

Sura 16: Al-Nahl (The Bees)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

The rhythm of the verses in this Sura is slow and the cadence is quite but it covers a wide scope of issues. The issues are presented in a comprehensive framework. Similar to other Meccan Suras, it deals with the major issues related to the doctrine: the divine nature of God, God's revelation, and the concept of resurrection after death. It also touches upon a number of related side issues. It articulates the relationship between the religions of Abraham (PBUH) and Muhammad (PBUH), the divine Will regarding guidance and misguidance, the responsibility of the Messengers of God, God's decree concerning those who reject guidance, the myth of idolatry, the migration for the sake of God, the trials that Muslims were subjected to, and the issue of apostasy. In addition, it touches upon ethical issues among which establishing justice, doing good, spending in the way of God, and fulfilment of promise. In the background of the Sura, the heavens and earth; the descending rain and the growing trees; the dark night, the daylight, the sun, the moon and the stars; the mountains, the seas, and the rivers all cast their shadows on the events unfolding.

Verses 1 to 21:

1. *The commandment of God will come to pass, so do not seek to hasten it. Glorified and Exalted is He above all that they associate (with Him).*
2. *He sends down the angels with the spirit of His command on whom He wills of His servants, (saying), "Warn that there is no God save Me, so be conscious of Me."*
3. *He created the heavens and the earth in truth. High is He Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).*
4. *He created humankind from a sperm-drop; and behold this same (humankind) becomes an open adversary.*
5. *And the cattle He has created for you, from them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) you eat.*
6. *You find beauty in them for you when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture).*
7. *And they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not (otherwise) reach except with great trouble to yourselves. Your Lord is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
8. *And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for ornament. And He creates that which you do not know.*
9. *And God points to the direction of the (right) way, but there are ways which deviate. If God had willed, He could have guided all of you.*
10. *It is He who sends down rain from the sky, from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle.*
11. *With it He produces crops for you, and the olive and the date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruits. Indeed, in this there is a sign for a people who reflect.*
12. *And He has subjected to you the night and the day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are all subjected by His Command. Verily, in this are signs for people who understand.*
13. *And what He has created on earth of varied hues, therein indeed a sign for a people who are mindful.*

14. *It is He who subjected the sea, that you may eat from it flesh that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract from it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships plowing through, that you may seek of the grace of God and that you may be grateful.*
15. *And He has cast into the earth firm mountains, lest it shifts with you, and streams and roads that you may be guided.*
16. *And landmarks (too), and by the star they are (also) guided.*
17. *Is then He who creates like the one who does not create? Will you not be mindful?*
18. *If you count up the favours of God, never would you be able to enumerate them.
Certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
19. *And God does know what you conceal, and what you reveal.*
20. *And those whom they invoke besides God create nothing and they are themselves created.*
21. *(They are) dead, not living. And they perceive it not when they will be raised. (16: 1 -21)*

“The commandment of God will come to pass, so do not seek to hasten it. Glorified and Exalted He above all that they associate (with Him). He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command on whom He wills of His servants, (saying), ‘Warn that there is no God save Me, so be conscious of Me.’” The idolaters in Mecca were hounding the Prophet (PBUH) about the promised punishment from God. They were challenging the veracity of the promise. The more the punishment was delayed the more their harassment grew and the more aggressive they became in ridiculing the Prophet (PBUH). They did not realize that the reprieve that they were given was a mercy from God and that there was a rationale behind it. They never tried to reflect on the signs of God in the universe and in the Quran. They did not try to reflect on the verses of the Quran which addressed their minds and challenged their intellect. They did not appreciate the Quranic methodology which appeals to the human intellect. This methodology appreciates the abilities and rights of the human being which God bestowed on him. These include the ability to think and feel, the right of expression, and the freedom of will.

The Sura starts with an unequivocal statement, *“The commandment of God will come to pass.”* This indicates that the command has been issued and this is sufficient for the command to be fulfilled at the time that God has decreed. So, do not be impatient. Nothing will change God’s plan. The decisiveness of the opening statement has a strong impact on the soul of the person, no matter how obstinate that person is. In addition, it only states the reality of the situation. God’s command will be fulfilled. God is high above what the idolaters associate with Him. God sends down the angels with His revelation. The use of the word *“spirit”* here indicates more than a revelation. It is a revelation that revives the souls, the consciousness, the intellect, and the emotions of people. It is a revelation that revives the society and protects it from corruption and decay. The message is the message of the belief in the Oneness of God. This spirit is the best of the blessings of God that He bestowed on humankind and it is the source of all other blessings which will be detailed in the rest of the Sura. The delivery of the message as a, *“warning,”* is congruent with the theme of the Sura which addresses those who rejected the message.

“He created the heavens and the earth with the truth. High is He Exalted above all that they associate (with Him).” The creation, control and management of heavens and earth are based on the truth. Nothing has been created accidentally. God’s plan is perfect and meaningful. God is

One and has no associates.

“He created humankind from a sperm-drop; and behold this same (humankind) becomes an open adversary.” This is a great leap from a humble beginning to an adversarial status. This is a great leap between the sperm-drop and the open adversary who argues with and rejects his Creator.

The narrative then starts to review the creation of God which has been created for the benefit of humankind, *“And the cattle He has created for you, from them you derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) you eat. You find beauty in them for you, when you drive them back (to home), and when you send them forth (to pasture). And they carry your heavy loads to lands that you could not (otherwise) reach except with great trouble to yourselves. Your Lord is All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”* The use of cattle could be appreciated greatly in an environment like the one in which the Quran was revealed as well as in many other rural communities. The Arabs were used to camels, cows, sheep, and goats. They also had horses, mules, and donkeys which were used in riding and were sometimes owned for their graceful look. The verses explore the benefits and uses which satisfy the needs and desires of people. The cattle provide skin that can be used to make warm clothes and tents, meat to eat, and milk to drink. They are used to carry heavy loads and to transport people. It also has a sight pleasing to the beholder.

The sentence, *“You find beauty in them,”* emphasizes the value of beauty in life. Beauty is an essential aspect of life on earth. God’s blessings are not limited to the necessities of life but they extend to cover human aspirations for the fulfillment of the sense of beauty in the hearts of people.

“And (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and use for ornament. And He creates that which you do not know.” This verse opens the door for the human creativity to think about new modes of transportation which carry heavy cargo and people.

The faith of Islam is a flexible and broad minded faith. It is open for new developments that use all the tools and means which God created to help us lead a better life. It accepts new innovations that are made possible through knowledge, ability, and science. The means of transportation will be ever changing as life progresses.

In juxtaposition to the cattle which are used to transport people physically, the Quran talks about another mode of transportation which transport people spiritually along God’s straight path, *“And God points to the direction of the (right) way, but there are ways which deviate. If God had willed, He could have guided all of you.”* God promised to make the road leading to Him clear through His messengers and His signs. God warns us not to follow the crooked ways which lead away from His path. Had God willed He could have guided all the people on earth. But God created humankind with equal propensity towards good and evil. God also gave the humankind the ability to differentiate and choose between right and wrong. Some will follow the straight path and some will choose the crooked path all according to the will of God which gave the

humankind the free will.

The verses continue to describe another group of God's blessings, "*It is He who sends down rain from the sky, from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it He produces crops for you, and the olive and the date-palm and grapes and all kinds of fruits. Indeed, in this there is a sign for a people who reflect.*" Rain comes down from the sky according to a physical law created by God. This is one of the laws which God created to control the behavior of the universe. People use rain water to drink, to grow vegetation to feed the cattle, and to plant trees and plants which produce food to eat. One should reflect on the creation of God which ensured this harmony between the different components of His creation.

The third group of blessings include the cosmic phenomena which makes life on earth possible, "*And He has subjected to you the night and the day; the sun and the moon; and the stars are all subjected by His Command. Verily in this are signs for people who understand.*" The presence of the cosmic phenomena like the night, daylight, the sun, the moon, and the stars makes one think about the harmony in God's creation. God created these cosmic phenomena and controlled them to create a suitable environment for human life. These phenomena are signs to be understood by those who reflect.

