

Sūra 3: Al- Imran (The House of ‘Imran)

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

The Qur’an is the book, the soul, the source, the spine, the guide, the constitution and the proclamation of this faith. In the ultimate analysis, it is the reference which delineates the strategies and tactics to be used in the call to Islam.

There will always be a gap that separates us from the Qur’an if we do not realize that the Qur’an was revealed to address a real people living in a real world, to help them manage major events in their lives, and to reshape their character. A thick wall will always separate us from the Qur’an if we only treat its verses as a ritualistic tool to be recited or listened to without having any effect on the daily life of the creature we call the human being and the nation we call the Muslim nation.

The Qur’an was revealed to address a specific people living in a specific environment at a specific time. However, the real miracle of the Qur’an lies in the fact that its revelation did not only bring dramatic changes to the lives of the people who received it, but it remained also, over the years, in an interactive relationship with the Muslim nation, almost as if the process of revelation never ceased. In order that we gain the greatest benefit from the Qur’an, appreciate its vitality, and tap into its never ending resource to help us lead a better life; we have to envision the life of the early Muslim community. We have to envision how the early Muslims interacted with the rapidly changing events they met, how they interacted with their foes and friends, and how they dealt with their human desires and whims. We have to relive in our minds the experience of the first Muslim community.

This Sura presents a dramatic segment of the life of the Muslim community in Medina. This segment of life spans the period between the time of the battle of Badr, which took place in the second year after Hijra (2 H), and the battle of Uhud which took place in the third year after Hijra (3 H). During this period, the Muslim community started to settle down somewhat in Medina. The results of the miraculous victory of Muslims in the battle of Badr were starting to unfold. One of these results, was Abd-Allah bin Saloul’s acceptance of Islam. Abd-Allah was one of the major chiefs of the tribe of Al-Khazraj. He hated Islam and hated the Prophet (PBUH) but realized that it would be prudent on his part to adopt Islam even though he did not like it.

Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of five well-defined sections. The first section is comprised of the first thirty-two verses. The second section is comprised of the following thirty-one verses. The third section is comprised of the verses sixty-four to ninety-three. The fourth section is comprised of the verses one hundred to one hundred and eighty-four. The fifth section is comprised of the last fifty-two verses.

Verses: 1 to 32

1. *Alif. Lam. Mim.*
2. *God, there is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting.*

3. *It is He Who sent down to you the Book (step by step), setting forth the truth, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel*
4. *Before this, as a guide to people, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Those who rejected the revelations of God will suffer grievous torment. God is Eminent¹, Avenger of evil.*
5. *Nothing on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from God.*
6. *It is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god but He, the Eminent, the Wise.*
7. *It is He Who has sent down to you the Book. In it are unequivocal verses, they are the foundation of the Book. Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, "We believe in it (the Book); the whole of it is from our Lord", and only those who are possessors of intellect really heed.*
8. *Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Own Presence; for You are the Grantor of bounties.*
9. *Our Lord, You will gather humankind together on a Day about which there is no doubt; for God never fails in His promise.*
10. *On that Day neither the riches nor the progeny of those who disbelieved will avail them in the least against God. They will be fuel for fire.*
11. *Like Pharaoh's folk and those who were before them, they denied Our revelations and so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment.*
12. *Say (Muhammad) to the disbelievers, "You shall be overcome and gathered in Hell, an evil resting-place."*
13. *There has already been for you a sign in the two armies that met (in combat). One was fighting for God's cause, and the other made up of disbelievers, whom they saw with their own eyes as twice their number. But God does support with His aid whom He pleases. In this is a lesson for those who have eyes to see.*
14. *Made alluring to humankind is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this worldly life; but with God is the best abode to return to.*
15. *Say, "Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God." God is All-Seeing of (His) servants-*
16. *Those who say, "Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the torment of the Fire;"*
17. *The perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn.*
18. *God bears witness that there is no deity but He, and (so do) the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge; maintaining His creation with justice; there is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.*

¹ The Arabic word "al-'Aziz," which has been translated here as the Eminent has a much wider meaning. There is no single English which can capture its full meaning.

19. *True religion in the sight of God is the submission to His Will. Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge had come to them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning.*
20. *And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, "I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me." And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, "Have you submitted?" If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of His servants.*
21. *Those who reject the revelations of God, and slay the prophets wrongfully, and slay people who enjoin equity promise them a painful torment.*
22. *The deeds of such people will neither bear fruit in this world nor in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help.*
23. *Have you not considered those who have been given a portion of the Scripture? They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their disputes, but a party of them turns away and declines (the arbitration).*
24. *This is because they say, "The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days". That which they used to fabricate has deluded them in their religion.*
25. *How will they fare when we gather them together on a Day about which there is no doubt, and each soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they will not be wronged?*
26. *Say, "God, Owner of Sovereignty, You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please. You endue with honour whom You please, and You abase whom You please. In Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power.*
27. *You cause the night to merge into the day, and You cause the day to merge into the night; You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure."*
28. *Let not the believers make the disbelievers their protecting guardians in preference to the believers. Whosoever does that shall cut himself from God, unless you are guarding yourselves against them. But God cautions you to beware of Him; for the final return is to God.*
29. *Say, "Whether you hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God knows it all. He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And God has power over all things."*
30. *On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done and all the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you to beware of Him. And God is All-Pitying towards all those who serve Him.*
31. *Say, "If you do love God, follow me, God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy."*
32. *Say, "Obey God and His Messenger." But if they turn back, God does not love the disbelievers. (3:1-32)*

"Alif Lam Mim." It was mentioned in the beginning of the previous Sura that we believe that these letters were probably used to remind us of the fact that the Book is composed using the letters of the alphabet of the language that the Arabs were familiar with at that time. The Qur'an challenged the Arabs repeatedly to use these same letters which they were familiar with to compose a book similar to the Qur'an. We choose this interpretation as a probable but not a certain explanation for the use of the letters in the beginning of some Qur'anic Suras. This

interpretation seems logical since it is directly related to the theme that appears in the subsequent verses. In Sura 2, “The Cow,” a challenge was posed to the disbelievers to compose a Sura similar to the Suras of the Qur’an. In the present Sura, it is stressed that the Qur’an is God’s revelation similar to the previous revelations which have already been accepted by the People of the Scripture.

“God! There is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting.” This is a statement of the pure belief in the Oneness of God, it is the corner stone of the Islamic creed. God has no partners, He is the Ever-Living, and He is unique in His attributes. God is the source of existence of everything. The belief in the oneness and uniqueness of God is the criterion which sets the Muslim faith apart from all other faiths. It also forms the foundation on which the Muslims’ way of life is based.

“It is He Who sent down to you the Book (step by step), setting forth the truth, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel before this, as a guide to people, and He sent down the Criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). Those who rejected the revelations of God, will suffer grievous torment. God is Eminent, avenger of evil.” The first part of the verse establishes certain facts that set the perspective of the faith. It also responds to those who denied Muhammad’s (PBUH) message. The verse states that all revelations come only from God. He is the one who revealed this Qur’an as well as the Torah and Gospel. The verse also emphasizes the oneness of the Message which was brought by all these Books. All the revealed Books embody a single truth which brings guidance to people. This new Book sets the truth embodied in the revealed Scripture apart from the falsehood that people fabricated motivated by their political attitudes, whims, and desires.

“Nothing on the earth or in the heavens is hidden from God.” God has complete knowledge of everything. This statement is congruent with the previous statements emphasizing the Oneness of God. It supports God’s power of retribution mentioned in the previous verse by stressing the fact that nothing can escape God’s knowledge. It is not possible to hide one’s intentions or thoughts from God. The comprehensive knowledge is like a great tree that extends the comfort of its shade to one of the most intimate aspects of human life: the origin of human life. *“It is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.”* God gives you the shape and the form, with all the attributes, that He has decreed for you. It is God and only He who is able to shape and form people as He pleases.

“It is He Who has sent down to you the Book. In it are unequivocal verses, they are the foundation of the Book. Others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, ‘We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord’, and only those who are possessors of intellect really heed. ‘Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate now after You have guided us, but grant us mercy from Your Own Presence; for You are the Grantor of bounties. Our Lord, You will gather humankind together on a Day about which there is no doubt; for God never fails in His promise.’”

This verse was revealed to refute the argument made by the Christians of Najran when they asked the Prophet (PBUH), *“Don’t you say that Jesus is God’s word and spirit?”* They wanted to use this description to prove that Jesus is not a human being and he is the spirit of God. So, the verse came to establish unequivocally the doctrine of the Oneness of God.

This verse establishes a basic principle. The verse states that the Qur’an includes unambiguous verses which are unequivocal in establishing the fundamentals of the faith and the law. There are also verses which deal with the unseen, like the verses dealing with the birth of Jesus for example which are allegorical in nature. Believers should believe the truthfulness of these verses and take them at their face value without delving into questioning how and why. The answers to these questions are not within the realm of knowledge of human beings. The belief in the truthfulness of these verses is a matter of faith because it is beyond the ability of human mind to comprehend the how and why of these matters.

The reactions of people when they listen to these verses divide them into two groups. The people whose hearts are perverted will ignore the clear unambiguous fundamentals of faith and will engage into vain discussions of the allegorical verses. But those who are grounded in knowledge and who appreciate the limitations of human mind will say with confidence, *“We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.”* Their confidence is grounded in the belief that this is a revelation from God and it must be true. God’s words are the truth, a truth that does not need a proof. They realize that the human mind is incapable of finding a proof even if it tried very hard to find one.

Only those who have understanding will heed the meaning of these verses. They have a sound initial natural disposition which only needs a slight reminder to get them to see the truth. Their sound initial natural disposition is filled with the truth which connects them to their Creator. It makes their tongues and hearts join in asking God in humility to set them on the straight path, to prevent their hearts from deviating from the truth, and to endow them with His mercy and blessings. They remember the Day which will certainly come. The Day on which all humankind will be gathered together, no one will miss it. This is how those who are grounded in knowledge will react to God’s words. It is a reaction motivated by a strong faith that emanates from their confidence in the truthfulness of God’s word, the hope in His mercy, and the fear of His wrath. It is a strong faith that implants in the believer a continuous feeling of the consciousness of God. The believer’s heart recognizes the value of guidance after being lost, the value of clear vision after having a cloudy vision, the value of the straight path after being lost in crooked ways, and the value of freedom after suffering from servitude. This is the freedom that one gains when one serves God alone rather than serving a multitude of human masters.

The supplication to God of those with understanding reflects their realization that nothing can be attained except by the will of God. It has been narrated by ‘Ayesha (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) used to pray God saying, *“You are the God in whose hands are the conditions of people’s hearts, establish my heart firmly on Your path.”* When ‘Ayesha (RA) asked the Prophet (PBUH) why he says this supplication often, he said, *“No human heart but rests in the hand of God. If God wills, He can set the heart on the straight path, and if He wills, He can make it deviate from the straight path.”*

“On that Day neither the riches nor the progeny of those who disbelieved will avail them in the least against God. They will be fuel for fire. Like Pharaoh's folk and those who were before them, they denied Our revelations and so God seized them for their sins. And God is severe in punishment. Say (Muhammad) to the disbelievers, ‘You shall be overcome and gathered in Hell, an evil resting-place.’ There has already been for you a sign in the two armies that met (in combat). One was fighting for God’s cause, and the other made up of disbelievers, whom they saw with their own eyes as twice their number. But God does support with His aid whom He pleases. In this is a lesson for those who have eyes to see.”

Those who disbelieved think that their wealth and progeny can provide protection for them, but on the Day of Judgment all of this will be useless. On that Day, God’s promise will be fulfilled and they will become fuel for the fire. This image takes away all human attributes from them and reduces them to a solid fuel for the fire. Even in their lifetime, wealth, progeny, and power can still be of no use to them as in the case of Pharaoh. History has often repeated the story of Pharaoh and the Qur’an narrates it in great details. It exemplifies one of the principles decreed by God as part of the set of rules that govern life on this earth. Those who disbelieved and denied the revelations of God will meet a fate similar to Pharaoh’s fate in this life as well as in the Hereafter. The verse asked the Prophet (PBUH) to warn and remind the idolaters of Mecca with what happened in the battle of Badr. The story of Pharaoh may have been long forgotten but the battle of Badr was still fresh in their minds. There are two probable interpretations for the expression, *“they saw with their own eyes as twice their number.”* One interpretation could be that the disbelievers saw the Muslim army as if it were twice as big as it actually was. They were scared to battle such a large army. Another interpretation could be that the Muslims thought that the idolater’s army is twice as big as their own army, while in reality the idolater’s army was threefold the Muslim army. Either way, the Muslims persevered and won. The victory was only possible by the grace of God. This principle will always be valid. The believers have to understand this truth. They should trust in God’s promise, do their best to prepare for the battle, and persevere when the time comes. They should not despair if victory is delayed. God only knows what is best for them.

“Made alluring to humankind is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this worldly life; but with God is the best abode to return to. Say, ‘Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? In store for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God.’ God is All-Seeing (His) servants- those who say, ‘Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;’ the perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn.”

The passive tense used in the sentence suggests that covetousness is embedded in humankind’s initial natural disposition. This is a natural attribute of the human psyche; there is no need to deny or suppress it. These natural feelings are essential in the development of human mental welfare. However, this natural instinct is balanced by another instinct which is embedded in the initial natural disposition of the human being. It is a disposition which provides the human being with the ability to control his/her desires. It is a disposition towards the spiritual that connects the

human being with God and makes him/her aspire to the Hereafter and God's reward. These two initial natural dispositions should always be kept in balance to keep the human being on safe grounds. The balance of these two dispositions protects the human being from being overwhelmed by the material aspects of life, allows him/her to entertain lofty aspirations towards God, and enhances the feeling of God consciousness in his/her heart.

Coveting women and sons has been always a strong human desire; add to this the love of hoarding money. Human beings are not only interested in money which satisfies their needs but they are fond of owning heaps of wealth. Hoarding is in itself one of the weaknesses of human beings. Horses are beautiful animals, people love to own, ride, or even just watch them. Animals and fertile farmland are examples of the love of ownership.

These are examples of the worldly desires of human beings, but what is their real worth? They are the, *"possessions of this worldly life,"* they will not last forever. Those who aspire to the everlasting reward, an aspiration that elevates the human being from the level of material desires to the level of heavenly spirituality, should seek it with God, *"Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? In store for those who remain conscious of God are Gardens, a reward from their Lord, under which rivers flow; therein is their eternal home; with pure companions; and the good pleasure of God."* This everlasting reward which the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to promise the believers was in fact a material reward. However, there is a basic difference between the material things in this worldly life and the material things in the Hereafter. In addition, there is the invaluable reward, *"the good pleasure of God."* This is a pleasure that outweigh all the pleasures of this life and the Hereafter combined. *"God is All-Seeing of (His) servants,"* God sees and knows what is in the hearts of His servants. He knows their feelings, their thoughts, and their desires and He knows what is best for them.

The characters of those servants are then outlined, *"those who say, 'Our Lord, we have indeed believed, forgive us our sins, and save us from the agony of the Fire;' the perseverant, the truthful, who worship devoutly, who spend (in the way of God), and who pray for forgiveness before dawn."* Their supplication reflects the depth of their consciousness of God. It is a proclamation of faith in God. They use it to seek God's forgiveness and salvation. These characters delineate the high moral ground that should be assumed by all Muslims.

They are perseverant. They do not cower when inflicted by pain. They persevere in performing their difficult undertakings. They submit to God's will and they are content with God's decrees.

They are truthful. They take pride in upholding what is right. They refrain from lying, because lying is a symptom of a deficient character motivated by the fear of loss or the extreme desire of gain.

They worship devoutly. They fulfill their duty to God. They dignify their souls by being devout to God alone.

They spend. They free themselves from the shackles of stinginess. They raise the value of human brotherhood above the personal desire of hoarding. They fulfill their share in the social collective duty towards the human community to make it a community befitting humans.

They pray for forgiveness before dawn. This is an image of highly spiritual beings in a highly spiritual environment. Before dawn, life is calm, the spirit is alert, and the thoughts are heavenly. The spirit of the human joins the spirit of the universe in a prayer to God, the Creator of both the human and the universe.

“God bears witness that there is no deity but He, and (so do) the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge; maintaining His creation with justice; there is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.” The belief in the Oneness of God is the corner stone of faith from an Islamic perspective. He is the only God and it is He who maintains His creation with justice. The verse states unequivocally this truth in the form of a testimony from God which is sufficient for any believer. However, it may be said that only those who believe in God would be happy to accept such a testimony as a proof of the Oneness of God. But the fact is that the People of the Scripture believed in God, however, they claimed that He has a son. The idolaters did believe in God, but they associated partners with Him.

The narrative indicates that the statement of the Oneness of God has far reaching consequences and deeper dimensions of understanding. God accepts nothing of His servants except absolute submission. Not only they have to believe and feel that there is only one God, but they also have to act accordingly. They have to follow the divine plan which is detailed in the rules and laws given in His Book. Those who claim that they believe in God but accept rules and laws which contravene the divine plan are, in actuality, associating partners with God.

The testimony of the angels and those who are endowed with knowledge is exemplified in their complete compliance with God’s commands and their absolute submission to His will. The statement reflects their belief in the truth of the Oneness of God, their obedience, and their submission to God alone.

The testimony that God is One leads to the testimony that He maintains His creation with justice. This is a reference to the second verse in the Sura, *“There is no deity but He, the Ever Living, the Self-Subsisting.”* Maintaining His creation with justice is a component of His Self-Subsistence. Justice in life will not be achieved until the way of life that God has chosen for people is established. This way of life has been delineated in His Book.

“There is no deity but He, the Eminent, the Wise.” Power and wisdom are necessary attributes for maintaining the creation and the establishment of justice. These are attributes of positive effectiveness. They motivate the believer to put his trust in God and accept His will. They transform faith from being an abstract concept into a dynamic propelling force.

