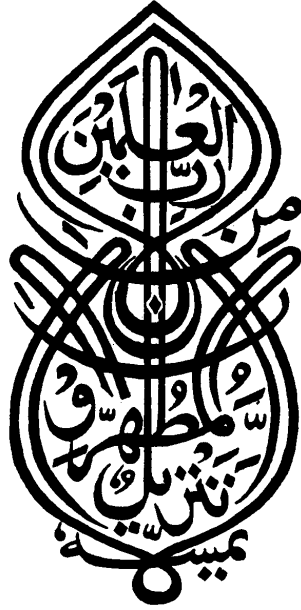


Light

From The

Holy Quran



Naseer Ahmad Faruqi

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore, U.S.A.

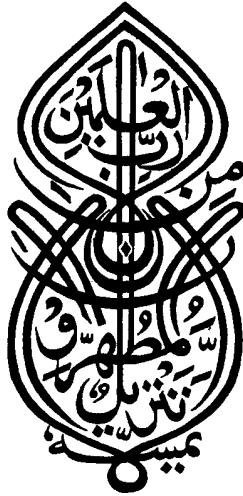
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Naseer Ahmad Faruqi

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Al-Fātihah (The Opening) (Quranic Lesson 1)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
besech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
لَعْنَةُ الْغَايِبِينَ

CH.1:1-7

I start this first lesson of the Holy Quran with its pure and sublime verses that mark the beginning of the Holy Quran. The selection of these verses is as much for their blessings and prayers, as it is upon my intention, God willing, to discuss those portions of the Holy Quran which are recited by Muslims in their daily lives and prayers. I also hope to comment on those verses that Allah has blessed me to understand. The motivation for developing this series of Quranic lessons has come from a request made by a foreign friend, who owns a radio station, and is desirous of broadcasting an easy to understand Quranic tutorial of about fifteen minutes duration, once every week.

Attributes of Allah

Let us start, “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful” (*Bismi Allahi Al Raḥ-mān Al Raḥim*). This verse is at the beginning of each chapter of the Holy Quran, except one. It is not numerically included in the

total verses of each chapter, because it contains a complete text in itself. It has been placed at the commencement of each chapter just like a seal on an imperial proclamation which gives the emperor's name and title. It is essential for a book to have the name of its author on its title page. Similarly, it should be the first undertaking of any revealed scripture to give us the identity of the One Who has revealed it. Holy Quran is the only scripture, which declares right at its beginning that it has been revealed by Allah. It begins with, *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥ-mān Al Raḥīm*, which means, "In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful," and thus states that this Book is from the Being Whose name is Allah, and Who is *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent) and *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful). Allah is the proper name of God, and means the Being Who is perfect in excellence and goodness. By excellence is meant that His attributes have reached perfection in His Being. This is further on stated in the first chapter *Sura Fātiḥah* as, "All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb* - One Who brings everything to perfection)." By 'goodness,' is meant that the perfection of Allah is not confined to His own person, but all His creation benefits from it each and every moment. If, for example, someone possesses knowledge or wealth, but its benefit is limited to his own person, and it contributes nothing to the well-being of others, then that attribute is flawed. The goodness of Allah manifested in His attributes of *Rabb Al-ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful), *Māliki yaum Aldīn* (Master of the Day of Requital), benefit the entire creation all the time, both in this world and the Hereafter.

Allah's attributes or qualities are unlimited, but only two of these attributes, *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), and *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) are mentioned here. I will try to explain the significance of this. First let us understand the meaning of *Al-Raḥmān* and *Al-Raḥīm*. Both these words are derived from one root word, *raḥma*, which means tenderness requiring the exercise of beneficence, and thus comprise the idea of love and mercy. 'Al-Raḥmān,' and 'Al-Raḥīm,' are both active participle nouns of different measures. *Al-Raḥmān* being of the measure of *falān* in Arabic and indicating the greatest preponderance of the quality of mercy. In other words, the mercy of Allah is such that He has created, without any effort on part of the creation, the whole universe and its wonders. In fact, He has created the means of subsistence for all His creation, guided the creation towards the purpose of its existence, and given it the means of obtaining this objective. *Raḥīm* is the measure of *fa'il* in the Arabic being expressive of the constant repetition of the quality of *raḥma*. Thus Allah's mercy is continuous and repetitive. When proper use is made of the means which Allah has given us by His beneficence, His mercy flows in abundance and results repeatedly in excellent reward for our effort.

The human soul

I will further explain the meaning of *Al-Rahmān* and *Al-Raḥīm* in the commentary of the first chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*. First, I would like to point out the special reason why the attributes of *Al-Rahmān* and *Al-Raḥīm* are mentioned at the very beginning of the Holy Quran. It is because Allah has blessed man with something that none of His other creation received, which is the spirit (*Rūḥ*). The Holy Quran mentions this a little further on in the verse, “so when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit” (15:29). This material world and everything that is in it, including the human body will one day cease to exist, and what will remain forever is the human spirit which Allah has given to man. This spirit, while in the human body is impacted by the good and evil actions of a person and shares all the circumstances experienced by the body. The *Rūḥ* thus develops a personality of its own, which has been called the *Nafs* (soul) by the Holy Quran. This *Nafs* (soul) is taken at the time of death and goes into the world Hereafter to exist forever. The *Rūḥ* is the real essence of mankind. What, one may ask, is the Divine program for nurturing, reforming and protecting this precious entity He has granted, and for making it realize its purpose? Man is unable to see his spirit although he is aware of its existence. Where does this spirit go after it departs from the body at the time of death? What is the nature of the spiritual cosmos, and the circumstances the spirit will encounter? Our physical existence ends over here, but the spirit has to remain forever; what should one do to maintain its health, and growth so as to realize the objective for which it was given? How has Allah’s attribute of beneficence fulfilled this urgent and most essential need? The Holy Quran states, “The Beneficent taught the Quran” (55:1-2), indicating that the beneficence of Allah has made full provision in the Holy Quran for the spirit by imparting this most excellent knowledge. When a person utilizing this knowledge acts upon it, then according to the Holy Quran, “And He is ever Merciful to the believers” (33:43). That is for those who believe and act upon it, Allah is oft returning to mercy and rewards man with those fine moral and spiritual blessings that are called the gifts of paradise. It thus becomes apparent how splendid and profoundly meaningful at the commencement of the Holy Quran is the verse, “*Bismi Allāhi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm,*” (In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful).

Knowledge of the Holy Quran

One of the meanings of the letter *Ba* in *Bismi Allāh* is, seeking the help of. The reader of the Holy Quran is thus taught to ask the help of Allah, Whose beneficence has granted us a blessing like the Holy Quran. We beg His Mercy that He may give us all the blessings- spiritual, moral, temporal, and

those pertaining to the Hereafter, and award us with His pleasure and contentment which can only be attained by following the Holy Quran. Included in this also is the prayer imploring the Beneficent, Who has given us the Holy Quran, to create all the conditions and circumstances conducive to our satisfactory completion of its study. These would include a healthy body, a mind free of worries and inclined towards the Holy Quran. Also required would be presence of mind and its inclination towards obedience, and absence of any circumstances that would influence the peace and comfort of the reader.

Appealing to Allah's attribute of mercy, involves supplication before the One Who possesses infinite goodness, so that His mercy opens up one's mind towards Divine guidance and complete submission. It also safeguards human effort from being wasted and protects him from the temptations and whisperings of the devil. Besides the recitation of the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has encouraged the Muslims to say *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful) at the beginning of every task, in the following words. "Any task that is not started with the recitation of *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* is devoid of blessing." Thus when a person recites it in this manner he pleads with Allah, for His Beneficence to provide the means for the accomplishment of the task, and to turn to him mercifully. Allah's quality of mercy thus invoked, rewards human endeavor with results that only He is capable of bestowing.

It may be noted that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has used the word 'blessing' in his statement quoted above. The Arabic word for blessing is *barkat* - which means goodness that lasts forever. A person who recites *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* at the start of any of his undertaking, dedicates it to Allah by invoking His name. Whether he meets with success or failure in its accomplishments, he is still rewarded by Allah for his effort. The rewards of this life are of course temporary, for one whose work is for Allah, the real bonus will be in the Hereafter which is everlasting.

By commanding the recitation of *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* a great reformation of mankind is also desired. A person, who before beginning a task recites with understanding, "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful," will abstain from any action that is evil or displeasing to Allah. This is *taqwa* (abstaining from evil, keeping one's duty), which is mentioned repeatedly in the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Al-Fātiḥah (The Opening) (Quranic Lesson 2)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝
لَعْنَةُ الْمَعْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

The Wisdom of Al-Fātiḥah

This is a translation of the well-known chapter of the Holy Quran known as *Al-Fātiḥah*, which is memorized and recited by every Muslim in every *ruk'a* (unit) of his prayer. It is essentially read by anyone beginning the study of the Holy Quran, and also on other occasions. I, therefore, feel it is appropriate, in fact necessary to include it in my tutorials. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “I have been given two blessings that no other prophet has received, one of these is the *Al-Fātiḥah* and the other is the last *ruk'u* (section) of *Al-Baqarah*, the second chapter of the Holy Quran.” How very true was his statement, because these two portions of the Holy Quran contain a sea of knowledge, wisdom and guidance. I am not going to go into the intricate depths of these verses so as to keep the present discourse simple and easily understandable. I am, however, obligated to go into some detail, otherwise I would not be doing justice to this most excellent chapter of the Holy Quran. It is important to

be aware of the spiritual knowledge, wisdom and essential principles of guidance in the *Al-Fātiḥah* because it is recited several times a day by every Muslim. Besides calling it the most excellent revelation, the like of which was not given to any other prophet, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) also named it the *Umm-Al-Kitāb* i.e., the Basis of the Book. Thus we can appreciate the critical need to understand it. Towards the end of my discourse on this chapter I will point out that not only is the *Al-Fātiḥah* unique in being the opening of the Holy Quran, but it is also the most excellent prayer for a person in difficult times of his life. It is therefore, imperative to understand the vast and comprehensive subject matter of these verses.

I have previously discussed the verse *Bismi Allāhi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful). I will briefly summarize its meaning again for the benefit of those who are not familiar with it. Every chapter of the Holy Quran contains a complete subject in it. The words 'In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful,' being at the beginning of every chapter but one, indicate that it has been revealed by Allāh, Who out of His grace, has given us all the means for our physical existence and progress. Not only that, but He has also granted us the extraordinary and splendid gift of the 'spirit' for a life everlasting and for the development and progress of our eternal spiritual life He revealed the Holy Quran. All this is inclusive in the word *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent). The attribute of *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) indicates that if a reader of the Holy Quran acts upon its teachings, he will develop spiritually and morally, and will attain peace in this world and the Hereafter as a special gift. The letter 'Ba' in *Bis- mil-lāhi* also means that one is beginning in the name of Allāh and seeking His assistance. He is requesting the Beneficent Who has revealed the Holy Quran, that He, out of His mercy, should bless the suppliant with its knowledge and comprehension, and give him the ability to act upon it, so that he is able to achieve the lofty goals of Quranic revelation.

Now I would like to discuss the *Sura Fātiḥa*. This *sura* (chapter) has been named in the Holy Quran and the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) by different names. The most well-known name is *Al-Fātiḥah* (the Opening) or *Fātiḥa-tul-Kitāb* (The Opening of the Book). By 'opening' is meant that it opens the door to the wisdom of the Holy Quran. Also opened up in this short chapter of seven verses is the path of guidance, Divine recognition and knowledge, which is unparalleled for all times. Although volumes have been written on this chapter, its treasures do not get depleted; I will only briefly mention a few important issues so that you can have some appreciation of this.

Man's quest after God

Man wonders Who is the Originator of this great universe in which even a single atom is such a marvel of creation? Man wants to know Who or What He is? He would like to know the names and attributes of this Divine Being? Next arises the question whether the Creator and Sustainer of this great universe are two separate entities, or is it the work of One Divine Being? Why did this Divine Being create the earth and all the life in it? What is the position of mankind in this creation? What is the relationship between man and the Divine Being? What is the purpose of man's creation? What kind of effort should one exert in order to attain the objective of his creation? Different people and nations are following their own direction, and everyone considers his way of thinking to be the correct one. Which then is the right path out of this maze? How can one find out, if the way he is following is the correct one? Has anyone achieved the purpose of his existence by treading on this path? What are the consequences of not following this path? Scriptures were revealed to all nations, before the Holy Quran, but today there are nations in which no trace of these revelations can be found, and they are following their own individual ways. What are the adverse consequences of doing so? This chapter has unveiled all these secrets in such a brief, but concise manner that no human being could have possibly accomplished this, as you will be able to soon appreciate yourself.

All Praise is for Allah

In the Arabic word, *Al-ham-du-lil-lāh* (All praise is due to Allah), letters *Alif, Lam (A,L)* indicate comprehensiveness in the sense of entirety (i.e., true, genuine and exclusive praise). Thus all praise is for Allah Who is the *Rabb* (Lord - One Who is the Nourisher unto perfection) of the whole universe, all creation and every nation. 'Allah' is the proper name of the Divine Being as I have previously mentioned in my discussion of 'In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful.' It is the prime obligation of any revealed scripture that it should inform its reader about the identity of the One Who is responsible for its revelation, and the purpose behind it. The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture which tells us in its very beginning, in the verse "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful," that the name of its author is Allah. The preponderance of beneficence in His nature led to the creation of mankind, and the revelation of this book for its guidance. If man follows this guidance, it brings into action Allah's mercy and He rewards him in this life and the Hereafter with eternal bliss. The most notable of these blessings is the one for which man has been created and which will be mentioned later.

Proof of existence of the Divine Being

Those familiar with the current state of world affairs know that communism and materialism have promoted the spread of atheism. How can those who do not believe in the existence of God, accept that which was revealed by Him? I shall *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases) address this question in the discussion of the first verse of *Al-Fātiḥah* i.e., “All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord (*Rabb*) of the worlds.” Before this, I would like to submit that the existence of the Divine Being is the basis of all faiths. The testimony of hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets (this is on basis of a *Hadith* - tradition), in addition to that of millions of righteous servants of Allah (whose truthfulness was established), and the evidence provided by revealed scriptures is such a powerful argument in support of this truth that it cannot be denied by an intelligent person. Courts of law can decide even matters of great contention on the basis of one truthful witness. Here we have the testimony of thousands of truthful ones, that there is a Divine Being with whom they were able to establish communion. Further proof of their truthfulness is that those who follow them with complete submission also achieve this blessing.

If we use our common sense, it becomes quite apparent that every atom in the immense and intriguing universe evidences, and clearly manifests the presence of the Divine Being. For this very reason scientific inquiry which initially assumed an atheistic philosophy, has now been forced to admit that this universe has one Creator, because the whole creation is made of the same matter, and is obligated to follow the same universal laws. Every man’s nature provides the ultimate testimony of the existence of a Divine Being. All human beings in times of distress and difficulty spontaneously cry out for Divine assistance.

Why, then may one ask, has the denial of the existence of God become such a common practice in this day and age? I shall *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases), provide the answer to this from the preliminary verses of *Al-Fātiḥah* in the next lesson.

Al-Fātiḥah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 3)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَا غُرُ

لُ مَعْضُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

CH.1:1-7

Undeniable proof of Divine Existence

I have mentioned in my previous lesson that the existence of the Divine Being is the essential basis for a revealed religion or its scripture. If there is no God as publicized by contemporary Marxist and materialistic philosophies, then the claim of any religion or book that it is revealed by the Divine Being for the guidance of mankind, holds no validity. I also pointed out that a hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, and a far greater number of righteous servants of Allah bear testimony to this. The truthfulness and honesty of these individuals was generally accepted, and they sacrificed every thing they had in the way of Allah. They faced great difficulties and risked their lives for His cause. In return God brought their implausible missions to fruition successfully and thereby, provided undeniable proof of His existence. God foretold their success at a time of complete hopelessness, and allowed them to announce this publicly. Those who followed them with complete obedience also found God.

Progress in knowledge and modern scientific thought initially propagated atheistic beliefs amongst the educated masses. Today, however, the very same people admit to the unity and existence of the Divine Being. This is because scientific discovery has proven that the amazing universe, of which even a single atom holds within it a phenomenal creation, must have a Creator. He is One because all His creation works under one universal law.

Modern age of atheism

Human intelligence itself makes man aware that this wonderful creation has a maker who is also responsible for its upkeep. His own nature is also a witness to this; that is why even an atheist is forced to call upon God in times of distress. Despite this very strong evidence why then is atheism such a popular phenomenon today?

The answer to this is that in this modern age of scientific and intellectual development, blind faith is no longer accepted, and the younger generation does not necessarily follow the beliefs of the older without questioning. Today, unless an argument is backed by strong reasoning, people will not accept it. The concept of the Divine Being presented by religions other than Islam, does not appeal to the educated mind. Common conception of the Divine Being was either that of a stone idol, a cow, or fire. Those who progressed beyond this, started to worship human beings like themselves, be it Jesus, Mahatma Buddha, Krishna or Rama. According to the Christian belief Jesus died on the cross, stayed for three days in hell and was subsequently resurrected. In this case he fared no better than other mortals because all religions tell us that every human being is brought back to life after death. Mahatma Buddha, Krishna, and Rama like ordinary mortals have left this worldly abode. With the concept of the Divine Being bearing such close resemblance to mankind, it is not surprising to hear today that either 'there never was a God,' (*Na'ūdhu bi Allahi*, we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so) or, 'if there was One, He no longer exists.' In fact all polytheistic beliefs (*shirk*) are dependent on the existence of one or several defects or shortcomings in God; that is why other gods are needed to make up for these deficiencies. In this age of enlightenment, human intellect and nature is unwilling to accept a stone idol or another human being as a god. Such deities would have defects and weaknesses similar to other humans, and would require associate gods to compensate for them. Scientific discovery, on the other hand is providing evidence that this marvelous universe has only One Creator Who possesses such goodness, strength and power that it astounds the human intellect.

Recognition of Divine Being through His Attributes

The One and Only God Who can be accepted today is the one the Holy Quran begins to inform us about in the words, “All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds (*Al ḥamdu lillāhi Rabbi al‘ālamīn*).” All praise is for Allah, the Only Lord (*Rabb*) of the worlds, i.e., He creates, develops and nourishes to perfection the whole universe and everything within it. Human nature is such that it does not appreciate a defect or a fault in a fellow being; how could it accept any deficiency or weakness in the Divine Being? God should be free of defects, in fact all of His attributes should be to the degree of complete perfection. *Alḥamdu lillāhi* (All praise is for Allah), indicates that goodness has reached its perfection in Allah. It also tells us that since all good qualities and excellent praise is for Allah, the concept of righteousness and all admirable qualities that have arisen in the human mind are a result of awareness of the attributes of Allah. The human brain, otherwise like that of any other animal, is an anatomical organ in which the concept of righteousness cannot arise by itself. Thus we observe that animals do not have the concept of rectitude, or higher moral and spiritual values. If they do exhibit some qualities such as maternal love and tenderness for their offspring, these are instinctive and have been programmed into their nature by the Creator for the survival of the offspring. They do not have the realization of what is good or evil, in order to guide them towards its performance or abstention from it.

Purpose of man’s creation

Human beings like all other animals have the instincts of self and species preservation; however, they were exclusively bestowed the realization of higher moral and spiritual values through Divine revelation. The Holy Quran does mention revelation to animals like the honey bee, but the revelation in that context refers only to the instinctive guidance given to it in order to achieve the purpose of its creation. Man has been created for a purpose much higher than the lower animals, i.e., the realization of Divine attributes within himself. He was for this reason given knowledge of these attributes through Divine revelation from the very beginning. The Holy Quran tells us about this in the verse, “Then Adam received words (revelation) from his Lord” (2:37). Lord (*Rabb*), is the Nourisher unto perfection from the lowest to the highest stages of development. The condition of man at the time of birth is similar to an animal, but he has been created so that his spirit, which is from Allah, should reflect the Divine attributes within himself. It was for this reason the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Create the moral characteristics of Allah within yourself.” The Holy Quran has also referred to this in the verse, “(We take)

Allah's color and who is better than Allah at coloring and we are His worshippers" (2:138). Creating Allah's color in oneself obviously means reflecting His attributes.

Divine Guidance to all Nations

Allah did not reveal His attributes only to the first created man Adam, the Holy Quran clearly tells us "And there is not a people, but a warner has gone among them" (35:24); "and for every nation there is a messenger" (10:47). This message was in the form of a revealed scripture which made man aware of the attributes of Allah, and enjoined him to inculcate those attributes within himself in a reflective sense. This arrangement which has continued for thousands of years is responsible for creating the concept of spiritual and moral excellence in the human mind. These revealed books were either destroyed or corrupted, but the effect of their teachings continued to some degree. With passage of time there was a real danger that even this residual influence may also disappear, and so Allah revealed the Holy Quran. In it, Allah gathered together all those teachings that merited preservation as stated in the verses, "Wherein are (all) right books" (98:3); "A Guardian over it" (5:48). Allah has taken the responsibility upon Himself to protect the Holy Quran from destruction, or against interpolation as indicated in the verse (*ayat*), "Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian" (15:9). Thus the forgotten lessons for human guidance have been revealed as a reminder in this book and Allah guarantees their preservation. This leads to the essential conclusion that only this book can now serve as a guide to all nations. This is such a great act of benevolence towards mankind, that spontaneously the words, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds" are articulated by the suppliant. It must be remembered that the words (*'ālamīn*) also stand for all nations and Lord (*Rabb*), means One Who causes to develop from the lowest to the highest stage of physical and spiritual perfection. Without the heavenly light and guidance of the Holy Quran mankind, which is unable to rise beyond the animal stage, would have been deprived of the spiritual progress it was created for. Since this progress is meant for this world and the world Hereafter, how very beautiful and appropriate are the words, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds." As man progresses along this path of moral and spiritual development, he becomes more aware of Allah's attributes of perfection in excellence and goodness. To quote Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th century Hijra: "Since the excellence and goodness of Allah is unlimited, there is no limitation to the moral and spiritual progress of mankind in the life Hereafter." Again, "All praise is due to Allah the Lord of the worlds."

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 4)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝

الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۝

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۝

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۝

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۝

لَعَنُوكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۝

CH.1:1-7

Attributes of Allah are Infinite

In my previous lesson, I have briefly discussed the vast and comprehensive meaning of the verse, “All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.” I would like to add that the attributes of Allah are infinite, and for this reason they have not been enumerated in this verse. As mankind takes advantage of His *Rabbubiyat* (attribute of nurturing unto perfection), and progresses down the spiritual pathway, it becomes more aware of His *Hasn* (excellence), and benefits from His *Ihsan* (goodness). His excellence being His attributes, and goodness being the benefits given to His creation as a result of these. Lord of the worlds (*Rabb al‘ālamīn*), indicates that His nurturing unto perfection (*Rabbubiyat*) is not limited to this world, but will go on in the Hereafter where man is to continue spiritual progress, and advance his knowledge of Allah’s attributes. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th century Hijra, highlights this in one of his writings: “Since Allah’s excellence and attributes are infinite, the

spiritual progress of man is also without limits.” “Glory be to Allah and all praise is His; glory be to Allah, the most High.”

Four basic Attributes of Allah

Out of the limitless excellence or attributes of Allah we have been given knowledge of only four in this chapter: *Rabb al'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds, One Who nurtures unto perfection), *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), *Al-Raḥīm* (the Merciful) and, *Mālikī yaum al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requital). These four basic attributes of Allah are the ones that benefit His creation in this world. *Rabbubiyat*, (Nurturing Unto Perfection) is the attribute, whereby after creating, He develops through stages, all His creation to the highest degree of perfection possible for it to attain. *Raḥmāniyat* (Beneficence), is the attribute which provides for all His creation the essential means to reach the stage of perfection, most of these provisions being made before bringing it into existence. *Raḥimiyat*, (Mercy) is the attribute which rewards exceedingly those who utilize these means. *Mālikī yaum al-dīn* (Master of the day of Requital) is the attribute as a result of which punitive measures are taken against those who do not utilize the means provided, or break and disobey the laws of Allah. This is to maintain law and order in the universe, so that suitable conditions remain for the creation to advance to its stage of perfection.

Lord of the Worlds

I would like to make one additional comment; the word '*ālamīn* (worlds) stands not only for the whole universe, but for all of the creation in it, and all of mankind. In this way the Holy Quran has presented a unique concept of the Divine Being, unlike previous religions where this concept is either of a stone idol, an animal such as a cow, inanimate objects like the fire, or heavenly bodies. Those making a little progress declared a weak human being as god, or came up with a national or tribal deity such as 'god of Israel' or 'god of the Aryan nation.' The Holy Quran declares the Divine Being as *Rabb al'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), i.e., One and Only God for all creation and all nations. There cannot be a better conception of the Divine Being than this. The idea of a national god led to divisions and dissension in the human race and promoted the idea of racial supremacy. The principle of One God for all humanity was advanced by the Holy Quran at a time when no other nation believed in it. They all considered themselves superior to others. Even within nations like the Hindus of India, there existed class differences between various castes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. These divisions eventually became part of organized religion. Prophets came to all nations for their guidance;

however, they erroneously accepted their own prophets as the only truthful ones and rejected all others, leading to further polarization of the human race and at times even to warfare. The Holy Quran declared prophets of all nations to be from Allah, and announced that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was a guide to all nations. "Say, 'O mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all'" (7:158). Thus the foundation to unite all humanity under one banner was laid down, by Allah sending Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as a messenger for all mankind. He is also the *Khātam-an- Nabiyyin* (33:40), the seal and end of all prophets, so that other prophets could not come after him to erode the unity of the human race. "Glory be to Allah, all praise is His: Glory be to Allah, the most High."

It is essential to focus attention on another aspect of the words, "All praise is due to Allah." It directs mankind to recognize Allah by His attributes. Someone may think that visual observation is necessary to recognize things in this world. Science, however, has now confirmed that the true state of matter can only be known by becoming aware of its properties. If the matter which is creation, has to undergo such scrutiny for its nature to be understood, then Allah Who is the Creator can only be recognized through His attributes.

It is interesting to note that the word *Rabb* (Lord) and not *Khāliq* (Creator) was used in the verse under discussion. Further on in the Holy Quran it is clearly stated that Allah is "The Creator of all things" (6:102). The word *Rabb* (Lord) not only conveys the meaning of One Who creates, but also of the One Who gradually advances His creation to the stage of perfect development. Great wisdom underlies the use of this word in the present context. For example, an atheist, or argumentative person could say, that since no one has observed the first creation, how could one say with certainty that there is a Creator? Although this is an absurd objection, the word *Rabb* (One Who nourishes unto perfection) provides a very satisfactory answer to it. It is true that we have not observed our initial creation, however we witness everyday in our lives the manifestation of this Divine attribute. We witness every single creation evolving from a lower to a higher stage. If we think about our own creation, we notice how the nutrient substances derived from the earth are utilized by our bodies to form the germ cell. The astonishing complexities of this cell are still being discovered by science today. In all human beings, it develops in the womb of the mother to form the amazing human body. This highly developed creation and its organization astounds those scientists who have investigated its development. From the stage of infancy and complete helplessness, the human child progresses to the stage of youthful vigor and vitality. Who is responsible for this gradual development from the lower to the higher stage? Isn't the birth and development of the human species, in fact of all

of creation a very strong proof for the existence of a Creator (*Khaliq*) and One Who nourishes unto perfection (*Rabb*)? The evidence for the existence, and the Unity of the Divine Being presented in this attribute of Allah cannot, therefore be denied by a fair minded atheist. In the days when most scientists were leaning towards atheism, an incident regarding one of them is related thus: While observing the development of the embryo in an egg he exclaimed, "As if some God were making it!"

Today the oneness of all creation, its subordination and progression under one universal law has clearly been proven by scientific discovery. While studying this amazing and powerful universe, the words, "All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds," are uttered spontaneously by the contemplating soul.

The Beneficent, the Merciful

Physical creation and this worldly existence, are only the first stage of human development. "Lord of the worlds (*Rabb al'ālamīn*)," also implies that there are other worlds beyond this one, created by our *Rabb* (One who nurtures us unto perfection), and He will carry us there to complete our ongoing spiritual development. His beneficence (the attribute of being *Al-Rahmān*) has created the means for our physical development, without any effort on our part. He has likewise made the provision for our spiritual development from the lower to the higher stages by revealing the Holy Quran. To emphasize this fact the verse, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds," is followed by, "The Beneficent, the Merciful." This is further clarified by the verse: "The Beneficent (*Al-Rahmān*) taught the Quran" (55:1-2). Whoever acts upon this guidance Allah is Merciful (*Rahīm*) towards him and rewards him manifold. The Holy Quran refers to this, "And He is ever Merciful to the believers" (33:43). The real reward for the believer is in the world Hereafter where he resides forever; the reward of this life ending with his death.

The verse *Al-Rahmān, Al Rahīm* (the Beneficent, the Merciful), also tells us that the Mercy of Allah works for us before every event. Its blessing, however, continues with us if we utilize His benevolence, the greatest of which is the Holy Quran. In other words the mercy of Allah does not end with manifestation of Divine beneficence, but for the ones availing His guidance, it is further stimulated, and produces the 'paradise of the heart,' or the peace and serenity in the mind of the spiritual wayfarer. It assumes a more permanent, apparent and palpable form for him in the life Hereafter. With a tranquil mind, a person remains satisfied under all circumstances; however, with loss of mental satisfaction, even the greatest luxuries of this life cannot offer any comfort. Do not therefore consider the paradise of the heart in this life as insignificant.

Al-Fātihah (The Opening) (Quranic Lesson 5)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,

Master of the Day of Requitul.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۞
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۞
 الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۞
 مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ ۞
 إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ۞
 اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ۞
 صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ ۞
 لَمْ يَعْصُوا بِعَيْبِهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ۞

CH.1:1-7

Master of the Day of Requitul

In the previous four lessons we had a brief glimpse of the profound knowledge and wisdom contained in the verses, *Bismi Allahi Al Raḥmān Al Raḥīm* (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) and *Al hamdu lillāhi* (All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds). Today we shall, by the grace of Allah, contemplate on the meaning of the verses: *Māliki yaum aldīn* (Master of the Day of Requitul) and *iyā ka na'budu* (Thee do we serve). The word *yaum* is ordinarily translated as 'day,' i.e., the time between sunrise and sunset; however, in the Arabic language and also in the Holy Quran, it has been used to specify a time or period which may be very small or large. For example, the Holy Quran states: "*Kul-la yaumin Hu-wa fi shān* [Every moment He is in a state (of glory)]" 55:29]. In this verse, the word *yaum* stands for a moment of time. Compare this with "*fi yaumin kāna miqdāru hu khamsīna alfa sanatin* (in the day the measure of which is fifty thousand years" 70:4). In this verse, *yaum* represents fifty

thousand years as stated. What then is the meaning of *Māliki yaum aldeen* (Master of the Day of Requital)? There is no doubt that a day will come when man is to be judged and recompensed for all his actions, good or evil, including the secrets hidden deep down within its bosom. That day can either be a single day, the whole time during which a person is rewarded for his good actions, or the extended period during which he faces the consequences of his evil deeds and internal detriment. The Day of Requital also stands for every passing moment of time in which the reward or punishment for every good or evil action is being recorded, though most people do not have true knowledge of it. Thus we observe that a good action immediately leads to a feeling of contentment and joy, while an evil one causes restlessness, worry and anxiety in one's mind. An honest person may go hungry, but he has the peace of mind and consequently a restful sleep at night. A dishonest person, on the other hand, is fearful of impending doom, and is uneasy and anxious. The reward and punishment for good and evil actions are therefore immediate, though man remains in denial during this life.

Concept of Paradise and Hell

The two types of paradise that are mentioned in the Holy Quran for those who guard against evil (*muttaqi*) are, by consensus, the paradise of this world and the Hereafter. The possessions of a righteous person in this world seldom include gardens with streams of running water (metaphorical language used in the Holy Quran for describing paradise); however, he is surely guaranteed peace and tranquillity of mind. On the contrary an evil person may own a garden with streams of flowing water, but he is devoid of inner peace and serenity, and his heart is always burning with the desire to acquire more material wealth. A person having thousands is worried about making millions, and a millionaire is likewise eager to reach the billion mark. After death, the burning desire and greed of a worldly person manifests itself as the external fire of hell. The Holy Quran tells us: "It is the fire kindled by Allah, which rises over the hearts. Surely it is closed in on them, in extended columns" (104:6-9). On the other hand the one whose heart is a recipient of internal peace and tranquillity, i.e., the paradise of this world, will after death enter the external blessings of heavenly paradise. The Holy Quran states, "O soul thou that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased well pleasing, so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden" (89:27-30).

The reward of heaven and the punishment of hell begin in this life, but are hidden from the physical eye. They assume a more apparent and palpable form in the life Hereafter. In both situations, that is in this life or the life Hereafter, this reward and punishment is not under man's control,

otherwise he could easily manipulate it to suit his advantage. The power to control this lies in the hands of One Who has been called, “Master of the Day of Requit,” in the chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*, and how very true it is! The verses: “All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds; the Beneficent, the Merciful,” draw man’s attention towards Allah, the Source of all goodness, the One Who guides and nurtures man from the lower to the higher stages of his development. Mercy is so preponderant in His nature that He provides for our physical needs before, and after our coming into existence. He has also provided for our spiritual sustenance, by revelation of a complete and excellent guidance, the Holy Quran. If we act upon this guidance, His mercy will reward us manifold not only in this life, but also in the Hereafter. In the verse, “Master of the Day of Requit,” man has been informed (which was very essential) that the way he spends his life in this world is his own responsibility, The compensation for whatever he thinks, speaks, or does starts in this very life; although, in the Hereafter it assumes a more perceptible form. Thus, mankind is in need of Allah’s guidance and help for his existence and well being, not only in this life, but also for the success and comfort of the life which occurs as a result of this.

Only Allah is to be Served with Humility

After becoming aware of these attributes of the Divine Being, the soul of the suppliant cries out spontaneously, “*Iyyā ka na ‘budu wa iyyā ka nasta ‘in* (Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help). This is the verse of *Al-Fātiḥah* that follows. I have translated *na ‘budu* as ‘to serve,’ or ‘obey,’ although most people misunderstand its meaning to be recitation of prayers. In fact the Arabic word *ṣalāt* has been used for prayer in the Holy Quran. The dictionary meaning of the word *‘ibādat* (noun of *na ‘budu*) is obedience with humility. Allah has clearly differentiated between the meaning of *‘ibādat* and *ṣalāt* in the Holy Quran in the verse, “So serve Me, and keep up prayer for My remembrance (*fa ‘budni wa aqimi ṣalāta li dhikvī*)” (20:14); and in the verse, “Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not the devil (*a lam a ‘hadu ilaikum yā banī ādama an lā ta‘budu alshaiṭān*)?” (36:60). In this verse *tabudu* (serve) from *ibadat* certainly does not mean prayer because no one performs the prayer service before the devil assuming the traditional postures of *qi-yām* (standing with folded hands), *ru-ku* (bending over), or *sajda* (prostration). The real meaning of *‘ibādat* in this context is exactly the dictionary meaning, that is ‘serving and obeying’; in this case the devil, which most human beings unfortunately do. It is a unique ability of the Arabic language that with a choice of a few words a very comprehensive and excellent meaning is conveyed. That is why it has been selected by Allah as the language of

His final revealed scripture, the Holy Quran, a book of complete guidance. We have seen an example of this in the use of the word *Rabb* (One Who nurtures unto perfection). Also we have just seen how the extensive subject of obedience with humility is addressed with the use of the word *i' bādat*. It is necessary to know all of this, because obedience can be of two kinds. One form is accomplished under duress and with infliction of chastisement. The other kind is purely voluntary and accomplished with humility. Compare the example of a child, who studies because he is afraid of being punished by his teacher with the one who considers the teacher as his benefactor and complies with his instructions, with enthusiasm and humility. Both of them cannot derive similar benefits from their teacher; certainly the one who is humble, and obedient benefits more. The same rule applies to parental guidance for children. Allah's mercy for man undoubtedly exceeds far beyond that of his parents. In fact He is responsible for inspiring mercy in the hearts of parents for their offspring. Who can be a greater benefactor of man than Allah? No one knows more than Him, what is beneficial or harmful for the human race. Parents, teachers and worldly leaders are liable to human error, however, Allah is *Subhān* (free of all faults). In fact according to the verse, "*Al hamdu lillāhi. . .* (All praise is for Allah)," He possesses all attributes and excellence to the degree of perfection. All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Requital. Whatever He commands for mankind to be carried out is beneficial for him and what He forbids is harmful. Therefore, one can only benefit from His *Rabbubiyat* (nurture unto perfection) by humbly submitting to His command.

Asking for Divine Assistance

In spite of good intentions man's effort may be lacking or faulty. This may be because of forgetfulness, lassitude, or lack of knowledge regarding Divine commandments. Man is also vulnerable to the continuous temptations of the devil, particularly during periods of trial and tribulation. This is why the subsequent verse is, "Thee do we beseech for help." In this verse one begs Allah for His protection, help, and the will required for complete submission so as to gain the full benefit of His blessings, and to protect oneself from loss and deprivation.

It is worth noting that the verses, "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Requital," Allah is addressed in the absent form. This is because when one starts reciting the *Al-Fātiḥah*, Allah is absent from the mind's eye. These verses with their profound meaning and wisdom when recited with full concentration bring before the mind's eye the full excellence and goodness of the

Divine Being. This is the reason for addressing Allah in the dialogue format in the subsequent verse, “Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.” In order to create a concept of the Divine Being during prayer, people have made idols, images or pictures of their prophets. These icons present a very poor and degrading concept of the Divine Being. Does this concept compare at all with the one presented in *Al-Fātiḥah*? —the concept which defines the grandeur, power, excellence and goodness of the Divine Being and how mankind benefits from it. When this powerful concept is presented to the mind of the suppliant, his heart cries out spontaneously, “Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.” In this way the true feelings, which are essential for prayer, are generated in the heart.

Another point worth noting in the verse, “Thee do we serve,” is that the plural (we) is used, although one is praying individually. This is because this prayer is recited several times in the obligatory prayers, which are required to be offered in congregation, whenever possible. Also when reciting the non-congregational portion (sunnah) of the prayer, one is frequently surrounded by other Muslim devotees in the mosque. Even if this is not the case, one should include his friends, relatives, and members of the congregation in his prayer, for no other prayer excels the *Al-Fātiḥah* in terms of blessings in this life and the Hereafter. Another reason for using the plural in the above mentioned verse is that man is a collective body composed of different faculties. All of these, including his eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet, mind etc., should submit before Allah with complete humility. It is only then that one can truly say, “Thee do we serve.” Similarly Allah’s help is asked for in, “Thee do we beseech for help,” because, without His grace these faculties can stray away from the right path. Sometimes the eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet are involved in sinful behavior, and the mind is frequently involved in deviant thoughts. May Allah protect us from these dangers. *Āmīn* (be it so).

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 6)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
لَا غُرُوبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

CH.1:1-7

Man created for a higher objective

Today we will discuss the meaning of the verse, “Guide us on the right path (*Ṣivāt-alladhīna an ‘amta ‘alaihim*).” The prayer in this verse is a vital part of *Al-Fātihah* because it provides, as explained in the verse that follows, the answer to the very important question; what is the purpose of man’s creation? No other revealed scripture in its present form, or a sage, a scientist or philosopher has been able to give an answer to this. Scientists have discovered today, what the Holy Quran made known 1400 hundred years ago in the verse, “And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all from Himself ” (45:13). The purpose of creation of the whole universe is, therefore to be beneficial and subservient to mankind. Further on the Holy Quran tells us that this was brought about by Allah appointing His vicegerent on earth, and by giving him knowledge of all things so he could dominate all creation (2:30,31). If the purpose of all creation is to serve mankind, then what is the

purpose of man's creation? As mentioned earlier, the answer to this is found nowhere else today except in the Holy Quran. If man does not know the reason for his creation, then his whole life, in fact the creation of the universe which was meant for him, would fail to achieve its purpose. Let us consider what man himself considers as the goal of his creation. With all the knowledge and scientific discoveries of the modern age, man still considers the goal of his creation to be, to eat, drink, get married, have children and make some worldly progress. In this, he is no different from his ancestors of thousands of years ago, who held the same view with their far lesser level of knowledge. Was this the purpose of creation behind the whole universe, a single atom of which contains a world of wonderment? Was it meant to serve mankind only for his limited life span? The whole universe, according to scientific research took billions of years to prepare for the arrival of mankind. Was he created only to perform a few bodily functions and fade into the dust? This could be the purpose of creating animal life, but for this to be the destiny of mankind for whom the whole universe was created, would appear to be an exercise in futility.

The path of the righteous

Human intellect and nature cannot be satisfied by such a desultory objective. Man had so far accepted this because no one had provided the correct answer. The light of truth was first shed on this by the Book of Divine wisdom revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The answer to this secret lies in the spiritually vital prayer of *Al-Fātiḥah*, "Guide us on the right path." What is that path, and where does it lead to? The explanation for this is provided in the verse, "The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors." Who are these people and what favors were bestowed upon them? The Holy Quran informs us about them in the verse, "And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger, they are those upon whom Allah has bestowed favors from among the prophets (*nab-iy-yīn*), and the truthful (*ṣiddiqīn*), and the faithful (*shuhadā*), and the righteous (*ṣāliḥīn*), and a goodly company are they!" (4:69). The verse just before this states, "And We would certainly have guided them in the right path" (4:68).

The question which now comes to mind is what kind of favors were they given? Most people with a worldly outlook consider wealth and power as the greatest blessing. With the exception of a few, no prophet or righteous person received this, and even those who did, considered it as something very insignificant. If material wealth and worldly power are the favors asked for in the *Al-Fātiḥah*, one must admit that the faithless and worldly people get the most of it. The greatest blessing bestowed upon the

prophets, the truthful, and the righteous servants of Allah is, in fact, the recognition of the Divine Being. The Holy Quran explains this in the verse, “Then as for those who believe and hold fast by Him, He will admit them to His mercy (spiritual blessings) and grace (worldly blessings) and guide them to Himself on a right path” (4:175). The prayer for the ‘right path,’ which is the life giving element of *Al-Fātiḥah* leads to the source of all righteousness, the Divine Being Himself. Other verses in the Holy Quran further clarify this, for example the verse, “Surely my Lord is on the right path,” (11:56) and the verse, “He said: this is the right way with Me”(15:41). The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent as a messenger to invite people towards Allah. This is clearly stated in several places in the Holy Quran as in the verse; “Say: this is my way, I call to Allah, with certain knowledge (*baṣīrat*) — I and those who follow me” (12:108). *Baṣīrat* or certain knowledge of Allah means having such a close relationship with Allah as to be able to visualize Him with the mind’s eye; such being the case of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those who follow him. Therefore, all the truthful (*ṣiddiqīn*) and faithful ones (*shuhadā* - the real meaning of the word being those who after acquiring knowledge of internal or spiritual matters convey it to others), and the righteous (*ṣāliḥīn* - those who completely follow the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), are the ones who attain nearness to God, the proof of this being that Allah communicates with them.

Several other verses of the Holy Quran give further confirmation to the statement that the real purpose of man’s creation is recognition of the Divine Being. For example, the Holy Quran states, “Surely this is a Reminder; so let him who will take a way to his Lord” (73:19). In another verse it is stated, “And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide (*hadai-na*) them in Our ways” (29:69). In Arabic language the word *hidāyat* means not only pointing towards the right path, but also guiding one along on it till one reaches one’s destination.

Testimony of a Righteous Servant of Allah

What a great blessing it is to attain closeness to Allah Who is the Possessor and Source of all excellence and goodness. Let us hear about it from the mouth of one who in this age of atheism and materialism, by following the Holy Quran and the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was able to find God and establish communion with Him. This person being none other than Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th Century Hijra, who writes in one of his books:

How unfortunate is that person who still does not know that he has a God Who is One and Who has power over all things. Our Lord is our heaven. Our greatest pleasures lie within Him, because we saw Him and found every excellence within Him. This treasure is worth gaining even if one has to lay down his life for it. This precious jewel is worth buying, even if one has to relinquish his self for it. O! Deprived ones quicken your pace towards this fountain, for it will quench your thirst. It is the fountain of life which shall save you. What should I do to focus your attention towards this good news? With what kind of drum beat should I proclaim in the streets that 'This is our God,' so that people would listen? What medicine should I prescribe for their ears so that they hear this message? If you become of God, then be certain that He is yours. While you are in slumber He lies awake for you. You will be unaware of your enemy, and God will be watching him, and destroy his plans. You do not yet know the Omnipotence of your God. If you knew about it, you would never grieve for this world. One who owns a treasure does he ever scream, or cry, or become despondent with the loss of a penny? If you knew about this treasure that God will help you in time of need, why should you be besides yourself in pursuit of worldly gain? God is a Beloved and Precious Treasure. Be cognizant of His blessings, He is your Helper in every step you take.

In another place Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed writes:

The overwhelming concern that motivates me is that I have discovered a gold mine, and I have been given information of a quarry of precious stones. I have been fortunate to find a shining and extremely valuable diamond from this mine. The value of which is such that if I distribute it amongst all my fellow beings, they would all become wealthier than that person who in the world today has, the largest quantity of gold and silver. What is that diamond? 'The Truthful God.'

Searching for and finding Allah, therefore is the greatest purpose for which man was created. The prayer to achieve this is the essence of *Al-Fātiḥah*. There is a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he says that God informed him as follows: "I was a hidden treasure, so I determined that others should have knowledge of Me, therefore I created man." This manifests the excellence and goodness of the meaning of the word Allah. Allah, Who is the Treasure House of all attributes and excellences, created man to give away these treasures. There could be no greater honor or benevolence for man.

Al-Fātihah (The Opening)

(Quranic Lesson 7)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord
of the worlds,

The Beneficent, the Merciful,
Master of the Day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we
beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou
hast bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is
brought down, nor those who go
astray.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ
إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ
اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ
صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ
لَا غُرُورَ لِمَعْصُوبٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ

CH.1:1-7

Closeness to God achieved through the religion of Islam

Today we will discuss the last two verses of this magnificent and comprehensive prayer, *Al-Fātihah*. In the previous lesson, I have discussed in detail the verse, “The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,” and it was pointed out that these were the people who attained the purpose of their creation, i.e., Allah Almighty. Whosoever achieves this goal is successful in this world and the Hereafter. He does not have any sadness, worry or desire left, because he has found the perpetual peace and happiness which exists only in a relationship with God. All religions have made this claim that they have come to inform people about God, and to help them establish a relationship with Him. There is no doubt that when these religions first came into existence, they were actually revealed by God to fulfill this purpose. Today, however, there does not exist within them a path which leads directly to God, nor can He be reached by following them. For example, pure monotheism has been adulterated. Belief in

One God, lays down before mankind only the objective of reaching Him. Polytheism, on the other hand presents the concept of many gods before man. Which one of these various deities should he be searching for? None of these religions, today can, therefore truly claim to have found God. In the beginning when the straight path (*ṣirāṭ-Almustaqīm*) did exist within them; those who followed their teachings, were able to establish a relationship with God. An affirmative sign of this was that He would communicate with them. Today, none of the followers of these religions can make such a claim, nor can they submit evidence that they are recipients of Divine communion in the form of *ilhām* (voice messages) or *wahy* (non-prophetic revelation). According to an Urdu couplet of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (Reformer of the 14th Century Hijra):

“We have tasted this fruit only from the garden of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).”

The Perfect Model of Righteousness

Now, only by following Islam, the guidance of the Holy Quran, and the living example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), people of different time periods can become closer to God to the extent that He communicates with them. In this age of materialism and atheism we have witnessed a shining example of this in the life of the reformer of the 14th century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. A living proof of this are the thousands of Divine revelations, words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*), and true visions (*kashūf*) bestowed upon him, which are available in print. A great number of these were fulfilled during his lifetime, and there are many that continue to do so even today, after his death. It is essential to mention over here ‘those upon whom favors are bestowed,’ and their leader, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who once again pointed out the straight path to the world. He was the one to whom the *Al-Fāṭihah* was revealed, and he reached his exalted spiritual status by acting upon its guidance. By following, ‘Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help,’ he not only became the perfect exemplar of one who serves with humility, but also the best of mankind, and foremost of all prophets. Who else is there who not only became beloved of God himself, but also led others in this direction? Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has described this beautifully in one of his Persian couplets, “In the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), all excellences of prophet hood have reached their full manifestation.” Therefore, he is inevitably the last of, and the seal of the prophets (*khatam-al-nabiyyin*). No deficiency remains behind to be fulfilled by another prophet. Think about the difficult

task that was accomplished by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He became the best exemplar for the whole of the human race, for all nations, and all ages till the Day of Resurrection. ‘O! Allah exalt Muhammad and those who follow him, and grant them peace and blessings.’ Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was able to follow the straight path in this life, and reach his destination with unparalleled success. The ultimate manifestation of this was the *mi‘rāj* (grand vision of Spiritual Ascension) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he was able to meet Allah face to face. A poet has put this so well in an Urdu couplet, ‘During the night of the *mi‘rāj* you ascended above all the spiritual heavens, and the status you achieved was not attained by any other prophet.’ Also observe (by reading his life history) how well he imbued himself in the color of Allah’s attributes described in the *Al-Fātiḥah*. ‘All praise be to Allah,’ was not only a part of his physical recitation, but he became a living manifestation of it.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), according to Hazrat Ayesha (his wife), emulated the Divine attributes described in the Holy Quran to such an extent that, ‘His character was the Holy Quran.’ If prophets before him described it as ‘coming of the Lord,’ this was the reason for it. He manifested the coloring of the Lord of the Worlds (*Rabb Al‘ālamīn*) to such an extent that he became the mercy for all nations. (*Raḥmat Al‘ālamīn*) The spiritual and moral nurturing of the whole world for all times is now dependent on his example. This is because he had the unique distinction of being the only prophet who out of his great concern for all of humanity, cried and supplicated day and night for their spiritual and moral welfare, and for their well-being in this world and the Hereafter. It is for this reason that Allah Almighty has said more than once in the Holy Quran, “Will you kill thyself with this grief (that they do not come towards righteousness).” This was mentioned in the Holy Quran also with the intent that if we want to follow the footsteps of this Holy person, we should also borrow a spark from the fire of his yearning, to ignite this flame in our hearts.

Along with his great concern for the human race, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also left behind a legacy of priceless treasures in the form of his *sunnat* (example) and *hadīth* (sayings), for the benefit of mankind. This knowledge was acquired by him through his extraordinary spiritual and moral progress. He thus became colored in the spiritual beneficence of *Al-Raḥmān*. His conduct was, therefore purely selfless as the Holy Quran remarks, “I do not ask of you any return on this?” Despite being completely imbued in the coloring of Allah, he did not give himself, or allow anybody else to give him a status beyond that of

a humble servant. Other prophets, though lagging behind him in spiritual status, were elevated by their followers to the status of a God or an associate with Him. Despite being a virtual ruler of his community, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) still kept himself and his household in a state of poverty and hunger. He did not ask anything in return for his service and benevolence to humanity. This is the meaning of being a servant of *Al-Rahmān*, who provides everything for His creation without asking anything in return. If He asks for obedience with humility in return, it is for the benefit of mankind. Unless man serves Allah with humility, He is unable to nurture him spiritually, just like the parents of a child are unable to contribute towards his development unless he follows their guidance. Now consider the manifestation of the attribute of *Al-Raheem* in the Prophet's character. It is provided in its most excellent form for the believer, and the Holy Quran bears testimony to it in the words, "To the believers (he is) compassionate, merciful" (9:128). Those who joined the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and followed his footsteps, definitely benefited from his bounteous nature and mercy. We also witnessed the manifestation of the Divine attribute *Mālik-i-yaum Al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requital) in his conduct. Thus on the day when Mecca was conquered, the day on which the victor and the vanquished were to receive their due, he magnanimously forgave all his enemies.

Those who did not benefit from Divine Guidance

Now let us consider the last verses of this chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*, "Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who went astray." This is the prayer seeking protection from falling into the ways of those upon whom the wrath of Allah was brought down, or those who went astray. When truth comes into this world, those who are presented with it, tend to fall into three categories. Those who accept it and act upon it, are included in the description of those, "upon whom Thou has bestowed favors." Some unfortunate ones, however, not only reject the truth, but also attempt to destroy it along with its followers. These people, after being given ample opportunity for reform and repentance, are destroyed by Allah. The word used for destruction in Arabic, besides conveying the meaning of 'to annihilate,' also indicates the breaking of the power, or hold of a people, or nation. If Allah does not destroy those planning the destruction of truth, then truth itself and those that follow it would be eliminated. How could this be acceptable to Allah Who has, 'power over all things'? Thus those who are destroyed, or whose power is eliminated are the ones, "upon whom wrath is brought down." There is also the third category of people i.e., 'those who went astray.' These are the ones who either ignore the truth and remain

persistent in their insubordination, or after having initially accepted the right path, they later on reject it. Because of their action in pursuing falsehood over truth, they are left by Allah to wander in their deviant ways.

The Prophet of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave the example of the Jews as, “Those upon whom wrath is brought down.” They did not accept Prophet Jesus (*Isa*), in fact tried to destroy him. He cited the Christians as an example of, “those who went astray,” because after accepting Jesus they elevated him to the status of Son of God, or in fact God. This is the way of excess or exaggeration (*ifrāt*), the way of the Jews being that of diminution or (*tafrīt*). Both of these being human weaknesses. Thus for example mankind either becomes totally engrossed in pursuit of worldly gain and gives up religion, or follows the other extreme of becoming a monk, nun, or a *sadhu* (Hindu ascetic). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “The best way of all is the middle course, which is the straight path.” This is why the Muslims are enjoined in their daily prayers to ask for the straight path, so they can guard against the two extremes.

A Comprehensive Prayer

Al-Fātiḥah is such a broad and comprehensive prayer that it is useful for mankind in all conditions and times of need. For example for a student, ‘The Day of Requit,’ is the day when he sits for an examination. “Those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favors,” are the ones who qualified with flying colors. Those who do not succeed are the ones “upon whom wrath is brought down,” and “the ones who go astray,” are the ones who qualify with marginal grades and stray around in life with the hope of achieving success. I would like to give one other example of the general benefit of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, and then close this discussion. In the case of a surgeon who decides to operate on a patient, the day of surgery for both of them is, the day of requital. Those upon whom favors are bestowed would include the surgeon who is successful, and the patient who regains his health. The condition of those upon whom wrath is brought down would occur when the patient dies, and thus, is a source of disappointment for the surgeon and ruins his reputation. For the relatives of the deceased it becomes a day of irreplaceable loss and profound sadness. The state of those who went astray would occur when the patient did not die, but also did not fully recover.

Every individual has to face situations in life on a daily basis where he is at a loss in deciding the appropriate course of action. For example, in the case of a merchant making a crucial business decision, or a parent giving the hand of his daughter away in marriage, or a person trying to decide to travel to a certain destination. If one considers these situations under *yaumi*

aldīn and asks for guidance towards the right path to avoid wrong decisions and pitfalls, it becomes quite apparent how helpful *Al-Fātiḥah* is in everyday life. In applying this to one's mundane affairs one should not, however, forget that the most excellent meaning of *Al-Fātiḥah* is prayer for the moral and spiritual guidance of mankind. The answer to the prayer, 'Guide us on the right path,' comes subsequently in the opening verse of *Al-Baqarah*, "I, Allah am the best Knower. This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty." The guidance asked for is thus provided by the revelation of the Holy Quran. One can, therefore appreciate the immense spiritual grandeur of *Al-Fātiḥah* in answer to which the whole Quran was revealed.

Thus from whatever perspective we look at the saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that, "I have been given two blessings, no other prophet has received i.e., the *Al-Fātiḥah* and the last section (*ruk'u*) of the *Al-Baqarah*," is so true. I have endeavored to comment only briefly on the *Al-Fātiḥah*, otherwise it is a sea of spiritual knowledge and wisdom, the treasures of which are limitless. Glory be to Allah, all praise is His. Glory be to Allah, the Great.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 8)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Beneficent, the Merciful.

I, Allah, am the best Knower

This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْم
ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

CH.2:1,2

Answer to the prayer of Al-Fātiḥah

These are the first two verses of *Surat Al-Baqarah* (Ch: The Cow). In a way this is the beginning of the Holy Quran. In another place, the Holy Quran, and the *Al-Fātiḥah* have been described thus, “And certainly We have given thee seven oft-repeated (verses) and the grand Quran” (*Al-Hijr*, verse 87). There is a saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that these frequently repeated verses are those of *Al-Fātiḥah*. Besides other occasions every Muslim recites the *Al-Fātiḥah* at least thirty times in his five daily prayers. It is an essential component of every *rakat* (unit) of these prayers. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself called *Al-Fātiḥah* as the *Umm-ul-Kitāb* i.e., the Basis of the Book, because it contains the whole of the Quran in a nutshell. This essence of the Holy Quran was thus extracted and placed at the very beginning of the Holy Quran, just like a diamond is placed on top of a gold ring. Although a part of the ring, the diamond still appears distinct from it. This also manifests the grandeur of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, as the Holy Quran was revealed in reply to the prayer for guidance towards the right path in it. Thus in the verses under discussion today, we are told that the guidance you had asked for, has been provided by Allah in this Book.

Lessons to be learned from previous nations

Also in the *Al-Fātiḥah* Divine guidance is requested on the ‘path of those upon whom favors are bestowed, and not of those upon whom wrath is

brought down, nor those who go astray.’ The lesson implied by obligating the repetition of these verses in the daily prayers is that some nations upon whom favors were bestowed, became subject to the wrath of Allah on account of their misdeeds, and went astray after being guided. The Muslims are therefore, given a constant reminder not to follow the path of these nations. Thus, in *Al-Baqarah*, after referring to the benevolence of a great blessing like the Holy Quran, and its many superb lessons of guidance, mention is made of the nation of Israel. This was the nation upon whom were bestowed both spiritual and worldly blessings in great abundance and in an unprecedented scale. A nation which had been in bondage for centuries, and persecuted by the Egyptians, was led to freedom by Allah sending prophets Moses and Aaron for this purpose. Towards the end, this persecution had increased to such an extent that by the command of the Pharaoh, the female progeny of the Israelites were allowed to survive, while the male offspring were killed. The intent of the plan was to destroy this nation, even as the Egyptians dishonored and degraded their young women. When Pharaoh pursued the Israelites with his forces, Allah manifested His supreme power by safely delivering the Israelites through the falling ocean tide, and destroying the mighty army of Pharaoh with the rising ocean currents. The Israelites witnessed this great manifestation with their own eyes. Before this also, during their period of slavery, this nation had seen great signs of Divine power. These are mentioned further on in the *Al-Baqarah*.

Significance of the name Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

Despite these powerful signs and blessings, the Israelite nation did not recognize the Divine Being, and were ungrateful. They secretly continued to worship the cow which they had observed the Egyptians doing. At first they worshipped clandestinely a live cow which was a fine looking and healthy animal, but when this was sacrificed by Allah’s command, they made a calf out of gold and silver and started worshipping it. The Holy Quran says, “And they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their hearts on account of their disbelief ”(2:93). The point to note in this connection is that the cow they worshipped first, was an animal, and the subsequent one was an object of gold and silver. Today in Europe and America, in fact in most areas of the world which follow their lead, the worship of God has been discarded in favor of the animal within oneself i.e., one’s emotions and animal desires.

Worship (*‘ibādat*), as I have previously explained in my commentary of *Al-Fātiḥah* means service with humility and obedience of Allah. The place of the love of the Divine Being in our hearts, has been taken over by

the love of gold and silver, the search and acquirement of which has become the purpose of life today. The purpose of man's creation on earth, as I have already discussed in my commentary on the *Al-Fātihah*, is to search for and establish a relationship with God. Therefore, even today, the cow representing our animal desires, and the golden calf our lust for material wealth, is the god that many worship. In this respect, this topic and subject is as relevant today as it was in the description of the disbelief of the Children of Israel (*Banī-Isra'īl*). I have made these comments because most people consider this relevant only to the polytheistic beliefs of the Israelites, and do not understand its implications for the modern age. Moses liberated his nation from centuries of Egyptian political dominance, however, their slave mentality persisted, resulting in their worship of an animal, and gold and silver representing the gods of their former masters. Similarly today, although the political bondage of the European powers has diminished, their psychological dominance persists. The whole world thus follows their lead in worshipping either their own animal desires, or making the pursuit of material wealth, rather than love of the Divine Being, as the sole objective of their lives. This is true also in case of the Muslims, amongst whom individuals influenced by Western thinking, follow their low desires and make the love of gold and silver rather than love of God, as the purpose of their existence. No other subject matter can therefore be of greater importance today. I have elaborated this point for you so that you can perceive the excellence of the Holy Quran. It made us aware of these truths fourteen hundred years ago which can be applied towards every age.

Allah is the Author of this Book

Let us now consider the verses which mark the beginning of the *Surat Al-Baqarah*. *Alif-Lām-mīm* and letters like these precede twenty nine chapters of the Holy Quran. These are called the *huruf-e-muqatta'at* or letters that are read separately i.e., abbreviations. For example, in this context these letters are not joined together and read as *ALM*, but are read separately as *Alif-Lām-mīm*. Most people do not interpret these letters, although their meaning has been reported by the honorable companions, and it is most likely that they came to know of this from the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Such letters, however, had been used previously in the Arabic language and their meaning in the appropriate context was understood. In other languages such as English, similar usage of letters exists, most frequently used of which is perhaps the abbreviation O.K. meaning it is quite all right or correct. Some commentators have misinterpreted these as being the names of the scribes who wrote copies of the Holy Quran. They do not give thought to the fact that these letters being part of

verses of the Holy Quran have always been enumerated with these verses, and are therefore, a part of the Holy Quran. These words have always been read in the prayers or recited otherwise as part of the Holy Quran. If the names of the scribes, after being written down, have become part of the Holy Quran, then what guarantee is there that the rest of the Holy Quran is safe from interpolation? (I seek the refuge of Allah from saying so). This would be quite contrary to the Quranic verse, “Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian” (15:9). Hadith (traditions of the Holy Prophet) tells us that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions used to read these letters from the very beginning while reciting the Holy Quran. Were they then reciting the abbreviated names of the scribes as part of the word of God? (I seek the protection of Allah).

Those who have seen Imperial decrees know that in the beginning of every such document is the name and title of the emperor. These *muqatta’āt* or abbreviations used in the Holy Quran indicate to us the titles or attributes of Allah, the greatest Emperor of all. The attributes they refer to have a deep and meaningful connection with the subject matter of the verse or chapter in which they occur. For example, Ibn Abbas, a companion of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has narrated *Anā Allahu ‘alamu* (I, Allah am the best Knower), as the interpretation of *Alif-Lām-mīm*. The first letter *Alif* was taken from the word *Anā* (I), letter *Lām* was taken as the second letter from *Allah* and the last letter *mīm* was taken from the Arabic word *‘alamu* (Knower). Thus the abbreviation *Alif-Lām-mīm* stands for, “I, Allah, am the best Knower,” which is a most elegant and appropriate explanation for the context.

The Book of Guidance

The reason for the verse, “I, Allah, am the best Knower,” is further elucidated by the words that follow. Allah replies, “This (here is) Book,” in response to the guidance asked for by mankind in *Al-Fātiḥah* in the form of the prayer, “Guide us on the right path.” The One most capable of giving guidance, is the One Who possesses the greatest amount of knowledge. Thus when somebody falls ill, we seek the advice and direction from a physician regarding what kind of medication to dispense, and what form of dietary precautions to take. This is because the doctor has more knowledge than us in this matter. If the doctor needs further consultation in this matter he would refer us to a specialist, who would have even greater expertise in that field.

Who possesses greater knowledge than Allah, the Creator of the universe? All knowledge scientific, or otherwise is based upon discovering the

laws of the Creator, and the study of His creation. Thus, Allah is the Source of all such knowledge. Allah created man and within him His spirit, He also created angels and the devil (*shaiṭān*). We shall, if Allah pleases (*Inshā-Allah*), study the great purpose behind this creation in the study of the fourth section (*ruk'ū*) of this Chapter *Al-Baqarah*. Who possesses greater knowledge than Allah regarding the purpose of man's creation? What is the path man needs to follow in order to fulfill the objective of this life and the life Hereafter (of which only Allah has knowledge)? What are the apparent and hidden dangers which one needs to avoid? In the matter of guiding mankind what could be a better and more appropriate statement than this, that Allah Who possesses the greatest degree of knowledge including, knowledge of the unseen known only to Him, is the One most Capable of giving such direction.

The verse *Dhalika alkitābu* (This, Book) means, this Holy Quran is that book of direction. The Holy Quran from the very beginning has been called, 'The Book,' indicating it will be written down and preserved in this form in this world. The Holy Quran is the only scripture which was written down as it was being revealed. I shall, if Allah pleases, discuss this in the next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 9)

In my previous lesson, I had discussed the significance of the name *Al-Baqarah* (The Cow), and its relationship with the ills of the modern age. The verses, “I, Allah am the best Knower (*Alif-Lām-Mim*),” and “This Book (*Dha-li-kal Kitābu*),” were also discussed.

Authenticity of the Holy Quran

Today we will learn about the remaining part of this verse:

This Book, there is no doubt in it.

CH.2:2

ذٰلِكَ الْكِتٰبُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيْهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِيْنَ

This statement is a parenthetical clause as it relates to, “This Book,” and also to the subsequent verse, “It is a guide for those who keep their duty.” Let us first consider what having ‘no doubt’ about the Book means. It is mandatory for a revealed book to tell us who it was revealed from, the mode of revelation, who the recipient of the revealed word was, the language of revelation, the time of revelation etc. We observe that no other scripture fulfills these criteria. For example, the Bible does not tell us who it was revealed from. The current four gospels do not give us a clue to this. In fact they are named after the names of their scribes, and are clearly the record of events in the life of the Messiah. They were translated from books existing in the Greek and Roman languages which were not the mother tongues of Jesus or his people. If they were revealed in his language, they would have been either in Aramaic or Hebrew. Even amongst the four gospels there is so much contradictory information that one cannot decide which of the four is authentic. In fact, none of them can be authentic. In addition to being translations, they cannot be the revealed word of God in their present form, because they were authored by human beings, and present different versions of the life history of the Messiah.

On the contrary, the Holy Quran leaves no doubt about these matters with regards to itself. It meets all the requirements that I had outlined earlier in this discussion. For example, in the verse I recited in the beginning of our lesson today, we are informed that Allah is the One revealing this book. These questions have been answered with further clarification in the

following verses of the Holy Quran. “And surely this is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The faithful spirit has brought it, on thy heart that thou mayest be a warner. In plain Arabic language”(26:192-195). Before commenting on these verses, I would like to cite a few more references from the Holy Quran. “Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel — for surely he revealed it to thy heart by Allah’s command” (2:97). This verse is addressed to the Israelites who now professed enmity to the Angel Gabriel, for bringing revelation to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), where as previously for two thousand years Gabriel had brought revelation to the prophets of Israel. It is stated that he was now descending upon the heart of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) only by the command of Allah. Likewise, in the following verses it is stated, “And believe in that which has been revealed to Muhammad” (47:2). “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed”(2:185). “Surely We revealed it on the Night of Majesty” (97:1). All these verses prove that Allah Who is the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb-Al’amin*) is the One revealing the Holy Quran. The Quranic message is, therefore for all nations, and is meant to advance them spiritually from a lower to a higher state of development in this life, and the life Hereafter. The Angel Gabriel is the one bringing this message from Allah to the heart of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is revealed in Arabic which has been chosen because it can express the wisdom and knowledge of Allah in a most comprehensive and easily understandable manner. The Holy Quran was revealed in the month of Ramadan on the Night of Majesty (*Laila-tul-Qadr*). Thus there is not a single detail about its revelation which is left out. Where mention is made of the Holy Quran being revealed to the blessed heart of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), it is stated, “So that you can become the warner.” Why is this so? This is because the heart upon which such a powerful revelation descended, itself trembled with humility due to the awe-inspired by the Divine word. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on his return from the cave of Hira, a distance of four or five miles from Mecca, was still trembling after having received the first revelation. According to Bukhari (book of the traditions of the Holy Prophet), the muscles in the neck and shoulders of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were still trembling with awe, and he asked his wife Hazrat Khadija to cover him up. In spite of being covered up he remained tremulous for quite a while. The same condition re-occurred at the time of the second revelation. According to his wife, Hazrat Ayesha, even afterwards when he became more accustomed to it, he would still break out into a sweat on a cold day. Only the heart of a person who is greatly impressed by the power and dignity of the Divine

word is thus capable of warning the rest of humanity.

Another matter in which there can be no doubt concerning the Holy Quran is whether this is the same book from the first to the last letter which was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The first point that I would like to mention in this regard is that the Holy Quran is the only scripture in which it has been written down that Allah Himself will protect this Book, "Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian"(15:9). No other revealed scripture has made such a claim. The followers of other books now admit that their originals have been lost and what remains behind is only the translation. Interpolations have occurred in them, and even today changes are being made in them intermittently. Recently the editorial board of the well known Readers Digest eliminated forty percent of the Bible in their edition. In comparison, even critics of Islam admit that no other book in the world is as well preserved today as the Holy Quran. This is because, besides the Divine promise of its preservation, the following measures were taken.