A fourth blessing from God, "*And what He has created on earth of varied hues, therein indeed a sign in this for a people who are mindful.*" God also created a vast number of minerals and metals that are kept underground for the human beings to use. These are treasures for people to extract one after the other. This is a sign for those who pay heed and recognize God's power which created these treasures and kept them safe until they are discovered by people.

The fifth blessing is the creation of living beings that live in the salty sea. This is the salty sea whose water cannot be used for drinking but God allows it to be an environment in which fish and other species can live, "*it is He who subjected the sea, that you may eat from it flesh that is fresh and tender, and that you may extract from it ornaments to wear. And you see the ships plowing through, that you may seek of the grace of God and that you may be grateful.*" The sea provides fish for food and pearls for jewelry in addition to the shells which are used to make other types of ornaments. The words that were used to describe the motion of ships at sea do not only point to their use as a means of transportation, but also to draw the attention to the beautiful scene of a ship going through the water. It indicates that human beings should not only focus on the necessities of life but they also should find time to appreciate the beauty of nature around them. These blessings are a reason for us to be grateful to God.

Now we come to the last blessing that is mentioned in this group of verses, "*And He has cast into the earth firm mountains, lest it shifts with you, and streams and roads that you may be guided. And landmarks (too), and by the star they are (also) guided.*" God created the mountains to maintain the earth's stability. It is appropriate to mention the high mountains in connection with the flowing rivers. The foot of a mountain is usually the starting point of a river.

The previous verses which discussed the creation and the blessings of God, which He bestowed on His creatures lead to a final conclusion. The conclusion is posed in the form of a question, "*Is*

then He who creates like the one who does not create? Will you not be mindful?" The inevitable answer should be no. No one can equate the Creator to those who cannot create. This calls for reflection.

"If you count up the favours of God, never would you be able to enumerate them. Certainly, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy." Are we able to count the blessings of God? The answer is no, so how about showing gratitude to God for the numerous blessings? Humankind is unaware of many of the blessings that God bestowed on him. We take many of these blessings for granted we only appreciate their value when we miss them. However, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.

The Creator knows His creation, *"And God does know what you conceal, and what you reveal."* How can these idolaters equate Him to those idols who create nothing and know nothing? They are dead and the dead have no feelings, *"And those whom they invoke besides God create nothing and they are themselves created. (They are) dead, not living. And they perceive it not when they will be raised."* How can they be considered gods while they do not know when their followers will be resurrected from death?

Verses 22 to 50:

22. *Your God is one God. As to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant.*
23. *Undoubtedly God does know what they conceal, and what they reveal. Verily, He does not love the arrogant.*
24. *When it is said to them, "What has your Lord send down?" they say, "Fables of former peoples."*
25. *That they may bear their burdens undiminished on the Day of Resurrection, with some of the burdens of those whom they mislead without knowledge. Evil is that which they bear.*
26. *Those before them did also plot (against God's Way), but God demolished their buildings from their foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above; and the torment came to them from wherever they did not perceive.*
27. *Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will cover them with shame, and will say, "Where are My partners, for whose sake you opposed (My guidance)? Those who have been given knowledge will say, "Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers."*
28. *Those whom the angels cause to die while they were wronging themselves will make full submission (saying), "We did not do any wrong." Surely God has full knowledge of what you used to do.*
29. *So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein forever. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant.*
30. *And it is said to those who were God conscious, "What has your Lord send down?" They will say, "Good." For those who do good in this world there is a good (reward) and the home of the Hereafter will be better. Pleasant indeed will be the home of those who are God conscious;*
31. *Gardens of Eden which they enter, underneath which rivers flow, wherein they have what they please. Thus God rewards those who are conscious of Him.*

32. *Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good, they (the angels) say, "Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do."*
33. *Do they (the ungodly) wait until the angels come to them, or there comes the command of your Lord (for their doom)? So did those who went before them. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves,*
34. *But the evil results of their deeds overtook them, and that which they used to mock beset them.*
35. *And the idolaters say, "Had God willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him, we and our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything without (a command from) Him." So did those before them. Are the messengers charged with anything except plain conveyance (of the message)?*
36. *We assuredly sent into every nation a messenger, (with the command), "Worship God, and shun false gods." Then some of them were among those whom God guided, and some of them were upon whom error was (deservedly) decreed. Do travel in the land and see what the end of those who denied was.*
37. *Even if you are keen on guiding them, God does not guide those whom He leaves to go astray, and there is none to help them.*
38. *They swear their strongest oaths by God that God will not raise up those who die. But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him, but most people do not know.*
39. *(They must be raised up), in order that He may explain to them the truth of that wherein they differ, and that the disbelievers would know that they were liars.*
40. *Indeed, to anything which We have willed, We but say the word, "Be", and it is.*
41. *And those who emigrated for (the sake of) God after they had been oppressed, We verily shall give them goodly lodging in the world, and surely the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but know;*
42. *Those who persevered and put their trust in their Lord.*
43. *And We did not send (as messengers) before you other than men to whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the message (former Scriptures) if you do not know.*
44. *(We sent them) with clear proofs and written ordinances; and We have sent down to you (also) the Message; that you may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them, and that they may reflect.*
45. *Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them up, or that the torment will not come on them from where they do not perceive?*
46. *Or that He will not seize them in their going to and fro so that there is no escape for them?*
47. *Or that He will not seize them gradually? Your Lord is indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.*
48. *Have they not observed all things that God has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration to God, and they are humble?*
49. *And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth of creatures, and the angels (too) and they are not arrogant.*
50. *They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded. (16: 22 – 50)*

"Your God is one God. As to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, their hearts are disapproving, and they are arrogant." The verse links the belief in the oneness of God with the

belief in the Hereafter. It goes further and makes one predicated on the other. The belief in resurrection is an integral part of the belief in the Oneness of God. God's ultimate justice will be displayed in the Hereafter. The previous verses presented the logic that leads to the conclusion that the Creator is One. Those who do not believe in the Oneness of God and in the Hereafter are simply denying the truth. Their denial is not based on a lack of evidence but is rooted in their arrogance. God knows all about their arrogance, *"Undoubtedly God does know what they conceal, and what they reveal. Verily He does not love the arrogant."*

"When it is said to them, 'What has your Lord send down?' they say, 'Fables of former peoples.'" There is no way to reach the hearts of those arrogant people. Their arrogance drives them to be dishonest. They read the Quran and claim that it is some of ancient fables. They fail to see the value of the Quran which delineates a perfect way of life for the benefit of individuals and society. This denial makes them fully responsible for their own sins and also partially responsible for the sin of those who followed them and believed in them, "That they may bear their burdens undiminished on the Day of Resurrection, with some of the burdens of those whom they mislead without knowledge. Evil is that which they bear." The sins are called burdens because they weigh down on the souls as actual weights weigh down on the body which carries them.

Ibn Abi Hatem has narrated on the authority of Assadi, that the (leaders of the tribe of) Quraish gathered in a meeting to discuss their strategy to curb the spreading of Islam. It was said that Muhammad (PBUH) has a way with words and he is able to talk people into joining his new religion. It was suggested that some of their well known chiefs should intercept foreigners, those who come from other towns, before Muhammad (PBUH) was able to talk to them; and tell them that Muhammad (PBUH) is a liar and only the weak minded and the slaves have followed him. They should also say that the honored chiefs of the tribe have abandoned him. Many of the people who came seeking to meet with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to know about Islam were turned back by Quraish and were never able to talk to the Prophet (PBUH). The few who were sincere in seeking the truth refused to go back before hearing from Muhammad (PBUH) personally. They went ahead to meet with the Prophet (PBUH). When they asked the believers what does Muhammad (PBUH) say, the believers said, "He says good."