“True religion in the sight of God is the submission to His Will. Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge came to them, through transgression among themselves. Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning. And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, ‘I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me.’ And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, ‘Have you submitted?’ If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of His servants.”

It is One God and one faith that bring people together under the banner of submission to God. But submission to God is not a slogan to be raised nor is it words to be uttered. It is not an abstract concept that resides in the heart, nor mere rituals to be performed. Submission is complete obedience to God. It is the use of God's revelation as the source for rules that govern the lives of people.

"Those who received the Scripture differed only after knowledge came to them, through transgression among themselves." Their dispute was not caused by ignorance, because the proof for the Oneness of God was given clearly in the revelations they received. Their difference in opinion was caused by their transgression. Disputing the Oneness of God is a rejection of the belief in God. Those who commit this transgression are warned, *"Whoso rejects the revelations of God, then God is swift in reckoning."*

God then told His Prophet (PBUH) how to settle this argument, *"And if they argue with you, (Muhammad) say, 'I have submitted myself entirely to God and (so have) those who follow me.' And say to those who have received the Scripture as well as the unlettered people, 'Have you submitted?' If they submit, then truly they are rightly guided, and if they turn away, then it is your duty only to convey the message (to them). God is All-Seeing of the servants."*

This is the challenge that God asked His Prophet (PBUH) to pose to those who argue about the concept of the Oneness of God: call people to submit to God alone. The meaning of submission was given above. If they submit, then they are guided. But if they do not accept the challenge then it is your duty only to deliver the message.

"Those who reject the revelations of God, and slay the prophets wrongfully, and slay those of humankind who enjoin equity promise them a painful torment. The deeds of such people will neither bear fruit in this world nor in the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help."

This is the fate of those who reject the revelations of God. Their deeds will be frustrated in this life and in the Hereafter. They did not only reject the revelations of God but they also murdered the prophets and those who tried to establish justice.

"Have you not considered those who have been given a portion of the Scripture? They are invited to the Book of God, to settle their dispute, but a party of them turns away and declines (The arbitration)." It is amazing how some of the People of Scripture (not all of them) turn away from referring to the rules in God's Book regarding matters of belief and daily life. This is similar to the situation of Muslims who say that they are Muslims but refrain from applying God's law in their lives.

"This is because they say, 'The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days'. That which they used to fabricate has deluded them in their religion." This is the reason behind their refusal to apply the rule of God's Book. They do not truly believe in a Day of Judgment nor do they truly believe in the divine justice. The fear of God and shying away from displeasing Him cannot settle in one heart side by side to the refusal to apply God's law; the law that has been delineated in His Book. Unfortunately, there are those who claim that they are Muslims but refuse to apply the rules of God's Book in their lives. They claim that there is no place for these rules in the

daily lives of people. They claim that religion should not interfere with the social and economic practices of people.

“How will they fare when we gather them together on a Day about which there is no doubt, and each soul will be paid in full what it has earned, and they will not be wronged?” This is a real warning posed in the form of a question left unanswered so that people would reflect on it.

“Say, ‘God, Owner of Sovereignty, You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please. You endue with honour whom You please, and You abase whom You please. In Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power. You cause the night to merge into the day, and You cause the day to merge into the night; You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure.’” This is a humble invocation which reiterates a fundamental fact, God is One. He is the sole owner of everything, He has no partner. He bestows on whomsoever He pleases whatever He pleases. Wealth bestowed on people does not become their own. It is a trust that has been entrusted to them so that they manage it according to the rules that pleases God. God can take it back whenever He pleases. He endows with honour whomsoever He pleases and He abases whosoever He pleases. No one has the power to dispute God’s decrees. He maintains everything in the universe with justice and in His hand is all the good.

The image of merging the day into the night and the night into the day is a moving image. The verse could be understood to refer to the change in the lengths of the day and the night from one season to another. It could also be a reference to the gradual change from the light of day to the darkness of night which takes place every day. Either way, the image alerts the heart of the believer to God’s management of the universe. This is a gentle touch which returns the human heart to the great truth, the truth of the Oneness of God, the truth of the Oneness of the maintainer of the universe, the truth of the Oneness of the doer, and the truth of the Oneness of the planner. He is the sole owner and He is the sole giver. He is God the Self-Subsisting, the Sovereign, the One who bestows honor, the One who humbles, the Supreme Life-Giver, the Supreme Death-Bringer, the Grantor, and the Preventer. He manages all the affairs of the universe and people with justice and goodness.

“Let not the believers make the disbelievers their protecting guardians in preference to the believers. Whosoever does that shall cut himself from God, unless you are guarding yourselves against them. But God cautions you to beware of Him; for the final return is to God. Say, ‘Whether you hide what is in your hearts or reveal it, God knows it all. He knows what is in the heavens, and what is on earth. And God has power over all things.’ On the day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done and all the evil it has done. It will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But God cautions you to beware of Him. And God is All-Pitying towards all those who serve Him. Say, ‘If you do love God, follow me, God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.’ Say, ‘Obey God and His Messenger’. But if they turn back, God does not love the disbelievers.”

Islam does not command nor allow Muslims to treat others who do not fight Muslims unkindly. An alliance is a different form of relationship. The word alliance in the verse refers to a bond based on love and loyalty. Members of an alliance subscribe to the same values and principles. It

is difficult that such a bond would exist between Muslims and others who do not subscribe to Islamic values.

To love God means to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH) and to lead a life according to his example. The belief in God is not words to be enunciated, feelings that fill the heart, nor rituals to be performed. The belief in God is obedience to God and His messenger, an obedience that is reflected on the deeds of the believer.

Ibn Katheer says, "This verse establishes a criterion which tests the truthfulness of those who claim that they love God. If they truly love God then they have to follow Muhammad's (PBUH) way in words and deeds." The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *"Whoever does something that contravenes our principles, he is not one of us."*

Ibn Katheer also said, "These verses suggest that disobeying God and the Messenger is synonymous to the disbelief in God; God does not love the disbelievers even though they may claim that they love God,"

Verses: 33 to 64

33. *God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all people,*
34. *Offspring, one of the other. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
35. *When the wife of 'Imran said, "My Lord, I do dedicate what is in my womb entirely for Your special service. So accept this of me. You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."*
36. *When she delivered her, she said, "My Lord, I am delivered of a female child" - and God knew best what she brought forth - "And the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from Satan, the outcast."*
37. *Her Lord graciously accepted her. He made her grow in purity and beauty under the care of Zachary. Whenever Zachary went into the sanctuary where she was, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, "Mary, whence comes this to you?" She said, "From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."*
38. *Then did Zachary pray to his Lord, saying, "My Lord, grant me from Your grace a progeny that is pure. You are Hearer of prayer."*
39. *The angels called to him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary, "God gives you the glad tidings of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble, chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous."*
40. *He said, "My Lord, how shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me, and my wife is barren?" He (the angel) said, "So it will be. God does whatever He wills."*
41. *He said, "My Lord, give me a sign." He (the angel) said, "Your sign is that you shall not speak to anyone for three days except with signals. Then remember your Lord often, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning."*
42. *And when the angels said, "Mary, God has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the world."*
43. *Mary, worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down in prayer."*

44. *This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not with them when they cast lots with their pens, as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed (the point).*
45. *The angels said, "Mary, God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him. His name will be the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God.*
46. *He shall speak to the people in his cradle and in maturity. And he shall be of the righteous."*
47. *She said, "My Lord, how shall I give birth to a child when no man has touched me?" He said, "So it will be, God creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He only says, 'Be' and it is.*
48. *And God will teach him the Book and the Wisdom; the Torah, and the Gospel.*
49. *And will make him a messenger to the Children of Israel, (who will say), 'I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God's leave; and I tell you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you are believers.*
50. *And I have come to confirm that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So be conscious of God, and obey me.*
51. *It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is the straight path."*
52. *But when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he said, "Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?" The disciples said, "We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him.*
53. *Our Lord, we believe in that which You have revealed and we follow the messenger. Enrol us among those who bear witness (to the truth)."*
54. *And (the disbelievers) schemed, and God too schemed, and God is the Best of the Schemers.*
55. *When God said, "Jesus, I will cause you to die and I will raise you to Me, and I am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and I am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me you will (all) return, and I shall judge among you as to that wherein you used to differ.*
56. *As for those who rejected faith, I will torment them with terrible torment in this world and in the Hereafter, and they will not have anyone to help them.*
57. *But as for those who believe and do good deeds, God will pay them (in full) their reward; but God does not love the wrongdoers."*
58. *This is what We recite to you of the revelations and the Message of Wisdom.*
59. *The similitude of Jesus in the sight of God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was.*
60. *This is the truth coming from your Lord, so be not of those who doubt.*
61. *If any one disputes in this matter with you after (full) knowledge has come to you, say, "Come, let us gather together - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves - then let us humbly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie."*
62. *This is verily the true account. There is no deity except God; and God is indeed the Eminent, the Wise.*

63. *But if they turn away, God has full knowledge of those who spread corruption.*
64. *Say, "People of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you. That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God." If then they turn away, say you, "Bear witness that we are the ones who submitted to God. (3: 33-64)*

This group of verses starts with a mention of those whom God has chosen from among His servants to carry the responsibility of bringing His guidance to people. This is a continuous chain of messengers that were chosen to deliver God's message. It is the single message that was revealed to humankind over the years since the beginning of time, *"God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all people, offspring, one of the other. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient."* The word "offspring" does not necessarily mean that there is a blood relationship between the messengers however, they all are the offspring of Adam and Noah (PBUT). The verse mentions two people, Adam and Noah (PBUT) and two families, the families of Abraham and 'Imran. This indicates that Adam and Noah were chosen by God as individuals, while in the case of Abraham and 'Imran (PBUT), not only they were chosen as individuals, but their offspring were also chosen as well. The meaning of "offspring" has been explained in Surat Al-Baqarah (Chapter 2), to indicate that prophet-hood is not bestowed according to rules of hereditary succession on the basis of blood relationships but it is bestowed on the basis of the legacy of faith.

The verses then continue to narrate the story of the birth of Mary, *"When the wife of 'Imran said, 'My Lord, I do dedicate what is in my womb entirely for Your special service. So accept this of me. You are the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.'"* But the baby came out to be a female, *"When she delivered her, she said, 'My Lord, I am delivered of a female child'- and God knew best what she brought forth – 'And the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from Satan, the rejected.'"*

The story of the vow that the wife of 'Imran, the mother of Mary, made reveals a heart full of faith. She vowed to commit the most precious thing she had, her child yet still in her womb, to the service of God. The voluntary dedication of her child to the service of God is an act laden with emotion. It suggests that absolute freedom can only be attained by those who dedicate themselves fully to God. This is the essence of the belief in the Oneness of God. The belief in the Oneness of God and the application of His law frees human beings from any kind of slavery to others. The humble invocation made by the wife of 'Imran reflected her absolute submission to God. However, she was hoping for a son because the tradition at that time was that only males are accepted to serve in the temple. The verses express Mary's mother's apology and her appeal to God to accept her offering asking Him in simple and humble words, the words of a person who feels the closeness to God, to protect her gift and her progeny from the cursed one. God responded to her sincerity and accepted her gift, *"Her Lord graciously accepted her. He made her grow in purity and beauty under the care of Zachary. Whenever Zachary went into the sanctuary where she was, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said, 'Mary, whence comes this to you?' She said, 'From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.'"*

This was God's reward for the sincerity that filled the heart of the mother. God entrusted Mary to the care of Zachary (PBUH), a descendent of the Prophet Aaron (PBUH) and the chief of the temple. She grew up in a pure environment and was supplied by provisions from God. There is no need to discuss the details of the provisions; we will simply say that she was given provisions that made Zachary (PBUH) wonder. He asked her about this, her response was the response of a humble believer who does not boast or brag about the blessings bestowed on her. She simply said it is, *"From God. God provides sustenance to whom He pleases without measure."* This was a harbinger for the miracles of the births of John and Jesus (PBUT).

Zachary (PBUH) did not have progeny but he was yearning for a child of his own. Seeing what was happening to Mary, the hope in the mercy of God grew in his heart, *"Then did Zachary pray to his Lord, saying, 'My Lord, grant me from Your grace a progeny that is pure. You are Hearer of prayer.'"* Zachary's (PBUH) humble invocation was accepted by God. Zachary (PBUH), the old man, and his barren wife were promised a child. The prayer that emanated from a pure heart and was directed to God who is able to grant what He pleases whenever He pleases has been accepted. The glad tidings of a son who was named before he was even born were carried by the angels, *"The angels called to him while he was standing in prayer in the sanctuary, 'God gives you the glad tidings of John, confirming a Word from God. He will be noble, chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous.' He said, 'My Lord, how shall I have a son when old age has overtaken me, and my wife is barren?' He (the angel) said, 'So it will be, God does whatever He wills.'"*

Zachary (PBUH) was taken by surprise, to have a son born to an old man and a barren woman is a miracle. But God does what He wills. Zachary (PBUH) wanted a sign to reassure his heart, *"He said, 'My Lord, give me a sign', He (the angel) said 'Your sign is that you shall not speak to anyone for three days except with signals. Then remember your Lord often, and glorify Him in the evening and in the morning.'"* God gave him a sign which illustrated how miracles take place. He was told that he will not be able to speak to people for a period of three days, but at the same time, he will be able to use his tongue to celebrate the praise of God.

"And when the angels said, 'Mary, God has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above the women of the world. Mary, worship your Lord devoutly. Prostrate yourself, and bow down with those who bow down in prayer.'" God chose her to receive this direct blessing from Him, exactly as the father of humanity was chosen to receive God's blessing. It is a great blessing. But, she did not realize the real impact of this news. The verses point to the purity of Mary. This has great significance in view of the doubts that were cast about the birth of Jesus. This also illustrates the beauty of this religion and reveals its source. At the time, Muhammad (PBUH) was facing great difficulties in dealing with the People of the Scripture, but in spite of that, here he is talking about the purity of Mary and her unique status among the women of the world. This is the same Mary that the Christians believe in and use as an excuse for not believing in Muhammad (PBUH). It is the truth that Muhammad (PBUH) received from his Lord. Had this religion not come from God, Muhammad (PBUH) would not have said it.

"This is part of the tidings of the things unseen, which We reveal to you (Muhammad). You were not with them when they cast lots with their pens, as to which of them should be charged with the

care of Mary, nor were you with them when they disputed (the point)." The verse points to what happened when Mary's mother brought her to the temple in fulfillment of her vow to God. The rabbis were competing with each other to get the honour of taking care of Mary. This story was neither narrated in the old nor in the new testaments, but it must have been known to the rabbis at that time. The Qur'an does not give many details about this incident, but we know that the care of Mary was entrusted to Zachary (PBUH). This story was not known to the Prophet (PBUH) either. It may have been one of the secrets of the temple and it was used by the Qur'an to challenge the People of the Scripture. The story in the Qur'an was never challenged by the People of the Scripture which attests to its veracity.

Now we come to the account of the birth of Jesus (PBUH), a miracle for human beings but a normal thing for the Divine will. The angels brought the glad tidings to Mary of a word from God; his name is Jesus the son of Mary. The verse refers to him as Jesus, the son of Mary. Thus, not only his name was given but also his lineage. *"The angels said, 'Mary, God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him. His name will be the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God. He shall speak to the people in his cradle and in maturity. And he shall be of the righteous.'"* The verses also described his relationship to God. He will be, *"held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and one of those drawn near to God."* The verses refer to another miracle that he was endowed with: he will be able to speak to people as a young baby in the cradle, and in maturity. He will be one of the righteous.

Mary the virgin, was puzzled as anyone in her place would be, she called upon her Lord, *"My Lord, how shall I give birth to a child when no man has touched me?"* The answer came to remind her of the simple fact that human beings often forget, *"So it will be; God creates what He wills. If He decrees a thing, He only says, 'Be' and it is."* This reminder is enough to resolve the puzzle, clear the confusion, and secure the heart. One would ask after that; how could I miss this simple fact? The verses continue to talk about Jesus (PBUH), *"And God will teach him the Scripture and the Wisdom; the Torah, and the Gospel."* The Scripture could be construed as writings, or as the actual books, the Torah and the Gospel. Wisdom is a state of mind which grants people insight and allows them to make the right decisions. It is a great blessing. The Torah was Jesus' (PBUH) Scripture as well as the Gospel. It was the foundation of the religion that Jesus (PBUH) believed in.

"And will make him a messenger to the Children of Israel, (saying) 'I have come to you, with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God's leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you are believers.'" The verse shows that Jesus' (PBUH) message was directed to the Children of Israel. He was one of their prophets. The verse also refers to the miracles that Jesus (PBUH) performed in front of the Children of Israel, *"I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal him the blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by God's leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses."* Jesus (PBUH) insisted, each time he performed these miracles, that he is able to perform these miracles only by the leave of God. These powers that were given to Prophet Jesus (PBUH) complement the

miracle of his birth and show that God is able to make anyone of His servants perform such miracles.

“And I have come to confirm that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So be conscious of God, and obey me. It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is the straight path.” These verses which summarize Jesus’ (PBUH) call to the Children of Israel reveal the original features of Christianity. Jesus’ (PBUH) message came to confirm the law revealed in the Torah with some modification. The modifications included the removal of some restrictions given in the Torah, thus rendering lawful some of the things that were originally prohibited. He also clarified the fundamental truth on which the religion of God was established: all the miracles which he performed were made possible by the grace of God. Jesus (PBUH) is a human being; he has no supernatural power which enables him to perform miracles out of his own accord. His message to them is to be conscious of God and obey Him and His Messenger. God is the only deity to be worshiped. To be on the straight path is to believe in the Oneness of God, to worship Him, to obey His Messenger, and to follow the Message which the Messenger brought.