- 1) The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as soon as he received Quranic revelation, would call in one of the scribes, and instruct them to have it written down in its proper location under his own direction. Other revealed scriptures were not written down right away, but in most cases hundreds of years later.
- 2) The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture that can be committed to memory, and since the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) hundreds and thousands of people have memorized it.
- 3) The Holy Quran is the only scripture whose copies were circulated worldwide, but no discrepancy can be found amongst the various copies in circulation.

This could not have happened without Divine intervention and protection. Thus neither friend nor foe can doubt the authenticity and complete preservation of the Holy Quran.

Meaning of the word Taqwa

The Holy Quran, "Is a guide to those who keep their duty (*hud-al-lil-muttaqin*).” The word *taqwa* (verb form of *muttaqin*) is mentioned frequently in the Holy Quran. It is therefore important to understand its meaning. In simple language the word *taqwa* means protecting the self from elements which are injurious, painful or detrimental to it. Such injury in case of the human soul is caused by evil and sinful behavior, therefore by definition of Quranic Law (*Shariat*), *taqwa* is defined as guarding against evil; *muttaqi* being one who is careful of, or has regard for, or keeps his duty. Sometimes

it is understood as meaning fear, because sin is something one should be most fearful of committing. Harmful and injurious behavior, and bad habits are things that human intellect and nature dislikes. Why does man, then get involved in these? One reason for this is lack of knowledge that such a path ultimately leads to suffering and fire (that envelops the heart in this life in the form of discontent, and assumes the more palpable form of hell fire in the life Hereafter).

Guidance for the dutiful

It is, therefore essential that mankind should be given such knowledge. This is one meaning of 'guidance for those who keep their duty.' Guidance, however is of no use unless it is followed. For example a doctor instructs us to take a certain medication and follow certain dietary guidelines. If the patient does not act upon this advice, he cannot benefit from it. Matters relating to the inner-self, or soul of man are beyond his comprehension, unless knowledge in this regard is given by Allah, Who created the human spirit. This is the reason why the Holy Quran, in another verse has been called, "Light, guiding thereby" (42:52). *Nur* means the light which illuminates matters relating to the inner self. Thus the Holy Quran not only gives guidance, but provides the inner light with the help of which man can follow the right path and reach his destination. It can protect him from going in the wrong direction, and warn him of pitfalls and dangers that lurk in the way. In fact all human faculties of action are two fold i.e., we can utilize them to do good or evil. Let us, for example, take the faculty of speech which distinguishes mankind from the rest of creation. We can use the power of speech to tell the truth or lie, to abuse verbally, or to speak to someone with love. We can indulge in backbiting people, or remember them for their good qualities. We can use it to disturb law and order, or to create peace and harmony among fellow beings. Thus all human actions are a mixture of good and evil. Therefore, for a person who is *muttaqi* i.e., wants to guard against evil, what greater beneficence is there that he is made aware of the difference between right and wrong in all of his actions. This is the meaning of guidance towards the right path. This Book provides guidance to, and distinguishes between the right and wrong of every action. Some people raise the objection that for someone who is already guarding against evil, what is the purpose of telling him about good and evil. As I have already stated, man despite his intention to guard against evil, falls prey to evil and wrongdoing because of incomplete and incorrect knowledge in this matter. For matters relating to the inner self of man, there is need for that inner light which can only be provided by the One Who has created the Human spirit. Those who raise such objections are not familiar

with the real meaning of the Arabic word *hidāyat* or guidance. It means guiding one on the right path with pleasure and kindness till one reaches the desired destination. *Muttaqi* is the one who intends to, and wants to guard against evil, but he has yet to walk on the right path and reach his destination. The spiritual wayfarer, who guards against evil, does not ever reach a point, where he is not in need of guidance from the Holy Quran. After the broad and general directions, the Holy Quran also gives guidance in finer matters of spiritual purification. As I have mentioned, every human faculty is capable of good or evil. Thus when man benefits from the light of Quranic guidance and guards against evil in all his actions, what remains behind is called righteous action (*'amal Al ṣāliḥ*), the reward for which is paradise (peace and contentment of the heart in this life and the more palpable heavenly blessings of the Hereafter).

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic lesson 10)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Who believe in the Unseen, And
keep up prayer and spend out of
what We have given them.

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَرْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Belief in the Unseen

In the last verse discussed, we are informed by Allah that this Book (Holy Quran) is a guide for those who keep their duty (*muttaqin*). In the verse under discussion today, those who keep their duty, are further defined. They are the ones who believe in the Unseen (*Al-Ghaib*). Unseen is what cannot be perceived visually or by means of our other physical senses. The Unseen in this verse means Allah. By use of the word Unseen, attention has been drawn to this specific attribute of Allah and its effect on our spiritual development. *Taqwā* (root word of *muttaqin*) has previously been defined as abstaining from evil and anything injurious to one's spiritual well being. This quality would fail to evolve in man, if the presence of Allah (Who is Omnipresent), could be visualized by our physical senses. For example, if the chief law enforcement official of a country is physically present in an area, then those who are aware of his presence are disposed towards following the laws and avoidance of criminal behavior. This does not mean that each one of those individuals is a truly righteous and law abiding citizen. The real measure of their character can only be established during the physical absence of the legal authority. If one abstains from evil while not being able to see the Divine Being, then only can it be said unequivocally that the quality of *taqwā* (abstinence from evil) has truly developed in that person. Such a person rejected the evil of a wrongful action after recognizing it and accepted the goodness of righteous action on the basis of a similar assessment. Only such a person can really be called a *muttaqi* (one who

keeps his duty and abstains from evil). Allah has kept Himself in the unseen only from human visual perception, otherwise Divine presence is with mankind all the time. The Holy Quran refers to this in the verses, “And He is with you wherever you are”(57:4); “And Allah is ever Hearing, Seeing”(4:134). Man may need His help, at any time and in any place, and if Allah was just confined to the heavens, or the mosque, then how could He have helped him? From the Holy Quran it is quite apparent that Allah helps His servants all the time as stated in these verses, “And thy Lord suffices as having charge of affairs”(17:65). “Surely my Lord is Preserver of all things (including human beings)” (11:57). If this was not the case the world would cease to exist. He is also the *Rabb-Al‘ālamīn*, One Who evolves and nourishes all His creation to perfection, from a lower to a higher state so that it can achieve the purpose of its creation. I have discussed this in my commentary on the chapter *Al-Fātiḥah*. Thus in every moment of its existence there is a relationship between the Creator and His creation.

The Holy Quran repeatedly tells us that, “Allah is Ever-Hearing, Seeing.” He listens to man and observes all his actions. He has knowledge of why man acts in a certain way as in the frequently stated verse, “And Allah is Aware of what you do” (2:234). He also knows the hidden secrets of our inner self and the condition of our souls as in the Quranic verse, “He is Knower of what is in the hearts” (57:6). This is not difficult to understand. God has created man from a state of non-existence to that of a fully developed human being. Not only has He fashioned his outer form, but also created his spirit within. How is it possible for such a Creator to be unaware of and be unresponsive to His creation, and to allow it to act according to its own design? Similarly it is inconceivable that the Creator of the human soul is unaware of its inner secrets and its moral condition. If one reads the histories of the prophets, and the appointed ones, it becomes quite evident that Allah listens to their supplications and responds to their actions and to those of their opponents in this very life. He brings to light the evil intentions of the evil doers, and informs His prophets and appointed ones of this beforehand. This proves that Allah is truly, ‘Ever- Hearing Seeing,’ and is, Knower of what is in the hearts, and He is with His servants at all times. In addition hundreds of events in the lives of these people testify to the truth that He responds to His servants who call upon Him during times of distress and difficulty, by bringing about a change in their condition. Unfortunately, the fact that Allah is not visualized by the human eye, has led many worshippers of form to go astray. Particularly in the last hundred years people influenced by the scientific materialism and western culture started making such statements that until they see God, they cannot be expected to believe in Him. How truly magnificent is the excellence of the Creator. The very same scientists who influenced their thinking are now

saying that although we can see and touch matter, we can never understand its real nature, because it extends far beyond atoms and electrons to a point beyond our comprehension. Thus we can only realize the real nature of matter through its properties (*The Mysterious Universe*, by Sir James Jean). If something as insignificant as matter can only be recognized through its properties, then why are objections raised when the Holy Quran (at least in this material world) teaches us to recognize the Divine Being through His attributes? From the beginning to the end, the Holy Quran on numerous occasions identifies the Divine attributes relevant to any of His commands or actions. A Persian couplet describes this very appropriately:

How very evident is the Source of all resplendence

The whole universe is His reflection for those who can truly see.

Limitations of human vision

These western oriented gentlemen do not realize that the eyes only fulfill our limited physical needs. In reality, they do not even give us reliable knowledge of God's creation, what to mention of God. Whatever information they do give us is flawed. Without light the human eye does not function, and even after its reception it can only visualize a limited spectrum of it. Even within this limited spectrum, it is unable to visualize the rays with longer wave length, such as ultraviolet, and those with shorter wave length such as infra-red and x-rays etc. Again the differences that are visualized by the human eye are merely in the outward form. In reality all things are internally composed of similar components of matter. The different colors seen in various objects by the human eye are not their actual colors. For example, something which appears red, is not really red in color. It absorbs all other colors except red which is the only color reflected back to the eye, thereby giving the false impression that the color of that object is red. Our eyes cannot even stand a slight increase in intensity of light. This is the reason scientists advise us not to look at the sun directly. Although the sun is ninety three million miles away even this type of minor exposure can result in permanent damage to the eye. Our sun is a small star, where as there are billions of other stars which are thousands of times larger in mass and the quantity of light they generate. These heavenly bodies are only a reflection of the light (*Nur*) and power of the Creator. As the Holy Quran states, "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (24:35). How can we then expect to see the Divine Being with our eyes?

The Holy Quran has explained this in the incident relating to Prophet Moses. The Israelites like modern materialists had asked a similar question from him, "And when you said : O Moses we will not believe in thee till we see Allah manifestly" (2:55). The Holy Quran further describes this

incident, “And when Moses came at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said : Thou canst not see Me; but look at the mountain; if it remains firm in its place, then wilt thou see Me. So when his Lord manifested His glory to the mountain, He made it crumble and Moses fell down in a swoon” (7:143). Thus when Allah cast the reflection of His power on the mountain, it was made to crumble, and Moses fell down in a swoon. If something as strong as the mountain could not bear the manifestation of Divine Power, how can the human eye (which is the most frail part of the human body) stand up to it? This type of difficulty arises because association with God, which is a universal phenomenon, has corrupted the concept of Unity of the Divine Being. This has led people to the worship of stone idols, the cow, or at the most that of a mortal being like themselves. I would advise my young western oriented friends to cast away this type of concept from their hearts. The strength, majesty, and dignity of the One Who is Creator of such a magnificent, powerful and limitless universe, cannot be measured. He is not a finite being that the human eye, which is the most delicate part of his body, could visualize Him with its extremely limited capacity.

The Holy Quran explains this in another verse, “Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision ; and He is the Subtile, the Aware”(6:103). Thus mankind or any other creation cannot visualize, or comprehend the greatness, and grandeur of the Divine Being. He, however, comprehends the full extent and degree of what they or any of His other creation can visually observe.

It is impossible to estimate the extent of Allah’s creation, or the limits of His universe. As progress is made in the development of telescopic instruments, and they become more powerful, the existence of previously unknown heavenly bodies is confirmed. The immensity of this universe is such that distances in it cannot be measured, except by the speed of light. The knowledge of the existence of this universe is also obtained by noting the increase and decrease in the colors of the light spectrum. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second. If we multiply this twice by sixty, we get the distance that light travels in one hour. Multiply this by twenty four, and then by three hundred and sixty-five to calculate the distance which light travels in one year. This is called a light year and is used to measure the distances in this universe. Human mind cannot comprehend the extent of this universe. Several years ago there was a news item that American scientists had discovered a galaxy 8 billion light years away which was estimated to be five to ten times our galaxy, the milky way . The sky we see full of stars, is only a limited portion of our galaxy. There are hundreds of thousands of galaxies much larger than ours and these amazing pieces of the universe with their vast distances surround us on all sides. They are formed from the

same elements and follow the same universal laws. This gives us only a small estimate of the power, unity and omnipotence of Allah. Human mind cannot fathom the depth of this limitless universe in which new discoveries are made every day. How can it be possible for the tiny human eye to envision the Creator and the Master of the Universe.

Vision of the truthful

Right after the verse, “Vision comprehends Him not,” the Holy Quran states, “Clear proofs (*baṣā’iru*) have indeed come to you from your Lord ; so whoever sees (*ab-ṣa-ra*), it is for his own good ; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm” (6:104).

The Arabic word used here is *baṣā’iru* which is the plural of *baṣīrat*. This word stands for the discerning faculty of the human mind. The verses that I have just quoted, therefore mean that the human visual faculty cannot comprehend the Divine Being. However, the discerning faculties of the human mind can recognize and find Him, through the luminescent proofs and arguments presented in the Holy Quran, which appeals to human wisdom.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 11)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And
keep up prayer and spend out of
what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَرْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

In the previous lesson the subject of belief in the Unseen was discussed. Some of the wisdom behind Allah's attribute of being Unseen visually, and being Omnipresent at the same time was elaborated. This is, however, such an important matter that additional comments are needed. I will cover some of these important points before discussing the rest of the verse.

Proof of Divine Existence

God's creation has always been a proof of His existence. In this age when science made further analysis of matter and split the atom, a whole new and remarkable universe was discovered. This and the ongoing new discoveries leave no doubt that the universe has a wonderful Creator Whose power, grandeur and goodness is a source of great amazement for the human intellect. In addition to the evidence provided by scientific discovery and human intelligence, there is another type of evidence which is ingrained into the human soul and cannot be separated from it.

The mind is the center of man's natural disposition. Imprinted upon human nature is a bond between man and his Creator which cannot be eliminated. The Holy Quran refers to this in these words, "And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves : Am I not your Lord? They said : Yes, we bear witness. Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection : We were unaware of this, Or (lest) you should say : Only our fathers ascribed partners (to Allah) before (us), and we were (their) descendants after them. Wilt Thou destroy us for what liars did?"(7:172, 173). In

these verses the Holy Quran reminds us of the natural bond which exists between every human soul and the Divine Being.

As a result of this natural inclination even the most diehard atheist, or the one who associates with God, sometimes calls out spontaneously to the One God. This crying out occurs particularly during times of distress. Even otherwise, however, the bond seems unbreakable. I would like to illustrate this with a few anecdotes. During the SALT-2 talks in Vienna, Leonid Brezhnev (the leader of the communist world), said to the American President Jimmy Carter, "Mr. President, if we do not sign such a treaty, God will never forgive us." Hearing the name of God from the lips of the leader of the communist world was so surprising for Mr. Carter that he immediately pulled out his note book and asked Mr. Brezhnev to repeat his words so that he could note them down correctly. Realizing what he had said, Mr. Brezhnev just smiled and remained silent. After the Soviet Union the greatest communist power was China. Chairman Mao was responsible for introducing communism to his country. Henry Kissinger, the American Secretary of State at the time has written that in his last days Mr. Mao Tse Tung remarked several times that, "I will be meeting my Creator soon" or, "God is calling me." When the daughter of the Russian dictator Stalin escaped to the U.S., responding to a reporters' question as to her reasons for leaving the Soviet Union, she said, "Without a place for God in one's heart, it is difficult for mankind to survive." This bond between man and his Creator cannot be kept a secret for long. This lady was born and raised in the lap of atheism, in the heart of Kremlin, where it was against national policy to even mention the name of God. Faith in God being so deeply ingrained in her nature, could certainly not have been due to the effect of her social upbringing. In fact all this is evidence of that inherently inculcated belief in God and His Unity which has been mentioned in the Holy Quran.

In addition to the evidence provided by the intellect, scientific development, and human nature, the most overwhelming proof of Divine existence, is His speaking to man when He responds to the quest of the seeker. He listens to his supplications and removes his distress. We see the most clear manifestation of this in the lives of prophets (*anbiyā*), reformers (*mujaddids*) and the saints (*auliyā*). The judicial systems in this world can give a decision in a legal matter on the basis of the testimony of one truthful witness, and on these very grounds send even their most prominent citizens to the gallows. There were in total, one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, and if we consider the number of righteous servants, this figure becomes even far greater. All these individuals were well known for their truthfulness. Their testimony provides overwhelming evidence for the existence of the Divine Being. A living proof of this communion are the

scriptures revealed to these prophets, other forms of Divine revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhaam*), which they received. These contained true knowledge of the unseen, which is further proof of their authenticity from God. The greatest proof of the existence of the Divine Being is provided by the very lives of these righteous servants and the sacrifices they made. In spite of overwhelming odds they succeeded over the opponents of truth, and through Divine revelation prophesied such events at a time and under conditions when success seemed very unlikely. All this is undeniable proof of the existence of the Divine Being. It is also through Divine revelation that we have obtained knowledge of the attributes of Allah, and the Holy Quran is the perfect example of excellence in this respect. From its first to the last letter, the Holy Quran gives us powerfully effective and exceptional knowledge of the attributes of Allah. I have explained this in my previous lesson that even in case of matter, which we can see and touch, truth can only be learned by becoming aware of its properties. The frail human eye cannot bear the sight of Divine manifestation, nor can vision comprehend Him. True knowledge of His Being by man in this life, can thus only be obtained through recognition of His attributes. If one could have visualized God, His Being is so attractive, that it would have been impossible for human beings to focus their attention in another direction, and they would not have been able to perform any other activity. It is, however, essential for God to be Omnipresent so that He can nurture us unto perfection, protect us, keep an eye on our actions and thoughts, and help us in extraordinary ways after hearing our cry for help. It is not in the human interest that God should be in front of human eyes; in this lies the secret of human freedom and concealment of their shortcomings.

Basis of all human development

It must also be remembered that that human spiritual faculties would have failed to develop if God was visible to the human eye. Take into consideration human development in the physical world. Both intellectually, and otherwise such development was only possible because everything was hidden from mankind since the very beginning. He struggled to make discoveries, and gradually progressed during this process. For example when Newton saw the apple falling down, he started wondering why it did not go in the opposite direction due to the resistance of air and the rotation of the earth. Then, with belief in the unseen, he postulated that there was a force which he could not visualize, but which affected every form of matter. After this belief in the unseen, Newton investigated further and discovered the force of gravitation, which forms the basis of modern

scientific development. In addition, he discovered many unknown facts which are relied upon by scientists even today. Similarly, the atom which is the basis of a new science cannot be visualized by the naked eye, or the microscope. It conveys to us the knowledge of its existence through its properties. Scientists after following the principle of belief in the unseen in this case, were able to achieve an amazing degree of progress. Consequently what we observe in the physical world is also applicable to our spiritual development. Only by belief in Allah, Who is the Unseen, by searching for Him, and striving in His way can we achieve development of our spiritual faculties.

Although the western oriented atheists do not profess belief in the Unseen, they undertake and carry out all their daily tasks on the basis of the same. For example, if they consume food, or drink water, they do so on basis of belief in the unseen that it is beneficial for their health. If they had prior knowledge that by doing so they could contract a dangerous illness; would they have taken this matter lightly? When they accept a job or get involved in a business, it is undertaken only on basis of belief in the unseen that such an undertaking would be beneficial for them. If they knew that taking up a job would land them in prison, or a business proposition could cause monetary loss; would they willingly accept such an offer? They support the marriage of their son or daughter with the belief in the unseen that the arrangement would be successful. If they knew that their loved ones would be hurt by the proposed union, would they have gone through with it? A person who does not believe in God travels in a car, bus or airplane with the belief in the unseen that he will be able to complete his journey. If he had known in advance that the vehicle he is traveling in would be involved in an accident, and he would die or get disabled, would he embark on such a journey? Thus it is quite apparent, that these persons with atheistic beliefs conduct their daily mundane affairs with belief in the unseen. Why then are they reluctant to believe in Allah, the Unseen?

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Mujaddid (Reformer) of the 14th Century Hijra, expresses this very eloquently in one of his writings, "Allah has manifested His Being clearly through luminescent arguments and circumstances. He then kept Himself in the Unseen so that mankind could believe and be rewarded for it." Every Muslim knows that the Holy Quran has mentioned a separate reward each for belief and goodly action. If God was visible to the human eye, then mankind would not deserve any credit for believing in Him, or for performing a righteous deed. We commonly observe that every one tries to follow the law in front of a policeman. This, however, does not make him a law-abiding righteous person.

The spiritual eye

The physical eye of a man disintegrates into the soil after his death. The spiritual eye which is a part of his soul, will accompany him into the life Hereafter. In the next lesson I will show that through prayer the spiritual eye of man begins to visualize God in this very life. That is why the Holy Quran states, "And whoever is blind in this (world) he will be blind in the Hereafter, and further away from the path"(17:72). It is quite evident that it is not the physically blind, but the spiritually blind that are spoken of in this verse. Therefore, man's spiritual eye which can visualize Allah through prayer in this life, will truly be able to see this complete manifestation of excellence and goodness in the life Hereafter. The Holy Quran tells us, "(Some) faces that day will be bright, looking to their Lord" (75:22,23). Thus on that day the countenance of the believers shall be radiant with joy, because they will be able to see the One Who is their Lord. The sight of the Divine Being will be the greatest blessing of paradise.

AL-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 12)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَّاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Prayer the means of Divine Realization

In the preceding lesson we have discussed the wisdom behind Allah keeping His Being in the unseen, and the spiritual benefits of our belief in Him as such. As a result of this wisdom, Allah is Invisible to the human eye, and therefore liable to be easily forgotten. Prayer is what keeps this memory alive in the human mind. Thus further on in the Holy Quran in the Chapter *Taha* it is said, “And keep up prayer for My remembrance”(20:14). There are some basic facts to keep in mind about the remembrance of Allah. He is Omnipresent and not confined to the church, temple, mosque or heaven. That is why the Holy Quran states, “And He is with you wherever you are”(57:4). Prayer can, therefore be said at any location. It is true that prayer, especially the obligatory prayers are considered most excellent and blessed when recited together in congregation. For this very reason a mosque is essential as a gathering place for people to get together and supplicate. However, when the need arises, congregational prayers can be said in any location. If a congregation is not available, prayer can be said alone, in the house, on the ground, while in a journey, standing, sitting, lying down or by using signs. Prayer can be said even in the battlefield.

God is Omnipresent

Prayer, therefore serves as a reminder to mankind that God is with him everywhere, and all the time. This is the way it ought to be; otherwise how could Divine protection and help be rendered to mankind in times of need? Questions arise about the Divinity of the Being Who is confined to a place like an

idol, or a human being, and as far as we are concerned, is not able to observe, protect, help and nurture us unto perfection. It is also essential for the Divine Being to be able to observe His creation at all times in order to nurture it unto perfection. This is even more so in case of mankind who is the vicegerent of God on earth. Man needs to be constantly observed and evaluated for his actions and the performance of his duty; for as I have stated in my commentary on the verse, "Master of the Day of Requit," every action good or evil has an effect, or consequence which occurs instantaneously. Similarly it is necessary for Allah to be able to hear mankind. The reason for this is twofold. First, because mankind is accountable not only for his actions but also for the statements he makes; and second, when man prays, God should be able to hear Him. It is also essential for Allah to be aware of man's inner secrets, because by hiding his inner thoughts from fellow beings he is capable of great deception and damage to others. The good or evil of any action depends upon the intent, which is again hidden deep within the recesses of the human mind. For example a murderer may slash a person's throat, so does a surgeon; because there is such a great difference of intent in each case, the murderer is hanged, while the surgeon gets paid a fee, with gratitude, even if the operation does not succeed. God is the Creator of man's inner self; how could he be unaware of what goes on inside his mind?

The Holy Quran elaborates all this by frequently referring to the Divine attributes; *Sami'* (The Hearing), *Baṣīr* (The Seeing), *'alīm bidhāt Alṣudūr* (He is Knower of what is in the hearts). The act of praying creates the awareness of these attributes within us. Belief in these attributes of Allah is strengthened, when we stand humbly with our hands folded, and bow down and prostrate with the knowledge that Allah is seeing us. Part of the prayer is said in a loud voice, while most of it is said silently. This is because Allah hears our speech and knows what is within our hearts. Prayer (*ṣalāt*) recited at least five times a day reminds us of the existence of the Divine Being. It nourishes our belief in Allah, and reminds us of the strong bond that exists between God and man, simultaneously strengthening our belief in it. Prayer, thus lifts the veil off the face of the Unseen, that is why right after the injunction to believe in the Unseen, we are enjoined to keep up prayer.

The true spirit of prayer

It must be noted that the Holy Quran always commands us to keep up prayer, not to merely recite it. Reciting the prayer is mentioned only on one occasion and that also in way of a reprimand, as in the verses, "So woe to the praying ones, Who are unmindful of their prayer! Who do good to be seen, and refrain from acts of kindness!" (107:4-7). This means that such people recite prayer, but are unaware of its true implications. The proof of

this is that their prayer is merely a performance to impress other people. It is not said with an honest intent and a truthful heart. The heart in this case is imbued with the love of material wealth, rather than with the thought of Allah. This causes it to forbid acts of kindness, due to lack of compassion towards God's creation.

As I have just mentioned, the Holy Quran has frequently praised, 'the prayer which is kept up.' One meaning of this is (as we have commonly experienced) that in the beginning, when a person recites the prayer, the devil (*shaitān*) tries to distract his thoughts in every way to keep him from converging his attention towards the Divine Being. In this situation, when one gets distracted, prayer instead of being kept up falls down from a righteous state. Under these circumstances, the believer refocuses his thoughts and brings back his prayer to the right state. Despite these trials, if the believer remains steadfast in his prayer, it eventually becomes a source of enjoyment for his spirit, just like good food is for the body. According to Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jilani (renowned Muslim saint), "Man is rewarded for the effort he makes to keep up his prayer." He was then asked if this reward ends once a person reaches the stage of full concentration in prayer? To this he replied, "his prayer then becomes a gift from God, and its reward is the pleasure and tranquillity that such a person experiences through prayer." That is why when the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to command Bilal (one of his companions), to recite the *Adhan* (call to prayer), he would say, "Oh Bilal arrange for our pleasure." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), also said, "the coolness of my eyes is in prayer."

Rules of prayer

The following requirements are essential for keeping up prayer.

- 1) Bodily cleanliness, or ablution, bathing and cleanliness of apparel. Injunctions in this regard are given in 5:6; 7:31; 74:4.
- 2) Obligatory prayers are to be recited at certain fixed times as indicated in the verse, "Prayer indeed has been enjoined on the believers at fixed times"(4:103). However, while in a journey, or in the battlefield, or for some other valid reason, or disability, prayers can be combined.
- 3) Effort should be made to keep up all prayers consistently as in the verse, "Who are constant at their prayer"(70:23).
- 4) Prayer should be safeguarded, i.e., kept up during a journey, illness, war, or any other time of distress and difficulty as indicated by the verse, "And those who keep a guard on their prayer"(70:34).
- 5) Prayer is to be recited with understanding, i.e., one must be aware of what is being said, and to whom it is addressed. Also one should be

aware of one's helplessness and humbleness, and pray in a respectful manner; then only can true spiritual awakening occur during prayer. This has been referred to in verse, "Who are humble in their prayers"(23:2).

- 6) During prayer one should not allow one's attention to get distracted as explained above in the commentary on, 'And keep up prayer.'
- 7) Prayer should not be performed with intent of impressing others as in, "Who do (good) to be seen"(107:6).
- 8) One should not be lazy in the performance of prayers. The Holy Quran speaks of the hypocrites as, "And when they stand up for prayer, they stand up sluggishly"(4:142).
- 9) As far as possible prayers, in particular, the obligatory prayers should be said in congregation as indicated by the verse, "And bow down with those who bow down"(2:43).

To recite the prayers quickly, and afterwards to raise the hands for prolonged periods of supplications, is akin to wastage of one's prayer, and mars its effectiveness. The Arabic word for obligatory prayers is *salaat* which means praying, and includes the whole of the obligatory prayer service. The proper manner is, therefore to understand the meaning of the whole prayer, to recite it thoughtfully, and with humility. Any prayer that comes to mind while saying the obligatory prayers (which are in Arabic), can be recited during the obligatory service, particularly while prostrating. This is the way (*sunnat*) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The example of a person who hurriedly recites his obligatory prayers, and then embarks on a course of prolonged supplication with raised hands, is like the one who goes into the court of a king, and instead of presenting his problems while he is there, comes out, and then tries to address the king, or the emperor in a loud voice.

One must remember that it is a great privilege to be allowed to appear before the Supreme Being five times a day. This is the opportune moment for the believer to attain the pleasure of the Best of judges, Who is the Master of his being, his entire life, and the life Hereafter. Allah, Who is the Source of all blessing, becomes the Friend, Patron and Helper of the believer, as is frequently mentioned in the Holy Quran. In this world if one of us befriends a powerful or influential person, he is manifestly proud of his association, and frequently brags about it. Who is more unfortunate than the person given the privilege of appearing five times a day before the Master and Lord of the heavens and earth, and perhaps the honor of His friendship; is unable to take advantage of or benefit from this opportunity?

I will, if Allah pleases, continue discussion on the subject of prayer in my next lesson, and discuss one of its most important benefit and need for mankind.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 13)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

CH.2:3

Prayer as a means of guarding against evil

In my last two lessons I have discussed the important reasons underlying the Divine intent to keep Himself in the Unseen. As a result of being in the Unseen, people tend to forget Allah, and are in need of a reminder. Prayer serves as such a reminder. Thus the Holy Quran states, “And keep up prayer for my remembrance”(20:14). It is not just enough to recite the prayer. In fact, a believer is enjoined to keep up prayer. In the previous chapters I have discussed the injunctions pertaining to this. In brief, prayer should be recited with understanding of its meaning, and with the realization that one is standing in front of Allah. It should be considered a great privilege to be given the opportunity to stand before the Best of judges, five times a day. The words of the prayer create the most excellent concept of the Divine Being and His attributes (provided, prayer is kept up, and not just said in a hurry). Prayer also strengthens the belief in our hearts that Allah, the Possessor of all perfect attributes is with us all the time; He sees us, and we can pray to Him wherever we are. He is able to hear our prayers, and is aware of our inner secrets. This is why during prayer we stand with our hands folded, bow down and prostrate; and some of the prayer is recited loudly while the rest is said in silence. When faith firmly becomes established in all of these concepts, the truth of the Quranic statement, “Surely prayer keeps (one) away from indecency and evil”(29:45), is fully manifested. This means that no dirt, or evil collects in one’s heart, or remains behind as a part of his actions. He reaches the state of *taqwā* or guarding against evil, which is a great achievement.

Spiritual sustenance

Now I would like to mention another great objective of prayer; knowledge of which has only been given to us by the Holy Quran. No other revealed scripture or religion mentions this. The human soul requires sustenance for its well-being, progress and existence, in the same way that the body requires food for health and development. This spiritual nourishment is provided by the institution of prayer. Our physical bodies which are maintained by the daily intake of food and water, will eventually die and perish into the earth. The human soul is the part that remains behind forever, and on it is based our life Hereafter. This is the reason why so much stress has been laid on prayer in the Holy Quran and Hadith, and it is a major edict of Islam. The human spirit which is nurtured by prayer, stays healthy, develops, and remains alive. This is the greatest blessing for mankind. The Holy Quran explains this vital truth in the verses, “And strain not thine eyes toward that with which We have provided different classes of them, (of) the splendour of this world’s life, that We may thereby try them. And the sustenance of thy Lord is better and more abiding. And enjoin prayer on thy people, and steadily adhere to it. We ask not of thee a sustenance . We provide for thee. And the (good) end is for guarding against evil” (20:131,132).

It is a distinctive characteristic of the literary eloquence of the Holy Quran that in very few and simple words, it sheds light on some very important and complex issues. The essential facts which have been described in these two verses can be summarized as follows.

- 1) Allah has created different classes of men. This is mentioned in another place in the Holy Quran in (17:21), “See how We have made some of them to excel others.” This Divine wisdom makes it possible for the activities of daily life to be conducted in a satisfactory manner.
- 2) Each class of men has been given variable amounts of material possessions. Abundance of wealth, however, is a means of trial. This occurs because the attraction of material wealth is such that man makes it the purpose of his life, despite the fact that the world is a temporary abode. The sorrow of leaving one’s prized possessions, and the realization in the Hereafter of the immense loss sustained by not having exerted oneself for the greatest blessing, the love of Allah, is in itself akin to the torment of hell. In addition, one will have to account for all that he was given in this world. If man considered his worldly possessions, a trust of God, and spent out of them according to Divine injunctions, he would be secure. His punishment otherwise, would be that of a dishonest person who betrays a trust given to him.
- 3) A believer should not greedily long for the fineries of this world. Worldly sustenance is temporary, and one is held accountable for its

appropriate disposal. For the believer, however, the everlasting reward is the spiritual sustenance which is bestowed without the need for accountability, and is of a far superior quality.

- 4) This spiritual sustenance is acquired through prayer. The Holy Quran is a wonderful book of knowledge and profound wisdom. While mentioning the procurement of this sustenance through prayer, the believer is first enjoined to ask his family to keep up prayer, and also to provide a strong personal example of steadfastness in the keeping up of prayer. This is so mandated because even in case of physical sustenance, man gives preference to his wife and children. A large portion of his earnings are spent in providing food, clothing and other essentials for his family. The man of the house who is usually the wage earner and spends very little on his personal needs, is thus told that just as he worries for the physical maintenance of his family, he should be even more concerned for their spiritual well-being. In order to accomplish this he is advised not only to enjoin them to keep up prayer, but also to set an example by keeping up prayer himself. Without a personal example it would be difficult to get the family's compliance.
- 5) Allah provides us with physical sustenance, and does not ask us for it. In a similar manner, when He enjoins prayer, it is not for His own benefit. It is purely for the good of mankind, and provides him with a spiritual sustenance which is not only essential, but of a far superior quality, and everlasting nature.
- 6) The final comment is that *taqwa* (keeping one's duty, guarding against evil) leads to a better end. Keep your duty also in regards to the physical sustenance you are given, for you will be held accountable for it. Utilize the spiritual sustenance provided to you in the form of prayer to strengthen and keep your spirit healthy, so that it can control your animal desires. If the animal within you is left unbridled, it will weaken your defenses (*taqwa*) against evil, resulting in loss and torment of hell. As I have already mentioned, if prayer is kept up and not merely recited, it leads to living faith in God, which of course gives rise to the quality of guarding against evil.

Spiritual Ascension

I will end this discussion by mentioning one other important aspect of prayer. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Prayer is the ascension (*Mi'rāj*) of the believer." Now the event of *Mi'rāj* (ascension) is well-known to the Muslims. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a state of vision (*kashf*) ascended to the spiritual heavens. He progressed in spiritual status beyond the level of all

other prophets. At a certain point in this spiritual journey, the Angel Gabriel who escorted him on this journey also parted his company, stating that from there on he would not be able to withstand the manifestation of the Divine presence. He advised the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to go on further by himself. As the Holy Prophet proceeded ahead, he came in the presence of Allah. He sat down respectfully with his legs folded in front of Allah and said, “All services rendered by words, and bodily actions, and sacrifice of wealth are due to Allah.” To this Allah replied, “Peace be on thee, O Prophet and the mercy of Allah and His blessings.” To this the Holy Prophet answered, “Peace be upon us and on the righteous servants of Allah.” What other conversation took place during this spiritual encounter is not recorded. The extraordinary precious treasure or reward, however, that he brought back with him was the permission for his followers to pray five times a day. The lessons that we learn from these events of the Ascension (*Mi‘rāj*) are.

- 1) If we follow completely the footsteps of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), we can ascend to the highest levels in the life after death, where we have to go eventually.
- 2) By completely following the path of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one can progress further than even the reaches of the angels. The Quran also tells us that if a man truly becomes the vicegerent of Allah, angels are committed to bow before him.
- 3) The spiritual status achieved by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the ultimate stage of *Fanā-fi-Allah* (loosing oneself completely in Allah). At this stage every word, action, and possession is spent in the way of Allah, and under His direction. This is apparent from the words of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “All prayers and worship rendered through words, bodily actions and sacrifice of wealth are due to Allah.”
- 4) As a result of this complete obedience and service with humility, Allah rewarded the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) with peace, mercy and everlasting blessings in this world, and the Hereafter. He immediately conveyed these to his followers, and all the righteous servants of Allah, because he knew that whenever Allah says something it is fulfilled. This is clearly indicated by his words, “Peace be upon us and the righteous servants of Allah.” In these words we see a remarkable display of the feelings of selflessness, love and caring for humanity that the heart of this pure and saintly person was endowed with.
- 5) Going directly into the Divine presence is a historically unique occurrence. What did the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him) request from Allah? He asked Allah to bless His followers with the same honor and blessing that he was blessed with in obtaining nearness to God. The permission to pray five times a day was granted for this very purpose. How unfortunate is the being who keeps himself deprived of this blessing, and does not keep up prayer; or merely recites it as a custom without acquiring its full benefit.

- 6) The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has called prayer the Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) of the believer. This tells us that prayer is the means to get close to Allah and recognize Him. The conversation which took place between Allah and him, is recited in the obligatory prayer service after the prostration. From this it is quite apparent that prostration is the posture of closest proximity to the Divine Being. Prolong your prostration and understand what is being recited, i.e., "My Lord (*Rabb*) is free of all faults, and He is the most High." In reciting these words, we are imploring Allah, Who has created the means for our spiritual evolution; just as He is free of all faults, may He nurture our spiritual progress, so that we can obtain freedom from all our shortcomings; just as He is the most High, due to His goodness and perfect attributes, may He create good qualities in us. If this prayer is rendered sincerely, in it lie all the blessings of this life and the life Hereafter. Besides the prayers of the Hadith and the Holy Quran, if one has to make any other request before Allah, he can pray in his own language. Say prayers with the soul moved to tears, for prostration is the time when one is closest to God. When a child wraps his arms around his mother and cries, maternal feelings of love and mercy are aroused. Crying of the suppliant in prostration evokes an outpouring of Divine mercy; for who is more Merciful and Bounteous than Allah?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 14)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who believe in the Unseen, And keep up prayer, and spend out of what We have given them.

And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee, and of the Hereafter they are sure.

CH.2:3,4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ
وَمِمَّا سَرَقْنَا لَهُمْ يَنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا
أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ ۗ وَالْآخِرَةُ لَهُمْ يُؤْفِقُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Broad concept of charity

In the previous two lessons we discussed the keeping up of prayer. In our lesson today, we shall discuss the verse, “and spend out of what We have given them (sustenance, *rizq*).” The Arabic word for sustenance (*rizq*) is ordinarily considered as meaning food and drink, or material wealth. It, however, has a much broader meaning. The dictionary meaning of the word *rizq* (sustenance) is, ‘any beneficence of Allah that is ongoing either in this life, or the life Hereafter.’ Sometimes it stands for the share, or fortune which a person has received, or the food he consumes. ‘What we have given them,’ includes not only the material wealth, but also the physical, mental and spiritual faculties a person is given. A person’s intelligence, insight, or knowledge are all included in the meaning of the word *rizq* (sustenance). In fact, the position in society, skills, or opportunities in life one receives are all included in this category. Knowledge signifies understanding about both spiritual and temporal matters. If one thinks about it, the physical faculties given to us are not by our own choice or will. In a similar manner our intellectual and spiritual faculties are all a benefaction of Allah, some are given more, some less. The more blessed a man is with these faculties, the greater is his degree of accountability.

All Sustenance from Allah:

The sustenance provided in the form of material wealth, may be taken as an example. In the very beginning, a person benefits from the wealth he receives from his parents. It depends upon the will and discretion of Allah, that a person is born in a rich family, or a middle income household, or to poor parents. Every individual comes into, and leaves this world empty-handed. Who is it that inspires the love of their children in the hearts of parents? They spend all their wealth for their children when they are alive, and leave behind for them what remains of it, when they pass away. A man cannot even control what he earns. His earning is not dependent upon his intelligence, knowledge, skill or degree of effort. For example, nobody works harder than a manual laborer, but what sort of return does he get? I have observed many highly learned and knowledgeable people who go hungry and remain in a state of poverty. On the other hand, totally ignorant people are overwhelmed with abundance of riches. Individuals with degrees in business and commerce can hardly make a living, while affluent businessmen, most of whom have no degrees, in fact are totally uneducated, and cannot even sign their names, are earning millions. If acquisition of wealth was under the control of man, every person would have been the owner of the fabulous riches of Korah. This, however, is not the case. The reason why money is worshipped all over the world today, is because all daily affairs of business are conducted through it. Acquisition of wealth has become the purpose of life, and man has forgotten God. On seeing this very detrimental effect of material wealth, religions other than Islam, felt that the emancipation of mankind lay in encouraging their followers towards adoption of nunnery and monasticism.

The Middle Course:

Islam takes the middle course. It encourages its followers to earn wealth honestly, discourages its hoarding, and enjoins its spending in the way of Allah Who has provided it. This is why it is stated, "out of what We have given them," meaning whatever sustenance is provided, is granted by Allah. If someone takes possession of the wealth of a donor, and considers it his own right and property, he would be considered a dishonest person, in fact an outright thief. For example, if you give a hundred dollars to a person with the instructions to spend a certain amount for helping the poor and needy, and to utilize the remainder for his own personal needs. If this person then turns around and spends all the money on himself, disregarding and resenting your instructions; would you not consider such a person as dishonest and thankless and hand him over to the police for criminal prosecution?

Means of spiritual development:

Why is there promise of so much reward, for spending according to Divine injunctions out of what He has given us? Good news of this reward being ten times, seventy times or even seven hundred times the original has been given by the Holy Quran. Why is this so? The reason for this lies in the fact that, it appears to man that he earns this wealth with his own hands, and often he does not consider it to be Divine providence. He, therefore considers it his own property. The things that can be accomplished with money, the fineries of this world and the luxuries that can be bought with it, all lead man to the great love for acquisition of wealth. Allah says, in the Holy Quran that when We ask of hell, if it is full? It's reply will be, 'Is there more?' The craving for wealth manifests in a similar manner. The one who earns hundreds is yearning for thousands, and the one who makes thousands desires to make millions, and so on. The greed for more money is never satisfied, it flares up and spreads out of control like an inferno.

In contrast to this the love of Allah, His Prophet, Religion, His Book, the love of one's poor brothers and sisters, and God's creation, is a form of love that is cool in nature. It has a calming effect over the warm and burning fire of the lust for wealth. A fire that is under control is useful. The one that flares up and burns out of control, becomes the fire of hell. The act of giving makes the desire for wealth subservient to the love of higher moral values. Sacrifice of the love of wealth to serve God and His creation, by spending one's wealth in His way, becomes a source of recompense for mankind. The Holy Quran states, "and spend out of what We have given them." They, the believers spend out of what has been given to them, according to the need and requirement. To spend every thing during the time of an important national, or religious need as demonstrated by Hazrat Abu-Bakr on one occasion, or to spend half of one's wealth as done by Hazrat Umar is the correct way. On other occasions, one should spend according to need. Since all the wealth belongs to Allah, why did He not keep all of it under His own control, and spent it on important religious and social needs? If He had done so, how would we have had the opportunity to develop spiritually and earn reward for the life Hereafter? The only wealth that one could acquire over there in abundance, is the recompense one would receive for righteous spending in this life. By spending one's wealth in the way of Allah, Divine attributes are evolved and nurtured in mankind, and there is no greater success than this. There are four basic attributes of Allah as narrated in the Chapter *Al-Fātiḥah: Rabb Al 'ālamīn* (Lord of the worlds), One Who nurtures, or evolves all His creation from the lowest to the highest stage of perfection; *Al-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), One Who gives without asking, purely out of His mercy; *Al-Raḥīm* (the

Merciful), One Who rewards manifold, on our asking for it, and making the effort; *Māliki yaum Al-dīn* (Master of the Day of Requital). The attributes of Allah are generated in us, to a degree proportionate to the amount of wealth we spend in His way. A person is doing the work of *rabūbiyat* (nurturing unto perfection), when he aids his poor and destitute brothers financially, and helps to improve their lot. Spending for religious propagation, to draw the attention of the worldly inclined towards religious duty, is nurturing them from a lower to a higher state of spiritual existence. Similarly, if a person helps God's creation without their asking for it, and voluntarily spends for the cause of religion, the attribute of *Al-Raḥmān*, becomes a part of his character. Giving bountifully upon being asked, reflects the color of *Al-Raḥīm*, and paying a laborer more than his due wages is invoking the attribute of *Māliki yaum Al dīn*. A person who spends in the way of Allah will be wealthy not only in the Hereafter which is a permanent abode, but by generating the Divine attributes within himself, he receives perpetual joy and contentment.

Service of humanity:

I have explained earlier that the word *rizq* (sustenance), signifies Divine benefaction to a person in the form of his physical faculties, intellectual capabilities and skills. A nurse who uses his or her physical and mental faculties to serve humanity, or an individual who strives in the way of Allah, are all included amongst those, "who spend out of what We have given them." A person serving God and His creation with his intellect and knowledge also falls under this category. In a similar manner those who serve their religion by dispersing their spiritual sustenance or knowledge, that they receive through the keeping up of their prayers, and the study of the Holy Quran, are also included amongst those, "who spend out of what We have given them."

Universality of Divine Revelation

Now I will discuss the last verse of our lesson today:

"And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee, and that which was revealed before thee, and of the Hereafter they are sure."

How can it be that God creates the whole universe for mankind, but does not inform him about the purpose of his own creation, or guides him towards the fulfillment of this objective? In my commentary on *Al-Fātiḥah*, I pointed out that the highest goal of man's creation is to find God. In discussing the first verse of *Al-Baqarah*, I mentioned that the Holy Quran shows us the path which leads towards God. By following its guidance, one

can establish a relationship with God. It is, therefore necessary to believe and act upon the teachings of the Holy Quran. In the verse, “And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee, and that which was revealed before thee,” the Holy Quran enjoins belief in the previous scriptures to prevent the development of arrogance in the Muslims. This also discourages narrow-minded beliefs like those of previous nations who received revealed scriptures. They believed that they were the only recipients of Divine guidance. The Quranic teaching, therefore promotes the feeling of universal brotherhood. The Holy Quran also informs us, and other religious authorities agree with this, that the previous scriptures have either been lost, or subjected to alterations and interpolations. It is, therefore difficult to believe in them today, and accept that they are Divinely inspired. This is the reason why belief in the Holy Quran is mentioned first, although the other books were revealed earlier. Only by believing in the word of the Holy Quran, can one acknowledge these previous scriptures to be Divinely inspired. This shows the great spirit of tolerance and benevolence of the Holy Quran towards other faiths. Only by recognizing the scriptures of other religions can mutual tolerance and peace be promoted. Due to the fact that these revelations have either been lost or interpolated, it is now not feasible to act upon them. In addition, these scriptures were revealed to certain nations, for example, the Israelite nation, or the Indo-aryans, and their teachings were temporary and incomplete. The Bible acknowledges this in John 16:12-14. The teachings of the previous scriptures that needed to be preserved and were practical, have been included in the Holy Quran as stated in the verse, “Wherein are (all) right books” (98:3). Thus, acting upon the teachings of the Holy Quran is equivalent to following all the excellent teachings of the former scriptures.

Belief in Life After Death

The last part of the verse under discussion is, “and of the Hereafter they are sure.” This is the greatest piece of good news for mankind, because no human being wants his life to end with death. In this verse he is informed that just as death is certain in this life, it is equally true that death is not the end, but the beginning of a new and higher existence. In the life Hereafter one has to account for his actions in this earthly abode. If man conducts his life in accordance with the Quranic injunctions, then the life Hereafter would be blessed with the joy and contentment of paradise. Remedial purification will otherwise be brought about through the chastisement of hell-fire, which is a unhappy and fearful closure. In this life the righteous are sometimes faced with difficulty, and the evil-doers have a good time. The end result of righteousness is, however good, and that of evil is bad. It,

therefore, makes sense to show concern for the Hereafter, and not be misled by some temporary benefit, or convenience. The pupil who remains oblivious of the end result, and wastes his time in play and entertainment, eventually faces disgrace and despondency. On the other hand, the student who foresees a better future after the qualification of an exam, and works hard to achieve this by not wasting his time in useless undertakings, will eventually be rewarded with everlasting satisfaction and ease. Without belief and conviction in the Hereafter, reformation of man cannot take place, nor can he undertake the hard work and struggle involved in the pursuit of righteous action. The purpose of man's life is to seek and find God; meeting with Allah and closeness with Him in a more perceptible form is only possible in the life Hereafter.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow) (Quranic Lesson 15)

I seek the protection of Allah from
the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Benefi-
cent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

O men, serve your Lord Who creat-
ed you and those before you, so that
you may guard against evil.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ
وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١﴾

CH.2:21

Message of the Quran is for all nations

This verse contains the first commandment of the Holy Quran. I, therefore felt obligated to include it in our Quranic study. The first point to note is that it addresses all of mankind in the words, “*Yā ayyuhā Al nās* (O men).” All religions prior to this were meant to be for a particular nation, for example, the Israelites, or the Indo-Aryans etc. Their concept of the Divine Being was also that of a tribal, or national deity; such as the God of Israel, or the various Hindu deities whose domain was confined to India only. As we have already seen in our discussion of the *Al-Fātiḥah*, that in Islam the concept of the Divine Being is of the Lord of the Worlds, that is Allah is the Lord of all nations and nationalities, in fact the whole universe, and He nourishes unto perfection whatever is within it. Science, today accepts that there is one single Universe, within which prevail the same universal laws, therefore its Creator, Master, and Sovereign is One. In the verse I have quoted for this lesson, the Holy Quran addresses the whole human race. Further on in the Quranic text, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is mentioned as the messenger to all of mankind as in the verse, “Say : O mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all” (7:158). This concept of world prophet hood was completely novel, and therefore totally invalidates the objection of some Non-Muslim critics that the Holy Prophet had copied ideas from previous revealed scriptures. This universal concept was altogether new and unique, as it was presented at a time when the human race was divided into nations

separated by vast distances. In fact, it was even new and unacceptable for the Arabs who were the immediate recipients of the prophetic message. The Arabs of those days would have been much happier if the religion being revealed was only for them, and not for all the nations whom they considered inferior. Today, when the world is becoming rapidly unified, the birth of such an idea, could be labeled as a result of the social environment. In those days, however, such a concept could only be acquired through Divine revelation, and in it was contained the great prophecy for the future, that the world would one day be united under the banner of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), by the grace of Allah Almighty.

Service with humility

The first commandment given by the Holy Quran, therefore was to the whole human race, “O men, serve (*na‘budu*, verb of *‘Ibādat*) your Lord Who created you.” In *Al- Fātiḥah*, commenting on the word *Ibadat*, I have explained its meaning as service with humility. The word used for prayer in the Holy Quran is *ṣalāt*. This difference has been clearly elaborated in the verse, “So serve Me (*fa‘budni*), and keep up prayer for My remembrance (*wa‘aqim Alṣalātā li dhikri*)” (20:14).

If we carefully think about it, we reach the undeniable conclusion, that the whole world is serving the Creator with humility. It is completely subservient to His laws and follows His command. If and when He desires, He can bring it to an end. We can observe a graphic illustration of this exhibited by the instantaneous destruction of stars in the universe billions of times larger, and more powerful than our planet earth. The sun, also has explosions with energy equivalent to millions of hydrogen bombs every minute, and it manifests fearsome and gigantic flames of flagrant firestorms. Although it is hundreds and thousands of times larger than the earth, yet it is bound to serve life on it in such a precise manner that there is not a seconds delay in its rising, nor does it stray an inch away from its orbit. Scientific discovery, today has recognized that this universe, the extent, immensity, and the power of which is hard to imagine, is made up of the same type of matter, and follows with complete obedience and humility the same type of laws laid down by its Creator.

This subject matter is very extensive, and I would now like to refocus on my original discussion. In the human organism itself, all the body organs such as the musculoskeletal system, the liver, stomach, intestines, heart, lungs etc., share a similarity with other animals in that they follow completely the guidance, and program laid down by their Creator. Mankind is totally helpless in this matter, and even a doctor can only intervene by following the laws laid down by the Creator. When Allah’s command of death

comes, both the doctor and the patient are helpless and the human body gives up its life.

Observe the animals and you will notice that their bodies are functioning a hundred percent in accordance with the laws laid down by their Creator. As far as the animals are concerned, their eating and drinking, locomotion, social interactions etc., are all governed by their instinct. There is no way an animal can go against its instincts. A lion for example, will never eat grass, nor a goat will become carnivorous. Animals are guided by their intrinsic computer, pre-programmed by the Creator for each animal species individually.

Freedom of Will

If Allah had so desired, He could have bound human beings by a similar design, however, He chose not to do so. This is such a great act of benevolence towards man that he should be thankful every moment of his life towards his Great Benefactor. All of nature and its forces are bound in obedience to the Creator. Man is the only creation Allah has empowered with the freedom of will. This power in the whole universe belongs only to Allah, as mentioned in the Quranic verse, “He does what He intends” (2:253). When Allah created man, and appointed him as His vicegerent on earth (2:30), He also gave him the freedom of will. An emperor appointing a Viceroy, or a Governor General gives him some executive powers, but at the same time carefully observes the deployment of these powers by his appointee, and intervenes, in case of abuse of such authority. Similarly Allah, by giving mankind some power through freedom of will, has not Himself become totally powerless. Whenever He deems appropriate, He uses His power to intervene.

Power to suppress animal instincts:

Instinct, in man is similar to animals. However unlike like an animal, it does not tie him down to make him a powerless slave. Man can thus, suppress his instinctive drive when he so desires. For example, he can control his anger. In fact, going quite contrary to his instinct, he can forgive the one who he is angry at, and thus remove the rancor from his own heart. He can actually go a step beyond this, and do good to such a person. The Holy Quran teaches us the method to suppress our animal instincts in the verse, “And those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others)” (3:134). It is easy to suppress minor degree of anger, but very difficult to control overwhelming anger or rage. A person who can do so is capable of controlling all his emotional outbursts. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said it very well,

“The real strong person is the one who can control himself during extreme anger.” In another Hadith it is stated, “Whosoever controls his rage, Allah will fill his belly with (the sustenance of) tranquillity and faith.” The Quranic verse quoted above enjoins not only suppression of anger, but also forgiveness. An even higher moral standard is, that one should not only suppress his anger and forgive, but in addition do good to the one who is the object of his wrath. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has sworn by three things: wealth does not decrease by giving away in charity; those who forgive others, Allah increases their respect and honor; and whosoever adopts humility and meekness for the sake of Allah, his spiritual status is elevated in return by the Almighty. This in reality is teaching man Divine attributes.

Spiritual benefits of:

Allah is Aware of all the misdeeds committed by humanity; if He was not the One to suppress His anger, and forgive mankind as indicated in verse, “And He pardons much” (42:30), this world would be destroyed in a split second. On the contrary, He continues to give worldly blessings to the non-believers, the atheists, the evildoers, even those who disrespect Him. The heart of a man that does not reflect the spirit of Divine tolerance, fails to recognize the Divine within itself.

We can therefore, conclude that if man like other animals was subject to the control of his instincts, he would seek retribution immediately when angered. Those who do so are at the level of animals. Allah wants to raise man above this level, so that he is capable of not only controlling his natural instincts, but also of acting quite contrary to them when necessary.

Guidance for proper usage: Sometimes, however it is appropriate to utilize the natural instincts. For example, if one does not get angry, he would be unable to fight gallantly in war, or on other occasions in self-defense, against murderers and thieves. He may also become extremely shameless, if somebody tries to molest his wife, or sister, he acts like a swine, and instead of showing revulsion and anger he actually encourages such advances. What then is the proper use of animal emotions? A man, who gets overwhelmed by his emotions cannot make the appropriate decision in this regard. One may then ask, why has Allah not tied down man’s nature to follow only the path of goodness? This is because a task accomplished through force cannot be called a good deed, or quality. A good deed can only become so when man has the opportunity to commit evil, but he controls himself, and goes against the evil suggestion of the devil by suppressing his evil tendencies. Honesty can only be called a virtue when one has the opportunity to be dishonest, and despite the need for monetary gain,

chooses to be honest. In short, moral qualities evolve only when man does good while fighting evil with his own free will, and not under duress. Angels, are programmed for goodness under Divine command as shown in the verse, “But do as they are commanded” (66:6), i.e., by nature they do as commanded by Allah, not having the freedom to act even slightly contrary to it, and therefore remain in a static state of development. Man, on the other hand, in the course of resisting evil evolves spiritually, and becomes the one to whom angels submit. Thus, by giving man the freedom of will, Allah has not only given him a great honor and a portion of His complete omnipotence, but also created the means of his spiritual development, and the realization of the Divine within him, provided he uses this freedom appropriately. I have already illustrated this with the following example. By controlling his rage, forgiving people, and doing good to them, man partakes of a Divine attribute; the very same attribute of Allah which is working every moment in this world. If this was not the case, man would have been eliminated a long time ago as a result of his misdeeds. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) laid down this very objective before us when he said, “Create the qualities of Allah within yourself,” and the Holy Quran states, “Allah’s color, and who is better than Allah at coloring” (2:138); color meaning the attributes of Allah. The words of this verse that follow, tell us how these attributes can be developed in mankind, “And we are His worshippers (*‘ābidūn*)” i.e., serve Him with humility. Commentary on this will follow shortly.

We now return back to the initial statement made in the verse under discussion today, “O men serve (with humility) your Lord (*Rabb*).” *Rabb* is the One Who gradually evolves His creation from the lower to the higher stages of development. Man’s attention is thus drawn to the fact that the command to serve with humility does not benefit the Creator, but is for his own benefit. Almighty Allah will evolve him from the lower animal stage to the level where he will be able to reflect the Divine attributes within himself. The injunction of service with humility is worth pondering upon. The individual who serves his Benefactor with humility, stands to benefit from His nurturing sustenance, unlike the one who is critical and disrespectful. For example, the pupils who are disrespectful and insolent, do not fully benefit from the guidance of their teachers or parents. On the other hand, those who consider their teachers and parents as their well-wishers and benefactors, and obey them with respect and humility, are the ones that fully benefit from their guidance.

Who is a greater Benefactor of mankind than Allah?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 16)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O men, serve your Lord Who created you, and those before you, so that you may guard against evil.

CH.2:21

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ
وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

Guidance for all Nations

In my previous lesson, I discussed the first portion of this verse, “O men, serve your Lord.” As pointed out this first commandment of the Holy Quran addresses not only the Muslims, or the believers, but all of mankind. Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the messenger of Allah to all of mankind, and the Holy Quran was revealed to him for the guidance of all nations; the Divine objective being unification of the human race in peace and harmony within Islam. Due to deterioration of previous religious orders, people had gone astray and were involved in religious conflict and warfare. The human race was, therefore given the same commandment that applies to the creation in general, that is to serve their Lord with humility. All of creation observes this Divine command in the form of natural laws, and serves with humility to the fullest possible extent.

Purpose of Divine Guidance

The ‘body,’ which is the physical part of man, follows the command, or law of his Lord without the slightest deviation. On the other hand, the ‘spirit,’ which Allah has breathed into man, and which forms the basis of his personality has been given the freedom of will by Divine wisdom. This leads to the development of moral and spiritual values in mankind. Without the freedom of will, and the ability to do good or evil, these qualities would fail to evolve. Only by having the freedom to lie, and choosing not to do so, can one nurture the quality of telling the truth. If there was no opportunity to be

dishonest, honesty would not be a virtue. The command to serve one's Lord was, therefore given; Lord (*Rabb*) being the One Who nurtures gradually, from the lower to the higher stage of development. Man's ability for action is motivated by the animal desires and emotions generated in his body. This is something that he shares in common with other animals, that is why doctors test medicines in animals before using them on human beings. Without Divine guidance man would continue to follow his low desires, and fail to rise above the animal state. We commonly see this today, in the western oriented materialistic culture. In fact, man falls even below the animal level, because animals do not commit acts that are against their nature. Such unnatural behavior is commonly observed in our civilized western societies, at times with the sanction of the law. In addition, drug usage which is detrimental to our health has become rampant. Animals on the other hand, would never consume anything that is harmful to their health. This is because they are fully controlled by their instinct, unlike mankind, which has been given the freedom of will. By proper utilization of this privilege, spiritual and moral values can be nurtured, as I just pointed out. Guidance to man for proper utilization of his desires and emotions, could only have been given by the Creator. This is the reason why in this verse man has been given the injunction to serve his Lord (*Rabb*) with humility.

The Creator, alone knows best, the purpose of man's creation, the appropriate use of the faculties and capabilities He has given him to achieve this goal, and the course of action to avoid. It is essential to follow His commandments, for He is not only the Creator, but also the One Who nourishes unto perfection (*Rabb*). He has not deserted His creation after bringing it into existence. He is nurturing it continuously to evolve it from a lower to a higher stage of existence. The rest of His creation, by manifesting unquestionable loyalty to His guidance, benefits from His nurturing (*Rabubiyat*), and continues to evolve and fulfill the purpose of its creation. Man, as already mentioned was given the freedom of will in order to evolve spiritual and moral qualities. This evolution would be impossible without being given the opportunity and freedom to commit good or evil. Man, therefore should also serve and obey his Creator and Lord (*Rabb*-One Who nourishes unto perfection) with humility, so that he can benefit from His guidance and reach the goal of his creation, which is recognition of the Divine Being. This purpose can obviously not be accomplished without perpetual nurturing and guidance by Allah Almighty. I have repeatedly mentioned the word '*ibadat* or '*abudiyat*, which means service with humility. Only the one who follows guidance with humility benefits from it, and not the one who submits only with reluctance and disrespect. We see an example of this in the nurturing provided by parents, or the education given by a teacher. The child who considers his parents and teachers as well-wishers and

benefactors, accepts their guidance with humility, and derives the proper and complete benefit from it. On the contrary, the reluctant and disrespectful pupil fails to take advantage of these opportunities. The question one may ask is, who is a greater benefactor, and well-wisher of mankind than Allah?

Uniqueness of man's physical and spiritual faculties

We need to contemplate further on the words, "Who created you." Man's creation is both physical and spiritual as stated in the verse, "He is Allah; the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner" (59:24). If we observe the physical creation of mankind, no two individuals would be found alike. From the top of the head, to the bottom of the feet, each individual human being is a distinct entity. Modern scientific research has determined that even the hair of each person has unique characteristics. In London for example, a thief got convicted on the basis of evidence provided by a strand of his hair in his cap which he forgot at the scene of crime. The forensic expert in this case, by microscopically analyzing the hair, provided the testimony that the hair belonged to the person who was eventually convicted for the crime. The footprints of individuals are also distinct, which accounts for the success of experts in tracking people down. Fingerprints and thumbprints are also unique to each human being, that is why such evidence is accepted in court. Even the body odor of every individual is unique, thus making it possible for blood hounds to hunt down criminals. Scientists, today have also confirmed that the DNA pattern of each human cell is also distinctly individualized. In short the Creator, Who is incomparable in greatness, has for this temporary worldly abode, bestowed upon each individual member of the human species, a distinct physical identity. How could the human spirit which is everlasting, not be blessed with such a distinction? The human spirit is, therefore also truly individualized in its capabilities and other characteristics.

The nurturing unto perfection (*Rabūbiyat*), which is specific for every human body, is also uniquely designed for the human spirit. This spirit, within its abode in the human body is called the *Nafs*, and with its separate upbringing, an individual forms a distinct personality. For this spiritual advancement it is absolutely essential that the human spirit should obey its Creator and Lord (*Rabb*), and thus achieve the objective for which it was created. This is the reason why man is enjoined in this verse to serve his Lord with humility, Who not only created him but, is the only One Who can nurture, and evolve him into the unique being he is meant to be.

Man's tendency to follow the religion of his forefathers

The verse then goes on to say, "And those before you," i.e., Allah Who has created you, also created your forefathers. Man has a strange weakness; in matters of religion he blindly obeys and follows his forefathers, without using his own reasoning to make the appropriate decision for himself. A Christian today, is a Christian because his parents and grandparents were Christians. For the same reason a Hindu professes Hinduism, even though the religion may not appeal to him, and this applies to all people of different national origin. In our society today, much is made of the generation gap, and it is put forward as an excuse frequently to disobey the parents. Strangely enough, in matters of religion, people blindly hold on to the faith of their forefathers, even though they may not practically follow it; hence the Divine word that He not only created you, but also your ancestors, and guided them likewise. It was their own fault that they formed associates with God, and became involved in all kinds of wrong beliefs, as indicated in this verse, "Mankind is a single nation. So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth, that it might judge between people concerning that in which they differed" (2:213). Allah gave all prophets similar type of teachings so that He may decide between the people, regarding that which they differed in. In spite of Divine guidance, disagreements arose between them again.

The fact that all prophets were sent with similar teachings, is further elaborated in the verse, "And We sent no messenger before thee but We revealed to him that there is no God but Me, so serve Me" (21:25). In the verse under discussion today, it is therefore clearly stated that Allah created your forefathers and ordained upon them the same teachings He has given you. They got involved in religious strife, and did not follow Divine guidance; why then are you embarked upon a similar self destructive course?

The consequences of following and ignoring Divine Guidance

The verse concludes with the statement, "So that you may guard against evil." The purpose of Divine guidance in other words is that mankind may guard against evil. Those who do not follow the Divine Guidance revealed in His Book, the Holy Quran, would then submit to their low desires and emotions. This in turn tends to cloud their judgment, and leads them to all kinds of loss and suffering in the form of evil. We see an example of this in our western societies today. If these Christian nations followed the edicts of the Bible, however faulty they may be; would those evils and cardinal sins that are being openly committed today in these societies be existent?

Every act of man can have either a good, or evil form. On the basis of his emotional involvement and desires, man is unable to decide when a good action becomes evil. For example, the search for and acquisition of wealth is in itself not a bad deed. Allah has called it His blessing, and enjoined that one should pursue it, but man on account of his lust and greed, fails to perceive when such an acquisition becomes detrimental to him. Wealth, after it is earned can be spent on good and evil deeds. The wealthy man cannot distinguish between the good and evil course of such an action on his own. This is to be determined by the Greatest Being Allah, Who is Free of all Faults (*Ṣubḥān*).

One meaning of *taqwā* is the keeping of one's duty. The duty of each individual towards another is a matter which cannot be decided upon by the parties involved. For example, there is always a disagreement between men and women regarding their individual rights, and a consensus has never been reached. The Holy Quran has, therefore discussed the rights of men and women in detail. To recognize these rights, and fulfill them is also keeping one's duty (*taqwā*), and no one can decide upon them other than Allah, the Best of judges. He created both men and women so that they could live together, and He ordained upon them their rights towards each other.

Before closing this lesson, I would like to point out that in both these lessons stress was laid on serving Allah with humility. The natural question that arises in one's mind is; how should he serve Allah? The answer to this question is given in the subsequent verses which tell us that the obedience of Allah lies in following the Quranic injunctions.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 17)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Who made the earth a resting place for you and the heaven a structure, and sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance; so do not set up rivals to Allah while you know.

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful.

CH.2:22,23

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أُشْرًا أَدَاءً وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ۝

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِمَّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝

Purpose of man's creation

In the preceding verse I had explained, mankind was commanded to serve his Lord (*Rabb*) with humility. Only the Creator of man knows best the purpose for which He has created him and the course he needs to follow in order to achieve this objective. The Arabic word *Rabb* (upon which I have commented in *Al-Fātiḥah*), indicates that just as Allah has physically and intellectually developed man from a lowly stage to a higher stage of development, He also wants to evolve him morally and spiritually. He wants to raise man from an animal level of existence, to the heights of moral development, and by nurturing him spiritually, wants to bestow upon him that higher life which is everlasting and is to continue after death. In this way man can achieve happiness and contentment in his temporal life, and the life Hereafter. This moral and spiritual upbringing can be accomplished satisfactorily only if man serves Allah with humility. For example, the obedient child who humbly complies with his parents and teachers wishes,

benefits the most from their guidance, unlike the one who is disinterested and rude. The humble servant, thus benefits from the nurturing of Allah, for He is a far greater Benefactor of mankind than his parents and teachers.

The Metaphor of spiritual sustenance

In the verses under discussion today, Allah has drawn our attention towards the external means He has created for our physical existence, in order to explain the internal and spiritual resources He has provided for our development. This is a distinctive excellence of the Holy Quran that it uses analogies from the extrinsic milieu to illustrate the internal truths for man, who possesses only vision capable of observing his external surroundings. Thus, we are told to observe how Allah Almighty has spread out the vast earth for us like a carpet, although in fact it is round. Although it is spinning fast on its axis, and also revolving around the sun, He has made it a stable resting place for us. In the last verse of the section from which these verses have been quoted, it is stated, “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth” (2:29). For the earthly existence and the physical development of mankind, He has made the essential provisions and has bestowed upon him countless blessings beyond the power of his estimation.

