكَاءُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ
فَمَا قَبَّيْتُمْ فَاتُوا الَّذِينَ ذَهَبَتْ أَزْوَاجُهُمْ
مِثْلَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَنْتُمْ بِهِ
مُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١١﴾

Prophet! When believing women come and pledge to you that they will not associate any partner with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who fathered their children, nor disobey you in anything reasonable, then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful. (12)

يَأْتِيهَا النَّبِيُّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ
يُبَايِعُنَّكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ
شَيْئًا وَلَا يُنْفِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ
أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ
بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ وَأَرْجُلِهِنَّ وَلَا يَعْصِينَكَ
فِي مَعْرُوفٍ ۚ فَبَايِعْهُنَّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ
اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Believers! Do not take as friends any people with whom God is angry. They despair of the life to come just as the unbelievers despair of those buried in their graves. (13)

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَانْتَوَلَوْا قَوْمًا
غَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ قَدْ يَسْأَمُونَ
الْآخِرَةَ كَمَا يُسْأَمُونَ الْكُفَّارَ مِنْ
أَصْحَابِ الْقُبُورِ ﴿١٣﴾

What Friends?

Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection when they have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord. If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure, then do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal. Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path. If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers. (Verses 1–2)

The *sūrah* begins with this friendly and inspiring address, calling on 'believers'. It is an address by their Lord in whom they believe, who calls on them in the name of faith that establishes their bond with Him, to carefully consider their position. He also warns them against their enemies' schemes and reminds them of the task they have been assigned. In a kindly and friendly way, God makes their enemies His enemies: "*Believers! Do not take My enemies, who are your enemies as well, for your friends, showing them affection.*" (Verse 1) Thus, He makes the believers feel that they belong to Him. Whoever is hostile to them is actually hostile to Him. They are the people who bear His insignia on earth and the ones He loves. Therefore, it is inconceivable that they should show affection to those who are His and their enemies.

God reminds them of the crimes, aggression and injustice committed by those people against them, their faith and His Messenger: "*They have rejected the truth you have received, and have driven the Messenger and yourselves out only because you believe in God, your Lord.*" (Verse 1) Having committed all such injustices, what basis could there be for friendship and affection? They rejected the truth and drove the Prophet and his followers out of their homes for no other reason than that they believed in God. He reminds the believers of all this, stating in effect that it was for their faith that the unbelievers fought them, not for any other reason. The real issue of contention, i.e. faith, is brought to the fore. They were driven out of their homes for no reason other than faith.

Having thus stated the true issue of conflict, the *sūrah* reminds the believers that there is no room for intimacy between them and the unbelievers, if they have truly left their homes for God's sake, and in quest of His pleasure: "*If you have left your homes to strive in My cause and to seek My pleasure.*" (Verse 1) It is not possible for someone to migrate seeking God's pleasure and His cause to combine this with friendship with those who drove him out because of it. Such people are the enemies of God and His Messenger.

The *sūrah* then adds an implicit warning against what they conceal in their hearts of friendly feelings towards their enemies, God's enemies. He is fully aware of what hearts may secretly harbour and what they leave in the open: "*Do not secretly lean towards them with affection. I well know all that you conceal and all that you reveal.*" (Verse 1) This is followed by a fearsome warning that strikes fear in believers' hearts: "*Whoever of you does this has already strayed from the right path.*" (Verse 1) A believer fears nothing worse than going astray after he has known and followed guidance.

The threat and the warning come right in the middle of an explanation of the unbelievers' true character and their evil intentions. Further explanation follows: "*If they get the better of you, they will remain your enemies and stretch out their hands and tongues to you with evil. They dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2) Whenever they have the chance to take advantage of the Muslims, they will act as open enemies, causing them whatever harm they can, verbal and physical, using every means available.

What is even worse is that "*they dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2) To a believer, this is worse than any verbal or physical harm that can be done to him. To wish him to lose his most valuable treasure of faith and revert to disbelief is to be his worst enemy. A person who has tasted the sweetness of faith after being an unbeliever, who has seen its light after the darkness of unbelief, and who has experienced the reassurance and happiness generated by holding the concepts and feelings of a believer will hate to revert to disbelief, just as much as he would hate being thrown into a fire. It is only an enemy of God who wishes to see him return to the hell of unbelief after he has experienced the happiness of living in the heaven of faith. How could he tolerate

the emptiness of unbelief after he has enjoyed life in the active world of belief? The Qur'ān gradually builds up the believers' reaction against their enemies until it culminates in a true description of their dearest wish: "*they dearly wish to see you unbelievers.*" (Verse 2)

The second round makes only one comment about the strong bond of blood relations, a tie that is deeply rooted in people's hearts. It is a bond that often forces its presence in the form of warm friendliness:

Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you. On the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you. God sees all that you do. (Verse 3)

A believer works for the life to come, on which he focuses his hopes. Whatever he does in this life is merely the planting of the seeds. The harvest he awaits is in the life to come. This verse touches his heart with what happens there when all ties of blood are severed, and if the bond of faith is non-existent. This should make it easier for him to abandon such ties in the short life of this world, preferring the permanent bond that remains strong in both this life and the life to come. Hence, the *sūrah* says to the believers: "*Neither your kinsfolk nor your own children will be of any benefit to you.*" (Verse 3) These ties which you cherish, and the preservation of which forces you to befriend your's and God's enemies happened to Ḥāṭib in his eagerness to preserve his bond with his family, and as happened to others who left their relatives and children. All these ties will be of no benefit to you, because "*on the Day of Resurrection He will decide between you.*" (Verse 3) You will be separated from them, because the tie that binds people together is already severed. Belief is the only tie that counts in God's sight. "*God sees all that you do.*" (Verse 3) He is aware of the action itself and the intention behind it.

A Long Historical Relation

The third round establishes a clear link between all Muslims and the first generation of believers in God's oneness. They all join the same procession that moves across countless generations, distinguished by faith and shedding all ties except faith. They are all the same community,

starting with Abraham, who preached the first version of the pure faith. He provided an example to be followed, not only in faith but also in practice. He struggled with the bonds of kinship before he, and those with him, managed to purge their feelings of any bond other than that of faith:

You have a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said to their people: 'We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you. The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone.' The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you, although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God.' 'Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination. Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers. Forgive us, Lord. You are the Almighty, the Wise.' In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise. (Verses 4–6)

When a Muslim reflects on these verses, he discovers that he has a great, well-established ancestry, a long history, and an example to follow set long ago. He goes back to Abraham, not only in his faith but also in his personal experience. Thus, his experience goes beyond his own personal one and that of his generation. People in this great procession of the faithful have gone through a similar experience to what he is now facing, and they came to a certain conclusion, taking a firm decision. The question is far from new, and the requirement does not constitute a very heavy burden. Besides, should ties with relatives who are hostile to his faith be severed, he still belongs to a great community, cherishing the bond of faith with all its members. He is only a branch of a great tree with firm roots and many branches that spreads its shade wide. This tree was planted by Abraham, the first to surrender himself to God.

So, Abraham and his followers went through the same experience as the Muhājirīn, and they provide a good example: "*They said to their people: We disown you and what you worship instead of God. We reject you.*

The enmity and hate that have arisen between us and you will last until you believe in God alone." (Verse 4) Abraham and his followers made their stand clear: they dissociated themselves from their people, the deities they worshipped and their beliefs. They rejected them altogether and believed in God alone. The only feelings they had towards them were ones of enmity and hate until those people also came to believe in God alone. It was a total break that left no ties or bonds after the one of faith had been severed. This is the absolute verdict in such a situation. The example set by Abraham and his followers is good enough for every believer until the end of time.