“But when Jesus became conscious of their disbelief, he cried, ‘Who will be my helpers in the cause of God?’ The disciples said, ‘We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him. Our Lord, we believe in that which You have revealed and we follow the messenger. Enrol us among those who bear witness (to the truth).’”

We can see the sudden change in the narrative. The details of the birth of Jesus and the description of the encounter between Mary and her people after Jesus was delivered are omitted. These details are mentioned in another Sura, Surat Mary (Chapter 19). The narrative moves to speak about the discussion between Jesus (PBUH) and his disciples when he realized the lack of support for his mission from the Children of Israel. He called upon those who believed in him to join him, *“Who will be my helpers?”* Each messenger or leader should have supporters to support his cause. Jesus’ (PBUH) disciples responded saying, *“We will be God's helpers. We believe in God, and bear you witness that we have submitted to Him.”* They asked Jesus (PBUH) to bear witness that they have submitted to God and they will help establish God’s way on earth. They also made a pledge to God. This pledge embodies their consent on a covenant between them and God. The task of the messenger is to deliver the message. Once the believer received the message and believed in it then he/she has to pledge allegiance to God. This is a pledge to follow the way of life that came in the message.

“And (the disbelievers) schemed, and God too schemed, and God is the Best of the Schemers. When God said, ‘Jesus, I will cause you to die and I will raise you to Me, and I am cleansing you of those who disbelieve and I am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me you will (all) return, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein you used to differ. As for those who disbelieve, I will torment them with terrible torment in this world and in the Hereafter, and they will not have anyone to help them. But as for those who believe and do good deeds, God will pay them (in full) their reward; but God does not love the wrongdoers.’” Those who did not believe in Jesus (PBUH) schemed. They accused

his mother of adultery and accused him of lying and sorcery. They complained to the Roman ruler accusing Jesus (PBUH) of being an agitator. The Roman ruler delivered Jesus (PBUH) to them to try him and punish him according to their law. They wanted Jesus (PBUH) to be crucified, but God wanted to take him back to Him, raise him, and honour him. How did God take him back and how did God raise him? These are matters of the unseen; we better not delve into them.

“This is what We recite to you of the revelations and the Message of Wisdom.” These stories and the lessons that one can learn from them are a revelation from God. The tone of the verse is endearing to the Prophet (PBUH). When God narrates stories to His Prophet (PBUH) it indicates certain closeness between the two. Then the miraculous birth of Jesus (PBUH) is explained, *“The similitude of Jesus in the sight of God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, and then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was.”* How can the creation of Jesus be more difficult than the creation of Adam?

“This is the truth coming from your Lord, so be not of those who doubt.” The Prophet (PBUH) never doubted the words of God, but the statement is meant to strengthen the Prophet’s (PBUH) argument when he deals with the doubters. If they continue in their arguments, then call them to a challenge, *“If any one disputes in this matter with you, now after (full) knowledge has come to you, say, ‘Come, let us gather together - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves - then let us humbly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) posed that challenge to those who were arguing about the truth of the Qur’an, but they declined.

“This is verily the true account. There is no deity except God; and God is indeed the Eminent, the Wise.” When they declined the challenge they admitted the truth of the Qur’an. The Qur’an describes those who turned away as, *“those who spread corruption.”* Those who do not believe in the Oneness of God are spreading corruption. The belief in the Oneness of God frees human beings from all sorts of slavery. It establishes a way of life that is based on God’s law. The values and morals of this way of life are dictated by God’s message.

“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, come to an agreement between us and you. That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with him; that none of us shall take others for lords beside God.’ If then they turn away, say you, ‘Bear witness that we are the ones who submitted to God.’” This is a fair invitation. It aims at putting all people on an equal footing in front of God. No people are better than other people and no human being is obliged to worship another. All people have one God. But if they turn away, then say to them, *“we are the ones who submitted to God.”*

Verses: 65 to 92

65. *People of the Scripture, why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Do you have no sense?*
66. *Here you are disputing concerning matters of which you had some knowledge, but why do you dispute concerning matters of which you have no knowledge? It is God Who knows, and you do not know.*
67. *Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; but he was an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater.*
68. *Indeed, the people who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and the believers; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.*
69. *A party of the People of the Scripture long to make you go astray; and they make none to go astray except themselves, but they perceive it not.*
70. *People of the Scripture, why do you reject God's revelations, when you (yourselves) bear witness (to their truth)?*
71. *People of the Scripture, why do you mask the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth?*
72. *A party of the People of the Scripture say, "Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe at the opening of the day, and then reject it at the end of the day, in order that they may return.*
73. *And believe no one unless he follows your religion. Say, 'True guidance is the Guidance of God.' Lest anyone is given the like of that which was given to you or that they may argue with you in the presence of your Lord". Say (Muhammad), "All grace is in God's hand. He bestows it on whom He wills". God is Vast, Omniscient.*
74. *He chooses for His mercy whom He wills. God's Grace is Great.*
75. *Among the People of the Scripture there is he who, if you trust him with a treasure, will return it to you. And among them there is he who, if you trust him with a piece of gold, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over him. That is because they say, "We are under no obligation towards the gentiles." They tell a lie against God knowingly.*
76. *Nay, whoever fulfills his promise and is conscious of God, then surely God loves those who are conscious of Him.*
77. *Those who purchase a small gain at the cost of God's covenant and their oaths, they have no share in the Hereafter. God will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Theirs will be a painful torment.*
78. *There is among them a party, who distorts the Scripture with their tongues, so that you may think it is a part of the Scripture, but it is not part of the Scripture; and they say, "It is from God," but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.*
79. *It is not possible that any human being, to whom God has given the Scripture and the Wisdom and the prophet-hood, would say to people, "Worship me rather than worship God." On the contrary he would say, "Be faithful servants of God, for you have taught the Scripture and you have studied it earnestly."*
80. *Nor would he instruct you to take the angels and the prophets for lords. Would he command you to disbelieve after you have submitted to God?*
81. *God took the covenant of the prophets, saying, "I give you the Scripture and the Wisdom; then when a messenger comes to you, confirming that which you have; you shall believe in him and you shall help him." God said, "Do you agree, and take my Covenant as*

binding on you?" They said, "We agree." He said, "Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses."

- 82. Then whosoever turns away after this, these are the transgressors.*
- 83. Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned.*
- 84. Say, "We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and we have submitted to God."*
- 85. And whoso seeks as religion other than the complete submission to God, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.*
- 86. How shall God guide a people who rejected faith after they have accepted it and bore witness that the Messenger was true and that clear signs had come to them? God does not guide the wrongdoers.*
- 87. The recompense for such people is a curse from God, from the angels, and from all people.*
- 88. They will abide therein. The torment which they will be subjected to will not be lightened; neither will they be reprieved;*
- 89. Except for those who repent afterward and make amends; for verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*
- 90. But those who rejected faith after they have accepted it, and then increased in their rejection of faith, their repentance will never be accepted. And such are those who have gone astray.*
- 91. As to those who reject faith, and die while rejecting faith, never would be accepted from any such as much gold as the earth contains, if it were offered as a ransom; for such is a grievous torment and they will find no helpers.*
- 92. By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever you spend God knows it well. (3:65-92)*

"People of the Scripture, why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Do you have no sense? Here you are disputing concerning matters of which you had some knowledge, but why do you dispute concerning matters of which you have no knowledge? It is God Who knows, and you do not know. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian; but he was an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater.

Those of humankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers."

It is narrated that these verses were revealed to address a situation that arose during a discussion between the Christians of Najran and some Jewish scholars who were at a meeting with the Prophet (PBUH). The two groups argued together: The Jewish scholars said Abraham (PBUH) was a Jew, and the Christians said Abraham (PBUH) was a Christian. Whether this is true or not, it seems that the verses came to address claims made by the Christians and Jews about Prophet Abraham (PBUH). Each group claimed that they are the only carrier of Abraham's (PBUH) legacy. These verses refuted these claims. How can Abraham (PBUH) be a Jew or a Christian

when the Torah and the Gospel were revealed long after he passed away? The verses state unequivocally that Abraham (PBUH) was, *“an upright man who had submitted to God, and he was never an idolater.”* This statement puts forward three points. First, the distortions that crept into Judaism and Christianity brought them into the circle of associating partners with God. This is something that Abraham (PBUH) would not have accepted. Second, Islam (absolute submission to God) and associating partners with God can never be congruent, since they contradict each other. Third, the idolaters of Mecca cannot claim that they are followers of Abraham (PBUH), as they used to claim, because Abraham (PBUH) was never an idolater.

“Those of humankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him, this Prophet, and the believers; and God is the Protecting Guardian of the believers.” Only those who accepted Prophet Abraham’s (PBUH) call when he was alive, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) - who followed in the footsteps of Prophet Abraham (PBUH) in submitting himself to God – and those who submitted themselves to God with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) can claim that they carry the legacy of Prophet Abraham (PBUH).

The verses then warn the believers of the trickery of a party of the People of the Scripture, *“A party of the People of the Scripture long to make you go astray; and they make none to go astray except themselves, but they perceive it not.”* This trickery is motivated by a desire in their hearts that makes them long to leading you astray, but they only lead themselves astray without even being aware of it.

The warning to the believers is followed by a rebuke to the group of the People of the Scripture who were involved in this deception, *“People of the Scripture, why do you reject God’s revelations, when you (yourselves) bear witness (to their truth)? People of the Scripture, why do you mask the truth with falsehood and knowingly conceal the truth?”* The verses address the group of the People of the Scripture who were involved in these acts of deception in spite of the fact that they recognized the truth in Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) call. There were signs and harbingers in their Scripture which paved the way to the appearance of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, they chose not to believe in him, not because of lack of evidence supporting his prophet-hood but because of their stubbornness. However, the Qur’an continued to address them as People of the Scripture even after they had transgressed and distorted the Scripture.

“A party of the People of the Scripture say, ‘Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe at the opening of the day, and then reject it at the end of the day, in order that they may return.’” This was a clever way to create confusion in the hearts of those Muslims who were not sure of their faith. This trick aimed at planting the seeds of doubt in the hearts of some Muslims who would think that those who left Islam did so because they discovered its fallacy. For this plan to succeed, it had to be kept in confidence, so they commanded complete secrecy, *“And believe no one unless he follows your religion.”*

God’s response to this trickery was to command His Prophet (PBUH) to say, *“True guidance is the Guidance of God”* There is no other way except God’s way to receive guidance.

The verses continue to elaborate on the efforts of some of the People of Scripture to lead the Muslims astray and the motivations behind these efforts. They were motivated by envy and fear that the Muslims would take away from them their place with God as if God does not know who deserves to be recognized by Him, *“Lest anyone is given the like of that which was given to you or that they may argue with you in the presence of your Lord”.* So, the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to set the record straight, *“Say (Muhammad), ‘All grace is in God’s hand. He bestows it on whom He wills.’ God is Vast, Omniscient. He chooses for His mercy whom He wills. God’s Grace is Great.”*

The Qur’an was fair to the People of the Scripture even if they were unfair to Muslims. It recognized that some were honest in their dealings and some were not. Hence, it praised those who were honest, *“Among the People of the Scripture there is he who, if you trust him with a treasure, will return it to you.”* But it deprecated those who were dishonest in their dealings, *“And among them there is he who, if you trust him with a piece of gold, will not return it to you unless you keep standing over him. That is because they say, ‘We are under no obligation towards the gentiles.’ They tell a lie against God knowingly.”*

Not only they were dishonest, but they also made the claim that it is their religion that commanded them to behave in such a despicable way. They were telling a lie, because God did not command them to use a double standard in dealing with people. The Qur’an states the golden standard with which all dealings are measured, *“Nay, whoever fulfills his promise and is conscious of God, then surely God loves those who are conscious of Him. Those who purchase a small gain at the cost of God’s covenant and their oaths, they have no share in the Hereafter. God will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. Theirs will be a painful torment.”* It is a single standard that should be followed. The Qur’an promised those who apply this standard, out of being conscious of God and seeking to please Him, to be loved and honoured by God. Those who chose not to use this standard, and bartered the covenant of God for a miserable price – it is a miserable price even if they gained the whole world - they have no share in the Hereafter, God will not look at them nor will He purify them. They will suffer a painful doom. One notices here that the principle of the fulfillment of promises is closely related to the concept of God consciousness. Therefore, one cannot use a double standard in dealing with people because ultimately the dealing is with God whether the person on the other side of the deal is a friend or foe.

“There is among them a party who distorts the Scripture with their tongues, so that you may think it is a part of the Scripture, but it is not part of the Scripture; and they say, ‘It is from God’, but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.” This is the problem when clergy or religious scholars become corrupt. We know how they twist the verses to provide statements which may contradict the essence of the religion. We can see this happening from people who belong to various faiths. They speak in the name of religion while they are acting against the religion. They twist the verses and extrapolate it wrongly to please their masters or to attain a worldly gain. They claim that, *“It is from God, but it is not from God. They tell a lie against God knowingly.”* This problem is not unique to the People of the Scripture but it applies to corrupt scholars and clergy in any religion. It is mentioned here to warn Muslims of the dangers of corrupt religious leaders.

“It is not possible that any human being, to whom God has given the Scripture and the Wisdom and the prophet-hood, would say to people, ‘Be my servants rather than God’s’. On the contrary he would say, ‘Be faithful servants of God, for you have taught the Scripture and you have studied it earnestly.’ Nor would he instruct you to take the angels and the prophets for lords. Would he command you to disbelief after you have submitted to God?” Any prophet knows that he is a servant of God. God alone is the Lord who deserves to be worshiped. It is impossible for any prophet to claim that he is a god. A prophet would only say to the people that they should submit only to God; they should worship Him alone; and they should follow His commands. This is what they have been told in God’s Scripture which they are familiar with. Similarly, a prophet will never ask people to take the angels or the prophets for lords, because this means he would be commanding them to reject faith in God. A prophet’s task is to guide people to God’s path not to lead them astray. The verses at hand describe also the transgressions committed by some present day self-proclaimed Muslim scholars. They conveniently select verses from the Qur’an and twist them to serve the purpose of their human gods.

“God took the covenant of the prophets, saying, ‘I give you the Scripture and the Wisdom; then when a messenger comes to you, confirming that which you have; you shall believe in him and you shall help him.’ God said, ‘Do you agree, and take my Covenant as binding on you?’ They said, ‘We agree.’ He said, ‘Then bear witness, and I am with you among the witnesses.’ Then whosoever turns away after this, these are the transgressors. Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned.” God has taken a sacred covenant from all messengers, He gathered all messengers to witness the ratification of the covenant, and He, Himself was a witness. The covenant commanded each messenger to follow what the subsequent messengers will bring, even though each one of them was given a Scripture and Wisdom from God. Each messenger should support subsequent messengers. The verse wraps up time and brings all messengers together in one scene to ratify the covenant. They were asked by God if they agree to take God’s Covenant as binding to all of them. They all agreed. The verse paints a majestic scene, a procession of honoured messengers submitting to the divine guidance and announcing the unity of the message and the brotherhood of the messengers. The messengers are a group of chosen people. Each messenger came to complete the work that has been done by his predecessor. They neither had ego nor personal ambitions to hinder the completion of the mission. The religion of God is free of any shadow of chauvinism caused by ethnicity or nationalism. In the light of this, one may conclude that the People of the Scripture broke the covenant of God when they refused to believe in the revelations that Muhammad (PBUH) brought.

Those who do not follow the Prophet (PBUH) are transgressors. God revealed one message that was delivered through a succession of messengers. All of them delivered the same single message. The message commanded complete submission to God. Submission is achieved through following God’s law and the way of life that He has decreed for His servants.

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to proclaim to the whole world that the Muslim nation recognizes God’s covenant which has been ratified by all the prophets. The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to say, *“We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was*

revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and we have submitted to God.”

It should be noted that the list of the beliefs mentioned in the verse is crowned by the statement of submission. Submission to God means absolute obedience to God’s commands, law, and rules. It is clear from the previous verse, *“Do they seek other than the religion of God? All creatures in the heavens and on earth have, willingly or unwillingly, submitted to Him. To Him they shall be returned,”* that submission of the celestial creatures means that they follow God’s law. The Qur’an reiterates the meaning of the word Islam (submission) over and over again to emphasize that it is not only a word to be uttered nor a belief to settle in the heart, but it is also a practical application of God’s law in our daily life.

Finally, the ultimate conclusion is made, *“And whoso seeks as religion other than the complete submission to God, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter.”* After this detailed discourse, there is no chance whatsoever for any doubt regarding the meaning of the word *“Islam,”* (submission). It is not sufficient to proclaim that *“there is no deity except God,”* but we have to follow that with applying the true meaning of the statement of the Oneness of God, the maintainer of the universe. It is not sufficient to proclaim that Muhammad (PBUH) is the messenger of God, but we have to follow that by following the way of life and the law that Muhammad (PBUH) brought to us. Islam is not only a belief that rests deep in our hearts, but also deeds and actions that reflect this belief. Rituals are not an end in themselves but they are a vehicle which keeps us close to God.

“How shall God guide a people who rejected faith after they have accepted it and bore witness that the Messenger was true and that clear signs had come to them? God does not guide the wrongdoers. The recompense for such people is a curse from God, from the angels, and from all people. They will abide therein. The torment which they will be subjected to will not be lightened; neither will they be reprieved.” This is a frightening warning that fills any believing heart with anxiety. The warning highlights the seriousness of the matter. However, the chance for forgiveness is still available, all it takes is a knock on the door for repentance, *“Except for those who repent afterward and make amends; for verily God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.”*

“By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever you spend God knows it well.” The early Muslims realized the implication of this verse and they sought righteousness by spending out of that which was dearest to them.