Seven realms of spiritual development

Attention is then drawn towards the heavens that they are not a mere scattered collection of stars, but a structure made with order and organization. Today, after fourteen hundred years of Quranic revelation modern scientific thought has corroborated this, that in fact the starry creation is divided into galaxies and a systematic arrangement exists throughout the universe. Towards the end of this section it is further elaborated that after creating for you in the earth what is above and beyond your imagination, “He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens; and He is Knower of all things” (2:29). In the physical universe we do not see the seven heavens, nor does scientific technology shed light on it, however, the Holy Quran and the Hadith both give us knowledge of seven levels of existence in the spiritual realm, or the life Hereafter. The verse under discussion today, therefore gives us a hint, that after giving you all the provisions and blessings for this worldly existence, Allah has made for you seven superior levels of spiritual existence in the life Hereafter. After death, spiritual progress through Divine nurturing (*Rabūbiyat*) continues within these seven levels of the spiritual heavens. It should be remembered that during the *Mi'raj* (spiritual ascension), the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw people, in fact even the prophets were divided into seven levels of heavenly existence. Glory be to Allah, all praise is His!

Glory be to Allah Who is incomparable in greatness! How Great is the Lord, and how magnanimous a Benefactor of mankind He is. In the verse being discussed today, making of the earth as the resting place also indicates that man's abode on the earth is temporary. Using the word structure for the heavens signifies that the earthly mode of existence is the foundation on which the edifice of heavenly life is raised. The way man leads his temporal life fashions his heavenly existence; that is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The world is the cultivating ground for the life Hereafter." Whatsoever one sows in this world, he shall reap its harvest in the life to come.

Once again after drawing attention towards an external phenomenon, an internal spiritual secret is revealed in the Divine words, "And (Allah) sends down rain from the clouds then brings forth with it fruits for your sustenance." The flow of heavenly rainwater stimulates the earth to generate its sustenance, and its fruits and flowers bloom. If rain were to stop, the rivers and waterways would dry up leaving mankind without food or life giving water, ultimately leading to his demise. Likewise in the spiritual realm, if there was no revelation (which has been repeatedly likened to rainwater in the Holy Quran), spiritual sustenance would not be produced, and man would die spiritually. Just as the rain water enlivens the dead earth to produce fruits and flowers responsible for the physical maintenance, and the development of the human species, revelation of the Divine word generates life in the dead souls of men, and provides the sustenance needed for the maintenance of their spiritual life. With it spring out the fruits and flowers which were previously lying dormant. These fruits and flowers are those fine qualities and excellent attributes that evolve in every righteous person who guards against evil, and become such an apparent part of his character, that they are perceived even by those who are of a worldly disposition. Although physical sustenance and produce, is created by Allah, man is duty bound to utilize the rainwater, soften and shear the land with the plow, sow the God given seedling, and put in the sweat and toil so familiar to the farmer. In a like manner, spiritual rainwater (revelation), the soil of man's inner soul, the seedlings of his good deeds, moral and spiritual blessings, and the spiritual exercise in facing trials and tribulations of destiny and heaven, all combine together to evolve a man spiritually, and produce the fragrant flowers, and the fresh fruits within his inner soul

Revelation a source of life for the spirit

Just as the rain in the physical world provides the link between the heavens and the earth, revelation is the bond between the earthly and the heavenly life of man. Divine revelation gives all the essential news of the world

Hereafter, and improves the worldly life of man in such a manner that it leads to improvement in his life after death. Allah has created such excellent means for nurturing the worldly and heavenly existence of mankind, that even if he spends every moment of his life in thanksgiving, praise and glorification of his Lord, it will not suffice. Therefore, it is stated, "Do not set up rivals with Allah while you know," i.e., you are commanded not to set up associates with Him, while possessing knowledge that Allah is your sole Creator, and the One Who nourishes you unto perfection. Any worldly idol, be it an effigy of stone, a prophet, or a spiritual, or a worldly leader raised to divinity, did not create man, nor was it responsible for the magnificent nurturing of man's worldly and heavenly existence that I have just briefly touched upon. In fact, like other human beings they too were dependent on Allah for their development. What a gross injustice it is to raise them to divinity, or as partners with God! The Holy Quran further expresses this in the verse, "Surely ascribing partners to Allah is a greivous iniquity" (31:13). There can be no greater self-inflicted injustice for the human soul, because man thereby deprives himself of the unparalleled worldly, and the everlasting heavenly source of Divine nurture.

A challenge for the critics of Divine Revelation

Revelation is essential for the moral and spiritual development of man in this world, to elevate him from an animal level of spiritual existence to that of a civilized human being, and to bless him with inner tranquillity. It is also necessary for the everlasting progress of the life Hereafter. This is fully expressed in the Divine words, "And if you are in doubt as to that which We revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful." Critics find Divine revelation as an easy target for their criticism. This is something they cannot visualize descending from heaven. They do readily admit to the fine and noble qualities of the Holy Prophet's character, and no fair minded person can object to the reasonable and excellent teachings of Islam. Those who did object to Quranic injunctions on certain issues, (such as defensive warfare and matters of divorce) have had to shamefully retract their statements, by practically following the same direction in their own practical conduct in these matters. In the case of revelation, as it cannot be perceived visually, objections were raised during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and, can even be put forward today. One, for example, can cast suspicion on the Holy Quran not being the revealed word of God, but a creation of the mind of the Holy Prophet (we seek refuge in Allah from saying so). A very simple and forceful reply to this is given by the Holy Quran that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon

him) was illiterate. The Holy Quran further challenges the skeptics that there exist many educated and knowledgeable persons amongst them, (as do exist in large numbers in Europe and America today) and if this is not the case, then they can enlist help from all over the world. In Arabia, during the Prophet's time, there were certainly many persons highly skilled and knowledgeable in the Arabic language. All of them, the modern and the ancient are collectively challenged by the Holy Quran to bring the likeness of its single chapter. Historically, in the text of the Holy Quran the challenge put forward initially was to bring forth a book like the Holy Quran. When this challenge went unanswered, the equivalent of ten chapters was demanded. When even this was not met, it was further reduced to what is demanded in this verse, "Then bring a chapter like it." It must be remembered that in the Holy Quran, while there do exist many lengthy chapters, there are shorter ones consisting of three or four verses like *Al-Kausar* and *Al-Ikhlās*. Can the entire world of critics with its large numbers of scholars and language experts even produce the equivalent of these three or four Quranic verses? What a baseless objection it is then to say (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so) that an unlettered inhabitant of Arabia, 1400 years ago crafted the whole Quran himself and put it forward as the word of God. The skeptics were, however, as dumbfounded towards this challenge 1400 years ago in the time of the Holy Prophet as they are today. This challenge of the Holy Quran stands for the whole world today as it did fourteen centuries ago.

It must be noted that this challenge is not only in the matter of eloquence and the quality of language, for which the Holy Quran remains, and has always been the standard authority. It is in fact a challenge to match the knowledge, wisdom and the light of guidance that the Divine revelation contains. It was through the miraculous effect of the Holy Quran, that within a short span of twenty three years, a nation sunk into the depths of depravity was raised not only to the level of decent human behavior, but found closeness with God. To comply with all these requirements, will really amount to meeting the challenge of the Holy Quran. In the verse under consideration today the word '*abd-i-nā*' i.e., our humble servant is proof in itself that the Holy Quran is the word of Allah, and not of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In this one word, the Holy Quran has encoded a sea of Divine wisdom. It is pointed out, that do you not observe that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the first and foremost servant of Allah, who follows this guidance revealed to him with complete obedience and humility. Could any liar or fabricator act upon his self created guidance in the manner the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did? He used to say, "I am the first of the Muslims," meaning, "I am the first of those who submit to Allah." He

was so conscientious of his status as a humble servant, that in all the formulae of faith, the word humble servant was placed before the word Messenger. He was more proud of being the humble servant of Allah than of being His Messenger. The sense of honor of Allah Almighty, in the matter of the Holy Quran is so great, that after putting forward this challenge, He has given the critics permission to call upon helpers, but has categorically stated, "Besides Allah." He has thus expressly forbidden them to call upon Him. We shall discuss this further in the next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 18)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it and call on your helpers besides Allah if you are truthful.

But if you do(it) not—and you can never do it— then be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers.

And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it. And for them therein are pure companions and therein they will abide.

CH.2:23-25

Quranic teachings are practical for all times

The first among the three verses quoted above was discussed at length in the previous lesson. To the critics' objection that the Holy Quran was not the revealed word of God, a simple and forceful answer is given. Another doubt that can arise in this matter is with regards to the feasibility of acting upon the Quranic injunctions in daily life. For a person who lives a monastic life, it is possible to comply with the religious injunctions. Is it,

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ۚ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْتُوا نَارَ الَّتِي تَوَدُّهَا النَّاسُ وَالْجِبْرَةَ ۗ أَعْدَتُ لِلْكَافِرِينَ ۝

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا مُتَشَابِهُونَ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرُونَ ۚ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ۝

however, possible to do so for the one who is involved in worldly pursuits? The reply to this was given in the words, “Our servant (*‘abdi-nā*).” Allah has called the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as His servant, the one who served Allah with complete humility and submission. He complied to the fullest extent with all the Quranic injunctions, and at the same time carried out all his worldly obligations. These being far beyond the level of an ordinary person. He carried out the common worldly duties of being a husband, a father, a kinsman and a bread-winner for the family. In addition to this, he was also a king, and a lawmaker. It was his duty to formulate such religious laws (*shariat*), that would remain useful and viable till the Day of Judgment. As a judge he had to rule in legal matters, and simultaneously meet the heavy burden of his duties as a commander in chief. If somebody fell sick, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was at his bedside to inquire about his well being. When somebody passed away, he would participate in, and lead his funeral prayers. People seeking religious knowledge flocked to his doorstep day and night. One is amazed at how a single person met all these personal and national obligations. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did all this, and at the same time complied with all the Quranic injunctions, thereby demonstrating that it was humanly possible to do so. This perfection as a role model is acknowledged by the Holy Quran in the verse, “Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah” (4:80). After his death, a group of young people while visiting Hazrat Ayesha (the Holy Prophet’s wife) inquired from her about the character of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The reply of this noble lady was that his character was the Holy Quran i.e., his morals were a practical illustration of the Quranic teachings. The study of the Holy Quran is in itself a study of the noble character of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Some religions propound seemingly beautiful teachings, but which are totally impractical to implement while pursuing a normal worldly life. Such an assertion, however, cannot be made in respect of Islam.

In the modern age another doubt arises in the minds of people and is sometimes articulated. It is said that it may have been possible 1400 years ago to act upon the Quranic teachings, but that it is no longer possible today. The answer to this objection was given by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the vicegerent (*khalifa*) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the reformer of this age. By his example, he demonstrated that it is fully possible, and indeed necessary to act upon the teachings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) today, as it was in the days gone by. He was thus able to find God, and achieve the object of man’s creation in this age of atheism and denial of

religion. He was a recipient of Divine communion, which has always been a sign of closeness with God, but has always been looked upon with cynicism by the skeptics. By being a recipient of Divine revelation (*wahy*) non prophetic revelation and voice messages (*ilhām*), he provided a very convincing, and a living proof of their truth. He proclaimed vociferously and repeatedly that the only way to truly find God in this day and age, was by acting upon the injunctions of the Holy Quran, and by following the footsteps of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He openly challenged all other religions that claimed to establish a relationship with God. Was there even one votary of another religion that had established a relationship with God, in the manner he had done, by following the scripture and the Prophet of Islam? None, however, responded to this challenge.

A challenge and a prophecy

As mentioned before, the Holy Quran collectively challenges all knowledgeable scholars of the past and present, that if they are convinced that the Holy Prophet, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who was unlettered, fabricated the Holy Quran (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), then they should bring forward the equivalent of its smallest chapter. Another simple, but cogent proof that the Holy Quran is the Divine word is then provided by making a grand prophecy in the following Quranic verse, “But if you do (it) not—and you can never do it,” i.e., that this challenge will forever remain un-responded. Such a prophecy for all times provides clear evidence that the Holy Quran can only be the Word of God, Who is All- Powerful, and has knowledge of the future. This should suffice to convince equally an ignorant person or the greatest scholar of any age. No one was able to disprove this prophecy during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), nor can it be done today.

Stones as fuel of fire

If even after this simple, easily understood, and irrefutable evidence, someone still remains skeptic, then it is stated, “be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers.” It may be questioned, why should the stones be put to fire? Some interpreters of the Holy Quran conjecture that the reference is to the stone idols of the Arab idolaters. This explanation is not satisfactory, however, because what is the fault of the idols, if it was man who created them, and then started to worship them? How could these idols be in the world Hereafter? At the time of the fall of Mecca, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had destroyed these idols anyhow. This interpretation is, therefore,

erroneous. There are two other interpretations which seem appropriate, and I like them both. The word *hijarat* in Arabic while meaning a stone, can also be used for a stone hearted person. It has been used in this sense in a subsequent verse of *Al-Baqarah*, “Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness”(2:74). The phrase stone-hearted person is used commonly in both the Urdu and English languages. In Arabic, the word *hijr* is also used for a person of frightening demeanor. These were those leaders who used their political prowess to intimidate people, and stopped them from accepting the truth, or incited them to fight against it. Even today, this occurs quite frequently. The Quranic statement, therefore means that ordinary people, and their political, or religious leaders who play a major role in opposing the truth will be the fuel of this fire.

The concept of Hell and Heaven

The word fuel indicates that the fire of base desires and envy that smolders in the hearts of the disbelievers, and their opposition to the truth in this life will kindle into the fire of hell in the life Hereafter. In chapter 104:6-9 it is stated, “It is the fire kindled by Allah, Which rises over the hearts. Surely it is closed in on them, In extended columns.” There are few today who worship stone idols, but those who worship their low desires includes all those who do not obey Allah. It is quite obvious that he who does not obey Allah, follows his low desires and emotions, which have the nature of fire. This fire which first appears in the hearts of men, can ignite into the conflagration of warfare, and ultimately appears as pillars of hell-fire in the life Hereafter. The Holy Quran was revealed to control the internal fire of desires in mankind, and to make it useful. An analogy for this is the utilization of controlled energy in rockets and airplanes etc., which makes it a source of progress and development. If this same energy runs out of control, it destroys the vehicle it was suppose to propel. Just as surely unbridled desires can consume man in its aftermath. Whosoever rejects the Holy Quran, will be unable to control this internal fire of his low desires, and it will ultimately flare into the burning fires of Hell. Those who are slave to their emotions and desires, their condition is appropriately described by the Quranic phrase, “Is there more (*hal min mazid*).” This desire for more could be for wealth, power, or unbridled sexual passions. On the other hand, those who believe in the Holy Quran, and thereby exercise restraint against evil, and purify their souls, their hearts are filled with cool freshness and tranquillity. This is the paradise of the heart with which every believer is blessed in this world, and the Holy Quran points this out in the verse, “And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens” (55:46).

The one who is fearful of the moment when he will have to answer before his Lord, is blessed with two kinds of paradise. Now it is quite apparent that most believers do not get the worldly paradise of material ease and comfort. What they are all blessed with is the paradise of the heart i.e., inner peace and contentment. After death this will assume a more palpable form of the blessing of paradise in the Hereafter. The young people today, who are influenced by the western culture, find it difficult to understand the paradise of the heart. A person who is content and lacks anxiety within his heart, is in paradise, although outwardly he may not be in gardens with flowing streams. The one, within whom burns the fire of discontent, is in a living hell, although he may be the owner of lush gardens with streams of running water. The last verse in this lesson gives good news to those who believe and do good, that they will have, "Gardens, wherein rivers flow." The Arabic word for belief (*imān*) is derived from the word *aman* which means peace, indicating contentment of heart. The word for paradise (*jannat*), means something which is not perceptible by the ordinary senses. This shows that by believing and doing good, a paradise of tranquillity is born within the soul of man, being hidden from the ordinary senses. This puts man in a state of blissful content, a heavenly existence in this world, and will assume a more perceptible form in the life Hereafter. When those blessed in this manner, are given such celestial sustenance, they will say it is similar to what they were given before. The spiritual blessings received by those hearts who enter paradise in this world, due to their belief and good deeds, are similar in their effect to the fruits of paradise in the world Hereafter. This is the reason why they would say, it is the same sort of sustenance they were given before. It is because of this resemblance, that the Holy Quran says, "and they were given the like of it." The spiritual delights of this life will be presented to them as the fruits of the life Hereafter.

Spirit - the real sensor of pain and pleasure

I would again like to lay stress on the fact that one should not look down upon spiritual blessings. In fact, all that brings happiness to the human mind is truly spiritual in nature. When the body dies, and the spirit leaves it, one is not able to taste even the most delicious of culinary delicacies, or appreciate the most melodious of tunes. The human body is merely the conduit, or channel through which the spirit perceives pleasure or pain. If the spirit is in serenity, it leads to individual satisfaction and likewise if it is in pain, the human body feels the effect of it. It is quite possible that an honest person may go to bed hungry, and a dishonest individual may have a table laden with dainties. The honest person's heart is, however, free from anxiety, and he is in a paradise of contentment, in comparison to the hell of

a crooked individual's anxious and fearful heart. A person may not have all the worldly goods and luxuries, but he may still be happy for the real happiness of a person lies in spiritual contentment.

Pure companionship and everlasting nature of Paradise: Two more things are mentioned after this, i.e., "And for them therein are pure companions and therein they will abide." It is no pleasure to be alone, and the best partner for a person is the spouse. They cover each others faults and deficiencies, and provide loving companionship and satisfaction. Being a pair is not however enough, it is pure companionship that is stressed. If a man's wife, though very beautiful, is impure and of a shady character, she becomes a source of discord in his life. The same rule applies to a woman; her life also becomes a living hell as a result of spousal infidelity. The other feature of this paradise is that it is everlasting. A beautiful garden which is just a temporary abode lacks the pleasure obtained from a permanent dwelling.

In the end I would like to mention that the heart of a righteous person even in this world is in heaven, and from it spring the streams of good deeds which benefit God's creation. This is the picture of this world's paradise which is described in the Holy Quran, "Gardens in which rivers flow." In the Hereafter the paradise of the heart takes the shape of external gardens, and the good and beneficial deeds of the righteous towards their fellow beings become the rivers which flow underneath these gardens.

Addendum to Lesson 18

Mr. Muhammad Aslam Rana, from the, 'Center for Research on Christianity,' at Shadara-Lahore sent us the following comments and inquiry on lesson 18. It is being published along with our reply. He writes:

For the students of the Holy Quran, it is refreshing to read Mr. Naseer Ahmed Faruqi's Quranic lessons which are being published regularly in the periodical *Paigham-e-Sulah*. In lesson 18, dated Jan. 19-26 1983, in his commentary on verse 23 of *Al-Baqarah* he states, Why then one may ask, should the stones be put to fire? Some interpreters of the Holy Quran conjecture that the reference is to the stone idols of the Arab idolaters. This explanation is not satisfactory, however, because what is the fault of the idols, if it was man who created them, and then started to worship them? How could these idols be in the world Hereafter? At the time of the fall of Mecca, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had destroyed these idols anyhow. This interpretation is therefore erroneous.' In this matter, it is respectfully stated that the commentators who consider these stones as the idols of Arabs, or other nations, are also correct. When these idols burn along with the idolaters in the fire of hell, the mere site of their predicament, degradation, and worthlessness, and the practical

illustration of the teachings of the honored prophets will be a source of spiritual and mental chastisement for those idolaters. As to the question, how could these idols be in the Hereafter, after having been destroyed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) at the time of the fall of Mecca? I would like to answer, 'For the Almighty, Who has the Power to raise mankind from the dust of his bones, it is not difficult to put together the broken pieces of these idols, and restore them to their original shape. The intent of this would be to question and chastise the idolaters. It is clearly mentioned in the Holy Quran that this will occur on the Day of Resurrection in the verses, "And on the day when He will gather them, and that which they serve besides Allah, He will say: Was it you who led astray these My servants, or did they themselves stray from the path? They will say: Glory be to Thee ! it was not befitting for us that we should take for protectors others besides Thee, but Thou didst make them and their fathers to enjoy until they forgot the Reminder, and they became a lost people. So they will give you the lie in what you say, then you can neither ward off (evil), nor (obtain) help. And whoever among you does wrong, We shall make him taste a great chastisement (25:17-19).

I hope these comments will reach the readers through the pages of your periodical *Paigham-e-Sulah*, so that they can be appraised of the correct situation.

Mr. Naseer Ahmad Faruqi's Answer:

Mr Muhammad Aslam Rana has ignored the following points in his commentary.

- 1) As mentioned in *Al-Baqarah* verses 23, 24 the Holy Quran collectively challenges all knowledgeable scholars of the past and present, that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is unlettered, and if they are convinced that he fabricated the Holy Quran (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), then they should bring forward the equivalent of its smallest chapter. "But if you do (it) not—and you can never do it then be on your guard against the fire whose fuel is men and stones; it is prepared for the disbelievers" (2:24).

In these verses, clearly those critics are addressed, who do not accept the Holy Quran as the Divine word and not the idol worshipping polytheists of Arabia.

- 2) Despite this if we interpret this as the stone idols of these idolaters, we are faced with the following objection. What was the fault of those lifeless stones? It was after all the idolaters who fashioned them into idols and started to worship them. This interpretation certainly does not appeal to my mind.

- 3) Those addressed first in these verses were the people of Arabia. Their stone idols were destroyed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) after the fall of Mecca. The contention that they would also be the idols of other nations, and would be put in the fire of hell, to serve as a source of spiritual chastisement for the Arab idolaters, leads to the following objection. How could they be a source of such punishment for those idolaters? They would in fact be happy that their gods were better, because they were saved from that inferno. The gods of other nations were false and were therefore subjected to fire, while their gods (whom Allah could according to Mr. Rana restore to original shape, although they were shattered to pieces) were true because they were saved from such a fate.

In the reference of Ch. *Al-Furqān*, that Mr. Rana has quoted, there is no doubt a reference to the false gods. In these lessons I have, however, explained that the Arabic word *ibadat* means serving with humility. The word *salaat* has been used where ever prayer is meant. Therefore, the Quranic words in verse 17 of *Al-Furqān*, “And that which they serve (*Ta‘budun* from *‘ibādat*) besides Allah,” signify those political and religious leaders whom people serve instead of Allah. Those leaders who thus misled the masses, will definitely be brought back to life to face such punishment.

- 4) In any case the verses of *Al-Baqarah* under discussion do not mention association with God, so that one should bring the idols into this discussion. The discussion is about those who do not consider the Holy Quran as the revealed word of God.
- 5) My interpretation is therefore not only appropriate, but also the correct one. The ‘stones,’ here signify the stone hearted people, or their political and religious leaders who played a dominant role in misleading the masses, by objecting to the truth of the Holy Quran being the revealed Word of God. I have supported this interpretation by reference to the dictionary meaning of the word *hijr* in my preceding lesson. I hope that Mr. Muhammad Aslam Rana will agree with me.

Most humbly,
Naseer Ahmad Faruqi.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 19)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Surely Allah disdains not to set forth any parable—a gnat or anything above that. Then as for those who believe, they know that it is the truth from their Lord; and as for those who disbelieve, they say: What is it that Allah means by this parable? Many He leaves in error by it and many He leads aright by it. And He leaves in error by it only the transgressors,

Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land. These it is that are the losers.

How can you deny Allah and you were without life and He gave you life? Again, He will cause you to die and again bring you to life, then you shall be brought back to Him.

He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth. And He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens; and He is Knower of all things.

CH.2:26-29

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَا بَعُوضَةً
فَمَا كَفَرْتُمْ بِهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ
الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ
مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا
وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ
وَيَقْضُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ
فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ
ثُمَّ يَمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ لَنُرجعون ﴿٢٨﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا
ثُمَّ أَسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ
سَمَاوَاتٍ ۗ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٩﴾

Weakness of false deities

You may remember that in the beginning of this segment which was discussed in the preceding lesson; a collective challenge was given to those who question the authenticity of the Holy Quran as the word of God. It was stated, 'if their assertion that the Holy Quran was a fabrication of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was true, (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), then it behooves them to produce the equivalent of its smallest chapter, and to call on all their helpers in this matter, except Allah.' No one accepted this challenge, but a new objection was put forward. It was said that there was nothing extraordinary about the Holy Quran, for it contained examples of very trivial things. The parables which led to this objection are those speaking of the weakness of the false deities; as seen in these verses, "The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house, and surely the frailest of the houses is the spider's house" (29:41) ; "O people, a parable is set forth, so listen to it. Surely those whom you call upon besides Allah cannot create a fly though they should all gather for it; and should the fly carry aught from them, they could not take it back from it: weak are the invoker and the invoked" (22:73). Instead of the spider and the fly, the verses under discussion today mention the gnat to characterize this objection. This is because the *ba'ūdah*, or the *gnat*, is among the Arabs a proverbially weak creature, so that to express the utmost degree of weakness they say, 'weaker than the gnat.'

In verse 29:41, the Holy Quran compares those who associate with Allah to a spider that spins an intricate web for a dwelling. The weak nature of that structure becomes evident, when it gets blown away with a gust of wind. Those who associate with Allah also weave a very intricate and complicated web of their beliefs, and spend a great degree of effort in doing so. Like the spider's web, it is also very fragile and gets blown away with a single assault of truth. The parable of the fly is used similarly in verse 22:73 to describe the weakness of these false deities. The critics when they noted these examples, sarcastically remarked as to what kind of a Divine word was this which gave the example of such lowly creatures as the spider and the fly. To this the Holy Quran replies that those who believe, recognize these examples to be the truth (that it is the truth from their Lord-*Rabb*), and know that He has used these parables to nurture mankind from a lower to a higher stage of existence. The true word, no matter how trivial, is very useful and essential, if it serves to elevate man from the lowly stage of associating with God, to the higher spiritual realm of monotheistic belief. Belief illuminates a man's soul in a manner that he can recognize the relevance of such examples. Those who disbelieve (the Arabic word for disbelief -*kufr*,

means covering over), cover their intellectual faculties, and thus fail to use them appropriately. As a consequence of this, they fail to understand such examples and therefore raise objections. These are otherwise very simple and easily understood parables, which illustrate in a very effective manner the absurdity of associating with Allah.

Guidance of the Holy Quran

The words of the Holy Quran which follow, “Many He leaves in error by it—*yudzillu bihi kathīran,*” are also the object of their criticism. They interpret the Arabic word *yu dżillu* as *leading astray* and thereby conclude (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so) that the Holy Quran leads astray a large number of people. Such objections can only be raised by those who become intellectually so blind, that while leveling such criticism they totally disregard the whole text of the Quran. In fact, the Holy Quran at the outset in reply to the prayer of *Al-Fātiḥah* states, “This Book there is no doubt in it, is a guidance for those who guard against evil” (2:1). There are in addition frequent statements in the Holy Quran calling it the, ‘Guide for all mankind.’ It is also called, ‘Guidance and Light,’ i.e., it possesses the complete guidance and light which illuminates the spiritual path in such a manner that he who treads on it cannot falter in his course and direction. Quite contrary to this, the devil is said to be, “surely he is an enemy, openly leading astray (*mudżillum*)” (28:15), “And certainly he led astray (*adżalla*) numerous people from among you” (36:62). “And those who disbelieve will say (on the Day of Judgment): Our Lord show us those who led us astray (*adżallana*) from among the jinn and the men that we may trample them under our feet, so that they may be of the lowest” (41:29). These verses make it quite clear that the Arabic word *idżlāl* (and its various forms) when used in terms of leading astray is applicable only to the devil, or those who follow him. The other meaning of *Idh-lal* is to find someone erring or to declare one in error. For example it is said, ‘the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) came upon a nation and found it in *idżlāl* (astray). No one using his common sense would translate this as the Prophet leading those people astray. Another example of this is that if some one’s camel is lost, in Arabic they would say, *adżlaltu Albahir.*’ No one translates this as meaning, that person led his camel astray. In fact it means the camel lost its way and could not be found. An Arab poet in one of his poetic verses remarks, ‘I got drunk to the point that my friend declared me to be the one gone astray (*adżallani siddiqi*).’ Thus the meaning of the word *idżlāl* as, ‘to be found astray,’ or ‘to declare as having gone astray,’ is the sense in which it has been used in the verse being discussed in this lesson. Allah, by means of this Holy Quran declares many to be in error and many are led in the right direction by it.

The transgressors

It is the distinctive quality of this Holy Book, that it informs and warns those who have gone astray, and many of these find the right way. It then identifies those who are astray, as being the transgressors. A transgressor is the one who exceeds the limits of the religious law or *shariat*. Every religion gave its legal code, and in this matter the religious law of Islam is explicit and complete. Those who dislike such limitations, and disregard them, become the transgressors. For example the religious law instructs us to earn an honest living. Those who use dishonest means, are the transgressors. These are, according to the Holy Quran, therefore, the ones who, after having been guided in the right direction, went astray.

The Covenant of Allah: The other group of people who are labeled as transgressors are those who broke the covenant of Allah after it was made firm. The Holy Quran has identified this covenant in the following verses, “ And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes ; we bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection: We were unaware of this” (7:172). This bond or covenant which is ingrained into the soul of every human child, male or female before his birth, is called the natural covenant. Human nature thus bears witness to this relationship with the Creator. The reason given for creating this bond is to ascertain that man, when he meets Allah on the Day of Judgment, is not able to deny having knowledge of Him. In some of my earlier lessons I have given examples of atheists, such as leaders of the communist world, who spontaneously admitted to the existence of the Divine Being in unguarded moments. The other component of this covenant is the natural inclination of mankind towards worship of One God. This is why during moments of spontaneity or urgency, man cries out for God’s assistance, although under normal circumstances he may associate others with Him. Man is, therefore reminded of the testimony of his own nature on the Oneness of the Divine Being, so that on the Day of Judgment he does not try to vindicate himself by blaming his forefathers for innovating the associates with God. As regards this covenant, we are further informed that the transgressors, after bearing witness to it and its confirmation, become responsible for breaking it. This confirmation is brought through Divine revelation which comes to confirm both the existence of God and the Oneness of His Being.

The worst example of those who transgress is given in the words, “Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined.” What is that which Allah has ordered to be joined? It is the same relation or bond between man and God. All

Prophets were sent to invite man towards God and to re-establish this shattered bond. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has been mentioned in this regard several times. For purposes of brevity, I will mention only a few instances as shown in these verses, “And as an inviter to Allah by His permission” (33:46); “Say: This is my way: I call to Allah” (12:108).

Regarding Prophet Moses, the Persian saint Maulana Rum has appropriately mentioned in one of his couplets, “The purpose of your coming was to bond people with God.” Who are the ones responsible for breaking this bond instead of strengthening it? These are the people who are spreading atheism on an international level, as is being done through communism and other similar movements in the world. Prior to this are mentioned, those who broke their own natural covenant they had made with Allah. That is deplorable, but it is even worse to invite others to atheism, which is what is mentioned here.

Consequences of transgression: Having a relationship with God strengthens one’s belief in Him. As a consequence of this, the fear of God is generated in one’s heart and he is saved from usurping the rights of others. When this bond is broken, unbridled animal desires lead to uncontrolled freedom of action; as a result of these evil acts, violation of human rights and cruelty is committed, leading to mischief in the land. This is the ultimate and worst category of transgressors which is alluded to in this verse as, “and make mischief in the land.”

In our western society today, we can see in living colors the violation of various forms of such covenants, and the mischief in the land as a result of such behavior. Initially the religious law was discarded after being labeled a curse, and the society drifted towards atheism. This was followed by communism, and other strong western movements to convert others to atheism. Communism is openly an atheistic movement which encouraged billions of people to deny God. Besides communism, however, voices were raised from Europe and America, and relayed in print all over the world, that there was no God, and if there was one, He no longer exists (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so). Such unbridled freedom has resulted in a general increase in evil actions, sexual decadence, violation of human rights, disregard for the rights of the weak and cruelty towards them.

Quranic debate with the atheists

To correct this worldwide trend towards atheism, the Holy Quran has given cogent arguments for the existence of the Divine Being. It states, “How can you deny Allah and you were without life and He gave you life?” Man’s very existence is witness to the fact that he was totally insignificant, and

was blessed with the gift of life by the Divine Being. Why does he not ponder on the fact that a year prior to his birth date he did not even exist? Is it not a supreme accomplishment! that nothingness was created into life? Who evolved him from a state of nonexistence to a life form? He obviously could not have done it himself. Parents are merely the means, they on their own cannot fashion, or give form to the baby, nor can they breathe life into him. Then it is stated, "Again, He will cause you to die." Who wants to die? Man is however totally helpless in this matter. There is a Being higher than him, who causes him to die, despite all his efforts and those of others who want to save him. The Quranic verse, however, abounds in Divine mercy, as it immediately says, "and again bring you to life, then you shall be brought back to Him." It assures man not to give up hope, that he will again be given life, to return to Allah where from he came. Mans attention is then drawn to the fact that Allah, "He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth." Man has created none of it. The farmer is the one who sows the seed, but the seed itself is created by Allah. The earth with all its wonders is created by Him. Take for example, the miracle of water, who is its Creator? There is only one answer to this, it is Allah Who does all this. It is then stated, "And He directed Himself to the heaven, so He made them complete seven heavens," thus giving the good news of progressive and everlasting spiritual development. Man in this age of development is presumptuous of the advances he has made in his knowledge, therefore the last statement made in these verses is, "and He is Knower of all things." It becomes quite evident, that the One Who has created the earth and all that is in it, possesses the best and most intricate knowledge of His creation. As far as knowledge of the life Hereafter, and its seven heavens are concerned, it is known only to Him. Allah is the Creator of all knowledge on this earth and makes it known to man through inspiration or Divine communication (*ilhām*), as we shall discuss in the next section. Knowledge about spiritual development, the life Hereafter and the heavenly stages of its development could certainly not have been discovered by man on his own. This is also given to him by Allah through Divine revelation. This will also be discussed in the next section.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 20)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And when thy Lord said (qaa-la) to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth, they said : Wilt Thou place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood? And we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness. He said : Surely I know what you know not.

And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said : Tell Me the names of those if you are right.

They said : Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise.

CH.2:30-32

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۗ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ ۗ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

قَالُوا أَسْمِعْكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

The incident of Adam and Eve

In its apparent meaning, these verses appear to narrate an incident, however, they contain an important and fundamental theme. Due to their inability to understand the real significance of these words, people have propagated a very wrong interpretation of their meaning. This interpretation has become firmly established, and when an idea becomes firmly rooted, it becomes very difficult to dislodge it from the minds of people. Since this wrong interpretation is not about a basic principle of Islam, I would have preferred not to discuss it. It does, however involve certain basic subjects which I will be referring to repeatedly in my subsequent lessons, and in any case, it behooves a person to clarify wrong impressions. I, therefore

beseech Allah for His assistance, and embark on the discussion of this section, so that with His blessing, I may be able to understand the issues myself, and also explain them to others. *Ameen* (be it so). Due to time the limitation of fifteen minutes for each lesson, I have not written down, or translated the section in full. Our listeners are perhaps familiar with the incident narrated in this section. If this is not the case I advise them to read verses 30-39 of *Al-Baqarah*, with their translation.

(Translators Note : translation of the verses 33-39 is given here for the facility of the reader)

He said : O Adam, inform them of their names. So when he informed them of their names, He said : Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide.

And when We said to the angels, Be submissive to Adam, they submitted, but Iblis (did not). He refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers.

And We said : O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden, and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and approach not this tree, lest you be of the unjust.

But the devil made them slip from it, and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. And We said : Go forth, some of you are the enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a provision for a time.

Then Adam received (revealed) words from his Lord, and He turned to him (mercifully). Surely He is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful.

We said : Go forth from this state all. Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then who-ever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

And (as to) those who disbelieve in and reject Our messages, they are the companions of the Fire ; in it they will abide.

Erroneous interpretation of: The ordinary understanding is that this was perhaps a gathering in which Allah, the angels, Prophet Adam and Eve, *Iblis* or the *shaiṭān* (devil) were all present. Direct conversation took place first between Allah and the angels, then between Allah and Prophet Adam, and eventually between the devil and Allah. All of this is narrated in this section. In this mutual conversation the angels objected to the Divine intent of making Adam as His Vicegerent on earth (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so). The basis of this objection was their knowledge that Adam was going to create mischief in the land and spill blood. According to some commentators, the angels felt that they were better qualified to be the vicegerents of Allah, because they glorified, praised and extolled His

Holiness. Another misconception is that when the angels were commanded to prostrate before Adam, the devil was also addressed as an angel because, according to these commentators, the devil was the master angel. The devil then verbally refused to obey the Divine command. The angels showed disrespect to the Divine command by their objection, and the devil was disrespectful by his refusal.

In fact, all these wrong impressions are created by not thoroughly understanding the use of the word *qāla*, in the Arabic language. The second erroneous presumption is that all these events occurred either simultaneously, or one after the other. It is, however, the style of the Holy Quran that it gathers together the essential elements of a subject matter together in one place. This does not indicate that all those elements occurred one after the other in a sequential manner. For example, in the first section of chapter 19-*Al-Maryam*, Prophet Zacharias is given the good news of the birth of a son Yahya (John). This is immediately followed by the Divine command, “O John, take hold of the Book with strength.” Now between these two events there was at least a time lapse of forty years. This example clearly illustrates that in the Holy Quran the essential elements related to the same topic are narrated together, and this should not lead one to presume incorrectly that they occurred sequentially. The incidents related to Prophet Adam which, are described in these verses, have been misunderstood not only because they were thought to have occurred in sequence, but also because the meaning of the Arabic word *qāla*, which is frequently repeated in this section, is not fully comprehended.

Qaa-la which is derived from the root *qa-ul* means ‘saying something verbally.’ However, it is also used for ‘saying something in one’s mind,’ or ‘feeling it within oneself.’ An example of this usage from the Holy Quran itself is, “And say within themselves (*naqūlu*) : Why does not Allah punish us” (58:8). The word *qāla* is also used for expressing something with one’s state of existence. For example, the submission of the earth and the heaven to their Lord is described as: They both said (*qālata*): We come willingly (41:11). Sometimes to describe a matter which has been brought about by the power of Allah, and the servitude of things to His command, the word *qāla* is used, as in the verse, “We said (*qulnā*) : O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham” (21:69). Ibn-Athir writes that with the word *qaul* the Arabs were able to express all actions although nothing may have been said with the tongue. For example, *qāla bi yadīhi* (he said with his hands), which actually means he held on to something with his hands. In this case, the act of holding on, is referred to by the word *qā-la*. Similarly in *qāla bi rajulīhi* (he said with his feet) actually means he went on foot. In this case, for the act of walking, the word *qaa-la* has been used. Again it is said *qāla bi Almā ’i’alā yadīhi* (he said with water on his hand) which actually means

he poured water on his hand. In this case the word *qāla* has been used for the act of pouring water. In short it is worthwhile to remember that the Arabic word *qāla* which has been used repeatedly in the Quranic verses being discussed in this lesson, does not mean that this was a face to face direct conversation with the tongue. In fact, this word is used to express a thought in one's mind, or to express something with ones condition or reaction.

Adam and Eve in Heaven on Earth: Another misconception is that Allah created Adam and Eve in the heaven of the Hereafter which He has prepared for His righteous servants. It is quite apparent, however, from the first verse of this section, "And when thy Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth," that it is the earth which is specified as their abode. About the life in the Heaven of the Hereafter, the Holy Quran states, "Nor will they be ejected therefrom" (15:48). Therefore, the Heaven mentioned in this section, in which Prophet Adam and Eve were residing and from which they were temporarily evicted, was actually a heaven in this world. In another place in the Holy Quran it is clearly mentioned, "And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens" (55:46). There is a consensus of opinion on this that by the two Gardens (*jannatān*) means the heaven of this world, and the Hereafter. These arguments clearly point out the erroneous nature of the opinion that Prophet Adam and Eve were in the heaven of the Hereafter, and were afterwards evicted from it. What is the heaven of this life? I will discuss this in my commentary on the section in its proper setting.

Origin of the human race: After discussing two more points, I will end my preliminary discussion. One of these is that there is no doubt that the human race evolved from one husband and wife who were named Adam and Eve. Prophet Adam is mentioned in the Holy Quran itself, while mention of Mother Eve occurs in the books of Hadith. Both of them were involved in the incident mentioned in this Quranic section. Further on, while addressing the whole human race, the Holy Quran calls them, "Your parents (*aba-wai kum*)" (7: 27). Today, many intelligent scientific minds believe that the human race evolved from a single set of parents. The best proof for this is that besides variations in external features such as height, color, facial appearance etc., all human beings have the same internal constitution. This would have been impossible, had the human race not evolved from a single set of parents. As far as external features go, they can differ significantly even in the offspring of the same parents brought up under similar conditions. For example, my parents had eight children, six daughters and two sons. Some of us are tall, some of medium height, and some are short. Our complexion also varies. Some are fair, some are dark, and others are light brown. The features of some are sharp, and some are

rounded. In the case of the human race, therefore, which was spread over far flung areas, and subjected to different diets, climatic conditions and means of subsistence, it is not unexpected to find over thousands of years, a variation in their height, complexion and facial features. Our earth was in the beginning a single land mass, but due to earthquakes, and drift of land masses it was eventually broken into continents. This is supported by modern scientific discovery, therefore it is not surprising to find that the human race is spread out over all continents.

Incident of Adam and Eve applicable to all of humanity:

It is true that Prophet Adam and Mother Eve were the progenitors of the whole human species and were involved in the incident related in this section. However, the incident itself is representative of the whole human race. The Holy Quran has clarified this matter in the verse, “O children of Adam, let not the devil seduce you, as he expelled your parents from the garden” (7:27). Similarly if in this section, Prophet Adam has been appointed as the vicegerent of Allah, in the following verses the whole of humanity is addressed, “And He it is Who has made you successors in the land” (6:165); “And will make you successors in the earth” (27:62). If we look at the verses preceding, and following the section being discussed today, we find that in both instances, the whole of humanity is addressed collectively. In the preceding verse, it is said, “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth” (2:29), and this has been frequently repeated elsewhere in the Holy Quran. Thus it is not any single person, but the whole human race which is the vicegerent of Allah on this earth. This section also ends with the words, “And He is Knower of all things” (2:29). He possesses knowledge of all things, and has dispensed His knowledge not to just one individual, but to the whole human race. In the next lesson, I will also show that the verse which mentions that Adam was taught all the names, includes imparting of knowledge to the children of Adam i.e., the whole human race. I will also explain that the prostration of angels before Adam because of his knowledge, means submission to his will. It conveys the meaning that man, when he progresses in his knowledge of worldly sciences is capable of gaining the submission of the forces of nature, over which the angels have charge, and it is thus that the angels submit to him. We can observe this phenomenon distinctly today in the way man has subdued the forces of nature through the strength of his knowledge. Similarly, further on in this section, it is mentioned, “Go forth from this state all” (2:38). The word ‘all,’ clearly implies the whole mankind. The verse which speaks of Adam spilling blood and causing mischief in the land, obviously does not refer to a single individual on the whole planet. Where would Adam, the first man,

have gone to commit such misdeeds? The logical inference is that this applies to the whole human race. In concluding this discussion I would like to lay stress on the fact that where ever Adam and Eve are mentioned, the words collectively refer to the whole human race. Unless we fully grasp this point, we cannot benefit from the important knowledge of the external physical world, and the inner spiritual realm conveyed to us by this section of the Holy Quran.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 21)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And when thy Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth, they said : Wilt Thou place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood? And we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness. He said : Surely I know what you know not.

And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said : Tell Me the names of those if you are right.

They said : Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise.

CH.2:30-32

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

قَالُوا أَسْبِحَنَّكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ط إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٢﴾

Summary of previous discussion

The summary of the discussion I had given as an introduction to this section in the previous lesson is as follows.

- 1) The Arabic word *qāla* which is frequently used in this section means not only ‘saying something with the tongue,’ but also ‘expressing something with one’s condition,’ ‘action,’ or for ‘expressing an action itself.’ The word *qāla* is also used for ‘a thought that comes to one’s mind.’
- 2) The incidents narrated in the Holy Quran have not necessarily occurred at the same time, or in sequence. There can be a long period of time between them.

- 3) In the incident of Adam and Eve, is the spiritual narrative of all mankind. Unless we fully comprehend this issue, it is unlikely that we would understand this section, or obtain spiritual benefit, and guidance from it.
- 4) This section tells us about the temporal and spiritual inheritance of man i.e., about his getting a share of God's power and understanding of His physical Creation, and at the same time being apportioned from His knowledge of moral and spiritual matters. In this manner, by relating a simple and easily understandable incident, the Holy Quran has elegantly explained the complicated subject of mans temporal and spiritual welfare and guidance. A common man can thus benefit from it, and also a scholar by digging deep into it, can discover many spiritual secrets and truths.

Divine Knowledge given through Revelation

The previous section was concluded with the Divine word that Allah had created all that was in the earth for the benefit of mankind. He created the heavens, where man is to be in the life Hereafter and made it into seven excellent portions. Allah being the Creator of whatever is in the earth, is the only One possessing complete knowledge of it. He is the only One Who can give man a portion of His knowledge. As far as the Hereafter is concerned, its knowledge is certainly with Allah Who is its Creator, and of this knowledge also, He gives man what He considers essential. The way all this knowledge is given to mankind is through Divine revelation (*wahy*) and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*) (see note below*). The relationship between man's temporal and heavenly life is that his life on earth is the foundation on which the structure of his life Hereafter is built as indicated in the beginning of the previous section.

* To further clarify the various modes of Divine communication, the relevant verse with commentary from Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation is added. (Translator)

“ And it is not vouchsafed to a mortal that Allah should speak to him, except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases. Surely He is High, Wise” (42 : 51).

The verse shows how Allah speaks to a person or makes known His will to him. Three modes of this are stated : 1) By *wahy*, which word is generally translated as meaning *revelation*. The primary significance of the word *wahy* is, however, *a hasty suggestion*, and since the different kinds of revelation are spoken of here, the meaning intended must be the primary significance of the word. Hence the inspired word which enters the hearts

of prophets and of the righteous, is called *wahy* or *revelation*, because it is like a hasty suggestion made directly to the heart of the inspired one, *ilqā-un fi-l- rau' i*. It is in this sense that a revelation is spoken of as being granted to the mother of Moses. (28 : 7), and to the apostles of Jesus who were not prophets (5 : 111). The second mode of Allah's speaking to His servants is that He speaks from behind a veil- a scene is shown as in a vision (*kashf***) carrying a deeper significance, or words are heard by the person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām***) The third form of revelation is that in which a messenger—an angel—is chosen by the Almighty to deliver His message to the person to whom He wishes to speak. This is the highest form of revelation, and such is the revelation of the Quran as granted to the Holy Prophet, being recited by Gabriel. This is called *wahy matluww* or *revelation that is recited*. This revelation is granted only to prophets, while the other two may also be granted to the righteous who are raised to the dignity of prophethood. It should, however, be borne in mind that all these cases the recipient of the revelation is granted certain other senses. He sees what others do not see and he hears words which others do not hear. It is, therefore, with what may be called the spiritual senses that he hears and sees and feels things which others do not hear, see, or feel. (** words are my additions to the original text- Translator).

Distinctive features of man's creation in light of the Quran: In the section under discussion, the following magnificent truths were revealed, none of which were known to man 1400 years ago, at the time of the revelation. Even today people are unaware of these truths except those who can perceive them with the light of Quranic wisdom.

- 1) Man is the vicegerent of God on this earth.
- 2) He is the only Creation whom God has given the freedom of will. Animals and plants, in fact, all living things are constrained by Divine Law. Even the angels (according to the Holy Quran), "Do as they are commanded." Only God is the One, "Who does as He wills." Out of this attribute of His, he has blessed man with the freedom of will.
- 3) The proper use of this benefit makes man the vicegerent of Allah on earth. On the other hand by misusing it, he can create mischief, and spill blood in the land.
- 4) In order for man to fully comply with the duties of this office, Allah, Who is the Creator of all wealth and goodly provisions, and possesses complete knowledge of all His creation, apportioned him a part of this knowledge. It was through Divine revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*), that man received this knowledge. The Arabic word for Divine revelation *wahy* means, 'A hasty suggestion,' to the mind of the recipient. This is how all the scientific knowledge has been given to mankind.

- 5) As a result of being given such knowledge man was able to control the forces of nature, and in this day and age we are a witness to this wonderful phenomenon. Angels are the agencies who have been given charge over all forces, and all of His creation, by Allah. Their prostrating before, or submitting to mankind indicates the gradual submission of the forces of nature to the will of man.
- 6) Out of all the creation, there is only one who is not submissive to man, and that of course is the devil or the *shaitān*.
- 7) Man has been placed in a state of heavenly bliss or paradise in this world, and forewarned not to become insubordinate to Allah, like the devil. Insubordination would result in his own loss.
- 8) Like Adam and Eve, however, most men and women fall prey to the devil's, instigation.

In this modern age, the western nations, after they acquired a portion of Allah's worldly knowledge of sciences, and gained dominance over the forces of nature, chose disobedience like the devil, "He refused and was proud" (2:34). They denied the existence of the Divine Being and manifested rebellion. The reason for this was the pride which took hold of them, as a consequence of their progress in scientific knowledge and control over the forces of nature. A major portion of the human race today, by following their example, is no longer submissive to Allah.

- 9) As a result of this, man deprives himself of that external paradise, and even more so the internal state of heavenly bliss in which he is created in this world.
- 10) This lost paradise can only be regained by submission to the Divine revelation which has been bestowed periodically in the form of Divinely revealed scriptures to save mankind. These scriptures were either lost or underwent interpolation. The Holy Quran under Divine guardianship from such adulteration was, therefore, sent as a book of complete guidance for mankind. The Holy Quran is that light which illuminates all internal spiritual matters for mankind. It clarifies the role of the devil, informs us on what is good or evil, and the right or wrong way. It tells man how he can bring into his own and Allah's subordination the one who leads him astray. In this way he can regain his lost paradise, be it the heavenly bliss of heart or mind in this world, or the everlasting external and internal paradise of the Hereafter. The Holy Quran, by describing in an interesting format the incident of Prophet Adam and Mother Eve, has made these great truths accessible for the common man. I have already shown with Quranic references in my previous lesson that this incident is applicable to all of mankind. The section prior to this one closes with the following points which I will repeat, "How can you deny the existence of the Divine Being?

You were dead without any life. Not only did He bring you from a state of nothingness to that of existence, but also gave you life and after causing you to die, will bless you with life which is everlasting. He created for you whatever is in the earth and divided your life in the Hereafter into seven heavens.” This is in order for you to continue your spiritual and moral progress in the life Hereafter. The knowledge of the One Who created all that is in this earth is certainly complete. This is true not only in these matters, but also on how you should spend your life on earth, so that the right foundation is laid for your heavenly life, of which also He is fully informed.

Purpose of creation of Angels

In this section, life on earth is discussed as follows, “And when thy Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth.” It was essential to inform the angels, because Allah has given them charge over all the creation, and the forces of nature. The Arabic word for angels *Malā’ika* is derived from *Malaka* which means taking control over, or taking charge of something. One of the essential duties of the angels, therefore, is to be in charge of every creation, or force of nature. Another meaning of the word *malaika* derived from its infinitive noun *’alaka* is that of sending, which means that they are also sent as message bearers of Allah. For example, Angel Gabriel was sent with the Divine scriptures. However, only a few selected angels are messengers of the Divine word. Most angels are just given charge of a specific aspect of creation and the laws governing it, by Allah Almighty, so that it should function according to His Will and Command.

Angels informed of Divine Intent to Create Man: Now that it was the Divine intent to create man, and to appoint him as His vicegerent, it was essential to inform the angels of this decision, for man was being empowered over them. Later on I will elaborate this further with the relevant verses of this section.

How great a Benefactor of man is Allah! Not only did He bring man from a state of non existence to life, but also made him as His vicegerent on earth in order to give him a share of His knowledge and power. No other creation has been given the freedom of will. It is only the attribute of Allah that, He does what He wills. This freedom of will was now being given to man as vicegerent of God on earth.

The Angels Response : On being made aware of this Divine intent, a thought passed through the mind of the angels, which is described in the Quran as, “they said, (*qā-lū*): Wilt Thou place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood?” They pointed out that there was this risk that man

may not use his powers wisely and thereby cause mischief in the land and bloodshed. Although in this verse, the Arabic word *qālū* has been used for the angels, which is ordinarily translated to mean, ‘they said.’ I will not, however, adopt this meaning. From the Holy Quran itself it is quite evident that no one can dare to speak before the Lord without His permission, or say something which is incorrect and that also in the form of an objection, which is inherently disrespectful. In this respect the Holy Quran states, “The Lord of the heavens and the earth, and what is between them, the Beneficent, they are not able to address Him. The day when the spirit and the angels stand in rank; none shall speak except he whom the Beneficent permits and he speaks aright” (78:37,38). In light of this I have translated the word *qālū* (where used for the angels) as meaning— a thought passed through their mind. As I have discussed in my previous lesson this meaning is permissible.

The angels very well knew that Allah was aware of what was within their hearts, they therefore said, “And we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness.” They immediately apologized for the thought that had passed through their mind, and affirmed that the Divine decision was free of fault and all praise was due to Him.

Divine purpose of giving man Freedom of Will

Allah then said, “Surely I know what you know not,” indicating that it is essential for the moral and spiritual development of man, that he be given the freedom of will. Any action carried out under duress cannot be called a good or a bad quality. A good quality is created when man has the opportunity to do evil, but he abstains and follows the righteous course. As far as mischief and bloodshed is concerned, the responsibility for it lies on mankind. He will be chastised for it, if not in this world, then certainly in the Hereafter, and the chastisement will lead to his reformation. Those who are oppressed will be given goodly reward for it. For example, illness though itself undesirable, creates patience and tolerance in man, and he will be rewarded for showing diligence, and perseverance in facing it. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has said in this matter that whosoever suffers severe illnesses, Allah grants them the status of a martyr.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 22)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And He taught Adam all the names, then presented them to the angels; He said : Tell Me the names of those if you are right.

They said : Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise.

He said : O Adam, inform them of their names. So when he informed them of their names, He said : Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide.

And when We said to the angels, Be submissive to Adam, they submitted, but Iblis (did not). He refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers.

And We said : O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden, and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and approach not this tree, lest you be of the unjust.

But the devil made them slip from it, and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. And We said : Go forth, some of you are the enemies of others. And there is

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ۝

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۚ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنْ عَلِمْتُمْ الْغَيْبَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا نُظِرَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْكُمْ وَمَا مِنْ خَلْفِكُمْ لَتُرْكَبُونَ ۝

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ ۖ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ ۖ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ ۝

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ۝

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ ۖ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ۝

for you in the earth an abode and a provision for time.

Then Adam received (revealed) words from his Lord, and He turned to him (mercifully). Surely He is Oft- returning (to mercy), the Merciful.

We said : Go forth from this state all. Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then who-ever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

And (as to) those who disbelieve in and reject Our messages, they are the companions of the Fire; in it they will abide.

CH.2:31-39

فَتَلَكَّىٰ أَدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ
إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٩﴾

قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ
مِمَّنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

How Divine Knowledge is given to mankind

For those who have not read my previous two lessons, it would be hard to understand the remaining discussion on this section. Due to time constraints, I have to avoid repetition, otherwise it will be difficult to complete this section. With this apology, I will now proceed further. As I have previously pointed out, this is not a direct conversation, but a description of events which occurred over a long period of time and have been described in a simple, and easily understood format. The incident of Prophet Adam inculcates within it the narrative of the whole human race. The first verse in this lesson discusses the manner in which Adam received knowledge from Allah. In the next verse we learn about the angels saying, they do not possess any knowledge except that which is taught to them by Allah. The teaching of Adam and angels was not in the manner of teaching children, because this is inconsistent with Divine Glory. Allah gives such knowledge through revelation, the Arabic word, *wahy* for which means a 'hasty suggestion which is conveyed to the human mind.' The reader should not be surprised by the meaning of the word *wahy* (revelation). There is a higher form of revelation which is given only to the prophets, and the revelation of a Divine Scripture is brought only by the exalted Angel Gabriel. There are, however, lower forms of revelation. For example it is said in the Holy Quran, "And thy Lord revealed to the bee" (16:68). The fascinating manner in which the bee carries out its tasks is called giving knowledge through

revelation. Similarly the heavens and the earth are said to be given the Divine command through revelation, and mention is also made in the Holy Quran of individuals who were not prophets, such as the disciples of Jesus, and the mother of Moses receiving the Divine word. The first revelation of the Holy Quran states, “Who taught by the pen, Taught man what he knew not” (96:4,5). In this verse, Allah attributes to Himself the progress of knowledge that man has made through the pen i.e., calls it His own teaching. I can site many other examples from the Holy Quran itself. Similarly as mentioned in this section of the Holy Quran, Allah has imparted knowledge to Adam and his race through the lower form of Divine revelation (*wahy*) and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*). This form of revelation (*wahy*) is called *ilqā’un fi alrau’i* (a hasty suggestion made directly to the heart of the inspired one), or inspiring an idea into the mind from outside. This truth which the Holy Quran revealed to us through the Holy Prophet Muhammad 1400 years ago, is now being supported by scientists who are responsible for the progress of modern science. A scientist of such renown and fame, as Albert Einstein remarked: Ideas come from God i.e., the ideas responsible for the development of science which he was discussing were inspired by God.

Adam being taught all the names

The Holy Quran states, “And He taught Adam all the names.” We can interpret this to mean the names of all the different things. This, however, is not a very elegant interpretation, because the knowledge of names is a very basic skill. As I have just mentioned, the angels are in charge over all of Allah’s creation and forces of nature. It is inconceivable that being given such an important duty, they were ignorant of the names of what constituted their field of responsibility. When Adam made the angels aware of those names, Allah asks the angels, that if they were correct in their doubt about Adam, why were they not able to tell the names? We already know that the doubt the angels had about Adam was that he would make mischief in the land and cause bloodshed. What relationship could this have with the name of things? By just gaining knowledge of the names of things, what was that supremacy that Adam achieved over the angels, for which they were asked to submit to him? In fact these are the names of all the disciplines of knowledge that were taught to mankind. The knowledge of worldly sciences is very extensive. Hundreds and thousands of books are written on these sciences, but what man has learned about them barely scratches the surface. It is impossible to list all of the books even in one area of the sciences. To ease the task of the students the sciences have been divided up into disciplines like, arithmetic, geometry, algebra, physics, biology etc. Each one of

these is an immense subject in its own right. In giving the knowledge of all the names to Adam, the Holy Quran, in fact, refers to all these sciences which Allah has taught mankind through His revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*). An angel on the other hand is only given knowledge of that which is necessary for fulfilling his duties. For example the angel in charge of the force of electricity is only given the knowledge which is concerned with creating, or moving the electric force. What is, therefore, stated in this section is that Allah commanded Adam (signifying the human race) to inform the angels of these various branches of knowledge that Allah has taught him. In case of electricity, this would be the knowledge of all the wonderful things man has created in this age of electricity over the last hundred years.

Submission of the Angels to Man

The literal meaning of the Arabic word for prostration (*sajda*) is showing submission, and in the religious code (*shariat*), it is used for prostrating because it indicates submission, or humility. The prostration of the *shariat* (Islamic religious code) is prohibited before anyone, but Allah. Therefore, when the angels were commanded to prostrate before Adam, it was in the literal sense of the word that they were asked to show submission. In this modern age we have seen the success man has achieved in advancing the frontiers of knowledge, and harnessing the forces of nature, which is a manifestation of angels submitting to man. This is the reason why Allah states in this section, “Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide.”

This verse indicates that the knowledge of what Allah had yet to manifest through man was known only to Him, and there are many other things in the heavens and on earth that are known only to Him and of which neither man, nor angel has any knowledge. Thus Allah knew of the thought which passed through the minds of the angels about man just as He was aware of their external praise and glorification, or other actions.

The Devil and his refusal to submit

In the context of submission of the angels it is mentioned, “But Iblis (did not). He refused and was proud, and he was one of the disbelievers.” The mention of the devil is actually not in conjunction with the angels, but in fact is related to the act of submission. Those interpreters who have considered the word *illā* (but, except) as relative to the angels and have even said that the devil was a master angel, have committed an error. The origin of the angels is from heavenly light, and the creation of the devil is from the fire as the devil stated himself, “Thou hast created me of fire” (7:12).

The Arabic word *'illā* (but, except) in this case is a conclusive exception. For example, we say : All the passengers came from the railway station, but their luggage did not. This does not mean that the luggage is also to be included in the category of passengers. In fact in the description of the angels submitting to Adam, we are informed that all the forces of nature will show submission to Adam as also stated elsewhere in the Holy Quran: “And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens, and whatsoever is in the earth, all, from Himself” (45 :13). There is one exception to this, and that is the devil. This warning has been conveyed to all of humanity, not only by Prophet Adam, but also through other prophets and revealed scriptures. Man is not fully capable of understanding Divine wisdom, therefore, people frequently raise this objection, ‘Why did Allah create the devil?’ Without the possibility of the devil tempting man to commit evil, how could righteous action be distinguished from evil? For example, if a person elects to tell the truth, when given the opportunity to lie, then only can he be called a truthful person. If there was no opportunity to lie, how could the quality of truthfulness be acquired, or strengthened?

Concept of Paradise and the forbidden tree

Let us now take the next verse, which states, “And We said : O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden, and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and approach not this tree, lest you be of the unjust.” People have mistaken this paradise to be the one of the Hereafter which is promised to all believers, who perform righteous action. In the first place those who do so forget that Adam was created on earth as clearly indicated in the beginning of this section, “I am going to place a ruler on the earth.” Adam did not as yet have the opportunity to believe or perform those acts of righteousness which are a reward for, and in fact, form the paradise of the Hereafter. It has also been clearly stated with regards to the paradise of the Hereafter, “nor will they be ejected therefrom” (15:48). In fact, the paradise mentioned in this verse, is the paradise of this earthly existence.). This is the paradise mentioned in the verse, “And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens” (55:46). All commentators of the Quran agree that one of the two Gardens promised to the dutiful in this verse is the one on earth. Outwardly we do not observe this in the lives of the dutiful i.e., we seldom find earthly gardens with streams and palaces in their possession. Therefore, the garden or paradise of this earth is the garden of peace and tranquillity which exists in the heart, or mind of the faithful. Do not consider this as something inferior, for even in adversity such persons have a tranquil mind. All the worldly pleasures, such as gardens with streams, palaces, varieties of food and drink are of no avail if one’s heart is

in hell i.e., he is consumed with the fire of his low desires and is without serenity of mind. Such a person is really in a living hell.

The question that now remains to be answered is, what was that forbidden tree? Some conjecture this to be the wheat plant, or the date palm, while still others believe it was a fig tree. These are, however the very foods consumed by the righteous servants of Allah and His prophets. The Arabic word *hādhi hi shajarat* for 'this tree' signifies something in close proximity, or something which has just been mentioned, this being the devil's disbelief in God due to pride (see preceding verse, "he refused, and was proud). In another text the Holy Quran has compared an evil word with an evil tree as in this verse, "And the parable of an evil word is an evil tree" (14:26). Therefore, the tree from which man has been prohibited is the tree of evil, and Divine disobedience, for evil, like a tree becomes firmly rooted, and brings forth deadly fruit.

The Bible states that the devil first lured Eve, who in turn was responsible for leading Adam astray, thus holding woman responsible for the moral decline of the human race. The Holy Quran has absolved her of such a serious accusation by stating, that the devil led both man and woman astray. They were both warned not to depart from the serenity of mind, in which Allah had created them, by following the devil. By doing so they would be going forth, or falling down from a higher condition to one of inferiority. This is the sense in which the Arabic word, *habuṭ* has been used. Allah has then consoled all members of the human race, that if they lose the serenity (paradise of heart or mind) in which they have been created by following the devil, they can repent like their forefathers Adam and Eve by following the Divine revelation, and thus benefit from the mercy of Allah. The Holy Quran has mentioned their repentance, and spiritual healing in the Quranic prayer, "They said : Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves; and if Thou forgive us not, and have (not) mercy on us, we shall certainly be of the losers" (7:23).

Salvation of mankind in following the Quran

In summary, knowledge of worldly sciences, and material progress is not enough to save mankind from the devil's instigation. A clear example of this in the modern context is that of the western civilization. By means of the worldly knowledge given to them by Allah, these nations were able to bring into their submission the forces of nature which are under the charge of the angels. This amazing progress was, however, not enough to save them from the incitement of the devil, and they got involved in evil and obscene behavior, the like of which is not found in the history of mankind. Their salvation now lies in the Holy Quran. This is the only Book in which

the revelation which saved Adam and Eve has reached its perfection, and is safeguarded in its original form. Spiritual knowledge and guidance given only by Divine revelation can save mankind from relinquishing the paradise of this world, and the Hereafter that is why the Holy Quran says, "Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then who-ever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve" (20:123).

The fear and sadness that is created by evil action can only be removed by following the guidance given through Divine revelation. Fear is generated before the commission of an act, sadness follows it. For example, when somebody tells a lie, fear is generated in his heart that it may be discovered, and when it is, sadness follows. Freedom from fear and sorrow is the serenity of mind, or the paradise of the heart. When the soul of a believer carries with him to the life Hereafter, this spiritual or inner paradise, he is rewarded therein the external paradise of the Hereafter. This is the message of complete satisfaction and happiness of internal and external paradise that the Holy Quran gives mankind as the purpose of its revelation. Without inner serenity, the external gardens and means of comfort become a thorn in one's side. If along with the inner peace and tranquillity, of mind one is also granted the external means of comfort, then only can he achieve complete happiness and satisfaction. The Holy Quran expresses this in the words, "O soul thou that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well pleased, well pleasing, so enter among my servants and enter My Garden" (89:27-30). May Allah bless us all with this good fortune. *Ameen* (be it so).

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 23)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O Children of Israel, call to mind My favor which I bestowed on you and be faithful to (your) covenant with Me, I shall fulfill (My) covenant with you ; and Me, Me alone, should you fear.

And believe in that which I have revealed, verifying that which is with you, and be not the first to deny it ; neither take a mean price for My messages ; and keep your duty to Me, Me alone.

And mix not up truth with falsehood, nor hide the truth while you know.

And keep up prayer and pay the poor rate and bow down with those who bow down.

Do you enjoin men to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book? Have you then no sense?

And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and this is hard except for the humble ones.

Who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١

يٰۤاَيُّهَاۤ اِسْرٰٓءِيْلَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيۡ الَّتِيۡ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاَوْفُوا۟ بِعَهْدِيۡ اُوْنِ بَعْدِكُمْ وَاِيَّاىَ فَارْهَبُوْا ٢

وَاٰمِنُوْا بِمَاۤ اَنْزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُوْنُوْا اَوَّلَ كٰفِرِيۡنَ ۗ وَلَا تَسْتَفْرِزُوْا بِاِيَّتِيۡ نَمُنَّا قٰٓئِلًا نُوْاۤ اِيَّاىَ فَانْقُوْا ٣

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبٰطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَاَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ٤

وَاَقِيْمُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَاَتُوا الزَّكٰوةَ وَاَرْكَعُوْا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِيْنَ ٥

اَتَاۤمُرُوْنَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَاَنْتُمْ تَنْسَوْنَ اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ تَتْلُوْنَ الْكِتٰبَ اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوْنَ ٦

وَاَسْتَعِيْنُوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلٰوةِ وَاِنَّهَا لَكَبِيْرَةٌ اِلَّا عَلَى الْخٰشِعِيْنَ ٧

الَّذِيْنَ يَتْلُوْنَ اٰيٰتِنَا مَلْفُوْٓنًا سَرٰٓهُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ اِلَيْهِۭ رٰجِعُوْنَ ٨

CH:2:40-46

Divine Blessings on the Israelites

This is the fifth section of *Al-Baqarah* which starts with the mention of the children of Israel. The discussion on this subject continues to a variable degree right up to the eighteenth section. The question that comes to mind is, what is so important about this nation that the Holy Quran has mentioned it at such great length over here, and briefly in several other locations in its text? 'Israel,' which means the servant of Allah, was the name of Prophet Yaquob (Jacob), and from his twelve sons evolved the twelve tribes of Israel. After Prophet Moses, with great patience and persistence released the Israelites from the bondage of the Pharaoh, Allah brought about their spiritual reformation from an abject state. He gave them blessings both in the spiritual and material sense that are unparalleled in the history of nations. They were delivered from a state of servitude, and were given both kingdom, and kingship which reached its pinnacle during the time of David and Solomon. They were given abundance of material wealth in the form of gold, silver and precious stones, but above and beyond that, they were also given incomparable spiritual blessings. A great number of prophets were sent to this nation for their moral and spiritual development. A father would be followed by his son in prophet-hood, several prophets would be raised contemporaneously, thus there was no time when they did not have a righteous servant of Allah amongst them.

A brief history of

Ten of the tribes of Israel established their kingdom under the name of 'Israel' in the northern part of Palestine, and around Syria. The remaining two tribes formed their kingdom in southern Palestine, which included Jerusalem, and named it Yehuda. A prolonged struggle with neighboring nations followed, and the ten tribes of Israel were taken into captivity, and transported to eastern lands. Ultimately they settled in what is Afghanistan, the North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan and Kashmir. Due to lack of communications, they were totally cut off from their original homeland, and were therefore, considered as lost. These were the, 'lost sheep of Israel,' in search of which Prophet Jesus set out. This occurred after the two tribes of Israel who had established the kingdom of *Yehuda*, and now called themselves the *Yehudis*, had not only rejected him, but attempted to crucify him. All the twelve tribes of Israel, lost their worldly power, and the Jews of Palestine, because of the gross inequity they had committed against Prophet Jesus became, 'those upon whom wrath was brought down.'