Some Muslims, however, found a loophole enabling them to continue to maintain warm feelings towards idolatrous blood relatives. This loophole was Abraham insofar as he prayed to God to forgive his father who was an idolater. The Qur'ān explains Abraham's attitude when he promised his father that he would seek God's forgiveness for him: "*The only exception was Abraham, when he said to his father, 'I shall pray for forgiveness for you.'*" (Verse 4) Abraham said this before he was certain that his father still held stubbornly to his idolatrous beliefs. Abraham was hoping and expecting that his father would see the truth and accept the faith. In another *sūrah* we are told: "*Abraham prayed for the forgiveness of his father only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was God's enemy, he disowned him.*" (9: 114)

When Abraham assessed the situation properly, he placed the matter in God's hands, turning to Him for guidance, placing his trust completely in Him in all situations: "*Although it is not in my power to be of any avail to you against God. Our Lord! In You we have placed our trust, and to You do we turn, and with You is the final destination.*" (Verse 4) This total self-surrender to God is the essential feature of Abraham's faith placed under special focus so that his Muslim offspring properly appreciate it. Here again we see the Qur'ānic method of cultivating the Muslim community with directives based on stories and the lessons derived from them.

Therefore, the remainder of Abraham's supplication is also stated: "*Our Lord! Do not make of us a test for the unbelievers.*" (Verse 5) This prayer is an appeal to God not to give the unbelievers mastery over the believers, which would strengthen the former's rejection of true faith.

They would think that had faith provided any protection to its followers, they themselves would not have been able to subdue them. This is a confusing point, one that often surfaces when falsehood manages to gain the upper hand for a time and purpose known only to God. In such periods, tyranny is able to treat believers very badly. Good believers endure this test with patience, but this should not prevent them from praying to God to spare them such hardship that makes of them a test to others and a basis for creeping doubt.

Abraham and his group continue their supplication: "*Forgive us.*" This is said by Abraham, God's own friend, realizing that the standard of worship which is worthy of God is beyond his reach. As a human being, he cannot attain the level of worship which gives due thanks for God's favours and which sufficiently glorifies Him. Therefore, he appeals for forgiveness, setting an example for his own group and all later believers.

Concluding his prayer, Abraham addresses his Lord by His attributes that are the most suitable here: "*Lord! You are the Almighty, the Wise.*" (Verse 5)

Concluding its account of Abraham and his followers' attitude, of those who surrendered themselves to God, the *sūrah* repeats the fact that they provided a good example for all believers: "*In them, indeed, you have a good example for everyone who looks forward with hope to God and the Last Day. Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.*" (Verse 6) The example is there for those who look forward with hope to God and the Last Day. These are the ones who truly appreciate the experience that Abraham and his followers went through, and treat it as the example to follow. This, then, encourages the present generation of believers to strengthen their resolve. Anyone who abandons this way, leaving the noble procession of believers and disowns the bond with those great ancestors may do so. God needs no one: "*Anyone who turns away should remember that God is truly self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.*" (Verse 6)

In this round, the believers have been taken back to the early period of their long history, remembering their first origins on earth. They have learnt from the experience of those earlier generations and reviewed the conclusion to which such experience led. The way to follow is

not difficult, especially since they are not the first to tread it. The Qur'ān repeats this conclusion so as to make the procession of faith uninterrupted. No one who follows the same way should feel lonely, even if he finds himself the only one in his generation following that way! He will not find it difficult to discharge his duty because previous travellers discharged it before him.

Whom to Boycott

God knows how eager the early Muslims were to see the hostility and conflict with their own people come to an end. Therefore, the *sūrah* raises before them the hope that those enemies might yet join the Muslims and accept the Islamic faith. In this way, hostility between the two camps would be replaced by firmly-based affection. Again, the *sūrah* lightens their burden, stating the main rule on which international relations between the Muslim community and other powers are based. Thus, boycott and enmity are applied only in cases of aggression and hostility by unbelievers. When there is no aggression against Muslims and hostilities are absent, then Muslims should treat others kindly, as they deserve, always maintaining fairness and justice:

It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies. God is all powerful; God is much forgiving, ever merciful. God does not forbid you to deal kindly and with full equity with those who do not fight you on account of your faith, nor drive you out of your homes. God loves those who behave equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship towards those who fight against you because of your faith, and drive you from your homes, and help others to drive you out. Those of you who turn towards them in friendship are indeed wrongdoers. (Verses 7–9)

Islam is a religion of peace, a faith based on love. It wants only for others to benefit from and implement its sound way of life. It wants all people to come together, under God's banner, as a fraternity based on love. Nothing prevents this other than aggression by Islam's enemies. Should those enemies wish to live in peace with Islam and Muslims,

Islam will not be the one to start enmity. Even if enmity and hostility exists, Islam preserves the seeds of friendship by extending justice and good treatment to its enemies, hoping that they will one day be convinced that their own advantage lies in adopting its noble beliefs. Islam never despairs of this possibility.

The first verse of this section refers to this hope that is never extinguished by despair. It seeks to lighten the burden of some of the Muhājirīn who were troubled by conflict with their own people: "*It may well be that God will bring about affection between you and those who are now your enemies.*" (Verse 7) As this prospect of hope is raised by God, it was certain to become a reality. When the Muslims heard it, they were certain that it would be fulfilled. Indeed, it was not long after, when Makkah fell to Islam, that the people of the Quraysh became Muslims, and all joined together under the same banner. All enmity between them disappeared and all were united as brethren.

"*God is all powerful.*" (Verse 7) He accomplishes what He wills, and no one can raise an objection, let alone try to stop Him. "*God is much forgiving, ever merciful.*" (Verse 7) He will forgive past sins and hostility.

Until God's promise is fulfilled, expressed here in the form of a hope, God gives them permission to be friendly with those who did not fight them or drive them out of their homes on account of their faith. No blame would attach to them if they maintained friendly relations with such people, treating them fairly, giving them all their due. On the other hand, there is a strict prohibition against friendship with those who fought them, drove them out of their land, or even helped in driving them out. Those who violate this prohibition are judged as wrongdoers. Wrongdoing is equated with unbelief, as God says in the Qur'an: "*To associate partners with Him is indeed a great wrong.*" (31: 13) This is, then, a very serious warning that strikes awe in a believer's heart.

This rule about how to treat non-Muslims is most fair and fits with the nature of Islam and its outlook on human life and on the universe as a whole. It represents the basis of its international law, which considers the state of peace to be the permanent state with all peoples and groupings. This state of peace is revoked only when military aggression against Islam and its people takes place, for it is imperative that such aggression be

repelled; or when treason is feared after a treaty with others has been signed, for this represents a threat of aggression; or when freedom of belief and advocating Islam is forcibly suppressed, which again represents aggression. In all other cases, Islam extends the hand of peace, affection and justice to all people.

This rule fits perfectly with the overall Islamic concept, which makes the only bone of contention between them and their opponents that of faith. The only value a Muslim will not compromise, even if this forces him to fight, is faith. Nothing puts Muslims in conflict and hostility with other communities except the question of the freedom to present their faith to people, the freedom of belief, the freedom to implement the divine code in human life.

This directive fits with the drift of the *sūrah* which aims to give prominence to faith, making it the only banner Muslims raise. Whoever stands under it belongs to them, and whoever fights them on account of it is their enemy. Anyone who maintains peace with them, leaving them to their faith, preventing no one from listening to it and adopting it, and putting no pressure on those who believe in it is a person at peace. Islam allows kindly treatment to be extended to such people.

A Muslim lives for his faith, making it his sole purpose within himself and with all people. He does not enter into conflict for gain, nor does he fight for ties of race, land, tribe or family. His only struggle is to ensure that God's word reigns supreme, and that His faith is the code to be followed.

Sometime later *Sūrah* 9, Repentance, was revealed, starting with the verse that gave notice to communities that held peace treaties with the Muslim state. It gave a four-month notice of termination of any treaty that did not specify a term of expiry. Treaties that ran for a specified notice remained valid until the end of their terms. This measure was taken after practical experience showed that the idolaters in Arabia only observed their treaties with the Muslim community until they had a chance of victory should they violate such treaties. This brought into operation the other rule concerning such treaties: "*If you fear treachery from any folk, cast [your treaty with them] back to them in a fair manner. God does not love the treacherous.*" (8: 58) To give notice of termination in a fair way was necessary to secure the Islamic base, which at the time

included the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, against its enemies living alongside them. These were the idolaters and people of earlier religions who were repeatedly in breach of their treaties, trying to take the Muslim community unawares. This was essentially a permanent situation of aggression. Another reason for this measure was the fact that the two superpowers at the time, the Byzantine and Persian Empires, began to feel that Islam could become a source of danger to them and this they wanted to pre-empt. Therefore, they started to encourage Arab tribes living close to them to take a hostile attitude towards the Muslim state. All this necessitated that the Islamic base be made solid and secure from any internal enemy before any clash with outside powers could take place.