The tribe of Quraish waged an organized and systematic propaganda war against Islam. The same war was launched by other peoples in different places at different times. Their arrogance blocked their way to the truth. The following verse describes the end of those who schemed and plotted against guidance before Quraish, *"Those before them did also plot (against God's Way), but God demolished their buildings from their foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above; and the torment came to them from wherever they did not perceive."* The verse describes their scheme as a building with a foundation, walls and a roof. The foundation was destroyed and the roof fell on their heads, a scene of utter destruction. This was their end in this life. The torment will continue, *"Then, on the Day of Judgment, He will cover them with shame, and will say, 'Where are My partners, for whose sake you opposed (My guidance)?' Those who have been given knowledge will say, 'Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers.'" On the Day of Judgment, they will be asked about those whom they took as partners with God. They will be dumbfounded. Those who were given the knowledge from among the angels, the*

messengers, and the believers and who will be given the right to speak will say, *“Disgrace and evil are this day upon the disbelievers.”* Those, *“Whom the angels cause to die while they were wronging themselves will make full submission (saying), “We did not do any wrong.” Surely God has full knowledge of what you used to do.”* The verse displays the scene at the time of death of these disbelievers and the dialogue between them and the angels who were sent to capture their souls. Finally, it will be said to them, *“So enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein forever. Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant.”*

On the other side we see those who remained conscious of their Lord, *“And it is said to those who were God conscious, ‘What has your Lord send down?’ They will say, ‘Good.’ For those who do good in this world there is a good (reward) and the home of the Hereafter will be better. Pleasant indeed will be the home of those who are God conscious; gardens of Eden which they enter, underneath which rivers flow, wherein they have what they please. Thus, God rewards those who are conscious of Him. Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good, they (the angels) will say, ‘Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do.’”* Those who remain conscious of their Lord recognize that goodness is the essence of God’s message. So when they are asked about what God brought down they simply sum it up in one word: goodness. The verse continues to detail the reward for those who remain conscious of their Lord. The verse then takes us back to the time of death of these people, *“Those whom the angels cause to die (when they are) good. They (the angels) say, ‘Peace be upon you. Enter the Garden for what you used to do.’”* Those who remained conscious of their Lord yearn to His meeting. The angels will reassure their hearts. They will greet them and give them glad tidings of earning their place in paradise, an ample reward for what they did during their lifetime.

The scene moves now to the idolaters of Quraish. What did they expect? Did they expect the angels to take their souls? Did they expect God’s command for resurrection? What will it be like at the time of their death? What will it be like on the Day of Resurrection? *“Do they (the ungodly) wait until the angels come to them, or there comes the command of your Lord (for their doom)? So did those who went before them. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves, but the evil results of their deeds overtook them, and that which they used to mock beset them.”*

It is amazing how people continue to go along a path that had been trodden before them and proved to be futile. They see what happened to those before them but they somehow convince themselves that the consequences of their deeds will be different. God’s laws are constant and consistent. The same deeds will always lead to the same results. God does not wrong anyone. They were given the freedom to reflect, think, and choose. God presented to them His signs and warned them of the consequences of going astray. They are the ones who wronged themselves by making the wrong choice. The punishment will commensurate with the crime.

“And the idolaters say, ‘Had God willed, we would not have worshipped anything beside Him, we and our fathers, nor would we have forbidden anything without (a command from) Him.’ So did those before them. Are the messengers charged with anything except plain conveyance (of the message)? We assuredly sent into every nation a messenger, (with the command), ‘Worship God, and shun false gods.’ Then some of them were among those whom God guided, and some

of them were upon whom error was (deservedly) decreed. Do travel in the land and see what the end for those who denied was.” The idolaters claim that it is God’s will that made them commit the sins of associating partners with God and made them prohibit the food which God had made lawful to please their false gods. This claim flies in the face of the true meaning of God’s will. It takes away from humankind the most important characteristic, a characteristic that God bestowed upon humankind to use in their daily lives. It does not please God to have His servants practice idolatry or to deprive them from enjoying the good things that God had made lawful. This principle has been enunciated in the message that all God’s Messengers brought to humanity. Each Messenger exhorted his people to *“Serve God, and shun false gods.”* This was God’s command and will.

God created humankind with propensity to both goodness and evil. God gave humankind the freedom of will to choose between goodness and evil. God gave humankind the intellect to help him in making the decision to choose between goodness and evil. God also filled the universe with signs that lead humankind to the right path. God sent messengers with guidance which provides the standard of goodness to guide the human intellect to make the right decision. The Messengers’ role was to deliver the message not to force people to believe. The Messengers delivered the message that only God is worthy of worship and that false gods should be shunned. Some people accepted the guidance and some rejected it. Each group used their intellect to choose thus, God’s will has been fulfilled.

“Even if you are keen on guiding them, God does not guide those whom He leaves to go astray, and there is none to help them.” Neither guidance nor misguidance is the responsibility of the messenger. His role is only to deliver the message.

“They swear their strongest oaths by God that God will not raise up those who die. But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him, but most people do not know. (They must be raised up), in order that He may explain to them the truth of that wherein they differ, and that the rejecters of truth would know that they were liars. Indeed, to anything which We have willed, We but say the word, “Be”, and it is.” One of the major problems that faced the messengers of God whenever they brought the Message to their people is that many people found the concept of the resurrection after death difficult to accept. The Prophet (PBUH) had the same problem with the idolaters of Quraish. Although they believed in God, but they refused to accept the idea of the resurrection after death. They disregarded the miracle of the creation in the first place and they did not understand the unlimited power of the Creator. They also did not comprehend the divine wisdom behind the necessity of the Hereafter. All disputes that were not resolved in this life will be resolved in the Hereafter. God had made a promise and He will fulfill it, *“But yes, it is a true promise (binding) on Him.”* On the Day of Judgement those who rejected the truth will know that they were telling a lie when they claimed that they will not be resurrected. Resurrection will happen whenever God wills. He only needs to say, “Be” and it is.

The verses then move to the opposite side, *“And those who emigrated for (the sake of) God after they had been oppressed, We verily shall give them goodly lodging in the world, and surely the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if they but know, those who persevered and put their trust in their Lord.”* Those who left behind their belongings, their families, and the things they loved and

migrated for the sake of God, they will be compensated in the Hereafter for the sacrifices they made.

“And We did not send (as messengers) before you other than men to whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the Message (former Scriptures) if you do not know. (We sent them) with clear proofs and written ordinances; and We have sent down to you (also) the Message; that you may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them, and that they may reflect.” God sent only men with the Message. He did not send angels, nor did He send special creatures. God chose certain men and gave them revelations similar to the revelation that was given to Muhammad (PBUH). If the people of Quraish were in doubt they should ask those who received a Scripture before. God sent messengers before Muhammad (PBUH) with, *“clear proofs and written ordinances;”* and God gave Muhammad (PBUH) a Book that he, *“may explain clearly to the people what is sent for them.”* The Quran also invites them to think and reflect.

At the end of this group of verses, a reference is made to those who are arrogant and those who scheme against God’s way and a reminder of the limitless power of God, *“Do then those who devise evil (plots) feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them up, or that the torment will not come on them from where they do not perceive? Or that He will not seize them in their going to and fro so that there is no escape for them? Or that He will not seize them gradually? Your Lord is indeed All-Pitying, Giver of Mercy.”*

“Have they not observed all things that God has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration to God, and they are humble? And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth of creatures, and the angels (too) and they are not arrogant. They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are commanded.” It is amazing how some people choose to ignore God’s power when they see how God seizes people in their prime. They continue to scheme thinking that they are safe unaware that God’s wrath can seize them suddenly or gradually whenever God pleases. Should not they reflect on God’s signs in the universe and how every creature prostrates itself to God.