The cause of Divine Wrath

After this brief history, I would like to come back to the question I had put forth, in the very beginning of this lesson, ‘Why is it that the nation of Israel has been mentioned at such great length in the very beginning of the Holy Quran, starting from the fifth to the eighteenth sections of *Al-Baqarah*?’ If you look through the pages of the Holy Quran, you will notice that just prior to these sections is the description of Adam being appointed vicegerent of Allah on Earth, and being blessed with the serenity of mind, or the paradise on earth besides all other Divine favors. We also learn in these very same pages as to how both Prophet Adam and Mother Eve were instigated by the devil to be disobedient towards Allah, thereby losing not only their inner peace and happiness, but also the external favors conferred upon them.

Every individual, like the Prophet Adam, is within his own limited circle of influence a vicegerent of Allah on earth. In fact, in a broader sense this applies to every nation in its own territory. This broader concept has been mentioned in the Holy Quran in the following verse, “And He it is Who has made you successors in the land” (6:165). This collective representation at a national level is treated in a manner similar to that of Adam as an individual. Allah, the real Master of the universe, gives such a nation all sorts of blessings, but if they persist in their disobedience, He does not wait till the Day of Judgment to chastise them. In order to establish a living proof for the real chastisement of the Hereafter, such nations are punished in this world by Allah. The best example of this is seen in the history of the British nation in our age. When they believed in, and worshipped God in accordance with their revealed scripture, the Bible, Allah blessed them with a worldwide empire and treasures of the world. In order to perpetuate their empire forever, they tried to extend their political dominance into the religious sphere through conversion of the subject nations to Christianity. As a consequence of this, and the spread of atheism on a large scale in their nation in the 20th Century, Allah took away His blessings, and they lost their worldly power and treasures of wealth. Similarly, the tribes of Israel became lost in the love of wealth and worldly gain. The two tribes of Yehuda even tried to crucify and murder Prophet Jesus, and thus brought down the wrath of Allah upon themselves. This further explains why the nation of Israel, and their most depraved section, the tribes of Yehuda, are mentioned over here.

Muslims warned

In my earlier lessons I have discussed the grand prayer of *Al-Fātiḥah*, “Guide us on the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast

bestowed favors,” in answer to which the Holy Quran was revealed. This prayer is immediately followed by the humble request of the suppliant to be saved from the path of, “Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.” The Holy Quran speaks of the Jews as incurring Divine displeasure in (2:61,90; 3:112; 5:60). In the concluding words of the *Al-Fātihah*, there is thus a warning for the Muslims to avoid following in the footsteps of the nations before them, who had received Divine favors, but went astray, and were subject to His wrath. Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has also said, “You shall also follow the ways of those gone before you.” When asked if these nations were the Jews and the Christians, he replied, “Who else?” Thus, in the narrative of the children of Israel, the Muslims are being taught a lesson that, like them, they would also be made rulers in the earth. They are warned to avoid the very same pitfalls as a result of which the gift of prophet-hood was taken away from the children of Israel, and given to the children of Ishmael (the great forefather of the Holy Prophet Muhammad). The spiritual gift of Allah is far greater than His worldly beneficence, and no loss can be greater than losing this spiritual gift.

Prophet Adam is mentioned as having received the Divine favor as an individual, before the nation of Israel is mentioned. After being led astray, both he and his wife repented, and reformed. This is another reason why the Israelite nation is addressed so frequently in the Holy Quran, so that they may repent, and reform, and accept the Prophet of the last age. This is the same prophet about whom all previous prophets had taken a covenant from their nations, that they would accept him when he came. Hundreds of Israelite prophets had taken this covenant from the Israelites, and repeatedly reminded them of it. I would like to clarify over here that out of the twelve tribes of Israel, ten settled down in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, Kashmir, and Afghanistan. These were the blessed tribes, who accepted Prophet Jesus when he was rejected by their Palestinian brethren. They also heeded the often repeated call of the Holy Quran to the tribes of Israel, and accepted Islam (all praise be to Allah for this). Only the two tribes of Yehuda are still devoid of this blessing excepting a few, whom Allah has blessed with the acceptance of truth.

Covenant of the Prophet

Now we shall consider the verses under discussion today. Allah’s reminder to the children of Israel of the favors He has bestowed upon them, is not with the spirit of contempt (we seek the refuge of Allah from saying so), but with the Divine intent of softening their hearts. It was to remind them that Allah Who had always blessed them, would once again make them

enter into His Mercy, provided they uphold their covenant. This covenant, which is mentioned in (3:81) as, “covenant through the prophets,” was taken by Allah from all nations through their respective messengers, that they should all believe in the last of the prophets when he came. The Israelite nation was blessed with more Divine messengers than any other nation. Therefore, this covenant was widely proclaimed and renewed amongst them, and the coming of ‘That Prophet,’ being the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him), was a term familiar even to their children. By means of this covenant, Allah wanted to gather all nations to His final religious dispensation and prophethood, so that all religious differences and enmity could be resolved.

It is then stated that if you fulfill your covenant, I will fulfill mine. The covenant referred to here is the one given to the believers in the following verse, “Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will surely make them rulers in the earth as he made those before them rulers” (24:55). After this it is enjoined, “and Me, Me alone, should you fear,” and this is stated because all sorts of difficulties arise on accepting the truth. People threaten and intimidate the righteous to back down from the acceptance of the truth, and this creates all sorts of difficulties. The believers are advised not to give into such pressures, and to fear Allah, and their accountability to Him. They are then told, “And believe in that which I have revealed, verifying that which is with you.” This is a unique distinction of the Holy Quran, that it confirms the coming of prophets to all nations and the scriptures revealed to them. Without such a confirmation, it would be difficult to accept the Divine origin of existing religious scriptures because of their present corrupted condition. The identifying characteristic of the Prophet who would fulfill the sign of the, “covenant through the prophets”(3:81), was that he would confirm all the previous prophets, and their revealed scriptures. This magnificent sign was not fulfilled by any other prophet besides the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him), who in particular confirmed the scriptures and prophets of the Israelite nation, the Holy Quran being a living testament to this truth. The Holy Quran, therefore, advises the nation of Israel not to be the foremost of the deniers like the Jews of Medina who with the exception of a few, did not accept the truth. The Quranic statement, “neither take a mean price for my messages,” is addressed to the religious scholars and priests of the Israelite nation. These people had a vested interest in denying the claim of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), because his acceptance would jeopardize their spiritual standing in the community. They disbelieved and adulterated the truth with falsehood. In fact, they hid the truth by misinterpreting the prophecies in the Jewish scriptures so as to make it appear that the prophecies did not

apply to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They used to encourage their followers to hide such prophecies from the Muslims (2:76).

Objective Of Prayer

The day of Sabbath, was appointed for this nation for the weekly worship of God. The Jews disobeyed this Divine commandment as repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Quran (4:47; 7:163; 16:124), by remaining engrossed in their material pursuits. This is generally true even to this day. As a result of this, their lives drifted away from the Divine presence. In order to correct this deficiency, they were commanded to, “And keep up prayer, and pay the poor rate, and bow down with those who bow down.” The remembrance of Allah once a week on the day of Sabbath did not prove to be sufficient, therefore, Allah states that He has ordained the keeping up of prayer five times a day in Islam. This serves as a frequent reminder, and keeps man from forgetting the remembrance of Allah while engrossed in the pursuit of wealth, and material well being. The institution of Zakaat, or payment of poor rate once a year, keeps man from worshipping wealth as his god, and from exploiting his poor brethren. Other religions have prescribed asceticism as a way to keep the remembrance of Allah alive, and to save mankind from the consuming fire of the love of material wealth. Islam adopts the middle course. It encourages the earning of wealth, and material gain, but safeguards the spiritual health of man by instituting certain preventive measures. The keeping up of prayer by a Muslim keeps the memory of Allah alive in his mind by focusing on the Divine attributes. The payment of the poor rate neutralizes the love for material wealth within man — a love, which thrives on greed and is nurtured by the blood of his poor brethren. The closing statement in this verse is, “and bow down with those who bow down,” which has been interpreted by some as the bowing down during prayer. This manner of bowing down is, however, included in the preceding Divine commandment about prayer. In the present context, the bowing down enjoins man to be obedient to the Divine Being in all phases of his life, and not to forget Him after the formal prayer is over.

In the next verse, the religious scholars and the priests of the nation of Israel are reminded, “Do you enjoin men to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book? Have you then no sense?” It is pointed out in this verse that the Jewish scripture, the Torah, commands them to reform their own souls before attempting spiritual reformation of others. The depraved moral condition of the Jewish religious scholars is described by Prophet Jesus in his biblical statements. He has cursed them in a manner which paints a vivid picture of their evil plight. Towards the end of this section,

the Israelites are advised to forbear in the face of adversity which accompanies the acceptance of the truth. This leads to the strengthening of belief, which otherwise remains a mere verbal acknowledgment. Patience and forbearance is the greatest of Divine attributes. He shows a great degree of tolerance to all that is said and done in this world contrary to his approval. If He was not a tolerant Being, His retribution would destroy the whole world in a single day. The Israelites are, therefore, enjoined to learn this magnificent attribute of Allah, by being patient in times of adversity. Man, however, is weak and can call upon no one else but Allah during difficult times; that is why man is permitted to supplicate Allah five times a day (“And seek assistance through patience and prayer”). All the tenets of the Jewish religion were more strict than that of Islam, except the five daily prayers. This appears cumbersome to the followers of other religions. The last two verses of this section are, therefore, also very important for the Muslims. It is first said, “and this is hard except for the humble ones.” The questions that arise are, what is humility? And, how is it manifested? Both these questions are answered here as we shall see shortly.

Keeping up of prayer with humility

Humility signifies meekness and obedience. Humility is created spontaneously, when one realizes his own humble origin from an extract of clay, and that the Creator can return him back to clay, whenever He so desires. The feeling of humbleness is generated when man’s realizes the majesty and grandeur of the Being he is standing in front of during prayer. The Being, Who is also responsible for nurturing him unto perfection, and for investing him with such power that he is able to control all the forces of nature. The earthly existence of man is, however, for a limited time. The real part of man that stays forever is the spirit which has been breathed into him by the Divine Being. This spirit needs to be frequently cleansed during a man’s life on this earth, much like an object on which dust settles during daily use. If man commits an evil deed, or an act of negligence, the spirit is infected and consumed like a bad malady, and the need for cleansing is even greater. How very excellent is this saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)! ‘He asked his followers, if one of them had a stream flowing through his front yard, and he bathed in it five times a day, would it leave any dirt on his body? Likewise, he said was the condition of the spirit of the believer who keeps up prayer.’ Prayer, besides cleansing the spirit of man (a trust of Allah which returns to Him after his death) for which he is responsible, also serves another purpose. It is essential for maintaining the health and growth of this spirit which receives its sustenance by establishing a relationship with Allah by means of prayer.

This is mentioned in this verse, “And enjoin prayer on thy people, and steadily adhere to it. We ask not of thee a sustenance, We provide for thee” (20:132). I have discussed this in one of my earlier lessons. The condition of the spirit is similar to the human body, which if deprived of sustenance, would fall ill and eventually die of starvation. The importance of the spirit is far greater, because it is the real self of a person which has to live forever in the life Hereafter after the body perishes away. The person, who lets this spirit fall ill, and get weak, is responsible for its demise, and certainly does not meet the obligations of his Divine trust. Therefore, if Allah Who is the Supreme Being, allows a person to His presence, five times a day, to cleanse and nurture his real and everlasting self, it is definitely to the advantage of man and does not benefit Allah in any way.

The last verse in this section states, “Who know that they will meet their Lord and that to Him they will return.” *Liqa* the Arabic word for ‘meeting,’ also means ‘finding someone.’ The believer comes to pray with fervor and enthusiasm for *liqa* Allah. He is not only given the honor of being in the Divine presence, but is also able to establish a relationship with Him provided he keeps up prayer, and does not offer it merely as a matter of custom. To recognize and establish a relationship with Allah is the purpose of man’s creation as I have discussed in my commentary on *Al-Fātiḥah*. The concluding words of this verse mention their return to the Lord. All commentators agree that this means the compulsory appearance before Allah on the Day of Judgment to account for one’s deeds. Those who do not choose to appear before Allah by means of prayer, will ultimately be compelled to do so on the Day of Judgment. The fear of accountability on this day should also activate man to seek the cleansing and reformation of his spirit through prayer. He who is able to understand all of this does not find prayer to be a heavy burden.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 24)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And the Jews say, the Christians follow nothing (good) and the Christians say, the Jews follow nothing (good) while they recite the (same) Book. Even thus say those who have no knowledge, like what they say. So Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in that wherein they differ.

And who is more unjust than he who prevents (men) from the mosques of Allah, from His name being remembered therein, and strives to ruin them? (As for) these, it was not proper for them to enter them except in fear. For them is disgrace in this world, and theirs is a grievous chastisement in the Hereafter.

And Allah's is the East and the West, so wither you turn thither is Allah's purpose. Surely Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.

CH.2:113-115

These are the first three verses of the 14th section of *Al-Baqarah*. Like the full moon of the fourteenth day, these verses are resplendent with light. They disclose the condition of the age of the Reformer of the fourteenth century Hijra, and the historical spiritual revolution to be brought about through Islam. May Allah bless me with the understanding of this magnificent section, and the ability to explain it.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ لَيْسَتِ النَّصْرَىٰ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ ۖ
وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرَىٰ لَيْسَتِ الْيَهُودُ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ ۗ
وَهُمْ يَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا
يَعْلَمُونَ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ ۚ فَاللَّهُ يَحْكُمُ بَيْنَهُمْ
يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ ١١٣

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَرَ
فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ مَا كَانَ
لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ ۗ لَهُمْ فِي
الدُّنْيَا جِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ١١٤

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ ۚ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَانْتَهَىٰ
وَجْهَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ١١٥

Muslims warned not to follow the ways of the Jews and Christians

Perhaps you are surprised, and would like to ask how this section refers to Muslims and Islam, when, in fact, it talks about the Jews and Christians? These verses definitely have a strong connection with Muslims and Islam, as I shall explain shortly. As you know *Al-Fātiḥah* is the prayer where the believer requests Allah for guidance on the path of those upon whom He has bestowed favors, not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who went astray. That prayer has a very comprehensive meaning as I discussed in my commentary on the *Al-Fātiḥah*. However, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has specifically explained the meaning of those upon whom wrath is brought down and those who went astray as being the Jews and Christians. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave this interpretation on the basis of the Holy Quran, for it is said about the Jews in the very beginning of the *Al-Baqarah*, “And they incurred Allah’s wrath” (2:61). Those who went astray are mentioned in Ch.5:77, as being the Christians who exceeded due bounds by making a human into the son of God, in fact God. They thereby went astray, and lead many others astray as well. When the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave an explanation of the verse, “upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who went astray,” he warned his followers that many amongst them would follow the footsteps of these nations. He forewarned them not to commit the same mistakes they did. Alas! We did not heed the warnings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Let us see how this happened.

The verse I quoted in the beginning of this lesson says that the Jews say that the Christians do not follow any good, and the Christians say that the Jews do not follow any good although they both read the Book. The book refers to their revealed scripture, the Old Testament, which forms the major portion of the Bible, and which is read by both the Jews and the Christians. In the section prior to this, in verse 111 it is stated, “And they say : None shall enter the Garden except he who is a Jew, or the Christians.” Two errors of the Jews and the Christians are pointed out here. Their first mistake is that each one of these groups regards itself as the only one deserving paradise, and the other destined to hell fire. Their second error is that they do not see any goodness in each other, as pointed out in the verse, “And the Jews say, the Christians follow nothing (good), and the Christians say, the Jews follow nothing (good).” These are two very common faults of human nature i.e., regarding oneself as pure, clean, and sinless, while finding faults with others, and turning a blind eye to any good qualities in those with whom we have the slightest disagreement. Since these two

weaknesses are so common, why were the Jews and Christians singled out in the Holy Quran? The answer to this lies in the Quranic statement, “while they recite the same Book.” This verse points to the fact that they both have a common scripture which they both believe in and recite. In light of this fact, such extreme prejudice is very surprising. What is the lesson in this for the Muslims? Both these religions i.e., Judaism and Christianity are affiliated with different prophets i.e., Prophet Moses and Prophet Jesus, and they share only a part of their Book, i.e., the Old Testament, and not the New Testament. Muslims on the other hand are the followers of the same Prophet, and their scripture from its first to the last letter is the same. It is a pity that believers in One God, the same Prophet and the same scripture would follow the example of the Jews and the Christians. Is it not true, however, that there are seventy two sects amongst the Muslims? Is it not also true that each one of these sects considers only itself to be worthy of paradise and all others deserving hell? Is this not similar to the opinion of the seventy two sects of the Jews, and the opinion of Christians sects about each other? Is it not the condition of the Muslims that each one of their sects cannot see any goodness in the other? This was exactly the prevailing state of affairs amongst the seventy two sects of the Jews and the Christians, although they shared a common scripture.

Divine warning not heeded by Muslims of the present age

All the sects amongst the Muslims believe in the same scripture, the Holy Quran. In this Book, which is full of purity and wisdom, the Muslims are enjoined, “and be not disunited”; immediately prior to this it is said, “And hold fast by the covenant (rope) of Allah” (3:103). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said the covenant (rope) of Allah is His Book, which extends from the heaven to the earth . Whosoever holds on to this covenant and acts upon it will progress morally, and spiritually till he reaches heavenly heights. The Quran, therefore, enjoins the Muslims to unite on the Holy Quran. If any differences arise, they should seek the answer to their differences from the Holy Quran. All the sectarian divisions would not have occurred among the Muslims if they had sought the answer to their differences from the Holy Quran. Why then, did the Muslims become so narrow minded that their different sects see no goodness in the others, and regard the others as having gone astray, in fact disbelievers, although they all read the same scripture? This was also prophesied by the Holy Quran in the verse, “Even thus say those who have no knowledge, like what they say,” i.e., those who have no knowledge are, or will be following the example of the Jews and the Christians. Commentators have considered these verses to mean people of other religions before

the Jewish and Christian faiths. In fact, where such a reference is given, as in verse (2 : 118), “And those who have no knowledge say : Why does not Allah speak to us, or a sign come to us? Even thus said *those before them*, the like of what they say”, the words, ‘*those before them*,’ are used. The Holy Quran has, therefore, specified where it is referring to nations before the Jews and Christians by using the words, ‘*those before them*.’ In the present context since this specification has been eliminated, it is quite clear that this reference is to nations that were to follow the Jews and the Christians, who could be no other than the Muslims.

The verse that follows is the charter of freedom of religion, and conscience for the world, “So Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in that wherein they differ.” The differences in religion and principles of belief is to be decided upon by Allah on the Day of Judgment. No one has the right in this world to declare anybody as having gone astray, or having become a heretic. Because of this freedom of religion, Allah does not punish people on the basis of religious beliefs in this world. The Holy Quran ordains the chastisement of nations in this world only under two conditions. The first instance is when a Prophet of Allah, or His appointee comes into this world, and the enemies of truth are bent upon his destruction and the destruction of his mission. Allah Almighty, after giving them sufficient time for reformation, brings about their destruction, for if He would not do so, they would destroy His chosen ones and their mission. This death is not on the basis of their beliefs, but is brought about to protect the mission of the Prophet, or the one who is appointed. The other example of Divine punishment in this world is when a nation’s evil deeds become so excessive that they destroy the peace in the land, and make the very existence of others impossible. Allah inflicts the perpetrators of such evil with lesser punishments as a warning, but if they do not reform, He destroys them. It must be remembered that this is because of their evil deeds, and not as a consequence of their beliefs.

It is then stated, “And who is more unjust than he who prevents (men) from the mosques of Allah, from His name being remembered therein, and strives to ruin them? (As for) these, it was not proper for them to enter them except in fear. For them is disgrace in this world, and theirs is a grievous chastisement in the Hereafter.” These Divine words indicate unambiguously that the discussion is now focused upon the Muslims as was indicated by the previous wordings also. This verse mentions clearly the preventing from the Mosques of Allah. The Jews and the Christians did not stop those who differed from them in their religious views, from their places of worship. In this century, we have witnessed ourselves that the Christians, in fact, invite people of other faiths to their churches, so as to influence the visitors with the goodness of their faith. It was only the different sects of

the Muslims who not only prevented each other from coming to their mosques, but also fought amongst themselves in such matters. On trivial matters such as pronouncing the words, ‘*wa-la-zaleen* or *wa-la-daleen*,’ on saying ‘*ameen*,’ loudly or silently, on where to place the hands when standing up for prayer etc., people clashed with one another in the mosques, and the sect to which the mosque belonged, excluded the other one from entering it. The evil of calling each other as heretics is an old one amongst the Muslims. Such action took place for the first time during the sedition of the Khawarij, in the time of the fourth Caliph Hazrat Ali. However, the people were never stopped from entering the mosques, until the beginning of the thirteenth century Hijra. The condition of the Muslims, then became such that signs were posted outside the mosques indicating the sect to which the mosque belonged, and barring others from entering it. Allah says who is more unjust than the people who indulge in such action, for mosques were built for the remembrance of Allah. Those who stop people from entering them endeavor towards their desolation by such action. The famous poet of the east, Muhammad Iqbal has described this as, ‘the lamentation of the mosques that no one comes for prayer.’ Another famous poet Maulana Hali also paints a heartbreaking picture of this in his poems. The Holy Quran says, those who prevent people from the mosques of Allah should not have entered them, but with the fear of Allah in their hearts. They have turned the House of Allah into their own private homes where from they exclude people as they desire. Such people, according to the Divine verse would be disgraced in this world, and will face chastisement in the Hereafter.

Spread of Islam in the West prophesied

The words that follow are truly amazing, “And Allah’s is the East and the West, so wither you turn thither is Allah’s purpose. Surely Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.” Glory be to Allah and all praise is His, Glory be to Allah who is incomparable in greatness. What a great Prophecy this is! It was made fourteen hundred years ago, and has been realized to the very letter. It states both the East and the West belong to Allah. Islam first spread to the East, which included the Middle East and Asia. The reason for this was that during that time period the East was the center of culture, learning and civilization. Islam is not the kind of religion which is propagated by taking advantage of the ignorance of uncivilized nations. Its appeal is to the enlightened mind, and not to one steeped in intellectual darkness. Fourteen hundred years ago, Europe and America were still in the dark ages. East was the center of culture and civilization, and that is why Islam spread in the East during that period. In this day and age, great progress in science

and humanities has been made in the West. Religious intolerance has gradually pervaded the East, as a result of which people are barred from entering the mosques. Allah, therefore, turned the direction of Islamic acceptance towards the West, through His appointed reformer (*mujaddid*) Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, and his followers. Hazrat Ahmed presented Islam as the enlightened religion which appeals to reason, and which is backed with the wealth of knowledge and wisdom acceptable to the educated mind. Thousands of individuals in Europe and many more people in America have converted to Islam after reading the commentary of the Holy Quran, and the Islamic literature produced by the organization, he formed for this purpose. This organization is represented today by the Ahmaddiya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam Lahore. The signs of the spread of Islam in the West are becoming more apparent every day as a result of these efforts.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had prophesied this in his saying that in the last age the sun shall rise in the West. The Holy Quran has called the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as the Light Giving Sun (*sirājun munīra*). It is quite a coincidence that the heavenly body called the sun also rises from the East. When we say it has set in the West, it is actually rising in the West at the time. May we dedicate our lives, and sacrifice our self for the Holy Quran, and the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the prophecies of both having been so elegantly fulfilled after fourteen hundred years. All praise be to Allah for this!

The last verse of this lesson is, “Surely Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing,” indicating that if He has given you close to eight to nine hundred million Muslims in the East, He will give you many more in the West. He knows where all the righteous souls are that would accept Him. It is our duty to focus our attention, and efforts towards the West. In fact, it is stated that where ever you turn Allah’s attention will be drawn that way. Nothing could be more encouraging than this Divine promise; what is lacking is our own effort.

In the subsequent verses of this section, the Christian beliefs of the son of God, and other objections raised in the West, for example regarding Divine revelation are answered. This is a further and clear indication that in this section the spread of Islam in the West is implied. What an amazing and a wonderful scripture is the Holy Quran!

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 25)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient.

And speak not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, (they are) alive, but you perceive not.

And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits.

And give good news to the patient, Who, when a misfortune befalls them say : " Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return."

Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِن لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦١﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٢﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٣﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٥﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ وَالْبَشْرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٦٦﴾

CH.2:153-157

Quranic philosophy of trials and tribulations

I feel it is essential to discuss these verses which relate the very important subject matter of trials and tribulations, and the display of patience under such circumstances. The Holy Quran sheds light on this subject, and mentions three ways in which such trials are brought upon mankind.

- 1) In the first instance this occurs with the advent of a prophet, but now that prophet hood has ended, with the advent of a reformer (*mujaddid*), or one appointed by God comes. Such a person, and those who follow him, have to face severe opposition. Attempts are even made upon

their lives. Thus in some manner and form, those who support the truth have to undergo frequent trials and tribulations.

- 2) In the second category are those difficulties which are ordained by Allah for mankind as his *taqdir*, meaning the Divine law, with the objective of enhancing his growth and development. Under this category fall the conditions which bring about a state of fear, hunger and destruction of life and property.
- 3) In the third group fall those tribulations which a man brings upon himself as a consequence of his wrong doings, and misdeeds. This is stated in the verse, “And whatever misfortune befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and He pardons much”(42:30). The remedy for such difficulties, besides patience, is repentance, asking for Divine protection from sin, and self-reformation.

At times it is difficult to differentiate between these three categories. As a measure of precaution it is, therefore essential for those who guard against evil (*muttaqin*) to reform themselves, along with sincerely repenting (*taubah*), and seeking Divine protection (*istighfar*). Even if the tribulation has not been brought upon by one’s own action, one of the important reasons for its occurrence is reformation, and spiritual development of mankind. A useful analogy to remember in this regard is the purification of gold from dross, by subjecting it to heat. In a similar manner spiritual purification occurs in face of adversity.

A spiritually depraved person considers adversity as an accidental occurrence, and therefore exhibits impatience and restlessness. He tries unsuccessfully to seek solace in alcohol, or some other intoxicant, and at times even commits suicide. The Holy Quran, however, tells us, “ No calamity befalls, but by Allah’s permission” (64:11). For this reason one should face such difficulties with patience, and steadfastness, while being sincerely repentant, and seeking Divine protection, lest the adversity be a result of his misdeeds. Crying out for help is a natural human reaction, and since all afflictions arise as a result of Divine command, and with His permission, it is quite natural to ask Him for help. Let us now see how we can solicit such assistance.

Prayers in Adversity strengthen Bond between Man and God

The first category of trials and tribulations that I have mentioned above, arise when one accepts an appointee of God and the truth he stands for. Unfortunately, those who accept the truth are always few and lack numerical strength. Their opponents are greater in number, stronger, and bent upon their extirpation. It becomes necessary, in fact, there is an intense

need for the ones who stand for the truth to ask for Divine assistance. Who is there besides Allah to help them? That is the reason why in the first verse in this lesson, Allah tells us to ask for His help, but show patience while doing so. Facing adversities with patience in itself evokes Divine assistance. It is part of human nature to ask for help, therefore Allah enjoins us to ask for His assistance through prayer and supplication. Patience is enjoined upon those who believe in the truth, so that the difficulties they have to face to uphold the truth, result in firmly anchoring the truth to their hearts. Truth becomes a part of their very essence, provided they face adversity, and remain steadfast in their belief. The reason such a person is permitted to ask for Divine help through prayer, and supplication is that it strengthens the bond between man and God. This bond becomes even more stronger with the prolongation of adversity. This is the greatest benefit of having to face difficult times. The purpose of truth is to establish a relationship between man and God. When man prostrates and cries before his Lord, the burden on his heart is lifted, and he eventually finds pleasure and exhilaration in doing so. This is the greatest blessing of this life, and the Hereafter.

If in spite of patience, and asking for Divine assistance, difficulties do not resolve, one should not take this as an indication that Allah is not with him, and that all his prayers were wasted. That is why Divine words of solace are repeated, "Surely Allah is with the patient." Therefore, one should keep up prayer, and remain patient thereafter.

Patience a Divine Attribute

Patience and tolerance are both great attributes of the Divine Being, and the Holy Quran and Hadith direct us to acquire Divine attributes. It is a great honor for man that he is given the opportunity to acquire Divine attributes. Who can be more tolerant than the Divine Being? He observes a great portion of humanity denying His very existence, as can be observed to a large extent in the communist world today. In Europe and America, the idea evolved and was propagated all over the world that either there was never a God (we seek the protection of Allah from saying so), or if He was there at one time, He is now dead. Those who are not guilty of such blatant disrespect, associate with God by worshipping their own self created stone idols, or an animal, or another creation of God, generally a human being who has passed away. This also is a kind of insolence and disrespect. The Divine Being also observes with patience, and tolerance all kinds of evil deeds being committed in front of Him. If He had not manifested His attribute of patience, the world would have long ended, and man would not have had an opportunity to reform himself. Patience is, therefore a magnificent

attribute of Allah, and man is given an opportunity to acquire this by facing adversity.

Some, amongst those who accept the truth lose their life. Are they unsuccessful, or is their sacrifice in vain? Certainly this is not so, Allah tells us, "And speak not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, (they are) alive, but you perceive not." Such martyrs acquire a superior, and everlasting existence which cannot be excelled upon. They were liberated from the pain, illness, hunger and grief of this worldly existence, and immediately entered into the garden of eternity. The achievement of such people is worthy of emulation.

Adversity a means of spiritual development

The second category of adversities which man has to face are those which are ordained by Allah for mankind as his *taqdir*, meaning the Divine law or the measure of his growth, and development, or as a trial from Him. These occur in the form of fear, apprehension, hunger, poverty, or a loss of life, property, and the fruits of his effort. These trials are for the purpose of exposing the hidden condition of man's soul, both its weaknesses and its strengths. For example, if a person is involved in an adverse circumstance, and he lies, bribes, steals, or breaks a promise to get out of it, then this situation has made apparent for him the weaknesses that were hidden in his character. This provides for him an opportunity to reform himself before his life ends, and he has no other remedy for his spiritual illness, but the fire of hell. On the other hand, those who face these Divinely ordained measures of growth, and development with patience, their character evolves such qualities which were not there before, and their hidden potential is thus manifested. A tree which sheds all its leaves, and faces the harsh winter, bears flowers and fruits, in springtime. The good qualities which adorn the character of man, like fruits and flowers are the same which will form the pleasant fruits and flowers of the garden of eternity.

This is why it is stated, "And give good news to the patient," i.e., those who face such trials with patience. As to what this good news is will be discussed later, but before this we are informed as to who the patient ones are. These, it is stated are the ones, who when faced with a Divinely ordained trial say, "Surely we are Allah's, and to Him we shall return." They admit that they belong to Allah, and that He may do with them as He pleases. The loss or damage, they may have suffered does not matter, for they have to return to their Lord, and if He is pleased with them, He will give them reward in the life Hereafter, which would be more than the loss they suffered. All the worldly possessions are eventually lost at the time of death. The Holy Quran then tells us that these are the people who in this very life

receive the protection (*maghfirat*), and the blessings of Allah. What is this protection of Allah from? It is from one's misdeeds, weaknesses, negligence, and from their adverse consequences. It is also from the repetition of these acts, for there is always a danger of this. For example, if someone steals, it becomes easier for him to steal again. A patient individual, thus not only comes under the protection of Allah, but he is also favored with spiritual blessings (*rahmat*) from Allah. Spiritual blessings are the real blessings, for the worldly blessings either finish during, or certainly at the end of one's life. The spiritual blessings will, however accompany the spirit into the eternal life Hereafter, where the blessings will also assume an external palpable form, as I have discussed in one of my previous lessons.

The Greatest blessing achieved by those who are patient

Another blessing, which is the greatest of all is also mentioned for those who are patient, "and those are the followers of the right course." In my commentary on the verse in *Al-Fātiḥah*, "guide us on the right path," I have explained that this prayer is in fact about finding closeness with God, which is the purpose of man's life and creation. There is no greater blessing than this which man can find. Those who are patient will, therefore, be guided on the path which leads them to Allah in this very life like the prophets, the truthful ones, and the righteous servants of Allah. These are the ones who bear the greatest hardships in the way of truth. Those who are not able to establish such a closeness with Allah are, however on the right path and will eventually find this treasure; therefore my friends do not despair of adversities, and be patient so that you can find God.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 26)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men, and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life therewith to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand.

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْخِلَافِ
الَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلْكِ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي
الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَّاءٍ فَأَحْيَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ
بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ
وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ
السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٦٤﴾

CH.2:164

The true meaning of worship of One God

This is verse 164 of *Al-Baqarah*. Verse 136, preceding this states, “And your God (*Ilāh*) is One God ; there is no God but He! He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.” The Arabic word, *Ilāh*, which stands for God in this verse, has a very comprehensive meaning which is thus explained.

- 1) He is the One Who deserves to be worshipped with complete submission.
- 2) This submission should be born out of love. Allah does not benefit from such love and obedience from mankind, but it is man himself who reaps the benefit in the form of Spiritual advancement brought about by the nurturing unto perfection of the Lord (*rabubiyyat*). Man can thus become a recipient of the blessings that Allah has prepared for him. A person should, therefore submit to his greatest Benefactor out

of love, not only because of His countless blessings, but also for the simple reason that he who shows obedience out of love, stands to benefit most from his Patron. For example, the child who considers his parents as his benefactors and obeys them with love, benefits most from their nurturing and guidance. The one who obeys with reluctance, and only on compulsion, fails to benefit fully from such direction.

- 3) The third meaning of the word *Ilāh* is the One Who is the goal of one's life, and is therefore sought after as such. The purpose of man's creation is to search and find the Divine Being, and to establish a relationship with Him. He who submits to Allah, gets close to Allah by developing the color of His attributes which evolve from such submission and thus establishes a relationship with Him.

In the verse, "And your God (*Ilāh*) is One God; there is no God but He! He is the Beneficent, the Merciful," the main stress is laid on the Unity of the Divine Being, and this is the basic distinctive feature of the religion of Islam. In this verse, it is also stated He is Beneficent, and in another place it is stated, "The Beneficent taught the Quran"(55:1-2). Just as His Beneficence has provided for all our physical needs without our asking, it has also provided for our spiritual need by revealing the Holy Quran, whose object is to inform man about the purpose of his creation, and to guide Him towards the Creator. As a result, the incorrectness and falsity of polytheism which had taken hold of the world was dispelled by the Holy Quran, and monotheism was re-established once more, on this earth to stay till the Day of Judgment. Allah is also Merciful. Those who follow the Quranic injunctions will be blessed with everlasting spiritual life, happiness, joy and contentment in this world, and the Hereafter. This verse also contains forceful arguments in support of the principle of Unity of God. Man cannot serve two masters at the same time, and there is no one more Beneficent and Merciful, or more deserving of our love than Allah, on account of His Benevolence. Man, therefore cannot make it the purpose of his life to attain closeness to more than one God. For example, the one who wanders around in search of two different locations at the same time, will fail to find his destination particularly if his real destination is neither of those two locations.

Signs of the existence and Unity of the Divine Being in the Universe

Sign of Creation of the Heaven and the Earth: Continuing the same subject of Unity of God, our lesson today identifies the many convincing signs of the existence, and the Unity of the Divine Being which are present in the universe around us. The creation of the earth and the heavens is discussed

first with the words, “In the creation of the heavens and the earth.” Although our earth is full of great wonders, its position in relation to the rest of the universe is that of a grain of sand in a vast ocean. Modern scientific discovery in this matter has been truly amazing. We have found out that the distances in the universe are so large that our ordinary measures fail to gauge them. Scientists have, therefore attempted to measure these distances with the speed of light, for light is the only entity that is common between us and the rest of the universe. Light, we know travels at the speed of hundred and eighty six thousand miles per second. If we multiply this by thirty six hundred, we get the distance light travels in one hour, multiply this with twenty four, and then with three hundred and sixty five to calculate the distance covered by light in one year. This is called a light year. The estimated length of the universe is seven billion light years, and this extends in all directions. Scientists have also discovered that the universe is a single entity governed by the same laws which is a cogent argument in support of the existence of the Divine Being.

Sign of Alternation of Day and Night: It is then stated, “and the alternation of night and day,” i.e., in the alternating cycle of the day and night also exist signs of the Unity of the Divine Being. Let us closely observe our own solar system within this vast creation. The immense power of the sun which generates the energy equivalent of the detonation of a hundred million hydrogen bombs every second, has been harnessed into the service of mankind in such an efficient manner that not even a slight variation can occur, otherwise it could lead to chaos in the whole solar system. All forms of life on this earth including plant, and animal life, and the existence of minerals is dependent upon the energy, and light that comes from the sun. A slight decrease in the distance of the sun from the earth could burn all that exists on the earth. Only a slight increase of this distance on the other hand would plummet temperatures to where every thing would freeze and life would become impossible. In a similar manner the moon not only provides light at night, but also affects many phases of life on earth. The rotation of the sun, moon and the earth is so well organized, that not even a variation of an inch or a second occurs in their motion. This has made it possible for the scientists to precisely calculate time and distance, thereby enabling them to land man on the moon. Although the effect of the alternation of the day and night is an extensive subject in itself, even an illiterate person can appreciate, that this phenomenon enables one to perform various activities during daylight, and to rest at night. This powerful system of heavenly bodies despite its opposing elements, and differences has been harnessed with the sole purpose of serving mankind. Is this not a sign of the existence of a Divine Being Who is the possessor of magnificent power and will?

Sign of the Ships and the Sea: Another very intriguing argument is then given, “and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men.” To the casual observer it seems that the oceans have caused the division of the earth into different parts leading to various racial differences, thus forming the basis of human conflict. The ships, by establishing a connection between these separated land masses have led to the elimination of some of these differences. From these very oceans which appear to be the cause of such conflict, Allah has provided mankind with unlimited benefits. Besides being the source of fresh water which is the basis of all life, they also have a seemingly limitless supply of food. The only way to reach this food source is also by means of these ships, and ocean freighters. International trade and commerce depends on them, and they are the least expensive means of transportation of goods, and materials from one country to another. For the transfer of heavy equipment which cannot be sent by air we have to rely on sea transportation. Who evolved the natural laws of physics which enable these ships to navigate the oceans, and for whose benefit were they created?

Sign of the Life-giving Rainwater: It is then stated, “and the water that Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life therewith to the earth after its death.” This verse also describes a natural phenomenon which manifests strong evidence of the existence of the Divine Being. Who has created this potent connection of life and death between the earth and the heavens which do not appear to be visibly linked? When the earth becomes lifeless due to lack of moisture, who generates vapor from the brackish sea water, cools it down in the higher strata of the atmosphere, propels it by means of pressure changes and winds, and brings it down as fresh rain water? Not only does this enliven the dead earth, but also makes the water fit for the consumption of man and beast. Who created this unity of purpose between the opposing elements of the earth and the sky, the salt water of the ocean and the fresh rain water, in fact life and death itself?

Sign of Creation of animal Life: The Holy Quran then says, “and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals.” In this verse, attention is then drawn to the fact that the earth contains hundreds and thousands, in fact millions and billions of living organisms. Who has created this vast variety of animal life for the sole purpose of serving mankind? Does this not prove the existence, and Unity of an ingenious Creator?

Sign of the Changing Winds: This verse closes with the statement, “and the changing of the winds, and the clouds made subservient between heaven and the earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand.” Who moves the wind currents all over the earth in such a manner that if a pressure change occurs over South America, the winds may shift from the West to the East, and cause rainfall in Asia. Similarly a weather occurrence

on the South pole may affect conditions over the North pole etc.

In this profound Quranic verse, besides the cogent arguments for the unity, and the existence of the Divine Being, our attention is also drawn to the fact that all the elements mentioned in these verses, despite their impressive strength, are subservient to One God. The law that works on the earth is the same that works in the whole universe. This has been proven by modern scientific studies, and development of space programs based on the same principles of physics which apply here on earth. It is not hard to contemplate the power and majesty of the Being Who is the Creator of, and controls the universe with such powerful elements as the sun, oceans and winds. Why should man not be subservient to such a God? The Holy Quran puts it very well, that this is not difficult to understand for the one who uses his intellect. There also lies another matter of wisdom in this Quranic statement. It tells us that all the powerful elements of nature mentioned in these verses, lack the intellectual capability with which man is blessed. With the use of this intelligence, and development of scientific knowledge, man has been able to make these powerful forces subservient to his will. The One who blessed man with such intelligence, and created all scientific knowledge, is Himself the possessor of such magnificent intellect that man's mental capabilities are insignificant in comparison. It behooves mankind, therefore to serve such a Creator without any reservations. Besides man the rest of the creation lacks such common sense, and it is therefore, subordinated to man by the Will of the Divine Being. The intelligent choice for man, which is to his own benefit, is to serve the One Who created all these forces, and harnessed them for man's benefit. This is well illustrated by the historical example of nations who made worldly progress, but lost it and were themselves destroyed, because their intelligence did not progress beyond the material and external element, and remained devoid of the spiritual insight.

History is replete with examples of the rise and fall of nations who concentrated solely on worldly progress and materialism, to the exclusion of moral and spiritual values. These nations lost their worldly glory, and their intellectual prowess which they considered to be the basis of their civilization, was destroyed.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 27)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Yet there are some men who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, whom they love as they should love Allah. And those who believe are stronger in (their)love for Allah. And O that the wrongdoers had seen, when they see the chastisement, that power is wholly Allah's, and that Allah is severe in chastising!

When those who are followed renounce those who followed (them), and they see the chastisement and their ties are cut asunder.

And those who followed will say: If we could but return, we would renounce them as they have renounced us. Thus will Allah show them their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they will not escape from the Fire.

CH.2:165-167

Nature's testimony towards Divine Unity (a brief summary of lesson 26)

In the Quranic verse, that I discussed in lesson twenty six, our attention was drawn to the fact that the magnificent universe surrounding us on all sides, was subservient only to the will of Allah. This truth that the whole universe follows the law laid down by its Creator, has been confirmed by modern

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ ۝

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللّٰهِ
اٰنْدَادًا يُحِبُّوهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللّٰهِ وَالَّذِیْنَ
اٰمَنُوْا اَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلّٰهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِیْنَ
ظَلَمُوْا اِذْ یُرَوْنَ الْعَذَابَ اَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلّٰهِ
جَمِیْعًا ۗ وَاَنَّ اللّٰهَ شَدِیْدُ الْعَذَابِ ۝۱۶۵

اِذْ تَبَرَّأَ الَّذِیْنَ اتَّبَعُوْا مِنَ الَّذِیْنَ اتَّبَعُوْا
وَمَرَّوْا بِالْعَذَابِ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ الْاَسْبَابُ ۝۱۶۶

وَقَالَ الَّذِیْنَ اتَّبَعُوْا لَوْ اَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةٌ فَنَتَبَرَّأَ
مِنْهُمْ كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوْا مِنَّا كَذٰلِكَ یُرِیْهِمُ اللّٰهُ
اَعْمَالَهُمْ حَسْرَتٍ عَلَیْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِخٰرِجِیْنَ
مِنَ النَّارِ ۝۱۶۷

scientific development. It was further pointed out that the earth, which is one of the smallest planets in the cosmos, contains extremely powerful elements, such as the oceans and the wind currents and others besides these. Disturbance in these elements can cause powerful hurricanes, and earthquakes which can be destructive to mankind. The sun which is one such extremely powerful element has a very precise relationship with the earth. If it only moves slightly closer to earth, its intense heat would burn and destroy all living matter. A slight shift in the other direction, on the other hand would lead to a deep freeze which would again prove destructive to life. On the surface of the sun the energy equivalent of a hundred million hydrogen bombs is released every second. All these powerful forces are completely subservient to Allah. This is proven by the fact that not only are these forces completely subservient to the laws laid down by Allah, but He has harnessed them to serve mankind. The observation, and study of the universe makes three things quite apparent to the intelligent mind.

- 1) There is a Creator of this universe, and He is Master over all its powerful forces.
- 2) He is One.
- 3) Even the most powerful and frightening forces in the universe are completely subservient to Him.

Submission to Allah appealing to Man's Intellect

After referring to these manifest signs, it was stated that those who use their intellect will draw the following conclusions from this. Since all these powerful forces are entirely subservient to the command of Allah Almighty, man, who is weak and humble in nature, should also submit to Him. These elements have not been blessed with intelligence, and have therefore been harnessed into Allah's submission under compulsion. Man on the other hand, has been blessed with intelligence which he can utilize to make these forces subservient to him. This is only possible by discovering, and following the laws laid down by Allah, something which every scientist does. How magnificent and comprehensive is the intellect of the Being Who has created all these powerful forces! The intelligence that Allah has bestowed upon man behooves him to submit to the Divine intellect which has given him the knowledge and guidance of the Holy Quran.

Love of the Benefactor also Leads to Submission: Now let us consider the verse, "Yet there are some men who take for themselves objects of worship besides Allah, whom they love as they should love Allah. And those who believe are stronger in (their) love for Allah." What a wonderful Book is the Holy Quran! In the previous verse we learned that the intellect leads man to recognize and submit to his Creator. It is now pointed out that

love is another reason which motivates man into submission. For example, if one is in love with someone, he has the desire to obey all his commands. Allah is most deserving of man's love, for He is the Possessor of all the perfect attributes, and is the greatest Benefactor of mankind. Having been made aware of, and duly impressed by the Divine attributes it becomes incumbent upon man to give Allah his foremost affection and obedience, something which a truly beloved Supreme Benefactor deserves. Many, however, associate with Allah and love their associates the way they should love Allah, the most High. Those Human beings who have been made into God or associates with His Being, are thus intensely loved by their followers. This occurs to the extent that the true God is forgotten, and is either replaced by these associates, or given a secondary, or lower status to them. For example, the degree of love the Christians show for Jesus is far more than the affection shown towards the other two members of Trinity. The Holy Quran states, "a believer loves Allah more than any one else." All other expressions of love are also the creation of Allah. For example, the love of parents for their offspring has also been imbued by Allah into their nature. Similar to this is the love of a husband for his wife. Man is allowed to participate in all such rightful show of affection, but he is enjoined to keep the love of Allah above all. If the need arises, he should not hesitate to sacrifice all other attachments, for the sake of Allah. Observe the example of Prophet Abraham, how he was ready to sacrifice his son on the basis of his vision which he considered a sign from Allah. The oath of fealty taken by the reformer of the fourteenth century Hijra from his followers, to keep the religion above the world, is a similar commitment, to sacrifice all for the love, and obedience of Allah when the need arises.

Association with God, the greatest inequity

The Divine Word then states, "And O that the wrongdoers had seen, when they see the chastisement, that the power is wholly Allah's, and that Allah is severe in chastising!" In this context it is essential to understand the meaning of the word *ẓālim* (wrongdoer). In fact all evil action is a wrong (*ẓulm*) committed against one's soul. The Holy Quran, however, tells us that, "Surely associating with God is the greatest wrong (*ẓulmun adẓīm*)."
The reason for this as I have already said in my commentary on the *Al-Fātiḥah* is that the sole purpose of man's creation is the recognition of the Divine Being, therefore, the person who associates with God fails to fulfill the very purpose of his creation. There can be no greater inequity than this against one's soul, nor can there be an evil, or disrespect greater than setting up of an associate with God Almighty, or taking another object of worship in His place. In the first verse of this very section of the Holy Quran,

Allah has appealed to human intelligence by providing cogent proofs in support of His Unity.

The second verse in the same section which is under discussion today, mentions the love of Allah. It is man's nature to love his benefactor and there can be no greater benefactor of mankind, or anyone higher in attributes than Allah. Polytheists therefore reject the testimony of their own intelligence which leans towards the love of the greatest Benefactor, Allah. Even an animal, which does not possess intelligence, begins to show affection towards its benefactor because of its instinct. For example, the love of dogs, horses and other animals for their masters falls into this category. The one who associates with God, therefore falls even below the level of animals, and leaves no choice, but that of comprehension through Divine chastisement. One can try to discipline an animal in many different ways, but eventually physical restraint and force may be the only way to make it submit. It is stated therefore, that when the polytheists witness the chastisement of Allah, then only will they realize that He is the Possessor of power over all, and their false deities were powerless, otherwise they would have saved them from Divine punishment. The chastisement of Allah is so severe that only the one who experiences some effect of it in this world has some awareness of it, but unfortunately, man remains totally oblivious of this.

False deities unable to assist in time of real need

Three things are mentioned in the next verse, "When those who are followed renounce those who followed (them), and they see the chastisement and their ties are cut asunder." First are mentioned those individuals who were made associates with God, or were chosen as leaders and guides. They fall under two categories. Under one category come the prophets of God such as Jesus, Buddha, Ramchandra and Krishna who were made into associates with God by the people. On the Day of Judgment they will definitely disapprove of their polytheistic followers, because all prophets and messengers are sent to preach Divine Unity as stated repeatedly in the Holy Quran. The second group includes those religious or worldly leaders, spiritualists etc., who are blindly followed by their followers although such obedience may lead to the disobedience of Allah. This is also polytheism, or association with God. We are informed that when chastisement comes these very same worldly leaders saints and savants will show their displeasure with their followers. In this worldly life, we frequently see manifestation of such behavior that whenever punishment is imposed, these worldly leaders are quick to deny, and disapprove of their followers. I observed this frequently during my service for the government. The Holy Quran states, 'those who worship such false deities instead of God will

witness these deities disclaiming themselves from being held responsible for their followers actions.' On seeing the chastisement they will show their displeasure with such followers and say, " We did not tell them to make us associates with Allah, or consider us above Him." The third thing mentioned is, "and their ties are cut asunder." Undue reliance upon worldly ties or resources is akin to their worship, and this is another form of association with God. For example many people have made wealth their God and believe that it will solve all their problems. They expect their own worldly position, or the goodwill of those who occupy positions of authority in the society, to be of assistance in times of need. To site another example, such people often consider medicine or the services of a physician to cure them of illness and their vision does not extend beyond this to Allah, the real Source of healing. They totally rely upon their own effort and do not pray for the blessing of Allah to be part of it. The Holy Quran states that all such worldly ties which promote such undue reliance akin to worship, will be cut asunder, and will prove of no benefit.

In the closing verse it is stated, "And those who followed will say: If we could but return, we would renounce them as they have renounced us. Thus will Allah show them their deeds to be intense regret to them, and they will not escape from the Fire." During my public life and worldly experience, I have also frequently witnessed this occurrence. Not only do the leaders disavow and disapprove of their followers, but the followers also wish that the clock could be set back so that they could treat their leaders in a similar manner and reject their leadership. The Holy Quran says such longing will become a source of torment and torture for them. Besides this, they will desire to get out of the external chastisement of Hell fire, but will be unable to do so. This means they will not be able to get out of the chastisement by themselves. It does not indicate that the chastisement of hell will never end. The Holy Quran has made it quite clear on several occasions that the punishment of evil is in proportion to it. Obviously when this punishment is fulfilled, and leads to the reformation of man, Allah will deliver him from hell. This is also confirmed by the Hadith.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 28)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O, men eat the lawful and good things from what is in the earth.

CH.2:168

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

Dietary laws in Islam

For this lesson I have selected the injunctions regarding food in Islam. The reason for this is that some young men and women who have been influenced by western values, raise questions regarding the prohibition of certain foods. The Divine commandments regarding food are as follows:

- 1) Eat of whatever is in the earth, provided it is lawful (*halal*), and good (*tayyib*). Those things are lawful which Allah has declared lawful, and are earned in a manner that is consistent with the law of God, and the law of the land. Allah has declared all things lawful, with the exception of a few, but it is essential that they should be earned in a lawful manner, and those means that are prohibited by God, and the law of the land should be avoided.
- 2) The second important law in this matter is, “ Eat and drink and be not prodigal” (7:31). Most of us eat more than is needed, and this leads to many illnesses, particularly due to excessive weight gain. Most of us are aware of the harmful effects of excessive food consumption, however, excessive consumption of beverages such as water, tea and coffee can also adversely affect one’s health and well being. In fact, doctors frequently recommend moderation in the consumption of both tea and coffee for heavy users. People are not ordinarily aware of the fact that drinking water in excess of one’s thirst, can also lead to weight gain, and just as over watering of land can lead to water logging, excessive consumption of fluids can be deleterious to the human body. Water consumption should be regulated by the thirst drive, and

over consumption should be avoided.

- 3) The third significant injunction in this matter is, “O, you who believe, forbid no the good things which Allah has made lawful for you” (5:87). What are these good things which have also been previously mentioned with the lawful ones? Good (*tayyib*) means that which is pure, or desirable. An item which is lawful may not be pure, clean and desirable under certain circumstances. For example, the flesh of a goat which has been slaughtered in the prescribed manner is lawful, but it becomes unsuitable (not good) for consumption if it rots. Eating sugar is lawful, but it is not good (*tayyib*) for a patient of diabetes. Islam, according to the Holy Quran respects the natural likes of people. For example, it is lawful to consume the meat of a crow, but some people do not like to eat its meat. It is inappropriate to insist that they should eat it because it is lawful. Before Islam, the Arabs used to eat *goh*, a larger variety of a lizard. Islam did not declare it unlawful, however, when a man cooked some of it and brought it for the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he declined to eat it. It is therefore all right to eat lawful things which are clean, provided they are not rotten or prohibited by the doctor, and are to one’s liking. The verse that I just quoted states that, ‘do not prohibit for yourself certain good and lawful things.’ This is to discourage certain practices common among some religions, and unfortunately also practiced by some Muslims, where so called *pirs* (spiritualists) prohibit certain foods to practice self deprivation.
- 4) In the fourth category we will discuss those things which Allah has forbidden. These are basically four in number, as stated in this verse, “He has forbidden you only what dies of itself, and blood, and the flesh of the swine, and that over which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked” (2:173). More details of this are provided in chapter five, verse three, where it is stated that, ‘what dies by itself,’ includes which dies by strangulation (for example, a goat which gets strangulated on its tie), that dying of injury, or that which the wild beasts have eaten except what you slaughter before it dies. In all these situations blood letting by slaughtering which is essential for purifying the meat has not occurred. It has also been further clarified in this verse that animals which are slaughtered without invoking the name of Allah include those that are slaughtered in front of the idols.

Why certain foods are forbidden

Now I will further discuss the above mentioned forbidden foods in order to elaborate the philosophy behind this Divine injunction. First let us

consider the animal that dies naturally. Obviously such an animal was stricken by some disease. Eating its flesh creates the possibility of being infected by it. It is also quite possible that such an animal may have putrefied inside, although this may not be apparent by superficial observation. The process of slaughtering eliminates the blood from the flesh as the heart of the animal continues to beat and pump the blood out, although the animal is unconscious and not feeling any pain. The flesh of an animal that is not slaughtered still contains blood, and decomposes at a faster rate. Food affects human character, as I will discuss later on, and also affects physical appearance. For example, animals like vultures and hyenas that eat the flesh of other dead animals, have an abominable appearance. This has been my personal observation as well. Several years ago while employed in Bombay, I noticed that races which consumed carrion possessed not only bad habits, and low levels of morality, but also had unpleasant physical characteristics. In any case, one cannot deny the fact that the animal which dies of itself is usually disease infected. And consumption of its flesh creates a health hazard.

Now let us discuss the prohibition on blood consumption. Scientific research has now proven that all germs, bacteria, viruses, and waste materials circulate in the body through the bloodstream. Disease causing germs, toxic materials, and waste products of metabolism are carried to and from body organs and the skin by the circulation of blood. Blood deteriorates faster than flesh, and for this reason meat that contains blood putrefies quickly. Consuming blood separately, therefore, can be deleterious to health. You may be surprised to learn that there are certain groups amongst the Sikhs and the Gurkhas who consume blood. Since food affects the character traits of the consumer, those who have fought against such groups are well aware of their bloodthirsty ferocity. Those who do not consume blood separately, but consume it along with the meat are also more ferocious than the nations that do not consume blood at all, such as the Jews and the Muslims. That is why a Muslim soldier is a more civilized soldier. Animals that consume blood, such as lions and tigers, are also well known for their ferocity.

The prohibition on the consumption of the flesh of the swine will now be discussed. The Jewish religion prohibits the flesh of the swine, and Jesus showed his disdain for it by making some evil spirits enter into the swine. The adverse health affects of pork are also being gradually discovered. Not only is it the most indigestible form of flesh, but it can also spread many illnesses which are not prevented even by cooking it. The greatest disadvantage however, is that food affects character. The swine has a particular character trait of being the only animal which has no territorial instincts, or sense of honor regarding its female mate, or with regards to sexual

behavior in general. Not only does it not protest the mating of other swine with its female, but actually encourages such behavior. The shamelessness which has occurred as a result of pork consumption, is quite evident in the western societies, today. The fact that food affects the character of an animal, has now been confirmed by some scientific experiments. These are mentioned in the January 1973 issue of the Reader's Digest magazine, where it is proven that the character traits of one animal can be transmitted to another by means of food. If this is true for the animals, it has to be true for the humans as well.

Finally, the consumption of the flesh of an animal over which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked, is prohibited. The reason for this is that since Allah is the Creator of Allah life, only He has the right to take it. Since it is not practically possible for man to seek permission from Allah every time an animal is to be slaughtered, therefore, Allah permitted man to invoke His name whenever he slaughters an animal. This is equivalent to seeking Divine permission for taking the life of that animal. If mention is made of the name of an idol, or a religious personality, then it is tantamount to considering that idol, or person as the master and creator of the animal being slaughtered, and this amounts to association with God, Who is the real Creator and Master. Hence, an animal sacrificed before an idol is considered unlawful. As far as monotheism is concerned, Islam has perfected the law to such a degree that anything which even slightly affects its sanctity is prohibited.

Dietary laws relaxed in times of necessity

The Holy Quran, while prohibiting the four things mentioned above, has provided for exemption in case of a person who is driven by necessity. This is stated in the verse, "Then whoever is driven by necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding limit, no sin is upon him. Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (2:173). For example, if a person's life is endangered due to hunger, or there is some other compulsion (as was done to some Muslims by non-Muslims), transgression of the dietary law is not a sin, provided the transgressor does not desire such unlawful things, and also does not go beyond what is necessary. His situation is under the forgiveness and mercy of Allah.

Hadith relating to dietary prohibitions

In the Hadith, it is stated, that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prohibited all beasts of prey with a *nab* (the canine tooth), such as the lions, wolves, dogs and all birds of prey with a claw, such as kites etc. The Holy Quran states, "Not does he speak out of

desire. It is naught , but revelation that is revealed” (53:3,4), i.e., the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) does not say anything out of his own desire, but only what is revealed to him through inner revelation. All sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) fall under this category, and therefore, these types of animals are also forbidden.

All of marine life has been made lawful , as stated in this verse, “ Lawful to you is the game of the sea and its food” (5:96). These do not require to be slaughtered (Bukhari 11:72). Some of these do not contain blood, and the ones that do have it in very small quantity, and its effect is different. All game is lawful, even if it is caught with hunting dogs, or hunting birds, provided that the name of Allah is recited on it (5:4). If there is no opportunity to slaughter the game, one should recite, ‘In the name of Allah, Allah is the Greatest (*Bismillah, Allahu Akbar*),’ before letting the hunting dog or bird lose. The same injunction applies to hunting with a bow or a rifle.

The food of the people of the book is lawful (5:5). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, if you are in doubt as to the name of Allah having been recited on it, or to its being slaughtered properly, recite yourself, ‘In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Allah is the Greatest,’ on it before consuming it (Bukhari 20:72). The people of the book include all those nations that have a revealed scripture, such as the Christians, Jews, Hindus, Parsees, etc.

Allah has made lawful all foods except the few mentioned above. To insist on eating these unlawful things is rebelling against the authority of Allah which is the result of persuasion of the devil, as stated in this verse, “O men, eat the lawful, and good things from what is on the earth, and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Surely he is an open enemy to you” (2:168). How can man learn to submit, if he is not prohibited from certain things, and given the opportunity to comply with such prohibition. If a person insists on eating the four or five items that Allah has prohibited when He, Allah has given him hundreds of thousands of lawful things to eat, then this is nothing else but rebellion and insubordination— an instigation of the devil. I have already shown that these Divine injunctions in this matter are not without a reason.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 29)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.

CH.2:177

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ
وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى
الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَ
الْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي
الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَ
الْمُؤْتُونَ بَعْدَ إِعْتَادِهِمُ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ
فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ
الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

The true meaning of East and West

The Divine words, “It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West,” need careful perusal. What exactly is the message being conveyed in this statement? Most commentators have interpreted this to mean the change in the direction in which Muslims offer their prayer. This took place when the Muslims moved to Medina about sixteen months after the Hijra. Prior to this, Muslims prayed facing towards Jerusalem. They were then commanded by Divine revelation to face towards the sacred house at Kabah, in Mecca. The commentators have, therefore interpreted the verse to mean that the act of changing direction is not by itself

an act of great righteousness, but, in fact righteousness lies in doing the things which are subsequently mentioned. This interpretation, however has the following drawbacks.

- 1) To connect this verse with the subject of change in the direction of prayers, the commentators have to go back four or five sections. In the intervening sections, so many new topics are introduced, and a natural continuity is lost. As I show later on during my lesson, the text of this section is a logical extension of its preceding section.
- 2) The importance of what direction to face during prayer, is such that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) individually, and the Muslims in general have been addressed on this issue altogether five times in the Holy Quran. They have been enjoined to face towards the *Ka'bah* (Sacred Mosque in Mecca) wherever they are, and whenever they get ready to pray. The importance of facing this direction (*Qiblah*) is such that in the Hadith the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has addressed the Muslims as the followers of this direction (*Ahle Qiblah*), and has prohibited them to call anybody who faces this direction to pray, as a disbeliever. From this we can conclude that facing the direction of the Kabah while praying is a distinctive sign of a follower of Islam, and is regarded as sufficient evidence to regard a person as a Muslim. In the light of this important significance attached to praying in the direction of the Kabah, calling it, "Not a righteousness," does not seem to be appropriate.
- 3) The interpretation of the commentators is also incorrect as far as the geographical direction is concerned. The verse under discussion was revealed at Medina. Jerusalem, the first direction (*Qiblah Awwal*) is North of Medina, and the sacred mosque at Kabah in Mecca, the final direction, (*Qiblah Akhir*) lies south of it. It is, therefore inappropriate to apply the verse, "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West," even to the Muslims of Medina, leave alone its application to Muslims in general. Muslim populations inside and outside of Arabia were at the time, and are even today, scattered in all directions of the Sacred Mosque at Kabah.

Actually East and West refers to two well known blocks the world is split into. In the English language also, the terms East and West are used to identify the people and the land of the East and the West. If we study the history of mankind, we find that the earlier civilizations, and cultural developments originated in the East. All religions evolved in the East, and then spread to the West. Since religion forms the basis of culture, and civilization, and provides the basis for good moral behavior, the West was influenced in this respect by the East. In the early period all the great empires were also in the East. Knowledge of science and humanities to whatever

degrees it existed, was in the East. Elegant clothes, good living conditions, poetry, literature, social etiquette, were all a part of the eastern culture. Europe and the Americas during that time were still in the dark ages. In the nineteenth century of the Christian era, this situation reversed itself. The western nations became politically, and militarily dominant, and made such remarkable progress in the fields of science and technology, that the whole world particularly those living in the East were greatly impressed by it.

Condition of the Muslim religious leaders during the 19th. Century

The nineteenth century is also the period during which not only the power of the eastern empires declined, but the religious structure which formed the basis of their culture, and civilization also weakened. Other religions had already deteriorated due to infusion of polytheism, and loss or interpolation of their Divine scriptures, but Islam remained monotheistic, and its scripture the Holy Quran was preserved in its original pristine form. The condition of the Muslim religious leaders, with a few exceptions, was akin to what has been appropriately described in the preceding section of the Holy Quran as, “Those who conceal aught of the Book that Allah has revealed and take for it a small price, they eat nothing, but fire into their bellies.” Maulana Altaf Hussain Hali the famous Indian poet of the period, also describes their condition very well in his famous work of poetry ‘*The Mussadas-e-Hali*.’ Muslim religious leaders, with a few exceptions, had abandoned the Holy Quran, and the example of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and were totally engrossed in matters of jurisprudence. This narrowed their outlook, shackled their thought process and led to the development of conservatism amongst them. Instead of the broad-minded views of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Holy Quran, they preached religious bigotry, which caused the Muslims to become divided into seventy two sects. All of these sects became involved in bitter mutual disputes on minor differences, resulting in sectarian violence and infighting. As a consequence of this, the educated Muslims were disillusioned by their religion, and either converted to Christianity, or at the very least, became admirers of the west.

Minor degrees of righteousness exist in all man made cultures

Now let us examine the words of the Holy Quran, “It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West.” Man only sees in the direction his face is turned to. He follows that direction, and all his attention is focused towards it. He learns, accepts and acts upon the

guidance he receives from there. In the early ages when the East was the cradle of civilization and culture, the attention of the whole world was turned towards it. In the 19th. and 20th. centuries people turned towards the west. This was not only because the ruling powers at the time were from the west, but also because their amazing scientific and technological progress had greatly impressed the people.

In the Indian subcontinent the people became divided into two groups. There were some who upheld only the eastern civilization and culture, and did not consider its western counterpart worthwhile. Some, on the other hand became so enthralled with the western values that whatever came from the west, or was done by westerners was considered by them to be the only right action worthy of following. They strayed away from their religion. Scientific development not only greatly impressed these people, but also encouraged them towards atheism and disbelief. There is an instinctive desire in mankind for self improvement. However, as these people had strayed far from religion, and did not look upon religion as the source of self improvement, they turned to secular western civilization, as an alternative.

True righteousness lies in higher moral values

The unbiased opinion of the Holy Quran in this respect is very admirable. Whereas both the followers of the East and the West could not see any worthwhile qualities in their counterparts, the Holy Quran states that they both have some lower level of amiable moral values, but it is only the higher values that are lacking. As an example of the minor virtues in the western civilization is the frequent expression of gratitude expressed by the words, 'thank you.' However, higher moral values are lacking. Due to a dearth of such higher moral values, the superficial glitter of the western culture has quickly faded away. Sexual delinquency, crimes against nature, nudity, alcoholism and other forms of drug abuse are rampant. Crime is on the rise, family life is in the shambles, and the younger generation has turned rebellious. Similarly, the different eastern cultures in the later periods of their development were involved in all kinds of evil. The higher moral values are, therefore non-existent in the worldly, and man made cultures. They exist in the principles the Holy Quran has laid down in the verse under discussion.

Quranic code of higher moral values

Unity of God: The primary and the most basic one amongst these higher values is belief in Allah. Belief in God does not carry only the significance that there is a God. It implies belief in that God has not created this whole universe without a purpose, and that man, the masterpiece of His creation,

and His vicegerent on earth, definitely has a higher purpose to his creation. What is the purpose of the creation of mankind? As mentioned frequently in these lessons, it is the realization of the existence of the Divine Being, and man's struggle to acquire closeness to Him. It is quite obvious that only those people can get close to Allah who recognize His attributes, and color themselves with His coloring. That is why the Holy Quran states, "(We take) Allah's color and who is better than Allah at coloring and we are His worshippers (with humility)" (2:138). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has expressed this in the following words, "Create the morals of Allah within yourself." How can this be accomplished? It can only be done by following His commandments with humility, as expressed in the Holy Quran by the words, "and we are His worshippers." The color of Allah is manifested by His attributes which represent the highest form of moral values.

Higher moral values acquired through awareness of Divine Attributes: I have explained this at length in my commentary on the verse, "All praise is for Allah." The concept of goodness has evolved in the human mind by the knowledge of Divine attributes given to it through Divine revelation, otherwise the human brain is made up of organic matter similar to that of animals. It is incapable of developing the concept of higher moral values without such revelation. This revelation started with Prophet Adam, and over thousands of years, knowledge of the attributes of Allah evolved into the concept of higher moral values in the human mind.

Quran is unique in giving knowledge of Divine Attributes: The knowledge of the Divine attributes that is given by the Holy Quran is not found in any other revealed scripture today. This is because the originals of all other scriptures have been lost. These scriptures exist today only in the form of translations done several hundred years later, and have undergone interpolation. The Holy Quran is the only scripture which was written down as soon as it was revealed, and is the only one undisputedly preserved in its original form till today. In any case, the extent to which the Holy Quran describes the Divine attributes is not matched by any other scripture in its present form. This is an open challenge to anyone who would care to accept it. If man is to be the vicegerent of Allah Almighty on this earth, then Allah wants him to carry out his responsibility with the same higher moral and spiritual values that are reflected by the attributes of Allah. Man, if he desires to get close to Allah in the Hereafter, has to color himself with the Divine attributes. The more imbued he is in the color of Allah, the closer is his relationship going to be with Him.