It has been narrated by Imam Ahmed, on the authority of Abi Ishaq bin Abdullah bin Abi Talha who heard Anas bin Malek (RA) says, *“Abu Talha was one of the richest people in Medina. He had a well facing the Messenger’s Mosque. Abu Talha was fond of the well because it had fresh water and the water tasted good. The Prophet (PBUH) used to drink out of this well. When this verse was revealed, Abu Talha came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, ‘God says you will not attain righteousness unless you spend out of that which you love and I am fond of this well, so I*

would like to donate it to the Muslims. I will put it under your control and you do whatever God commands you to do.' The Prophet (PBUH) admired this deed and said to him, 'This is a profitable bargain. I see that you should give it to your kinsfolk.' Abu Talha said, 'I will do that.' And he gave the ownership of the well to his cousins."

Verses: 93 to 120

93. All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except that which Israel made unlawful for himself, before the Torah was revealed. Say, "Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful."
94. Then whosoever shall fabricate a lie and attribute it to God, these are indeed the wrongdoers.
95. Say, "God speaks the truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. He was not of the idolaters."
96. The first House (of worship) appointed for humankind was that at Bakka, a blessed place, and (source of) guidance for all humankind.
97. In it are clear signs, the place where Abraham once stood; whoever enters it attains security. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for those who can afford it. But if any disbelieves, God does not stand in need of any of His creatures.
98. Say, "People of the Scripture, why do you reject the revelations of God, when God is Himself a witness to all what you do?"
99. Say, "People of the Scripture, why you obstruct those who believe, from the path of God, seeking to make it seem crooked, while you were yourselves witnesses (to God's Covenant)? But God is not unaware of what you do."
100. You who believe, if you obey a party of the people who were given the Scripture, they would (indeed) turn you back as disbelievers after you have believed.
101. And how would you disbelieve while God's revelations are being recited to you and His messenger is in your midst? Whoever holds firmly to God will be guided to a straight path.
102. You who believe, be conscious of God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not die except in a state of submission to God.
103. And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's Blessings on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Blessing, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus, does God make His revelations clear to you, so you may be guided.
104. And from among you there should be a party who invite to what is good, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and these are the successful.
105. Be not like those who are divided amongst themselves and fall into disputations after receiving clear revelations. For such is a dreadful torment.
106. On the Day when some faces will be brightened, and some faces will be darkened, it will be said to those whose faces are darkened, "Did you reject faith after accepting it? Then taste the torment for rejecting faith."
107. But those whose faces will be brightened, they will be in God's mercy, therein to dwell (for ever).

108. *These are God's revelations. We recite them to you with the truth. And God wills no injustice to any of His creatures.*
109. *To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. To Him all things will return.*
110. *You are the best community that has been raised up for humankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been best for them. Among them are some who believe, but most of them are transgressors.*
111. *They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance. If they come out to fight you, they will turn their backs to you and flee, and no help shall they get.*
112. *Overshadowed by ignominy wherever they are found save if they clutch a rope from God and a rope from people. They have incurred anger from God, and wretchedness is laid upon them. That is because they used to reject the revelations of God, and slew the prophets wrongfully. That is because they were rebellious and used to transgress.*
113. *Not all of them are alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a party that stands upright. They recite the revelations of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.*
114. *They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they vie one another in doing good deeds. These are in the ranks of the righteous.*
115. *And whatever good they do, it will not be rejected. God is aware of those who are conscious of Him.*
116. *Those who disbelieve, neither their possessions nor their progeny will help them against God. They will be the companions of the fire, dwelling therein (for ever).*
117. *The likeness of that which they spend in this worldly life is as a biting, icy wind which smites the harvest of a people who have wronged themselves and destroys it. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.*
118. *You who believe, do not take as your intimate friends people who are not your kind. They will spare no pains to ruin you and they love to see you in distress. Hatred has already appeared in the utterance from their mouths, and what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made plain to you the revelations, if you will understand.*
119. *Here you are, you love them but they do not love you, though you believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, "We believe." But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in their rage. Say, "Perish in your rage; God knows well all the secrets of the hearts."*
120. *If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if some misfortune overtakes you, they rejoice at it. But if you persevere and do right, their cunning will not do you the least harm. God encompasses all what they do. (3:93-120)*

"All food was lawful to the Children of Israel, except that which Israel made unlawful for himself, before the Torah was revealed. Say, 'Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful.'" Some Jews criticized the Qur'an because it made lawful some food which they were forbidden to eat, in spite of the fact that the Qur'an states that it came to confirm the Torah. It was narrated that the food they referred to was camel meat and milk. The verse came to remind

them of a historical fact: it is Prophet Jacob (PBUH) who made this food unlawful before the Torah was revealed. Prophet Jacob (PBUH) was also called Israel. It is narrated that he suffered a severe illness. His favourite food was camel's meat and milk; he vowed to give up his favourite food voluntarily upon his recovery. God accepted his vow and healed him. The Children of Israel followed their father in keeping this vow, hence the prohibition. God made unlawful other types of food to the Children of Israel as punishment for their transgression. These foods are mentioned in Surat Al-Ana'am (Chapter 6). The present verse stated the basic Qur'anic rule regarding prohibited food. Food, in general, is made lawful by God except that which has been explicitly declared prohibited for a specific reason. The reasons behind the earlier prohibitions did not apply to Muslims. Thus, these types of food were made lawful to Muslims. The challenge was made, *"Bring you the Torah and read it, if you are truthful."* Those who invent lies about God are not only lying, but they are also committing an injustice against themselves and the people. The punishment for those who commit injustice is known, so it is sufficient to identify the crime and the culprit for the people to recognize the kind of punishment which they should expect.

"Say, 'God speaks the truth. So follow the religion of Abraham, the upright. He was not of the idolaters.' The first House (of worship) appointed for humankind was that at Bakka, a blessed place, and (source of) guidance for all humankind. In it are clear signs, the place where Abraham once stood; whoever enters it attains security. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for those who can afford it. But if any disbelieves, God does not stand in need of any of His creatures." The statement, *"God speaks the truth"* may refer to the previous discussion made in regard to the realignment of Qibla from Jerusalem to Mecca. The Sacred Mosque in Mecca was built by Abraham and Ishmael (PBUH) to be a Qibla for people and a place of safety and security. It is a Qibla for the believers, hence the command to follow Abraham's (PBUH) religion. It is a religion free of idolatry. This House was dedicated to those who prostrate themselves in worship to God. The sign indicating the place where Abraham (PBUH) once stood may be a reference to an old stone that was found attached to the K'aba. It is thought that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) used to stand upon this stone while building the K'aba. It was separated from the K'aba at the time of 'Umar (RA) to clear the path for people to circle around the K'aba.

God decreed that this House is a place of safety and security for whomsoever enters it. This decree was respected even at the time when the Arabs abandoned Abraham's (PBUH) religion and became idolaters. It is narrated that very often a murderer would seek asylum in the House. He would stay safe from any retribution as long as he remains inside the House, even if the murdered person's family knows his whereabouts. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said on the day of Mecca's conquest, *"This city has been made sacred on the day God created the heavens and earth. It is going to be sacred till the Day of Resurrection. Fighting has been made unlawful until today, when I was allowed to fight but only for an hour. Fighting, hunting, and destruction of plants are prohibited in this city till the Day of Resurrection."*

The verses state that Pilgrimage has been prescribed as a ritual for those who can afford it. God is not in need of those who turn away from guidance. It is interesting to note that the command to perform Pilgrimage has been addressed to *"the people."* The command was not issued to the Muslims alone, it is, thus, a command to all people.

Pilgrimage is a duty to be performed once in a lifetime, for those who can afford it. Affordability means financial ability and health capability, in addition to the safety of the road. Several scholars argued about the date on which Pilgrimage was made obligatory. Some say it was made obligatory during the 9th year of Hijra based on the fact the Prophet (PBUH) performed Pilgrimage on the 10th year of Hijra. Another view holds that Pilgrimage was made obligatory after the battle of Uhud, but the Prophet (PBUH) was not able to perform it right away for one reason or another. Either way, this verse is quite clear in making Pilgrimage an obligatory religious duty for those who can afford it.

“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, why do you reject the revelations of God, when God is Himself witness to all you do?’” This verse denounces the People of the Scripture who rejected the Qur’an. The verse describes those who reject the Qur’an as disbelievers. This denouncement is followed with a harsh warning, *“God is Himself witness to all you do.”* An even harsher rebuke is expressed in the subsequent verse, *“Say, ‘People of the Scripture, why do you obstruct those who believe, from the path of God, seeking to make it seem crooked, while you were yourselves witnesses (to God’s Covenant)? But God is not unaware of what you do.’”* The straight path leads to God; all other paths are crooked because they do not lead to God. Corruption prevails when the way to God is obstructed and people are prevented from pursuing this path.

“You who believe, if you listen to a party of the people who were given the Scripture, they would (indeed) turn you back as disbelievers after you have believed. And how would you disbelieve while God’s revelations are being recited to you and His messenger is in your midst? Whoever holds firmly to God will be guided to a straight path.” The Muslim nation was not only commanded to lead a way of life based on God’s commands, but also to illustrate the viability of such a way of life for the whole humanity. The Muslim nation was commanded to be the model that shows all human beings that it is possible to lead a way of life which translates the revelation into practical actions, feelings, morals, and dealings. The Muslim nation would not be able to fulfill its undertaking unless it follows God’s commands.

The verse stated that it is certainly a capital sin for a believer to reject faith during these favourable conditions. This statement is valid today as it was valid then, because even if the Prophet (PBUH) is no longer alive; we still have the Qur’an which addresses us today as it used to address the Muslims at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The salvation lies in holding tight to God’s path.

The Prophet (PBUH) used to be very strict with his companions when it came to matters of faith. However, he used to be flexible with his companions in matters of daily life. He used to listen to their opinions, heed their advice, and benefit from their experience.

The Qur’an then addressed the believers stating two fundamental principles that the Muslim nation should adhere to if it desires to fulfill its responsibility. The first is to remain always conscious of God and the second is to maintain a strong sense of brotherhood among the believers. The role of the Muslims nation as a nation which commands what is good and forbids what is evil will not be fulfilled without a strong faith in God which makes it remain always conscious of Him at all times and a strong feeling of brotherhood among the believers which strengthens the structure of the society.

Let us elaborate on these two fundamental principles. The first principle is to remain, *“conscious of God with all the consciousness that is due to Him, and do not die except in a state of submission to God.”* God consciousness keeps the heart of the believer on the alert at all times. The pursuit of God consciousness is an endless endeavour for the heart of the believer. No one is certain when he/she will die. Death can overtake the human being at any time. It is part of the unseen no one knows when its time will come. If someone wants to die in a state of submission, then one has always to remain conscious of God.

The second principle is the principle of the brotherhood in faith, *“And hold fast, all together, to the rope of God, and do not be divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude God's Blessings on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Blessing, you became brethren; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus does God make His revelations clear to you, so you may be guided.”* It is a brotherhood that is rooted in Islam and God consciousness. The way to establish this brotherhood, is to hold fast to the rope of God. Its philosophy is to fulfill the covenant of God and to follow His commands. It is a favour that God bestows on whom He loves from among His servants. The Muslims are reminded that before God bestowed His favour on them, they were fighting each other in Medina. Only through Islam, the two tribes of Aws and Khazraj were able to forget their enmity and become brethren under the banner of Islam. The verse used the expression, *“joined your hearts,”* rather than saying *“joined you,”* because the hearts are the home for feelings such as love and hate. The verse paints a picture of a group of hearts gathered closely together around God's covenant. They were about to fall in the pit of fire and suddenly the hearts remembered God's covenant and held tight to God's rope which saved them from falling into the abyss.

Having mentioned the two basic principles which shape the community of the believers, the verses continued to state the role that the Muslim nation was entrusted with, *“And from among you there should be a party who invite to what is good, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong, and these are the successful.”* It is absolutely necessary to have a group of people who invite people to what is good, enjoin what is right, and forbid what is evil. It may be possible for anyone to play the role of inviting to what is good, but it is the responsibility of the government to command what is right and forbid what is wrong.

The narrative continued to warn the Muslim community of falling into the pitfall of disputes that divide the community as has happened to communities before them, *“Be not like those who became divided amongst themselves and fell into disputations after receiving clear revelations. For such is a dreadful torment. On the Day when some faces will be brightened, and some faces will be darkened, it will be said to those whose faces are darkened, ‘Did you reject faith after accepting it? Then taste the torment for rejecting faith.’ But those whose faces will be brightened, they will be in God's mercy, therein to dwell (for ever).”* This is a lively image that describes different kinds of human beings, some with bright faces and some with darkened faces. Those with darkened faces are rebuked for choosing to reject faith after they had recognized the truth. These verses visualize the consequences of disputations and divisions among the members of the community, and alert the Muslim community to the perils of disputes that lead to divisions. The narrative is ended by a statement supporting the truth of the message, highlighting the seriousness of the reckoning on the Day of Judgment, stressing the absolute fairness with

which people will be judged, and emphasizing the sovereignty of the Creator, *“These are God’s revelations. We recite them to you with the truth. And God wills no injustice to any of His creatures. To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. To Him all things will return.”*

“You are the best community that has been raised up for humankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in God.” The passive tense used here points to the subtle power of God that fashioned this nation and pushed it forward to assume its responsibility. The words underscore the specific role that the nation was entrusted with. This is what the Muslim nation should realize: this nation has been created to lead humanity on the way of goodness. It is incumbent on this nation, in order to fulfill its role, to be always a source of inspiration. The nation should be a role model for humanity. The tools for achieving such a status include true beliefs, sound perspective, excellent organization, good characters, and knowledge. The role of leadership cannot be assumed by force; it has to be earned by hard work. The Muslim nation has to earn its status as a leader on the basis of its qualifications and characteristics. It is a great responsibility and major undertaking. The first prerequisite for leadership is to have the strength to be able to promote goodness and protect against evil in the world. Strong and true faith is necessary for the nation to fulfill its role. Through true faith the correct moral standards can be established on the basis of the correct understanding of the relationship between God and the human being, and the correct understanding of the role of the human being on earth.

Strong faith is required to provide the necessary support for those who promote goodness and enable them to overcome the difficulties that will face them. Strong faith is the only source for genuine support; it will be still there when all other forms of support are exhausted.

Previous verses called upon the Muslim community to delegate a group from among themselves to carry the responsibility of promoting goodness, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is evil. The present verse describes the nation as a whole as a nation which promotes goodness, enjoins what is right, and forbids what is evil. These are the necessary conditions for the existence of a Muslim nation. There are many places in the Qur’an where this fact is stated. There are also Prophetic traditions which emphasize this.

On the authority of Ibn Sa’eed Al-Khodry (RA), he said, *“I heard the Prophet (PBUH) say, ‘Whoever saw an evil being committed, he should raise his hand against it, if he could not stop it by hand, he should speak against it, and if he is unable to speak against it, he should at least condemn it in his heart.’”* On the authority of Jaber bin ‘Abdullah (RA) that the Prophet (PBUH) said, *“The greatest Jihad is to speak the truth in the court of a tyrant.”*

“If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been best for them. Among them are some who believe, but most of them are transgressors.” This is a verse which encourages the People of the Scripture to accept the faith of Islam. Their belief will benefit them both in this life and in the Hereafter. Belief will unite them in a single nation in this life and will guarantee their salvation in the Hereafter. The verse provides a fair description: some are believers but many are transgressors. Examples of People of the Scripture who accepted Islam include: ‘Abdullah bin Sallam (RA), Asad bin ‘Obaid (RA), Tha’labah bin Sho’bah (RA), and K’ab bin Malek (RA).

“They will do you no harm, barring a trifling annoyance. If they come out to fight you, they will turn their backs to you and flee, and no help shall they get.” The verse indicates that no serious harm will be inflicted on the Muslims by their enemy, whatever harm that they will suffer will not affect their existence as a community nor it will ever amount to displacing them from their land. Muslims were promised victory over their enemy if the enemy chooses to engage them in a fight. The disbelievers will not only lose the battle but they will also be humiliated. They will only be saved by the protection offered to them by the believers and God, if they choose to take advantage of this protection, *“Overshadowed by ignominy wherever they are found save if they clutch a rope from God and a rope from people. They have incurred anger from God, and wretchedness is laid upon them.”* History tells that the events foretold by these verses materialized at later times. The Muslims were able to gain victory over those who waged wars against them from the People of the Scripture. Those who fought Muslims incurred the anger of God because they *“used to reject the revelations of God, and slew the prophets wrongfully. That is because they were rebellious and used to transgress.”*

But this does not apply to all of the People of the Scripture, *“Not all of them are alike. Of the People of the Scripture there is a party that stands upright. They recite the revelations of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.”* There are among them believers who are true to God, *“They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they vie one another in doing good deeds. They are in the ranks of the righteous.”* The verse depicts a bright picture for the believers among the People of the Scripture. Their faith is true, complete, and comprehensive. They joined their Muslim brethren and carried out their responsibility the best they can. They became part of the best nation raised for people and they enjoined what is good and forbade what is evil. They competed with one another in doing good deeds. They deserved a divine testimony that they were righteous and they were promised a great reward, *“And whatever good they do, it will not be rejected. God is Aware of those who are conscious of Him.”* God is fully aware of those who remain conscious of Him. This is a bright image that is held in front of those who look forward to earn a similar testimony, to show them the way for such an achievement.