Verses 51 to 76:

51. *And God said, "Do not take two deities; He is only one God; so fear only Me."*
52. *And to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, and everlasting obedience is His right. Do you then fear any other than God?*
53. *And whatever Blessings is (bestowed) on you it is from God; then when evil afflicts you, you call on Him for help.*
54. *Yet, when He removes the affliction from you, some of you associate partners with their Lord.*
55. *Let them show their ingratitude for the favours We have bestowed on them. Then enjoy yourselves, you will soon know.*

56. *And they assign a portion of that which We have given them to what they do not know. By God, you will indeed be asked about that which you used to fabricate.*
57. *And they assign daughters to God - Glory be to Him - and for themselves what they desire.*
58. *When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he suppresses his grief.*
59. *He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which he was informed of. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now verily evil is what they decide.*
60. *The attribute of evil applies to all those who do not believe in the Hereafter but God has the most sublime attribute. He is the Eminent, the Wise.*
61. *If God were to take the people to task for their wrongdoing, he would not have left on it (earth) a living creature, but He reprieves them to an appointed term, and when their term comes they will not be able to delay (it) an hour nor can they bring (it) on (before its time).*
62. *They attribute to God what they hate (for themselves), and their tongues assert the falsehood that all good things are for themselves. Certainly, for them is the Fire and they will be the first to be hastened to it.*
63. *By God, We verily sent messengers to nations before you, but the devil made their deeds fair-seeming to them. So he is their patron this day, and theirs will be a painful torment.*
64. *And We have revealed the Book to you only that you may explain to them that wherein they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.*
65. *And God sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death. Indeed, in this is a sign for those who listen.*
66. *And verily in the cattle (too) will you find a lesson. We give you drink, from what is in their bellies between excretions and blood - pure milk, agreeable to those who drink it.*
67. *And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out intoxicants and wholesome food. Indeed, in that is a sign for those who understand.*
68. *And your Lord inspired the bee to build its cells on the hills, on trees, and in what they construct.*
69. *Then eat of all the fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth (for you). There comes forth from their bellies a drink of different hues. In it there is healing for people. In this indeed is a sign for people who reflect.*
70. *It is God who created you, then puts you to death; and of you there are some who will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject state, so that they know nothing after having known (much). God is Omniscient, All-Powerful.*
71. *And God has favoured some of you above others in provision. Now those who are more favoured will by no means be able to hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal to them therein. Is it then the Blessing of God that they deny?*
72. *And God has made for you mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Is it then in falsehood that they believe and in the Blessing of God that they disbelieve?*
73. *And they worship beside God that which does not possess for them any provision from the heavens or the earth nor do they have any power.*
74. *Do not make up similarities to God. God knows, and you do not know.*

75. *God sets forth the parable (of two men, one) a slave under the dominion of another; he has no power of any sort; and (the other) a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favours from Ourselves, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly. Are the two equal? (By no means) praise be to God. But most of them do not know.*
76. *God sets forth (another) parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal to the one who commands justice, and is on a straight path? (16: 51 -76)*

“And God said, ‘Do not take two deities, indeed He is only one God; so fear only Me.’ And to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, and everlasting obedience is His right. Do you then fear any other than God? And whatever Blessing is (bestowed) on you it is from God; then when evil afflicts you, you call on Him for help. Yet, when He removes the affliction from you, some of you associate partners with their Lord. Let them show their ingratitude for the favours we have bestowed on them. Then enjoy yourselves, you will soon know.” God commanded people not to worship two deities. It is only one God that they should worship. The command is expressed in an unequivocal language. The dual form of the word “deity” is followed by the number two and the word “only” is added to the command to worship one God to emphasize the command. This command is followed by another specific command not to fear anything else other than God, *“fear only Me.”* This emphasis is necessary and appropriate because the belief in the Oneness of God is the corner stone of the doctrine of Islam. God is One, the owner of the heavens and earth is One, and only Him deserves to be obeyed. He is the one who bestows His blessings on His servants. In time of difficulty, the initial natural disposition of the human being seeks God’s help. Praise be to Him who is alone the God, the King, the Master, the Giver of blessings, and the Giver of help. At the time of difficulty, the initial natural disposition of the human being turns spontaneously to God alone. But once they are saved, some people turn away from the path of God seeking temporary enjoyment. They should wait and see, they will soon know.

The behavior of many people fits exactly the human model that has been described in the above mentioned verses. In the time of need, their hearts harken to God asking for help, but in the time of ease and prosperity the link becomes weak and they indulge in the pleasures of life.

“And they assign a portion of that which We have given them to what they do not know. By God, you will indeed be asked about that which you used to fabricate.” The idolaters used to prohibit eating or riding certain cattle, as has been mentioned in Surat Al-Anaam, in the name of their false gods about which they have no knowledge. God, not the false gods, did provide them with the cattle. God is the provider. Instead of showing gratitude to the Provider, they disobey Him. Not only they associate partners with God but they assign a portion of the provision He provided them with to these false gods. They will be definitely asked about this on the Day of Judgement.

“And they assign daughters to God - Glory be to Him - and for themselves what they desire.” The doctrine is the basis of the way of the life. When the doctrine is corrupt, the way of life becomes crooked. The Arabs used to claim that the angels are God’s daughters but in the mean time they hated having daughters. The corrupt doctrine which they believed in provided them

with excuse to practice infanticide against baby girls. Those daughters who survive would be subjected to bad treatment and humiliation. They thought that women are potential sources of disgrace and poverty for the tribe because they are not raised to fight or to earn their living. The true doctrine of Islam protects women from this inferior status. Islam states that it is God who provides. He provides for men as well as women with no distinction on the basis of gender. Men and women complement each other and have the same worth in front of God.

The verses paint an ugly picture of one of the traditions adopted by the Arabs in Jahiliya (the pre-Islamic era), *“When one of them receives tidings of the birth of a female, his face remains darkened, and he suppresses his grief. He hides himself from the people because of the evil of that which he was informed of. Shall he keep it with disgrace or bury it (alive) in the dust? Now verily evil is what they decide.”* The verse describes the reaction of a father when he would receive the news that his wife delivered a baby girl; his face would turn black reflecting how much anger and sadness he felt. A baby girl is like a baby boy they are both gifts from God. God is He who forms the human being in the womb. Creation is a miracle. The process through which a sperm-drop grows to become a human being is a miraculous process. We have to celebrate the birth of a new baby whether a boy or a girl. It is the Divine wisdom that willed that procreation can only occur through the meeting of a male and a female. The female and the male are essential partners in the process of procreation.

“The attribute of evil applies to all those who do not believe in the Hereafter but God has the most sublime attribute. He is the Eminent, the Wise.” The rejection of the concept of the Hereafter is closely related to the principle of belief in the Oneness of God. They start from the same premise and they lead to the same consequence. Those who do not believe in the Day of Judgement are an example of all evil attributes in life. God gives the highest example for the best attributes. He controls everything wisely.

God could punish people any time He wills but His divine wisdom willed that the wrongdoers are given a reprieve, *“If God were to take the people to task for their wrongdoing, he would not have left on it (earth) a living creature, but He reprieves them to an appointed term, and when their term comes they will not be able to delay (it) an hour nor can they bring (it) on (before its time).”*

The disbelievers assign that which they hate to God and they claim that they will be rewarded for doing this, *“They attribute to God what they hate (for themselves), and their tongues assert the falsehood that all good things are for themselves. Certainly, for them is the Fire and they will be the first to be hastened to it.”* The Arabic expression suggests that their tongues became a symbol of falsehood because they had a long history of uttering false statements. They will certainly get their punishment in Hellfire.

The idolaters of Mecca were not the first people to stray away from the straight path. There were people before them who succumbed to the temptation of Satan and they took him as their patron, *“By God, We verily sent messengers to nations before you, but the devil made their deeds fair-seeming to them. So he is their patron this day, and theirs will be a painful torment.”* God sent Muhammad (PBUH) to save the people and guide them to the truth. Muhammad (PBUH) was

sent as a guide and a mercy for those who chose to believe, *“And We have revealed the Book to you only that you may explain to them that wherein they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe.”* The main objective of the last Book and the last Message is to settle the disputes which had arisen among the people who were given Scriptures before and to state clearly the principle of the belief in the Oneness of God. The Quran was revealed to remove any shred of doubt about this fundamental principle and to purify the religious practices from any form of idolatry.