The attributes of Allah reflect such higher moral and spiritual values, that if they form the basis of a culture, or civilization, the resultant society would be the best, one can imagine.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 30)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.

CH.2:177

In the preceding lesson I have explained why it is inappropriate to interpret the verse, "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West," as the change in direction of prayer from Jerusalem towards the Sacred Mosque at *Ka'bah*. As pointed out earlier, the terms 'East' and 'West,' stand for the people of the East and West as is also the common connotation of these words in the English and Urdu languages. In the advancement of culture and the civilization which is mentioned here it was the East which took the first initiative. It gave birth to all the great religions of the world, many great empires, and arts, sciences, literature, and social etiquette, flourished here at a time when Europe and America were still in the dark ages. People, therefore, used to look upon, and turn in the direction of the East in order to learn about culture and civilization. This situation

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وَ الْمَغْرِبِ وَ لَکِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ اٰمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَ الْیَوْمِ
الْاٰخِرِ وَ الْمَلَائِکَةِ وَ الْکِتٰبِ وَ الرُّسُلِ وَ اٰتٰی
السَّالِ عَلٰی حُبِّهِ ذَوٰی الْقُرْبٰنِ وَ الْیَتٰمٰی وَ
السَّکِیْنِ وَ اٰبْنَ السَّبِیْلِ وَ السَّآئِلِیْنَ وَ فِی
الرِّقَابِ وَ اَقَامَ الصَّلٰوةَ وَ اٰتٰی الزَّکٰوةَ وَ
الْمُوْتُوْنَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ اِذَا عٰهَدُوْا وَ الصَّٰبِرِیْنَ
فِی الْبَاسِءِ وَ الضَّرَّآءِ وَ حِیْنَ الْبَآسِ طُ اُولٰٓئِکَ
الَّذِیْنَ صَدَقُوْا وَ اُولٰٓئِکَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُوْنَ ﴿۱۷۷﴾

reversed itself in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. The West not only became politically dominant, but made such amazing progress in the scientific, and technological fields that the whole world was astounded, and quickly tried to follow its lead. Serious differences of opinion arose between people of the old and the new schools of thought. Some were of the opinion that only the eastern culture and civilization possessed all that was good, and all that came from the West was evil. There were others who considered the eastern culture as old and antiquated, and blindly embraced whatever came from the West. The Holy Quran points out over here that all the cultures created by mankind irrespective of the fact that they are from the East or the West, are devoid of the higher forms of righteousness. We know that eventually the eastern culture fell into all kinds of evil and moral depravity, and are also witness to the shamelessness and obscene behavior rampant in the western society today. The Holy Quran tells us that real culture and civilization, is evolved from higher moral qualities which in turn are acquired by believing in Allah. Belief in Allah means awareness of His attributes, which from the very beginning of man's creation have been the real source for his knowledge of goodness. The complete detail with which the Holy Quran has explained the attributes of Allah, is enough to teach man all acts of righteousness. Culture means cultivation of high moral standards, and these are created through acts of righteousness, the real source of which is Allah, the Possessor of all goodness.

Belief in the Day of Judgment, a highly effective deterrent against evil

The real reward and benefit of righteousness will be realized in the life Hereafter. It is for this reason, the Holy Quran has laid this as the next principle of belief, in the verse under discussion. As I have explained in my commentary on *Al-Fātiḥah*, the words, “*yaumi-aldīn*,” in their broadest sense mean, the life Hereafter in which man will continue to receive reward for all his acts of righteousness. The Arabic word, *Yaum* also means the time period which extends from the morning till evening i.e., a day, or a specific time period. In this sense, the phrase means, the Day of Judgment, in the Hereafter. The Holy Quran has repeatedly informed man that a day will come when he has to account for all his words, actions, in fact even his hidden thoughts. Praise be to Allah! What an effective deterrent to sin is this belief in the Day of Judgment. If this belief becomes firmly entrenched in a person's heart, it leads to the reformation of all his feelings, words, deeds, thoughts and desires. This leads to the development of greater acts of righteousness, and higher degree of morals— the real culture, unlike the superficial man made culture, the glitter of which easily fades away.

Belief in the Angels involves listening to the inner voice of guidance

Allah is the greatest Benefactor of mankind, and the Holy Quran is a book full of great wisdom and knowledge. It states, that in order to help man to acquire higher morals, Allah has created three agencies. The first of these are the angels. Angel is the link between man and God, by means of which Allah creates the desire for righteousness in man's heart. Belief in the Angels, which is the third principle of belief laid down in this blessed verse, means that man should be aware of the fact that there is within his inner self a Divinely created agency which motivates him towards righteousness. He should, therefore pay attention to the desire for righteous action generated in his heart, because it is motivated by the angel under direction from God. He should act upon it expeditiously, and not let it go to waste, for that would be a great misfortune. To waste an opportunity to do good is one's own loss, for time and opportunity do not return.

Divine Scripture, a guidance in black and white

The other means that Allah Almighty has created for the benefit, and guidance of mankind is the Divine Scripture. The Angel of high dignity who brought this Book is named *Jibrā'il* (Angel Gabriel). There is always this danger that the angel which is inside of man's self, being hidden from his eyes, goes unnoticed. In order to safe guard against such occurrence, Allah made the provision that He revealed His Book to guide nations for all times. It tells us in black and white the acts of righteousness to be accomplished, and the evils to be avoided. Other nations either lost their scriptures, or they were distorted, or manuscripts with opposing views were created. Allah, out of His Beneficence collected together all the essential teachings of these scriptures in the Holy Quran, completed it, and saved it for all times. The Holy Quran mentions this in the following verses, "Wherein are (all) right books" (98:3); "And We have revealed to thee the Book with the truth, verifying that which is before it of the Book and a guardian over it" (5:48). The word, 'Book,' has been used as a class i.e., it verifies all the revealed scriptures prior to it, and preserves of their teachings, that which is essential. The truth which was adulterated, or lost from the earlier scriptures was revealed again through the Holy Quran, and the portion which needed to be saved, was preserved in it. In addition to this, the religion, and blessing of God was completed in this Book (5:3), and Allah is now the Guardian of this Book as stated in this verse, "Surely We have revealed the Reminder, and surely We are its Guardian" (15:9). For the reasons cited above, the word Book (*Kitāb*) has been used in the singular tense, in the verse under discussion. It is now necessary only to accept

one Book of guidance, the Holy Quran. Who so ever accepts the Holy Quran accepts the righteous teachings of all the previous scriptures. In any case this is the only revealed Book which is complete and fully preserved.

A human role model essential for the teaching of righteousness

Allah has appointed an angel within the inner self of every being to guide it towards higher virtues. He has also revealed a Book in which all acts of righteousness are clearly mentioned, along with how they can be acquired, and evil avoided. Words can, however, be ineffective unless accompanied by a living example. Allah has, therefore, created the example of the prophets for the guidance of mankind. Every nation considers its prophet as a role model of higher virtues. Details of their noble example are found in scriptures and religious traditions. The Holy Quran also, has highlighted the high moral qualities of these prophets, where ever it has made mention of them. In addition to this, the exemplary character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), is mentioned in the Holy Quran, and books of his life history and Hadith document every aspect of it in great detail. His daily living, sayings and actions are so well preserved that it is not an exaggeration to call him the 'Living Prophet.'

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) **a Role Model of Quranic Teachings:** A Prophet, by acting upon all the injunctions of the scripture revealed to him, demonstrates that they can all be put to practice. Hazrat Ayesha, the noble wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), remarked about him that, "His character was the Holy Quran," that is if any body wanted to learn about his character, he could read the Holy Quran. His character was a practical demonstration of all the Quranic teachings and injunctions. In fact, Allah has given a certification to the noble character of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), in these Quranic verses, "And surely thou hast sublime morals" (68:4); "Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah" (4:80). Following the example of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), means submission to Allah.

In short, by belief in Allah, the Day of Judgment, the angels, the Holy Quran, and the prophets, man can acquire the higher moral qualities in their full manifestation, and in a complete manner.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 31)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.

CH.2:177

I have discussed the first part of this verse in my previous lesson where, I pointed out that the subject matter under discussion was about Islamic culture and civilization. Culture and civilization in the early ages was in the East, and people turned in that direction to learn about it. In the present age, the west aggressively propagated its culture and civilization, and the world populace turned towards it. There was a time when people blindly followed everything prescribed by the west, and considered eastern cultural values, and civilization as erroneous and antiquated. There were others who rejected everything western, and completely followed the eastern line. Man made culture and civilization wherever it is from, quickly degenerates. We have observed this in our time in the decadence of the western civilization.

The Holy Quran takes the position that although man made cultures

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وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى
الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَ
الْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي
الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَ
الْمُؤْتُونَ بَعْدَهُمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ
فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ
الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

and civilizations may possess minor admirable qualities, they lack the higher virtues. The higher qualities of righteousness which are the true basis of culture are evolved by belief in Allah. This is because all human concepts of goodness evolved by awareness of Divine attributes (which represent the highest degree of goodness) through Divine revelation. By believing in Allah, one becomes desirous of inculcating the Divine attributes within himself. I have discussed this in detail in my previous lesson. The fear of accountability on the Day of Judgment, and the desire to live in a everlasting state of contentment in the life Hereafter also encourage man to abstain from evil. All this comes from belief in Allah. The other agency that Allah has created to guide man towards righteousness is that of the angels. They motivate man in the right direction from within his inner self, and this comes after the belief in the Day of Judgment. Belief in the angels means that the believer is cognizant of his inner self, and acts expeditiously on the motivation of the angel from within, considering it to be from God. Since the angel is from within the soul of man, it is likely that its voice may go unheeded. In order to help mankind, Allah revealed His scripture which lays down in black and white what is evil and needs to be shunned, and what is righteousness which needs to be followed. This is the fourth component of belief. To be an example of righteousness for mankind, Allah sent his prophets, whose lives show that everything within the Divine scriptures is practicable. Words are merely advise and not as efficacious as an example which is witnessed. Belief in the prophets has, therefore been mentioned in the end. The Holy Quran is the only protected, and complete Divine scripture. The Holy Prophet Muhammad's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) practical example of following the Quranic injunctions is documented in the Hadith with such detail that his character is a true manifestation of every righteousness mentioned in the Holy Quran.

Islam discourages asceticism

The spiritual basis of Islamic culture and civilization rests on the belief and practices mentioned above. Now let us consider the provisions of our worldly existence. Other religions have considered the fineries of this worldly life to be opposed to spiritual and moral values. They encouraged their followers to become monks, nuns or ascetics. This type of behavior, however, precludes material progress, and in fact would lead to the demise of human species if everyone followed such advise, and remained celibate. In contrast, Allah has informed us through Islam, that He has not created the worldly provisions without a purpose. Let us consider the example of wealth. People all over the world are involved day and night in the pursuit of wealth. The ownership and distribution of wealth has formed the basis

of many civilizations in the world, as for example the capitalistic and communistic systems. They are both based on material acquisition. Such acquisition is, however, only for personal gain. This leads to many evils such as greed, avarice, selfishness, theft and dishonesty.

Quranic philosophy of wealth

The Holy Quran, stresses the earning of wealth by honest means, but emphasizes its spending on others, after fulfilling the needs of one's family. Injunctions for this are given in the verse under consideration. Only in this manner can man raise himself above the animal level, for it is an animal trait to gather and hoard everything for itself, or its mate and offsprings. We find that in capitalism and communism this animal characteristic is dominant. In the verse under discussion, it is stated, "and gives away wealth out of love for Him (*hubbi hi*)," which can be interpreted in two ways. If Allah is to be considered the object of love (the Arabic word, *hubbi-hi*, referring to Allah) in this verse, it would mean that they spend their wealth on the needy to be deserving of the love of Allah. Allah gives wealth and affluence to man, who in turn exhibits the Divine attribute of beneficence, and thus becomes deserving of Divine love. The other interpretation arises if wealth is taken to be the object of one's love (the Arabic word *hubbi-hi*, referring to wealth) in this verse, and in my humble opinion this interpretation seems more appropriate. Allah has made the love of wealth a natural characteristic of man (otherwise he would not have struggled for his progress and worldly existence), but if he spends his wealth on others, he sacrifices his animal desires, and thus moves to a higher spiritual level. The government can also take away a person's wealth particularly in a communist system. Giving away one's wealth in this manner, however does not evolve the higher moral qualities which form the basis of Islamic culture and civilization.

Spending of wealth on relatives: Compassion for fellow human beings, and merciful dealings with them are excellent moral qualities. Merciful dealings with relatives are natural because of the blood ties, and those who neglect to do this are guilty of extreme cruelty and selfishness. Spending one's wealth on relatives is, therefore, given first priority. In another verse it is stated, "And give to the near of kin his due" (17:26). Whosoever is closer and more needy, deserves more. Those who are of a worldly inclination, and worship their wealth i.e., those who consider only their wives and children to be worthy of their bounty (which is the animal level) always want the government to take care of the deprived section of the society. No government can fulfill this demand satisfactorily, and even if it attempts to do this, it will only be by taxing the wealthy. This process,

however, does not nurture the feelings of compassion and mercy for others, nor is it rewarded by Allah. Islam directs us to take care of our relatives, and the needy, for we are in a better position to understand their needs rather than the government social worker. We are thus, enjoined to create the higher virtues of human compassion, and mercy within ourselves, and this also leads to the creation of mutual love and affection.

Spending on the orphans and the needy: Besides the relatives, the orphans (*yatāma*), and the needy (*masākin*) are deserving of mercy and compassion. The Arabic word, *yatamu* means one who is cut off. Children whose parents die are thus cut off from them. The word *yatamu* is also used for the widows in the Holy Quran because they are cut off from their husbands. Becoming an orphan or a widow, entails not only the loss of the loved ones, but also means facing economic hardships. Those with a pure conscience feel merciful, and compassionate towards widows and orphans. The Holy Quran directs attention to the practical form of such compassion and mercy which is to provide for their means of subsistence that have been cut off. This could involve a lengthy commitment, but involvement in some one's grief is a highly noble quality.

The needy (*masākin*) are the physically handicapped, the sick, and the poverty stricken, who cannot earn and are in need of assistance. For example, a tailor who is so poor that he cannot buy a sewing machine, or a student who cannot afford his tuition. To help such individuals is helping the needy. This creates the higher virtues of compassion and mercy in a human being.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 32)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.

CH.2:177

I have discussed about half of this blessed verse in my previous two lessons. I request those who have not read these two lessons to please do so, for I am unable to repeat their extensive subject matter at this point. A summary of the discussion so far, is as follows: The grandeur and glitter of material civilization, whether in the east (as it was in the early ages), or in the West (where every body is turning today) is superficial, and hollow from inside. The truly genuine culture and civilization is based upon higher moral values. These are acquired through belief in Allah, the angels (who motivate man towards righteousness from within), the Day of Judgment (so that man is conscious of the responsibility and accountability of his actions), the Book of Allah (which presents right and wrong in black and white), and the prophets who are the living models of righteousness for mankind.

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فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحِينَ يُبَايِعُ
الَّذِينَ صَدَّقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

Quranic philosophy of wealth (continued from previous lesson)

Life in this world requires sustained effort to earn wealth, and the Holy Quran provides for spiritual development in the earning and spending of wealth. In order to control greed and avarice while earning wealth, the Holy Quran provides the following remedy. Wealth should not be spent solely for the essential needs of one's wife and children, which is the basic animal instinct, but one should rise above this level, and spend it on one's relatives, the orphans, and the needy. This develops the noble traits of compassion, and mercy within man for his fellow beings. The various categories included in this type of expenditure do not end here, and we will now cover the rest of them.

Spending on the wayfarer: The Holy Quran enjoins us to assist the wayfarer with our wealth. Some people question the practicality of this in the modern context. However, in my opinion, the need for this injunction is more now than ever before. The reason for this is that there is more domestic and international travel today. In addition to this hotel rates have gone up astronomically. Only millionaires, or those who travel on their employers' expense account can afford such luxury. For the ordinary person, staying in hotels has become very expensive. To put up a guest in one's house is, therefore an even greater act of compassion today, than it was at any time in the past. Travelers, at times also face difficulty in obtaining foreign exchange, and may at times run short of cash, or their funds may get stolen. Helping such a person does involve the risk that he may not repay when he returns to his country. Despite this Allah enjoins us to help them. If it is not returned, it would be considered as charity (*sadqa*) on the donor's behalf. At times a person has to travel out of necessity, but does not have the means to do so. To help such a person is an act of great righteousness.

Helping the beggar: The Holy Quran also tells us to help the beggar. Beggars often annoy us, especially when we cannot observe any overt signs of the person's inability to earn. When the need of such a person is doubtful, it is helpful to remember that Allah keeps giving us sustenance even though we may not be in need of it. In order to follow the Holy Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) advise of creating the moral characteristics of Allah within us, and to act upon the Quranic teaching of imbuing ourselves with the coloring of Allah, we should help the beggar despite having doubts about his true need. The Hadith even goes so far as to say, that one should help the beggar even though he may have come mounted on a horse. Begging without a genuine need has, however been prohibited, but this is something between Allah and the person who begs.

Helping the captive: In the end it is enjoined to render assistance to

another class of persons. The description of this class, if the Arabic is translated literally is, ‘those whose necks are held in captivity.’ People have interpreted this as the freeing of slaves. However, slavery does not exist in the modern society, and a contemporary interpretation can be the ransoming of prisoner’s of war, and obtaining their freedom, which is a great act of righteousness. There is, however a more common situation which is akin to being in captivity, and that is the bondage of debt. To pay off the debt of the indebted, and to free them from its captivity is an act of great righteousness. Demanding reimbursement for such payment diminishes the noble act of discharging the debt.

Prayer and obligatory charity

It is then stated that offering the obligatory prayers, and paying the obligatory charity (*zakāt*) are acts of great righteousness. Both of these have been discussed at length in my commentary on the first section of *Al Baqarah*, therefore I will not discuss these in detail here. Keeping up prayer, provided it is not a mere ritual, creates a living faith in God, and purifies the inner self of man and his actions. This is supported by the verse, “Surely prayer keeps one away from evil and indecency” (29:45). Prayer nurtures the belief in the omnipresence of God. Who observes him all the time, and is Aware of his inner thoughts. It is, therefore enjoined to cleanse one’s inner self, and one’s actions through prayer, and obligatory charity (*zakāt*). Excessive love of wealth is the greatest detriment for the soul. *Zakāt*, which is obligatory, and is usually a large sum, sacrifices the love of wealth, and extirpates the idol of wealth from man’s heart.

Keeping up of promises

The next great act of righteousness mentioned, is the keeping up of promises. Promise can be a commitment of any kind. It could be an agreement between a husband and a wife, between a master and a servant, between businesses, an industrial contract, or a treaty between two governments. Many husbands do not keep their promises. Frequently we find servants and laborers not honoring their commitments. They promise to come to work the next day, and do not show up. As far as governments are concerned, they seldom honor their commitments unless it is under some compulsion. They break promises whenever it is inconvenient to keep the promise. This discussion would get lengthy, otherwise I could quote many instances where the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) kept his promise despite suffering loss, and extreme hardship. I would encourage the reader to read his life history for this purpose.

Patience the greatest virtue

In the end of this list of acts of righteousness is mentioned, “and the patient one’s (*wa alṣābirīn*),” i.e., those who show patience in the circumstances that are mentioned immediately after. Following the mode of expression used in the preceding portion of this verse, the form of this Arabic word should have been *wa-alṣābirūn*. The grammatical form used, however used here is, *wa alṣābirīn*. This is to stress the praise of the forthcoming acts of righteousness i.e., to say that the virtues mentioned earlier were great, but those to be discussed now are even greater. The “patient in distress and affliction,” i.e., those who exhibit patience under difficult, or straitened circumstances in which they are even without food to satisfy their hunger. This does not mean that one should not make an effort to change one’s condition, or dispel hunger. What it implies is that, if despite such an effort, one remains poverty stricken then he should remain patient, and not resort to pilfering, bribery and dishonesty. The majority of people in the world today, are facing such circumstances. Thirty percent of the people, even in a country like America, fall in this category and the cost of living keeps going up everyday. Under these circumstances, it is an act of great righteousness if a person does not get involved in bribery, corruption and dishonest behavior, and patiently remains upright. This is indeed a difficult task. Indigence, saves one from the accountability of the Hereafter that the wealthy will have to face, and which according to the Hadith, and the Holy Quran would be a very stringent one. The fear of God, and honesty in poverty and hunger is undeniably a great moral quality. Patience, which is a magnificent attribute of Allah, is thus acquired by such a person.

“And the patient .. in affliction,” is the next category mentioned. These are those who show patience in illness and suffering. This subject has also been discussed previously. Illness, and suffering occur in accordance with the Divine law of Measure (*tāqdīr*). If despite treatment and supplication, there is no relief, showing patience, and forbearance in face of such adversity indicates a very high standard of morality.

“And the patient .. in the time of conflict,” is the last characteristic mentioned. People have generally understood this to mean, during conflict with the enemy. Man, however, has to face many hostile elements. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has said, “strive against your low desires like you strive against your enemy.” Similarly one has to struggle against falsehood every moment to stay with the truth. Conflict with the devil is also an ongoing struggle, for he is persistent in trying to tempt mankind. Man may have to face various other forms of tribulations, and must remain steadfast through them.

Such people have been called the truthful (*ṣādiq*) for their external

actions become a reflection of their inner self, and they manifest the truth of their beliefs by their actions and practical example. This is the highest level of truthfulness. These are they who keep their duty i.e., they guard against all evil, and instigations of the devil. Their soul and their actions become purified, and this is the highest moral virtue.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 33)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.

For a certain number of days. But whoever among you is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor man. So whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know.

CH.2:183,184

Unbridled passions the cause of spiritual decline of a nation

The subject matter of the preceding several lessons dealt with some of the basic principles of Islamic culture and civilization. Historically there have been many examples of human civilizations before, and since the advent of Islam. They have all had one common feature. In their earlier stages of development they all had some good and admirable characteristics, particularly when they were still influenced by the spiritual, and the moral values of their respective faiths. Eventually, however, the inner animal passions of the members of these faiths became predominant over their moral and spiritual values. This unbridled freedom of emotions, and desires led to their eventual decline. To observe this we do not have to go very far into our past. In our own times we have witnessed the historically unparalleled

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ ۝

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ
الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلٰى الَّذِيْنَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ﴿۱۸۳﴾

اَيَّامًا مَّعْدُوْدٰتٍ ۗ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيْضًا
اَوْ عَلٰى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ اَيَّامٍ اٰخَرَ وَعَلٰى
الَّذِيْنَ يُطِیْقُوْنَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مِسْكِيْنٍ ۗ
فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لِّهٖ ۗ وَاَنْ
تَصُوْمُوْا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿۱۸۴﴾

worldly progress, and dominance of the western nations. The West has been very proud of its culture and civilization, and remains so, to this day. The whole world has practically adopted their values. Careful observers can, however, perceive even now the ultimate fate of this civilization. During the advent of the modern civilization, when the moral values of Christianity were influential in their society, it had some admirable qualities. The Christian religion has tried to treat human internal spiritual, and moral ailments by encouraging its followers to become monks or nuns. As a result of this it has been unable to keep its followers on the right path, and today the western civilization manifests the consequences of unbridled human emotions and desires. Humanity has fallen below the level of animals because even animals do not indulge in acts contrary to their natural instincts. In the western society today, unnatural acts are not only committed without any inhibitions, but also have the sanction of the law.

Islamic teachings suited to human nature

Islam does not give the impracticable advise of giving up one's biological emotions and desires. Instead it teaches their proper control and usage, so that it can lead towards achieving the goal of human spiritual development. Man's body resembles that of other animals. That is why medical experiments with drugs are first carried out in animals before being tested on humans. The basic emotions and desires that are generated in human beings are, therefore similar to those of other animals. These emotions and desires are also the basic motive forces of man's struggle in life, without which he cannot advance. Let us take the example of a car engine in which motion is generated through the production of heat. This, when properly controlled, and utilized by the driver has numerous benefits, and can transport man with all his necessities from one place to another. Improperly controlled, this energy can lead to destruction, and irreparable damage. All motive forces act in a similar manner, irrespective of the fact that they are human emotions, or desires, or the physical forces that move a railway engine, an airplane, or a rocket which has propelled man into space.

Fasting the means to regulate human passions

Islam has clearly identified the high moral, and spiritual values it seeks to inculcate in society. In addition, it has prescribed fasting to regulate human emotions, and desires which provide the motive force to achieve these lofty goals. If we observe animal behavior we find that there are three basic desires in every animal including man i.e., eating, drinking, and the sexual urge. A person who follows only these basic instinctive drives, as is quite common in the modern western society, wastes his lifetime. The desires in

themselves are not bad, and in fact all human activities of daily living are dependent upon them. The desire to eat motivates many of man's worldly activities, and human progress, and endeavor have evolved from his struggle to gather food for himself, and his family. Similarly, the desire for sex leads to procreation of the human race, and various aspects of his social existence.

Divine Wisdom behind Fasting: Just as an animal does not appreciate being restrained, the inner animal within man also does not like interference, or constraint. It disobeys, and rebels against such measures. Any animal trainer will confirm that in order to discipline a circus animal, it has to be subjected to deprivation of food and sex. Likewise by fasting, and abstaining from food, and sex from dusk till dawn for thirty days, a person can discipline and control the animal within him. Only then can he successfully mount it and journey on to higher stages of his moral, and spiritual development. The Holy Quran has referred to riding, and controlling this very animal in Chapter 16, verses 8 and 9, where the physical and externally manifest theme of the creation of animals for riding, in verse 8 is immediately changed in verse 9 to the spiritual one of guidance.

Fasting enjoined on all Nations: The plain and simple words of the Holy Quran possess great wisdom. The verse pertaining to fasting begins with the words, "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you." Let us look into the wisdom behind this statement. The institution of fasting exists in all religions, but it does not extend over a period of thirty days as in Islam. The Christians fast for three days during Easter, while the followers of Hinduism do not have a prescribed schedule and fast as they wish, and have made it easier for themselves by just abstaining from a particular type of food. Islam is unique in that it obligates fasting continuously for thirty days, during which eating and drinking is prohibited from dawn till dusk. Does this mean Islam is more rigid than other faiths? The Holy Quran states that this is not the case, for all these nations had been commanded to fast in a similar manner, and with similar restrictions. They, however changed this Divine injunction, and retained fasting only as a token; Muslims are enjoined not to do so. Praise be to Allah! Since the Holy Quran is safeguarded, the institution of fasting has also remained intact.

Fasting for the sake of spiritual development: To an observer, from a superficial point of view, restriction to eat and drink from dawn till dusk, in the heat of the summer, or the cold of the winter, appears to be excessive. Doctors have now determined the health benefits of fasting, but not many western oriented people, despite knowing about the medical benefits, will be willing to commit to this effort for thirty days? The Holy Quran states that the believers, should accept this challenge more so for its

spiritual, rather than physical benefits. When a doctor prescribes a medication which is very strong, and could have harmful side effects, or recommends an operation which could be life threatening, we accept his advise. This is because we believe in what he says, and accept his advise even though we do not know the outcome of his recommendations. In case of fasting, besides the command of Allah, we have the testimony of hundreds, and thousands of prophets, the truthful (*ṣiddiq*), and saints (*auliyā*), and other righteous servants, to the fact that based on their own experience, fasting is the best remedy for the purification of the soul. We, however, do not listen to their advise. It is a great benevolence of the Holy Quran that it does not enjoin anything without explaining its benefits. It tells us that the efforts of fasting is for our own good, for it will develop within us the ability to guard against evil (*taqwā*). *Taqwā* also means guarding one's soul against harmful and noxious elements. Nobody wants to be exposed to such detriment, but even so why is it that the whole world is so deeply involved in evil, and misdeeds despite the fact that there is nothing more painful, harmful and grievous to the human soul? This is a consequence of unbridled freedom of the low desires, and emotions that I have already mentioned. The inner animal of man representing his biological desires can be as uncontrollable as a wild animal. The human spirit which is sensitive and fragile in comparison, is assisted by man's intellect and instinct, but it can be overwhelmed by the animal drive. Unless the animal instincts of man are controlled by means of fasting; other means such as, intellect, worldly education, cultural factors, or an internal guidance system, can be of no avail. We can clearly observe this in the modern western society today.

After striving for a whole month in the way of Allah, by abstaining from lawful sustenance, and sexual relationship in accordance with His command, it becomes difficult for man to commit unlawful acts. A believer abstains from food and water only for the sake of Allah, despite the fact that no one is observing him, and he may have the most delicious food, and the coolest drink available in his house. This strengthens his belief in Allah, and whosoever develops such strength, all his actions evolve towards righteousness.

Those exempted from Fasting

The verses under discussion ends with the statement, "For a certain number of days," which means that the days of obligatory fasting are numbered. A sick person, or a traveler is allowed exemption of fasting during *Ramadzān*, but must complete the fasts on other days. Jurists have gone into lengthy discussions as to what length of journey, or what type of illness falls into this category. How can it be appropriate for us to dig into

such details when Allah and His Messenger have not specified any such matter? In any case the distances which the jurists have fixed were applicable only to journeys on foot, or on camel and horseback, and are not applicable to modern means of fast travel by car, trains or airplanes. Every individual has a different limits of toleration and, therefore it is inappropriate to put limitations. In any case, it is improper for anybody else to prescribe limits when Allah and His messenger did not do so. To discourage people from misusing this privilege, attention is drawn to the fact that righteousness does demand some sacrifice, therefore if one chooses to fast with some tolerable exigency it is better for the person.

In the end it is stated, those who find it extremely hard to fast should feed a poor man. This also includes the elderly who find fasting an unbearable burden due to feebleness of age, and those in ill health who are unable to fast even at any other time because of medical advise. Pregnant women, and those breast feeding also fall in this category. Fasting is also not allowed for menstruating women, and they should make up for the missed fasts.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 34)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hard-ship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah for having guided you and that you may give thanks.

CH.2:185

Control of the animal within self leads to spiritual progress

In my previous lesson I had discussed the first two verses of the Holy Quran dealing with the subject of fasting. Besides other things, I had mentioned that by means of fasting man brings the animal within himself under his control, and by mounting it he can then progress through his spiritual journey, and travel to greater heights. In this context I had given reference of the following verses, “And (He made) horses and mules and asses that you might ride upon them and as an ornament. And He creates what you know not. And upon Allah it rests to show the right way, and there are some deviating (ways). And if He please, He would guide you all aright” (16: 8,9). It is quite obvious that in this day and age very few people ride

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

شَهْرٍ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ
هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَ
الْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ
فَلْيَصُمْهُ ۖ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ
فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ
الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُوا
الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمُ
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٨٥﴾

horses, mules and asses, and those who do, do not put the responsibility upon God of giving the correct directions for their journey. In fact, the whole of humanity is addressed in these verses. In mentioning the animals used for transportation in the physical world, inference is drawn for the provision of riding and thus controlling the animal within every man in the spiritual realm. Man cannot determine by himself how to navigate the inner darkness of his spiritual self. That is why the Holy Quran states that Allah has taken upon Himself to give guidance towards the right path in man's spiritual journey. At the same time it has warned that if man fails to make use of the Divine Guidance, and follows the wrong ways, he is liable to get lost.

Holy Quran the only complete and fully preserved guide

With this in mind, one can appreciate the beauty of the Quranic verses when in (2:183), after describing the control of animal desires by means of fasting, it mentions the revelation of the Holy Quran in (2:185). It is stated that *Ramadzān* is the month in which the Holy Quran was revealed, that it is a guide for men, supports its guidance with arguments, and clearly differentiates between right and wrong. Glory be to Allah and all praise is His! Glory be to Allah the Most High! This verse is placed like a lustrous diamond on a ring. Allah has revealed this Quran for the spiritual journey of mankind. Three characteristics of the Holy Quran are mentioned here. The first is that it is, "a guidance to men." Allah has always been sending His Books for the guidance of mankind. These Books were, however, completely lost. A glaring example of this is the Bible, a composite of the Old and the New Testament, the original books of which are not available. Only the translations which themselves have been translated from Latin and Greek are available. These translations have significant conflict amongst themselves, and have been interpolated. This fact is even accepted by scholars of the Bible today. Nations thus lost the Divine guidance. Allah states in this verse that He is again giving the guidance to man by means of the Holy Quran (the protection of which He has Himself guaranteed). Take for example, the religious institution of fasting. In the words of the Holy Quran, the same rules for fasting were laid down for all nations, as I have shown in my previous lesson. Some of these nations reduced the number of days for fasting to a mere token, while others allowed the consumption of all foods except a few while fasting. Nations were given only specific guidance to meet the need of their time. For example, the rigidity of the Mosaic law was essential for the reformation of a nation corrupted by centuries of slavery. The Jurists of the Israelite nation made it even stricter. It, therefore became necessary for Jesus to come as an Israelite prophet, and introduce the necessary gentleness in its

precepts. Afterwards, however his followers totally did away with the law of Mosaic dispensation, which was the other extreme. The Holy Quran, is unique in perfecting the religious law and knowledge. This is the only revealed scripture which has lays the claim, “This day have I perfected for you your religion, and completed My favor to you” (5:3). It will be instructive here to comment on the state of religious affairs before the advent of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), even though a hundred and twenty thousand prophets had preceded him for the reformation of humanity. Let us take the example of the Israelite nation which was blessed with the coming of thousands of prophets of a greater or lesser known degree, along with the revelation of the Torah and the New Testament (*Injil*). Let us listen to what Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) had to say to them, “ I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. How be it when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth : for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, he shall speak” (John 16:12-14).

The Holy Quran has another unique distinction. It claims that inclusive of all Divine guidance that needed to be preserved from previous scriptures and had been lost. This is stated in the verse, “ Wherein are (all) right books” (98:3). The Holy Quran thus confirms the collection, and preservation of necessary facts from the previous scriptures. Another unique feature of the Holy Quran is, “And We have revealed to thee the Book with the truth, verifying that which is before it of the Book and a guardian over it.” The Holy Quran, therefore frequently mentions previous prophets, and discusses their teachings. The world was thus not only restored the lost heavenly guidance by means of the Holy Quran, its completion was also accomplished, and the blessing of Allah was manifested completely.

Guidance for all nations

This Book is, “a guidance to men,” as stated in the Quranic verse under discussion. Instead of being a book of guidance suited only to the needs of a particular tribe or nation, the Holy Quran suffices for the needs of all humanity till the Day of Judgment, which is another unique feature of this Book. Let us see how facts have confirmed this. Other nations today have either totally neglected their Holy scriptures, or they do not use them to seek guidance for their daily lives. In contrast to this, the Muslims are now turning back to the Holy Quran, and are using it to formulate their laws. Today, the western nations are adopting Quranic teachings to which they most strongly objected eighty or ninety years ago. For example, the need for defensive warfare, divorce etc. The Holy Quran is, therefore becoming, “a guidance to men,” although the Non-Muslims have yet to acknowledge

this verbally.

Supports guidance with clear and concise arguments: Another point raised in the lesson today is that the Holy Quran is, “a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance,” i.e., its guidance is not through compulsion, but through convincing arguments. This is another distinction of the Holy Quran which is not possessed by any other revealed scripture. Other religious books either do not describe the basic tenets of their religion, or if they do, they expect its acceptance purely on the basis of faith, even though the idea may be irrational. Let us consider for example, association with the Divine Being, which has permeated into all faiths except Islam, one cannot find arguments to support it in any scripture. The Holy Quran, on the other hand gives all kinds of arguments in support of monotheism. It draws attention towards the universality of Divine law, the evidence of human nature about the Oneness of God, in the sayings of prophets, and revealed books, which have still survived to this time.

Distinguishes between truth and falsehood: Another distinguishing feature of the Holy Quran which is mentioned in these verses, is described by the words, “and the Criterion,” i.e., this book differentiates clearly between truth and falsehood. This is to prevent man from falling erroneously into the evil course, and losing the right path. Holy Quran, is thus the only revealed scripture which contains complete guidance within it. It gives arguments in support of this guidance, and clearly identifies the things which are liable to mislead mankind and exposes their falsehood. Not only does it show the error in previous beliefs, but it also contains arguments against false beliefs which were to arise in the future. This is yet another unique distinction of the Holy Quran. It furnishes proof of the perfection of Divine knowledge about the unseen as expressed in the verse, “Falsehood cannot come at it from before or behind it: a revelation from the Wise, the Praised One” (41:42). The Holy Quran completely exposes all the old and new falsehoods.

A practical demonstration of the truth of the Quranic claim

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, the reformer of the 14th. Century Hijra, in his debates with the Non-Muslims used to say, “any statements and arguments I will give in support of Islam will be from the Holy Quran, and also all my rebuttals to your erroneous assertions will be from the Holy Quran, the Book of Wisdom. Can you do similarly from your scriptures? If you are unable to do so, then what kind of a holy book is that which does not even contain the basic tenets of its faith, or if it does to some degree, it does not have arguments to support them, and expects its followers to create such

arguments? It is unable to provide the answers to my objections, and depends upon its followers for such answers.” None of the parties who debated with the Reformer of the 14th. Century Hijra accepted his challenge. Despite this he maintained his position, and relied on the Holy Quran to support his arguments. Besides debates, whenever he got ready to write a book on any religious topic, he would read the Holy Quran from the beginning to the end with the subject matter of his book in mind. This was a practical demonstration of the claim of the Holy Quran we studied today, that it is not only a complete guide, but also supports its guidance with arguments. It clearly exposes all the errors of false beliefs brought before it, and thus saves mankind from their influence. Praise be to Allah for this!

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 35)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And when my servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am Nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way.

CH.2:186

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ
دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذْ دَعَا نِ إِذْ دَعَا نِ إِذْ دَعَا نِ
وَلِيَسْمَعُوا رِئَايَ أَن يَحْتَفِظُوا لِيَّ ۗ

Summary of the previous lesson

This is my third and final lesson dealing with the subject of fasting. To maintain continuity, I will very briefly summarize what we discussed in the previous two lessons.

- 1) Striving for a whole month by giving up food and water from dawn till dusk, regardless of the season and length of the days, appears to be a difficult task, superficially. Despite the fact that doctors have now discovered the medical benefits of fasting, there are many who will still find an excuse not to fulfill this obligation.
- 2) The Holy Quran enjoins us to participate in this spiritual exercise if we believe in Allah and His Messenger. If we have faith in a doctor's advise, we are ready to take the strongest medicine which may even be potentially harmful, or to undergo surgery which could have adverse consequences for our health and may even prove fatal. We readily and willingly accept all this although the physician may be in error. Allah is, however free of faults. He does not give wrong advise. In addition to this we have the testimony of hundreds and thousands of prophets, truthful and righteous servants of Allah and saintly persons. They all testify to the fact that fasting is indispensable for purification of the soul and self control. Why then do we not heed their advise?
- 3) One could raise the objection as to why such an effort is not made

obligatory in religions other than Islam? To this the Holy Quran replies that an exactly similar obligation was mandated for previous nations. They, however, altered the Divine commandment, in order to make life easier for themselves. In some nations the ordinary people do not fast at all. In Islam, because the Holy Quran is unchanged, the institution of fasting has also been preserved.

- 4) The purpose of fasting is to guard against evil (*taqwā*). *Taqwā* means protecting ones soul from harmful and detrimental influences. No one obviously desires such exposure. Why, then do people get involved in evil deeds, which cause more injury or suffering than anything else?
- 5) The reason for all of this is that the human body is similar to other animals. That is why doctors first test medicines on animals before administering them to human beings. The emotions and desires generated in the human body are, therefore similar to those of animals. Just as other animals do not like any kind of restriction or restraint, the animal within man also resists such measures. Loss of control over these emotions, and desires leads to evil and misdeeds. For example, eating, drinking, and getting married are lawful actions, but consuming food bought with dishonestly earned wages, and illicit sexual relations fall into the category of major sins.
- 6) How is a circus animal trained and disciplined? It is by subjecting it to deprivation of food, water, and sex for a limited period of time. It is then only that it can rise above the animal level, and sometimes perform even human tasks. At least, it becomes disciplined enough to obey the command of its master. Similarly, fasting deprives the animal within man of food, water, and sex, and brings it under his control. This is called *taqwā* or guarding against evil.
- 7) It is for man to bridle and ride the inner animal to spiritual heights. In support of this concept, I have given the reference of Ch.16:8,9. In these verses, after mentioning the physical act of mounting and riding an animal, attention is drawn to the control of the inner animal. It is also stated that besides providing the wayfarer with a ride to make the journey, it is also essential to show him the way. This guidance on the right path which had been lost was given back to all of mankind by means of the Holy Quran, and has been fully preserved to prevent future loss, or interpolation. Allah is the only Being capable of giving such guidance, for only He has the awareness of the inner, and spiritual secrets of man.

Purpose of man's spiritual journey

Man has been given the means to make this spiritual journey, and he has

also been shown the right path. Now only one question remains to be answered, what is the purpose of his journey? The Holy Quran is a Book of amazing beauty, it answers this question precisely in the verse under discussion, “And when my servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am Nigh.” May Allah be praised! What an exalted goal this is for the creation of mankind; man must find God and get close to Him. This important purpose has been mentioned in the Holy Quran in several places. For example, the essence of *Al-Fātiḥah* is that unique prayer in it i.e., “Guide us on the right path.” I have already explained in my commentary on *Al-Fātiḥah* that the destination of this right path is Allah Almighty, Who is the Source of all blessing. Below are examples of some other places in the Holy Quran where the right path is mentioned:

Surely my Lord is on the right path. Ch.11:56

He said : This is a right way with Me. Ch.15:41

Then as for those who believe in Allah and hold fast by Him, He will admit them to His mercy and grace, and guide them to Himself on a right path. Ch.4:175

Say : This is my way : I call to Allah.. Ch.12:108

Surely this is a Reminder; so whoever will, let him take a way to his Lord. Ch.76 : 29

Perfect example of the one who completed his spiritual journey: In

the Holy Quran there are many other places where this great truth has been revealed. I would like to draw your attention to a couple of things mentioned in the verses under discussion today. It should be noted that the Holy Quran does not say, “ when my servants ask about Me,” the statement it makes is, “And when my servants ask thee concerning Me.” The verse addresses the person of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) because he is the one who has experienced more closely than any other human being, the destiny of man’s spiritual journey towards Allah. This is again mentioned in several places in the Holy Quran, the most outstanding of which are the verses, “ Then he drew near, drew nearer yet, So he was the measure of two bows or closer still.. .. And certainly he saw Him in another descent, At the farthest lote-tree.. When that which covers covered the lote-tree ; The eye turned not aside, nor did it exceed the limit. Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord” (53: 8,9,13,14,16-18).

Also in the verse, “Say: This is my way: I call to Allah, with certain knowledge (*baṣīratin*) - I and those who follow me” (12:108). The Arabic word, *baṣīratin* from the root *baṣīrat* in this context, means visualizing through spiritual insight, or being a certain witness because of spiritual insight i.e., the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and those who follow him develop the capability to visualize Allah with

their spiritual sense of sight. A poet has expressed this very subject in a Persian couplet. Addressing the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) he says, “On the Night Of Ascension your ascent (spiritual journey) extended beyond the heavens. The point of destination you reached was not reached by any other prophet.” One always seeks information about the destination from someone who has already been there.

Bond between Holy Prophet and spiritual wayfarer needed to complete journey: This verse also refers to the truth that closeness to Allah can now only be achieved by establishing a bond with the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This is the meaning of the Arabic word, *shā‘at* which literally means establishing a bond. Only those who believe in the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and follow his footsteps can now find God. It is a proven fact that closeness with Allah, can now only be achieved through Islam. The proof of this is that Allah Almighty communicates with those who are near to Him, and this is found in the followers of no other religion than Islam.

Other necessities for the spiritual journey: The commentary on the remaining words of this lesson is as follows:

- 1) “So they should hear My call,” i.e., those who want to get close to Allah should follow the guidance of the Holy Quran, and the example of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).
- 2) “And believe in Me,” that is closeness to God is not achieved instantaneously. The more exalted the goal, the greater the reward, the harder the achievement, and longer the period to accomplish it. In order to test the faith of a person, Allah also tries him with trials and tribulations. It is essential to remain steadfast and to maintain faith in Allah during such periods.
- 3) “That they may walk in the right way.” It is apparent from *Al-Fātiḥah* and other verses of the Holy Quran already quoted, that it is Allah Who guides man on the path that leads to Him. This has been expressed in another location in these words, “And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide them in our ways” (29:69). Allah, then communicates with those who are able to find closeness with Him in this life. Those who do not receive this honor should not despair. As long as they are following the right path they will eventually find their destination, that is closeness with Allah. It may occur in this life, or the Hereafter. May Allah make us one of those. *Ameen* (Be it so).

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 36)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And swallow not up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know.

CH.2:188

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتُدْءُوا
بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِتَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ
النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٨﴾

Quranic expression an example of true eloquence

The commandments regarding fasting, which we discussed in the previous lessons, are contained in the seven verses of *Al Baqarah*, that immediately precede the verse of this lesson. A sign of the literary eloquence of the Holy Quran is that it expresses with a few simple words a great depth of meaning encompassing a great variety of subjects. This is true eloquence, in contrast with the commonly held misconception that eloquence means expressing a single idea with numerous difficult and complicated words. Such words may be pleasant sounding to the ears because of their rhythm, but other than fooling a few simple people, and soliciting their praise for the speaker, they serve no other useful purpose. The verse quoted above has compacted a great depth of knowledge within its few words. Let us see how this is.

In the verses discussed in the last few lessons, we learned that fasting brings under control man's animal desires of eating, drinking and sexual appetite, and thus the animal within man is restrained. This is similar to the deprivation techniques used to train wild animals to become obedient. This discipline enables man to guard against evil (*taqwā*). Without it, the animal within man which like the animals on the outside abhors restraint, can lead him to exceed the limitations laid down by Allah and thus get him involved in sin and misery. One difference, however, between man and animal is

that, where as an animal does not require money to fulfill the three basic urges mentioned above, man does need it to get married, and to buy food and drink.

Divine philosophy of the creation of wealth

Wealth was created by Allah to be a means of subsistence for mankind, as stated in the verse, “ Your property which Allah has made a (means of) support for you” (4:5). We can observe that the conduct of daily activities of man’s life is based upon wealth which is essential to meet his needs. In order to maintain the struggle for acquisition of wealth, God has also created in man, the desire for food, drink and marital relationship. This leads to a more determined and keen effort on his part, thus leading to a better fruitful outcome of his undertakings. The only problem is that, the desire to earn wealth, like the other desires does not stay restrained, but becomes excessive. Referring to this the Holy Quran has warned mankind in the following words, “And you love wealth with exceeding love” (89 : 20). Within limits, the love for wealth is harmless. If, however, this love exceeds the limits, it makes man commit all those sins, and excesses which have always been a source of grief for humanity. These excesses appear to be getting worse, because the limitations that every religion has placed on the love of wealth have been shattered, and religion no longer exerts the control over mankind that it once did. What are the limitations on the acquisition of wealth set by the Divine Being?

False means of accumulating wealth

The verse of the Holy Quran quoted in the beginning of this lesson tells us about these limitations on acquisition of wealth. The verse states, “And swallow not up your property among yourselves by false means.” The Holy Quran is such an amazing book that every word of it, even a part of a word, contains a treasure of wisdom and knowledge. This Divine command could have been stated simply in the words, “ And swallow not up property by false means.” However, by adding the Arabic word *kum* (among yourselves) to *'amwāl* (property), our attention is drawn to the harsh reality. It tells us that the wealth one consumes dishonestly really belongs to someone else. All dishonest means for the acquisition of wealth are included in this definition. It would be useful to learn the meaning of the Arabic word *bāṭil* (*bil bāṭili*—false means) at this point. *Bāṭil* means the opposite of truth i.e., falsehood. Use or consumption of anything that does not rightfully belong to a person, is falsehood. Thus wealth acquired by means of stealing, armed robbery, murder, embezzlement, fraud, inappropriate expenditure, bribery, profiteering, adulteration, black-marketing, smuggling, or

anything obtained by breaking a Divine commandment, or the law of the land is unlawful (*harām*), and man has no right over it.

Some religious individuals may agree, that following Allah and His messenger is required, but they may question the necessity of following the law of the land? The answer to this question is, “yes, it is one’s duty to do so.” If the situation arises that the law of a certain country is contrary to the law laid down by Allah, then such a matter must be decided in accordance with the Holy Quran, and the Hadith as stated in this verse, “O you who believe, obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those in authority from among you ; then if you quarrel about any thing, refer it to Allah and the Messenger” (4:59).

Property of an orphan protected by the Holy Quran

All over the world, in every society, the easiest thing to do is to misappropriate the wealth and property of an orphan. An orphan may be a young child, an older boy, or girl, a widow, or anybody without a ward, or guardian. This population is vulnerable because of their age or gender, and people readily consume their wealth without fear of accountability. The Holy Quran has, therefore given repeated injunctions in this matter, to the effect that the property of orphans (which includes children whose fathers have passed away and widows) is a sacred trust and must not be violated by forceful, or deceptive means. I will now quote a few of these verses:

“ Those who swallow the property of the orphans unjustly, they swallow only fire into their bellies. And they will burn in blazing fire.”

In connection with giving the orphans their full right in their inheritance, and on completely returning their wealth and property by their ward when they reach maturity, the Holy Quran states, “And give to the orphans their property, and substitute not worthless (things) for (their) good (ones), and devour not their property (adding) to your own property. This is surely a great sin.”

Substituting the property or the wealth of orphans for that of an inferior quality is a sin. Genuine investment by wards with the intention of increasing the wealth of the orphans is permissible. If, however, the intention is to misappropriate the principal or its profits by giving it the sham appearance of a shared venture, then it is a cardinal sin. These are subtle means of dishonestly consuming the wealth of the orphans, who unfortunately are not in a position to fight for, or prove the validity of their claims in the courts. That is why the Holy Quran has given strict injunctions on their account, and has promised severe retribution if their rights are trampled upon. It has warned that Allah is fully Aware of one’s intentions and inner thoughts, and sees one’s deceitful actions, and that one should fear His retribution.

Injunctions regarding bribery

The verse under discussion, also addresses the issue of bribery. This is an illegal way of accumulating wealth which is so common that the condition appears non-remediable. The Holy Quran warns against conspiring with those in position of power in order to consume the wealth of other people unlawfully. The Holy Quran is an amazing Book! It has used the words, “nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges.” It is usually difficult to reach the judges or those in position of power. Bribery, however, makes this access very easy, and removes all the impediments in the way, such as the doorman, unfamiliarity with the person in position of authority etc. The words of this verse (nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know) have been positioned very carefully. If we ponder upon them, the following conclusions can be withdrawn.

- 1) It is a sin to acquire some one’s property or usurp their right by means of bribery.
- 2) However, if one has to acquire one’s own property, or right, and this cannot be accomplished without making a payment to the authority in charge, then there is no harm in making such a payment. This permission, however, is restricted by a very fine line. Great care has to be taken not to cross this boundary, and intentionally infringe upon the rights of others. That is why it is stated, “while you know,” that you are going to take over the property, or usurp the right of someone else. This does not diminish the crime of the official who is taking the bribe. The person whose genuine rights or property have been usurped has no recourse, but to make payment, and get relief from an inequity. He is thereby acquiring his own property and right and not taking away that of another individual. For these very reasons, the Reformer of this age gave a ruling in favor of this justification. I can site several examples where there is no alternative, but to take such a course. For example, a student had passed a certain exam, but his degree got lost. He contacted different people in authority seeking a replacement copy, but every time they tried to intervene on his behalf, the officials soliciting bribes would thwart these efforts with various excuses. In the end by making an extra payment, he was able to obtain his degree, which was rightfully his. Another individual needed to go out of the country on an urgent business. So much delay was created in issuing him a passport, that in the end he had to pay someone to get his travel document.

I want to tell another interesting story and close this lesson with it. In days gone by, a king got smitten with the love of a lowly commoner, a woman of extraordinary beauty. He put her up in the royal palace, and on

her insistence employed her brother in a certain branch of the kingdom. His character was so prone to soliciting bribes, that where ever the king put him, he caused a public outcry because of his crooked dealings. After becoming extremely frustrated with him, the king told him to just sit on the palace walls and count the waves in the nearby river, for which task he was promised a gratuity. True to his nature, however, this person started intimidating the owners of the riverboats, telling them that they were interfering with his royally deputized task of counting the waves and only the payment of a certain amount of money could guarantee them a hassle free passage. In relating this story, I had two objectives in mind. Firstly, that bribery has always been around, and secondly despite all efforts by the government, this disease cannot be eradicated. In this day and age, the rising cost of living, and the excessive love of wealth and luxury have led to a serious rise in this crime of greed. I have worked for the government for forty years and on the basis of my information I can state categorically that every government has tried its best in good faith to eradicate this evil. No government, judiciary, law, police department, or anti corruption squad has succeeded in doing so, despite a lot of good intentions, and a full effort. In this day and age no other society is more affluent, civilized and progressive than the United States. This moral malady exists over there too in all levels of society. The same holds true for Europe. A prime minister of Japan was also involved in a bribery scandal, although it is one of the most affluent countries.

The real reason is, therefore not poverty, but a lack of fear of God, and the erosion of belief in the day of judgment. It is the duty of parents, teachers, priests and preachers that they should inculcate in the public, belief in the Divine Being and the Hereafter. Only such a belief can eradicate this sickness, for there is no other cure for it. Fasting (the section on which also includes this verse), is an effective way of fostering belief in the Living God. Excessive heat, the privacy of one's home, intense thirst and cold refrigerated water or drink are not sufficient to tempt the believer to swallow even a drop of fluid because of the awareness that Allah is watching him. Remaining steadfast in this belief for a whole month helps to cultivate a living faith in a Living God. There is yet another wisdom in putting this verse together with the injunctions about fasting. It draws one's attention to the fact that after abstaining from even lawful things for a whole month, solely for the compliance of Divine ordinances, it should be unthinkable to consume what is unlawful and prohibited by Divine injunctions at all times. Glory be to Allah! All praise is His! Glory be to Allah the most High! The Holy Quran is a Book full of great Wisdom!

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 37)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and men are a degree above them.

And Allah is Mighty, Wise.

CH.2:228

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَعَوَّلْتُهُنَّ أَحْسَنُ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٨﴾

Condition of women in Arabia and the world before Islam

I have selected the sensitive issue of the rights and obligations of men and women towards each other for our discussion today. The human race is divided approximately equally between men and women. This is therefore, a very important and universal issue. From the beginning of creation, men because of their physical strength have been able to dominate women. Before the advent of Islam, the women had a very low status in the Arabian society. They were inherited like property by men and this included their own stepmothers. They could do as they wished with the women they inherited. They could take them to be their wives, gift them to others, or sell them in the market place. Birth of a female child was considered a disgrace. The father would be reluctant to show his face outside the house and would try quietly to bury his daughter alive. In the Hindu society also, women, like cows and buffaloes, were considered as legal property of men and the question of women rights did not even arise. According to the Jewish tradition, woman is the evil persona, who on the instigation of the devil tempted Adam and got him out of paradise, and forever accursed humanity to sin. That is why the Saint Paul the originator of present day Christian faith also condemns women.

Holy Quran predicts resurgence of women rights in the modern age

The revelation of the Holy Quran gave rights to women, which even to this day are non-existent in the civilized western world, in the very same societies which boast of their women liberation movements. The Holy Quran has in fact predicted that a time will come, “And when the one buried alive is asked. For what sin she was killed” (81: 8,9). The commentators have applied this verse to the day of judgment. If God grants me a long enough life to do a commentary, I will, if Allah pleases (*inshallah*) show you clearly that this amazing chapter of the Holy Quran has made some surprising predictions about the modern age. These prophecies offer such a cogent proof in support of the truth of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Holy Quran, that no honest minded person can ignore them. We are actually living in the times referred to in the above mentioned verses.

It is a common weakness of human nature, that it tends to follow extremes. For example, man can get so involved in pursuit of material wealth, and its acquisition that it becomes the sole purpose of his existence — a god that he worships. The opposite extreme to this is that a life of monasticism is considered the route to salvation. A similar analogy is applicable to the rights of women. For hundreds of years these rights were readily trampled upon. In the present times however, women aspire for supremacy over men, and long for political power. This environment creates doubts in the minds of many western oriented girls, and even more mature women, that perhaps Islam does not give women their rights, or equality with men.

Status of women in Islam

Let us see what is the status of women in Islam. Every human being male or female is made up of two elements, physical body, and the spirit or soul. The body is a temporary abode for the spirit. Physically man bears a resemblance to other animals, and many animals are stronger, and more powerful than man. If intelligence is what puts man in a higher class, then there are many animals who can be taught intelligent behavior to some degree. What really differentiates man from animals, and gives him superiority over them is the human spirit. This is something separate from his animal existence. The spirit is bestowed upon man during his creation, and breathed into him by Allah as stated in the following verse, “So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down making obeisance to him” (15 : 29). It is the human spirit which gives man the true distinction, and makes him superior to other animals. The spirit is

capable of reflecting the Divine attributes, as is apparent from the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), “Create the moral characteristics of Allah within yourself,” and, the verse of the Holy Quran, “(We take) Allah’s colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring, and we are His worshippers”(2 : 138). After the demise of our bodies, the spirit moves on to the Hereafter, and acquires a new and everlasting existence.

Spiritual rights of women: Let us see the status of man and woman in Islam, as far as this spirit is concerned. The following verse sheds light on this matter, “O people, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being, and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women” (4:1). As far as the spirit is concerned, men and women are, therefore on an equal footing. No other principle of equality of rights for men and women can provide a match for this, and because of it, both men and women can achieve similar degrees of spiritual progress. In support, I would like to quote one verse of the Holy Quran from many on the subject, “ Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember -Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward” (33:35). Like men, women can also get revelation as stated in the Holy Quran about Mary and the mother of Moses. There being no higher degree of honor for any man or woman, than the gift of Divine revelation.

Material rights of women in Islam: The Western culture, which has a strong influence on our younger generation, has lost its appreciation of moral and spiritual values and their growth. In fact, the values are frequently ridiculed. Wealth and money have taken the place of God. Let us further examine the issue from this standpoint. Holy Quran is the only revealed Book, which over fourteen hundred years ago, gave property rights, and right of inheritance to women at every level of society. These were the very same women, who were themselves considered as property. This was true whether she was a daughter, a sister, a wife, or a mother. Has any other nation, or religion ever given such legal rights in property and wealth to women? In the western society, if a man wishes, he may give something to a woman, but it is not her legal right. The Holy Quran fourteen hundred years ago, gave numerous rights to women, and fixed their share in the property, at a time when the rest of the world was not only oblivious of such

rights, but actually regarded women as property. Western oriented women also object to why Islam gives women only half the property rights of men? The answer to this objection is given by the Holy Quran in the verse, "Men are the maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth" (4:34).

Men are told that they are responsible for the protection, and provision of the physical sustenance of women, because Allah has given them physical strength superior to women. They are enjoined to spend out of their wealth for maintaining women. This is an obligatory command despite the fact that women are themselves allowed to earn by lawful means as stated in, "For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn" (4:32). Regardless of this, man has been given the responsibility to provide sustenance for his wife and children. Although a woman may voluntarily participate in earning for the household, the responsibility for it falls on the shoulders of man. Man has also been enjoined to give *mahr* (obligatory donation of property, or wealth to the wife, at the time of marriage) in accordance with his means. For a rich person, this can be the equivalent of a pile of gold or silver (4:20). Women, on the other hand, have not been commanded to give *mahr* to men out of their property.

Based on his responsibility as a provider for his wife and children, it is justifiable for a man to receive double the woman's share of inherited property. Man is also enjoined not to take back any of the marriage gifts given in the form of jewelry or clothing, even in situations of divorce as stated in verse, "And it is not lawful for you to take any part of what you have given them, unless .. for what she gives up to become free thereby" (2: 229). It is, therefore unlawful for the husband to take anything back of what he has given to his wife, unless the wife seeks divorce, and of her own free will returns some portion back as a redemption.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 38)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and men are a degree above them. And Allah is Mighty, Wise.

CH.2:228

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَبَعُولَهُنَّ أَحْسَنُ بِرَدُّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَلِيمٌ

Quranic charter of woman liberation

The status of woman in Islam was the subject of discussion in the previous lesson. We continue the same discussion in this lesson, and I will further elaborate on the very important verse above, which sets forth the rights of men and women. In my previous discussion, I covered only a few of the many injunctions on the rights of women over men. These are so many of these injunctions, and of such significance, that it may lead men to think that they have been treated unfairly. God's purpose in these Divine ordinances is manifold. Women have always been subjected to injustice. Therefore, the Holy Quran, almost fourteen hundred years ago, gave to women rights, especially in the inheritance of property, which are not enjoyed even today by their counterparts in the western world, where the women are supposedly liberated, or in any other non-Muslim country. It is unfortunately true that Muslim men are guilty of usurping some of these rights, but the Holy Quran is the final arbitrator in the matter, and it has given a clear judgment, i.e., women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner. This charter of women liberation should be hailed by women, and they should be eternally grateful to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Holy Quran for it.

Criticism of the charter answered

Alas! for the thankless nature of mankind, women have raised objection, to the Quranic statement, "and men are a degree above them." I will discuss

the rationale for this later on. At this point I would simply like to ask women, if any other religion has given the equality of rights that Islam has? Far from giving equality, other religions even to this day consider woman to be as contemptible. I have shown this to be the case in Christianity (and in the Bible). In the Hindu religion too, woman is still considered a property of man. I have, however, not seen a Christian, or a Hindu woman raise objections to her religion like the Muslim women do. I think this is a result of the freedom that Islam has given to women since, about fourteen hundred years ago. One should, however, refrain from the misusing of such liberty. If one does not understand a certain issue, it is quite appropriate to inquire and ask questions. However, it is inappropriate to raise objections, and criticize an injunction of the Holy Quran without investigation. I will give an example of this later on. First, I would like to narrate an incident which illustrates the status of woman in the Hindu religion from which many of us have converted to Islam (this is in reference to the Muslims of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent).

In nineteen thirty five, I was an assistant commissioner in *Nasik* (Bombay Presidency, British India). To the best of my knowledge, the legal basis of arguments in this incident are unchanged to this day. This is so because the arguments are based on the Hindu *shastars* (code of law) which was written by Manu, and the founders of the Hindu religion thousands of years ago. Who can dare to alter this today? It so happened that, a Hindu Marhatta woman petitioned my court under the criminal procedure code for seeking judicial assistance against her husband for financial support, and restitution of marital rights. I asked the husband if he was willing to give her marital rights. To this he replied in the negative. Hindu religion does not recognize divorce (I am not aware whether the law of the land has now altered this). Even if such a law had been there, the man was neither ready to divorce his wife, nor give her maintenance. This twenty four years old woman was in a pitiful state. She had all her life ahead of her, but under the circumstances she could neither marry, nor had any means of financial support. According to the relevant code, I ordered the woman be given financial support and maintenance. That evening, I came across Mr. Vasodiyo, a session judge and his wife in the country club. Mr. Vasodiyo was rightfully famous for his legal expertise. A few months later he was appointed as a judge to the Bombay High court, where his judgments were frequently considered as judicial standards. Both the husband and wife were modern, and broad minded in their outlook. Feeling good about the judgment I had given, I narrated to Mr. Vasodiyo, how I was instrumental in giving a Hindu woman her rights. I was extremely surprised when Mr. Vasodiyo became extremely angry at my narration, and asked me what right I had to interfere in their religion? There upon I learned from him for the first time,

that in the Hindu religion the wife is the property of the husband, and he can do with her as he pleases. She has no more rights than a cow or a buffalo that man possesses. I looked at Mrs. Vasodiyo to see her reaction, but she smiled at me and kept quite. Mr. Vasodiyo pronounced in a loud voice that if the husband went in appeal to his court against my decision, he would readily rescind it.

Why men are given a degree above women

The declaration of equal rights between men and women, by the Holy Quran is followed by the statement, “and the men are a degree above them.” I will now give a reason for this. There is a very appropriate, and important intent behind this. If there is a disagreement between a man and a woman, who is to be the final arbiter? Disagreements between husbands and wives are a common every day matter, for just as Allah has not created two beings with similar features, he has also not given them similar likes and dislikes. Such differences exist even between men. In case of men and women there is also the difference of gender. Women are emotional, that is why they can accomplish the difficult task of rearing children, and also promoting mutual relations between families. Men have to face the adversities of worldly life. They are, therefore more practical in nature. Difference of opinion between husband and wife is, therefore a natural consequence. This is the reason why the Holy Quran, and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) have laid particular stress on kind treatment of women. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), according to one Hadith said, “the best amongst you is the one who treats the members of his household kindly.”

Most differences of opinion, between a husband and wife can be resolved by mutual understanding and goodwill, but occasionally differences arise in which each party takes a stand on their own opinion. How is this situation to be resolved, because as a matter of principle, the rights of both parties are equal? Should they go to the courts for decision in such matters? Should they ask their parents to intervene? These are not practicable alternatives for day to day living. The only solution is that in such eventualities, the opinion of one party should be accepted. The Holy Quran, therefore states that in such matters the opinion of the husband should be accepted. The main reason for this is that often such differences arise about financial issues, and the husband has been made responsible for the financial well being of the family, by the Holy Quran. Often in matters of marriage, and exchanging gifts, women being sentimental tend to spend beyond their means. Some are influenced in this matter by public opinion, and consider such spending as a matter of prestige. They do not care if their husband has

to sell property, get into financial debt, accept a bribe, or be involved in a dishonest transaction to procure the money for this lavish spending. All they are interested in is a display of their vanity. How could the Holy Quran give such unlawful freedom to women? Besides being the provider for his wife, the husband has also been given the responsibility for her protection by the Holy Quran. If the wife seeks freedom not permissible by religion, then it is the duty of the husband to prevent her from doing so. In such a situation can the wife refuse to comply by stating that her rights are equal to those of her husband, therefore what right does he have to stop her? The Holy Quran has given the correct decision in this matter i.e., the word of the one who is charged with the responsibility of provision and protection should be accepted.

A warning to men: How excellent are the words that follow! “And Allah is Mighty, Wise.” Man is warned that if Allah has given him the upper hand in this matter, he should not forget that Allah is Mighty, and always has the upper hand over him. If he takes advantage of his strength, then he should fear the Might of Allah. Women are informed that Allah is Wise, and there is wisdom in His decision. In addition to the wisdom behind this decision mentioned above, if the wife insists on her point of view, there is the danger of her losing the affection of her husband and the marriage may ultimately end in divorce.

Public discussions on the subject

I have frequently made this Quranic wisdom the theme of my sermons at marriages, when I have been called upon to officiate at such functions. The reaction of some women to my comments has been very negative. They have remarked that if they had the microphone in their hands they would have definitely given me a piece of their mind. Afterwards when I inquired from them privately as to their objection in accepting their husband’s decision in matters where mutual decision was not possible, their answer was, ‘How can we accept a wrong decision by the husband?’ I pointed out to them that often in such matters right and wrong is subjective. From their husband’s point of view they are in the wrong. What would be the next step to resolve this issue? Should they refer the matter to the courts? Or should they ask their parents to decide the matter for them? Even if we accept that in a certain matter the decision of the husband is incorrect, my advice would be to settle the matter at home by accepting the husband’s decision. They could, at some other time convince their husband to accept their advice, and women know many ways to influence their husbands, the details of which I do not want to discuss at this point. Let us assume that there is a husband who is totally unwilling to accept his wife’s opinion. In

such a situation, we may take an analogy from the workplace where sometimes a person can get a boss who is unwilling to listen to any opinion even when wrong. Man has to face these situations with equanimity.

In my own case, I have served, by the Grace of Allah, in the highest offices of the civil service. I always had to listen to, and accept the opinion of higher officials, and ministers, although at times, I was convinced that their opinion was incorrect. If I was given an order by a higher official, or a minister which I considered was wrong, I would respectfully point out their error, and support my opinion with arguments, and try to convince them to change their order. If they insisted the final decision was theirs. I accepted it, without raising the standard of rebellion, or being angry, and critical like many women are when they have to accept their husband's decision. Now that I am retired and no longer a high ranking official, I have to accept the orders of even junior officials, like the office attendants, when I visit an office for some work. It is a great Divine favor upon woman, that after being given equality of rights, and warning the husband to fear the Might of Allah, if he misuses his position of strength, she has been asked to only occasionally obey a loving husband.

I have to regretfully admit that my arguments had no apparent effect on these ladies.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 39)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And women have rights similar to those against them in a just manner, and men are a degree above them. And Allah is Mighty, Wise.

CH.2:228

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَعَوَّلْتُهُنَّ أَحْسَنُ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا
إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَالرِّجَالُ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَلِيمٌ

An example of the purity of speech and eloquence

I have discussed this verse in two of my previous lessons. It is not only the charter of women rights, but it also establishes a balance between the rights of men and women. It, therefore deserves to be studied in great depth. I would briefly like to draw your attention towards another point. This blessed verse is a very good example of the purity of speech, and eloquence of the Holy Quran. Unfortunately, eloquence is sometimes considered to be the use of multiple superfluous words to convey a simple thought or idea. The so called eloquent speakers, or writers use difficult words of Persian and Arabic to convey simple ideas in Urdu, and a poor listener fails to comprehend. Often these words are used out of context, and do not convey the real meaning to begin with. Thus, such speakers take advantage of the ignorance of their audience or readers. In order to impress, such speakers also bring in poetic verses to assert the magic of their eloquence.