But there is also the other side of the coin, *“Those who disbelieve, neither their possessions nor their progeny will help them against God. They will be the companions of the fire, dwelling therein (for ever).”* This is the image of those who reject faith. Nothing they earned in this life will be of benefit to them. Neither their wealth, nor their offspring will be of any help to them on the Day of Judgment. Not even the money they spent in good causes will be of benefit, because they lacked the intention of spending it in the way of God, *“The likeness of that which they spend in this worldly life is as a biting, icy wind which smites the harvest of a people who have wronged themselves and destroys it. God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.”* Here we are in front of an image of a field ripe with plants that are waiting to be harvested and suddenly the field is hit by a storm of icy wind destroying all the plants. In one moment, in a sudden move, the harvest that they were looking for is lost. Similarly, those who reject faith will find out that they lost the work of a lifetime in one moment. God did not wrong them. It was their fault that they followed a crooked path that deviated from the straight path.

“You who believe, take not as your intimate friends people who are not your kind. They will spare no pains to ruin you and they love to see you in distress. Hatred has already appeared in

the utterance from their mouths, and what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made plain to you the revelations, if you will understand.” This is a fully expressive image that describes the intense hatred that filled the hearts of the enemy and exposed their feelings towards the Muslims. This is a classical image of the hypocrites, whose outward expressions show love and affection while their hearts are bent on hatred and malice. They returned the love and affection of the Muslims with malice and plots to plant discord among the ranks of the Muslims, “Here you are, you love them, but they love you not, though you believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you, they say, ‘We believe.’ But when they are alone, they bite their fingertips at you in their rage. Say, ‘Perish in your rage; God knows well all the secrets of the heart.’ If good befalls you, it grieves them; but if some misfortune overtakes you, they rejoice at it.” The antidote of their venom is given by the Qur’an, “But if you persevere and do right, not the least harm will their cunning do to you. God encompasses all what they do.”

These verses describe a group of people in Medina who were bent on hating and hurting the Muslims. The verses warn the believers of the danger of trusting this group. The Muslims should then be careful in choosing their intimate friends. Those who harbour bad feelings towards the believers are not their kind and should not be entrusted with their friendship. However, it is important to emphasize Islam’s tolerance in dealing with the other, even when the other is a foe. Muslims are commanded not to reciprocate the feelings of hatred. Muslims are commanded to treat all people nicely and kindly. Muslims’ behaviour should reflect Islam’s policy of promoting good will towards all people. That does not mean that Muslims should not be prudent in dealing with their enemy. They should protect their community and their faith against the danger of those who hate them, even if this means that Muslims should bear arms against the aggressors.

Verses: 121 to 179

121. *Remember that morning, when you left your household to post the faithful at their stations for battle. And God is All-Hearing, Omniscient.*
122. *Remember when two of your parties almost lost courage, and God was their Protecting Friend. In God let the believers put their trust.*
123. *God had helped you at Badr when you were a contemptible little force. Be conscious of God in order that you may show your gratitude.*
124. *Remember when you said to the believers, “Is it not enough for you that God should support you with three thousand angels sent down?”*
125. *Well, if you persevere and remain conscious of God, even if the enemy should attack you suddenly, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels having marks (of distinction).*
126. *God made it a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts. Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise.*
127. *That He might cut off a group of the disbelievers or expose them to infamy, and they should then be turned back, frustrated of their purpose.*
128. *It is no concern of you (Muhammad) whether He relents toward them or torments them; for they are wrongdoers.*
129. *To God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgives whom He wills and torments whom He wills; indeed, God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.*

130. *You who believe, do not devour usury, doubled and multiplied; but remain conscious of God; that you may be successful.*
131. *And guard yourselves against the fire which has been prepared for the disbelievers.*
132. *And obey God and the Messenger; so that you may obtain mercy.*
133. *And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and for a paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who are conscious of God.*
134. *Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity, who restrain their anger and pardon people. God loves those who do good deeds.*
135. *And those who, having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done.*
136. *The reward of such will be forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, an excellent reward for the workers (of righteousness).*
137. *Many ways of life have passed away before you. Travel in the land, and see what the end of those who rejected the truth was.*
138. *This is a declaration for humankind, guidance, and an exhortation for those who are conscious of God.*
139. *So do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers.*
140. *If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are days of victory and defeat which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers.*
141. *God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to destroy the disbelievers.*
142. *Did you think that you would enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (In His cause) and those who remained perseverant?*
143. *You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it with your own eyes.*
144. *Muhammad is no more than a messenger, many messengers (like him) passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will you then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God; but God will reward those who are grateful.*
145. *No soul can ever die except by God's leave at an appointed term. Whosoever desires a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and whosoever desires a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And We shall reward those who are grateful.*
146. *How many of the prophets fought (in God's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart when they met with a disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are perseverant.*
147. *All that they said was, "Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses which we have committed in our affairs, establish our feet firmly, and help us against the disbelievers."*

148. So God gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter, for God loves those who do good deeds.
149. You who believe, if you obey those who disbelieve, they will make you turn back on your heels, and you will become losers.
150. But God is your Protecting Guide, and He is the Best of Helpers.
151. Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve, because they associated partners with God, for which He had not send authority. Their refuge will be the fire, and evil is the abode of the wrongdoers.
152. God did indeed fulfill His promise to you when you, with His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy, until you faltered, disputed the command, and disobeyed after He had shown you what you covet. Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who desire the Hereafter. Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you but He pardoned you. God is Gracious to the believers.
153. When you climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight). Therefore, He rewarded you grief for grief to teach you not to grieve for that which you missed or for that which befell you. God is Totally-Aware of what you do.
154. Then, after grief, He sent down a sense of security on a band of you – who were overcome with slumber - while another band was anxious about themselves. They thought wrongly about God, the thought of ignorance. They say, “Do we have a say in this?” Say to them, “Indeed, everything to do with this affair is in God’s hand”. They hide in their hearts what they dare not reveal to you. They say (to themselves), “If we had any say about this affair, we would not have been killed here.” Say, “Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom death was decreed would certainly have gone forth to the place of their death.” All this has been in order that God might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts. God knows well the secrets of your hearts.
155. Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, it is Satan who caused them to fail, because of some of that which they have earned. Now God has pardoned them. God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing.
156. You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said to their brothers, when they traveled in the land or were engaged in fighting, “if they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain.” God will make these thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. God gives life and causes death; and God sees all what you do.
157. And if you are slain, or die, in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than all they could amass.
158. And if you die, or are slain, it is to God that you are brought together.
159. It was by an act of mercy from God that you were gentle in dealing with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, ask for God’s forgiveness for them, and consult them in the conduct of the affairs. Then, when you have made a decision put your trust in God. God loves those who put their trust (in Him).
160. If God helps you, none can overcome you. If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, who can help you? In God, let the believers put their trust.

161. *It is inconceivable that a prophet could (ever) embezzle. Whosoever embezzles will bring what he embezzled with him on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul will be paid in full what it had earned; and they will not be wronged.*
162. *Is the one who follows the good pleasure of God like the one who has earned condemnation from God and whose refuge is the fire – an evil destination?*
163. *They have different ranks in the sight of God, and God is All-Seeing of what they do.*
164. *God did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent to them a messenger from among themselves, who recites to them God's revelations, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error.*
165. *And do you, when a calamity has befallen you after you have inflicted twice as much on your foes, say, "How did this happen?" Say (Muhammad), "You brought it upon yourselves. God is Able to do all things."*
166. *That which befell you, on the day when the two armies met, was by God's leave; so that He might know the true believers.*
167. *And that He might know the hypocrites, to whom it was said, "Come, fight in the way of God or defend yourselves." They answered, "If we knew that there will be fighting we would have followed you." On that day, they were nearer to disbelief than belief. They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts. God knows best what they conceal.*
168. *Those who, while they sat at home, said about their brothers (who were fighting for the cause of God), "Had they obeyed us they would not have been slain." Say to them (Muhammad), "Then avert death from yourselves if you are truthful."*
169. *Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.*
170. *They rejoice in the grace bestowed upon them by God. They rejoice for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind, that there shall be no fear to come upon them neither shall they grieve.*
171. *They rejoice in God's blessing and favour and that God does not let the reward of the believers be lost.*
172. *Those who answered the call of God and the Messenger, even after being wounded -those from among them- who do right and are conscious of God will have a great reward.*
173. *Those to whom people said, "The people have amassed a great army against you, therefore, fear them." But this only strengthened their faith and they said, "God is Sufficient for us, He is our best Guardian."*
174. *So they returned with blessings and favour from God, and no harm ever touched them. They followed the good pleasure of God. God's favour is great.*
175. *It is only Satan who instils fear in his votaries. Do not fear them but fear Me, if you are true believers.*
176. *Do not let the conduct of those who rush headlong into disbelief grieve you. Not the least harm will they do to God. God will give them no share in the Hereafter and they will have immense torment.*
177. *Those who purchase disbelief at the price of faith will not harm God in the least. They will have a painful torment.*

178. *Let not those who disbelieve think that our respite to them is good for themselves. We grant them respite so that they become more sinful. They will have a humiliating torment.*
179. *God will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good, nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the unseen. But He chooses from His Messengers whom He wills. So believe in God, and His messengers. And if you believe and remain conscious of God, you will have a great reward. (3:121-179)*

These verses deal with the events that transpired during the battle of Uhud. The idolaters of Mecca, having lost the battle of Badr to the Muslims, vowed to take revenge. So, they amassed a large army to attack Medina. The Prophet (PBUH) consulted with his companions about the strategy of the looming battle. The Muslims were divided into two groups: one was of the opinion that the Muslims should stay within the borders of Medina and fortify the city to be able to repel the enemy, while the second group thought it is best to meet the attacking army outside of the borders of Medina. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed that the Muslim army should go out to meet the attacking army outside the borders of Medina, *“Remember that morning when you left your household to post the faithful at their stations for battle. And God hears and knows all things.”* After the decision was made, the Prophet (PBUH) put on his shield and went out early in the day to arrange the army positions and to give his last commands to the believers. The strategy was for the army to camp in front of a mountain called Uhud. The Prophet (PBUH) assigned a group of archers to camp on top of the mountain so that they could protect the army against any attack that may be launched from the back. One setback that faced the Muslim army occurred when Abdullah bin Saloul and his group broke up from the Muslim army and returned back to Medina. The verse ends with a subtle touch on the major issues of the event. God sees and knows everything. He knows what the people say, what is hidden in their conscious, and what motivates their deeds and actions.

The setback caused by the breakup of Abd-Allah bin Saloul and his group from the army created confusion in the ranks of the Muslims. Two other groups were about to follow suit, *“Remember when two of your parties almost lost courage and God was their Protecting Friend. In God let the believers put their trust.”* These two groups were Banu Harithah and Banu Salamah, they were about to be swayed by Ibn Saloul’s move. However, God’s protection saved them. Jaber bin Abd-Allah (RA) said, “We were the two groups mentioned in this verse, Banu Harithah and Banu Salamah. The only reason for being happy about the revelation of this verse was that it mentioned that God is our Protecting Friend.”

Thus, God knew what was hidden in the hearts of the members of these two groups as they were contemplating to follow the example of Ibn Saloul and break up from the Muslim army. But God protected them against this fall and gave them the courage and strength to continue their mission with the rest of the Muslims. The verse is meant to emphasize God’s knowledge of everything and to show the believers the way out from such falls. Salvation is attained only by the grace of God, therefore, *“In God let the believers put their trust.”*

The two morals that come out of this narrative are the realization that God's knowledge is unlimited and that the road to salvation is through seeking God's support: God sees and hears everything, so let the believers put their trust in God.

The victory in Badr was a miracle. All the material elements required to achieve victory were missing. The Muslim army consisted of three hundred ill equipped men, while the idolaters' army consisted of one thousand of well equipped men. The objective of the Muslim army was to capture the idolaters' caravan, while the idolaters' army came from Mecca to fight the Muslims. The Muslims had not fully recovered from their experience as new migrants. They barely had enough time to fully settle in Medina. In addition, they were surrounded by a hostile environment. They were reminded by all of this on their way to Uhud, *"God had helped you at Badr, when you were a contemptible little force. Be conscious of God in order that you may show your gratitude."* They won their victory in Badr by the grace of God for no victory can be achieved without God's grace. They should then fear God and remain conscious of Him because all power and sovereignty belong to God alone. God consciousness may lead them to show gratitude befitting the grace of God that He bestowed upon them. Details of the battle of Badr are reiterated, *"Remember when you said to the believers, 'Is it not enough for you that God should support you with three thousand angels sent down?' Well, if you persevere and remain conscious of God, even if the enemy should attack you suddenly, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels having marks (of distinction)."* These were the words that the Prophet (PBUH) used to provide comfort and support to the believers, who went out with him to capture the idolaters' caravan, when they realized that the caravan had escaped and that it is the idolaters' army that they were going to fight. The Prophet's words echoed God's promise of help. As humans they needed the material support, even though they should know that, in the final analysis, it is God's will that decides the result. They were also told that there are conditions for getting God's help. These conditions are perseverance and God consciousness. The angels were a tool to comfort and reassure the believers that they are being helped, *"God made it a message of hope for you, and an assurance to your hearts. Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise."*

This principle has been reiterated over and over again so that it became inculcated in the believers' psyche, *"Victory comes only from God, the Eminent, the Wise."* Muslims are commanded to do their best in material preparation for the war, but the ultimate result is in God's hand. Victory and loss occur according to a divine plan. The Prophet (PBUH) and those who fought with him had no say in achieving victory, nor should they have a personal stake in it. They were only a tool that was used to execute the divine plan. The Prophet (PBUH) and the believers were neither the makers nor the owners of victory.

"That He might cut off a group of the disbelievers or expose them to infamy, and they should then be turned back, frustrated of their purpose. It is no concern at all of you (Muhammad) whether He relents toward them or torments them; for they are wrongdoers." Cutting off the disbelievers may occur as a result of killing some of them in battle, making them lose their land to the believers, reducing their power by occupation, making them lose their wealth to the believers, or forcing them to capitulate. God may force them to retreat in infamy or He may forgive them. Their fight with the believers may open the doors of guidance for them and they

may repent, or God may torment them for their transgression. Either way, it is God's decision and no one can interfere with His decision.

“To God belong all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgives whom He wills and torments whom He wills; but God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.” God has the absolute will, the absolute sovereignty, and the absolute power. God does not wrong any of His servants, nor does He favour any of His servants. His decrees are based on justice, wisdom, mercy, and forgiveness.

Before resuming the discussion of the battle of Uhud we find a group of verses which discuss several other topics: the institution of usury, the attributes of those who remain conscious of God, and the spending in the way of God. It may seem strange to have such a mix of topics, but there is a logical rationale behind this. The discussion of this variety of topics together demonstrates the comprehensiveness of this religion. These topics deal with a variety of human activities. The religion of Islam as a whole revolves around one theme: worshiping God alone. Worshiping God encompasses the whole array of human activities. This is a comprehensive religion which is based on the belief in the Oneness of God. The practical product of this belief is a way of life that reflects the impact of this belief on every aspect of human life.

“You who believe, do not devour usury, doubled and multiplied; but remain conscious of God; that you may be successful. And guard yourselves against the fire which has been prepared for those who disbelieved.” The institution of usury has been previously discussed, but we would like to stop at the expression used here to describe the return of debt, *“doubled and multiplied.”* At the present time, there is an argument which is being put forward by some advocating a twisted explanation for this term. It claims that the forbidden usury is the kind of usury which requires an exorbitant return on the debt but if the interest rate was reasonable (say 4% or even 9% for example) then this form of lending becomes permissible. It should be pointed out that the reference to a rate of return is simply a statement of details of transactions that were common practice at the time the Qur'an was revealed. It should not be used as a criterion for defining usury. The verse in Surat Al-Baqara (Chapter 2) is an unequivocal statement which prohibits usury.

“And obey God and the Messenger; so that you may obtain mercy.” This is a general command to obey God and His messenger so that one can enjoy God's mercy. However, the fact that it came after the discussion of usury points to the fact that obedience of God and His messenger cannot be achieved in a society whose financial transactions are all based on usury.

“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and for a paradise as wide as are the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who are conscious of God.” Hasten, the paradise is waiting for those who are conscious of God. What are the salient attributes of those who are conscious of God? *“Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity,”* They are constant in their spending whether they are in a state of affluence or a state of need. Affluence does not spoil them and adversity does not frustrate them. They are aware of their duties and they are keen to free themselves from the shackles of stinginess. The verses regarding spending may have been included here to motivate the believers to support the army in its upcoming battle.

“Who restrain their anger and pardon people. God loves those who do good.” Anger is a human emotion which cannot be eliminated but should be controlled and managed; God consciousness is one of the best tools to manage one’s anger. However, one should not stop at anger management. Anger restraint should be combined by pardoning people. This eliminates the chance of channelling anger into destructive feelings of hate and frustration. The combination of anger restraint and pardoning people provide a mix which cleanses the heart of any destructive emotions. Those who are able to spend money in prosperity and adversity, to restrain their anger, and pardon people are good doers. God loves those who do good deeds. The term “God’s love” is used to express God’s affection for His servants. It induces the believer to do good deeds. These individuals form a community that God loves; a community that is established on the feelings of mutual interdependence, brotherhood, and forgiveness. These characters were needed for a community that will soon engage the enemy.

“And those who, having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done.” Look at the levels of tolerance in this religion. Before asking people to be tolerant, God shows people how tolerant He is. Those who are conscious of God rank high in status among the believers. God’s leniency towards His servants opens the doors of hope to those who, *“having committed an immoral act, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins.”* The mercy of God engulfs those who commit sins and allows them to join the ranks of those who are conscious of Him, provided they recognize their error, are willing to seek God’s forgiveness, and do not persist in their sin.

What is the reward for those who are conscious of God? *“The reward of such will be forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, an excellent reward for the workers (of righteousness).”* Those who are God conscious are not indifferent. They are hard working. They are fully engaged in the daily life while practicing the pursuit of forgiveness, managing their anger, pardoning people, and spending in the way of God.