The following verses present signs that we see around us which support the concept of the Oneness of God. The previous verse refers to the revelation of the Quran. It is the Book that sustains the spiritual life of people. The following verse refers to the water that God cause to descend from the sky and which sustains the physical life of people, *“And God sends down rain from the skies, and gives therewith life to the earth after its death. Indeed, in this is a sign for those who listen.”* Water is the basis of life on earth. Life on earth can only be sustained by water. Only He who gives life after death is worthy of being God. There is a lesson in this for those who listen and reflect.

Another sign can be seen in the creation of cattle, *“And verily in cattle (too) will you find a lesson. We give you drink, from what is in their bellies between excretions and blood - pure milk, agreeable to those who drink it.”* The pure milk that the cattle produce is actually made from the food that has been digested by the animal and the blood that feeds the cells of the animal. Producing milk requires a very complex and delicate process which cannot be duplicated by any manmade machine. This scientific fact has been only recently discovered and it was certainly not known at the time of the revelation of the Quran.

“And from the fruit of the date-palm and the vine, you get out intoxicants and wholesome food. Indeed, in that is a sign for those who understand.” The fruits that was produced as a result of the water coming down from the sky can be used to make wine (wine had not been prohibited at the time of the revelation of this verse) and wholesome food. The verse suggests that wine is not considered as wholesome. This may have been a step towards making drinking wine unlawful. The verse was only describing the practice that was used at that time and should not be used as evidence that it is lawful to make and drink wine.

“And your Lord inspired the bee to build its cells on the hills, on trees, and in what they construct. Then eat of all the fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth (for you). There comes forth from their bellies a drink of different hues. In it there is healing for people. In this indeed is a sign for people who reflect.” The bee does its job instinctively. This can be considered a form of inspiration which directs the bee to perform such an intricate process to produce pure honey. Many researchers discussed the healing function of honey, however, as believers we believe in the absolute veracity of the Quranic verses.

Let us stop a moment to reflect on the blessings which, the water coming down from the sky, being us. What is the common feature between producing milk by cattle, and producing honey

by the bee? One common feature is that these are all fluids which are produced for human consumption. That is why only the milk produced by cattle was mentioned in this passage. In a later passage other benefits derived from the cattle will be mentioned.

“It is God who created you, then puts you to death; and of you there are some who will be reduced, in old age, to a most abject state, so that they know nothing after having known (much). God is Eminent, All-Powerful.” Every mortal will enjoy life and will suffer death. Humankind by instinct love life, thinking about life may soften the hard heart and may make the individual reflect on God’s power and blessings. The fear of approaching the end of life may induce the human being to become conscious of God and may encourage him to seek God’s support. The image of old age and the helplessness associated with it may encourage the human being to reflect upon the phases of life and teaches him/her to be humbler. The verse ends with the statement, *“God is Omniscient, All-Powerful,”* which juxtaposes God’s infinite knowledge and power with the limited knowledge and power of the human being in terms of both magnitude and duration.

Human beings vary considerably in the amount of money they make. God favors some over others with more earnings for reasons known only to God. God’s provision is bestowed according to a plan. A person may be talented as a scholar or a scientist but his earnings are little while another may be less talented in these areas but is clever in earning and investing money. Different people have different talents and abilities. One may be inclined to think that there is no relationship between the earnings and the abilities. But this is a superficial look. If we look deeper we could discover a certain relationship between people’s abilities and their earnings. On the other hand, plentiful earnings may be a test from God, and low earnings may be as well a test from God, *“And God has favoured some of you above others in provision. Now those who are more favoured will by no means be able to hand over their provision to those whom their right hands possess, so that they may be equal to them therein. Is it then the Blessing of God that they deny?”* The verse berated those who were giving a portion of the provision that God bestowed on them to the false gods which they adopted.

“And God has made for you mates of your own nature, and made for you, out of them, children and grandchildren, and has provided you with good things. Is it then in falsehood that they believe and in the Blessing of God that they disbelieve?” The verse states the similar nature of males and females. The human worth of both males and females is the same. God had willed that human beings procreate and produce children and the children produce grandchildren so that life on earth would continue. So, in a way, the children and grandchildren are an extension of the life of an individual. Should then people be ungrateful to God? *“And they worship beside God that which does not possess for them any provision from the heavens or the earth nor do they have any power.”* Not only they disbelieve in God who provides for them but they also make up equals to Him. God has no equal and He is unique, *“Do not make up similarities to God. God knows, and you do not know.”*

The following verses strike two parables for the master who owns a slave and provides for him and the slave who is incapable of owning or providing to illustrate the difference between the two and to emphasize that God is above everything and He is unique, *“God sets forth the*

parable (of two men, one) a slave under the dominion of another; he has no power of any sort; and (the other) a man on whom We have bestowed goodly favours from Ourselves, and he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly. Are the two equal? (By no means) praise be to God. But most of them do not know. God sets forth (another) parable of two men: one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal to the one who commands justice, and is on a straight path?"

The first parable must have been easy to understand by the Arabs of Mecca. Many of them owned slaves and they would appreciate the boundaries that differentiated between a master and a slave. If they could not imagine that their slaves could be their equals, how dare they make equals to God the Master and Owner of everything? The second parable illustrates another concept: the comparison between a disabled person and a powerful person who uses his power in establishing justice on earth. The question that the verse raises is how can one equate God the Almighty, the Omniscient who commands justice to an idol made of stone.

Verses 77 to 89:

- 77. To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker. God has power over all things.*
- 78. It is God who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may give thanks (to God).*
- 79. Have they not seen the birds constrained in mid-air? None holds them save God. Verily, in this there are signs for a people who believe.*
- 80. And God has given you in your houses an abode, and has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household items and items for enjoyment for a time.*
- 81. It is God Who made out of the things He created, some things to give you shade; of the hills He made some for your shelter; He made you garments to protect you from heat, and coats (of armour) to protect you from your (mutual) violence. Thus, does He complete His blessings on you that you may submit (to Him).*
- 82. But if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the clear Message.*
- 83. They recognize the Blessings of God; then they deny them; and most of them are disbelievers.*
- 84. And one day We will raise up a witness from each nation, then the disbelievers will not be given a leave, nor are they allowed to make amends.*
- 85. When the wrongdoers will see the torment, then it will not be mitigated, nor will they receive respite.*
- 86. When those who associated partners with God will see their "partners," they will say, "Our Lord, these are our 'partners,' those whom we used to invoke besides You." But they will throw back their word at them (and say), "Indeed you are liars."*
- 87. That day they shall show (their) submission to God; and all that which they used to fabricate will fail them.*

88. *For those who disbelieve and debar (people) from the way of God, We will increase them in torment over torment for the corruption they caused.*
89. *One day We shall raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, and We will bring you (Muhammad) as a witness against these. And We revealed the Book to you as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who submit. (16: 77 – 89)*

“To God belongs the unseen of the heavens and the earth. And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker. God has power over all things.” The concept of resurrection after death is one of the issues in the doctrine which raised great objections, in each age and for every Messenger of God. This is part of the unseen whose knowledge belongs only to God. No mortal was able to break the barrier of the unseen. No mortal knows what the future will bring and when he/she will die. It could happen any moment. It is certainly a mercy of God that people do not know the future. This ignorance allows them to dream, aspire, work, and produce. They leave behind what they have accomplished in their lives for someone else to complete or to further develop. Had people known the time for the Hour of Judgment, life would have stopped. However, *“And the decision of the Hour (of Judgment) is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker,”* but this is not measured using the known human standard. God is able to bring it about any time He wills, *“God has power over all things.”*

“It is God Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may give thanks (to God).” The verse gives an example using the development of the human fetus. This is also a part of the unseen although it happens right in front of our eyes. One can see the development of the fetus but no one knows exactly how the process develops. This is the secret of human life which cannot be discovered no matter how knowledgeable we become. The Quran uses the words heart and brain interchangeably. The heart is considered the center of all discriminatory faculties of the human being at the levels of the conscious and the subconscious. One should express gratitude to God by worshipping Him alone.