In the pre-Islamic society too, poetry was considered as the eloquent form of expression and was used to impress people. Contrary to this, the Holy Quran embraced prose as the means of its expression. Glory be to Allah! All praise is His! The like of this prose has never been written before or since. This is evidenced by the repeated challenge of the Holy Quran that if this is not the Book of Allah, let the opponents of the Holy Quran combine together to produce even one chapter in poetry or prose to match its excellence. This challenge requires the humanly produced product to meet

all the qualities of the Holy Quran, including its purity of speech and eloquence. This challenge has never been met by any enemy of Islam at the time it was first given, or since. The prose of the Holy Quran excels any poetic verse. Its eloquence lies not in the use of numerous meaningless words, but in the expression of the greatest amount of meaning and wisdom in the simplest possible words. This is eloquence, in the real sense.

Take for example, the verse under discussion today. A great depth of knowledge has been expressed in a few and simple words. The thorny issue of the mutual rights of billions of men and women, which has not been solved in hundreds of years by the best minds in sociology and economics, are solved in an excellent manner in just a portion of this verse. No human being could have stated, or solved this problem in such a few and simple words.

Disruption of family order

I mentioned in the preceding lesson that the Holy Quran gives equal rights to men and women, but if a situation arises where a decision cannot be reached by mutual consensus, the Holy Quran offers the solution that under such circumstances the opinion of the husband should be accepted. The Holy Quran assigns, the responsibility of earning for the household expenditures and maintenance to the husband, and these are the issues, which frequently become the source of conflicts. Thus, if the woman of the house wants to spend beyond the man's means, or on things which are injurious to the morals, faith, chastity and honor of the woman, then the man has the right to fulfill his responsibility and his opinion should be accepted. Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his Urdu translation and commentary of the Holy Quran (*Bayan-al-Quran*) has written an excellent note on this verse. I would like to quote that for the reader over here:

“The Holy Quran has solved two problems in this verse in an excellent manner. It has first established the principle, that just as men have rights against women, they have similar rights against them in a just manner. As far as rights are concerned, both men and women are thus on an equal footing. This is a truth which has been ignored by all religions except Islam. In fact it has not even been fully adopted by the civilized nations today. On the other hand, a difficulty arises with equality of rights, and that has to do with the maintenance of order in family matters. Such an order cannot be maintained unless one party is given some precedence over the other. Proper family relationship and household management is the basis of the welfare of the whole human race, and the first step in the development of human civilization. Civilization means mutual coexistence and it begins with the family unit. The Holy Quran has established, that without this

balance order in the family unit would be disrupted.”

How perceptive is this commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali. It has been sixty years since He wrote this, but even today in Europe and America and wherever such unnecessary liberty is taken by women, family life seems to be adversely affected. The number of divorces and separations has risen, and domestic discord is on the rise. This has adversely affected the younger generation, crime is on the rise, and has caused a great deal of anxiety amongst the intelligentsia in the society. Most people agree that this affliction has destroyed the family life. Besides criminal behavior, the use of drugs has risen, and has caused a public outcry.

I have apprised the ladies in our community, who are obsessed with freedom, about the consequences of unlimited freedom. However, they are unwilling even on some occasions to accept the opinion of their husband, despite the fact that such behavior could result in his loss of love and affection for them. For a wife there could be no greater misfortune, divorce being something that may only occur later on. It should be remembered that it is the woman who bears the brunt of the adverse consequences of a failed marriage. Because of attitude of women towards their husbands and the bitter experience of marital life, there is a tendency in men, in Europe and America to avoid marital life altogether. Men and women live together without marriage, and the relationship is broken off when desired. What has happened after sixty years in the West as a result of women's attitude towards their husbands, will occur in the East sixty years from now, if a similar course is followed. This situation is very disadvantageous for women, because not only are they treated as mistresses, but also are unable to establish a permanent home to rear children, which is their greatest natural desire.

Quranic remedy for women who desert their husbands

Some western oriented women also object to another verse of the Holy Quran in which certain injunctions are given directly to men only without reciprocity for women. The verse in question is, “And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion (*nushūz*), admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and chastise them. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever Exalted, Great.” (4 :34). The answer to this is that in case of irreconcilable differences, the Holy Quran has enjoined that the opinion of the husband should be accepted. Therefore the Arabic word *nushūz* (which means desertion, also means rising against, in this case the husband) in light of the Quranic injunction mentioned earlier, applies only to a woman. It is only for her reformation that these measures have, therefore, been recommended. They are to be undertaken in the order

recommended i.e., first counseling, then temporary suspension of marital rights, and if that is also ineffective, then chastisement. This chastisement according to the Hadith should be so light that it should merely be a means of expressing displeasure, and must not be with the intention of causing injury.

Western oriented women counter by saying that, “even such a chastisement is uncivilized.” To this my reply is that a civilized woman does not rise up against her husband, and even when she does, counseling is usually effective. Temporary suspension of relationship is a matter of deep concern for a rebellious wife, and usually results in reformation. The stage of chastisement is never reached. For the uncivilized woman light chastisement is effective. In Islam such a situation seldom arises. I also pointed out to them that in the western world whose culture has so greatly impressed them, spousal abuse, and that also to an extreme degree is quite common. They readily agreed with me on this point, and I appreciate their honesty in this matter.

Maulana Muhammad Ali has written an excellent note on this verse in his English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran which is being reproduced here for the reader’s facility (Translator):

The word *nushūz*, which I have translated as *desertion*, primarily means *rising*, and as spoken of a woman in connection with her husband it means *her rising against her husband*. This is explained in a number of ways; according to one of these explanations it means *her leaving the husband’s place, and taking up an abode which he does not like* (AH). LL quotes various authorities showing that *nushūz* on the part of the woman means that *the wife resisted her husband and hated him* (S,Q) and *deserted him* (T).

The remedy pointed out in the case of the wife’s desertion is threefold. At first she is only to be admonished. If she desists, the evil is mended, but if she persists in the wrong course, her bed is to be separated. If she still persists, chastisement is permitted as a last resort (Rz). Regarding this last remedy two things must, however, be borne in mind. Firstly it is a mere permission, and sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) make it clear that, though allowed, it was discouraged in practice. Thus the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, on the complaint of certain women, the ill-treatment of their husbands, “You will not find these men as the best among you” (AD.12:42). According to Shafi, it is preferable not to resort to chastisement of the wife (Rz). In fact, as the injunctions of the Quran are wide in their scope, the example of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and his constant exhortations for kind treatment towards women, so much so that he made a man’s good treatment of his wife the

gauge of his goodness in general — *the best of you is he who is best to his wife* — show clearly that this permission is meant only for that type of men and women who belong to a low grade of society. Secondly, even this permission cannot be adopted indiscriminately, for sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) make it quite evident that chastisement, when resorted to in extreme cases, must be very slight. I'Ab says, “it may be with a tooth-brush, or something like it” (AH). The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, “You have a right in the matter of your wives that they do not allow anyone whom you do not like to come into your houses; if they do this, chastise them in such a manner that it should not leave an impression” (Tr.10:11). Thus very slight chastisement was allowed only in extreme cases.

Testimony of a woman in Islam

Another question frequently asked by women is, “Is it correct that in Islam the testimony of a woman is equivalent to half that of a man?” My answer is that the Holy Quran has instructed only on one occasion in reference to witnessing debt records, that if one man is not available to witness, two women could witness instead (2:282). The reason for this is also given in the same verse, “so that if one errs, the other one may remind her.” This, in fact, is a Divine favor for women, because they are not usually very well versed in complexities of financial transactions and the lawyers may confuse them, and make their testimony appear suspicious. Another instruction implied in the Quranic statement, “so that if one errs, the other one may remind her,” is that both female witnesses should appear together in the court, so that they are not awe-inspired, or brow beaten by the attorneys, particularly during technical cross examinations of cases involving financial transactions. In other situations, where financial complexities are not involved, the Holy Quran discusses the acceptable number of witnesses without reference to their sex, and does not mention that a male witness is equal to two female witnesses. This follows from the fact that under ordinary circumstances, only the truthfulness of the testimony is the essential requisite, and the Holy Quran has repeatedly mentioned the women to be truthful. I quote only one such verse, “. . .and the truthful men and the truthful women.. ” (33:35). Here truthfulness of man and woman is mentioned as being equal. If there is a situation when only one woman is available as a witness, even in matters involving financial transactions, there is no restriction in accepting her testimony, for as far as truthfulness goes, both men and women are on equal footing. If she forgets, she will not have a helper to remind her, but this will not make her testimony inadmissible.

In cases where a crime has been committed against a woman, or a woman is a witness to a crime, the Holy Quran does not debar her testimony, or says that it is equivalent to half that of a man. In case of a wife accusing a husband, or vice versa, or in case of slander, the Holy Quran has given equal credibility to a male, or a female witness. I do not want to involve myself in a discussion of what opinion the jurists formed afterwards. I only want evidence and confirmation from the Holy Quran.

The marriage of a Muslim woman to a follower of the Book

Finally another question asked by the western oriented ladies is that if a Muslim man can marry a woman from amongst the followers of the Book, then why is it that a Muslim woman cannot do the same? In reply to this I would like to state that ordinarily it is the husband who is the dominant figure in the household. If a Muslim woman therefore marries a non Muslim man, her faith, culture and existence as a Muslim can be in jeopardy. Further, children are generally identified through the race and religion of their father (and not of the mother), and in later life, continue to follow the religion of their father. That is why the Holy Quran frequently blames the non-Muslims that they blindly follow the religion of their forefathers. The children of a man who is the follower of the Book will, therefore be considered, and will remain as followers of the Book. Because of this danger, a Muslim woman, who has even a small degree of faith in Allah in her heart, and who fears the accountability in the Hereafter, will not like to be married to a man who is a follower of the Book. I am grateful that the western oriented Muslim ladies generally concede this point.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 40)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Hast thou not thought of the leaders of the Children of Israel after Moses? When they said to a prophet of theirs: Raise up for us a king, that he may fight in the way of Allah. He said: May it not be that you will not fight if fighting is ordained for you? They said: And what reason have we that we should not fight in Allah's way and we have indeed been deprived of our homes and our children? But when fighting was ordained for them, they turned back, except a few of them. And Allah is Knower of the wrongdoers.

And their prophet said to them: Surely Allah has raised Saul to be a king over you. They said: How can he have a kingdom over us while we have a greater right to kingdom than he, and he has not been granted abundance of wealth? He said: Surely Allah has chosen him above you, and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and physique. And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He pleases. And Allah is Ample-giving Knowing.

And their prophet said to them: Surely the sign of his kingdom is

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَكِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالُوا لِنَبِيِّ لَهُمْ اأْبْعَثْ لَنَا
مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَهُ هَلْ
عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنِبْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ الْآ
تِقَاتِلُوا أَطْوَأَ مَا لَنَا آلَا نُفَاتِلُ فِي
سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا
وَأَبْنَاؤُنَا طَغَا كُنِبْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا
إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ط وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ
طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ
عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ
يُؤْتْ سَعَةً مِّنَ الْمَالِ قَالَتْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ
وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مَلَكَةً مَّن يَشَاءُ ط
وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٤١﴾

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ
التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ

that there shall come to you the heart in which there is tranquillity from your Lord and the best of what the followers of Moses and the followers of Aaron have left, the angels bearing it. Surely there is a sign in this for you if you are believers.

So when Saul set out with the forces, he said: Surely Allah will try you with a river. Whoever drinks from it, he is not of me, and whoever tastes it not, he is surely of me, except he who takes a handful with his hand. But they drank of it save a few of them. So when he had crossed it, he and those who believed with him, they said: We have to-day no power against Goliath and his forces. Those who were sure that they would meet their Lord said : How often has a small party vanquished a numerous host by Allah's permission! And Allah is with the steadfast.

And when they went out against Goliath and his forces, they said: Our Lord, pour out patience on us and make our steps firm and help us against the disbelieving people.

CH.2:246-250

مِمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحِيَّةً
 الْمَلَكَةِ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُم مِّن
 كُنُوزِكُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ ۖ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ
 مِنِّي ۚ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ
 اعْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ ۚ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا
 قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۗ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
 مَعَهُ قَالُوا الْوَاطِقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَ
 جُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَتَاهُمْ مِّسْقُوا
 اللَّهُ كُمْ ۖ مَنْ فَعَلِ قَلِيلًا غَلَبَتْ فِئْتَهُ
 كَثِيرَةً يَأْذِنُ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

وَلَمَّا بَرَرُوا الْبَآئُوتَ وَجُنُودَهُ قَالُوا اسْرَبْنَا
 أَفْرَعُ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَثَقِيتُ أَفْءَامَنَا ۗ وَ
 أَنْصَرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٨﴾

I have selected this portion of the Holy Quran for our discussion because it contains many lessons for the Muslims on how to choose their worldly leaders, and it also removes many misconceptions in this regard. Also in some older translations of the Holy Quran, the translators have incorrectly interpreted some of these verses, and these mistakes persist to this day. These interpretations have been ridiculed by some western influenced persons, but the fact is that when properly interpreted, these verses are full of profound knowledge waiting to be unveiled.

Purpose of warfare

Verse 253 of this section gives the rationale for why previous prophets had to be involved in fighting. Verse 251 states that if Allah does not cause the removal of some by others, disorder would prevail upon the earth (or it would be destroyed). In the verse that follows it is stated, “These are the messages of Allah-We recite them to thee with truth: and surely thou art of the messengers” (2 :252). These Divine words informed the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that like the preceding prophets, he too will have to participate in armed conflicts. In fact, since he is the leader of all prophets, his involvement in warfare will be greater. In relation to this, certain incidents from the history of the Israelites are mentioned, including certain events from the battle between Prophet David (*Dā’ūd*) and Goliath (*Jālūt*). This narration is meant as a lesson for the Muslims, as is apparent from the opening words, “Hast thou not thought of.” The historical perspective of these incidents is that during that time period the Israelite nation was repeatedly defeated, and overpowered by the Philistines. Hundreds and thousands of Israelites had been put to the sword. They had lost their land, and many of their youth had been enslaved by the enemy. The Muslims at the time of this revelation were facing a similar situation. After thirteen years of severe persecution at Mecca, they had to leave their homes and migrate to Medina. They had been separated from their families, and now the enemy was preparing a final assault to annihilate them at Medina. This lesson from history was, therefore presented to the Muslims to tell them that though smaller in numbers, they should not be intimidated by the great numbers of the enemy. They were urged on to defend themselves with patience and steadfastness, and not to accept a humiliating peace which would ultimately lead to their defeat. Allah never forsakes his patient and steadfast servants. In fact, He makes them prevail over an enemy which is numerically greater and stronger.

Similarities between leaders of Israelite nation and modern politicians

The verses of this lesson refer to a period, when after repeated setbacks in the battlefield, the Israelites consulted their Prophet Samuel to appoint a king to lead them. The leaders from amongst the Israelites were all competing for this position because of their greed for the acquisition of worldly status (unfortunately we see examples of similar competition amongst modern leaders and nations.) They consulted their prophet because they could not come to an agreement on this matter. (Even in this age, the worldly wise may resort to a person of good moral character to decide their differences, because of their trust in his fairness and honesty.) Prophet Samuel

did not make a personal choice, but asked for Divine guidance in this matter. Allah selected Saul for this purpose. The Israelites quarreled amongst themselves even regarding this selection made by Allah, and His Prophet. They were hoping that a leader from amongst their existing leaders would be chosen for this office, but the standards of Divine selection are quite different. They questioned how Saul could be given power over them, while they were more deserving of such a choice. (Is this not reminiscent of modern politics, of leaders and parties, vying for position of power.) In those days, lineage of royal descent, or being from a ruling family, used to be the basis of the claim for leadership. (Even in modern times a family can assume the role of leadership, as appears to be the case of the Nehru family in India.) The first objection of the Israelites was, therefore that Saul was not from amongst the royal, or the ruling class. Their second objection was that he was a poor man. He had neither the distinction of having power, nor wealth.

Divine criteria for selection of leaders

How appropriate was the reply of their Prophet! The first lesson he addressed was that Allah had chosen him over them because of his goodness. A leader who is immoral and guilty of misdeeds, will lead the nation on the very path that he is following. This can influence the results of battles as is well illustrated by the following incident.

People knowledgeable of the true history of the early caliphate know that both Persia and the Byzantine empire, the two super powers of the time were concerned about the rising power of the Arabs. They came up with their own strategies to curb this perceived danger. Heraclius, the Emperor of Byzantine empire, instigated the border tribes of Arabia, who had accepted Christianity under his influence, to rise up against the Muslims and promised them the support of his own forces. It was because of these incidents that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had to undertake the expedition to Tabuk. However, the Prophet's dignity inspired so much awe in these tribes that they fled away without giving battle. The promised help of the Byzantine forces also failed to materialize. Later, during the time of the early caliphate, this Christian power embarked upon hostilities against the Muslims. The Persian polytheists also forced war upon the Muslims by fanning rebellion, and sedition on the borders of the Muslim territory. Hazrat Umar, the second Caliph, once remarked that he wished there was a wall of fire between the Muslims and the Persians, which the Persians could not cross to create mischief for the Muslims. The Muslims were therefore, forced to fight on two fronts, which as every military strategist knows is a very precarious situation. But no one can destroy

whom Allah wants to save. The condition on both fronts was such that if the enemy forces numbered a hundred thousand, there were only ten thousand Muslims facing them. The enemy, however, suffered one defeat after another. The Heraclius of Byzantine was extremely perplexed by this. He questioned his minister, why the Muslims were victorious despite the fact that the Roman forces were more experienced, had more sophisticated weapons and outnumbered the Muslim forces ten to one? To this, the minister replied, "Your Majesty should observe the behavior of your soldiers before and after the battle. They spend most of the night in drinking, gambling and womanizing, while the Muslim soldiers spend their nights in prostrating before the Lord." "This," he said, "was the difference."

The second reason Prophet Samuel gave the Israelites was that Allah had chosen Saul because of his superiority in knowledge and physique. The selection had to be made first for commander in chief, and then for king. Superiority of knowledge, therefore refers to both these offices. Fighting the enemy successfully is a great art, which is learned by soldiers not only in various staff courses, but also in the battlefield, and prior to that by means of military exercises. Governing, also involves a great degree of skill and knowledge (to this I can testify by my forty years of experience working for the government in various capacities). It was stated that Saul was not only a capable and experienced soldier, but also knowledgeable in worldly and administrative matters.

The physical superiority of Saul, is mentioned because it is necessary for a military commander to be in good health, and the need for this is self evident. I have observed this during my public service that even in the civil administration, ailing officers cannot perform their duties satisfactorily.

After mentioning the qualities of Saul, the Holy Quran states, "And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He pleases." Note that the three qualities of Saul are mentioned before the statement, "And Allah grants His kingdom to whom He pleases." The sequencing of these statements shows that when the Holy Quran uses phrases like, 'Allah gives to whom He pleases,' or 'Allah selects whom He pleases,' the decision is made on the basis of firmly established principles, and not (we seek refuge in Allah from saying so) merely on whim, or without any rhyme or reason. The words, "And Allah is Ample-giving Knowing," provides further rationale for the decision i.e., that Divine knowledge extends across the broadest range, encompassing not only the leaders, but all the people, and is complete, and perfect in comparison with that of mankind.

More signs about the kingship of Saul are given further on in the statement, "And their prophet said to them: Surely the sign of His kingdom is that there shall come to you the heart in which there is tranquillity from your Lord and the best of what the followers of Moses and the followers of

Aaron have left, the angels bearing it. Surely there is a sign in this for you if you are believers.” A literal interpretation of the Arabic words has led to some strange explanations. It has been said that the angels came actually bearing a box which contained a thing called *sakina* with a head like that of a cat and it also contained the stone tablets of Prophet Moses (with the ten commandments), and the rod of Prophet Aaron which had miraculously sprouted branches etc. If this was actually the case, it is difficult to comprehend how this proves the superiority of Saul as the best choice. The fact of the matter is that these stories have been imported from Israelite traditions, and are not deserving of serious consideration. The Arabic word *taaboot* besides being used for a box, also stands for a man’s heart or mind (for reference see *Lisān-ul-Arab*, and *Al-Mufradāt fi Gharib al Qurān* by Imam *Rāghib*). Interpreted in this sense, the statement is a great prophecy made by their Prophet. It prophesies that when the Israelites go into battle, they will witness the great tranquillity with which the heart of Saul has been inspired. Tranquillity is inspired into the heart of a person, and obviously does not come in a box containing a kitty cat. The Holy Quran itself, where it mentions the believers being blessed with tranquillity, uses the words, “He it is who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers” (48:4). All combat tested veterans know that when the battle is raging, the most essential quality of a commander is to remain tranquil. If the commander becomes anxious and loses his composure, then it is inevitable that chaos will ensue among the fighting units, and they will lose ground. The heart of Saul being upheld by angels, means steadfastness, which has been explained by the Holy Quran in another verse, “When Thy Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, so make firm those who believe” (8:12). The last sign mentioned is that the heart of Saul has, “the best of what the followers of Moses, and the followers of Aaron have left.” This prophecy refers to the time when Saul was to rule as king. Prophet Moses spent a lifetime in giving the law, and settling the differences amongst his people, and Prophet Aaron led them in worship. It was thus prophesied that when Saul becomes king, he will not only be a lawgiver, but also a spiritual leader. That is why the fulfillment of this prophecy was referred to as a sign from Allah, “Surely there is a sign in this for you if you are believers.”

Trial of the Israelite forces

When Saul marched on with the army, he said, “Surely Allah will try you with a river (*nahar*).” The Arabic word *nahar* stands for both river and stream. Many commentators have interpreted this statement literally, and stated that it means that these soldiers on foot were tried by being given instructions that they could only drink a handful of water from a river they

had to cross. Most of them, however, drank to their hearts content. If someone is content with this interpretation, it is their choice. I prefer the other meaning of the word *nahar*, which means affluence (*Al-Mufradāt fi Gharib al Qurān* by Imam Rāghib). The statement thus refers to trial by affluence. When ever a fighting force adopts a life of comfort and luxury, it loses the will to fight. This reminds me of a story related about the soldiers of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah Rangeela. They were carried into the battlefield sitting in portable carriages, dressed in fine cotton, and fanning themselves with fans.

Divine criteria for granting victory

Further on this blessed verse after mentioning the large numbers of the enemy forces, and the smaller numbers of believers, states that Allah made the believers victorious by His permission. Certain pre-conditions are mentioned before Allah grants His permission to make the believers victorious, and these are patience, consistency, steadfastness and bowing down humbly in prayer before Allah. In the battle of Somnath when the army of Mahmood Ghaznavi was at the verge of being routed under assault by hundreds of elephants from the enemy side, he dismounted from his horse and prostrated humbly before Allah with his head in the dust. How the tide of battle turned after this is something that I invite the reader to read in the books of history. There is another tradition in this regard that I would like to mention before closing. It is written that after the Battle of Somnath, Mahmood Ghaznavi saw his deceased spiritual mentor in a dream. The mentor told him that Allah so loved his gesture of humility, that if he had prayed for the whole of India to accept Islam, his wish would have been granted. Unfortunately, besides the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and a few generations after them the Muslims ignored these Divine requirements for permission to grant victory, otherwise Spain would not have been lost, and all of India today would have been in the fold of Islam.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 41)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O you who believe, spend out of what We have given you before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, nor friendship, nor intercession. And the disbelievers - they are the wrongdoers.

Allah - there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Great.

CH.2:254-255

Monetary sacrifice required for striving in the way of Allah

These are the first two verses of section thirty four of *Al Baqarah*. In the two sections prior to this the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ
مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعَ فِيهِ وَلَا
خُلَّةَ وَلَا شَفَاعَةَ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٢٥٤﴾

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ
سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا
فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ
إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا
خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا
بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

upon him) is informed about the battles that the prophets before him had to participate in and it is then stated, “These are the messages of Allah. We recite them to thee with truth ; and surely thou art of the messengers.” The truth referred to is that these messengers were forced to take up arms, and the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) being a messenger will also find it necessary to take part in battles. After the reference to the battles, Prophet Jesus (*Isa*) is mentioned. He did not have to take part in fighting with the sword, but had to participate in another kind of striving in the way of Allah (*jihād*) which was by means of arguments and reasoning. It is, therefore stated, “And We gave clear arguments to Jesus son of Mary, and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit” (2: 253). Since Prophet Jesus had to strive in the way of Allah by means of arguments, the strengthening with the Holy Spirit is mentioned to indicate that his striving was spiritual in nature and the Divine help given to him was also spiritual. In mentioning Jesus son of Mary, there is also an indication that when the one like him in spirit and power will come, i.e., the Promised Messiah, he too will not have to fight with the sword, but will carry out a mighty spiritual striving in the way of Allah.

Striving in the way of Allah (*jihād*), whether it is by means of the sword, or with arguments (in the form of published literature), requires financial resources. This is the reason why the reference to battles and Jesus is immediately followed by the first verse of this lesson, “O you who believe, spend out of what We have given you.” In this verse, the holy Quran points out to the Muslims, that it was only through Allah’s grace that they were born to Muslim parents, or blessed with the acceptance of Islam. These favors were bestowed upon them not only in the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), when this verse was revealed and when the whole world had succumbed to the worst form of idol worship, but also hold true in the context of modern times when atheism is rampant. It therefore behooves them as believers in Allah to act upon His guidance which enjoins them to “Spend”, i.e. , make monetary sacrifice for the Divine cause.

On basis of my lifelong experience I can assure you that ordinarily it is not as difficult for people to accept and carry out other forms of injunctions and worship, as it is to spend money in the way of Allah. A Persian poet has described this human weakness very well in a couplet:

If you ask me for my life I am ready to give it.

Your asking for money is what I object to.

It is for this reason that the Holy Quran requires that verbal confession of belief be supported by the act of spending wealth, which is so dear to a person, in the way of Allah. The Holy Quran requires us to spend “Out of what We have given you.” Allah does not require us to spend all of our

money, but only a portion of it according to need. It is also pointed out that it is rather strange that a person becomes niggardly when Allah asks him to spend in His way some of the wealth out of what He has given him. For example, if you give someone a thousand rupees (currency) and ask him to spend a hundred rupees out of it on a certain job, would it not be extremely ungrateful of the person to refuse to do so?

Spiritual development is the purpose of spending in Allah's way

There should be no misgivings about the veracity of the statement, "out of what We have given you," for Allah is the one who gives sustenance to mankind. Man comes empty handed in this world from his mother's womb, and leaves empty handed when he is put in the grave. The wealth and the treasures of this world belong to the one who has created them. If someone earns wealth, it is because of Allah's grace, for if He had not given him the intelligence and capabilities to do so, he would have been helpless. Quite often we observe that some very intelligent people remain poor, while people with ordinary capabilities become wealthy. I have myself observed this very frequently. When Allah wants to take away some one's wealth then no capability, or skill can assist him. We can therefore conclude that whatever is given to mankind is out of Allah's grace.

In addition, the purpose for which Allah enjoins the spending of wealth is the best way in which wealth can be spent, i.e., the defense and propagation of truth. If Allah had pleased, He could have made his messengers and reformers (*mujaddids*) independently wealthy, so that they would not have had to stretch out their hands before sinful beings like us to give in His way. The reason He has not done so to give people like us, who are lost in the worldly ways, and oblivious of the Hereafter, an opportunity to make some provision for it. The only resource we can carry with us into the everlasting life Hereafter is what we have spent in the way of Allah in our temporal existence. In the Holy Quran Allah has promised to reward ten times, or more for such spending. Is there a worldly business or enterprise which gives a thousand percent (ten times the return on a hundred comes out to be a thousand) return on investment?

Belief and righteous actions are both complementary: The injunction to confirm belief with action has dual wisdom. The first is that belief leads to good actions. The person who does not have belief in accountability of actions, or the Hereafter lacks the moral imperative for righteous action. The second is that belief itself is nurtured by, and blooms with the performance of good deeds. The Holy Quran likens belief to the gardens of paradise and pure deeds to the streams which flow beneath these gardens.

Just as streams provide water to the garden and enhance its growth, righteous actions also strengthen belief and make it grow. For example, the belief of a person who does not do good deeds after believing, will eventually weaken and die, like a plant deprived of water. The person who does good, his belief will thrive and strengthen with every good deed.

The true meaning of intercession

Then follow the Divine words, “before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, nor friendship, nor inter-cession.” When faced with accountability, or punishment for misdeeds in this world, people can often save themselves by bribing officials. In this verse it is stated, that such a deal would not be possible in the life Hereafter. For those who have not spent in Allah’s way, there will be nothing to spend in the Hereafter for redemption, nor will there be any crooked officials there who would accept money in return for favors. Besides bribery, contacts either directly or indirectly with those in positions of power, or the ability to buy their influence can save a person from facing punishment for his misdeeds. Friendships in the Hereafter, we are told, will be of no benefit. From the Hadith we learn that if Allah permits intercession on anybody’s behalf in the Hereafter, it will only be from the prophets, the righteous, and the angels. Those who have not done any good deeds would not have made friends with the prophets, the righteous, the angels (who inspire the human heart towards goodness), or with Almighty Allah (Who becomes the friend of believers as we shall learn later on in this section). How can these people then expect any benefit from them in the Hereafter? In this worldly life, intercession by an influential person on behalf of a guilty party can lead to acquittal. In the Hereafter, according to the Hadith only the Prophets, the true believers, and the angels will be able to intercede, and that too only with Allah’s permission, as the subsequent portion of these verses indicate, “Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?” Those who did nothing to deserve the bounty of Allah, nor lent support to the messengers and the true believers, nor paid heed to the inspiration of angels towards goodness, will have nobody to count on for intercession on their behalf.

Many Muslims, misunderstand the real meaning of intercession, and consider it a license to act as they desire, without fear of consequences. It is essential, therefore to shed some light on the real meaning of intercession. The Arabic word, *shafā’a*, means pair. *Shafā’atun*, or intercession is, therefore only possible, when a person by his belief and action bonds with the true believers, the messengers and the angels, and not otherwise. Allah will only allow intercession when He deems that a person, in spite of his shortcomings and weaknesses is excusable. This is stated in the verse, “and

they intercede not except for him whom He approves” (21:28). In the matter of such a person, when Allah sees a desire in the heart of a prophet, a true believer, or an angel to intercede on his behalf, Allah will honor such a righteous being by asking him if he would like to intercede for the sake of such a person? He will then grant him permission to ask for His mercy.

Wrongdoing of the disbelievers

It is then stated, “And the disbelievers — they are the wrongdoers.” This verse indicates that the disbelievers against whom the injunction is given to strive (*jihād*), and spend one’s wealth, are the wrongdoers because they want to destroy the truth, and those who believe in it. If the believers do not spend their wealth in striving against them, the disbelievers will destroy them and their faith. In the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the disbelievers tried to destroy the truth, and its followers with the sword. The nineteenth century of the Christian Era was also a dangerous time for Islam, when the disbelievers tried to destroy Islam, and the Muslims by means of raising a storm of objections, innuendo and false propaganda. Allah, Who is Himself the Supporter, and Helper of His faith, ordained Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed as the Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of the age and charged him to meet this challenge. He and his followers sacrificed their life, and property to fulfill this charge and strive in the way of Allah in an exemplary manner. History, and the valuable literature produced by him and his followers, and circulated all over the world, attest to this. This literature not only contains the answer to all the objections against Islam, it proves its truth and beauty like the light of the day. It presents the remedy for materialism and atheism that has plagued this age. There is still a great need to propagate this literature all over the world.

The interpretation of the verse, “And the disbelievers - they are the wrongdoers,” that our late president Maulana Muhammad Ali (may the mercy of Allah be upon him) has done in the *Bayan-al-Quran* (Urdu translation and commentary of the Holy Quran) is also commendable. He comments, “Not spending in the way of Allah is a wrongful deed because one shirks from fulfilling his duty towards God. This is the way of the disbelievers which is beneath the dignity of the believer. It is also a warning for the believer to avoid behavior resembling disbelief.”

The writer would like to add that the Arabic word *Kufr* (disbelief) also means ingratitude. It is therefore ingratitude, not to spend in the way of Allah out of what He has given to mankind. It is also an injustice to one’s own self not to make provision for the life Hereafter.

The meaning of, Allah— there is no god (Ilaha) but He

The next verse is, “Allah - there is no god but He.” I have discussed the meaning of the Arabic word *Ilāh* in some of my previous lessons. It conveys three meanings. First, it stands for the One Who is worshipped i.e., deserves complete submission. Allah has made the whole creation submissive to the Divine command, but has given freewill to mankind. However, mankind should also submit to its Creator and Lord, out of its freewill, because Allah is the Creator of man, and also nurtures him unto perfection. Man can only take advantage of this nurturing if he submits to Him. One can give the analogy of a child who can benefit from his parents guidance, and nurturing only by being obedient to them.

The second meaning of *Ilāh* is the One who deserves our love. Who is more deserving of love than Allah? Not only is He the possessor of all perfect attributes, but He also gives to man the benefit of these attributes by nurturing him. As the Creator, and the One Who nurtures unto perfection (*Rabb*), He is the greatest Benefactor of mankind. It is this benefaction that creates the feeling of true love in the heart of man. It is also necessary to obey Allah because He is the Master of the Day of Requit, and man will be called to account before Him on the Day of Judgment.

The third meaning of *Ilāh* is of the One Who is the purpose, or objective of existence. The purpose of man’s creation is, therefore to search for God, and strive for His pleasure, and to become close to Him. Who is a greater Benefactor of mankind than Allah? Man can acquire His pleasure, and get closer to Him by being colored in His coloring, i.e., by giving to others like He does.

Those who do not spend in the way of Allah, their objective or *Ilāh*, is not Allah, but wealth. Their whole existence revolves around the acquisition of wealth, which thus becomes the object of their worship. They utilize all means, lawful or unlawful, to acquire the maximum amount of wealth. Wealth becomes their beloved, for its love exceeds all other affections. In fact, love of wealth leads to the demise of all other affections. Earning wealth becomes the objective and the desired purpose of their lives. This verse of the Holy Quran tells us that the search and greed for wealth, its acquisition and its love, are not the purpose of man’s life. In fact, recognition of the Divine Being, and getting close to Him is the purpose of man’s creation. Other religions have declared the acquisition of wealth to be detrimental to salvation. They encourage their followers to become monks, nuns, or ascetics. Islam, on the other hand considers wealth as a worldly blessing of Allah, and gives permission to earn it legally without limits. It lays down only two preconditions, that it should be earned honestly, and instead of becoming the object of one’s worship, it should be

spent in the way of Allah. Spending in the cause of religion, which is mentioned here, is the best, and most excellent way to spend money. Every individual should, therefore, appropriate a suitable amount of their earnings for this purpose.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 42)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Allah - there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Great.

CH.2:255

The verse quoted above is the famous verse also known as *Āyat-al-Kursi* (verse of Knowledge). Its excellence has been described in the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and emphasis has been laid upon its recitation after the obligatory prayers. In the previous lesson I had mentioned that the Holy Quran tells us that the object of man's creation is not to earn wealth (as we so clearly observe around us in the world today), but to find Allah and strive for closeness with Him. There is no greater treasure than this. Love of amassing wealth and avarice can so influence man's heart and mind that his entire life is consumed by it, and he departs from this world empty handed. The perpetual search and love of wealth makes a man heedless of his spiritual development. In fact, it breeds immorality which results in criminal behavior, robbery and even murder.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ
سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا
فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ
إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا
خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا
بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

Why Islam does not encourage monasticism as a way of life

For this reason, other religions, besides Islam, have condemned wealth, and consider worldly involvement as being extremely dangerous for man's spiritual development. They feel that the way to salvation is through becoming a monk, a nun or an ascetic. There are few individuals, however, who give up the worldly ways and the rejection of such monastic behavior by the majority of the human race indicates that it is contrary to human nature. If all human beings had become monks and nuns, human development would have been impossible, and the human race would have become extinct, as a result of the celibacy practiced by these orders. In addition, even spiritual and moral development is not possible in monasticism, as I will show later on.

Islam, is the natural religion of mankind. It does not prohibit any natural desire of man, but only urges their control as a necessary means to his moral and spiritual development. Let us, for example, consider the matter of wealth. Those who reject affluence and become hermits in a monastery or a temple, not only by their action declare worldly progress as unlawful, but also deprive themselves of many higher moral values. For example telling the truth in face of adversity, when it could be much easier to tell a lie, is an excellent moral and spiritual quality. A person secluded in a monastery, or a cave does not have the opportunity to face such a choice, and is therefore unable to develop such an excellent moral quality. Similarly honesty is an excellent moral and spiritual quality which can only be acquired if one gets involved in worldly affairs, earns wealth, and has the opportunity to be dishonest, or earn wealth by unfair means. If one rejects dishonesty and deceit even when money is desperately needed, virtue of honesty evolves in him in its true color, and excellent form. Similarly moral qualities, like purity and chastity cannot be developed by locking oneself in a convent, or a monastery. These higher moral values can only be developed when men and women while living together in the world and meeting, prefer chastity and purity in the face of all sorts of attractions.

There are great opportunities for men and women to attain higher moral values in the role of a husband and wife, or that of parents. For example, a husband who earns sustenance for his wife and off springs, and sacrifices his just needs to fulfill their needs is reflecting the Divine attribute of nurturing unto perfection. Similarly, a mother who deals with her children mercifully despite their shortcomings and weaknesses, and who sacrifices and faces hardship to provide them with all kinds of comfort, creates the color of beneficence and mercy of Allah in herself.

Wealth as a means of spiritual development of mankind

I can give hundreds of such examples, but I would like to revert to the subject of wealth mentioned in the preceding verse, which we discussed in the last lesson. Other religions have considered the acquisition of wealth as a barrier to communion with Allah. Islam, however, is distinctive in showing wealth to be a means of achieving closeness with God. Allah provides mankind with wealth through His attributes of being the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb ul 'ālamīn*), the Beneficent (*Al-Raḥmān*), and the Merciful (*Al-Raḥīm*). Even the most destitute of human beings is provided with considerable wealth if all the free blessings like water and air that Allah provides are counted. Allah has permitted man to earn as much wealth as he can with three preconditions. Firstly, the acquisition of wealth must be by honest means and all unlawful means must be strictly shunned, even if it means starvation. Secondly, wealth must be shared unhesitatingly with the indigent, the orphans and those in need, in line with Allah's attribute of beneficence, whereby Allah gives to all of mankind, without their having done anything to deserve it. In particular, wealth is to be spent generously for the need of religion, which includes importantly the defense and propagation of Islam. Failure to do so is culpable before Allah, as repeatedly stated in the Holy Quran. Thirdly, while earning wealth, man should not forget that this is not the real purpose of his creation, which in reality is communion with God. The way to accomplish this is to inculcate the Divine attributes within oneself by spending one's wealth in accordance with Divine injunctions. For example, by spending on one's wife, children, poor relatives, neighbors, widows, orphans, the indebted, and others in need, one inculcates the Divine attributes of nurturing, beneficence and mercy. Thus, wealth becomes the means of developing the Divine within man. Despite this, acquisition of wealth is not the purpose of man's life, but the lofty objective for which man, the best of creation was created, is communion with Allah. This is the greatest treasure of all. Only those who establish such a relationship with God can fully comprehend what a treasure and blessing it is to know God. This is why the prophets, saints, and the righteous servants of Allah ,after receiving this greatest and most excellent treasure, regard worldly wealth and riches as of no consequence.

The purpose of man's creation in the words of a righteous servant of Allah

The Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of the fourteenth century Hijra, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian was one such saintly person who had communion with Allah. I would like for you to read what he has written in a state of ecstasy on achieving such closeness with Allah. He states:

How unfortunate is that person who still does not know that he has a God Who is One, and Who has power over all things. Our paradise is our Lord. Our greatest pleasures lie with Him, because we saw Him, and found every excellence within Him. This treasure is worth taking even if one has to lay down one's life for it. This precious jewel is worth buying, even if one has to relinquish one's self for it. O! Deprived ones quicken your pace towards this fountain, for it will quench your thirst. It is the fountain of life which will save you. What can I do to focus your attention towards this good news? With what kind of drum beat should I proclaim in the streets that 'This is our God,' so that people would listen? What medicine should I prescribe for their ears so that they hear this message? If you give yourself up to God, then be certain that He will be yours. While you slumber, He lies awake for you. When you are unaware of your enemy, God will watch him, and destroy his plans. You do not know yet, the Omnipotence of your God. If you knew about it, you would never grieve for this world. Does he, who owns a treasure ever scream, or cry, or become despondent on the loss of a penny? If you knew that God will help you in time of need, then why would you, knowing about this treasure, be besides yourself in pursuit of worldly gain? God is a beloved and precious treasure. Be cognizant of His blessings; He is your Helper in every step you take. You are nothing without Him, nor are your means and schemes of any consequence. Do not follow the example of other nations who totally rely on their means. Like the serpent eats dust, they have consumed the dirt of their earthly resources; like dogs and vultures, they have partaken of the carrion. They have receded far away from the Lord. They worship human beings, eat of the swine and consume wine like water. By totally depending on their means and not asking for God's help, they have died a spiritual death, and the heavenly spirit has left them like a dove that has flown away from its nest. Their spirits are infected with the leprosy of materialism which has cut off their inner faculties. You should fear this disease. I do not prohibit you from relying on your means with moderation. What I forbid you is to become total slaves to your means like other nations and forget God, Who is the Provider of these means. If you possess real insight, you would perceive that God is the only truth, all the rest is of no consequence (*Kishti-e-Nuh* pages 19-20).

You will find a further glimpse of this enlightened concept of the Divine Being presented above by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed in the verse of the Holy Quran known as the *āyat-al-Kursi*, which will be the subject of my next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 43)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Allah - there is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. Slumber overtakes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of them both tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Great.

CH.2:255

I gave an introductory commentary on this verse, commonly known as the *ayat-al-kursi* (verse of Divine Knowledge), in my previous lesson. In fact, there is a great depth of wisdom and knowledge enclosed in the few sentences of this verse. I will attempt a brief commentary of it in this lesson. The concept of the Divine Being that is commonly found in religions other than Islam, can be categorized into three or four types. One type is that of an inanimate stone idol carved by man which he has the power to destroy at will. A second type is that of an animal such as a cow which is inferior to him. Like all other animals, it is created from a non-existential state. It was born and will eventually die a natural death, if not slaughtered for its meat. The third concept of the Divine Being is that of a human like us. Like

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ
سِنَةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا
فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ
إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا
خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا
بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٥٥﴾

all human beings, the deity was brought from a non-existential state to life in the mother's womb. Her blood nurtured him, and eventually he was born like any other baby. The deity felt hunger and thirst, possessed all human frailties, and eventually passed away. Such is the Christian concept of the Divinity of Jesus. If the Christians claim that the life experience of Jesus was different from that of a human because he was given life after death, it does not in any way make him superior to the rest of humanity which too has the same fate. In fact, the prophets of God and the righteous are all given a new life, immediately after death. The fourth concept of divinity is that celestial bodies, like the sun, moon, stars etc., are gods. Science has proven that these are nothing, but masses of heated matter, and gas bound by the laws of the Great Master and Creator. In this age of science and knowledge there was the widespread rejection of such concepts, and the consequential spread of atheism on a large scale.

Concept of the Divine Being in Islam

It is quite apparent that the human mind which is a material entity like that of other animals cannot independently acquire knowledge of the Divine Being. The concepts that man formulated independently were so flawed that they have been rejected today. It is, therefore essential that knowledge of His Being and attributes be given by God Himself. He certainly did give such knowledge in different revealed scriptures, but unfortunately these were either completely destroyed, or greatly altered by human hands. This is the reason why Allah Himself became the Guardian of His complete and Final Word, the Holy Quran. Even the critics admit that the Holy Quran we have in our hands today, is exactly the same as was revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The concept of the Divine Being is presented throughout the Holy Quran from its beginning to the end. The verse (*Āyat-al-Kursi*) that I am going to discuss briefly today, also presents this magnificent concept.

“Allah- there is no God (*ilāh*), but He.” As I explained in my first lesson, Allah is the proper name of the Divine Being. When we introduce someone, we first mention his proper name. For example, “This is Mr. Rashid Khan.” It is surprising that no other religion besides Islam has informed us about the proper name of God, although there are names describing His attributes. This is just like saying about someone that he is a Muslim, a very good person etc., but without revealing his proper name. If only the descriptive qualities are given without the proper name, the introduction is not only incomplete, but is also generalized because these qualities could be possessed by several different persons. The name Allah, even before Islam, was used in the Arabic language for the One and Only God,

and for no one else. The proper name Allah means, One Who is perfect in the excellence and goodness of His attributes, and also in their manifestation, so that His creation benefits from them at all times. It is not enough for someone to possess good qualities unless others benefit from them. For example, if a person is a great scholar, his knowledge is useless unless it is of benefit to someone else. The creation of Allah, the Most High, however benefits from His attributes all the time as is quite apparent from His attributes of *Rabb-ul-‘ālamīn* (One Who nourishes the whole creation unto perfection), *Al-Rahmān* (the Beneficent), and *Al-Rahīm* (the Merciful).

After giving knowledge of the name Allah, it is stated that there is no God (*ilāh*), but He. The ordinary meaning of the word *ilāh* in Arabic is One Who is worshipped, i.e., the One served with humility. In this one word a cogent proof of the unity of the Divine Being is given. The question is raised, in whose service is the whole creation obediently bound? This answer which was given fourteen hundred years ago has been confirmed by modern scientific knowledge, that the whole universe is one, and is bound by the same universal law. That is why even the atheist and Christian scientists have now finally accepted that this magnificent universe has all been created by, and is under the control of One Being. Since this whole universe, and even the human body is serving the One God with humility, mankind should also strive to serve the One and Only God. This can only be accomplished by completely following the guidance given in the Holy Quran.

The second meaning of *ilāh* is, the One Who deserves our love. This tells us that submission to God should be with love, only then can it be truly representative of genuine enthusiasm and sincerity. This is the kind of submission which can bring the most beneficial results. For example, the child who appreciates the favors of his parents, considers them his well-wishers, and follows their guidance enthusiastically, will benefit the most from it. If he does so reluctantly, he cannot reap the same rewards. The parental favors towards their offspring are nothing compared to the Divine favors upon mankind. He created the heavens, and the earth and made man His vicegerent upon earth. He made all creation submissive to man and blessed him with innumerable favors. He breathed into him His spirit, and blessed him with His knowledge, and provided him with guidance, so that by following it he can get closer to Him. As I have pointed out in my previous lesson, there is nothing more satisfying, rewarding, or of value that can equal this relationship. The third meaning of *ilāh* is, the One Who is the desired objective or purpose of life. Recognition of the Divine Being and establishment of a relationship with Him is the purpose of man's creation, and giving man knowledge and guidance to accomplish this is the greatest Divine favor upon mankind. Whosoever sets up associates with Allah, fails to achieve the purpose of his creation.

The verse then proceeds to state, “the Ever-living (*Al-Hayy*), the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist.” The Arabic word *Hayy* means One Who was always living, and will live forever. By using the Arabic letter *Alif* and *Lām*, which makes *Al*, with the word *Hayy*, indicate that the Divine Being is also Unique in this matter, i.e., He is the Only One Who was always living and will live forever. Scientists agree that the universe has finite life, though perhaps a long one by our reckoning. There was a beginning, and there will be an end. This is true for everything in the universe, including humans and all other living beings. Every one amongst us did not exist at one time, and will eventually die. The other meaning of *Hayy* is that Allah is not only Himself Ever-Living, but He also gives life to others. This meaning of the word *Hayy* informs us that Allah is our Creator and the Source of life for each one of us. Not only is Allah the initiator of life, but in accordance with the first meaning of the Arabic word *Hayy*, i.e., the One Who is Ever-living. He gives everlasting life, which is a blessed one for those who seek His pleasure. This is a source of immense satisfaction for humans, because the greatest desire of every human being is to abide forever. We are thus informed by this Quranic verse that if you desire a blessed everlasting life, then Allah is the Only One Who can give it. The Arabic word *Qayyūm* means that He is the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. After the desire for life everlasting, the second greatest desire of man is that he should have stability in life, remain physically active, and in good health. This can also be granted only by Allah, the Most High. He has promised this for the life Hereafter, where mankind is to abide forever.

It is quite surprising that modern science has also come to the conclusion that the existence of this universe is because of the Divine Being. There are several books on this subject, two of the easily comprehensible ones being, ‘The Mysterious Universe,’ by Sir James Jeans, and ‘The Universe and Dr. Einstein,’ by Lincoln Barenett. Sir James Jean writes in his book, “The Universe exists because it exists in a Universal Mind.”

A being that is not ever-living and self-subsisting by whom all subsist does not deserve to be called god, for such a being was born like us, and will likewise die one day. It did not give life, or subsistence to others nor is it self-subsisting. In contrast, the Holy Quran has given such a magnificent and attractive concept of the Divine Being that in this age of science and reasoning no other concept can be acceptable. It is then stated, “Slumber over-takes Him not, nor sleep.” Slumber creates a period of temporary unawareness, while sleep does that for a more prolonged period. Science, today has also established this principle. If the existence of this universe is because of its existence in a Divine mind encompassing the whole universe, if that Being goes into slumber or sleep, then the whole universe would perish. Those who elevate their prophets to the status of god do not deny

that they were prone to slumber and sleep. I have heard from Hindus that their idols do sleep in the temple, or cave. That is why the worshipper rings a bell before commencing supplications. If those prophets or idols were the real Divine Being, then this universe would have ended in a few seconds. How can the Being Who is prone to slumber and sleep be our guardian at all times? I have quoted Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in my previous lesson that, ‘Allah lies awake while human beings are asleep, He sees their enemies, and the dangers they face, and protects them, provided they are His humble servants.’

It is then stated, “To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.” Ordinarily heavens are considered as the physical heavens about which modern science is making novel discoveries everyday. If we accept his meaning momentarily, it is quite obvious that Allah is the Creator of whatever is in the heavens and the earth, for man comes into this world empty handed and leaves it in a similar condition. A better meaning of the heavens, is those spiritual heavens which are the abode of man’s life Hereafter. According to the Quran and the Hadith, these are seven in number and man’s everlasting existence and progress will continue in them after death. Considering this meaning, let us now study the words of this verse, “To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth.” This implies that whatever you desire in your earthly existence, can only be given by Allah, who owns everything that is in this world, and He is the Creator of all. To Him also belongs whatever is in the heavens, meaning the life Hereafter, for He has created everything over there for you, and only He can give it to you. Mankind is, therefore totally dependent upon the blessed being of Allah, in this world, and in the life Hereafter. What can other human beings, or the ones who have been made into gods give, for they are themselves dependent on Allah for everything?

Further on it is stated, “Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?” I have discussed the subject of intercession in my previous lessons. Unfortunately it is a common misconception that a certain entity can intercede on our behalf, and save us. That is the reason why prophets, saints, holy men, ascetics and even their graves are worshipped. The foundations of Christianity rest on Jesus being the intercessor between man and God. Misunderstanding the concept of intercession has led people associating other entities with God. As I have already discussed, and is apparent even in this verse, that Allah, the Most High, is the One Who gives the permission to intercede. It behooves us to seek His pleasure by submitting to Him with humility, and not His displeasure by associating others with Him. If a certain person has developed a bond with a prophet continuously striving to follow in his footsteps, (Arabic word for intercession *shafa’at* means bonding or forming a relationship), and Allah desires to forgive this person

despite his shortcomings, Allah will give His prophet permission to intercede on the person's behalf and not otherwise. It must be remembered that Allah's permission to intercede is accepted merely to honor the prophet. The same holds true for a person who emulates a righteous person or follows the impulses from angels to do acts of goodness. If Allah desires to forgive such a person, despite his shortcomings, He will give permission to the righteous persons and angels to intercede merely to honor them. The intercession in the hereafter, therefore, is very different from the intercession that we see in worldly affairs. Here the intercessions are unsolicited and the intercessor is generally a person who feels he has some right over the person he is asking for a favor, if the favor is not granted it is implied that it will incur the displeasure of the intercessor. I have worked all my life for the government, and it is my personal observation that if I did not accept someone's recommendation it invariably led to their displeasure even if they did not show it. No one has any right over Allah, the Blessed Most High, or can have the impertinence to think that he can put any kind of pressure on Him on basis of which he can intercede without His permission. Nor can anyone have the audacity to say that if his intercession is not accepted, it will offend him or result in his displeasure.

The subsequent words of *āyat-al-kursi* give another reason why intercession would not be possible without the permission of Allah, and those words are, "He knows what is before them, and what is behind them." Allah only has the complete knowledge of a man's present and past, and no one else. Only Allah, therefore, is in the position to decide whether a person should be forgiven or not. The deeds that are committed by man, his intentions and circumstances and subsequent actions are known only to Allah, and no one else. How appropriate are the words that follow, "And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases." The limits of human knowledge whether it is of this world, or the Hereafter, or of his temporal, or spiritual self are defined by Allah the Most High. We are told not to assess the knowledge of Allah by means of our own imperfect knowledge. Man's knowledge of the past or present is incomplete and defective, as is well known to historians and scientists. That is why science is constantly making new discoveries which show older ideas to be faulty or incomplete. The knowledge of the future and the unseen is possessed only by Allah. He gives proof of this by imparting knowledge of the unseen to His prophets and righteous servants. He has also made the Holy Quran a repository of such knowledge. Quranic prophecies are being fulfilled even today, fourteen hundred years after its revelation and only Allah knows how many more will be fulfilled in the future. Even modern science has accepted Allah's knowledge of the unseen. This a very lengthy subject which I will, if it please Allah, discuss on another occasion by directly

quoting some well known scientists on this subject. We do not however, need the confirmation of the scientists to convince us. The unlimited amount of knowledge of the unseen that is there in the Holy Quran, thousands of prophecies that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) made on being given knowledge by Allah, and the knowledge of the unseen given to other righteous servants and reformers by Allah, is sufficient proof for us.

“His knowledge (*kursi*) extends over the heavens and the earth.” The Arabic word *kursi* commonly refers to an object used for sitting. Without going into the lexicological details, suffice it to say that the word *kursi* also signifies both dominion and knowledge, and both of these meanings are appropriate in the present context. Allah has created the heavens of this physical universe, and also those of the Hereafter. His knowledge and sovereignty, therefore encompasses both the heavens and the earth. with knowledge comes power. For example, as man has gained more knowledge of science, his dominion over the rest of the creation has increased. Allah is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and His control extends over not only this world, but also the Hereafter. Man, whether in this life, or the life Hereafter cannot go outside the domain of Allah, and there is no refuge for him if he displeases Allah. If you desire the benefit in this world, or the Hereafter, seek the pleasure of Allah which can be achieved through humble submission to Him.

“And the preservation of them both tires Him not. If Allah was to tire like humans, the heavens and the earth would cease to exist. These words also indicate that protection in this world and the Hereafter can only be acquired by coming within the protection of Allah and not otherwise.

“And He is the Most High, Great.” Most High (*'Aliyy*) indicates exaltation of status due to His attributes and qualities, and Great (*'Azim*) indicates His dominion and power. Most High is mentioned first because attributes and qualities are the real source of eminence. For example, the honor and eminence attained by prophets and saints by reflecting the Divine attributes within themselves is much greater than the honor and eminence of kings and rulers, although it cannot be denied that worldly power and sovereignty is also a source of honor. The sequencing of *'Aliyy* before *'Azim*, therefore, indicates that it is eminence of character which embellishes worldly prominence and honor. Without character worldly power and honor are of no consequence as is frequently observed in the case of world leaders who get involved in scandals. The sequence of the words the Most High, Great (*Al'aliyyu Al'azim*) also indicates that if you rectify your character and spirit, Allah will also bestow worldly honor upon you.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 44)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

There is no compulsion in religion—the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the devils who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.

CH.2:256,257

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ لَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ
الْغَىِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاهُمْ
الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

Fighting with the sword lawful only in defensive warfare

Those who have studied my earlier lessons on this magnificent section of the Holy Quran may remember the discussion which is to follow. Preceding this section, the Holy Quran prophesies the battles which the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Muslims would have to fight in order to save their faith, life and property. Also discussed was the striving (*jihad*) with the Holy Quran according to the Divine command, “And strive against them a mighty striving with it” (25:52). This latter kind of jihad was the one which was to persist in all ages. Its need is particularly acute in the present time when the opposition is trying to destroy Islam not only militarily, but also with objections,

instigation, innuendo and propaganda. To answer an objection with the sword is not the way of the righteous. In fact, it was the way resorted to by the supporters of falsehood i.e., the disbelievers of Arabia. When they could not rationally counter the strength of Muslim arguments, the fire of wrath and resentment was ignited in their hearts, and they decided to destroy the truth with the sword. Fighting with the sword is lawful only in case of defensive warfare. This is quite apparent from all those Quranic verses where the ordinances for fighting (for which the Holy Quran has used the word *qitāl*) are given. For example, the first ordinance was given thus, “Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed” (22:39). Islam which literally means peace and security, allows fighting only when war is forced upon the Muslims by an enemy guilty of oppression. In another verse it is stated, “And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors” (2:190). The real intent and purpose of the permission to fight in Islam is captured in the verse, “And fight with them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allah” (8:39).

The charter of religious freedom that Islam proclaims is given in the beginning of the verses under discussion today i.e., “There is no compulsion in religion.” Glory be to Allah! How exalted and superior is the teaching of the Holy Quran.

Death is not the punishment of apostasy in Islam

It is essential at this point to remove the misunderstanding that in Islam apostasy is to be punished with death. The verse quoted above clearly shows that this is not the case. This is even admitted by fair minded Orientalists. For example, Heizming, a Christian author of the essay on apostasy in the ‘Encyclopedia of Islam,’ starts his essay with the words, “The Quran has only threatened the apostate with chastisement in the Hereafter.” This statement is absolutely correct. If the apostate is to be put to death, would the following verse be in the Holy Quran? “And if thy Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Wilt thou then force men till they are believers?”(10:99). Would the Jews of Medina have schemed to deceive the Muslims in this manner, “And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve in the latter part of it, perhaps they may turn back” (3:72). If in fact, the punishment for apostasy was death, then the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who was the ruler in Medina would have meted out the death penalty to such apostates whether Jews, or otherwise. Under these

circumstances would the Quran contain the following statement? “Those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them in the (right) way” (4:137). There are several other Quranic verses on this subject, but time does not permit a more detailed discussion of these verses, nor of some of the misconceptions arising out of certain Hadith. For a more detailed discussion of the subject, I would like to refer the interested reader to the section on apostasy in ‘Religion of Islam,’ by Maulana Muhammad Ali. The gist and essence of that discussion is the blessed verse, “There is no compulsion in religion,” with which I started my lesson today.

Holy Prophet’s life— a magnificent example of religious tolerance

The Holy Quran gave this magnificent charter of religious freedom fourteen hundred years ago when the world was enveloped in the darkness of bigotry and religious intolerance. In modern times the United Nations has accepted this same principle of religious freedom and all of the member nations, by becoming signatories to its charter, have affirmed the truth of this principle of the Holy Quran. What is the relationship of this spiritually luminescent verse, “There is no compulsion in religion,” with the preceding verses of the Holy Quran? The preceding verses mention that the disbelievers have avowed to forcefully impose their beliefs upon the Muslims by waging a war against them. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and his companions are enjoined to uphold, and establish the principle of religious freedom in the world by resisting the onslaught against them through defensive fighting. They are cautioned not to enforce their religion upon their vanquished foes when Allah granted them victory which was to take place in the near future. The most excellent display of this religious tolerance which the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), taught his followers was manifested during the victory at Mecca. Even the worst enemies of Islam cannot site a single example where the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forced the disbelievers of Mecca, or any other subjugated nation to accept Islam. “O Allah! Exalt Muhammad, and have peace and blessings upon him, and the true followers of Muhammad, with Thy Mercy, O Most Merciful of all.”

Freedom of Will essential for spiritual development

If Allah, the Most High wanted to enforce acceptance of faith, He would not have given free will to man and would have bound him into submission, just as He has constrained the rest of the universe into submission. For

example, the instincts of animals have been programmed into their nature by the Divine Being and they are bound to follow it. It is impossible for an animal to go against its natural guidance or instinct. If Allah had treated man in a similar manner, he would not have been able to rise above the animal stage. How great is the beneficence of Allah, the Most High, towards man, that He has opened the path of his spiritual development by granting him the freedom of will. This, in fact, is a Divine privilege for, "Allah does what He intends" (2:253). It is because of this freedom of will that man is rewarded for his good deeds, which is mentioned in almost every page of the Holy Quran. If man is forced to follow or do something against his will, then such a compliance does not qualify as a good deed. For example, if belief in One God which is the basis of faith, and truthfulness which is the foundation of all good deeds, is enforced, then such compliance becomes devoid of all goodness. An act of goodness occurs only when there is an opportunity to make an associate with God, but one rejects it, or there is an opportunity to lie, but one chooses to tell the truth.

Divine Guidance necessary to save mankind

The words that follow this magna carte of a religious freedom makes one truly appreciative of the greatness of the Holy Quran. It is stated, "the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error." The secret of man's eminence and his spiritual and moral development which lie in the freedom of will, are captured in these words. Allah has always clearly defined the right from the wrong way in order to save man from drifting, and losing his way. He has done this through the ages by sending His prophets and Books, but with the passage of time the Books were either lost or adulterated, and the example of the messenger forgotten or misrepresented. This system came to an end with the revelation of the Holy Quran to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) because the guidance in the Holy Quran is in its most excellent form, and Allah guarantees to safeguard it against any form of corruption or alteration. Even the worst enemies of Islam acknowledge the purity of the text of the Holy Quran. Though the Holy Quran reached the four corners of the world about a millenium and a half ago, and has circulated since in many far flung and isolated communities, there is not a verse of the Holy Quran that has been altered anywhere. Similarly the *sunnat* (actions) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has been preserved, and the smallest detail of his life is recorded in numerous books of Hadith (sayings). If any prophet deserves the title of being a prophet whose life has been recorded in a historical sense, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is certainly the one. If any doubt arises about the authenticity of some

saying, or action of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the Holy Quran provides us with a simple test. The Holy Quran states, ““Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah” (4:80).” This provides us with the test to authenticate any Hadith or Sunnah. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) followed the command of Allah, or in other words the Holy Quran to such a complete degree that if any doubt arises about a Hadith or a tradition, it can be judged from the Holy Quran. If it is in accordance with the Holy Quran, it is correct. If it goes against the Holy Quran, it is incorrect, for no saying or deed of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was in contradiction of the Holy Quran.

Holy Quran— a guidance with clear proofs

Not only is the Holy Quran a complete guide, but it also supports its guidance with rational arguments as stated in this verse, “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (separating truth from falsehood)” (2:185). If it invites towards the right path, it supports and proves its point with arguments. For example, the teaching of monotheism is supported by different arguments. Sometimes attention is drawn towards the testimony of all creation and sometimes towards that of man’s own nature. At times, appeal is made to the intelligence of man, or he is reminded of the testimony provided by the prophets and the revealed scriptures. Another rational argument in support of monotheism is given in this verse, “Nor is there with Him any (other) god—in that case would each god have taken away what he created, and some of them would have over-powered others. Glory be to Allah above what they describe” (23:91). Even if men are real brothers, they tend to divide their property and separate in order to avoid future conflict. No country functions with two kings, two presidents, or two prime ministers. How can God be expected to share His Power, and be bound by limitations of shared arrangements? The concept of Trinity—three gods in one is indeed very strange. We observe that two conjoined twins are in such great difficulty! If in reality there were three gods what would their condition be?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 45)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

There is no compulsion in religion—the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the devils who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.

CH.2:256,257

Truth clearly distinguished from error

In the previous lesson I had explained that the prime reason for the golden principle, “There is no compulsion in religion,” is given in the words of the Holy Quran which immediately follow this statement i.e., “the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.” We are thus informed that Allah, the Most High is the one Who has always given this guidance by sending His prophets, and scriptures to the people of every age, and He also clearly defined for them the wrong path that they were following previously because of their ignorance. This was done by means of arguments that were appealing to human nature and intelligence. Unfortunately these nations

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ لَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ
الْغَىِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَهُمُ
الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

lost their revealed scriptures, or interpolated them in such a manner that true guidance became adulterated with falsehood. The true example of these prophets also met a similar fate. Allah, therefore completed His guidance in the Holy Quran, and guaranteed its protection. The example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in whom the institution of prophet hood has reached its finality and completion, is also preserved in the form of traditions (*sunnat*), to a degree unmatched by any other prophet. If any doubt arises about any action, or tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a simple solution is offered, which is to judge it in the light of the Holy Quran. No action of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was contrary to the Quranic teachings. In fact, they were in complete accord with the Quranic injunctions. I have discussed this in detail in my previous lesson.

Disbelief in the Devil

As guidance towards the right path is clearly defined and separated from the wrong way, man's intelligence naturally encourages him to follow the right course, and avoid the wrong one. However, the worst enemy of mankind, the devil (*shaitan*) constantly instigates his desires and emotions to run out of control by clouding his intellectual faculties, and natural inclination towards the truth. He thus makes him blind to the consequences of his actions, and leads him astray from the right path. One marvels at the wisdom of the Holy Quran, for in the very next verse it states, "So whoever disbelieves in the devil, and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break."

Disbelief in the devil here does not mean the denial of the existence of the devil, because the Holy Quran itself gives us knowledge of his existence. Disbelief in the devil therefore, means not acting upon his suggestions. This has been repeatedly stated by the Holy Quran. It would greatly lengthen this brief lesson if we discuss all those verses. Therefore, I will only quote from one chapter, "Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not (*lā ta'budū – 'ibādat*, noun) the devil? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you serve Me. This is the right way. And certainly he led astray numerous people from among you. Could you not then understand? This is the hell which you were promised. Enter it this day because you disbelieved" (36:60-64).

There are numerous verses on this subject in the Holy Quran. I have selected this particular verse because it also explains further the verse under discussion in this lesson. Before commenting on the above quoted verse, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that most people translate the

Arabic word *'ibādat* as offering prayer, though, in fact, its literal meaning is 'showing obedience to,' or 'serving someone.' The Holy Quran uses the word *ṣalāṭ* for prayer. If some revered persons take the meaning of *'ibādat* as reciting the prayer, it is only to show that prayer is an expression of service, or obedience to the Creator. Nobody prays to the devil with hands folded in the traditional manner of saying one's obligatory prayers. Thus, in the above quoted verse, the first statement means that on the Day of Judgment Allah will ask the children of Adam that had He not commanded them not to serve the devil? This command was first given through Prophet Adam (therefore the term children of Adam is used), and has subsequently been conveyed through all prophets, and their revealed scriptures. It is clearly and repeatedly described in the Holy Quran, as for example, in the verses of the present lesson, and also in the verses(36:60-64) quoted above. The command, "not to serve the devil," is supported by the argument given that, "Surely he is your open enemy." The devil has been called the open enemy because all his instigation is openly hostile to one's intelligence and nature. That is why human intellect considers them wrong, and his nature abhors them. Even those whose intellect and nature is corrupted by following the devil hate it when somebody does a wrong to them. They may verbally abuse someone, but if someone else metes out the same treatment to them, they dislike it intensely and are willing to commit mayhem.

As I explained in the incident of Adam and Eve, the paradise from which they were removed was not the paradise of the Hereafter. The devil does not have any access to that paradise. Further, the Holy Quran states about the paradise of the Hereafter, "Nor shall they be ever ejected from it" (15:48). Thus, the paradise from which Adam and Eve were ejected after succumbing to the instigation of the devil, was of the contentment of heart and the peace of mind with which man is created in this world. This same tradition continues and anybody from amongst their children who obeys the devil's prompting will also lose their inner peace. For example, contentment of mind is lost, the moment one accepts a bribe, and leads to additional grief if one is caught. That is why it has been mentioned repeatedly in the Holy Quran about the believing men and women, "They shall have no fear nor shall they grieve," this is the paradise of the heart which always accompanies them in this world.

Service of Allah, the right way

In the above quoted verses of chapter thirty six, "Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not (*lā ta'budū* – *'ibādat*, noun) the devil? Surely he is your open enemy", these Divine words follow, "And that you serve Me. This is the right way." With the commandment to serve Allah,

the reasoning is given that He will guide you on the right path. The One Who has created man knows best the purpose for which He has created him, and the position He wants him to attain. It is then stated, "And certainly he (the devil) led astray numerous people from among you. Could you not then understand?" For example, human intelligence considers stealing as wrong; even a person who has no qualms about committing robbery stands ready to fight for his share of the loot with his accomplices, if he feels that they are not being fair to him. Thus, Allah has not only clearly defined the right path, but also given man the understanding to distinguish it from the wrong course. If, then a man chooses to tread the wrong path, it is clearly a failing on his part to use his intellect.