Women Migrants

The *sūrah* issues a ruling concerning women believers who might join the Muslim community:

Believers! When believing women come to you as migrants, test them. God knows best their faith. If you ascertain that they are believers, do not send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them. None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries. Such is God's judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise. Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid. Fear God, in whom you believe. (Verses 10–11)

The Prophet concluded the al-Hudaybiyah Treaty with the Quraysh in Makkah and this specified a condition whereby the Prophet and the Muslim community would return to them anyone who went over to the

Muslims, even though that person might be a Muslim. Reports mention that when the Prophet was about to leave al-Hudaybiyah, a few women came over to him seeking to join the Muslim community in Madīnah. The Quraysh asked for their extradition in accordance with the terms of the treaty. It appears that those terms were not conclusive in the case of women. These two verses were revealed to block returning women believers to the unbelievers, for fear that they would be persecuted on account of their faith.¹

This was a situation requiring rules of international law. These rules outlined here regulate such cases on the basis of absolute fairness, without allowing the behaviour of the other party, unfair as it may be, to influence the Islamic stand. Furthermore, Islam's stance is that it ensures justice in all internal and external dealings.

The first step required by these rules was to test migrating women in order to determine their reasons for migration. In other words, they must not be trying to escape from a marriage that had gone wrong, or be pursuing some other material benefit, or hoping to marry men they were in love with in the Muslim community. Ibn 'Abbās reports that the Prophet rested any such woman, asking her: "By God, have you fled to us because you hate your husband? By God, have you come to us merely to migrate to a new land? By God, are you coming to us in pursuit of some material gain? By God, have you come to us only because you love God and His Messenger?"

'Ikrimah explains that the test was a form of questioning so as to establish whether the woman was migrating only because she loved God and His Messenger or for some other purpose. The test was also to establish whether or not she was in love with a man from the Muslim community, and whether or not she was fleeing from her husband.

1. It should be mentioned here that the Prophet and the Muslims abided by this treaty, right from the first moment after its signing. Hardly had the treaty been so signed when Suhayl ibn 'Amr, the Quraysh negotiator, saw his son coming to the Muslim camp seeking refuge. He was a Muslim but his father had imprisoned him and tried to force him to revert to idolatry. Suhayl demanded that his son be handed back to him, and the Prophet granted his request. He explained that Muslims are always true to their pledges. The events leading to the signing of this peace treaty are dealt with in detail in the commentary on *Sūrah* 48 in this volume. – Editor's note.

Such, then, was the test. It relied on statements made under oath. Whether such a woman had any different motive, God only knew. People simply cannot establish this with any measure of certainty: "*God knows best their faith.*" (Verse 10) When they have made their statements under oath, confirming that they are believers, then the Muslim community cannot "*send them back to the unbelievers. They are no longer lawful [as wives] for the unbelievers, and these are no longer lawful to them.*" (Verse 10) When the most important bond of faith has been severed, nothing can repair the relationship. Marriage is a union of permanent settlement and it cannot be properly established when the primary bond of faith is absent. Faith is the basic and vital emotion that keeps a heart alive; it cannot be replaced by any other. A believer's heart cannot warm to another that is devoid of faith. There can be no true feeling of mutual inclination or security between two hearts when only one of them has faith. Marriage survives on mutual affection, compassion, inclination and security.

After the Prophet's migration to Madīnah this issue had been left open, with no rule stated about it in the Qur'ān. Therefore, no couple were separated even if only one accepted Islam while the other did not. This was due to the fact that the Muslim society had not yet by then established firm roots. When al-Hudaybiyah Treaty was concluded, it was time that such a separation be made. Muslims, men and women, should understand that the bond that overrides all other bonds is faith, and they should put this rule into practice.

The provision for separating such couples was accompanied by a provision for compensation. Thus, an unbeliever whose wife left him because she was Muslim was entitled to receive back whatever he had paid to her in dowry at the time of their marriage. The same applied in reverse, should the man be a believer and his wife not.

When this had been done, the Muslims could marry such migrant women, provided that they paid them dowries. Scholars differ as to whether such women should observe a waiting period; as also over the length of the waiting period. Some scholars say that it is the same as that observed by a divorced woman, i.e. until she has gone through three menstrual periods, while others maintain that it lasts only until she has completed one period, to make sure that she is not pregnant. It

is agreed that if any such woman is pregnant, her waiting period lasts until she has given birth.

“None the less, hand back to the unbelievers the dowries they have paid them. It is no offence for you to marry them after giving them their dowries. Do not hold on to marriage ties with unbelieving women. Ask for repayment of the dowries you have paid, just as they have the right to ask for repayment of their dowries.” (Verse 10) All these rules are then tied to the strongest guarantee a believer has, which is that of watching God and fearing Him: *“Such is God’s judgement. He judges between you in equity. God is all-knowing, wise.”* (Verse 10) Indeed, this is the only inviolable guarantee. God’s judgement is that of the One who knows what is in people’s hearts, the Almighty who has power over all creatures. It is enough that a Muslim should realize the source of this judgement in order to implement it fully, because he knows that he will ultimately return to God.

Should a believer lose what he had paid in dowry, because his unbeliever wife or her family refuses to refund her Muslim husband, as happened in some cases, the Muslim ruler would compensate him for this, taking this from any money due to the unbelievers whose Muslim wives had migrated to join the Muslim community, or from any war gains made by the Muslim community: *“Should any of your wives go over to the unbelievers and you subsequently acquire gains from them, then pay those whose wives have gone away the equivalent of whatever dowry they had paid.”* (Verse 11) Again this ruling is tied to the same guarantee that ensures the implementation of every Islamic rule: *“Fear God, in whom you believe.”* (Verse 11) This is a profound and touching instruction for believers.

We see how these rulings concerning the separation of married couples provide an example of the practical implementation of the Islamic concept of life values and ties. They reflect the unity of the Muslim community and its being distinct from any other. It is a community where all life is based on faith, where all distinctions of race, colour, language, family and land are insignificant. There is only one sign that distinguishes between people – the sign of the party to which they belong. There are only two parties: the party of God and the party of Satan.

Women's Pledge of Allegiance

The Prophet is then instructed on how women should pledge their allegiance, and what the terms of their pledge should be:

Prophet! When believing women come and pledge to you that they will not associate any partner with God, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill their children, nor lie about who fathered their children, nor disobey you in anything reasonable, then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful. (Verse 12)

These terms outline the major elements of faith, and provide the framework of the new social system established by Islam. They comprise associating no partners with God in any way whatsoever. They confirm that offences with prescribed penalties, such as theft and adultery, should never be committed. Women should also pledge never to kill their children. This is a reference to the pre-Islamic practice of burying girls alive, and includes killing embryos for any reason. Women are placed in trust of their pregnancies. Another term of the pledge women give is that they should never "*lie about who fathered their children.*"² Ibn 'Abbās says: "This means that they must not attribute to their husbands any child that does not belong to them. The same view is stated by Muqātil. Perhaps this term, coming as it does after that of refraining from adultery altogether, was to address some practices of pre-Islamic days, when a woman might sleep with several men and when she gave birth to a child, she would choose its father from among them on the basis of looks, or perhaps on some other basis when she knew who its true father was. However, the text includes this and any other case of falsehood in this regard. Perhaps Ibn 'Abbās and Muqātil referred to this particular situation because of a case at the time.