Another amazing example of God’s power, *“Have they not seen the birds constrained in mid-air? None holds them save God. Verily, in this there are signs for a people who believe.”* The scene of birds flying in the sky is a familiar scene. One can only sense the beauty and appreciate the miracle when the curtain is lifted off one’s heart to realize that it is God who allows birds to fly and maintains their balance in the sky.

“And God has given you in your houses an abode, and has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household stuff and a provision for a time. It is God who made out of the things He created, some things to give you shade; of the hills He made some for your shelter; He made you garments to protect you from heat, and coats (of armour) to protect you from your (mutual) violence. Thus does He complete His blessings on you that you may submit (to Him).” Safety and security which a person finds within the confines of his/her own home are great blessings from God. No one can appreciate the

value of these blessings except a person who has no shelter in which he/she finds the security and safety that come with one's own home. It is interesting to note that the talk about houses came after the unseen was mentioned. The common element between the two is that both provide cover to their contents.

The verse also sheds light on the concept of a home in Islam, *"God has given you in your houses an abode."* The home in Islam is a place where a person finds psychological as well as physical comfort and security. The home should provide an environment of love and compassion between the members of the family. It is not a place for bickering and turmoil but it is a place for comfort, peace, and security. Islam protects the privacy of people inside their homes. No one is allowed to break in forcibly – except by the power of law. No one is allowed to spy on people while they are in the privacy of their homes. Visitors should seek permission from the owner of the house before they are allowed in.

The verse continued to enumerate the benefits that human beings derive from the cattle, *"has given you (also), of the hides of cattle, tents which you find light (to carry) on the day of your march and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, (He has given you) household items and items for enjoyment for a time."* The verse did not stress only the aspects that can be considered necessities of life *"household items,"* but also the uses from which people derive enjoyment. Shade brings comfort, shelter brings security, and garments bring safety and comfort. Hopefully, then people would appreciate the blessings of God and submit to Him. Submission to God also brings peace and tranquillity. However, *"if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the clear Message. They recognize the favours of God; then they deny them; and most of them are disbelievers."* The messenger's task is only to deliver the message.

The verses then go back to the scene of the Hour, *"And one day We will raise up a witness from each nation, then the disbelievers will not be given a leave, nor are they allowed to make amends. When the wrongdoers will see the torment, then it will not be mitigated, nor will they receive respite. When those who associated partners with God will see their 'partners,' they will say, 'Our Lord, these are our 'partners,' those whom we used to invoke besides You.' But they will throw back their word at them (and say), 'Indeed you are liars.' That day they shall show (their) submission to God; and all that which they used to fabricate will fail them. For those who disbelieve and debar (people) from the way of God, We will increase them in torment over torment for the corruption they caused."* The scene starts with the prophets reporting about what they experienced when they took the message to their people. The disbelievers will be standing there watching but will not be given the chance to seek forgiveness because it will be too late for seeking forgiveness. This is the time for reckoning. When they will see those whom they used to associate with God, they will point to them and say to God, *"Our Lord, these are our 'partners,' those whom we used to invoke besides You."* Note that at that moment they will admit that God is their Lord, they will say, *"Our Lord."* They will also say, *"these are our 'partners,'"* rather than say these are God's partners. Their partners will deny any responsibility and will call them liars, *"Indeed you are liars."* Those who fabricated lies in their lives will find no support, *"that they used to invent will fail them."* All those who are guilty will be punished.

The verses then move to the Prophet's (PBUH) situation, "*One day We shall raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, and We will bring you (Muhammad) as a witness against these. And We revealed the Book to you as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who submit.*" To end the scene of the Day of Reckoning, the Prophet (PBUH) is promised the status of being a witness over his people. The verse emphasizes that the Book that has been revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) explains all things. Thus, none has an excuse. It is also guidance and mercy for those who chose to believe in it.

Verses 90 to 111:

90. *God commands justice, the doing of good, and giving (help for) relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and bad conduct and oppression. He exhorts you, that you may become mindful.*
91. *And fulfill the covenant of God when you have made a covenant, and do not break oaths after you have confirmed them; indeed, you have made God surety over you; for God knows all that you do.*
92. *And be not like (the woman) who unravels her yarn, after she has spun it strongly. You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because (one) nation is more numerous than (another) nation. God only tries you by this; and He will most certainly make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that in which you differed.*
93. *If God so willed, He could have made you all one nation. But He sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills, and you will indeed be asked about what you used to do.*
94. *And do not use your oaths as a means of deceit between yourselves, lest a foot should slip after being firmly planted and you taste evil because you debarred (people) from the way of God, and you would suffer an awful torment.*
95. *And do not sell the covenant of God for a miserable price; that which God has is better for you, if you did but know.*
96. *What you have will run out, but what God has is ever lasting. And We will certainly reward those who persevere according to the best of their deeds.*
97. *We will give, whoever does right whether a man or a woman and is a believer, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their deeds.*
98. *And when you recite the Quran, seek refuge in God from Satan, the outcast.*
99. *He has no power over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord.*
100. *He has power only over those who take him as an ally, and those who associate partners with God.*
101. *When We substitute one verse in place of another - and God knows best what He reveals - they say, "You (Muhammad) are but a fabricator," but most of them do not understand.*
102. *Say, "The Holy Spirit has delivered it from your Lord with the truth, that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who have surrendered (to God).*
103. *We know indeed that they say, "It is a man that teaches him." The tongue of him they wickedly refer to is notably foreign, while the language of this Book is Arabic, pure and clear.*

104. *Those who do not believe in God's revelations God will not guide them, and theirs will be a painful torment.*
105. *It is those who do not believe in God's revelations who fabricate falsehood. It is they who lie.*
106. *With the exception of those who are forced to deny God under duress while their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous torment is waiting for them.*
107. *This is because they love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, and God does not guide those who disbelieve.*
108. *Those are they whose hearts, ears, and eyes God has sealed up, and they are heedless.*
109. *Without doubt, in the Hereafter they will be the losers.*
110. *Verily your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy to those who leave their homes after having been persecuted then they strive and persevere.*
111. *On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, and every soul will be repaid what it did, and they will not be wronged. (16: 90 – 111)*

“God commands justice, the doing of good, and giving relatives, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and bad conduct and oppression. He exhorts you, that you may become mindful.” The Book came to establish a nation and organize a community. This nation and this community act as a model for the whole human race. The Book introduces a universal system for all humanity. The Message is not exclusive for a tribe, a nation, or a race. It introduced a system which brings people together around one faith irrespective of their race, nationality, or tribal affiliation. It brought principles which guarantee the coherence of the community and the security of people and nations. These principles came to establish a system for daily dealings that people can trust.

One of these basic principles is justice. Establishing justice ensures the use of a single standard for the judiciary system. All people are equal in front of the law. The law is not governed by the whims of people or the type of government. There is no place for nepotism or favouritism in such system.

The second principle is doing good. Doing good is a comprehensive term that includes each and every deed and behavior performed by human beings as part of their daily activities. These activities encompass the relationship between the individual and his/her creator, family, community, and the whole human race. Implicit in doing good is being generous in helping one's relatives. This has been singled out in the verse to emphasize its importance for protecting the integrity of the family and to emphasize the principle of collective responsibility of the members of the community. The verse also states the command to refrain from committing indecencies, obscenities, and oppression.