One reason for establishing the golden principle of, "There is no compulsion in religion," is that if compliance of a religious principle is enforced, then intelligent thinking is turned off, and is no longer used. The objective (based on wisdom) of Allah, Who is the Creator of the human race, in giving man the most precious and unique gift of intelligence is to enable him to select the right path and to reject the wrong path, not through duress, but through understanding and free choice. It is only through the exercise of such freedom that man can evolve to higher stages of moral and spiritual development. A deed which is enforced, or done under duress cannot be qualified as good or evil. An incarcerated person who does not commit a robbery cannot claim to be a righteous person nor can it be said with assurance that he will not steal again on being released from confinement. Such is the wisdom of the Holy Quran. When I perceive its explanation of the secrets of Divine knowledge, my heart is overwhelmed and I bow down with humility before my Lord, spontaneously uttering the words, "Glory to my Lord, the Most High." My heart wishes that I should keep on repeating this, every moment of my life, "Glory be to Allah, and with His Praise, Glory be to Allah the Possessor of All Greatness."

Low desires and the Devil

The devil has been created from fire. Man's body also requires heat for keeping it alive (that is why the body of a dead person turns cold), and the nature of his emotions and desires is also related to this warmth. Heat, when under control, forms the basis of all movement and action. The devil, however, fuels and ignites this fire to the extent that man's emotions and desires run out of control. One manifestation of this is the fire of greed in a man's heart which never leaves him satisfied and he is always yearning for, "Is there more?" This fire becomes the palpable conflagration of hell, in the life Hereafter. This is clearly described in chapter hundred and four of the Holy Quran, and in the last verse of chapter thirty six quoted earlier in this

lesson as, "This is the hell which you were promised. Enter it this day because you disbelieved." Allah, the Most High teaches man to control his emotions and desires, to utilize them for the motive power in the struggle of life and to achieve moral and spiritual progress with it. Those who submit to the devil, instead of submission to Allah, ignite this inner fire of discontent in their hearts, and will feel its heat as the external hell-fire in the life Hereafter. This treatment is a remedial measure for their reformation. The more prolonged and deep rooted the spiritual illness, the longer will be the treatment.

I have quoted, and explained this verse of chapter thirty six because it explains the verses being discussed in this lesson. After stating in the first verse, that true guidance has been clearly distinguished from falsehood, it warns man to be on guard against the devil who attempts to lead him astray. The next verse enjoins man to enter into a state of peace through belief in Allah (for *Imān*, the Arabic word for belief also stands for peace). The Holy Quran repeatedly gives arguments on the existence of One God in order to inculcate such a belief. I have described these arguments in my previous lesson based on the verse, *Āyat-al-Kursi*.

Belief in Allah, the firmest handle

Let us now resume discussion on the verses in this lesson. It is stated that by believing in Allah one will hold on to the firmest handle which shall never break. In this worldly existence the waves of wrong ideas and beliefs come like the waves in a stormy sea. Man gets entangled in the whirlpools, and like a swimmer in the sea, is tossed and turned by the waves. When he is about to drown, he may find something secure to hold on to. Most of the time, however, such supports falter under the pressure of the waves, or the flow of the current, and the swimmer drowns. In the modern age of materialism, making associates with God, worship of wealth and worldly life, atheism, communism, and all sorts of new movements and wrong concepts are like these waves which can carry a person away with their flow. Cultural customs and fashion trends are like floods that sweep away people who get involved in such fads. The trials and tribulations of life, like poverty, sickness, deaths and disappointments, that human beings have to face, can also cause some of them to lose their balance, go astray or sometimes even commit suicide.

Belief in Allah, while facing these stormy waves and undercurrents, provides a firm handle which never breaks. Throughout history one finds that those who showed steadfastness during the trials of life were those who had firm belief in Allah. Belief gives them the consolation that whatever difficulties they face are manifestations of Divine Will, and are intended for

the moral and spiritual development of mankind. They should therefore, be borne with patience and prayer.

Allah listens and responds to the cries of the Believer

What a lovely book is the Holy Quran! The Divine words that follow are, “And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.” Man spontaneously calls upon Allah during the tribulations of life. This verse tells us to definitely do so, for Allah hears our supplications. Sometimes a disaster may overtake a person so suddenly that he does not have the time to supplicate. However, Allah is still Aware of his condition, and will come to the aid of His servant. It is my personal observation that Allah saves His servants from dangers that they do not even perceive till after the danger has passed away.

The next verse is, “Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light (*Nūr*).” What a great honor this is for the true believer! Allah becomes his Friend and Helper. A true believer thus becomes a friend of Allah. The result of Allah’s help is that he receives guidance from darkness into light. It is quite true that worldly distractions, and hedonistic doctrines create spiritual darkness in which man loses his spiritual sight, and does not know which way to turn. But, there is an even greater darkness which prevails in the deep recesses in which man conceals his inner self or real personality. This inner self of man guides him through life. Every action that man takes in this life affects his soul, and shapes his personality. Acts of goodness result in a healthy soul while evil acts make it sick. One marvels at the choice of words of the Holy Quran. It uses the Arabic word *noor* for the light that it provides to the true believer to guide him through the external darkness (of wrongful beliefs and perverse movements), and also the spiritual darkness of his inner self. The difference between *noor*, and ordinary light is that the ordinary light only illuminates external surfaces on which it falls, but reveals nothing of what may be hidden inside. In contrast to this *nūr* is that light which illuminates both the outside and the inside. Thus, a man finds light to guide him through the exogenous darkness of false doctrines and the endogenous darkness of his inner self. The difference between a true believer and an ordinary person is that the latter either gropes in darkness, and keeps falling, or at the most sees only the exterior of things. The true believer can perceive both his inner self, and the outside with the light of perception given to him by Allah. He is thus saved from falling down and going astray. “All praise be to Allah for this.”

The words of the last verse are, “And those who disbelieve (*kafarū*, *kufir*- noun), their friends are the devils (*tāghūt*), who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.”

Kufr means both disbelief and ungratefulness. Those who reject the guidance, and light that Allah has revealed in the Holy Quran do so either by verbal rejection, or by being ungrateful in the manner that they verbally acknowledge belief, but do not derive benefit from it by putting it into practice. What do such people follow? They follow their own desires and emotions which are fueled by the devil. The word used for the devil in this verse is *ṭāghūt* which means the one who exceeds the limits. The Quran, however, does not allow unbridled freedom of emotions and desires, and puts reasonable constraints on them. Without such constraints two consequences follow. Firstly, emotions begin to override the light of intellect which Allah has bestowed upon mankind. We observe this in the actions of evil persons and criminals. Thus man is deprived of his inner light, falters, and goes astray in the darkness. About this it is said, “who take them out of light into darkness.” Secondly emotions and desires have the nature of heat which ignite the desire for progressively more gratification in man. This creates an inner hell for the person in this world which will assume an external manifestation in the Hereafter. How beautifully and clearly does the Holy Quran manifest the matters of the inner self, or soul of man. This is the purpose of guidance and light as I have discussed earlier.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 46)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ ۗ وَإِنْ تُبَدَّلُوا مَا فِيْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَوْ تَخْفَوْا يَحْسِبْكُمْ بِهٖ اللّٰهُ ۗ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَّشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَّشَاءُ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝

CH.2:284

This is the first verse of the last section of chapter *Al-Baqarah*. I will *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases) give a somewhat detailed commentary on this section. The reason for this is the saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that, “I have been given two blessings that no other prophet has received, one is the *Al-Fātihah*, and the other is the last section of *Al-Baqarah*.” According to another tradition this section was revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), during the *mihraj* (Ascension). In any case, this section contains a sea of wisdom, spiritual insight, and guidance for mankind. I hope I can do justice in explaining this section. May Allah help me in doing so, *ameen* (be it so).

Questions about the creation of the Universe

The following questions arise in the mind of a person who contemplates. Who created the heavens and the earth? Who created all that is within them, and what is the purpose of this creation? Who created man, and for what purpose was he created? How did man get pre-eminence over the rest of creation? Is there a Being above mankind? What is death and what comes

after it? Some of the answers to these questions are in the verse that I have related today, and some follow later.

The first truth revealed in this verse, unknown to mankind fourteen hundred years ago, is that the heaven we see with our eyes is not one, but many. This is the reason why the Arabic word *samāwāt* (many heavens) in the plural tense is used, instead of *samā* (heaven), which is in the singular. The extent of this universe is beyond human comprehension. Scientists have attempted to measure the distances in the universe by the speed of light which travels at the speed of a hundred and eighty six thousand miles per second. To gauge the enormity of these distances it helps to contemplate on the following simple mathematical calculation. If the distance traveled by light in one second is multiplied by sixty twice, this gives the distance traveled by light in one hour. By multiplying this further with the numbers twenty four, and then by three hundred and sixty five, the distance traveled by light in one year is obtained. This unit is called one light year in astronomical terms. Current estimates of the diameter of the universe is seventy billion light years. The estimate is likely to be revised upward as more accurate methods are developed. Fourteen hundred years ago, an unlettered person from Arabia could not have had knowledge of the oneness of creation. In fact, even the scientific minds of the day did not know that this amazing universe was made up of the same matter, and was governed by the same universal laws. This discovery has forced the atheistic scientific minds of our age not only to accept the existence of God, but also that He is One. The Holy Quran revealed this amazing truth fourteen hundred years ago, that whatever is in the heavens and on earth, belongs to Allah, Who created them. No human being can even think of claiming mastery over the heavens. Even in his earthly existence, a human child arrives empty handed from the mother's womb, and at the time of his death, is laid to rest in his grave devoid of all possessions. Whatever mankind is given in this terrestrial existence, and which he apparently considers as his own property, belongs to him only temporarily. This includes his life, health, body, honor, happiness, wealth and power. All that we receive in this life is given to us by Allah. Several verses of the Holy Quran relate this, one of which I will quote, "Who so desires this transitory life (*'ājilat*), We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire" (17:18). The Arabic word *'ājilat* stands for things to be received soon, in this transitory life.

As I have mentioned in one of my earlier lessons, Allah has appointed mankind as His vicegerent on earth, and has delegated limited authority to him. We observe that this remarkable system of the universe, including the rising and setting of the sun and the moon works with absolute perfection. It is not possible for the sun, or the moon to be a second earlier or late. Man,

however, frequently mismanages his affairs and spoils the earth which was created as a paradise for him. This is stated in the verse, “And We said: O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden” (2:35). I explained in my commentary on this verse that by garden (*jannat*) is meant the garden of paradise on this earth. Man, frequently creates discord and difficulties by his actions. Without dwelling into history, we observe in this age of ours, that mankind has made great progress in science and technology, and has advanced the frontiers of knowledge. Despite this material progress, the world today is more degenerate, and lacking in moral values than ever before.

Mankind’s reformation possible only through reformation of the heart

Unless there is moral reformation of man, who runs the activities of this worldly life, the world cannot be a better place. This is not possible, until the heart of man is reformed. The reason for this is that human intelligence which is centered in his brain gives uniform guidance to all of mankind. Man, however, is motivated by the desires and emotions. Human intelligence is like the driver of a vehicle, or the rider of a horse. Despite intellectual inhibitions, man tends to do what his heart desires when his emotions and desires, which are the motive forces, run out of control.

It is, therefore stated in the verse under discussion today that, “And whether you manifest what is in your minds (*mā fi ’anfusikum*) or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it.” The Arabic words *mā fi ’anfusikum* have been translated as, what is in your hearts, or minds. I will now comment based on this meaning. No other religion, or revealed scripture has mentioned accountability of what is in the mind, or given it importance similar to what the Holy Quran has done. The legal systems of this world only hold men accountable for their actions, and not for what is within their hearts. This is, however, a shortcoming, for the actions of men are manifested much later, they are contemplated first. For example before a thief commits a robbery, he plans it for a long time in his mind. He spies on the occupants of the house which he is going to burglarize. He makes various inquiries, and then ultimately goes through with the decision that brings about the apparent act. A black marketer, or a licentious person cooks the whole scheme in his mind, and in the end commits the action. In short, all the moral and spiritual illnesses of mankind first take root in the mind, and manifest much later on as actions. Until the roots are extracted, one cannot get rid of these illnesses. For example, if a doctor cleans the purulent secretions from an abscess, but does not treat it, the sore will not heal. He has to go to the source, or root of this illness, and get rid of it.

Religions which have not called into accountability the inner thoughts of man, have been unable to accomplish his reformation. Human laws can only address his actions for they are unaware of his inner thoughts. These are only known to the person whose mind is contemplating them, or to Allah Who is the Creator of that mind, and all the systems within it. That is why the Holy Quran calls Allah the Most High as, “The Knower of what is in the hearts (50 : 16),” for He knows very well what is within our minds.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has described this wisdom very well, he states “Pay attention to this that within the body of man is a piece, which if it is in a righteous state, the whole body becomes well, and if it becomes corrupted it leads to the corruption of man. Be-ware that it is the heart of man.”

Within the hearts of men are all sorts of evil emotions like malice, envy, hatred, enmity and pride, which are spiritual illnesses. When these become the motive forces for his actions, but are camouflaged under the false impression of good intent, other people are misled. Nevertheless, this results in a lot of wickedness and corruption. Hence, it is that unless man is held accountable for his inner thoughts, he cannot be reformed, nor can the sorrows of humanity be remedied. How correctly has the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated this, “The goodness, or evil of an action is based on the intent with which it is done.” For example, the action of a murderer and a doctor, whose operation fails, can both lead to the death of a person. The doctor is paid for his action while the murderer goes to jail. The only difference is that of intent which is motivated by different emotions and desires in the two cases.

The Holy Quran is an amazing book of wisdom. The wisdom underlying the words, “whether you manifest what is in your mind, or hide it,” is that a person’s mind is expressed first by his tongue. A child for example, does not know how to hide his inner feelings. As he grows older, the fear of antagonizing people, or of punishment arises and he begins to hide what is in his mind. With maturity he becomes an expert at hiding his intentions, and inner secrets from fear of people, or the law. The Being Who has created the human mind, and all its inner systems is aware of these hidden secrets, and as a form of chastisement creates the fire of discontent in the heart of such a man. Quite frequently, He manifests the hidden detriment, and evil of such a person in this world leading to his dishonor and disgrace. Such a person then receives chastisement for it in this world, which is a proof for the accountability, and punishment of the Hereafter.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 47)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

CH.2:284

In the previous lesson I commented generally, on this verse, but did not get into finer details, which I intend to cover now. I have mentioned the importance of this section of *Al-Baqarah*. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “I have been given two blessings no other prophet has received, one is the *Al-Fātiḥah*, and the other is the last section of *Al-Baqarah*.” I urge the readers to first read the previous lesson, if they have not already done so, in order to fully benefit from the spiritual knowledge contained in this section.

Philosophy of accountability of the self

Two truths are revealed in this verse. Firstly, whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. No one can claim proprietorship, in fact, even in this earthly existence, the human child comes empty handed from his mother’s womb, and returns to his grave devoid of all material possessions. As I have discussed in detail in my previous lesson, every thing belongs to Allah. Secondly, we are told that man is accountable before Allah for whatever is in his mind, whether he manifests it or hides it. To understand this section fully, the reader is advised to study section thirty-nine of *Al-Baqarah*, before reading on. Three fundamental statements are made in

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدُّوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ فُبِعْضٍ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

section thirty nine.

- 1) Loans should be evidenced in writing and a maturity period fixed for the return of the loan.
- 2) The loan agreement should be witnessed by two persons.
- 3) If a scribe is not available to put the loan agreement into writing, as for instance in a journey, a collateral should be taken for the return of the loan.

Now if we read the verse under discussion, it states that whatever is in the heavens and the earth, belongs to Allah Who created every thing. Man enters into and leaves this world empty handed. Whatever he receives from Allah is a loan. The terms of this loan are also similar. It was enjoined in the previous section to put down in writing the amount, and the duration of the loan. Similarly, Allah writes down, and fixes a time limit on whatever he gives to man as stated in, "And no soul can die but with Allah's permission - the term is fixed" (3:145). The life term of every human being is thus fixed and written down. All that is given during this period is a loan from Allah for which he is answerable to Him. The terms on which human beings are given this loan are included in the revealed scripture given to every nation, and these terms have also been put in writing and preserved in the Holy Quran. The acceptance of Divine scriptures is, therefore mentioned in the next verse.

In the preceding section it was also mentioned that the writing of a loan should be witnessed by two witnesses. Similarly whatever is loaned to man in this life, is also witnessed by two witnesses. One of them is the angel who brought this scripture from the Divine Being, and the other is the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who carried its message to mankind. The Holy Quran mentions the angels as witnesses, as in this verse, "But Allah bears witness by that which He has revealed to thee that He has revealed it with His knowledge, and the angels (also) bear witness" (4:166). The witnessing by the messengers is mentioned thus, "But how will it be when We bring from every people a witness and bring thee as a witness against these" (4:41).

Man will be held accountable for all that he is given in this worldly life. That is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once remarked, "They are at a loss, they are at a loss." When asked by one of the companions as to who these people were, he replied, "those who are given abundance of wealth, except those who say, take this in the way of Allah, and take this, and also this." Allah has mentioned this accountability in several places, in the Holy Quran. I will only refer to one verse, "Then on that day you shall certainly be questioned about the boons" (102:8). Who can estimate the blessings that Allah has given to man. The Holy Quran states, "And if you count Allah's favors, you will not be able

to number them” (14:34)? The blessings for which man will be specially held accountable are the various parts of his body, for example, his hands, feet, tongue, eyes etc. and the way in which he used them for doing good or evil. The wealth and power, that is given to a man, will also be called into account. He will be answerable for, whether he used it to serve Allah, and His fellow human beings, or utilized it only for the benefit of his self, spouse and offspring. The latter is a basic animal instinct, for we observe that even animals provide for their mates and offspring. The topic of man’s accountability is very vast, and beyond the scope of this brief lesson. I urge the reader to study the Holy Quran in full with its translation for a complete description of the process of accountability. The reader will find that it has been explained in a simple and easily understandable language.

The human soul and its stages of development

The last condition of a loan mentioned in section 39, of Ch.2:283, is of offering property as a security trust. If what is given to mankind is a loan, the spirit which Allah breathes into man is a trust which He takes back at the time of his death. In the Holy Quran this spirit, when it is first given, is described by the Arabic word *ruh*, as in the verse, “So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit (*ruh*), fall down making obeisance to him” (15:29). After the initial creation, the Holy Quran does not use the Arabic word *ruh*, but uses the Arabic word *nafs*, to describe the soul. At the time of death it is the soul (*nafs*) which is taken away as in the verse, “And no soul can die but with Allah’s permission” (4:144). On the Day of Judgment it is the soul (*nafs*) which will appear before Allah as stated in the Holy Quran, “And every soul comes, with it a driver and a witness” (50:21). This soul (*nafs*) will be given a different body after death, and will enter into hell or heaven. In short, since soul is the essence of man, everything that is given in this earthly life is given to the soul, and so too will be the rewards and punishment of the Hereafter. In light of this fact, if we study the words of the verse under discussion once more, it states, “To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.” It is because of this that Allah is the One Who gives everything to mankind. The human soul is mentioned after this, for it is the common factor between this life and the Hereafter.

The spirit which is placed in man at the time of birth is exposed to all the stages and experiences of his life. For example, childhood, teenage, youth, old age, good health, sickness, joy, grief, worries, knowledge, wealth, struggle for worldly things, good deeds, evil deeds, hard work and laziness, usage of time wisely or its wastage, the good and evil thoughts in one’s mind, etc. In fact, the spirit is affected by all of this, and evolves into

an individual, or personality. All the good and evil deeds done by an individual cast their reflection on his soul. That is the reason why the Holy Quran states in the verse under discussion, “And whether you manifest what is in your minds (*'anfusikum* - souls) or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it.”

In regards to the soul I have discussed earlier that it is given to man as a trust from Allah, and is taken back by Him at the time of death. Man is accountable before Allah for how he took care of this trust. The Arabic word *'amānat* for trust is from the root *aman* which means, “the realization of peace by the human soul and the removal of the state of fear.” We, therefore fulfill our duty towards the trust of Allah when our soul becomes the soul at rest, or the *nafs-i-muṭmainnah*, and there remains no fear and sadness in it. That is why the Holy Quran says about the true believers, “they have no fear nor shall they grieve.” Fear or apprehension is an *ex ante* feeling while, sadness or grief is an *ex post* feeling. For example, the fear of being caught exists in the heart of a person who has lied, but once he is caught, it is replaced by sadness. The heart of a true believer is protected against such innocuous elements for he does not commit wicked and evil deeds. Even when confronted by difficult circumstances, righteous persons do not fear or grieve, because of their strong belief. The Reformer of this century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has shed great light on the soul at rest (*nafs-i-muṭmainnah*) in his momentous lecture, “The Teachings of Islam.” In brief, he states that the Holy Quran calls the first stage of the human soul as the *nafs-al-ammāra* i.e., one wont to command evil. In this stage man does whatever his self commands. This is the animal stage because an animal also does what the provocation of his emotions, and desires leads him to do. In this stage man is liable to commit wrongful deeds as stated in, “Surely (mans) self is wont to command evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy” (12:53). The *nafs-al-ammāra*, or the animal soul commands evil, except for those upon whom Allah has mercy. After receiving the Divine guidance, man initiates the reformation of his soul by opposing evil inclinations and his soul passes into the stage which the Holy Quran calls the *nafs-i-lawwamah*, or the self accusing soul. An animal never reprimands itself. This stage has been called the moral stage by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. At this level man rises above his animal instincts, and acquires human, or moral values. The Holy Quran has called the last stage of the soul’s development as the *nafs-al-muṭmainnah*, or the soul at rest as stated in, “O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing, So enter among My servants, And enter My Garden!” (89:27-30). This is the spiritual stage in which the spiritual and moral values become so dominant and established in the human soul that the earlier struggle between good and evil, which was waged in the stage of the

self accusing soul, ends with a victory for good. With this stage, man at this stage enters into the paradise of contentment in this life, and after death he is given the paradise of the Hereafter. The trust of the Divine Spirit that Allah has breathed into man is thus truly fulfilled when it becomes the 'Soul at Rest.' This trust has been mentioned in another verse of the Holy Quran which, if God willing, is the subject of my next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 48)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

CH.2:284

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدَّلُوا مَا فِي الْاَرْضِ اَوْ تَخْفَوْنَ يَحٰسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللّٰهُ فَيَغْفِرْ لِمَنْ يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبْ مَنْ يَشَآءُ وَاللّٰهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

Human soul the trust of God

How true is the statement of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that he has been given two blessings of the like of which no other prophet received, one the *Al-Fātihah* and the other the last section of *Al-Baqarah*. My previous two lessons were on the later, but the subject is far from complete. The last point I made in my previous lesson was that the Divine spirit breathed into man at the time of his creation passes through all the experiences of an individual's life. It is affected by his good and evil, thoughts, words and deeds, and shapes into a personality of its own for which the Holy Quran uses the term *nafs* or soul. The spirit which comes from the Divine Being, and gets transformed into the *nafs* or soul is a trust from Allah, the Most High, which is taken back from man at the time of death. The Holy Quran mentions this trust in these words, "Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains and they refused to bear it and feared from it, and man bore it. Surely he is ever unjust ignorant" (33:72). The Arabic word *ẓalūman* translated as unjust, also means ready to bear loss, and the word *jahūlan* translated as ignorant, also means oppressor. This verse states that the burden of trust of the spirit,

which Allah has given to man, is so heavy that the heavens and the earth and the mountains are unable to bear it, but man has the capability to do so.

The heart of man capable of manifesting the Divine Presence

When man truly fulfills this trust, his heart becomes larger in magnitude than the heavens, wider in expanse than the earth, and greater in strength than the mountain. It is only then that God, Who cannot be contained by the heavens and the earth, manifests His glory in the heart of man. One may recall here the events of Prophet Moses narrated in the Holy Quran. When Prophet Moses asked God to show Himself to him, he was told that he would not be able to see Him with his physical eye. The human eye is a very delicate structure. It cannot even tolerate a flash of regular light, much less the manifestation of Divine glory. To get this point across, Allah the Most High manifested His glory on a nearby mountain which was rent asunder as a consequence, and Prophet Moses fainted (7:143). Thus we see that Allah, Whose manifestation cannot be borne by mountains or contained by the heavens and earth, manifests Himself in the heart of a true believer. Based on a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Maulana Rum, the famous Persian saint and poet, expresses this point succinctly thus, “The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that Allah stated, ‘I cannot be contained within the heavens and the earth, but it is strange that I can be in the heart of a true believer. So if you want to find Me, look for Me inside that heart.’”

Hazrat Khawaja Moin-ud-din Chishti, another saintly person states in a couplet, “There is a King in the palace of my heart; if He pitched a tent on the outside, He would not be contained by the dry land and the oceans.”

Hazrat Khawaja Mir Dard, a saintly poet puts it thus, “The heavens and the earth cannot comprehend Thy magnitude, it is only my heart that can accommodate Thee.”

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Reformer of the 14th. Century Hijra said, “I do not visualize a throne greater than the heart of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on which Allah the Most High was manifest.”

Why man is capable of bearing the trust of the Divine Spirit

In summary if man can truly bear the trust of the spirit that Allah has given him, he gets to know Allah, which is the real purpose of man’s creation. The reason why man can bear the burden of this trust is given in the verse that I quoted earlier from chapter thirty-three. Man is ever ready to bear loss

and oppression. In Arabic, the words *ẓalūman* and *jahūlan* when taken in the negative sense can mean unjust and ignorant. However, the Arabic word *ẓulm* also means causing a loss and *jahūl* also means oppressing. For example there is a couplet from the days of ignorance before Islam which reads thus in Arabic, “*lā lā yujhalna ‘aḥadun ‘alainā fa najḥal fauqa jahūl al jāḥilīnā*—Beware no one should use force upon us, for we shall oppress more than the greatest oppressor.” The word *Jahala* (verb form of *jahūla*) is therefore used in this blessed verse of the Holy Quran in a positive sense to describe that quality of man, as a result of which he can suppress and discipline his self, and thereby bear the burden of the trust. All righteous deeds, and supplications entail some discipline of the self. For example, offering the five obligatory prayers, or getting up late at night for the *tahajjud* (late night prayer) all require a great measure of self discipline. A similar effort is involved in performing ablutions, or concentrating one’s wandering thoughts towards God. The other quality of man that is praised, and because of which he can bear the burden of the trust is that he can bear repeated loss to his self. Sacrifice in the way of Allah, in particular monetary sacrifice, appears on the surface to be a loss. Similarly, man can even sacrifice his life in the way of Allah, despite the fact that there can be no greater loss than this for the welfare of his family. When, however he does all this, then Allah, the Most High, creates in the heart of such a person the magnitude that does not exist in the heaven, the expanse that is not there in the earth, and the strength is not possessed by the mountain. Can this really happen to the heart of a true believer? Consider an atom which cannot even be seen with the naked eye, yet it contains within its tiny mass the same structure and relative magnitude as the astronomical universe. Thus, it has its own heavens, stars, and planets, a true replica of the real universe, despite being a sub microscopic speck. If Allah can create a whole universe in a tiny speck, why is it difficult to comprehend that He does something similar in the heart of a believer? He certainly can and does, as is the experience of all prophets, saintly persons and even the true believers.

A psychologist has written that it is the natural desire of man to bring the expanse of the earth under his control. This found an expression in the behavior of such conquerors, as Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Genghiz Khan. The super powers of this age follow a similar policy of domination over the world, and spend a great deal of effort, and millions of dollars to achieve this objective. Similarly, man has the desire to climb mountains, and risks his life to do so, although there is no apparent benefit. The desire to go into the heavens is the motivating factor behind space exploration, and billions of dollars are spent for this purpose. In the physical world it is not possible for every human being to ascend into the heavens, or to climb mountains, or to control the expanse of the earth. In every

human being, however, Allah has created the capability to achieve this and much more in a spiritual dimension, by truly fulfilling the trust of the soul placed within him.

Allah's Mercy takes precedence

Let us now ponder on the remaining verses of this lesson. It is stated, that Allah will call man to account for the condition of His trust, whether man manifests it by his words and deeds, or hides it. There will be accountability for all the worldly boons that Allah has given to man as a loan, but in particular Allah will ask man about the way he handled the spirit that came from Allah, and was the most precious trust given to him. All the deeds and words of a man, and the thoughts that dwell in his mind are recorded in his soul. In holding the soul accountable, therefore, all things given as debt to man are accounted for.

The burden of this great responsibility and the fear of reckoning makes the heart of man to shudder. Divine words of comfort, however, follow immediately, "So He forgives whom He pleases." In the matter of reckoning, chastisement should have been mentioned first, but Allah mentions His forgiveness first. The Holy Quran is full of such consolations. For example, it is stated, "Say: O My servants who have been prodigal regarding their souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives sins altogether. He is indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful" (39:53), or as in verse, "He has ordained mercy on Himself" (6 : 12,54) ; And "My mercy took precedence over my anger", as stated in *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet.

A warning is also given in the words, "And chastises whom He pleases." Allah's forgiveness, and mercy is for the person who continues to strive in the way of Allah with good intentions, but is still prone to mistakes and shortcomings. However, it is necessary to subject a person who is intentionally evil to the remedial hell fire for the purpose of his reformation, and purification. The Divine words at the end of this verse are, "And Allah is Possessor of power over all things." Allah can forgive whom He pleases, and chastise whom He thinks deserves punishment. The Divine Being in Islam is not constrained like the gods of other religions who cannot forgive on their own free will, and are bound to dispense punishment (as is the basis of the Christian concept of atonement), or who cannot reward more than a person deserves (as is the basis of the Hindu belief of transmigration). Before the Possessor of Power over all things, the soul of man can bow down in humility, and ask for repentance and reform.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 49)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers. And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course.

CH.2:285

Progress of the human soul

Two statements were made in the verse preceding this. Firstly, that whatever is given to man in this life is a debt from Allah for which he will be accountable after death. Secondly, the Divine spirit placed in man evolves through his life experiences into a distinct personality, which the Holy Quran calls *nafs* or soul. The soul is a trust from Allah which is taken back at the time of death. The soul is held accountable for whatever deeds a man performs, the words he speaks out and the thoughts he harbors in his mind. The image of each one of these is cast upon his soul, and embellishes, or deforms it accordingly.

These statements raise two questions. If every thing an individual receives in this life is a debt, what are its terms that need to be fulfilled? The second question is, how can man carry out his obligation to the precious trust of the Divine spirit placed within him, for which he is to be held accountable? The answer to both these questions is given in the verse to be discussed in this lesson.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَمِنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ
وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ تَدَارِكُنْ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ
مِّنْ رُّسُلِهِ قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا
عُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

Belief with practice essential for human spiritual development

Human soul is not a material entity whose growth and condition can be evaluated by physical examination, or by instruments. Nor can it be fixed by means of medication, or an operation. Only one element can illuminate the inner darkness of man, and that is the light (*nūr*) of belief. When the lamp of this inner light is placed in a man's heart it illuminates his inner self. It should be remembered that when one declares his belief, it is only a verbal expression. Until belief gets firmly entrenched in a person's heart, he cannot be called a true believer. This is confirmed by the Holy Quran in the verse, "The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You believe not, but say, We submit: and faith has not yet entered into your hearts And if you obey Allah and His Messenger He will not diminish aught of your deeds. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware" (49:14). The dwellers of the outlying villages, and the bedouins, who only occasionally came to Medina, unlike the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), had not yet become true believers. The way in which true belief is established is given in the following words of the Holy Quran, "And if you obey Allah and His Messenger He will not diminish aught of your deeds." Belief begins with a verbal acceptance of the unity of Allah as God and the apostleship of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but it only truly enters the heart when man follows the guidance given by Allah, and exemplified by His Messenger. That is why our lesson today starts with these Divine words, "The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the best exemplar of the Holy Quran revealed to him. This is also the reason why in another place the Holy Quran states, "Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah" (4:80). Similarly, after the death of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when some young people came to visit his widow, Hazrat Ayesha, to inquire about his morals, she advised them to study the Holy Quran. She said, "His character was the Quran." All the virtues taught in it were there in the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

It is then stated in the verse under discussion, "and (so do) the believers," i.e., they also believe and act upon the teachings of the Holy Quran. This refers to the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who are stated in the Holy Quran as having earned the 'the pleasure of Allah,' in this world. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave them a similar endorsement when he said, "My companions are like the stars, whichever amongst

them you follow, you will be guided towards the right path.” The Arabs used to find their way in the desert by means of the stars, as there were no roads. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “My companions are your guides towards the right direction in the darkness of your inner self.”

Belief through Divine Revelation

It is worth noting that the verse, “The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord,” clearly shows that it is the Divine revelation which engenders faith. This is the reason why Imam Bukhari introduces the first chapter, entitled ‘The Book of Belief,’ in his famous collection of Hadith with the section on, “How the Revelation Began.” The Holy Quran is the result of the highest and most complete form of revelation, lesser forms of divine communion are granted to reformers (*mujaddids*) who come from time to time, usually at the beginning of each century. They receive the gift of Divine communion in the form of revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*), which rejuvenates their belief, enables them to engender a new faith in those who follow them. It is with reference to such individuals that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, “Like the Children of Israel, amongst my followers, there will also be such individuals with whom Allah communicates without their being prophets.” (*Bukhārī—Kitāb Fazā’il Ashāb-Al nabi bab Munāqib—Umar bin Al Khatab*).

Belief essential for serenity: The remaining portion of this blessed verse states, “They all believe in Allah. The Arabic word *Āmana*, is ordinarily understood to mean, “He believed,” but its dictionary meaning is, “He entered into peace.” Peace, signifies serenity of the heart. Just like a child is not satisfied till he holds on to his parents, the spirit which comes from Allah is not at peace till it holds on to Allah. The inherent connection of man’s nature with the Divine, which I have previously explained as the, “covenant of nature,” does not allow man to be at peace till he forms a spiritual bond with Allah, the Most High. In the world today, particularly in Europe and America, there is no dearth of material comforts, but there is no contentment of mind, because of a break in the relationship with God. Members of this materialistic society try to acquire this contentment through the use of alcohol, drugs, and music, but this is at best a temporary fix and their real condition keeps on getting from bad to worse. Serenity of the mind, in practice, can only be acquired through acts of goodness. For example, a person who accepts a bribe loses his serenity. On the contrary an honest person can go to bed hungry, but he does have peace of mind. This holds true for all acts of righteousness.

The evolution and progression of belief: Allah, the Most High is the Source of all excellent virtue. The concept of righteousness evolved in the human mind through the awareness of Divine attributes, otherwise the human mind is like that of other animals. This concept of righteousness developed in the human mind through Divine revelation which mankind has received off and on from the beginning of its creation, starting with Prophet Adam. The revealed word of God gave man the knowledge of Divine attributes and exhorted him to create those same attributes in himself. I have discussed this topic in my previous lessons with reference to the Holy Quran and Hadith in my previous lessons, and will therefore avoid repetition here.

After belief in Allah, the second element of belief is stated in the Divine words, "And His angels." I have also discussed this in one of the previous lessons, to summarize Allah has created spiritual agencies called angels which help and guide mankind, by inviting it to acts of goodness. Belief in angels means conviction that the urge to do good within man is motivated by angels, under the command of Allah, the Most High. Man should, act upon this urge with exigency lest the opportunity to do good be lost. For example, if is an opportunity to do good, and a person does not act immediately on the prompting of the angel, the opportunity may pass by and leave him guilty of falling a prey to the instigation of the devil, who caused the complacency.

In contrast to Allah, and His angels who cannot be seen, the Beneficence of Allah has provided spiritual guidance in the form of revealed scriptures, which can be seen and read. The most complete form of such revelation has been preserved in writing, and given to man in the form of the Holy Quran. That is why immediately after belief in Allah and the angels, the Holy Quran mentions belief in the revealed books of Allah. Belief in the prophets is mentioned next. The prophets show by their example that it is practical and feasible to follow the teachings of the Books in every detail. In addition, the life of a prophet is a living example, which is always more effective than just words. How excellent is the teaching of the Holy Quran! Followers of other religions have strayed away from true guidance because they accept only their own prophets and scriptures, and reject those of other nations. Not only do they find faults with the prophets of other nations, but in reality by rejecting their revealed scriptures, they accuse them of falsehood and deceit. That is why this amazing Book, the Holy Quran states, "We make no difference between any of His messengers," meaning that we consider all of them to be truthful and from Allah. Some people find it difficult to reconcile this statement with the one in another verse which states, " We have made some of these messengers to excel others" (2:253). In this verse it is clearly the excellence of some

prophets over others that is mentioned. As prophets they are all the same, just as we, as human beings are the same. Amongst us there are some who excel over others. However, this does not mean that as human beings we are different.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 50)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course.

Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us ! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.

CH.2:285,286

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
أَمِنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ
وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ تَقُولُ لَا نُخَافُ مِنْكُمْ
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مَنْ سَأَلَهُ تَقَالُوتًا وَسَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا
عُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

لَا يَكْفُرُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وَسَعَهَا طَهْرًا
مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا النَّسَبُ رَبَّنَا لَا
تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا
وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا رَبَّنَا
وَاعْفُرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا وَارْحَمْنَا إِنَّكَ مَوْلَانَا
فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾

How to achieve the objective of belief

The Holy Quran is a unique and comprehensive Book, that does not omit the discussion of any essential matter. Belief is an elementary component of man's spiritual life, as I explained in the previous lesson. I also discussed the necessary constituents of belief. Belief is not something that can be perceived visually, or gauged with a measuring device in order to determine its presence, or strength. I also pointed out that without belief man cannot obtain peace of mind, reform his deeds, or understand the purpose of his life. However, just being aware of this purpose is not enough unless one is

able to fulfill it. Belief leads us to recognize this purpose, but what is the means of attaining it? The answer to this is given at the beginning of this lesson's verse, in the words, "And they say (*qālū*): We hear and obey" i.e., the believers say, they heard the word of Allah, and His Prophet, and submitted to the Divine commandments fully. In one of my earlier lessons I had explained that the word *qāla* (plural form is *qālū*) in the Arabic language, does not only mean verbal expression of a matter, but also making it a part of one's action. Therefore, "And they say: We hear and obey," means that the believers hear the word of Allah, and His Prophet, with rapt attention, and then act upon it immediately.

The example of the Holy Prophet and his Companions

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the best example of what is meant by complete submission to Allah. He said about himself, "I am the first of those who submit." The life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was a practical expression of all the Quranic injunctions. The Holy Quran bears testimony to this by not only calling him the first of those who submit, but also by stating that, "Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah" (4:80).

The lives of the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are also an excellent demonstration of the Quranic statement, "We hear and obey." Before the prohibition of alcohol, Muslims consumed alcohol like the rest of the Arabs. Those who have observed people addicted to alcohol know that it is a very strong addiction, and very hard to get rid of, particularly for those with a lifelong habit. In a civilized and educated society like America, attempts to prohibit the consumption of alcohol by legislation failed, despite the full use of law enforcement, and the law had to be abrogated. In Medina, however, all the Muslims gave up drinking without any hesitation as soon as the commandment for prohibition was revealed, despite the fact that they were frequent users of alcohol like the other Arabs of the time. They demolished their wine kegs, and it is said that wine flowed like rain water through the streets of Medina. There are other similar incidents which exemplify how the early Muslims complied with the Quranic injunction, "We hear and obey." I will describe only one more such incident. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was giving a sermon in the mosque, and noticed that some people were standing in the back row. He, therefore, asked them to sit down. It so happened that a companion of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was walking in the street outside the mosque at that very moment. No sooner that he heard the command of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to sit down, he

sat down immediately right where he was. Somebody pointed out to him that he was not the one being addressed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). To which he replied that he was well aware of that, but he did not want to delay in submitting to the command of the Holy Prophet, for who knows, he might die before entering the mosque, and be a sinner for not obeying the Prophet.

Instantaneous submission on hearing the command of Allah and His Prophet is sufficient testimony to the righteous state of a person's belief. Any procrastination in the matter of obeying Allah and His Prophet after accepting them as one's benefactors, totally negates belief. The individual who, "Hears and obeys," is also the one who achieves the purpose of his creation. However, despite this complete and excellent degree of belief attained through the injunction of hearing and obeying Allah and His Prophet, the words that follow are, "Our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave)." This prayer is a realization on the part of a true believer that the devil, and his own animal self (*nafs-al ammara*) are constantly instigating him to falter from the right path and his heart cries out for the protection and forgiveness of Allah. The words that follow, "and to Thee is the eventual course," are even more remarkable because they bring home the essential point that if man remains focused on his ultimate meeting with the Creator, he is not likely to vacillate, or become careless.

Burden laid down upon the soul in proportion to its capacity

"Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope." In the verse before this it is stated that belief is in a state of righteousness when the spiritual condition is a manifestation of, "We hear and obey." Along with this is a reminder of the accountability which will occur when the eventual return takes place to Allah. These injunctions create an apprehension in a responsible person whether he will be able to achieve that high standard of belief which leads to instantaneous compliance of Allah's commands. Allah, therefore, assures man that He does not impose upon him a burden that he cannot bear. Accountability is for acts of omission and commission which are in the control of a person. Man should not, therefore, be apprehensive of his accountability before God, for it will be in proportion to the capacity of his soul, or ability to undertake an action.

Three types of Burdens: From the Holy Quran it appears that Allah, the Most High, imposes only three kinds of burdens upon mankind. The first kind consists of the commandments of religious law (*shariat*) such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage (*Hajj*), poor rate (*zakāt*), and other religious injunctions and prohibitions. The second kind consists of the trials and

tribulations that fall to the lot of man as part of his destiny i.e., in accordance with the law of Divine measure (*taqdir*). This includes illness, death, hunger, monetary difficulties, and other losses. The third kind consists of tribulations which are a chastisement for man's sins. This chastisement can be persistent and may even lead to a person's demise. The first two burdens, i.e., that of religious law, and tribulation of destiny are from Allah, and His law in the matter is that He does not put upon man a burden which is beyond his limit of tolerance. The third burden, however, is a result, and in proportion to man's sins. It is quite possible that he may be crushed under its weight.

Let us examine these three categories separately. First, is the burden of religious law. About this it is stated that it is in proportion to a man's strength and forbearance. For example, let us take the obligatory prayer. If a man cannot recite his prayer while standing, he is allowed to say it while sitting, or lying down, or even by using sign language with a finger. Thus, facility is provided to accord with the difficulty a person may be in. The wayfarer is allowed to combine, or shorten the prayer. If a person has other pressing obligations such as invitation to a dinner, religious gathering, or a marriage ceremony etc., he is allowed to combine the prayers. When combining prayers, the *sunna* portion of the prayers is not recited, and therefore the prayer also becomes shortened. Similarly, in the case of fasting, provision is made for the sick, the wayfarer, and the elderly who do not have the strength to fast. It is permissible, in case of the first two, to fast on other days. The elderly and the one who cannot fast at any other time during the year due to prolonged illness may issue redemption by feeding a poor man. The Holy Quran states, "Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you" (2:185). The Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed also stressed this point by stating, "Religious law is based on facility and not harshness."

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 51)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.

CH.2:286

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
لَا يَكْفِيكَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وَسَعَهَا طَاهَهَا
مَا كَسَبْتَ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَرَبَّنَا لَا
تُوْأْخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا
وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا رَبَّنَا
وَاعْفُ لَنَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا
فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ۝

In the preceding lesson I mentioned that Allah lays down two burdens upon mankind. These are the injunctions of religious law and the burden laid down in accordance with the Divine law of measure, such as illness, death, grief, hunger, the loss of wealth, and failure after a hard struggle. Both these burdens are such that Allah lays them down in proportion to the capacity, and strength of a person. The third burden, which we shall discuss in this lesson, is the burden of man's own sins, and the chastisement that results. This burden is a punishment from Allah, the Most High, and since it is based on man's own misdeeds, it can exceed his capacity to bear if the burden of sin is too great.

Limitations in religious law not to exceed those of Allah and His Prophet

I discussed the burden of religious law (*shariat*) in my previous lesson. Allah has granted all kinds of facilities to fulfill these requirements, so that the burden may not become excessive. For example, in the injunctions about fasting, a sick person, or a wayfarer is allowed to forego fasting during the prescribed period and to meet the requirement at a later time. If the health of the sick person does not permit even that, redemption can be offered by feeding a poor man. These facilities have been granted by Allah and His Prophet without any limitation about the length of the journey, or the nature of a person's sickness, and hence it is not proper for any person to curtail these concessions by imposing restrictions. Similarly if water is not available to perform ablution, the Holy Quran has allowed an alternative by stating, "betake yourselves (*tayammamū*) to pure earth, and wipe your faces and your hands therewith" (5:6). It is ludicrous to put a restriction, as some have done, to conduct search for water for twenty four miles in all directions, before availing oneself of this facility. If this condition was to be fulfilled seriously, the time for the prayer would be long gone before the search was over, and such attempts would be a serious distraction in completing the journey. In interpreting the religious law, one should remember that, "Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you." That is why the Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed stated that the religious law (*shariat*) is based upon facility, and not harshness.

Burdens in accordance with the Law of Divine Measure

Now I will discuss the other burdens put down upon mankind by Allah, the Most High. They are mentioned in another place in the Holy Quran as follows, "And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient" (2:155). Further on it is stated, "Who, when a misfortune befalls them say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course." These are burdens which come in accordance with the law of Divine measure, and sometimes these tribulations appear unbearable. Out of fear and anxiety, some people faint, bang their heads against a wall, become mentally deranged, or even commit suicide. One should, however, always remember that there can be no burden in accordance with the law of Divine measure which is beyond human forbearance. Such burdens should be borne with patience and assent, and those who do so, are given the spiritual rewards and blessings mentioned by the Holy Quran. In fact Allah, the

Most High, eventually makes such difficulties tolerable for them, or totally eliminates them.

Burden laid down to increase the capacity of the soul

The two burdens imposed by Allah, the Most High, are those of religious law, and the difficulties that arise as a result of the Divine law of measure. Both these burdens are never beyond the level of human endurance. There is another interpretation of this verse, as well. It states that Allah never puts down a burden upon the soul of man except to increase its capacity i.e., advance it in spiritual terms. I like this interpretation a lot. The Creator of the soul is the only One aware of its capacity, which is unknown to man himself. By subjecting it to the burden of religious law, Allah intends to advance the capacity of that soul to its maximum potential. In accordance with this interpretation, Hazrat Imam Raghīb, the famous lexicologist, states that the paradise, whose extent the Holy Quran says is similar to the extent of the heavens and the earth, is created within the soul of a man, only when its capacity becomes akin to that of the heavens and the earth. This capability is developed by bearing the burdens of religious law and the law of Divine measure. At this level of spiritual development Allah, Who cannot be contained within the heavens and the earth, manifests Himself in the heart of such a person. Because of the spiritual benefits that accrue from bearing these two burdens, even the prophets were not exempted from bearing these burdens. In fact, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) states that the prophets encounter trials and tribulations of a degree not faced by other humans. About himself, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who possesses the greatest degree of excellence from amongst the messengers, said, "I have been tormented more than any other prophet."

Let us now examine the words of the Holy Quran, "For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil)." This means that while facing the burdens of religious law, or those of the law of Divine measure, if someone does a good deed, or sets a good example, it is for his own benefit. On the other hand, if someone sets a bad example, or commits an evil deed, he will be the one to suffer its evil consequences. These burdens are imposed for the spiritual benefit of mankind, and those who do not take advantage by bearing them patiently will surely incur a loss upon themselves. We can give the analogy of two students who are both administered an exam. One of the students passes his exam is successful in the world and satisfied. He is akin to the person who bears his burdens patiently. The other student keeps failing, remains unsuccessful, and spends the rest of his life in an abject and disappointed state. Such is the person who

does not benefit from the Divine burdens imposed upon him.

In the trials of life that fall to the share of man by the will of Allah lies the success or failure, and the happiness or sorrow of not only this life, but also of the everlasting life after death. The realization of one's own weaknesses and shortcomings, on the one hand and the momentous nature of the struggle that has to be waged to bear the Divinely imposed burdens on the other, man's soul cries out spontaneously, "Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us." The burden refer to here is the same one that I mentioned earlier, i.e., the burden imposed in accordance to the Law of Divine Measure. This prayer is totally in accordance with the nature of man which desires to shun difficulties that are likely to arise from the Law of Divine Measure, and desires relief as and when they do arise.

Burden of man's own sins

"Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear." Allah does not impose a burden upon man that he does not have the strength to bear. Such a burden that is unbearable for man, therefore cannot be a burden of religious law, or one that is in accordance with the law of Divine measure. It is the burden of man's own misdeeds that he has himself earned, and the punishment of Allah as a consequence of such evil actions which is referred to in this part of the verse. The laws in accordance with which such punishment is meted out are made by Allah, the Most High, that is why Allah refers to the consequences of such actions to be from Him. The Reformer of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has explained the use of this language form with a very good example. If there is only one window in a room, and the person residing in the room closes it, then Allah will describe it thus, "This person shut the window and We turned his room dark." Allah ascribes the consequences of man's actions to Himself, because the laws which bring about those consequences are laid down by Him. In short, the burdens that can break a man's back, or lead to his demise are the burdens of his own sins. Man, therefore cries out to Allah, knowing that the burden of his own sins are such that they could crush him, but hoping that the most Merciful Who does not impose unbearable burdens under the laws of religion and measure will extend the same mercy to the burdens of his sins. Hence, he pleads to Almighty to save him from such burdens, or their consequences, which he does not have the strength to bear.

How appropriate are, therefore the words that follow, "And pardon us!" Man, even when he does evil to someone else is actually being iniquitous to his own soul, because he commits a sin against Allah Who gave him that

soul to fulfill a higher purpose, and not to waste it. As I mentioned in the first lesson of this section, the spirit which has come from Allah is a trust from Him within man. Whoever pollutes this spirit, or does not guide it properly, betrays the trust of Allah, and thus commits a crime against Him. “And grant us protection!” so that we do not commit any further misdeeds. This is so when man has committed evil once, it becomes easier to commit it the second time around. For example, if a person accepts a bribe once, his inhibition is broken and it becomes easier for him to accept bribes in the future. Therefore, after asking for forgiveness of previous sins, protection is sought from their commission in the future. “And have mercy on us!” In the Holy Quran the mercy of Allah signifies spiritual blessings. Therefore, asking for Allah’s mercy means asking Him to give back to us through His mercy the spiritual blessings we have lost as a consequence of our misdeeds. “Thou art our Patron,” our Helper our Friend, who can we beseech besides Thee? “So grant us victory over the disbelieving people.” The leader of the disbelievers is the devil himself, who was the first of the disbelievers, and about whom the Holy Quran tells us, “ And he is one of the disbelievers.” (2:34). Those who fall to his temptation become his helpers. These helpers are from amongst one’s friends as well as enemies. Man faces a lot of grief because of the devil, and his helpers as we learn from the prayer of Prophet Job, “ When he cried to his Lord: The devil has afflicted me with toil and torment” (38:41). The true believer cannot succeed against the devil and his friends without the assistance of Allah Almighty.

Another interpretation is also possible. This verse started out with the mention of man’s self. Man has to strive with his self in order to bear the burdens of the religious law, and those of Divine measure. The other striving (*jihād*) of the true believer is externally against disbelief. Allah’s help is asked for in both these forms of striving. We can observe that a prophet, or a reformer first strives against his own self by means of worship, devotion and guarding against evil. Subsequently, when they are appointed for the reformation of other souls, they face a storm of mighty opposition and they have to strive against it. They receive Divine help, which they ask for, in carrying out both these struggles. We stand in great debt of the Reformer of this age for emphasizing that we need to strive against our self by means of guarding against evil (*taqwā*), and also that we need to strive against disbelief by means of propagation of Islam. He asked us to contribute a portion of our income monthly for this purpose. By doing this, we can fulfill both forms of striving at the same time; against the self, by giving in the way of Allah what we could have spent on the self, and also against disbelief.

The Prayer of one lost in the love of God

There can be yet another interpretation of this verse, which is of my own rendering, and which I like very much. In this prayer, the one who is in love with Allah, beseeches Him thus, "O Allah do not punish me for my mistakes, or shortcomings, and do not impose upon me the burdens imposed upon those before me. If, however, You do impose upon me a burden like that imposed upon those before me, I will be able to bear it. There is one burden, however, which I cannot bear, and that is the burden of your displeasure. If you have to chastise me, go ahead and do so, but do not be displeased with me for that I cannot bear. You have been forgiving me all my life, please do so once again. You have always kept me under your protection, do not deprive me of it now. You have always had mercy on me and I have become used to it. Now have mercy on this weakness of mine that I only know your mercy. I do not know your wrath. You have always been my Patron, and I cannot be saved without you. Therefore, please help me against the devil, and his companions, for they will try to destroy me when they observe me to be your servant. If Your help is with me, I will be able to overpower the devil and his helpers." When the Imam recites this prayer of *Al-Baqarah*, the congregation should say *Āmin* (be it so) in a loud voice.

Āl-‘Imrān (Family of Amran)

(Quranic Lesson 52)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

I, Allah, am the best Knower, (Alif-lam-meem)

Allah, (there is) no god (Ilaha) but He, the Ever-living (Al-Haye), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (Al-Qayyum).

He has revealed to thee the Book with truth, verifying that which is before it, and He revealed the Torah and the Gospel.

Aforetime, a guidance for the people, and He sent the Discrimination. Those who disbelieve (kafaru) in the messages of Allah — for them is severe chastisement. And Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution.

(Ch. 3:1-4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْمَع

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ

مِن قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ

Significance of the name Āl-‘Imrān

These are the first four verses of the chapter Āl-‘Imrān. ‘Imrān is same as Amran the father of prophet Moses and Aaron. Āl-‘Imrān meaning the Family of Amran. The history of the descendants of these two prophets is spread over thousands of years. The Holy Quran has very elegantly given expression to this, by calling them Āl-‘Imrān, The Family of Amran thus illustrating the usage of a single word in a brief and most comprehensive manner. This is real eloquence, i.e., the expression of a very broad meaning in a few simple words. It is quite in contrast to the common misconception about eloquence as being the usage of difficult and rhyming words, delivered in a speedy manner. By doing so the speaker usually intends to

create a false impression upon the audience about the extent of his knowledge. The chapter preceding this discusses the Israelites and the causes of their decadence. This chapter discusses the sequential chain of prophethood within the house of Israel, beginning with Prophets Moses and Aaron and ending with Jesus. It also sheds light on the reasons for its termination amongst the Israelites and its subsequent bestowal upon their brethren the Ishmaelites. From the descendants of prophet Ishmael arose the last of the Prophets, Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. It also discusses events relating to Jesus, the last prophet of the Family of Amran, and shows how these events were exaggerated to lay down the foundation of his divinity and the creed of Christianity.

Those who professed belief in Jesus exaggerated his teachings. The Jews who rejected him, in particular the Jewish religious leaders, were in a state of obvious moral decadence. Fourteen hundred years had passed between the advent of Prophet Moses and Jesus. In this lengthy span of time despite the advent of hundreds of prophets (thousands, according to the Torah), all attempts towards the reformation of Jews had failed. Because they attempted to crucify Prophet Jesus, the Jews became, “those upon whom wrath is bestowed”(Holy Quran 1:7). Time had therefore arrived that a prophet like Moses should be “ raised ” from amongst their brethren the Ishmaelites, as Prophet Moses had prophesied. It was also time to give prophethood to those who would bear its fruit in a timely manner as foretold by Jesus, the last of the Israelite Prophets.

The usage of abbreviations in the Holy Quran

The Arabic letters *Alif-lām-mīm* are abbreviations (*huruf-e-muqatta'āt*). These letters are to be read separately and each letter stands for a word. This is a form of expression common to all languages. Such expressions were used in the Arabic language even prior to their use by the Holy Quran and their usage is in fact quite common in the modern languages. For example we find in the English language the use of the abbreviations, B.A , M.A., Phd., O.K., etc. Most commentators usually avoid interpreting the abbreviations found in the Holy Quran. The reason given for this by some is that only Allah knows their meaning. If this was in fact so and Allah did not intend to tell man the meaning of these letters, then one may question (may Allah protect us from doing so), the usefulness of Allah's intent in revealing these letters. The real reason for the commentators confusion was that in the early period different meanings were ascribed to these abbreviations. There is, however, nothing wrong with this practice for as the Holy Prophet has stated, “the difference of opinion amongst my followers is a blessing.” It is quite appropriate to choose different meanings of these

letters by following the same rules by which other words of the Holy Quran are subject to different interpretations. In the books of lexicon we find that a single word of the Holy Quran will have several different meanings and one frequently finds a difference of opinion amongst the commentators. One may therefore question why different meanings cannot be ascribed to these abbreviations and why such practice is a source of confusion?

Another interpretation of these letters that I have come across in a commentary is that these letters stand for the initials of the earlier scribes of the Holy Quran. The person giving this interpretation did not perceive how such a notion could undermine the veracity of the Holy Quran itself. If the names of the scribes could become a part of the Holy text (may Allah protect us from this), then there is no guarantee to the Divine promise of protecting the text of the Holy Quran, and its freedom from extraneous materials. In fact the meaning of these abbreviations has been conveyed to us by the companions of the Holy prophet and from the very beginning not only have they been a part of the Quranic text, but have also been a part of the prayers in which the Quranic text containing these abbreviations was recited. If one presumes that the scribes had (may Allah protect us from this) tagged their names on to the Quranic text, then one also has to question the judgment of those who memorized the Quranic text for they kept on reciting these letters. This presumption is therefore totally erroneous.

The meaning of *Alif-lām-mīm*, as stated by the renowned commentator of the Holy Quran, Hazrat Ibn Abbas, is that these letters are abbreviations for, *Anā-Allah-‘alamu* (I Allah am the best Knower). This is an excellent rendering of the meaning. The first letter *alif* of the word *Ana* has been taken, while the middle letter of *Allah* the word in the middle is taken and the ending letter *mīm* of the last word *‘alamu* is used thus comprising the abbreviation *Alif-lām-mīm*. This abbreviation *Alif-lām-mīm* is also used in the beginning of the chapter *Al-Baqarah*.

I have explained the meaning of, “I Allah am the best Knower,” while discussing the opening passage of *Al-Baqarah*, in an earlier lesson, but I will repeat the gist of it over here as well. It forms an excellent link with the Quranic words that follow immediately after i.e., “This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty,” for guidance is always asked from the one who possesses more knowledge. For example a patient seeks guidance from a doctor because he possesses more knowledge than the patient, and when a doctor himself is in need of further guidance, he seeks the assistance of a specialist in that disease. No one possesses knowledge more perfect than Allah, regarding the purpose of man’s creation and the spiritual direction in which he should proceed in order to achieve this objective.

In this chapter *Al-Imran*, the meaning of *Alif-lām-mīm* is the same,

“I Allah am the best Knower,” but carries a slightly different connotation, which is excellently suited to the present text. This chapter discusses matters dealing with the external physical existence and the internal spiritual life of man. Knowledge of understanding the Holy Quran and of events dealing with the past present and the future is given. Who can have a better knowledge of all of this than Allah the Most High? By stating, “I Allah am the best Knower,” The Holy Quran therefore succinctly draws our attention to the fact that in worldly matters such as a doctors prescribed treatment, (in taking a potentially harmful pill or undergoing a risky operation) you readily follow the advise of one who possesses more knowledge than you although he is not even a claimant to perfection in knowledge. Why is it then, that you deny the guidance of Allah, Who is the only Being in possession of complete and perfect knowledge in all matters?

Allah, (there is) no god (Ilaha) but He

In the verse, “Allah, (there is) no god (*Ilāha*) but He,” the Arabic word *Ilāha* is ordinarily taken to mean the One Who is worshipped with obedience. This word, however, also implies, the One Who deserves our love and the One Who is the purpose or Objective of our existence. The Holy Quran states that everything in the universe is bound within the laws laid down by Allah the Most High (this fact made known to the world through the revelation of the unlettered Prophet peace and blessings of Allah be upon him was unknown to the scientific minds of the day). Mankind has been given unique intellectual ability and freedom of will. He is, however, directed to use his intellect to recognize the unity Of Allah the Most High and to obey Him, like the rest of creation, which by doing so benefits from Divine nurturing unto perfection. By willingly doing so, man can benefit from the Creators nurturing unto perfection (*rabubiyyat*), and be rewarded for it not only in this world but also in the Hereafter. Goodness and higher moral values can develop only when man is given the freedom of will. This is not the case in animals who cannot act with free will and are thus unable to develop morally and spiritually. Besides obedience to Allah, His goodness (*ḥusn* — attributes) and beneficence (*Iḥsān*—eternal dispensation of those attributes), should inspire love in the heart of the believer. Obedience with love is most beneficial, unlike submission that is devoid of it and is considered only a burden. The third meaning of the Arabic word *Ilāh* is the one Who is the aim and aspiration of our life, establishing a relationship with Allah thus being the purpose of mans creation. We are directed to obey Allah with love and humility, thus creating the ideal conditions to mold our spirits in accordance with His attributes and getting closer to Him as we advance spiritually. It is quite obvious that only those of us will obtain nearness to

Him, who have colored their self with the coloring of His attributes and goodness.

The verse, “Allah, (there is) no god (*Ilāha*) but He,” also encompasses the subject that since He is the only One in His Being, He has always given mankind the lesson of His unity through His prophets and revealed scriptures. All other false deities are the creation of mans own mind and those who waste their lives in seeking and following them will do so to their own disadvantage. This verse is followed by mention of the Divine attributes of, “the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist.” I will very shortly comment on these attributes, but the Beholder of these attributes is described further in the Quranic text that follows i.e., “He has revealed to thee the Book with truth.” This shows that He will always keep alive the principle of the unity of His Being, which is the truth, through the revelation and complete preservation of this Book — the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture whose main subject is the unity of the Divine Being, which has remained unaltered in its original text, and it lays claim to protection by the Divine hand.

The Ever-living

The Arabic word *Al-Ḥayy* means, “the Ever-living.” By the addition of the Arabic letters *Alif and lām (Al)* to the word *Ḥayy*, this attribute has been made specific for Allah, Who is its only Possessor in the most complete and comprehensive meaning of the word. The Ever-living also indicates that all life is from Him, i.e., He is The Creator. Development of Scientific thought has not been able to identify the Creator of life itself. It now, however, recognizes that the universe and every thing within it was once inert matter, and will ultimately come to an end. The Holy Quran expresses this idea in the verse, “Every one on it passes away — And there endures forever the person of thy Lord, the Lord of glory and honor” (55: 26, 27).

The Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist

The Arabic word *Al-Qayyūm* means, “the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist.” God is Great! Today even the scientists say that this universe exists because it exists in a universal mind. The Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet informed the world of this fourteen hundred years ago, thus providing irrefutable evidence that the source of this knowledge is Allah, Who is unique not only in His Being, but also His attributes. Another profound piece of knowledge is also conveyed to us in the words, “the Ever-living (*Al-Ḥayy*), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyūm*)”. The greatest desire of mankind is to live forever, that is why those who worship wealth and power are ready to part with all their possessions at the time of

their death in return for a lease on life. One also desires that he should be in a state of good health, with all the means of subsistence at his disposal. This meaning is conveyed by the Arabic word *qiyām*, (verb form of the word *Qayyūm*). This worldly life is, however, neither everlasting, nor does one remain in good health all the time, or has all the means of subsistence at his disposal. In any case all of man's possessions are lost at the time of his death. The Holy Quran thus directs us that if you want everlasting life and sustenance, then turn towards Allah Who is, "the Ever-living (*Al-Ḥayy*), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyūm*)". Unfortunately, however, man has always made this worldly life and its fineries the object of his love, aspiration and purpose in life. None of these elements can give him everlasting life, eternal well being, or contentment. The gods he created were either stone idols, animal deities like the cow or helpless human beings like himself whose eternal needs were similar to his own. This includes venerable and righteous beings like Jesus, Buddha, Ramachandra and Krishna, all of whom were raised to the status of divinity by man. The teaching of the unity of the Divine Being given by all revealed scriptures and prophets of God was thus adulterated by human hand in order to justify his polytheistic beliefs. The Holy Quran states, "He has revealed to thee the Book with truth," because by revealing the Holy Quran Allah has restored this truth, which had been lost to mankind, thus fulfilling his greatest need.

Verification of previous scriptures by the Holy Quran

The Quranic words that follow, "verifying that which is before it", have a general application i.e., the Holy Quran verifies all of the scriptures revealed before it. In the very beginning of the Holy Quran it is stated, "And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee" (2:4). A Muslim believes not only in the Book revealed to the Holy Prophet, but all the Divine scriptures revealed before the Holy Quran. What a marvelous Book of wisdom is the Holy Quran! It mentions belief in the other scriptures after the Holy Quran, though they were revealed before it. This is because the condition of these scriptures today is such that they contain material which is accepted as erroneous, either from a historical or knowledge based perspective. Their teachings today are so defective that those who profess belief in them seek guidance elsewhere. Thus it would have been very difficult for any intelligent person to accept these scriptures to be from God, had not the Holy Quran confirmed this as it also states in this verse "verifying that which is before it". Once again the profound wisdom of the Holy Quran shows! By confirming the source of these scriptures to be the revealed word of Allah, it provides

a cogent proof to affirm the unity of the Divine Being, for no one actually says, or can say that the source of these revelations was other than the One Divine Being. From amongst the previously revealed scriptures the Torah and the Gospel are particularly mentioned over here. This is not only because these scriptures, in comparison with others, mention the unity of the Divine Being more often, but they are also the first and the last scriptures of the Mosaic dispensation, which was now being discontinued. Thus the mention of the first and last scriptures includes all of the scriptures revealed to this order. The Holy Quran, however, states that not only the books of the Mosaic dispensation, but all the previously revealed scriptures were, “a guidance for the people,” when they were revealed. They no longer remain so because their texts have either been completely lost, or as is generally accepted, the truth in them has been adulterated abundantly with falsehood.

The Holy Quran discriminates between truth and falsehood

The words of the Holy Quran which follow, “and He sent the Discrimination.”, inspire great admiration in the mind of the reader. The Holy Quran has been called the Discrimination because it clearly discriminates between the truth and falsehood. It not only identifies the truth that remains behind in the previous scriptures, but is also capable of making this distinction between truth and falsehood in the future, and is therefore the only scripture capable of guiding mankind. The closing words of this section are, “Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*) in the messages of Allah — for them is severe chastisement. And Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution.” This verse indicates, now that Allah has sent the word which clearly distinguishes between truth and falsehood, if man continues to be ungrateful and disbelieves (the *Arabic* word *kafarū* carries both these connotations) and remains astray, his reformation will be brought about through remedial punishment. This situation is analogous to the remedial course of action taken by parents who wish their children well, and want to bring about their reform. Allah the Most High is Mighty in His authority, and if man does not submit to His command through love and affection, He brings about his correction through remedial chastisement. If correction does not occur by remedial castigation in this life, such reproof nevertheless, serves as proof for the therapeutic chastisement of the life Hereafter, where reform will be accomplished with certainty.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

Quranic Lesson 53

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Surely nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah.

He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god (Ilaha) but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee ; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say : We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none mind except men of understanding.

(Ch. 3:5-7)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ۝

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ
يَشَاءُ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ
آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخْرَىٰ
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ طُ بَ مَا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ رِغْبَ

فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ
الْفِتْنَةِ ۚ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ۚ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ
تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۗ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ
يَقُولُونَ ۙ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا
وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ ۙ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ۝

Misinterpretation of allegorical verses by previous nations

These are verses five, six and seven of the chapter Āl-‘Imrān. I have commented on verses one, two, three and four in the preceding lesson, which mention the revealed scriptures prior to the revelation of the Holy Quran. These scriptures were a source of guidance for the people at the time of their revelation, however, those who follow them today are not guided towards the right path through them. This is proven by the fact that in spite

of following their guidance, the followers of these scriptures are unable to establish communion with God. The proof of such communion has always been, that Allah the Most High spoke with such persons. Now that falsehood has entered these religions, the Holy Quran has been revealed to discriminate between truth and falsehood and forever sustain the truth. Those who believe in the Holy Quran should not commit the same errors committed by the ones before them. I will discuss this at length later on. What they did was to ignore the decisive verses of the scripture in favor of the allegorical ones and interpret them in accordance with their desires. In this way not only did they go astray from the truth, but also lead others astray and created disunity.

Definition of decisive and allegorical

Before any further comments, it is essential to explain what is meant by decisive and allegorical verses. The famous lexicologist, Imam Raghīb has defined the Arabic word *muhkam* (decisive), “as that in which there is no doubt between the word and its meaning.” For example the verses of the Holy Quran dealing with the unity of the Divine Being, the reward for good and punishment for evil are so clear and uniform that no doubt can arise concerning their meaning. The allegorical verses are such that they can be interpreted in one or more ways and though their meanings have a certain similarity, those in whose hearts is perversity, instead of interpreting these verses in light of the decisive ones, interpret them in accordance with their own desires. In this manner, they create a climate of dissension and turn away from the truth. Another example to illustrate this is that the Bible clearly teaches and enjoins the unity of the Divine Being. When Jesus was questioned about the first amongst the commandments, he replied, “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel ; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment. And the scribe said unto him, Well Master, thou hast said the truth : for there is one God : and there is none other but He. (Mark 12:29, 30,32).