The verses imply a relationship between the characters of the individuals forming an army and the ability of this army to win against its enemy. Individuals who are able to overcome their stinginess, control their anger, overpower their desire to sin, and seek God’s forgiveness are well prepared to win victory in the battle field. The decisions that such individuals make are dictated by rational thinking not by whims and desires. They lead a well disciplined life according to God’s law. These are necessary qualifications for the army to win its battle.

“Many ways of life have passed away before you. Travel in the land, and see what the end of those who rejected the truth was. This is a declaration for humankind, guidance, and an exhortation to those who are conscious of God. So do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers. If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are days of victory and defeat which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers. God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to deprive of His blessing those who disbelieved. Did you think that you would

enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (in His Cause) and those who remained perseverant? You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it with your own eyes,” The Muslims were hurt badly in this battle, they were defeated and some were killed. The hurt was both physical and psychological. Seventy people were killed and the Prophet (PBUH) was wounded. Muslims were shocked for the change in their fortune especially after they had won a miraculous victory in the battle of Badr. They were wondering what happened? What has changed? The Qur’an reminded them of God’s natural law, the law that govern life on earth. In order for people to succeed in their endeavours, they have to study and understand this law. They need to prepare the tools necessary for success. Muslims were reminded with lessons from history and they were asked to study and learn from them. These lessons include the inevitable end for those who reject faith, the fluctuations in life conditions and circumstances, and the perseverance that people should exercise in face of the tests that they are destined to meet during life. There is a law that govern how life progresses on earth and there is a rationale behind that law. This law will continue in effect till the Day of Judgment. This assured the believers that they will win the war at the end but they need to persevere in face of the current adversity. The Qur’an interjected these lessons with messages of hope and encouragement: others have also been wounded like you, and you have a high calling that needs sacrifice.

This is a general proclamation to all people to heed the guidance, but only a few will make use of it. Only those who are God conscious will benefit from this proclamation. Only hearts seeking guidance can receive guidance. The problem is not in being able to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong - many people can differentiate between right and wrong - but only few people are willing to abide by what is right. Few people are willing to do what is right because of the sacrifices that they may have to make. Only those people whose hearts are always conscious of God are able to overcome these difficulties. The desire to accept the truth and to do what is right is initiated by a heart full of faith and is supported by a heart which is always conscious of God. That is why the Qur’an often reiterates the statement that only those who believe and are God conscious will benefit from the truth revealed in this Book, the guidance that it embodies, and the lessons that are detailed in it. Faith and God consciousness open up the hearts to receive guidance and encourage the mind to choose the path of light, and support the human being to persevere in face of the adversity that will be encountered on the path to the truth. This is the crux of the matter, being able to differentiate between right and wrong is not sufficient for salvation but the ability to choose the right path and endure the difficulties along this path is what really matters.

The proclamation is followed by a message of encouragement, *“do not lose heart, nor grieve. You will have the upper hand if you are indeed believers.”* Your faith elevates you above the enemy. You submit to God alone, while they submit to false deities. You follow God’s way of life and they lead a life that is fashioned by creatures like them. If you are true believers, then you will have the upper hand over them.

“If a wound has touched you, a similar wound has certainly touched the others. These are (only) the vicissitudes which We cause to follow one another for humankind, so that God may know those who believe and may take witnesses from among you; and God does not love the wrongdoers.” This may be a reference to the defeat that the idolaters suffered in the battle of

Badr at the hands of the Muslims. Or it may be a reference to the battle of Uhud. In the battle of Uhud the Muslims won at first, then they were overcome by their enemy when the Muslim archers left their positions on the mountain top and the back of the Muslim army was open to a counter attack by the idolaters' army. This is an example of how God's natural law works. The Muslim army was overtaken by the idolaters because the Muslim archers, motivated by greed and the desire to put their hands on the spoils of war, disobeyed their leader and left their assigned positions undefended. God has decreed that in battles of Jihad, those who fight only for His sake deserve to win. Another rule of God's natural law is the fluctuations of good and bad times. These are tools to differentiate between who is a true believer and who is a hypocrite. True believers persevere during times of prosperity and times of adversity, while hypocrites suffer anxiety and panic when faced by adversity. God knows who is a true believer and who is a hypocrite, and He knows the secrets of the hearts, but He will not hold people accountable on the basis of His knowledge. Reckoning is based on deeds. The fluctuations in life conditions are meant to bring what is hidden in the hearts to the realm of the deeds. The belief and the hypocrisy in the hearts of the believers and the hypocrites will be reflected on their reactions to the fluctuations in life conditions, respectively. Their reward and punishment will be based on their deeds.

God will choose those who will die as martyrs. Therefore, dying for God's cause is not a loss but is an honour. It is an honour that God bestows on select people. They are also witnesses chosen by God. They will bear witness that the message they fought and died for is the truth. Their fight and death in the way of God is an expression of their testament.

Not everyone who pronounces the testament that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His messenger is called a witness. Only those who act upon this testament can claim that they bore witness to the truth of the testament. Acting upon it means the belief in the Oneness of God. One of the consequences of the testament is to accept God as the only law maker, no one else has the right to legislate for people. God legislates and servants accept. The other consequence is that the only way to receive the message is through Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He is the conduit through which God transmitted His message, His guidance, and the way of life that He has decreed for people on earth. A person who dies in the cause of establishing this testament is a martyr.

God does not love the wrongdoers. The Qur'an often refers to associating partners with God as injustice or wrongdoing, "*Associating partners with God is a great injustice.*" On the authority of Ibn Mass'oud (RA), he said, '*I asked the Messenger of God, which kind of injustice is worst?*' He said, '*To associate partners with Him who created you.*'"

"*God's object is to purge those who are true believers and to deprive of His blessing those who disbelieved.*" Purging is a step higher than sifting through. Purging is a process that runs through the inner self of a human being to assess her/his personality and to purify it. Purging rids the human being of bad attributes and inculcates good ones. Very often we are unaware of our strengths and weaknesses. The objective of fluctuating life conditions between prosperity and adversity is for the human being to discover points of strengths and weaknesses in his/her personality.

“Did you think that you would enter paradise without God knowing those of you who fought hard (in His Cause) and those who remained perseverant?” The Qur’an uses a disapprobation style to correct the understanding of the meaning of submission to God. It is not enough to make an oral statement, what really matter is the behaviour of the person. Those who submit are willing to strive in the way of God and persevere in the face of adversity. Fighting may be the least arduous duty that faces a believer. Daily challenges which are faced by the believer may be more demanding. There is the endless daily suffering caused by being constant on the path of God, the suffering felt in resisting temptations, and the suffering of observing the requirements of faith in face of inappropriate situations. The path to paradise is full of challenges which attempt to sway the believer away from the straight path. Paradise is not achieved by wishful thinking and rhetoric, but it is achieved by perseverance in face of the daily challenges that meet the believer.

“You did indeed wish for death before you met it. Now you have seen it with your own eyes,” The believers were looking to engage the enemy on the battle ground. The dreams of martyrdom filled their minds and the desire to die as martyrs was uttered. Now they have seen death with their own eyes. The verse poses the question to them so that they can feel the difference between the dream and the reality. It is a lesson for the future, to weigh every word uttered before committing oneself to a task. One should appreciate the gravity of real life actions, the responsibility attached to promises, and the consequences of oral statements. Actions speak louder than words.

God could have given victory to His Prophet (PBUH). He could have commanded the angels to fight with the believers and conquer the idolaters. But the point is not to gain victory in a battle. The point is to train the believers and prepare them for the undertaking of propagating the message of God. They have to assume a leadership role in providing guidance to humanity. Such an endeavour requires a solid character, perseverance in upholding the truth, patience in face of adversity, and an understanding of the human failings and strengths.

“Muhammad is no more than a messenger, many messengers (like him) passed away before him. If he died or were slain, will you then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to God; but God will reward those who are grateful.” The first part of this verse refers to a specific incident that occurred during the battle of Uhud, when the archers left their positions on the mountain top and allowed the idolaters to occupy it and attack the Muslim army from behind. When chaos spread in the Muslims’ ranks someone screamed that Muhammad (PBUH) was dead. Upon hearing this many Muslims, overwhelmed with the feeling of despair, decided to abandon the battle ground and go back to Medina, but the Prophet (PBUH) was still alive. He stood there wounded but persevered and rallied the troops around him. Muslims came back and resumed the fight. This incident took the Muslims by surprise and it was used by the Qur’an to teach the Muslims a lesson. Muhammad (PBUH) is only a messenger, there were many messengers before him, they all died and so will he. Muhammad (PBUH) came to deliver God’s message, God is eternal, He will never die neither will His message. The believers should not turn their backs if Muhammad (PBUH) dies or is killed. This is the simple truth that they should not forget. Humans will all perish, but the faith will last forever. It should be understood that there is a difference between God’s message and God’s messengers.

The expression used in the verse, “*turn back on your heels,*” does not only mean the physical movement of going back but its meaning extends to the spiritual turning away from the religion. The term addresses the thought that filled the minds of the believers, after they heard the cry that Muhammad (PBUH) had died; they thought that the religion will die with the death of Muhammad (PBUH). This is exactly what the companion of the Prophet Al-Nader bin Ias (RA) said when he saw the Muslims throwing their arms. He said, “*If Muhammad (PBUH) is dead, for what are you going to live? Let us fight to die and join our Prophet (PBUH).*” Those who turn away from Islam will not inflict any harm on God; it is they who will be the losers. God does not need any one, but people are the ones who need God to help them live a happy life on this earth and in the Hereafter. God will reward those who are grateful. Gratitude can be shown by adopting the way of life which God has decreed. God will reward those who show gratitude because they appreciate the blessings that God bestowed on His servants.

The objective behind this incident may have been to wean the believers off the tremendous love they had for Muhammad (PBUH) and to direct them to the source of guidance that Muhammad (PBUH) brought. It is as if God wanted to take their hands to show them the way to hold tight to the strong link that connects them to Him. As if God wanted them to feel the direct link between them and Islam and to get them to recognize that their covenant is with God directly without any intercessors. It may have also meant to be a training session for the Muslims to be prepared when the time comes for the death of the Prophet (PBUH).

“No soul can ever die except by God's leave at an appointed term. Whosoever desires a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and whosoever desires a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And We shall reward those who are grateful.” Every soul has a specific set day on which it will die. No soul will die before this set day. Therefore, fear of death and cowardice will not elongate one's life, and courage and gallantry will not result in a premature death. This statement inculcates the concept of the inevitability of death in the hearts of the believer. We should not busy ourselves thinking about when we will die and how we are going to die. These thoughts should not also hinder our progress and should not dictate what to do and what not to do, especially when it comes to performing duties and responsibilities. We should lead a secure and confident life and put our trust in God who controls life and death. It is therefore, important to think about what do we want to achieve in life and how can we make this achievement. Do we want to live for this worldly life alone, or are we aiming at a higher goal? These are two different routes, those who chose to live for this worldly life alone will lead a lowly life, while those who are aiming at the Hereafter will lead an honoured and dignified life, however, both groups will die at their appointed times.

“How many of the prophets fought (in God's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? but they never lost heart if they met with a disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are perseverant.” The believers who fought with many previous prophets fought with courage and determination, they never lost heart or wavered no matter how hard the difficulties they faced were. God loves those who persevere and are steadfast. The expression “*God loves*” intimates the power of this love in healing the wounds, removing the suffering, and compensating the hard work.

“All that they said was, ‘Our Lord, forgive us our sins and the excesses which we have committed in our affairs, establish our feet firmly, and help us against those who disbelieve.’” They did not ask for wealth or material compensation; they did not even ask for a reward in this life or the Hereafter, but they asked God to strengthen them and to affirm their steps in face of the enemy. They did not ask for personal victory, but they asked for a victory over disbelief. However, God gave them everything without asking. He gave them, *“A reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter, for God loves those who do good deeds.”* God described them as doers of good deeds, because they did well on the battle ground and they did well when they prayed for God’s favor.

The following verses talk about the battle of Uhud, but before doing this, a warning was issued to the believers. Islam and Muslims were still new to Medina. Muslims in Medina gained a great deal of respect after the victory in the battle of Badr, but the setback in the battle of Uhud was an opportunity for the disbelievers and the hypocrites to plant the seeds of doubt and sedition in the hearts of weak willed Muslims especially those who were directly affected by the defeat. Hence a warning was issued to the Muslims not to fall in the traps that are laid by the disbelievers and the hypocrites, *“You who believe, if you obey those who disbelieved, they will make you turn back on your heels, and you will lose.”* Remember that, *“God is your Protecting Guardian, and He is the Best of Helpers.”* So, ask God for help. Who can provide better support than God? Who can secure better victory than God? The support of God is coming, *“Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieved, because they associated partners with God, for which He had not send authority. Their refuge will be the fire, and evil is the abode of the wrongdoers.”* This is a promise from God whenever belief and disbelief are confronting each other. Whenever there is a battle between the believers and those who disbelieved, God will cast fear in the hearts of the disbelievers. However, the believers have to have true faith. They should have the firm conviction that only God can provide support and protection. Their faith should be devoted to God alone, a faith that is not blemished by any residue of doubt in God’s power. The disbelievers will not only suffer fear in this world, but will also abide in Hell fire in the Hereafter.

The believers were reminded by the fulfillment of God’s promise in the early stages of the battle, *“God did indeed fulfill His promise to you when you, with His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy”* This was in the beginning when the Muslims were obedient and before they became bedazzled by the spoils of war, *“Until you faltered, disputed the command, and disobeyed after He had shown you what you covet. Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who desire the Hereafter.”* This is what happened when the archers left their positions which they were commanded to hold. They disputed among themselves, a group was tempted by the spoils and another wanted to stay put in their positions until the battle was completely finished. The first group was interested in the quick reward of this life, while the second group was more interested in the permanent reward of the Hereafter. The army became divided and the unity around the objective was lost. They lost the most important ingredient of victory, they lost the pure intention that this battle is for God’s sake. God does not provide His help and support unless the effort is purely dedicated to Him.

The verse also uncovers the secrets of the hearts. Ibn Mass'oud (RA) said, *"I never thought that any of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) would be interested in the gains of this worldly life, until the verse, 'Among you are some who hanker after the gains of this world and some who desire the Hereafter.' was revealed."* The verse thus, uncovers the desires for worldly gains that some of the believers harboured and led them to disobedience thus causing the defeat. This was also a test for the believers, *"Then did He divert you from your foes in order to test you but He pardoned you. God is Gracious to the believers."* But God has forgiven you. God forgave your wavering, your disobedience, your disputation, and your fleeing the battle ground. These sins were committed because of human weaknesses which were forgiven by the grace of God.

"When you climbed (the hill) and paid no heed to anyone, while the messenger, in your rear, was calling you (to fight)." This is a dramatization of the scene of the battle; this was intended to shame those who fled because of their weakness, their dispute, and their disobedience. The verse draws an image of a group of people climbing the mountain, fleeing the battle ground in confusion and fear. Nobody is paying attention to anyone else. The Prophet (PBUH) is calling to reassure them that he is still alive. They were rewarded for the misery that they inflicted on the Prophet (PBUH) a similar misery, *"Therefore, He rewarded you grief for grief to teach you not to grieve for that which you missed or for that which befell you. God is Totally-Aware of what you do."* Misery filled their hearts when they realized that they left the Prophet (PBUH) alone and fled the battle ground. This sadness in their hearts was greater than the sadness they may have felt for any other loss. God was fully aware of what they did. A strange calm descended on them after the confusion and the overwhelming fear that followed the defeat. They remembered their Lord and remembered their Prophet (PBUH) and they were cloaked with a mysterious slumber, *"Then, after grief, He sent down calm on a band of you overcome with slumber,"* This was a strange phenomenon that reflected the mercy of God when it descends over His believing servants. Slumber even for a few minutes reenergizes the fighters and fills their hearts with confidence and security. But there was another group who only cared about themselves, *"While another band was anxious about itself. They thought wrongly about God, the thought of ignorance. They say, 'Do we have a say in this?' Say to them, 'Indeed, everything to do with this affair is in God's hand.'"* They criticized the policy and strategy that were used to conduct the battle. This may be a reference to the group of people who were of the opinion that Muslims should have stayed in Medina and fought to defend the city. They lamented the fact that their view was overruled by those who wanted to meet the idolaters' army outside Medina. They were angry that their opinion was not adopted. The response came to tell them that *"This affair is in God's hand."* All affairs are in God's hand. In a previous verse, the Prophet (PBUH) was told, *"You have no say in the affairs."* All matters of faith, fighting for God's cause, and guiding hearts are all in God's hand. Human beings have no say in these matters. But this group had ill feelings in their hearts. *"They hide in their hearts what they dare not reveal to you. They say (to themselves), 'If we had any say about this affair, we would not have been in the slaughter here.'"* Their hearts were filled with misgivings. This points to a weakness of faith that became apparent when they were put to the test of defeat. The understanding is corrected, *"Say, 'Even if you had remained in your homes, those for whom death was decreed would certainly have gone forth to the place of their death.' All this has been in order that God might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts. God knows well the secrets of your hearts."* Death will be met by those whose time has come, even if they had chosen to stay home and not to go out

with the army. Death is inevitable, no one can escape death. This whole episode was a means to test what is in your breasts, to make you aware of your faults, and to purify your hearts. God is fully aware with what in people's hearts. He knew the inner thoughts of those who fled the battle ground. He knew their weakness which opened the door for Satan to control them, *"Those of you who turned back on the day the two hosts met, it is Satan who caused them to fail, because of some of that which they have earned. Now God has pardoned them. God is All-Forgiving, Forbearing."* This may have been a reference to the archers who were lured away from their positions by the desire to collect the spoils of war. They ended up losing their share in the spoils of war by the Prophet's (PBUH) decree. But it is a general rule that applies in many situations. Usually committing sins weakens the connection between the human being and God and opens the door for Satan who fills the heart with misgivings and bad thoughts. Satan then finds its way to seduce the person to more sinful acts. This is why it is advisable to seek forgiveness from God whenever one has committed a sinful act. Seeking forgiveness from God strengthens the relationship with God, closes the doors in face of Satan, clears the hearts of the bad thoughts, and puts the person back on the straight path away from the influence of Satan.