The last term in women's pledge of allegiance is that they must not "*disobey you in anything reasonable.*" This means a commitment to obey

2. A more literal translation of this term of the pledge is "nor perpetrate any falsehood of their invention with regard to what is between their hands and legs." The chosen translation is based on the views of most leading scholars, as indicated in the commentary above. – Editor's note.

the Prophet in everything he says, because he never ordered anything other than what is reasonable and good. However, this term is also one of the main elements of the Islamic constitution. It makes clear that obedience of the Muslim ruler remains valid only within what is reasonable, i.e. what is in line with Islam and its laws. It does not give blanket cover, requiring obedience in every situation whatsoever. This rule ensures that the force of any legislation is derived from its being based on God's law, not the will of the ruler or the nation should they differ with God's law. Both ruler and nation are subject to God's law and derive their authority from it.

When women give such a comprehensive pledge of allegiance, their pledges are accepted. The Prophet is asked to pray to God to forgive them what they might have done in the past: "*Then accept their pledge of allegiance and pray to God to forgive them. God is most forgiving, ever merciful.*" (Verse 12) It is God who forgives and pardons.

The *sūrah* concludes with a general directive:

Believers! Do not take as friends any people with whom God is angry. They despair of the life to come just as the unbelievers despair of those buried in their graves. (Verse 13)

This is addressed to believers in their capacity of faith, a faith that distinguishes them from all other communities. Some reports suggest that the description of '*people with whom God is angry*' refers to the Jews, since they have been branded as such elsewhere in the Qur'ān. However, we have here a general text that applies to the Jews, the polytheists and all other enemies of God. All these groups have incurred God's anger. All of them despair of the life to come. They never take it seriously, and never give it a thought. Their despair of it is the same as that of unbelievers who think that those who died will never return and be resurrected.

This final address sums up the theme of the *sūrah*, giving it a conclusion akin to its opening. Its message is thus very clearly stated.

SŪRAH 61

Al-Şaff

(The Ranks)

Prologue

This *sūrah* seeks to establish two major themes which permeate its entire text. It also includes a number of secondary references which relate to those major themes.

The first aim of the *sūrah* is to establish in the conscience of every Muslim the fact that his religion is the final version of the divine system God has laid down for mankind. There were earlier versions, each suited for a particular period of human history. There were also experiences in the lives of earlier messengers and past communities that afforded much to reflect upon. All these have paved the way for this final version of the one divine faith. It incorporates God's final message for mankind, which He has willed to prevail over all other religions.

Hence, the *sūrah* mentions Moses' message, making it clear that his people caused him much grief and deviated from his message. They had gone astray and were no longer to be trustees of the divine faith: "*Now when Moses spoke to his people, he said: 'My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you? So, when they swerved from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth. God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers.'*" (Verse 5)

The *sūrah* then mentions Jesus' message to establish that Jesus was sent to carry on Moses' earlier message, confirming what was revealed before him of the Torah. He was also given the task of paving the way for the final message, giving news of the Messenger who was to carry it, and serving as a link between the first and the last divine religions. *"And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad."* (Verse 6) Hence, his task was to carry the trust of the divine faith after Moses and then to give it to the Messenger whose coming he announced.

It was always confirmed, according to God's knowledge and by His will, that these steps would eventually lead to a final and permanent version to establish God's faith in human life, and this by the final Messenger: *"It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters."* (Verse 9)

This first clear purpose of the *sūrah* gives rise to its second purpose. When a Muslim is fully aware of this fact, knows the history of the divine faith and is aware of his share of it, he realizes the duties that this trust involves. Hence, he has a clear and sincere motive for striving to ensure that this faith prevails over all other religions, just as God wants it to do. There is no longer any vacillation in practically carrying out what one verbally has proposed to do. It is inappropriate for a believer to declare his intention to strive for God's cause but then to refrain from doing so. According to some reports, it appears that there were some cases of this sort. Hence, the *sūrah* starts with a proclamation that the entire universe and all that is in it unceasingly glorify God. *"Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building."* (Verses 2-4)

In the middle of the *sūrah*, the believers are called upon to take part in the most profitable transaction that they could have in this life and in the life to come: *"Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? You are to believe in God and His Messenger,*

and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers." (Verses 10–13)

The *sūrah* ends with an appeal to the believers to be the helpers in furthering God's cause, just like Jesus' disciples who supported him when the Israelites continued to deny his message and were hostile towards him: "*Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: "Who will be my helpers in God's cause?" The disciples said: "We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause." And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail.*" (Verse 14)

These two purposes are very clear throughout the *sūrah*, taking up nearly all of its text. There only remains a denunciation of those who reject the final message, which is clearly linked to the two main themes. We see this clearly stated after Jesus gave the news of the impending appearance of the final Messenger, the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him): "*But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: 'This is plain sorcery.' Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers.*" (Verses 6–8)

Thus, every Muslim is clear in his mind that his faith is the final version of the religion God wants to be established on earth. He realizes that the trust of this divine faith is given to him, and he knows that he is required to strive for God's cause as God wants. His line is clear, leaving no room for ambiguity, hesitation or faltering. The goal is well defined and the way to achieve it is made clear.

With this goal-defining directive we also have clear pointers to the nature of the moral code a Muslim must follow. A Muslim must

demonstrate consistency between his conscience and his action. He cannot say one thing and then do another. His appearance must not fundamentally differ from what he conceals within himself. He must be consistent in all situations, dedicated in his service to God's cause, clear in both his intention and action, moving with steady steps, collaborating with his brothers so that the Muslim community is seen to be solid and firm like a building with strong foundations.



Al-Şaff (The Ranks)

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

All that is in the heavens and in the
earth extols God's limitless glory:
for He alone is the almighty, truly
wise. (1)

Believers! Why do you say what
you do not do? (2)

Most loathsome is it in the sight
of God that you say what you do
not do! (3)

God loves indeed those who
fight in His cause in solid ranks,
as though they were a firm and
compact building. (4)

Now when Moses spoke to his
people, he said: "My people! Why
do you cause me grief, when you
know that I am a messenger God
has sent to you?" So, when they
swerved from the right way, God
let their hearts swerve from the
truth. God does not bestow His
guidance upon evildoers. (5)



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١﴾

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ
مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢﴾

كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا
مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ
فِي سَبِيلِهِ ۖ صَفًّا كَأَنَّهُمْ بُنْيَانٌ
مَرْمُوسٌ ﴿٤﴾

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ ۖ يَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
تُؤَدُّونَنِي وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ أَفِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
إِلَيْكُمْ فَلَمَّا زَاغُوا أَزَاغَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ
وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٥﴾

And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: "This is plain sorcery." (6)

Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. (7)

They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers. (8)

It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters. (9)

Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? (10)

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدٌ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٦﴾

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ وَهُوَ يُدْعَى إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٧﴾

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتِمُّ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٨﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَى وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٩﴾

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَى مَخْرَجٍ تُنَجِّكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ أَلِيمٍ ﴿١٠﴾

You are to believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. (11)

تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ مَجْتَهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ
كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١﴾

He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! (12)

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَيُدْخِلْكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى
مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتِ
عَدْنٍ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers. (13)

وَأُخْرَى تُحِبُّونَهَا نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ
وَبَشِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: "Who will be my helpers in God's cause?" The disciples said: "We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause." And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail. (14)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُونُوا أَنْصَارَ اللَّهِ كَمَا
قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ لَلْحَوَارِيِّينَ مَنْ
أَنْصَارِي إِلَى اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ
أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ فَتَأَمَّنَتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْ بَنِي
إِسْرَائِيلَ وَكَفَرَتْ طَائِفَةٌ فَأَيَّدْنَا الَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا عَلَىٰ عَدُوِّهِمْ فَأَصْبَحُوا ظَاهِرِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Words and Actions

All that is in the heavens and in the earth extols God's limitless glory: for He alone is the almighty, truly wise. (Verse 1)

The whole universe participates in this glorification of God Almighty whose might is combined with His infinite wisdom. This glorification begins this *sūrah*, which declares to Muslims that their religion is the last and final version of the divine faith. They are placed in a position of trustees of this faith based on God's oneness, denouncing all deviation perpetrated by unbelievers and idolaters. Muslims are also called upon to strive in support of this faith, which God has willed to prevail over all other religions, hateful as this may be to unbelievers. This opening, thus, implies that the trust given to Muslims belongs to the entire universe; the faith they strive for is the faith of all creatures in the heavens and the earth. Hence, this religion's prevalence is a universal phenomenon, one that is in line with the whole universe as it turns to God Almighty.