“And fulfill the covenant of God when you have made a covenant, and do not break oaths after you have confirmed them; indeed, you have made God surety over you; for God knows all that you do.” God's covenant includes all types of agreements and pledges that a Muslim makes.

This principle builds up the trust between people. The verse exhorts people not to break these pledges reminding them that they made God a witness over their pledges. God knows what they do. Islam is very strict about the application of the principle of the fulfilment of pledges and promises. The following verse strikes a parable for those who break their oaths and pledges, *“And be not like (the woman) who unravels her yarn, after she has spun it strongly. You make your oaths to be means of deceit between you because (one) nation is more numerous than (another) nation. God only tries you by this; and He will most certainly make clear to you on the Day of Resurrection that in which you differed.”* Those who break their promise are similar to a stupid woman who spins her yarn and once she had completed it she unravels it again. Her life is completely wasted because she continues to unravel what she had spun before.

The verse also refers to some Arabs who pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) but later changed their minds and broke up their pledge for fear of the revenge of mighty tribe of Quraish. They thought that Quraish had an advantage in numbers over the believers. This was a test for them, so that God would know who of them would persevere.

“If God so willed, He could have made you all one nation. But He sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills, and you will indeed be asked about what you used to do.” Diversity is a deliberate plan. God created people with different aptitudes and established laws for guidance and misguidance. Everyone will be held accountable for what he/she had done. Thus, Muslims should honor their promises whether they were made to other Muslims or to non Muslims.

“And do not use your oaths as a means of deceit between yourselves, lest a foot should slip after being firmly planted and you taste evil because you debarred (people) from the way of God, and you would suffer an awful torment.” A person who takes an oath knowing that he/she does not intend to keep but using it as a means to cheat and deceive people is a person whose faith is shaky. His/her trickery not only inflicts harm on him/her but also destroys the image of true believers in the sight of people. Trickery puts the person on a precarious footing and implants distrust in the minds of people who have been tricked. He/she gives the worst example of a believer thus debars people from seeking the path of the God.

Many groups and nations reverted to Islam because of their positive experience in dealing with Muslims. Muslims were honest in conducting business and they were always true to their word. Dishonesty is a short sighted strategy in business and in life in general. Honesty and keeping one's promise are very fruitful in the long run.

Islam inculcated the principle of keeping one's promise in Muslims, individuals and nations. It is narrated that Mo'awiah bin Abi Sufian (RA) entered in an armistice agreement with the Roman emperor. When the term of the agreement was about to expire Mo'awiah (RA) led his army and took the Romans by surprise. Omar bin 'Otbbah (RA) said to him, *“God is Great, you should not have taken them by surprise. You should have fulfilled your agreement. I heard the Messenger of God (PBUH) say, ‘whoever entered in an armistice agreement with a people, he should not attack before the expiry of the term of the agreement.’”* Mo'awiah (RA) withdrew his army and evacuated the place he had conquered. The Quran emphasized this principle, telling people that

the price one gets for breaking promises is cheap, *“And do not sell the covenant of God for a miserable price; that which God has is better for you, if you did but know.”* The fulfillment of the promise will have a great reward from God. This reward is everlasting while the benefit that one gets from breaking promises is only transient, *“What you have will run out, but what God has is ever lasting. And We will certainly reward those who persevere according to the best of their deeds.”*

The verses then state a fundamental principle, *“We will give, whoever does right whether a man or a woman and is a believer, a life that is good and pure and We will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their deeds.”* Both males and females are equal in the sight of God. Both are required to do good deeds and both will be rewarded equally. Good deeds are grounded in the belief in God. A strong faith in God inculcates in the believer the attribute of doing good. Good deeds are then transformed from being sporadic events in the life of the believer to become an integral part of the character of the believer. It becomes one of the values of the way of life of the believers.

God promised good-doers who believe in Him a good life in this world and a great reward in the Hereafter. The goodness of the worldly life that the good-doers are promised is not measured in terms of material gains only. There is more to a good life than money. Good life is not achieved without security, health, contentment, and God’s blessings. Good life is a life where the individual is continuously connected to God. Good life is a life where the individual lives in harmony with his/her family. This is the best reward a believer can hope for.

The narrative moves to a discussion of the etiquette which should be followed when a believer reads the Quran, *“And when you recite the Quran seeks refuge in God from Satan, the outcast. He has no power over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. He has power only over those who take him as an ally, and those who associate partners with God.”* Seeking refuge in God from Satan prepares the individual to the experience of reciting Quran. It creates an atmosphere free from delusions and focuses the attention of the reader on what he/she is about to read. Satan has no control over the believers, those who sincerely dedicate their hearts to God. Their connection with God protects them from the temptation of Satan. Only those who chose to follow Satan are controlled by him.

“When We substitute one verse in place of another - and God knows best what He reveals - they say, ‘You (Muhammad) are but a fabricator,’ but most of them do not understand. Say, ‘The Holy Spirit has delivered it from your Lord with the truth, that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who have surrendered (to God).’” The idolaters did not understand the purpose of this Book. They did not understand that the Book was revealed to provide the basis for establishing a universal human society and to train a nation to play a leadership role in guiding this society. This Book contained the last Message that God has revealed for the benefit of the human race. Some verses were revealed to provide a temporary solution. God may replace the outdated verse with another which would provide a lasting solution. The idolaters did not appreciate the logic behind replacing a verse by another, so they

thought that the Prophet (PBUH) is forging the verses. How can the Prophet (PBUH) forge it? It was brought down with the truth by the Holy Spirit. It included guidance which guides the believers to the straight path and glad tidings of victory.

“We know indeed that they say, ‘It is a man that teaches him.’ The tongue of him they wickedly refer to is notably foreign, while the language of this Book is Arabic, pure, and clear.” This was another lie that the idolaters told. They claimed that a man who was not an Arab was the one who taught the Prophet (PBUH) the Quran. The rebuttal of this claim is simple and straight forward. How can a person who does not speak Arabic teaches a Book that is written in a pure and clear Arabic language?

“Those who do not believe in God’s revelations God will not guide them, and theirs will be a painful torment. It is those who do not believe in God’s revelations who fabricate falsehood. It is they who lie.” Those who did not believe in God’s verses were not guided by God to the truth; they will not be guided to the truth in any other matter because they turned away from the way that leads to the truth. Forging falsehood about God is a capital sin. No believer would ever try to commit such a sin.

“With the exception of those who are forced to deny God under duress while their hearts remain firm in faith, those who reject God after believing in Him and open their hearts to disbelief will have the wrath of God upon them and a grievous torment is waiting for them. This is because they love the life of this world more than the Hereafter, and God does not guide those who disbelieve. Those are they whose hearts, ears, and eyes God has sealed up, and they are heedless. Without doubt, in the Hereafter they will be the losers.” The verse indicates that those who reject faith after they had become Muslims will suffer a grievous punishment. Except those who were forced to do so under duress. The early Muslims were persecuted by the idolaters of Mecca. The torture that some Muslims were subjected to was beyond any human endurance. The idolaters would continue torturing a Muslim until he/she declares that they were no longer Muslims. The verse made an exception for these Muslims. They declared their rejection of Islam verbally but their hearts were full of faith. Their declaration was only a means to stop the torture they were subjected to.

It is narrated that this verse was revealed to address the situation of ‘Ammar bin Yaser (RA). ‘Ammar was a slave who was subjected to extreme forms of torture. At one time he capitulated to the demands of those who were torturing him and said that he was no longer a believer. He went to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him about this. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him how he felt in his heart. ‘Ammar (RA) told the Prophet (PBUH) that his heart was full of faith. The Prophet (PBUH) approved what he did. Some Muslims did not follow ‘Ammar’s (RA) example and preferred to die rather than to capitulate to the idolater’s demands. ‘Ammar’s (RA) parents died during one of the sessions of torture. The idolaters used to lay Bilal (RA) down on the hot ground in the desert and place a huge rock on his chest and leave him to suffer in the hot summer’s sun but he never gave in. Others suffered the same fate without giving in. A believer’s faith is a trust. A true believer sacrifices everything to protect this trust even if that would cost him/her their lives.