"You who believe, do not be like those who disbelieved and said to their brothers, when they travel in the land or engage in fighting, 'if they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain.' God will make these thoughts a source of anguish in their hearts. God gives life and causes death; and God is All-Seeing of what you do." It seems that this is what the hypocrites and the idolaters of Medina, whose family members became Muslims, said to the believers upon their return defeated from the battle ground. They took advantage of the defeat that the Muslims suffered at the hands of the idolaters of Mecca to spread the seeds of sedition among the ranks of the Muslims by arousing in their hearts the feelings of loss of their loved ones in the battle. The verse came to put things in the right perspective. The saying, *"If they had stayed with us, they would not have died, or been slain,"* illustrates the basic difference between those who have strong faith and those who are lacking in faith. Those who believe recognize God's laws which control life on earth. They are confident of God's fairness. They know that nothing will befall them except that which God has decreed. They neither panic when a calamity befalls them, nor do they boast when a gain accrues to them. They accept God's decrees with secure and contented hearts. They are happy to accept God's decrees in any form or shape. However, they recognize that they have to consult, plan, and do their best to achieve their goals, but the end result is in God's hands. Once, they have discharged their responsibility they do not worry about the results because they cannot control the results, only God is in control of the end results. They maintain a delicate balance between actions and submission; and between taking the initiative and putting their trust in God. Those who have been deprived of faith live with an inner struggle that never ends. They are always thinking of "what if", and "I wish." The verse warns the believers not to be like those who are saddened by the loss of a relative if he died while traveling to earn a living or to strive in the way of God. Those who think that traveling is the cause of death simply do not understand God's law. They should realize that death is inevitable and the length of life is predestined. God has power over life and death.

However, death is not the ultimate end, *"And if you are slain, or die, in the way of God, forgiveness and mercy from God are far better than all they could amass. And if you die, or are slain, it is to God that you are brought together."* Death in the way of God is better than this worldly life because God's mercy and forgiveness are better than what people amass in this life.

The believers should not be interested in personal fame and glory but they should be more interested in what God has for them: His mercy and forgiveness. All people, those who die in their beds or on battle grounds, will return to God at the end. The end is same for all but the reward will be different.

“It was by an act of mercy from God that you were gentle in dealing with them. Were you severe or harsh-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you.” God bestowed His mercy on the Prophet (PBUH) and the believers, a mercy that made the Prophet (PBUH) gentle with the believers. Had he treated them harshly their hearts would not have flocked around him. People need to be treated kindly. They need a leader who cares for them, helps them with their problems, and appreciates their shortcomings. They need a leader who opens his heart to them, and who is willing to help whenever help is needed. This was how the Prophet (PBUH) treated people and that is why he was loved by everyone who dealt with him.

“So pardon them, ask for God’s forgiveness for them, and consult them in the conduct of the affairs.” This unequivocal statement establishes a fundamental principle of governing in Islam: the principle of consultation. Every Muslim ruler has to abide with this principle, even if he were a prophet. An Islamic government should be built on this fundamental principle. However, the details of the process are left for people to decide. This verse was revealed at a point in time when the consequences of consultation seemed to lead to undesirable results. On the face of it, consultation resulted in a difference of opinion which led to disunity among Muslims: a group of Muslims wanted to stay in Medina waiting for the enemy to come, while the second group wanted to fight the enemy outside the boundaries of the city. As a result of this difference in opinion, one third of the army lead by Abdullah bin Saloul abandoned the Muslims ranks and went back to Medina. The plan that was decided upon as a result of the consultation process may have not been the best military strategy to be adopted. Muslims did learn this lesson, so when they were attacked in a later battle, the battle of the Trench, they stayed in Medina and waited for the enemy to attack the city which was protected by a trench.

The Prophet (PBUH) was cognizant of these consequences, he himself was in favour of fortifying the city and letting the enemy come to them; he had been alarmed by a dream which he saw earlier which described what may happen if they take the fight outside of Medina. He also had the right as a supreme leader to veto the decision that was reached by the majority, but he chose to go ahead with the majority’s decision to establish the principle of consultation. He saw that establishing the principle and giving the example is worth the sacrifices that were made.

The Prophet (PBUH) could have taken the failure in the plan that was reached by consultation as an excuse for abandoning the institution of consultation, but he did not, because this was part of the training program for the Muslim nation. This was a training program for the nation and for the leaders who will assume the responsibility after the Prophet (PBUH) has gone. These training programs were essential for the nation to mature and to be able to lead a stable life. Maturity cannot be achieved without sacrifices, but it is worth it at the end.

One of the attributes of a successful leader is resolve, *“Then, when you have made a decision put your trust in God. God loves those who put their trust (in Him).”* Consultation involves

brain storming to explore all possible available alternatives and to choose the best alternative. Once a decision has been made, the implementation phase starts. The leader should be resolute in implementing the decision, putting his trust in God. God loves those who put their trust in Him.

The narrative continues to explain the true meaning of putting one's trust in God, *"If God helps you, none can overcome you. If He forsakes you, who is there, after that, that can help you? In God let the believers put their trust."* One of the characteristics of the Islamic perspective is the ability to maintain a delicate balance between recognizing the ability of God to do what He wills and the human effort which is dedicated to achieve this will. God decreed that results are to be achieved through means, but the means do not guarantee the results. The human being has to work hard, do his/her best, and make use of all available tools to achieve the set objective. Once this has been completed, the human being should put his/her trust in God and accept whatever result God wills. In the case of a battle the two expected outcomes are victory and defeat. Believers should put their trust in God, if God willed that they secure victory so it will be, and if God willed that they would be defeated no one else could provide them a road to victory. Recognizing the fact that God's power does effectuate His will is not an excuse for Muslims not to seek the means: results are to be sought through appropriate means.

"It is inconceivable that a prophet could (ever) embezzle. Whosoever embezzles will bring what he embezzled with him on the Day of Resurrection. Then every soul will be paid in full what it has earned; and they will not be wronged." One of the reasons that the archers abandoned their designated positions during the battle was that they were worried that they would not get their share of the spoils of war. In addition, some of the hypocrites spread a rumour about the disappearance of some of the spoils of war that were obtained from the battle of Badr and they did not shy away from suggesting that the Prophet (PBUH) had a hand in their disappearance. The verse came to state, beyond a shadow of a doubt, not only that it does not befit prophets to commit such acts, but also to emphasize that prophets by their nature cannot assume such characters.

Another recitation implies that the verse commands the believers not to betray the Prophet (PBUH). The verse continues to threaten those who embezzle the Muslims money with appropriate punishment on the Day of the Resurrection.

It has been narrated by Abu Hameed Al-Sa'di (RA) on the authority of Imam Ahmed, that the Prophet (PBUH) appointed a person by the name of Ibn Al-Lateebah, from the tribe of Azad, to collect Zakat proceeds. Ibn Al-Lateebah brought the Zakat he collected to the Prophet (PBUH), but he kept some articles for himself, when the Prophet (PBUH) asked about the articles that Ibn Al-Lateebah kept for himself, Ibn Al-Lateebah answered that these were given to him as a gift. The Prophet (PBUH) went to the podium and said, *"Why do people we employ come back with articles that they claim it was given to them as gifts? Why do not they stay home and see if anybody would care to give them gifts?"* This verse and the Prophetic traditions played a major role in educating and training Muslims not to betray the trust. Stories about how the fighters were meticulous in bringing the spoils of war back to the leader of the army are abundant. When the battle of Qadisiyah was won, the soldiers brought to the Caliph Umar (RA) the treasures of the king of Persia intact. Umar (RA) was impressed by their honesty.

“Is the one who follows the good pleasure of God like the one who has earned condemnation from God and whose refuge is the fire – an evil destination?” These are the standards and these are the choices. One either aims at winning the pleasure of God or aims at losing it. God will assign different ranks to the different categories, *“They have different ranks in the sight of God, and God is All-Seeing what they do.”*

“God did confer a great favour on the believers when He sent to them a messenger from among themselves,” It is out of God’s grace that He bestowed this blessing on His servants. It is a blessing that has been bestowed without being requested. The expression used is also indicative of God’s mercy. The verse says, *“A messenger from among themselves,”* and did not say, *“One of you.”* The expression used intimated the existence of a personal relationship between the Prophet (PBUH) and each and every one of his followers. God has blessed them twice: first, by guiding them to the faith and the second blessing by connecting them to the messenger. The messenger, *“Who recites to them God’s revelations, purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while, before that, they had been in manifest error.”* It is a great blessing that God addresses them with His words, these words which describe God and His attributes. These words address human feelings and the issues that are important to people. These words chart a way for salvation and purification of the souls. God wants to purify humankind and elevate them above old traditions which denigrate their humanity. Ja’fer bin Abi Taleb (RA) addressed the King of Abyssinia saying, *“King, before Islam, we were living in ignorance. We worshipped idols, ate dead animals, committed sins, cut our kinfolks, abused our neighbours, and the rich oppressed the poor. God sent a messenger from among ourselves, whom we know and trust. He called us to believe in the Oneness of God, to worship God alone, to be truthful, to be honest, to join our kinfolks, to be good to our neighbours, to abstain from sin, to abstain from giving false testimony, and to abstain from devouring orphans’ money.”*

“And teaches them the Book and the Wisdom.” The Arabs to whom this verse was addressed, were illiterates. They had no civilization. They were transformed by this message into people who carried the flame of knowledge and wisdom to the whole world. The message changed the environment in which they were living and that spilled over to countries all over the world. They were at a loss both in faith and in life and were completely changed by this message.

“And do you, when a calamity has befallen you after you have inflicted twice as much on your foes, say, ‘How did this happen?’ Say (Muhammad), ‘You brought it upon yourselves. God is able to do all things.’ The verse refers to the final defeat in Uhud. Before that they had two victories: one at Badr and the second in the early stages of the battle of Uhud when they inflicted a great loss on the idolaters before the balance of the battle was turned around when the archers left their assigned positions on the mountain top. The verse addressed the astonishment of the Muslims when they said, *“Why is this happening?”* The answer to this question was given clearly, *“You brought it upon yourselves,”* when you wavered and disputed among yourselves. You brought defeat upon yourselves when you broke the covenant with God and His messenger. You brought defeat upon yourselves when you allowed your selfish greed to control your actions and to lead you to disobedience. *“God is able to do all things,”* God is able to maintain His rule over the world. He has decreed certain laws to govern the universe. God is able to maintain these laws.

There is always a rationale behind God's decrees, *"That which befell you, on the day when the two armies met, was by God's leave; so that He might know the true believers."* What happened in the battle was not a coincidence, it was God's Will. God willed that this would happen for a certain reason and to teach the believers a lesson. *"And that He might know the hypocrites, to whom it was said, 'Come, fight in the way of God or defend yourselves.' They answered, 'If we knew that there will be fighting we would have followed you.' On that day they were nearer to disbelief than belief. They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts. God knows best what they conceal."* This is a reference to the actions taken by Ibn Saloul and his group. The verse called them, *"the hypocrites"*. They *"were nearer to disbelief than belief."* They claimed that they returned to Medina because they were not aware that there would be a fight. This was not the truth, *"They utter with their mouths that which is not in their hearts."* Their hearts were replete with hypocrisy which left no place for faith, and their actions were controlled by their egotistical nature. Ibn Saloul felt bad that the Prophet (PBUH) did not follow his advice when the consultation process about how to conduct of the battle of Uhud was held. Before the arrival of the Prophet (PBUH) to Medina, Ibn Saloul had big plans to assume the leadership of Medina. He was in the process of being appointed by the people as their chief. The arrival of the Prophet (PBUH) rescinded all these plans. Ibn Saloul harboured a grudge against the Prophet (PBUH), thinking that the Prophet (PBUH) usurped his right for leadership. But God knows what is in their hearts.

They did not only abandon the Muslim army but they also tried to dissuade others from fighting, *"Those who, while they sat at home, said about their brothers (who were fighting for the cause of God), 'Had they obeyed us they would not have been slain.' Say to them (Muhammad), 'Then avert death from yourselves if you are truthful.'"* They tried to spread fear among Muslims by saying that those who were going to fight would be killed. The verse answered their claim with a statement of the inevitable truth: can you avert death from yourselves? Death is inevitable, it will befall everyone. No one can escape death no matter how careful he/she is. This answer refuted the claim and reassured the Muslims.

It is interesting that the Qur'an mentions the incident of Ibn Saloul's desertion after the account of the battle of Uhud has been dealt with, in spite of the fact that this incident occurred before the battle started. We may think of two reasons behind this organization of the text. The Qur'an wanted to outline the basic principles of consultation, life and death, unity and obedience of the Prophet (PBUH) from an Islamic perspective before dealing with this incident. The Qur'an wanted to define the characteristics of the believers before talking about the characteristics of the hypocrites, so that the difference is clearly seen and the people are able to judge fairly on the basis of clear criteria. The other reason may have been that the Qur'an did not want to attach an undue importance to the hypocrites. Thus, it was appropriate to delay this account after major issues related to the battle of Uhud have been dealt with. The Qur'an did not even mention Ibn Saloul by name as a sign of disrespect for him and his actions. The Qur'an alluded to him as part of the hypocrites.

Having dealt with the issue of death, the Qur'an wanted to reassure the Muslims of the destiny of the martyrs who were killed in the way of God. These martyrs are alive and they are enjoying all the characteristics of life: they get provisions from their Lord, they are pleased with the blessings

that God bestowed on them, and they are looking forward for the others to join them. If this is their situation, why would the living feel sad about their martyrdom? *“Think not of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay, they are alive, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord.”*

Although we, who live in this world, have no firsthand information about the nature of the life that the martyrs lead after death, but we have authentic prophetic traditions and we have the present verse which tells us that things are not as they seem to be. Many things are different in their reality than what they seem to be if we take them at their face value. These people who were killed in the way of God look dead to us, they seem to have lost all signs of life as we know it, but they are living with their Lord. They, *“rejoice in the grace bestowed upon them by God.”* They also remember their brothers who are still fighting in the way of God and, *“they rejoice for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind, that there shall be no fear to come upon them neither shall they grieve. They rejoice in God's blessing and favour and that God does not let the reward of the believers be lost.”*

This is a new formulation of the concept of dying in the way of God which changes the attitude of the believers who are fighting in the way of God and their loved ones whom they leave behind. Life extends beyond this world. The Hereafter holds great pleasures for those who seek martyrdom. This new understanding inculcated in the believers an ardent zeal for seeking martyrdom.

The narrative went on to describe the believers who continued to fight even after they had been wounded, *“Those who answered the call of God and the Messenger, even after being wounded, those who do right and are conscious of God have a great reward.”* These are the believers whom the Prophet (PBUH) asked to join him in pursuit of the idolaters' army. This occurred the following day after the battle of Uhud took place. They barely escaped death on the battle field, and their wounds were still fresh and painful. But the Prophet (PBUH) called upon them, and did not call upon any other, to join him in his mission. He did not allow any one of those who did not participate in the first battle to join them. They responded favourably to the Prophet's call. It was not only the Prophet's call but it was God's call as well.

What was the rationale behind this move on the part of the Prophet (PBUH)? The group of Muslims that he asked to join him in pursuit of the idolaters were fewer in number than the army that fought the idolaters on the previous day. The memory of defeat was still fresh in their minds, the sadness of losing the battle and losing their comrades filled their hearts. The Prophet (PBUH) objective may have been to efface these feelings off their minds. He did not want the Muslims to return home with a memory of defeat. He may have wanted to convince his companions that what happened in the previous day was only a setback, and that the Muslims are still strong and are capable of fighting their enemy. He may have also wanted to send a message to Quraish. He did not want Quraish to go home with the prize of victory. He did not want Quraish to go home thinking that they have defeated the Muslims once and for all. The Prophet (PBUH) may have wanted to send a message to all the Arabs that the Muslims have a strong faith, and they are willing to embark on any endeavour for the sake of defending this faith. This was a new phenomenon. The phenomenon was dramatically illustrated in the move that the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions took in pursuit of their enemy. The move also illustrated their trust

in God, and their confidence in their faith, *“Those to whom people said, ‘The people have amassed a great army against you, therefore fear them.’ But this only strengthened their faith and they said, ‘God is Sufficient for us, He is our Best Guardian.’”*

There are many traditions which describe the difficulties that faced the believers and how they dealt with them to join the Prophet (PBUH) in his pursuit of the idolaters. It is on the authority of Muhammad bin Ishaq that one of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) who participated in the battle of Uhud said, *“My brother and I fought in the battle of Uhud with the Messenger of God (PBUH) and came back wounded. When the call came to join the Messenger of God (PBUH) the following day, my brother said, ‘Are we going to miss a battle with the Messenger of God (PBUH)?’ We did not have a ride, and we were heavily wounded. However, we joined the Messenger of God (PBUH); my wounds were less severe than my brother’s, so whenever he got tired I would carry him.”*

These images combine to illustrate the birth of this new phenomenon in the souls of people who did not recognize other than God as their Protecting Guardian. They were happy with having God as their Protector, a happiness that increased as difficulties grew. They responded to those who were trying to scare them, *“God is Sufficient for us, He is our Best Guardian.”*

The consequences were just as they expected from their Lord, *“So they returned with blessing and favour from God, and no harm ever touched them. They followed the good pleasure of God. God’s favour is great.”* By the grace of God, they were not hurt in the least.

This group of verses ends with an explanation of the source of fear that human beings may experience in situations like this, *“It is only Satan that instils fear in his votaries. Do not fear them but fear Me, if you are true believers.”* Satan tries to aggrandize the image of his agents and to magnify their power and abilities to plant fear in the hearts of the believers. The believers should be aware of Satan’s tricks.