A group of believers are strongly reproached for something they did that was particularly hateful to God. This was inappropriate behaviour for believers:

Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do! God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building. (Verses 2–4)

Ibn 'Abbās reports that prior to making *Jihād* obligatory, some believers used to say: "We wish that God would tell us what action is most loved by Him, so that we could do it." God instructed His Messenger to say that what God loves most is a belief in Him that allows no room for doubt, and striving against deviant people who reject the faith. However, when *Jihād* was made obligatory, a number of believers found it difficult, and they disliked it distasteful. Hence the revelation of the verses saying: "*Believers! Why do you say what you do not do? Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!*" (Verse 2–3) Al-Ṭabarī also confirmed this in his commentary on the *sūrah*.

On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr says in his commentary that the majority of scholars agree that these verses were revealed when some Muslims turned away from *Jihād* when it was declared a duty. He adds that this is the same as other verses in the Qur'ān: "*Are you not aware of those who have been told, 'Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]?' When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God – or in even greater awe – and said, 'Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!' Say, 'Brief is the enjoyment of this world, whereas the life to come is the best for all who are God-fearing. None of you shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. Wherever you may be death will overtake you, even though you be in towers built up strong and high.'*" (4: 77–78)

Qatādah and al-Ḍaḥḥāq say that this verse reproaches those who used to boast about their exploits, claiming that they had fought and killed the enemy, when they had not done so.

Looking at these verses, their context and the mention of fighting, we feel that the occasion inviting their revelation was the one mentioned by the majority of scholars and by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. However, Qur'ānic texts always take dimensions that go beyond the individual events which they address. They also comment on many other events in addition to the immediate occasion. Therefore, we look at these verses according to their general import, without forgetting the immediate events for which they were revealed.

The *sūrah* starts then with a reproach for behaviour in one or more actual events: "*Believers! Why do you say what you do not do?*" (Verse 2) It then denounces this action and its lack of morality in a doubly powerful way: "*Most loathsome is it in the sight of God that you say what you do not do!*" (Verse 3) What is viewed by God as most loathsome must certainly be very hateful and repugnant. This statement is sufficient then to make believers view this in the vilest of terms, particularly as they are addressed by God as people who have accepted His religion and who believe in Him.

The next verse refers to that particular matter when they did something different to what they used to profess, namely *Jihād*. It defines what God

likes in this question and what earns His pleasure: *“God loves indeed those who fight in His cause in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.”* (Verse 4) This is not mere fighting, but fighting for God's cause, in collaboration with the Muslim community, within its ranks, and with resolve and steadfastness, so that believers remain *“in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building.”*

Moral Values in Practice

We have said on several occasions that as it was being revealed, the Qur'an was carrying on with a process of nation building. Its aim was to build a community that carried the trust of the divine message, implemented its approach and established its system in human life. It was necessary for this purpose that the Qur'an should undertake the reform of its individuals, establish its bonds as a community, and build it as a living nation in practice. All of this was to be accomplished at the same time. A Muslim is not a Muslim unless he functions within a community. It is inconceivable for Islam to be put into practice unless it functions in a community with well-defined bonds, a system and goal. Its ultimate goal applies to the community as a whole, but it also applies at the same time to each individual. This goal consists of establishing the divine system in people's consciences and practices on earth. To achieve the latter, Islam must live in an actual community that implements it fully.

Islam places much emphasis on the individual's conscience and responsibility, but it is certainly not a religion of individuals who dedicate themselves to worship in their respective little corners. This does not establish Islam within the individual's own conscience, let alone in his whole life. Islam was not revealed in such isolation. Rather, it was revealed to establish its criteria and standards in human life. It aims to put its mark on every individual and collective activity in every direction. Mankind do not live as individuals, but as groups, communities and nations. And Islam wants to provide people with its controls as they conduct their lives. Hence, it is so structured as to cater for people as they live. Its morality, manners, rules and systems are all formulated on this basis. When Islam directs its attention to the conscience of the

individual, it moulds this conscience on the basis that the individual lives in a community. Both the individual and the community turn to God and seek His pleasure. Therefore, a Muslim works within his community to fulfil the religious trust on earth and to establish the Islamic system in life.

Right from the very first day of the Islamic message, a Muslim community was established under the leadership of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Its individuals had their commitments towards their community, which also had its special entity distinguishing it from all other communities. It had its values that related to the human conscience but which looked at the same time to the life and welfare of the community. All this took place before the Islamic state was established in Madīnah. Indeed, the formation of this community was the means by which the Islamic state was later established.

When we look at these three verses we find that the morality of the individual is intertwined with the needs of the community, under the authority of religious faith. By its very nature, this faith can function fully in human life only in the form of a system that is properly served and protected.

The first two of the three verses under discussion refer to God's punishment and a strong censure if believers say something that is belied by their deeds. Thus, these two verses delineate the hugely important qualities of truthfulness and consistency in a Muslim's personality. A Muslim must reflect the same image in his inner self and in his appearance. His actions must be consistent with his words. This applies in all situations and goes far beyond the call to *Jihād* to which the third verse refers.

The Qur'ān places great emphasis on this Islamic characteristic, which is also repeatedly emphasized in the *sunnah*. Denouncing the Jews, God says: "*How can you bid others to piety and forget yourselves even while you are reciting the Book? Do you not understand?*" (2: 44) "*They say: 'We do obey you,' but when they leave you, some of them devise, in secret, something different from what you advocate.*" (4: 81) "*There is a kind of man who pleases you greatly in the present life by what he says, and he cites God as witness to what is in his heart, whereas he is the most antagonistic of adversaries. Yet, no sooner does he turn away than he strives to spread corruption in*

the world, destroying crops and progeny. God does not love corruption." (2: 204–205) The Prophet says: "The three distinctive marks of a hypocrite are: he lies when he speaks, and breaks his promises, and he is untrue to his trust." [Related by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasā'ī.] There are numerous *ahādīth* that emphasize the same concept. Perhaps the *hadīth* we will quote now includes one of the most subtle and refined directives by the Prophet to reiterate this moral aspect of Islam. Imām Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd relate this report by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah: "God's Messenger came to us when I was a young boy. I wanted to go out to play, but my mother said to me, 'Abdullāh, come and I will give you something.' The Prophet said to her, 'What do you want to give him?' She replied, 'Dates.' He said, 'If you would not give him anything, it would have been recorded against you as a lie'."

Perhaps Imām Aḥmad was guided by this *hadīth* when he travelled a long distance to meet someone whom he wanted to ask about another *hadīth*. However, when he arrived at the man's place, he saw him raising his robe in a way that suggested to his mule that it contained food, but there was nothing in the robe. Imām Aḥmad then felt that he should not report the *hadīth* reported by this man simply because he had lied to his mule.

A Muslim's conscience is reared to such a fine moral standard so as to build the character that can be entrusted with the establishment of the divine system in human life. This is what we see in this *sūrah*, which provides an important aspect of education for the Muslim community and its preparation to shoulder its great trust.

The *Jihād* Duty

Let us now consider the issue of *Jihād* which these verses addressed at the time of their revelation. We find here several points that need to be appreciated.

We see firstly that human beings may experience moments of weakness and this is when they need God's help to combat such shortcomings. They need repeated reminders and regular education. These verses refer to a group of Muslims who, according to some reports, belonged to the Muhājirīn, the early Muslims who migrated with the Prophet from

Makkah to Madīnah. Whilst in Makkah, they wished, in all enthusiasm, that God would allow them to fight, but they were told to hold back and attend to their worship duties instead. However, when later in Madīnah they were told to fight, at the time that was considered appropriate, they held a different attitude: “*Are you not aware of those who have been told, ‘Hold back your hands [from fighting], and attend regularly to prayer, and pay your zakāt [i.e. the purifying dues]’? When, at length, the order for fighting was issued to them, some of them stood in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God – or in even greater awe – and said, ‘Our Lord! Why have you ordered us to fight? If only You had granted us a delay for a little while!’*” (4: 77) Other reports suggest that they were a group of the Madīnan Muslims who asked about the action God loves most so that they could perform it. However, when they were ordered to fight for God’s cause, they disliked this.