“Verily your Lord is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy to those who leave their homes after having been persecuted then they strive and persevere. On the Day when every soul will come pleading for itself, and every soul will be repaid what it did, and they will not be wronged.” Some Muslims were weakened by the persecution they suffered and gave in but they migrated as soon as they got the chance to do so. God promised to forgive them. On the Day of Judgement everyone will be for him/herself. However, no one will be wronged.

Verses 112 to 128:

112. *God sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and safety, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place, but it denied the favours of God. So God made it taste hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of what they used to do.*
113. *And there came to them a messenger from among themselves, but they denied him; so the torment seized them while they were wrongdoers.*
114. *So eat of the sustenance which God has provided for you, lawful and good; and be grateful for the blessings of God, if it is He whom you worship.*
115. *He has forbidden for you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which has been immolated in the name of any other than God; but he who is forced by hunger, neither craving nor transgressing, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
116. *And do not say falsely, "This is lawful, and this is forbidden," to fabricate a lie against God. Those who invent a lie against God will not succeed.*
117. *A brief enjoyment (will be theirs); and theirs is a painful torment.*
118. *To the Jews We prohibited such things as We have mentioned to you before. We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves.*
119. *But verily your Lord - to those who do wrong in ignorance, but who thereafter repent and make amends - your Lord, after all this, is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
120. *Abraham was indeed a (comprehensive) model, devoutly obedient to God, true in faith, and he was not of the idolaters.*
121. *He showed his gratitude for the blessings of God, who chose him and guided him to a straight path.*
122. *And We gave him good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, in the ranks of the righteous.*
123. *Then We revealed to you (Muhammad), to follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters.*
124. *The Sabbath was only made (strict) for those who disagreed (as to its observance); but God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, as to their differences.*
125. *Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord knows best who strayed from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided.*
126. *If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted. But if you persevere, verily it is better for the perseverant.*
127. *Persevere (Muhammad). Your perseverance is only by (the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they scheme.*

128. For God is with those who remain conscious of Him and those who do good. (16: 112 – 128)

“God sets forth a parable: a city enjoying security and safety, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place, but it denied the favours of God. So God made it taste hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of what they used to do.” Mecca could be a perfect example for the city that the verse is referring to. God established the Sacred House in Mecca and He made the city itself an inviolable place. Whoever enters this city enjoys safety and security; no one can harm any of its inhabitants even if they were murderers or criminals. This safety and security are lost once an individual steps outside the boundaries of the city. Mecca itself was situated in a barren valley but it was a thriving city because of the wealth and provisions that the pilgrims brought during the season of pilgrimage.

“And there came to them a Messenger from among themselves, but they denied him; so the torment seized them while they were wrongdoers.” The people of Mecca knew Muhammad (PBUH) all his life. He was known among them as the truthful, the honest. However, when he became a messenger bringing them God’s mercy, they rejected him and called him a liar. They wronged him and persecuted his followers. The verse threatened the idolaters of Mecca with a punishment that would replace the safety, security, and affluence which they were enjoying with fear and hunger. The metaphorical description of the punishment as a garment and the use of the word “taste,” imply that the effect of the punishment will not be only felt superficially but it will also be felt inside their bodies.

“So eat of the sustenance which God has provided for you, lawful and good; and be grateful for the blessings of God, if it is He whom you worship.” God commanded them to eat of that which He made lawful. If they truly worship God, then they should follow His rules not the rules made in the name of false gods. The command is then followed by a list of the foods that were prohibited, *“He has forbidden for you only carrion and blood and swine flesh and that which has been immolated in the name of any other than God; but he who is forced by hunger, neither craving nor transgressing, then God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”* These foods were prohibited either for the physical or for the spiritual harm they inflict on the human being. Islam does allow exceptions when it is necessary to break the rule. If the individual could suffer a greater harm as a result of obeying the rule, then the person is allowed a measure of exception that would alleviate the potential danger.

These were the limits that God has decreed for what is lawful and what is forbidden. The verses commanded not to reject them in favor of idolatry myth. People should not take the law in their hands to determine what is lawful and what is forbidden. No one has the right to determine what is lawful and what is forbidden except God. Those who usurp the right to state what is lawful and what is forbidden are fabricating a lie against God. Those who fabricate lies against God will never succeed, *“And do not say falsely this is lawful and this is forbidden,” to fabricate a lie against God. Those who invent a lie against God will not succeed. A brief enjoyment (will be theirs); and theirs is a painful torment.”* They will have a brief enjoyment in this life but they will meet their doom in the Hereafter.

The things that God made unlawful for the Jews, which have been mentioned in Surat Al-An'am, are lawful for the Muslims, *"To the Jews We prohibited such things as We have mentioned to you before. We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves."* These were made unlawful to the Jews as a punishment for their transgression. God did not wrong them but they wronged themselves. Those Jews who repented and sought forgiveness from God before they died, they will be forgiven, *"But verily your Lord - to those who do wrong in ignorance, but who thereafter repent and make amends - your Lord, after all this, is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."* This is a general ruling that applies to whomsoever sins but later repents and seeks God's forgiveness.

The claim of the Arabs that they were following the religion that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought is addressed in the following verse, *"Abraham was indeed a (comprehensive) model, devoutly obedient to God, true in faith, and he was not of the idolaters. He showed his gratitude for the blessings of God, who chose him and guided him to a straight path. And We gave him good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, in the ranks of the righteous. Then We revealed to you (Muhammad), to follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one, and he was not of the idolaters."* The Quran's rendering of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) portrays him as a model for guidance, obedience, gratitude, and repentance to God. The use of the Arabic word "Ummah" to describe Prophet Abraham (PBUH) can be interpreted in different ways. It may mean that the attributes that the Quran used to describe Prophet Abraham (PBUH) are equivalent to the attributes that a whole nation would possess. It may also convey the meaning of the comprehensive leadership that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) had. A comprehensive leader guides his nation to goodness and God will reward him for the goodness that each and everyone in the nation does.

Prophet Abraham (PBUH) was fully dedicated to God, obedient and upright. He was not one of the idolaters. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) showed his gratitude for the blessings that God bestowed upon him. His gratitude was both reflected on his deeds as well as on his words. God has chosen him and guided him to the straight path, the path of the belief in the Oneness of God. This is the same path that God revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) and commanded him to follow.

The prohibitions that God has prescribed during the Sabbath were not part of Abraham's (PBUH) religion. They were made specifically for those who differed about it, *"The Sabbath was only made (strict) for those who disagreed (as to its observance); but God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, as to their differences."*

Having clarified the nature of the new religion; stating the fact that it is an extension to the religion that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) brought before; and expounding the differences between it and the distorted beliefs that were adopted by the idolaters and the Jews; God commanded His Messenger to use wisdom and good admonition to call to the doctrine of the belief in the Oneness of God, *"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the best manner. Your Lord knows best who strayed from His way, and He knows best those who are rightly guided."* But if the Muslims were attacked, then they should respond in a fair way. However, perseverance is better, knowing that God will reward everyone fairly, *"If you punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith you were afflicted. But if you persevere,*

verily it is better for the perseverant. Persevere (Muhammad). Your perseverance is only by (the help of) God. Grieve not for them, and be not in distress because of that which they scheme. For God is with those who remain conscious of Him and those who do good.” These verses establish a strategy and a methodology for calling people to Islam. People calling to Islam should not harbor feelings of superiority over others and should only expect their reward from God.

Wisdom requires knowing one’s audience and understanding their needs and their circumstances. One should be brief and respect the human limits on the length of the span of attention. Fair exhortation indicates that one should use an amiable approach that touches the hearts in a kind way. Reasoning in the best manner indicates that one should use an approach which both articulates and elucidates the tenets of the religion.