“Do not let the conduct of those who rush headlong into disbelief grieve you. Not the least harm will they do to God. God will give them no share in the Hereafter. They will have a severe torment.” This verse provided solace to the Prophet (PBUH) who was saddened by those who hastened to reject faith. They were not able to inflict any harm on God. God is giving them respite because they will have no share in the Hereafter and they will suffer severe torment.

They meet that dreadful doom in the Hereafter because they *“purchase disbelief at the price of faith.”* They were offered the truth. The signs which support the truth are all around them. They could find the proof in the signs of the harmony of the universe and in their initial natural disposition which can open their eyes to the beauty and miracles of the creation. But they chose to reject the truth.

People may be fooled by the power, wealth, and success which the disbelievers amass. But let them not be fooled by this, *“Let not those who disbelieve think that our respite to them is good*

for themselves. We grant them respite so that they become more sinful. They will have a humiliating torment.” Although adversity is a trial; but it is also a blessing from God. It touches only those whom God loves.

God used the battle of Uhud to test people. The test was used to differentiate between the true believers and the hypocrites who joined the ranks of the believers for different reasons, *“God will not leave the believers in the state in which you are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good, nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the unseen. But He chooses of His messengers whom He wills. So believe in God, and His messengers. And if you believe and remain conscious of God, you will have a vast reward.”* The verse indicates that it is one of God’s norms to subject the believers to tests so that the hypocrites would be exposed. It is also not the norm that God would reveal the secrets of the unseen to human beings. They are not prepared to cope with such experience and they do not need such knowledge, but God chooses messengers to transmit His message. Thus, we are commanded to believe in God and His messengers.

Let us now review some of the lessons that can be gleaned from the verses describing the battle of Uhud.

1. Some people expect miracles from this religion, ignoring the nature of human beings, their capabilities, their intellectual disposition, and their material abilities. These people become disappointed when these miracles fail to occur. The change that people should go through so that they can lead the way of life that God has chosen for them has to be achieved using normal human efforts. The religion adopts a methodology which helps people to change gradually from the state that they are in to the state that they should be in. It is a methodology that recognizes the reality of human nature and the initial natural disposition of people. It achieves its goals relying on normal human means and without taking recourse to miracles or supernatural means.

Naturally, God has the power to change people, with or without the help of this religion. God could have, if He willed, created humankind with a different initial natural disposition. But it was the will of God to create humans as they are, having a free will to decide and choose. It was the will of God that humankind be able to receive guidance. It was the will of God that people would have initial natural dispositions that guide them to make the right decisions.

2. Human beings are not perfect but they can work hard to improve and to rise to supreme levels. Those who failed the test in the battle of Uhud were believers, but they were at the beginning of the road. When, they failed the test they were neither excommunicated nor humiliated but they were taken into the fold and were taught how to deal with their weaknesses. God left them to experience the consequence of disobedience so that they learn the lesson, but He accepted their weakness and forgave them. They were trained and helped to reach the top.

3. A third principle that can be gleaned from this account is the close association between faith, behaviour and attitudes, whether the behaviour and attitudes are in the social, political, economical, or ethical realm. This association was emphasized by highlighting the importance of the concept of God consciousness.
4. Islam uses the analysis of real life occurrences and events to educate and train people. The Qur'an provided a deep and rational analysis of the battle of Uhud reflecting on human nature and its failings, the reasons behind victory and defeat, and the factors that influenced the progress of events. This is done in a dramatic and emotive way to have the strongest effect on people.
5. Islam does not offer abstract teachings that have no bearing on Muslims' daily life. It presents its teachings through real life experiences.
6. Islam does not condone any wrongdoing by anyone no matter how high the rank of this person in society is. Those who make mistakes are held accountable. People are all equal in front of God and in front of the law. No mistakes are swept under the rug because the perpetrator is one of the dignitaries. Mistakes committed by Muslims are their responsibility not the fault of Islam.

Verses: 180 to 189

180. *Let not those who covetously withhold the grace, which God has bestowed on them of His Grace, think that it is good for them. It is bad for them. The things which they covetously withheld will be tied to their necks like a twisted collar on the Day of Judgment. To God belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and God is Totally-Aware of all that you do.*
181. *God has heard the words of those who say, "Truly, God is indigent and we are rich." We shall certainly record their words - as well the slaying of the prophets in defiance of all that is right - and We shall say to them, "Taste the torment of the scorching fire.*
182. *This is on account of that which your own hands have sent before (you to the judgment)." God is never unjust to His servants.*
183. *Those who said, "God took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He brings us an offering which will be consumed by fire." Say, "There came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you asked for. Why then did you slay them, if you speak the truth?"*
184. *And if they deny you, so other messengers were denied before you, who came with clear signs, Books, and the Book of enlightenment.*
185. *Every soul shall have a taste of death. And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is pulled away from the fire and admitted to paradise will attain a supreme achievement. The life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.*
186. *You shall certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Scripture before you and from the idolaters. But if you persevere, and remain conscious of God, then that will be the best course.*

187. *And remember when God took a covenant from the People of the Scripture, to make it known and clear to humankind, and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and bartered it for a small price. And vile was the bargain they made.*
188. *Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done, will escape the torment. A painful torment is theirs.*
189. *To God belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and God has power over all things. (3:180-189)*

“Let not those who covetously withhold the grace, which God has bestowed on them of His Grace, think that it is good for them. It is bad for them. The things which they covetously withheld will be tied to their necks like a twisted collar on the Day of Judgment. To God belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is Totally-Aware of all that you do.” There is no authentic source which indicates which group of people this verse was referring to. However, this is a general statement that applies to all those who are stingy and do not want to share what God has provided them. They think that their wealth will be preserved if they do not spend it in the way of God. The Qur’an rebuts this claim and warns them that they will be tormented on the Day of Judgment with what they kept for themselves. It is a dire warning especially when they are reminded that their wealth has been provided by the grace God. They came to this world with nothing and only by the grace of God they were able to amass wealth, and now they refuse to give back some of what they received. Those who said, *“Truly, God is indigent and we are rich.”* God will certainly record, *“their words - as well the slaying of the prophets in defiance of all that is right”* God will say to them, *“Taste the torment of the scorching fire.”* Describing God as an indigent does not only reflect a crooked understanding of the nature of God, but it is also distasteful. How can the creature address His Creator in such a manner? Everything they say will be recorded and they will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. They will also be held accountable for killing the messengers of God who were sent to them. This seems to be a reference to some Jews who committed these sins. The punishment that they will receive on the Day of Judgment is on account of that, *“Which your own hands have sent before. God is never unjust to His servants.”*

“Those who said, ‘God took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He showed us a sacrifice consumed by fire.’ Say, ‘There came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you asked for. Why then did you slay them, if you speak the truth?’” They did not believe in Muhammad’s (PBUH) message because he did not perform the miracle of a fire descending from heaven to burn his offering. This seems to be a miracle that was given to some of the prophets who were sent earlier to the Jews. The Qur’an confronts them with the historical account of what happened when the earlier prophets performed the miracle they requested. Then the Qur’an offers a consolation to the Prophet (PBUH), *“And if they deny you, so other messengers were denied before you, who came with clear signs, Scriptures, and the Book of enlightenment.”* He was not the first prophet to be denied by his people. Many a prophet came before him, they were supported with miracles and a Scripture from God, but they were also rejected by their people.

The Qur’an then addresses the believers and outlines certain values that they should cherish and persevere in protecting them, *“Every soul shall have a taste of death. And only on the Day of*

Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is pulled away from the fire and admitted to paradise will attain a supreme achievement. The life of this world is only an illusory pleasure.” This is a truth that should rest deep in everyone’s consciousness: our stay on this earth is only temporary. Death is the inevitable truth. All humans will meet the same destiny, but what differentiates people from one another is the reward on the Day of the Resurrection. The expression “*pulled away*” intimates an image of Hell fire that has a gravity which pulls people towards it. One needs help to be pulled away from Hell fire. Those who were able to get the necessary help are the successful. It is a dramatic image which involves pulling and pushing. It alludes to the pulling force of sin. The desire to sin pulls people towards Hellfire; they need a strong force to counteract this pull. No matter how vigilant human beings are in resisting the pull of sin they would not be saved except by the grace of God. Worldly life has many pleasures but they are all transient pleasures, nothing will remain forever. The true everlasting pleasure is obtained when one is admitted to paradise after one was pulled away from Hellfire. Realizing this fact, one is ready to sacrifice and persevere in the face of adversity, “*You shall certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and you shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Scripture before you and from the idolaters. But if you persevere, and remain conscious of God, then that will be the best course.*” This is the standard route through which all who subscribe to a specific ideology will pass. Those who subscribe to a certain ideology are usually tested. In trying to be faithful to their ideology, they are usually faced with adverse conditions. There are many obstacles that one should cross on the road to paradise, but the fulfillment of carnal desires paves the road to Hellfire. Perseverance is the only way to remain on the road to paradise.

“And remember when God took a pledge from the People of the Scripture to make it known and clear to people and not to hide it; but they threw it away behind their backs, and bartered it for a small price. And vile was the bargain they made.” God has taken a pledge from the People of Scripture that they should transmit the knowledge that God gave them in the Scripture to humankind, but some of them chose to breach this covenant and hide the Scripture behind their backs for a miserable price.

“Think not that those who exult in what they have done, and love to be praised for what they have not done, will escape the torment. A painful torment is theirs.” It has been narrated on the authority of Al-Bukhari that this verse is referring to some of the hypocrites who did not want to join the Prophet (PBUH) whenever he went on a military expedition. They were happy that they were able to provide excuses to the Prophet (PBUH) after the battle and they would love being praised for their valor. However, this is a general statement that applies to all those who claim a credit for something that they did not do. They will not escape the punishment for their false claim. For God has, “*The dominion of the heavens and the earth; and God has power over all things.*”

Verses: 190 to 200

190. *In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for those who are possessors of intellect.*

191. *Those who celebrate the praise of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth, and say, "Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain. Glory be to You. Protect us from the torment of the Fire.*
192. *Our Lord, You have indeed disgraced whomsoever You do admit to the Fire. The wrongdoers will never find any helpers.*
193. *Our Lord, we have heard someone calling to Faith, 'Believe you in your Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins, absolve us of our evil deeds, and make us die the death of the righteous.*
194. *Our Lord, grant us what You did promise us through Your messengers, and save us from the disgrace on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise."*
195. *And their Lord has heard them, and answered them, "Never will I let the work of any of you be lost, be he a male or a female, each like the other in reward. Those who emigrated, were driven out from their homes, suffered harm in My cause, fought, and were slain, verily, I will absolve them of their evil deeds, and admit them into gardens underneath which rivers flow. This is a reward from God, and God has the best of rewards."*
196. *Let not the vicissitude (of the success) of the disbelievers through the land deceives you.*
197. *It is but a brief enjoyment. Their ultimate refuge is hell - an evil resting place.*
198. *But those who remain conscious of God, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will be safe for ever as a reward from God. That which God has in store is better for the righteous.*
199. *And there are, certainly, among the People of the Scripture those who believe in God, in what has been revealed to you, and in what has been revealed to them. They bow in humility to God. They will not barter the revelations of God for a small price. For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in reckoning.*
200. *You who believe persevere, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed. (3:190-200)*

This is the last lesson in this Sura. The Sura dealt with a large number of issues which form a comprehensive Islamic perspective. The Sura offered clarifications of certain misunderstandings and rebuttals of myths in its dialogue with the People of Scripture, the idolaters, and the hypocrites. It also detailed a plan for the daily life to be followed by members of the Muslim community. The plan dealt with issues of spending in the way of God, fulfillment of responsibility, coping with adversity, and the willingness to sacrifice in the way of God.

This last part continues to deal with issues that are related to the main themes of Sura. The verses discuss the universe as a sign of the existence of God. The universe is an open book full of signs and truths that only those who reflect are able to read and understand. The verses also point to the close connection between the nature of the universe and the initial natural disposition of the human being, a connection which should shape the relationship between humankind and the universe.

“In the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for those who are possessors of intellect. Those who celebrate the praise of God, standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the (wonders of) the creation of the heavens and the earth” What are the signs that those who reflect and celebrate the praise of God realize when they see the alternation of day and night? And how can they reach the conclusion, *“Our Lord, You have not created all of this in vain.’ Glory be to You. Protect us from the torment of the Fire.”* This is a conclusion that a person who has a sound understanding and who receives the correct signals from the universe is able to reach. The Qur’an urges humankind to continuously reflect on the creation of the universe. The Qur’an urges us to open our minds and our hearts to different cosmic phenomena and try to reach to the secrets of this universe which God created.

If we open our hearts and minds and reflect on the scenes of heaven and earth, of the alternating day and night, we would reach the conclusion that there is a single power behind the planning, the organization, and the harmony of the universe. There is no randomness in the creation of the universe. Every part of the universe moves according to a plan. The verses connect between celebrating the praise of God and the contemplation of the heavens and earth. It implies that this contemplation is a part of the rituals of worship of God. This establishes two basic Islamic principles. The first one is that thinking and reflecting on the God’s creation is an essential component of the worship of God. The sciences which aim at the discovery of the secrets of the creation and the laws that govern the universe are part and parcel of the worship of God when this study is done with the intention of the remembrance of God and celebrating His praise. The second principle is that the truth of the cosmic phenomena can only be understood and appreciated fully by hearts which are intensely involved in the remembrance and praise of God.

“Our Lord, You have indeed shamed whomsoever You do admit to the Fire. The wrongdoers will never find any helpers.” This supplication points to the fact that their fear of Hellfire is actually a fear of being shamed. The believers find the pain of experiencing the humiliation which the companions of the Hellfire will suffer to be more painful than the fire itself. They fear displeasing God more than they fear the pain that they would experience by the fire. They believe that only God can help them, and the wrongdoers will have no helper.

“Our Lord, We have heard someone calling to faith, ‘Believe you in your Lord,’ and we have believed. Our Lord, forgive us our sins, absolve us of our evil deeds, and make us die the death of the righteous.” They have open and sensitive hearts, open to accept what they receive and they are cautious to commit anything that is tainted by the shadow of a sin. They hasten to seek God’s forgiveness for their sins and they long to die as righteous people.

This supplication is compatible with one of the main themes of the Sura which revolves around the desirability of seeking God’s forgiveness often. Seeking God’s forgiveness often provides support in the never ending battle against the temptation to indulge in carnal desires. The results of this basic battle determine the outcome of all battles that the believers will be engaged in during their life on earth.

The supplication ends on a note of appeal, hope, trust in God, and certitude in His fulfillment of the promise, *“Our Lord, grant us what You did promise us through Your messengers, and save us from shame on the Day of Resurrection. You never break Your promise.”*

What is the relationship between the reflection on heavens and earth, the alternation of day and night and this passionate supplication? Those who are able to reflect will reach the conclusion that the process which runs the lives of people living in this universe is a process which has been carefully planned. It is a rationale process that has goals and objectives, and it aims at establishing the truth with justice. People living according to such a plan must be held accountable for what they do. There must then, be another life in which people will reap the reward for what they have done in the previous life.

“And their Lord has heard them, and answered them, ‘Never will I let the work of any of you be lost, be he a male or a female, each like the other in reward. Those who emigrated, were driven out from their homes, suffered harm in My Cause, fought, and were slain, verily, I will absolve them of their evil deeds, and admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow. This is a reward from God, and God has the best of rewards.’” God’s response to the supplication was given in detail. First, it starts with an assurance that the supplication will be accepted, then, the characteristics of those whose supplication will be accepted are given. The supplication is not a lip service but it is a mandate to *“act.”* Action is the practical application of the principles of reflection, planning, celebrating the praise of God, and seeking His forgiveness. God does not promise those who remain conscious of Him worldly benefits, but He promises them a reward from Him and He has the best of rewards.

“Let not the vicissitude (of the success) of the disbelievers through the land deceives you. It is but a brief enjoyment. Their ultimate refuge is Hell - an evil resting place. But those who remain conscious of God, for them are Gardens underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will be safe for ever as a reward from God. That which God has in store is better for the righteous.” The vicissitude of the success of the disbelievers is a sign of the enjoyment of life and a sign of power and influence. This may overwhelm the hearts of the believers with feelings of envy, for they work hard and sometimes they get nothing in return. The message to the believers is that do not let this deceive you. This is only a transient enjoyment, it will not last long, and it is going to lead to a bad abode. On the other hand, there are gardens underneath which rivers flow waiting for the believers who are conscious of God. The choice should be clear for all.

“And there are, certainly, among the People of the Scripture those who believe in God, in what has been revealed to you, and in what has been revealed to them, bowing in humility to God. They will not barter the revelations of God for a small price. For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in reckoning.” Having mentioned the scenes of the believers supplicating to God and God responding favourably to them, the People of the Scripture are not forgotten. Those of them who believed in God, believed in what was revealed to them, and in what has been revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) their reward awaits them with their Lord.

The very last verse embodied a command to the believers, *“You who believe persevere, vie in such perseverance, strengthen each other, and remain conscious of God that you may succeed.”* The command is to persevere and remain conscious of God. Perseverance and God consciousness are mentioned often in this Sura. Sometimes they are mentioned together and sometimes they are mentioned separately. These are two important attributes that the believers need in their fight against their enemy. Perseverance is the sustenance for the believers which support them along the path of God. It is a long path full of difficulties and obstacles. Perseverance is needed to ward off temptations of carnal desires, to provide support in face of adversity, and to provide strength in face of human weakness. God consciousness goes hand in hand with perseverance; it is the attentive guard that evokes feelings of God observance in the conscious of the believer. This command sums up the Sura in a beautiful finale.