As we reflect on this, we realize that regular and repeated encouragement, directives and strengthening are all necessary for the human soul as it faces difficult tasks and responsibilities. Only with such repeated encouragement can the human soul maintain its path and overcome its weaknesses, setting its sight on higher objectives. Moreover, we realize that we must not ask to be given great goals when we face neither pressure nor difficulty. This because we may not be able to fulfil what we ask God to assign to us. Here, we see some early Muslims weakening to the extent that they say one thing and do another. Hence they faced this strong reproach from God.

Secondly, we need to reflect on the phraseology of the verse that speaks of God’s love for those who fight for His cause in closed ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building. This represents profound encouragement to fight for God’s cause. This statement was first made to deal with a case of reluctance and turning away from fighting, but this immediate cause does not change the fact that the encouragement is meant for all times and all peoples. Hence, there is a definite and constant purpose behind it.

Islam neither likes nor encourages fighting, but it makes it a duty on Muslims because life necessitates it, and because the purpose behind it is very important. Islam presents the final version of the divine system to humanity. Although this system meets all the needs of an upright

human nature, it requires that people exert themselves to rise to its standard and maintain it. On the other hand, there are numerous forces on earth that dislike this system and try to undermine it, because it deprives those forces of many privileges that are based on values Islam considers false and which it aims to eradicate from human life. These evil forces try to exploit people's weaknesses and their slackening after they have attained the high standard to which Islam elevates them. They also exploit people's ignorance and inherited values to oppose Islam and prevent the establishment of its system. Evil can muster great forces and falsehood is wont to boast of its power; Satan is indeed wicked and cunning. Hence, the advocates of faith who try to establish the Islamic system and protect it must be strong in order to overcome the agents of evil and Satan's supporters. They must be strong in their moral values, and tough in their fighting against evil. They must resort to combat when it is the only way to guarantee the freedom of action that promotes the Islamic system, and the freedom to believe in it and implement it in human life.

They fight for God's cause, not for their own glory or for any bonds of race, nationality, tribe or clan. The aim of their fight is that God's word reigns supreme, for the Prophet says: "Whoever fights to make God's word supreme fights for God's cause." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.]

God's word in this context is an expression of His will. What appears to us human beings, of God's will is that which conforms to the system that operates the universe, which in its entirety glorifies God and praises Him. The final version of God's divine faith, Islam, is the one that fits perfectly with the universal system. It makes the whole universe, including human beings, implement God's law, to the exclusion of all other laws.

It was inevitable that this faith should be opposed by individuals, classes and states. It was also inevitable that Islam should proceed along its way despite such opposition. Hence, it was necessary that *Jihād* should become obligatory on Muslims in support of this faith and for the purpose of making God's word supreme on earth. Hence, God loves those who fight for His cause with complete unity of hearts and unwavering dedication.

Finally, we need to reflect a little on the description of the state fighters should be in when they undertake *Jihād* for God's cause. They should be "in solid ranks, as though they were a firm and compact building." (Verse 4) This is an individual's obligation discharged in a collective form, i.e. in a community with a clear system. This is because those who stand against Islam marshal their forces and try to raise great coalitions against it. Hence, the soldiers of Islam must face its enemies standing in solid and straight ranks. It is in the nature of the Islamic faith that when it triumphs it moves to establish a solid community. Hence, the image of an individual believer, worshipping God on his own, striving and living alone is far removed from the nature of this faith and its duties. This is true both at the time of *Jihād* and fighting, and at a time when victory has been secured and the Islamic community established.

This condition, which God loves for believers, portrays the nature of their faith and explains for them the landmarks on their way. It illustrates the nature of the close cooperation between them as portrayed by this creative Qur'anic image: solid ranks like a firm and compact building. It is a building in which every brick is firmly placed in position, fulfilling its specific function. The whole edifice may collapse if one of its bricks moves out of place, whether forward or backward, so as not to firmly link with the one next to it in the higher or lower row or on either of its two sides. This is an expression that shows the reality, not merely gives a simile. It raises before us the nature of the Muslim community, the relations between individuals in this community, their feelings and united action within the overall system and towards a well-defined goal.

Denounced Attitude

The *sūrah* moves on to speak about the history of this divine system and the stages it went through with the messages revealed before Islam:

Now when Moses spoke to his people, he said: 'My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?' So, when they swerved from the right way, God let their hearts swerve from the truth. God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers. And also Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you, [sent] to confirm the Torah revealed before

me, and to give news of a Messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.' (Verses 5–6)

Moses was the one who saved the Children of Israel from Pharaoh and his tyranny. He was God's messenger to them, their leader and teacher. Yet the grief that they caused him was of the extended type, taking many colours and forms. His struggle to put them on the right course was hard, tiring and trying. In the accounts the Qur'ān gives of Moses and his people we read about the different aspects of the grief they caused him and how hard he had to struggle to reform their belief system.

For example, they discouraged Moses' efforts to persuade Pharaoh to let them go free. So whilst he exposed himself to Pharaoh's wrath, they were safe having accepted their lot and humiliation. They even blamed Moses for worsening their plight: "*We have been oppressed before you came to us, and since you have come to us.*" (7: 129) The suggestion being that they did not see much good coming their way as a result of his message, or that they blamed him for this latest round of oppression.

No sooner did Moses, guided by God, deliver them from Pharaoh's humiliation – He caused Pharaoh and his people to drown before their very eyes – than they inclined themselves to a type of worship akin to Pharaoh's people: *We led the Children of Israel across the sea; and thereupon they came upon people who were dedicated to the worship of some idols of theirs. Said the Children of Israel: "Moses, set up a god for us like the gods they have."* (7: 138) Again, Moses had not been gone long for the appointment with his Lord to receive the tablets when the Sāmīrī led them astray as he "*produced for them the effigy of a calf, which made a lowing sound. 'This,' they said, 'is your deity and the deity of Moses; but he has forgotten.'*" (20: 88)

They were also dissatisfied with their desert food, which was manna and quails. Thus they complained to their prophet: "*Moses! We can no longer put up with one kind of food. Pray to your Lord, then, to bring forth for us some of what the earth produces of green herbs, cucumber, garlic, lentils and onions.*" (2: 61) Mention should also be made here of the cow they were required to slaughter, yet they continued to demand explanations, seeking excuses and behaving impolitely to their prophet and to their

Lord. Time after time they said to Moses: "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make plain to us what kind of cow she should be.*" (2: 68) "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make clear to us of what colour she should be.*" (2: 69) "*Pray on our behalf to your Lord to make plain to us of what exact type she should be, for to us cows are much alike.*" (2: 70) When finally they ran out of excuses, "*They sacrificed her, although they had almost left it undone.*" (2: 71)

They requested that a day be assigned to them when they would not work. But when the Sabbath was ordained for them, they violated its rules. Later, when they were close to the Holy Land, which God told them they would enter, they stalled, not daring to go forward, while at the same time they spoke insolently to Moses: "*Mighty people dwell in that land, and we will surely not enter it unless they depart from it. If they do depart, then we will enter.*" (5: 22) He kept encouraging them, assuring them of the great success awaiting them, if they would only do what God had bidden them to do. Nonetheless, their insolence and disbelief reached new heights: "*They said, Moses, we will never go in so long as they are in it. Go forth, then, you and your Lord, and fight, both of you. We shall stay here.*" (5: 24)

They gave Moses much more grief, putting questions to him, making suggestions, and even starting a rebellion. Furthermore, as related in *ahādīth*, they also falsely accused him. The *sūrah* mentions here how Moses remonstrated with them in a friendly way: "*My people! Why do you cause me grief, when you know that I am a messenger God has sent to you?*" (Verse 5) They knew for certain that he was God's messenger, but he did not put this fact across in a strong and assertive way. Rather, he simply gave them a remonstrating reminder. The result was that they swerved from the right way after being given every possible means of sticking to it. Hence, God let them go further astray and their hearts were no longer fit to receive guidance. "*God does not bestow His guidance upon evildoers.*" (Verse 5) Thus their trusteeship of the divine faith was over. They were no longer fit to carry God's message after they had gone so far astray.

Then Jesus came, saying: "*Children of Israel! I am God's messenger to you.*" (Verse 6) He did not say to them that he was God or the son of God or a manifestation of God. He was simply a messenger sent "to

confirm the Torah revealed before me, and to give news of a messenger that will come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad." (Verse 6)

Thus we see how the divine faith moved from one stage to the next, with all the stages interrelated, moving in the same direction, stretching from heaven to the earth: a long chain moving from link to link. This is the proper image, one worthy of God's design and constitution. It is basically the same approach, taking slightly different forms, according to what suits the needs, experience, knowledge and potential of humanity at each particular stage, until it reaches full maturity. Only then does the last stage arrive and the final form of divine faith be given: perfect, complete, addressing a mature mind that has benefited from all past experience. It opens the way so that the human mind works to its full potential within the method set for man and his abilities.

That Jesus gave the news of the impending arrival of Ahmad, (another name of the Prophet Muḥammad), is absolutely confirmed by this verse, whether the Gospels mention this or not. Note also that the circumstances surrounding the writing of these Gospels and the way they were written make them totally unreliable on this issue.

The Qur'ān was read to the Jews and Christians in the Arabian Peninsula, including the verse that speaks of the Prophet Muḥammad as *"the unlettered Prophet whom they shall find described in the Torah and the Gospel."* (7: 157) Some of their genuine scholars who embraced Islam, such as 'Abdullāh ibn Sallām, acknowledged this fact, but they counselled each other to suppress.

Several reports also confirm that the Jews were awaiting the arrival of a new messenger; this was considered imminent. The same was stated by a number of Christian priests in Arabia who were unitarians, living in isolation. But the Jews wanted this messenger to be one of their own. When God so willed that he should belong to the other branch of Abraham's seed, the Jews disliked and opposed this. Needless to say, the Qur'ānic statement is the ultimate verdict on such matters. It is the final say.

Trying to Extinguish God's Light

It seems that the verses that follow are mostly concerned with the way the Jews and the Christians received the Prophet mentioned in their

scriptures. They are denounced for the reception they gave Muḥammad and for their designs to undermine the new and final message God willed to prevail over all other religions:

But when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: 'This is plain sorcery.' Who could be more wicked than one who invents a falsehood about God, when he is only being called upon to submit to Him? God does not bestow His guidance upon the wrongdoers. They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers. (Verses 6–8)

The Jews' attitude to this new faith was a combination of hostility, evil scheming and misrepresentation. They waged a determined fight against Islam, using all means and resources, and this has continued to the present day. They levelled charges against it: "*when he came to them with all evidence of the truth, they said: This is plain sorcery.*" (Verse 6) This echoes the allegations of idolaters who had no scriptures and had no advance news of the new faith. The Jews also sought to create discord within the Muslim community. In particular, they tried to create division between the Muḥājirīn and the Anṣār in Madīnah, and between the two tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj. They conspired with the hypocrites at times and with the idolaters at others. They also joined with the idolaters' attack on Madīnah, as happened in the Battle of the Moat. Their designs against the new faith also included spreading false rumours, as happened in what is known as the story of falsehood in which the main culprit was 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy ibn Salūl. Later, they used the same tactics in the events masterminded by 'Abdullāh ibn Saba', which led to the assassination of 'Uthmān, the third Caliph. Thereafter, they tried further to undermine Islam with the fabrications and false stories they managed to infiltrate into *ḥadīth*, the reports of the history of the Prophet and the books of commentary on the Qur'ān. All this after they found themselves totally incapable of implanting any falsehood into the Qur'ān itself.

This war has continued unabated until the present day. Zionism and Christian imperialism have continued to scheme against Islam, launching or supporting aggression against Islam in every generation.

They launched the Crusades against the Muslim east, and they fought against the Muslims in Andalus in the west. They also fought against Islam in its central area launching one attack after another against the last Caliphate, i.e. the Ottoman Caliphate, which they called 'the sick man of Europe', until they managed to destroy it and divide its provinces. They needed to create false heroes in the land of Islam to carry out their schemes against it. When they needed to destroy the Caliphate as the last symbol of Islamic rule, they created in Turkey a national 'hero' and groomed his image. Thus, the Allied forces, which were in control of the Ottoman capital, retreated before his army in order to make him a great hero. In this way was he able to abolish the Caliphate regime and the Arabic language, and to separate Turkey from the rest of the Muslim world making of it a secular state. The Jews and Christians continue to create such false heroes whenever they feel the need to smash an Islamic movement in any Muslim country and replace Islamic ties with other bonds.

"They aim to extinguish God's light with their mouths, but God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers." (Verse 8) This verse expresses a fact and paints a pathetic image of those enemies of Islam. It is true that they used to say about the Prophet and his message, *'This is plain sorcery'*. It is also true that they continued to scheme against Islam, trying to undermine it. It is a pathetic picture we see of them as they try to extinguish God's light with a blow from their mouths. How naïve and weak they are!

"But God will spread His light in all its fullness, however hateful this may be to the unbelievers." (Verse 8) There is no doubt that God's promise will always come true. He brought His light to fullness during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), when the Muslim community came into being as a living and practical representation of the system He had chosen for mankind. It was a well-defined religion with clearly delineated features so that future generations could follow in its footsteps. It was a fact of history, not a theory explained in books. He also brought His light to fullness when he perfected the favour He bestowed on Muslims, choosing Islam as their religion and making it complete. Thus, they loved their religion and were keen to fight for its cause. Anyone of them would prefer to be thrown in a fire rather than

revert to disbelief. Thus the truth of the faith lived in people's hearts and in their world. This truth continues to spring up time after time, showing that it continues to live in spite of all the sustained aggression, repeated scheming and unabated persecution campaigns waged against Islam and its followers. The fact is that God's light cannot be extinguished by people's mouths, nor can it be stifled by fire and iron-fisted tactics to which some small people resort. It may appear to tyrants, stooges made up as heroes and to Zionists that they can achieve this goal and put out God's light, but all their efforts will come to nothing.

It is God's will that this religion should prevail. Hence, it is inevitable that it will:

It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, so that He may cause it to prevail over all other religions, however hateful this may be to the idolaters. (Verse 9)

That God testifies that this religion of Islam is '*guidance and the religion of truth*' is the final word. God's will has been fulfilled, and this religion has prevailed over all other religions. It has prevailed by its very nature as a religion. No other religion compares with it in its nature. Pagan and idolatrous religions cannot stand up to it for a moment. Divine religions, on the other hand, find it as their final and complete version. So, in essence, Islam is the perfect and complete version of these faiths, and it will preserve its pure form for the rest of time.

Earlier divine religions were distorted by omissions and additions. Thus, they became unfit to lead human life in any direction. Even if they had remained free of distortion, they are no more than earlier versions of the divine faith which did not cater for ever-increasing life requirements, because they were intended by God to serve for a limited time only.

This shows that God's promise has come true from the viewpoint of the nature of faith. As for real life, God's promise was fulfilled at one time when Islam gained power and established its own system of government. Within one century, most of the populated world came under its rule. Then it moved peacefully into Asia and Africa to win, through advocacy efforts, more than five times the numbers who embraced it during the early *Jihād* efforts. It continues to spread without having a single state implementing it fully, after Zionism and Christian imperialism

destroyed the last Caliphate in Turkey at the hands of the 'hero' they manufactured for this purpose. It continues to spread by God's grace, despite all the schemes devised to stop its march and undermine it, and the persecution of Islamic revivalist movements everywhere at the hands of other 'heroes' Zionism and imperialism create.

This religion will continue to have other roles to fulfil in the life of humanity. It will prevail in fulfilment of God's promise. Human efforts cannot stop God's will, no matter how powerful they may be or how wicked their schemes of misrepresentation are.

These verses served as motivation to the believers to carry the trust for which God has chosen them, after it was abandoned by the Jews and Christians who were not true to it. These verses reassure the believers that they are simply the means of fulfilling God's will. They continue to provide such motivation and reassurance to new believers who are certain that God's promise will always come true. They will give new generations the same motives and reassurance until God's promise comes to be fulfilled in people's real life once more, God willing.

A Most Profitable Bargain

When the history of faith has thus been outlined and the inevitable triumph the final version of the divine faith has been promised, the Qur'ān addresses the believers – those living at the time and those of later generations – offering them the bargain of their lives. This is a transaction in which the merchandise is faith and the means to achieve it is *Jihād*:

Believers! Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering? You are to believe in God and His Messenger, and to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives. This is for your own good, if you but knew it. He will forgive you your sins, and [in the life to come] will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden. That is the supreme triumph! And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers. (Verses 10–13)

The style employed here uses a variety of forms, such as splitting sentences and reconnecting them, putting forward a question and providing the answer, inversion and transposition all aiming to drive a certain message home. The address starts in the name of faith, "Believers!" It is followed by an inspiring question. It is God who puts the question and holds their expectation of an answer: "*Shall I point out to you a bargain that will save you from grievous suffering?*"

Who would not wish to know what this bargain is and what its terms are! Yet here the verse ends, providing a break between two sentences to add to the expectation. The answer is given when interest in it has been heightened: "*You are to believe in God and His Messenger.*" Since they were truly believers in God and His Messenger, they are happy that this part of the answer is already met by them. "*And to strive hard in God's cause with your possessions and your lives.*" This is the main theme of the *sūrah*, and it is given here in this particular fashion to reiterate a message that has already been clarified. God knows that human beings need such repetition and variety of modes and styles in order to rise to the occasion. Realizing this, they will exert their maximum efforts to establish and preserve the divine system.

The *sūrah* goes further, presenting the bargain in an even more attractive way: "*This is for your own good, if you but knew it.*" Knowledge of the truth will encourage the person who knows it to try to obtain this beneficial matter. But the thing that is referred to as being good for us is given in more detail in the next verse. This again heightens the effect even further; providing the details after a general statement drives the point home and makes it even more desirable. "*He will forgive you your sins.*" On its own, this is more than enough. Who would need any further reward when he is assured of God's forgiveness? Who would begrudge anything if he is certain to obtain God's forgiveness? But God's grace has no limit, for the reward also includes something for the life to come. God "*will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, and into goodly mansions in the gardens of Eden.*" This is the most profitable bargain of all, because all that is needed for this deal to be concluded is that a believer should fight for God's cause during his short life on earth. Even if this means him losing his life in this fight, he will be compensated for it with heaven and these goodly mansions where he lives in permanent bliss. "*That is the supreme triumph!*"

The account of this transaction appears to conclude here. It is indeed a highly profitable bargain which the believer makes, bartering the life of this world for that of the hereafter. A person who receives a profit ten times his capital will be the envy of everyone in the marketplace. What about one who puts up a few days of life on earth and its limited and narrow comforts to earn an eternal life with God in pure happiness and enjoyment that knows no end?

The deal was concluded between the Prophet (peace be upon him) and 'Abdullāh ibn Rawāḥah on the night when the Anṣār (the Prophet's Companions from Madīnah) pledged their support to him. 'Abdullāh said to the Prophet: "Make whatever conditions you wish, for yourself and for your Lord." He said: "My condition for my Lord is that you worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him. And my condition for myself is that you pledge you will protect me as you protect your own womenfolk and children." 'Abdullāh said: "What will our reward be if we honour our commitments?" The Prophet said: "Paradise." They said: "It is a profitable bargain. We will never seek release from our commitments, nor do we accept any cancellation."

God's grace is limitless. He knows that human beings always look for something close, in this world, which fits human nature. Therefore, He gives them the happy news of what He has determined of making this religion of Islam prevail in this world, and making its system and code triumph in the life of that same generation: "*And [He will grant you] yet another thing that you dearly love: help from God and a victory soon to come. Give you the good news to the believers.*" (Verse 13)

At this point, the bargain attains the point of supreme returns which only God, whose stores are endless, and whose grace is interminable, can give. What He gives in return, then, are forgiveness, heaven, goodly dwelling and eternal bliss, but in addition to all such profits He gives a soon-to-happen victory. Who would hold back, hesitate when God tells him of this bargain?

With all this temptation and goodly prospects, a thought may well occur to us. A believer who knows the Islamic concept of life and the universe, and appreciates the great horizons this concept opens up before us, and then looks at life without faith, with its narrow concerns and lowly levels, cannot tolerate life without faith even for a moment. He

will not hesitate for a second in joining the struggle for God's cause in order to establish the great concept of faith in real life, so that he may live with the rest of mankind in its superior reality. It may be that he would not need to have any reward other than such a life, because the struggle for God's cause is, in itself, a reward, giving us contentment and happiness in this life. Moreover, such a believer cannot live in a world devoid of faith, and cannot sit idle, not striving to establish a world governed by faith. Thus, he is strongly motivated to struggle, no matter what happens to him as a result.

Echoing Jesus' Appeal

God, however, knows that people may slacken, and that enthusiasm may dampen, efforts may wane and love of safety may lead people to accept the *status quo*, even though its level is too low. Hence, the Qur'an administers this treatment, providing motivation and images to enhance feelings and enthusiasm, making use of every occasion and possible means to appeal to human hearts and souls. It does not rely merely on faith or on one mode of address in the name of this faith. Hence, the *sūrah* ends with a new and distinctive address, and one that carries new appeal:

Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God; just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: 'Who will be my helpers in God's cause?' The disciples said: 'We shall be [your] helpers in God's cause.' And so some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail. (Verse 14)

The disciples were Jesus Christ's pupils. It is said that they were 12 men who were close to him and who dedicated themselves to learning from him. They continued to spread his message and commandments after his term was over. This verse does not give us a detailed story: it simply outlines an attitude. Hence, we look at it in the context it is given and for the purpose it serves.

"Believers! Be helpers [in the cause] of God." (Verse 14) Place yourselves in this noble position to which He elevates you. Is there a position that

is higher and more noble than that of being a supporter of God and His cause? This bargain bestows an honour that is greater than heaven and its happiness: be helpers of God, *“just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: ‘Who will be my helpers in God’s cause?’ The disciples said: ‘We shall be [your] helpers in God’s cause.’”* (Verse 14) They were chosen for this task and earned this honour. Jesus came to give the news of the last Prophet and the last religion. It is only fitting that Muḥammad’s followers should be chosen for this permanent task, just as Christ’s disciples were chosen for it during their period of time. This is clearly apparent in the way the dialogue is presented in this verse.

But what was the result then? *“Some of the Children of Israel came to believe whereas others denied the truth. But We have given those who believed strength over their enemy and they were the ones to prevail.”* (Verse 14) This statement may be interpreted in one of two ways: either the believers in Christ’s message are all Christians, whether they remained faithful to its original form or they are those whose faith was subject to distortion. God supported them over the Jews who did not believe in Him at all, as known from history. Or the believers were only those who continued to believe in God’s oneness in defiance of those who gave Jesus divine status, those who believed in the Trinity, or those who deviated in some other way. The believers prevailed in argument, giving irrefutable evidence. Alternatively, we may understand the verse as meaning that those who continued to believe in God’s oneness were supported by the last religion that endorsed their beliefs. God has made the final victory assured to this religion, as happened in history. This last sense is perhaps the most probable.

The aim of this last address is to strengthen the resolve of the believers in the last religion, the heirs of the divine message. They are the ones charged with a great task, namely the implementation of God’s system on earth. They are encouraged to come forward to support God’s cause: *“just as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the disciples: ‘Who will be my helpers in God’s cause?’ The disciples said: ‘We shall be [your] helpers in God’s cause.’”* Eventual victory is assured for believers who support God’s cause.

Thus the *sūrah* concludes with a verse that fits the general context and drift of the *sūrah*, yet has a special colour and effect. It enriches an already rich variety of colours and effects.