In places, however, he called God, “father,” and himself the, “son of God.” For this the Jews accused him of blasphemy i.e., calling himself God and tried to stone him. To this accusation, he replied, “ Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods (referring to Psalms 82 : 6 —I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.) If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken: Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest : because I said, I am the Son of God? (John 10:34-36).

All his life Jesus called himself, “son of man,” and two of the gospels in his genealogical tree mention Joseph the carpenter as his father. Later on, however, Paul and others took advantage of the allegorical statements of Jesus and created the doctrine which considers Jesus as son of god in a real sense. In fact, not only that, but considers him as one god, out of three. This is the perversity of the heart which has led to the interpretation of allegorical verses in accordance with one's desires, the result of which is deviation from the truth. As a consequence of this deception, a great majority of mankind today has gone astray.

I have intentionally quoted Christian sources to illustrate this tendency of setting aside the decisive verses in favor of the allegorical ones and interpreting them according to one's desires. This behavior led these nations to go astray and caused dissension. I preferred to highlight these biblical references because the Chapter *Āl-‘Imrān* mentions the Christian beliefs. In conjunction with these, the Holy Quran also mentions Prophet Jesus (*Isa*) peace be upon him, as healing the sick, raising the dead to life, or creating birds, which is also in an allegorical sense. There are decisive verses of the Holy Quran which state that the healing of physical ailments, raising of the dead, and the task of creation is only the work of Allah The Blessed Most High. I will, if Allah please, discuss in detail the reasons Why the Holy Quran has mentioned these in an allegorical sense for Jesus when I am discussing those verses. I am bringing up this reference at this point, because unfortunately our own commentators forgot the difference between the decisive and the allegorical verses of the Holy Quran. As a result of this error, they interpreted these works of Jesus in a literal sense. In doing so, they provided the Christian missionary with a very effective weapon for his missionary propaganda. These missionaries would refer to the Holy Quran and argue that since these tasks performed by Jesus were distinctly Divine, they provided (may Allah protect us from this) proof of his divinity. They would then effectively use these arguments to convert Muslims to Christianity. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (Reformer of the 14th Century Hijra) was the first person to clarify this matter and effectively demolish their arguments.

Divine objective behind allegorical verses

The Holy Quran contains prophecies which are based on the knowledge of the future. They are mostly in the form of allegorical verses. The wisdom behind this arrangement is that their meaning does not become apparent until they are fulfilled. This has two advantages. Firstly, a dishonest and untruthful person cannot take advantage of these prophecies and apply them to his own person, since he is unaware of their real meaning. Secondly

when these prophecies are fulfilled, they provide cogent proof of the truthfulness of the Holy Prophet, and of the Holy Quran being a Divinely revealed scripture.

The other kind of allegorical verses are those, that in order to unravel their meaning, the researcher of the Holy Quran has to stay within the limits set by the decisive verses, work hard, use his intellect, and supplicate before Allah The Most High. When Allah The Most High illuminates the meaning of these verses for him, the suppliant commentator is overwhelmed and prostrating humbly before Allah admits in the words of the Holy Quran, “ Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise” (2:32). A world of humanity then benefits from these disclosures. Faith is strengthened in the truth that the Quranic revelation is from Allah and contains limitless treasures of spiritual knowledge. One should remember that just as the human mind cannot progress in the worldly sciences unless man works and struggles hard to dig for these hidden treasures, a similar situation exists in the matter of religious and spiritual knowledge.

I will illustrate this with an example from the physical sciences to make it easily understandable. Allah created electricity with its defining principles and characteristics. For example we have negative and positive charges, alternate current, direct current etc. and the various laws governing them. By creating electricity, Allah has given man the opportunity to use his God given intellect, hard-work and effort to make all the useful appliances which are of such great benefit for mankind today. All these appliances are based on the fundamental principles and laws of electricity. They are controlled by and evolve out of the knowledge of these fundamental principle. These are the basic definitive principles, similar to the decisive elements of religious law upon which man can capitalize to interpret the allegorical verses and utilize them for his spiritual development

In a similar manner, the allegorical verses are overruled by the decisive ones and in a way evolve from them. The criterion for the good and evil of a mans actions and his accountability for them is based on the decisive verses. All the verses describing hell and heaven are, however, allegorical and only after death will their true nature be revealed. That is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said after he was given knowledge from Allah regarding the blessings of paradise that no one has seen or heard of them, nor have they been perceived by the human mind. Some similarity does, however, exist between them and the worldly blessings, that is why it is stated in the Holy Quran, “and they are given the like of it” (2:25). Allegorical language is essential for our understanding in this earthly existence and this is again expressed in the Holy Quran, “A parable of the Garden which the dutiful are promised” (47:15). For example the

mention of rivers of milk and honey in this regard is not at all in the real sense of the meaning of these words, but by way of metaphor. The meaning of these allegorical references are disclosed upon the commentator of the Holy Quran as a result of his hard work, effort and supplications. I will, if Allah please, discuss these at the opportune time.

The gist of this discussion is that the allegorical verses of the Holy Quran contain within them a great knowledge of the unseen, which evolves or becomes apparent from the decisive verses at the appropriate time. Keeping these two facts in view, we return to the verses under discussion.

Difference between the Divine and human perception of time

The first verse states, “Surely nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah”. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth is hidden from human perception, until its knowledge becomes apparent. Allah The Most High, Who has created all of this, is aware of all His creation and has knowledge of it. This is because He is the creator of both its outer form and internal composition. In a similar manner, Allah is aware of what has occurred in the earth in the past or present for He has been an eyewitness to all of these occurrences and whatever happens in the future will also be in accordance with His law of measure. For mankind knowledge of the future is an unknown dimension, but it is not hidden from Allah. Scientific knowledge now informs us that that the past, present and the future occur in the human perception as a series of events, however, they are there all the time. To check this reference see page seventy two of the book, “The Universe and Doctor Einstein”, written by Lincoln Barnett. One is amazed at the knowledge and the wisdom of the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran has compared the knowledge of Allah to an open book. The page of this book which is open is the present, the preceding pages are the past, and the pages that follow are the future. In Allah’s knowledge they are present simultaneously. For the human eye looking at an open page of a book the preceding and following pages of the book are invisible, however, for a book which encloses all these pages, they are all the same. It does not visualize them with the human visual faculty but its own visual dimension which includes all the pages within it. What a simple and easily understood example the Holy Quran has given to explain a very complex problem!

Why may one ask has the all encompassing knowledge of Allah the Most High been mentioned in this context? It is because this verse is followed by verses discussing the allegorical and the decisive. Allah has given knowledge to mankind in both these ways. The decisive verses are in front of our eyes like the open pages of a book. The allegorical verses are like

those closed pages of the book which are not apparent to the human eye, but are open before Allah, and He can when He so wishes, turn over the unturned pages of the book and display their contents before man.

Relationship of the decisive verse to the allegorical

The verse that follows is even more amazing! “He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god (*Ilāha*) but He, the Mighty, the Wise.” It is a well known fact that no human being, either on his own, or with the assistance of a doctor or midwife can shape the features of his children. The unborn child which is hidden in the confines of the mother’s womb is not hidden from Allah and He gives shape to its form as He pleases.

How amazing is the work of the Creator! With the same number of muscles and bones and other tissue elements, He creates so many beings all differing in their features to the extent that differences exist even between twins. The Holy Quran tells us that the One who shapes your forms is your *ilāh*, the meaning of which I have already discussed. The Arabic word *ilāh* is ordinarily taken to mean the One Who is worshipped with obedience. This word, however, also implies the One Who deserves our love. When obedience is shown out of love for Allah for His supreme beneficence towards mankind, it generates the greatest benefit for mankind, unlike obedience which is only undertaken as a burden. This word also means the One Who is the purpose or Objective of our existence. This communion with Allah which is the purpose of man’s existence can only be achieved through obedience with love. Why then is the word *ilāh* used in this context?

The Holy Quran has given us knowledge which is not to be found anywhere else. As the human child is developing within the mother’s womb, within its body is also developing its spirit. After the demise of the physical being, this spirit, which has by now evolved into the human soul i.e., it has formed a distinct personality, is born into the life Hereafter, in a manner similar to the birth of a child in this world. To those who doubt the life Hereafter, the Holy Quran poses the question that is it not possible for the one Who has created you the first time to recreate you again? The wisdom behind the usage of the word *ilāh* in this context is to emphasize that the soul evolves into the most pleasing form in the Hereafter. This is a result of spending a lifetime in the obedience of Allah, the Most High, striving for His pleasure and thus fulfilling its purpose, i.e., communion with Allah.

This verse also has another very elegant meaning which pertains to the verse that follows in which the Holy Quran mentions the decisive and the allegorical verses. It indicates that the decisive verses in the Book have the

position and the status of the mother to the allegorical ones. They bear the same relationship to the allegorical ones as the mother to its unborn child. The form of the allegorical verses is evolved in the shelter of the decisive ones, just as the features of the child are formed in the womb of its mother, therefore more than one meaning of the allegorical verses which are periodically deduced in this manner, are the manifestations of the great wisdom of Allah. However, just as it is necessary for the shape of the unborn child to be formed within the womb of its mother, it is also essential that no interpretation of the allegorical verse should be done outside the meaning of the related decisive verse.

The next verse is, "He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee ; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say : We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none mind except men of understanding."

Those firmly rooted in knowledge

I have already discussed the greater part of the subject matter of this verse. I only need to comment on the last part of this verse i.e., "And none knows its interpretation save Allah." In this Allah states that He has already indicated the status of the decisive verses is akin to that of a mother , we should therefore remain within these bounds, while interpreting the allegorical verses. In other words the interpretation of the allegorical verses should be subject to the decisive verses of this Book. Since knowledge of both comes from Allah there cannot be any disparity between them. It is also enjoined to seek knowledge of their interpretation from those firmly rooted in knowledge. By inserting a period at both ends of the Arabic words of this commandment, it is connected with both the preceding and the following portion of the verse in the following manner. Firstly, that the meaning of the allegorical verses is known only to Allah or those firmly rooted in knowledge. Secondly, if we form the connection at the other end, it means that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge, they believe both in the decisive and allegorical verses and say it is all from our Lord (*Rabb*) i.e., they are both meant to nurture us in our spiritual knowledge and progress, even if we temporarily lack the understanding of an allegorical verse. It can also mean that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge interpret the allegorical verses by referring to the decisive ones, for they firmly believe that both are from Allah and hence there cannot be any disparity between them. In the end it is stated, "And none mind except men of understanding." This

statement appeals to our intellect to ponder and ask ourselves the question, how can there be a disparity between Allah's word? We should therefore interpret the different branches of religious doctrine in light of the principles and thus benefit from both types of Quranic knowledge.

Perversity of the Heart

Because perversity of the heart led other nations to go astray, and they forgot the decisive commandments in favor of the allegorical which they interpreted in accordance with their desires, the verse that follows teaches the Muslims to pray, "Our Lord, make not our hearts to deviate after Thou hast guided us and grant us mercy from Thee; surely Thou art the most liberal Giver." Only the grace and bounty of Allah can protect ones heart from perversity, for besides Allah no one is aware of the inner secrets of the heart. In the end in order to warn that one is to be held accountable for the perversity of heart and for going astray, this segment of the Holy Quran is closed with the verse, "Our Lord, surely Thou art the Gatherer of men on a day about which there is no doubt. Surely Allah will not fail in His promise." A promise is broken only by one who cannot fulfill what he has promised. Allah the Most High, is Mighty and possesses all power over His creation, therefore it is easy for Him to fulfill His promise.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 54)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*), neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against Allah. And they will be fuel for fire.

As was the case of the people of Pharaoh (*Ālīfir‘aun*), and those before them! They rejected (*Kadh-dhabū*) Our messages, so Allah destroyed them on account of their sins. And Allah is Severe in requiting (evil).

Say to those who disbelieve : You shall be vanquished (*satughlabūn*), and driven (*tuhsharūn*) together to hell ; and evil is the resting place.

Indeed there was a sign for you in the two hosts (which) met together in encounter— one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other disbelieving, whom they saw twice as many as themselves with the sight of the eye. And Allah strengthens with His aid whom He pleases. There is a lesson in this for those who have eyes.

(Ch. 3:10-13)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ تُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ
وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأُولَئِكَ
هُمْ وَقُودُ النَّارِ ۝

كَذَّابٍ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِمْ ۖ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ
بِذُنُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ۝

قُلِ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَعْتَابُونَ وَنَحْسَرُونَ
إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ۝

قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فِي فِئَتَيْنِ الْتَقَتَا
فِئَةٌ تَقَاتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَأُخْرَىٰ
كَافِرَةٌ يُرِيدُونَ مِنَ اللَّهِ الْغَيْبَ
وَاللَّهُ يُوَسِّدُ بِنَصْرِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ إِنَّ
فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ ۝

Summary of the previous lesson

With these verses begins the second section of the chapter *Al-Imran*. I have given two lessons on the previous section. As I have stated, this Chapter deals mainly with Christianity and its followers. The important subject matter of the preceding section was that revelation from Allah The most High contained both decisive and allegorical verses. We discussed the Divine wisdom behind the rule that interpretation of the allegorical verses was always subject to the authority of the decisive ones, and how one could benefit from such an arrangement. It was pointed out that contrary to this, pursuit of only the allegorical verses and their interpretation in accordance with ones wishes, misguided people and caused dissension. All of these basic principles were discussed. It was pointed out that Christianity and its followers, by not adhering to these principles, have faltered and gone so far astray that they serve as an example to illustrate such deviant behavior. That is why the Holy Quran calls them *Al dzālin* i.e., those who go astray (1:7). It is inappropriate on their part to show such lack of concern and audacity in this matter only because Allah does not hold them accountable in this life for their beliefs. This was also to warn the Muslims that they should not adapt a similar course in the matter of decisive and allegorical verses. In the end of the last section, there was a general warning that all generations past and present will be gathered and questioned about their beliefs, on the Day of Resurrection. It is therefore not righteousness to innovate a matter of belief or faith out of what our desires dictate. Such behavior, not only leads the individual concerned to go astray, but also leads others on to this path, by setting a wrong example.

Consequences of going astray

The Christian nations today have in general lost faith in God and the Day of Accountability. Even those religious minded people who profess such a belief are lulled into a sense of false security because of the Christian doctrine of atonement. They believe it is enough to declare faith in the sacrifice of Christ for the atonement of their sins and that his intercession on their behalf will save them on the Day of Judgment. Lack of such concern for accountability leads them to act according to their desires. This behavior is further strengthened by pride in the superiority of their monetary resources and numerical strength. One is amazed at the wisdom of the Holy Quran which leads it to discuss such behavior in the very first verse of this lesson. This verse states, “Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*), neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against Allah. And they will be fuel for fire.” Man earns and accumulates wealth for the benefit of his children. The Holy Quran states that both of these will ultimately fuel the

fire which Allah, the Most High, will impose upon these Christian nations, from time to time. This will be a consequence of the evil actions committed by them in this worldly life as a result of lack of concern for accountability on the Day of Judgment. I interpret this fire as the conflagration of war. This interpretation is supported by the Holy Quran in verse (5:64) which states, "Whenever they kindle a fire for war Allah puts it out." The Arabic commentary *Ruh-al-ma'ānī* states regarding this verse that it was customary amongst the Arabs to light a fire on an elevation or a hill to indicate a declaration of war.

Such a chastisement was brought upon the Christian nations in the form of two world wars. The fire that rained from the earth and the sky during these wars was unique in that it had never before been witnessed by mankind. God save us from the destructive consequences of a conflict now if the arsenal of modern atomic and hydrogen bombs were to be deployed. These deadly confrontations would not have been possible without the great monetary resources of the Christian nations. In previous ages wars could be fought with bows, arrows and swords which did not require a great commitment of financial resources. In the present day and age, however, the weapons of war are so costly that only the great wealth and earnings of the western nations can support such undertakings. In comparison to them the possessions of the Muslim nations are meager and they rely heavily upon the Christian nations. That is why these nations are fearless of consequences of their actions and strive to sustain their dominance.

The Holy Quran states that their war machinery and arsenals will not help them against Allah The Most High. In these internal conflagrations of war levied upon them by Divine will, the youth of these nations will be drafted and consumed. That they were in fact brought about by Divine commandment is established by two distinct signs. Firstly, by the prophecies of the Holy Quran and the Hadith (also by the revelations of the Reformer of this age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed). Secondly, despite the fact that these nations are acutely aware of the destructive consequences of such conflicts, and try their best to avoid them, they are nevertheless dragged helpless and fearful into their midst.

It is true that in the verse above the Arabic word *kafarū* means those who disbelieve and does not specifically refer to the Christians. It is, however, equally true that it also applies to those who disbelieve and confront Allah and can therefore be applied to the Christian nations. The disbelievers of Arabia, when they tried to annihilate Islam and the Muslims by means of the sword, were consumed by the fire they ignited. Because the chapter *Āl-Imrān* specifically deals with the Christian nations, this verse is, therefore, in particular applicable to them. Their wealth and children also became the fuel of these fires as prophesied amazingly by the Holy Quran

fourteen hundred years ago.

Similarities between the Pharaoh and the Christian nations

The verse that follows states, “As was the case of the people of Pharaoh (*Ālifiraun*), and those before them! They rejected (*kadhhabū*) Our messages.” They rejected the messages of Allah and committed evil deeds, as a consequence of which Allah, the Most High, held them accountable in this very life. The exemplary punishment thus meted upon them went down in history. I would first like to draw your attention to a few points regarding this verse. The Arabic word *ālifir‘aun* used in this verse has been ordinarily and mistakenly translated as the children of Pharaoh. It is correctly and appropriately translated as people of Pharaoh. It would be easier to understand this when we consider that when we evoke blessings upon *āli muḥammad* during the obligatory prayers it includes not only the descendants of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) but also his followers. The other question that arises in ones mind is why this comparison with Pharaoh was made by the Holy Quran? Pharaoh was the most powerful king of his time. He subjugated the Israelites and for a long period of time and issued orders for their male progeny to be killed while allowing their female children to live. He became so inebriated by the strength of his imperial power and kingdom, that he proclaimed himself god and was eventually destroyed as a result of his evil actions.

If we study the history of the Christian Colonial Powers, we find close parallels with the history of Pharaoh. The Christian nations of this day have already succumbed to the accountability and chastisement of Allah The Most High. A hundred years ago, however, at the zenith of colonial power, their condition was such that they were dominating the whole world and no one could stand up to them. It was said that the sun never sets over the British Empire. They dominated the land and the sea and the map of the world appeared red with British colors, as a consequence of this supremacy. From amongst the subject nations those who showed manly courage and stood up to them were dealt with by imprisonment and thus eliminated. Those who exhibited feminine qualities and became weak and submissive were left alone and thus survived. This demonstrates the similarity to Pharaoh’s treatment of the Israelite male progeny. Those who flattered them and served them well with feminine acquiescence were given entitlements in the British Raj like *Khan Sahib*, *Rao Sahib* etc. In this day and age, the Christian nations are openly spreading atheism either by completely denying the existence of the Divine Being, or by stating that there was no God, or if He was there at one time, He is (may Allah protect us from

saying so) now dead. Even prior to this they tried to assume the position which fell only into the Domain of the Divine. What does God expect from mankind after all ? Only this that submission should be shown to him with humility. This was exactly what the Christian colonial powers demanded of their subjects. God also wants that His commandments should be obeyed, and people after being made aware of His reward and chastisement should act righteously. The Colonial Christian Powers expected similar behavior from their subjects. They expected them to be humble and submissive, to be acutely aware of the masters pleasures and displeasure, and to do their bidding. They felt empowered to reward and punish, give life or bring destruction upon a nation and to provide them with food and sustenance according to their wishes. These were the powers of God which the colonial Christian nations tried to assume and impose upon their subjects. This resemblance with the Pharaonic attitude is therefore quite striking.

Accountability in this life not on basis of belief

The third point which is noteworthy is that Allah does not hold one accountable in this worldly life on the basis of his faith or belief. I have discussed the wisdom behind this in my discussion on the verse, “ There is no compulsion in religion”(2:256). If someone therefore only denies the truth, he is not held accountable for it in this world but in the Life Hereafter. In the verse under discussion, the disbelievers (whether they be those from amongst the tribes of Makkah or the Christian nations) have not been blamed for not accepting the truth. They were blamed for rejection (*kadh-dhabū*). Such rejection involves spreading false propaganda and lies about the truth (i.e., it was falsehood) so that others may not accept it . It also includes attempts to annihilate the truth or the supporters of truth as was done by the disbelievers of Makkah. The attempts of the Christian propagandists through false allegations against Islam and the founder of Islam or by means of character assassination also fall under this category. This is a very serious offense, for which Allah mandates accountability even in this life. If Allah, the Most High, did not chastise those who attempt to eliminate the upholders of truth, or cause their power to lessen, it would eventually lead to annihilation of the truth and its adherents, something that Allah does not allow. Besides rejection of the truth in the manner described above, the disbelievers of Makkah, similar to the rampant moral depravity so visible in the western society today, were also guilty of other evils mandating immediate accountability.

The next verse states, “so Allah destroyed them on account of their sins. And Allah is Severe in requiting (evil).” Allah held them accountable for their sins in this life. His chastisement is severe, although it takes a long

time for it to come. Only the one who has experienced such chastisement can speak for its severity. The verse after this states, “Say to those who disbelieve : You shall be vanquished (*satughlabūn*), and driven (*tuhsharūn*) together to hell ; and evil is the resting place.” The Arabic letter *sa* as in *satughlabūn* indicates an occurrence in the near future, in this case it indicates the occurrence of this vanquishment within the lifetime of the disbelievers. When this verse was revealed, the strength and power of the disbelievers of Makkah was such that no one could have imagined that it would be broken so soon. The situation of the Christian nations was analogous to this. The Arabic word *tuhsharūn*, means to be driven out of ones resting place towards conflict. The Christian nations were likewise driven to war in areas of the world where they had no concern and had to face bloody conflict, for example in North Africa, Korea and Vietnam. They were driven to death helplessly in the, “evil resting place.” These fiery conflicts were replaced by the cold war, financial crisis and other difficulties.

A sign in the Battle of Badr

The closing verse of this lesson is, “Indeed there was a sign for you in the two hosts (which) met together in encounter — one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other disbelieving, whom they saw twice as many as themselves with the sight of the eye. And Allah strengthens with His aid whom He pleases. There is a lesson in this for those who have eyes.”

The battle which is called a sign in this verse was the Battle of Badr. The Holy Quran had prophesied regarding it in verse (54:45), “Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they will show (their) backs.”

This sign was also prophesied in the Bible, which is read by the Christians. Isaiah 20 : 13-17 states, “ The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye traveling companies of Dedanim. The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled. For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the greivousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail : And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the Lord God of Israel hath spoken it. These biblical verses clearly speak of the flight of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from Makkah and the Battle of Badr a year later.

On one hand was a well equipped and experienced force of the Makkan disbelievers. Facing them was a group of three hundred and thirteen Muslims which included children, young and old men who did not even have enough swords (the minimum fighting equipment of the day) to

go between them. The outcome of this historic conflict, a clear victory for Muslims, was certainly miraculous.

Similarly in this age during the colonial times particularly in India we witnessed on one hand a well trained army of Christian missionaries, who had the backing of the government and its resources at their disposal. Facing their vitriolic onslaught against Islam and the Holy prophet were The Founder of the Ahmadiyya movement (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed) and a few of his followers who did not possess any material resources. The help of Allah was, however, with them and the result was a clear victory over the enemy. For those with spiritual insight, there is a great admonition and a sign in these events. Such spiritual insight is, however, a faculty of the heart. This discussion will be continued in the next lesson.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 55)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Fair-seeming to men is made the love of desires, of women and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well-bred horses and cattle and tilth. This is the provisions of the life of this world. And Allah – with Him is the good goal (of life).

Say : Shall I tell you of what is better than these ? For those who guard against evil are Gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them , and pure companions and Allah’s goodly pleasure. And Allah is Seer of the servants.

Those who say: Our Lord, we believe, so forgive our sins and save us from the chastisement of the fire. The patient and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend and those who ask Divine protection in the morning times.

Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

(Ch. 3:14-18)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

مُرِينَ اللَّكَايِسِ حُبَّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ
وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ
الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ
وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَاكِ ۝١٤

قُلْ أَوْ نَبِّئْكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ لِلَّذِينَ
اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَ
رِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يُبْصِرُ بِالْعِبَادِ ۝١٥

الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا
ذُنُوبَنَا وَتَنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۝١٦

الصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَ
الْمُسْتَقِيمِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ ۝١٧

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝١٨

Holy Quran prophesied the dominance of Christian Nations

In my discussion of the first four verses of this chapter, I have pointed out that although the subject matter of this section appears to be of a general nature, by close examination of the context, we find that its subject matter has a particular relevance for Christianity and the Christian nations. The history of religion for the last two to three hundred years shows us that during this period, Christianity as a religion, attacked Islam with great intensity. What is known as the Industrial revolution in Europe started with the invention of machines and the urgent need for raw materials arose in order to make progress through mechanization. The search for such raw materials took the European nations to the less developed regions of the world including the countries in Asia and Africa. They went there under the guise of trade, but because of their industrial might and superior armaments were soon successful in subjugating these countries.

The Holy Quran prophesied this dominance 1400 years ago in the verses, “And it is forbidden to the town, which We shall destroy, that they shall not return. Until when Gog and Magog are let loose (*yansilūn*) and they will sally forth from every position of vantage” (21:95-96). The word *Qaryah* (town) is used here in the singular to denote greatness, prominence, uniqueness. Makkah has been called, in another place in the Holy Quran, ‘Mother of Towns,’ because it was the place where Adam and Eve lived, Adam building the first house for the remembrance of Allah at Makkah (‘verily the first house of Allah built for mankind was at Mecca — Holy Quran 3:95). What the Holy Quran says in the verse quoted above is that the opposition to Islam and the Muslims (which was represented by the city of Makkah at the time of the Holy Prophet) will be destroyed (as it happened with the fall of Makkah). It will not return until Gog and Magog (then held in invisible chains of Divine destiny as the holy Prophet saw in a vision about them) will be let loose, and they will sally forth from every position of vantage. Strange stories about the identity of Gog and Magog persisted until the Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this century (14th century Hijra) Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed identified them to be the Western Christian Nations. His position was ridiculed at the time, but is now generally accepted by the Muslim intelligentsia. That is why the famous poet of the East, Sir Muhammad Iqbal wrote in one of his poetic verses,

“All the armies of the Gog and Magog have been let loose
The eye of the Muslim should behold this explanation of the
(Quranic) word *yansilūn*” (See above verse 21: 96).

Scheme to convert the colonies to Christianity

The Western Christian nations found in these underdeveloped nations, not only a source for the raw materials they needed, but also a market for their manufactured goods, thus enabling them to maintain a balance of payments. To perpetuate their control over the wealth of the colonies, they embarked upon a scheme to convert the subject nations to Christianity, and to this end launched an army of Christian missionaries into these areas. In the highly backward areas of the African continent, where the only religion was based upon superstition, they did not meet with great resistance towards their designs. Enticement by means of medical aid, offers of employment and education were enough to convert people to Christianity. Christian religious propaganda, however, met opposition in those areas where other major religions were already in existence. Even in these regions, for example in the Indian subcontinent, hundreds and thousands of individuals belonging to the untouchable class were converted to Christianity. This was accomplished by offers of greater opportunity in education, employment, financial incentives and land grants etc. In reality though, the principles of Christianity are such that they cannot be understood either by the primitive African or the untouchable of India. Where religious confrontation did arise, for example with Hinduism, the missionary did not face a very difficult task, for it was easy to gain acceptance for three gods in place of three hundred and seventy million Hindu deities.

Christian onslaught against Islam

The real confrontation took place between Christianity and Islam, for trinity could not stand up to the pure monotheism of Islam. Monotheism is in accordance with human nature, a fact now even being confirmed by modern scientific thought. The missionary and the orientalist alike could not say anything against this principle, so instead they attacked the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They also took advantage of certain misconceptions about Prophet Jesus prevalent amongst the Muslims. These included the belief that he was sitting alive in heaven and possessed certain divine attributes such as raising the dead to life and the creation of birds. The Christian missionaries played upon these misconceptions, and used them in their arguments to prove the divinity of Jesus. The difference between Islam and Christianity is only this that Islam regards Jesus as one of the chosen Prophets of God, while Christianity holds him to be son of god, and one of three gods. If the divinity of Jesus could be proven from the Holy Quran itself (we seek the protection of Allah), then the superiority of Christianity over Islam becomes established. This argument was further fueled by the prevalent misconception

amongst the Muslims, that in the later days when they would be in dire straits, Jesus would descend from heaven and save them. The logical question thus put forth by the Christian missionary was, why do the Muslims not accept him as their savior now and guarantee their salvation? No one could stand up to this line of argument and Muslims estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands, including those belonging to well educated prominent families converted to Christianity.

Defense of Islam by the Reformer (Mujaddid) of the 14th century Hijra

During such difficult times for Islam and the Muslims, Allah who always protects His true faith, sent Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed to accomplish the task as the Reformer of the century and as the Promised Messiah. Through Divine revelation Hazrat Mirza's attention was directed towards those references of the Quran and the Hadith which prove that like all prophets and other mortals, Prophet Jesus had passed away, and the Messiah to come, in accordance with the *Sahih Hadith of Bukhari and Muslim* was, "to be your *imam* (spiritual leader) from amongst yourself (i.e., from amongst the Muslims)."

After these revelations, Hazrat Mirza Sahib and his followers provided such a strong refutation to the arguments of the Christian missionaries, that they soon began to abstain from religious debate with them. The Christian Government which was backing the missionary movement was, however, still in power, and together they evolved schemes which were referred to earlier in this lesson.

Different elements employed in the conversion scheme

The Holy Quran points out that the love of certain desires has great attraction for mankind. This includes the love and desire for women, the children they bear particularly their male offspring, the acquisition of wealth, land holdings and fine means of transportation. These material things were not only greatly desired by the Christian nations (and remain so till this day), but they also utilized them as a means of enticing others towards Christianity. Although they were soundly defeated in the field of religious debate by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed and his followers, governmental power, jobs and the allure of wealth remained in the hands of the Christian rulers. In those days Muslim women stayed mostly in their homes, involved with household work and the upbringing of children. If at all they did venture outside, they were covered up in veils. In contrast Christian women and young girls would go out wearing make up and dresses which would either expose a part of their body or make their figures more attractive. Because

of this also many Muslims faltered in their steps and converted to Christianity. In a pattern similar to this, the western nations have frequently used women for intelligence gathering, and diplomatic maneuvers.

The fall of the Empire

Because the Christian Governments were using their power and enticing people by means of wealth, land and material offerings to lead them astray, Hazrat Mirza in accordance with a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prayed for their demise. He was informed by means of Divine revelation that wars would occur which would lead to the decline of their worldly power, and so it did come about by means of the great world wars. Another momentous change occurring in these nations, was the decline of the Christian faith (which they had tried to enforce upon others) within their own societies. Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had prophesied such an occurrence in one of his Hadith comparing it to, “the dissolution of salt in water.”

A great majority of them abandoned their religion in pursuit of the very same desires mentioned in the Quranic verses under discussion, “fair-seeming to men is made love of desires of women and sons.” Like the disbelievers of Arabia, amongst the Christian nations, the uncontrolled desire for love of women and a tendency towards preferential treatment of the male heirs from amongst their progeny was also prevalent. In Islam the female children of the deceased also have the right of inheritance, whereas in Europe, America and the Christian nations this is only limited to the male offspring. Also included in this relentless pursuit are hoarded treasures of gold and silver (which the Arabs in those days did not have, but which still exist in abundance in possession of the Christian nations). Acquisition of large land holdings called ranches and luxury automobiles which have replaced the fine bred horses is also eagerly pursued. These desires are so pervasive that even those with limited means are striving to have their own car. The Holy Quran which has to go to the west and influence the western mind, draws attention in these verses to the fact that these acquisitions are not the purpose of mans creation. They are temporary and provide a means only for this worldly existence.

Higher Goal of man’s creation

Man we are told has been created for a much higher and abiding purpose—the recognition of Allah the most High, and getting close to Him. That is why the Holy Quran states, “And Allah – with Him is the good goal (of life).” In comparison with the tranquillity and serenity acquired by getting close to Allah, the fire of dissatisfaction generated by the thirst for worldly

acquisitions is contemptible. The Holy Quran then states, “Say: Shall I tell you of what is better than these ? For those who guard against evil are Gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them , and pure companions and Allah’s goodly pleasure. And Allah is Seer of the servants.”

In this verse Allah, the Most High, states that instead of being totally consumed by the attractions mentioned earlier, it is better for you to guard against evil. In the end of the last verse it was stated that instead of making the fineries of this world as your *ilāh* i.e. the object of your veneration love and purpose of life, come towards Allah, for this is the goal of your creation. In the verse under discussion it is pointed out that seeking this purpose does not forbid the attractions of this worldly life. Allah only wants you to spend your life in this world guarding against evil. In order to teach you how to guard against evil, He has revealed the Holy Quran as a guide for those who keep their duty. It gives guidance to differentiate between right and wrong, good and evil, that which is beneficial or harmful to the human soul and between righteous action and sinful behavior. There are two sides to mans earthly existence i.e., the good and the evil. By running blindly in pursuit of the worldly attractions, man loses the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. One could see an example of this in the western society today where the purpose of human existence is mainly to earn wealth. Wealth in itself is not something bad, it is the manner of its practice which determines the righteousness or impropriety of an action. The Holy Quran guides us with regards to the good and evil of every action, belief or saying. In fact, it clearly elaborates upon these aspects even in the matter of our thoughts. It does so by means of reasoning and by clearly distinguishing between right and wrong. I have explained this in my discussion on the subject of fasting in the chapter *Al-Baqarah*. The Holy Quran thus teaches man to guard against evil. The *muttaqī*, or the one who guards against evil, has to sacrifice a lot to achieve this end. Let us take wealth as an example. Because of his honest living, it is possible that one who guards against evil may have to face poverty and starvation. One has to make a similar sacrifice for all worldly attractions. The Holy Quran states that Allah intends for man to face such worldly attractions, and thereby practically learn how to guard against evil. When he who is successful in these worldly trials goes to meet his Lord, his reward is paradise.

The Nature of Paradise

The gardens of paradise have streams of water running beneath them. These gardens are a reward for his belief and the streams a reward for righteous action. In this earthly existence, belief creates serenity and pleasure in his heart similar to the feelings engendered by visiting a beautiful garden.

Righteous actions leads him not only towards the protection of the rights of other individuals but humanity in general benefits from them, and such actions flows forth from these individuals like streams of running water. The rewards of paradise are such that as the Holy Prophet has stated, "There is not an eye in this world that has seen them, nor an ear that has heard of them nor a mind that would understand them." The Holy Quran has thus explained them beautifully in an allegorical manner by giving examples of elements which are a part of mans physical experience such as gardens and streams. The gardens and streams of this world are not forever. They experience decline in autumn, face destruction by drought and other natural calamities, and man can loose access to them. The Holy Quran informs us, however, that the gardens and streams of paradise are everlasting. These and other blessings would have been devoid of pleasure, if mankind were to be without companionship in paradise. The best pair, created by Allah, the Most High, is that of a man and a woman. They are a source of comfort and happiness for each other. The Holy Quran states that such companionship will exist in paradise. In this worldly existence, the union of a man and woman, if one of them is impure, can be a source of pain instead of pleasure for either individual. Therefore we are told, that the companions in paradise would be pure, but more then anything else, "Allah's goodly pleasure," will be the source of happiness and delight for mankind. In the end of this verse it is stated that, "Allah is Seer (*Baṣīrun*) of the servants" which implies He not only sees their actions, but is also aware of the true intentions and inner thoughts behind such actions. That is why, until the inner thoughts of a person as well as his outward actions do not attain purity, he cannot truly be the one who guards against evil (*mut-taqi*) and will not be able to enter paradise in the Hereafter. Paradise cannot be called as such, unless it has people of this caliber, for if its inmates were thieves, robbers, con-artists and people of low character then it would be very much like the hell in this world. If policemen, prisons and judicial courts were required over there for the criminals, then it could not remain a paradise but would turn into hell.

In the end I need to mention that The Most Merciful has ordained the real reward for one who keeps his duty in the Hereafter (that which is everlasting), the rewards of this worldly existence being temporary. In a way, however, the reflection of the paradise of the Hereafter is created in the heart of those who guard against evil in this life. They may not be in a garden in the physical sense but their heart is blessed with the garden of serenity. An honest person has no fear or grief, while these always exist in the heart of a dishonest person. An honest individual may go to bed hungry, but his mind is free of worries. A dishonest person on the other hand may feast on the finest foods, but his heart is engrossed in the hell of restlessness and

anxiety. In a similar manner in this worldly life, the nurturing streams of beneficence flow at all times for the benefit of others, from the person of one who guards against evil. On the other hand no one benefits from a person lost in the love of this material world. The pleasure of Allah is also manifest for those who guard against evil. The companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were given the honor by the Holy Quran of being called, “those with whom Allah is pleased,” in their very lifetime. Whosoever follows their footsteps and treads on the path laid down by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he can witness proof of the pleasure of Allah in this very life. Besides true dreams and visions, he is also blessed with the honor of communion with Allah. As an indication of His pleasure, Allah creates respect and reverence for such a pious person amongst righteous souls. The first step in the path towards guarding against evil is mentioned in the next verse.

The Path of spiritual development

“Those who say: Our Lord, we believe, so forgive our sins and save us from the chastisement of the fire.” Those who guard against evil are directed in this verse not to stop their spiritual journey after professing belief in Allah Almighty. The Being Who is the most merciful of all is also their nurturer unto perfection (Rabb) at all times and wants them to progress from the lowest to the highest stage of spiritual development. Not only does He want to rectify their spiritual illnesses and moral deficiencies, but also wants to create moral and spiritual qualities in them. The first essential step towards reformation is the realization and admission of ones shortcomings and sins. Satan went astray and was driven away from Divine presence because, “He refused and was proud” (2:34). By instigating mans pride and insolence, the devil thus falsely leads him to believe that he is free of all faults and sins. If someone else tries to create awareness of these faults, the devil misleads, and by instigating refusal and disobedience within man makes him deny his shortcomings. Those who have tried to reform human behavior have ample experience of this.

The essential and basic step for guarding against evil is to have such a belief in Allah, the Most High, that He is with us where ever we are. The Holy Quran creates awareness of this by stating that, “He is with you wherever you are”(57:4), He is *Sami‘* (the Hearing), *Baṣīr* (the Seeing), *‘alimun bi dhāt alṣudūr* (He is Knower of what is in the hearts). It is not sufficient For such a belief to be professed only once, it needs to be refreshed over and over again. One should strengthen the bond with his Lord by affirmation of his belief in the words, “*Rabba nā ‘āmannā* (our Lord we believe),” and by means of prayer, which this blessed verse teaches. The word

which the Holy Quran has used for obligatory prayer is *ṣalaat*, which also means prayer. Obligatory prayers are therefore a means of creating a living faith in Allah The Most High, provided they are kept up in their proper manner, and not merely undertaken as a compulsory recitation. In short our Lord is our patron, witnesses all our deeds, listens to what we say, and is aware of the innermost secrets of our hearts. The one who guards against evil supplicates before Him thus, “O my Lord, you are well aware of the sins I have committed, so please forgive them (*maghfirat*), although the devil and my animal soul (*nafs-i-ammāra*), by turning me spiritually blind, may have led me not only to the commission of these sins but also made me unaware of them.” The Arabic word *maghfirat* means covering over and protection. The supplicant thus requests the Lord to cover over his sins from their being manifested before others, and also seeks His protection from repeating these evil deeds, for the commission of every evil deed is difficult the first time around but becomes easier with repetition. The final supplication in this verse is, “and save us from the chastisement of the fire.” The supplicant knows that the remedial punishment for the sins he has already committed is the chastisement of fire, but he begs for the mercy of his Lord, to save him from this. All sins are committed by man when he becomes overwhelmed by his emotions and desires, the nature of these being akin to fire. If they are not controlled by guarding against evil, they can ignite into the chastisement of fire.

Stages of the spiritual journey of those, “who guard against evil.”

In the subsequent verses the various stages of the spiritual journey and qualities of those who guard against evil (*muttaqin*) are discussed. The first amongst these being *as-ṣabirīn*, those manifesting the quality of patience. A man may have been living comfortably, but as soon as he accepts the truth, he has to face all kinds of opposition, trials and tribulations. To be patient during these circumstances, prevents a man from being led astray in his spiritual quest. Then come the difficulties that he may have to face as a consequence of the law of Divine measure. He may have to face a state of fear, disease, death and loss of the fruits of his hard work. Being patient under these conditions also saves him from faltering in his footsteps and falling down. Remaining steadfast in one’s belief and actions, despite the instigation of the devil from within, in the form of the prompting of one’s own animal soul, or from without through the suggestions of evil minded people is also a manifestation of the quality of patience.

“*Wa-AlṢādiqīn* (and the truthful),” mentioned in this verse are those who remain steadfast in the trials mentioned above, they are the ones who

proved the truth of their belief by their actions. They attain the status of being the truthful ones (*ṣādiq* or *siddiq*).

The third stage is of those, “*Wa-alqānītīn* (and the obedient).” At this stage submission which is initially carried out with effort, is now manifested with humility, true feelings and inner love. This the stage of *qanūt* or obedience.

“*Wa-almunfiqīn* (and those who spend). At this stage one is ready to sacrifice all he has in the way of Allah, this includes not only his wealth and time but also his life and children. Spending, does not mean spending only out of ones wealth, but also giving away in the time of need, all of ones God given bounties in His way. This willingness is portrayed beautifully in a couplet by the famous Urdu poet *Ghalib*,

“I gave up my life, which was in fact given to me by Him,
the truth of the matter is that I did not quite fulfill my obligation.”

“*Wa-al mustaghfirīna bi-Al Aṣḥār* (and those who ask Divine protection in the morning times). Having reached such an advanced stage of spiritual development, does not however generate in them feelings of pride and arrogance, and they get up in the later part of the night to bow down humbly before Allah. At the break of dawn they seek the protection of Allah so that the coming day should not lead them to the commission of frail or sinful behavior. The pleasant hour of the morning is the time when the angels descend upon the human heart and attract it towards goodness. Seeking the protection of Allah with humility assists in the completion of their inner light (*nur*). That is how exactly the words of those who have entered the paradise are mentioned in the Holy Quran. “They will say: Our Lord, make perfect for us our light, and grant us protection ” (66:8). Thus even after entering paradise the moral and spiritual development of the one who guards against evil (*muttaqī*), does not come to an end. *Nūr* is the light which illuminates inner or spiritual matters. Within the spirit or soul of the man (which has been breathed into him by Allah, the Most High), thus lie latent those means of moral and spiritual improvement which can forever manifest and lead towards his spiritual development. In seeking this spiritual progress they ask for the protection of Allah, for He is the only Perfect Being. Only when His mantle of protection covers the deficiencies and weaknesses which are a part of human striving, can they successfully travel through these inner and unseen realms of their spiritual journey.

The Doctrine of Divine Unity to prevail

The final verse of this lesson is, “Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.” This verse

is placed here as a prophecy that eventually the doctrine of Divine unity will prevail in the world. This thought is reinforced by the subsequent verse which states, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam," further indicating that Islam which establishes this principle of Divine Unity is to become the dominant religion of the world. Also in this verse three types of arguments are put forward to establish the truth of the Islamic principle of the unity of the Divine Being and to prove the falsity of the Christian doctrine of Trinity.

The first of these is the witnessing by Allah of His own unity, which also proves the falsity of Trinity. This witnessing is of two types, i.e., by His word and by His action. All Divine revelation starting from Prophet Adam and going down to the last Prophet of God, The Holy Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, witnesses the Unity of the Divine Being, and strongly condemns association with God. In all the revealed scriptures found today, despite the generally accepted adulteration of their text, there exists evidence of the Unity of the Divine Being. No evidence of association with the Divine Being is found in the words of any prophet in any tradition. This, therefore, is the evidence provided by the word of God. The evidence provided by Gods action is that the whole universe is one, made of the same kind and is obligated to follow the same type of law. Marvelous scientific discoveries about the universe have occurred in our age, for example, from the existence of a whole universe of its own within an atom to the existence of the amazing immensity and vastness of the universe on the outside. All of these discoveries have proven the oneness of the universe. That is why modern science has accepted this, and it is factual testimony to the oneness of its Creator, whose creation follows His command and Who is the All Powerful and Supreme Sovereign.

The other piece of evidence mentioned in this verse is that provided by the angels. As I have mentioned in my previous lessons, the relationship of the angels is with the hearts of men. Mans own nature testifies to the unity of the Divine Being although it may be temporarily inhibited by the contemporary teachings of polytheism. In times of need, for example, in dire difficulties, this natural tendency of man is brought to the surface by the working of the angels on the human mind and even the most impenitent atheist or polytheist cries out for Divine assistance.

The third kind of testimony is provided by those possessing knowledge who are fair minded, and these fall into two categories. To one class belong those who have knowledge of religious matters. If they are just in their testimony, they will admit to the unity of the Divine Being as the teaching of the founder of their religion. For example, many fair minded scholars today admit openly that the teachings of Jesus or the Bible are none other than the unity of the Divine Being. The other class of knowledgeable individuals is

that of the scientists. The Holy Quran tells us that even the fair minded amongst them will also testify to the unity of Allah, the Most High. I have in fact read such testimony myself.

In the end, the Holy Quran states that no one else besides Allah is the god *ilāh* (sole object of worship, love and purpose of mans existence), He is the Mighty, the Wise and as a manifestation of these attributes, monotheism will predominate in the world. Although Allah manifests his works with wisdom and it takes time to do so, it is always based on a firm and lasting foundation. This dominance of the principle of Divine unity will come about by Islam being made the prevailing religion of the world, that is why it is stated in the subsequent verse, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam." It is therefore quite in accordance with the Divine intent to spread the religion of Islam in the world, this being the duty of every Muslim. With this in mind the Reformer (*mujaddid*) of the 14th century Hijra, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed formed an organization. The Holy Quran itself enjoins this, "And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful." This is the work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya movement.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 56)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say : O Allah, Owner of the Kingdom, Thou givest the kingdom to whom Thou pleasest, and takest away the kingdom from whom Thou pleasest, and Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest. In Thine hand is the good. Surely, Thou art Possessor of power over all things.

Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night; and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure.

Ch.3:26,27

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَلِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ
مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُعِزُّ
مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ بِرَبِّكَ
الْحَكِيمِ إِنَّكَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٦﴾

تُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي
الَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ
الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ
بِعَبْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

Allah the Real Source of All Power

The Creator of the heavens and the earth is obviously their Owner, and is therefore in reality their ruler. Man comes into the world empty handed and departs to his grave without any material possessions. The question that comes to mind is why is it that apparently man seems to be the ruler while Allah, the Most High, appears to be in the background? The Holy Quran, which is truly an amazing book, provides the answer to this important question in the following verse, “ And when thy Lord said to the angels, I am going to place a ruler in the earth” (2:30). This of course is a reference to mankind. Man should therefore not forget that he is only the delegate of the

real Sovereign — Allah. A delegate who does not act according to the directions, or proves himself incompetent, is liable to be removed by the true Master, Who can deprive him of his power in the land. History bears testimony to this that many a great emperor, president or prime-minister who loses his political power, certainly does so reluctantly, thus proving that there is a Higher Power in control Who brings this about. The real proof of Allah The Most High being the, “Owner of the Kingdom,” is this, that He can give power to rule the land to whom He wants, when He wants and likewise deprive him of it.

It is then stated in the next verse, “And Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest.” The greatest attraction in power and government is that of fame and honor. The Holy Quran, however, tells us that attaining a position of power does not guarantee honor and respect for you. I have personally observed this, that a well respected person when he becomes a prime minister etc., is initially paid homage by the people and they turn out to celebrate his presence with colorful processions and loud proclamations. Very soon, however, he becomes the target of their criticism, falls from his position of grace and quite frequently is either forced to give up his power or returns home abased after losing badly in an election. Some of them are imprisoned or even end up on the gallows. Those who perform good deeds while in office and instead of working for their own selfish motives work selflessly for their nation do, however, receive respect and honor. Thus in the verse under discussion besides saying that Allah The Most High exalts whom He pleases and abases whom He pleases, it is stated, “In Thine hand is the good.” When Allah, the Most High, gives power to an individual or a nation, it is for their own good, if however they become involved in vice and rebel against Allah, they are deprived of their power. He does this also for the benefit of His subjects, for a wicked and cruel ruler brings his nation to great grief.

In the Quranic text that follows, it is stated, “Thou art Possessor of power over all things.” When a person or a nation is in power, they presume that they are in total control. In reality they do not possess the ability to either maintain their power or safeguard their honor. We witnessed the truth of this verse, that Allah is the Possessor of power over all things, in the creation of Pakistan. The Muslims were not only in minority, but also weak and lacking in material strength. The Hindus who were in great majority, were against the creation of Pakistan, and had declared their willingness to lay down their lives to prevent this from happening. The Sikhs who were a strong, warrior nation also had their swords drawn in resistance to this idea. Even the British, who were the rulers at the time were against this. In fact the whole world opinion under the influence of British and Hindu propaganda was not in favor of this idea. A group from amongst the

Muslims called the nationalists were also against the creation of Pakistan. Allah the Most High in Whose hand is all the goodness, did what He had willed for the benefit of Islam and the Muslims in the subcontinent. He informed His righteous servants of this ahead of time, and Pakistan came into being despite severe opposition. No doubt Allah is Possessor of Power over all things.

Allah the Source of Life and Sustenance

The next verse is, “Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night ; and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure.” The incidents mentioned in this verse occur everyday before our eyes, but we seldom think in terms of Whose intervention and handiwork they clearly signify. Who can remove the deepest darkness of the night besides Allah and bring forth the brightness of daylight? The night makes a man either totally useless, or at least affects his performance. In the bright light of the day when he is working efficiently and earning wealth, he may not wish for the night to come, but Who can prevent this from happening? Similarly human beings, animals and plants evolve from a state of nothingness to living organisms while at the same time living things die. All of this being quite essential although mankind is totally helpless in the face of these events. While discussing life and death, I am reminded of the scientific truth that cells within the human body are constantly undergoing a cycle of death and regeneration. In fact within a period of three years, major portion of the cells within the human body are regenerated. Thus the process of life and death is itself being carried out every moment within the human body. Similarly the whole human race is making a constant effort to find abundant and better sources of food, which man cannot improve or increase with his own effort or authority. I would like to mention over here that the Arabic word for sustenance (*rizq*), does not only stand for food items, in fact all that is given to man by Allah is included, and wealth is at the top of this list. Who can earn whatever he desires? It is my lifelong experience and observation that those given wealth in abundance are frequently not superior in capabilities or intellect to those who are not. In fact it is true that Allah gives abundance of sustenance to whom He desires.

This external physical cycle of life and death has been described to explain inner and spiritual matters. You might remember that in the previous verse, it was stated that Allah, the Most High, Who is the Real Owner of the Kingdom, can give it to whomsoever He pleases. Like individuals, nations that become independent are able to govern themselves. In this

verse they are cautioned not to forget God on receiving independence and sovereignty. Not only can they lose such liberties once again, but the outbreak and the mitigation of difficulties, which has been allegorically likened to the night and the day, is also in the hands of Allah. He can bring such difficulties upon them in order to chastise them or to test their abilities. They should show repentance, remain patient and steadfast, and ask for Divine protection, in the face of such difficulties, for He not only brings in the darkness of the night but also replaces it with the brightness of the day. Similarly, after remaining in bondage for centuries, when a nation becomes dead, it is advised not to despair but instead to work hard and beseech Allah's assistance for only He can bring the dead back to life. On the other hand, although a nation may have gained its freedom and the dark night of difficulties and hardships may have dissipated, life may still become miserable if the means of one's sustenance are constrained. Sustenance (*rizq*) does not only signify food and drink, but stands for wealth and all the blessings which are given to man by Allah, the Most High. One can only enjoy liberty and self rule when he gets all of this. However, on being given all of this i.e., freedom, independence, respect, a living nation and abundance of sustenance, man has a tendency to lose awareness of the Divine. This, despite the fact that nations who received such blessings in the past, were deprived of them because of ingratitude, misdeeds and rebellion against God. The history of human race bears witness to this fact. If upon being blessed with similar favors, we, as Muslims also lose awareness of the Divine, commit evil deeds and manifest rebellion towards God then we stand to face a similar fate. There is another aspect of the meaning of these verses which is closely linked to our times. This if Allah pleases, I will discuss in the next lesson.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 57)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah , the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: O Allah, Owner of the Kingdom, Thou givest the kingdom to whom Thou pleasest, and takest away the kingdom from whom Thou pleasest, and Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest. In Thine hand is the good. Surely, Thou art Possessor of power over all things.

Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night; and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure.

(Ch.3:26,27)

In my previous lesson on these verses I had mentioned that the heavens and earth obviously belong to One Who has created them, and He Who owns them is indeed their real Ruler. Man who comes to this world empty handed from his mother’s womb and leaves it in a similar state, is in fact a vicegerent of the real Master. From amongst mankind He gives power to whom he wants, and takes away power from whom he wants, despite the fact that man may exert his utmost effort to stay in power. The Quranic words, “In Thine hand is the good,” indicate that Allah gives power to someone for the sake of goodness and if that person loses it, it is his own fault.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَلِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ
مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَ
تُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۗ بِيَدِكَ
الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۝

تُؤَلِّجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي
اللَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ
الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَنْ تَشَاءُ
بِعَذْرِ حِسَابٍ ۝

Western domination prophesied by the Holy Quran

Power can belong to an individual or a nation. In the last few centuries, on an inter-national level, one cannot site a global historical example similar in scope to the worldwide western domination. A case in point is that of the British who rose as a small island nation and eventually dominated the whole world. They would proudly remark that the sun never sets on the British empire. The British empire was marked in red on the world maps of the era and one could see the red color everywhere on the map. Besides the British, other western nations had their own colonies spread throughout Africa, Asia and the West Indies. Was such international domination achieved by these nations on their own? This was certainly not the case. The Quranic verses under discussion tell us that the giving of the kingdom is in the hands of Allah The Most High. This was a manifestation of His Will and was prophesied in the Holy Quran ahead of time in the verse, “Even when *Gog* and *Magog* are let loose and they sally forth from every elevated place” (21:96). The commentators of the Holy Quran and the preachers had conceptualized the *Gog* and *Magog* as a strange creation. This opinion did not change until the *Imam* and the *Mujjadid* (Reformer) of the 14th century, *Hijra* Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, upon receiving revelation from Allah, the Most High, pointed out that *Gog and Magog* were the western Christian nations who were let loose in this age. Not only did he identify them, but also pointed out that their letting loose meant their coming out of their small nation states, where they were confined, and gaining world dominance. Their sallying forth from every elevated place, which the Holy Quran mentions, indicates that they will take possession of all the places of importance that were worth taking.

People at the time did not understand or appreciate this exposition of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. Now, however, they all seem to understand. For example, the famous poet and philosopher of the East, Doctor Sir Muhammad Iqbal, has written,

“All the armies of the Gog and Magog have been let loose
The eye of the Muslim should behold this explanation of the
(Quranic) word *yansilūn*” (See above verse 21: 96).

Scope and objective of Western domination

Maulana Muhammad Ali, the famous commentator of the Holy Quran, has also given a unique explanation of the sallying forth of Gog and Magog from every elevated place. In his book, the History of the Ahmadiyya Movement, on page 114 he states, “This can have only one meaning, that Europe will dominate the world. In fact, by using the phrase *kulli hadabin* (every elevated place), it is indicated that this domination will include not

only the land and the physical elements, but will also be inclusive of their influence over the human psyche and their superiority in scientific knowledge, for the word *hadab* (elevated place) signifies all of this. The dominant influence of Europe over the rest of the world and its way of thinking provides truthful testimony in support of the Quranic statement, “and they sally forth from every elevated place” (21:96). Thus the matter, which at present has become the apparent means of weakness and domination of Islam is itself also a clear proof of its truth.”

For what purpose did the European colonialist powers use their political and military might and the effect of their scientific development over the thought process of the subject nations? It was obviously utilized to hold and establish their power in the colonies, in fact to perpetuate it forever. To accomplish this, they evolved a premeditated scheme to convert the subject nations to their own religion, Christianity. According to this scheme, hordes of missionaries, doctors with Christian evangelistic fervor and teachers of missionary schools, belonging to both genders, were let loose in the towns and villages of the colonies. They received support from the local European officials who in those days were in charge of every district and branch of Government. The power of government was used to influence people to convert to Christianity. The colonial subjects of the backward African nations could only receive education, employment and medical assistance if they converted to Christianity. The people of the Indian sub-continent which had not yet divided into the countries of Pakistan and India, were somewhat more sophisticated. They were, however, also enticed to accept Christianity by the offer of educational opportunities and medical assistance through missionary schools, colleges and medical dispensaries. In addition to this, employment opportunities, land grants, favorable business contracts and all other forms of facilities were offered.

Historical and documentary evidence can be cited in support of this statement, that it was the official policy of the British Government to encourage conversion of its colonial subjects to Christianity. In the Urdu publication *Ulama-i-haq aur unke mujahiddana kar-namay* translated by Syed Muhammad Mian Sahib (administrator of Jamiat-ul-ulema-i- Hind) on page 25 it is stated, that a member of the British parliament, Mr. Inglis, while speaking on this subject remarked, “The Lord God this day has made us witness to the British sovereign rule over the Indian empire so that the banner of Jesus the Messiah may fly from its one end to the other. Every individual should spend all of his strength to accomplish the glorious task of converting India to Christianity and should not show any apathy in this matter.”

Mr. Charles Wood, the minister for India, who was in charge of the affairs of the Indian Government, remarked in his conversation with a

delegation which had met with him on this matter in 1862, "It is my firm belief that every new convert to Christianity in India, becomes a new link of unity with England and is a new source of strength for the empire." The British prime-minister stated in his speech to the parliament, " It is my understanding that we are all united in our purpose. Not only is it our duty, but our own interest lies in this matter that we encourage propagation of Christianity as much as possible and spread it all over India."

Of note also is the opinion of the high ranking British officials in India. For example, the Governor of India Sir Henry Lawrence who said, " Nothing can strengthen our rule more then this that we spread Christianity through out India." Sir Donald McLoed who was the Governor of the Punjab remarked, " I want to express my firm belief that if we want to safeguard our rule in India, we should strive our utmost to convert this country to Christianity."

When the British Prime minister, the Minister for India and the Governor were all articulating this policy, it becomes quite obvious that instructions in this matter were also given to the British officers in India who were in charge of all the key positions in the Indian districts and subdivisions. These blatant pressure tactics led to the rebellion of 1857 in India. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, who was considered a friend and Well-wisher of the British, wrote in his book, "The causes of the Indian Mutiny", that the prime reason for the mutiny of 1857 was the blatant pressure of the British officials upon the people to convert to Christianity. The mutiny of 1857 was crushed by the British with their military might in such a manner that the people did not dare to rise again.

I will *inshallah* (if Allah please) in the next lesson elaborate further on the relationship of these historical events with the Quranic verses I quoted earlier in this lesson.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 58)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Say: O Allah, Owner of the Kingdom, Thou givest the kingdom to whom Thou pleasest, and takest away the kingdom from whom Thou pleasest, and Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest. In Thine hand is the good. Surely, Thou art Possessor of power over all things.

Thou makest the night to pass into the day and Thou makest the day to pass into the night; and Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure.

(Ch.3:26,27)

In the two previous lessons on these verses, I pointed out that one cannot find a precedence in the annals of world history which matches the universal dominance given by Allah to the European nations. In order to perpetuate this dominance, they attempted to convert the subject nations to Christianity. To achieve this purpose, they worked hard and utilized all their resources on a large scale, including their monetary and political strength. It is worth noting that these nations achieved political power and kingdom first, and used it later on to spread their faith. The Holy Quran fourteen hundred years earlier foretold a similar sequence of events in the verses under discussion, which point out that if Allah The Most High gives kingdom and rule, he can also take it away. In the verses that follow, the principles of Christianity are discussed. To predict these events fourteen

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَلِكُ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ
مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتَنْزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّنْ تَشَاءُ وَ
تُعِزُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ وَتُذِلُّ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۗ بِرِجْهِ
الْحَيْرُطِ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ۝

تُؤَلِّجُ الْبَيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَتُؤَلِّجُ النَّهَارَ فِي
الْبَيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ
الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ ذُو تَرْزُقٍ مَنْ تَشَاءُ ۗ
يَغْيُرُ حِسَابٍ ۝

hundred years ago in the exact sequence they occurred in this age, provides a clear proof that the Holy Quran is from Allah — the Knower of the Unseen.

The tribulation of the dajjal

Since the rule of the European nations extended over subjects of different faiths, Christianity had to challenge their religious beliefs in order to convert them. In this matter the Christian missionary movement did not feel imperiled by, or face a strong opposition from any other faith besides Islam. The reason for this was that association with God had permeated all these other religions on a scale larger than Christianity, thus facilitating the acceptance of its principles amongst the followers of those faiths. The missionaries, however, felt a grave threat from the pure monotheism of Islam, for falsehood is always intimidated by the truth. The offensive launched against Islam was therefore not only extremely powerful in comparison with other religions, but was also unique in that never before in its history had such a strong assault been launched against the faith of Islam. The spiritual eye of Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), after receiving knowledge of the unseen from Allah, the Most High, had perceived this danger thirteen hundred years earlier. Calling it the tribulation of the *dajjāl*, he made several prophecies which are safely preserved in the books of Hadith. As I have mentioned, in the annals of Islamic history never before was Islam in such danger or under such a powerful attack. I am going to relate only a few of the Holy Prophet's many truthfully revealed prophecies. In *Mishkāt* (272) he is quoted as saying, "From the day of Adams birth till the day of Judgment, there has never been a greater tribulation than that of the *dajjāl*."

As I have mentioned earlier, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), called the attack of Christianity on Islam as the tribulation of the *dajjāl* and he said on more than one occasion, "O men ever since the creation of the human race by Allah, the Most High, there has been no greater tribulation than that of the *dajjāl* on the face of the earth." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), called it a tribulation or trial because the European nations, employed their worldwide political and international dominance and made use of their economic and scientific progress to impose their religion upon others. The prophecies of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), mention how the European nations will extract treasures (oil and other minerals) out of the wilderness and will control the energy resources of the earth. Calling these nations by the name of *dajjāl*, he said, "He shall come upon a nation, and invite them (into his faith), and they will believe in him. The heavens will bring

down rain upon his command, and the earth will produce on his behest. He will then come upon a nation and they will disobey him, he will be offended, and as a result they will face famine and none of their wealth will remain in their hands.” In another hadith, after a similar prophecy, he states, “The rivers of the earth and its fruits will be made subservient to the *dajjāl* and whosoever will follow him, he will feed him and turn him into a disbeliever. He will deprive whosoever disobeys him and hold forth his sustenance.” The Holy Prophet also mentioned those people who will try to obtain worldly benefits by ingratiating these European nations. He particularly warned against the instigations of the *dajjāl* in these words “Whosoever hears of the *dajjāl*, should stay away from him; for a person considering himself to be a believer, will come to him and the *dajjāl* will create such doubts in his heart that he will become his follower.” That is exactly what happened in the nineteenth and the earlier part of the twentieth centuries. Hundreds and thousands of Muslim youth thus turned towards atheism, lost their faith and became worshippers of materialism and worldly gain. The hundreds of thousands who converted to Christianity were besides these. Their ranks included well educated persons, lawyers, barristers, landlords and other reputable persons including religious scholars.

The crumbling of the Cross and the prayer of the Promised Messiah

The Muslims were in such dire straits during the nineteenth century of the Christian era that Allah appointed the *Mujaddid* (Reformer) of the 14th century Hijra Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed also as the Promised Messiah. The task of crumbling the cross i.e., effectively counteracting the Christian religious propaganda and manifesting the fallacy of Christian doctrinal beliefs (was according to the prophecy of the Holy Prophet), to be done by the Promised Messiah who was to be (as the hadith of Bukhari states), “Your *imam* from amongst yourself,” that is, a spiritual leader from amongst the followers of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Hazrat Mirza, in accordance with the prophecies of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), accomplished this task so well that it was appreciated by the enlightened Muslim minds of the age. Even the flag bearers of Christianity accepted their defeat by prohibiting their followers from entering into debate with members of the Ahmadiyya Movement. The literature produced by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed and the organization he formed for this purpose, The Ahmadiyya movement, provides written testimony of how well the task of crumbling the cross was accomplished. At a time when Christianity was at its zenith, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed also predicted that Christianity as

a religion will be finished before the turn of the 14th century Hijra. Thus in the last few years, the enlightened scholars of Europe and America, professors of Christianity in institutions of learning, and members of the clergy have openly admitted, in fact have written books, that Jesus was neither god nor son of god nor did he make any such claim, and the doctrine of trinity is a later innovation and an erroneous belief. Some have even confirmed the declaration of the Promised Messiah that Jesus did not die on the cross, but escaped alive to Kashmir (where he died at an age of hundred and twenty years - in accordance with the saying of the Holy Prophet), and the grave located on *Khan Yar* street bearing the inscription, 'Prophet *Yuz Asaf*,' is in fact the grave of Jesus. These, however, are later developments.

A hundred years earlier the European nations and their religion were at the peak of their dominance. I have discussed in my previous lesson by submitting written and historical evidence, that they were using this material superiority to convert people to their faith. It was not therefore possible to neutralize this danger without severing their worldly dominance. Their pre-dominance and military might was such that as the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had predicted, "No one would have the power to fight them." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), had also made this wonderful prophecy that the Promised Messiah will overwhelm these nations by means of his prayer. This has been stated in the Hadith collection *Kanz-ul-Amal* (vol.7, page 3021) as, "I have created some of my servants, such that no one has the power to do away with them, except myself." It was thus the command of Allah and His messenger that the worldly dominance and kingdom of the European nations will be brought to an end by the prayers of the Promised Messiah. This is the reason why the verses that I quoted in the beginning of this lesson open with the Arabic word '*qul*,' which means 'Say.' The subject matter of the prayer that follows can be applied thus: O Allah You are the Owner of the Kingdom, You can give it to whom you please, and take it away from whom you please, You have given dominance to these European nations over the world, only You can take it away. Because these nations are using their world wide dominance in a wrongful manner to corrupt the faith and religion of people, take it away from them. For the purpose of carrying out this magnificent and historical prayer, the Promised Messiah had a separate room constructed, wherein he supplicated for many years. His prayer was accepted, and he was given the knowledge by Allah that world wars will break this dominance of the European nations, and the Muslims and other enslaved nations will gain freedom. I have discussed the details of this in the issues of the Urdu newspaper *Paigham Sulah* dated 17th-24th May 1978, 21st May 1980 and 20th-27th August 1980 and also in the English newspaper 'The Light,' dated 24th May 1978.

The remaining verses of this lesson can also be very appropriately applied to the events of this age in the following manner. While there is the supplication to remove the great tribulation created by the misuse of their worldly dominance by the European nations, there also is prayer for the freedom of the Muslims and other enslaved nations. For the verses state : O Allah You are The Owner of The Kingdom, You can give it to whom You please, and take it away from whom You please. You can exalt whom You please and abase whom You please. In Your hands is all good and You have power over all things. This is followed by the prayer that as, You change the night into the day and daylight into darkness in the material world, You can convert the darkness enveloping the Muslims and other subjugated nations into daylight. Just as You bring life to the dead and death to the living, give life to these dead nations, and bring death to the political power of the nations whose political dominance has brought death to the liberty of others. The Muslim nations at the time were mostly in the desert regions of the world. In response to the prayers of the Promised Messiah, deposits of oil were discovered in those desert regions. Today, these Muslim nations are the richest nations of the world, and there is no material comfort beyond their reach. All Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 59)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Let not the believers take the disbelievers for friends rather than believers. And whoever does this has no connection with Allah — except that you guard yourselves against them, guarding carefully. And Allah cautions you against His retribution. And to Allah is the eventual coming.

Say: Whether you hide what is in your hearts or manifest it, Allah knows it. And He knows whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

On the day when every soul will find present that which it has done of good ; and that which it has done of evil— it will wish that between it and that (evil) there were a long distance. And Allah cautions you against His retribution. And Allah is Compassionate to the servants.

(Ch. 3:28-30)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ٥٩

لَا يَتَّخِذِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكٰفِرِيْنَ اَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُوْنِ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذٰلِكَ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللّٰهِ فِيْ شَيْءٍ اِلَّا اَنْ تَتَّقُوْا مِنْهُمْ تُقٰتًا وَيَحْذَرُكُمْ اللّٰهُ نَفْسًا وَّ اِلَى اللّٰهِ الْمَصِيْرُ ﴿٥٩﴾

قُلْ اِنْ تُحِبُّوْا مَا فِيْ صُدُوْرِكُمْ اَوْ تُنۡبِئُوْهُ يَعْلَمُهٗ اللّٰهُ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ ط و اللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّحْضَرًا وَّ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوْٓءٍ تَكُوْدُ كُوْدًا اَنْ يَّبَيِّنَهَا وَّبَيِّنَهٗ اَمۡدًا بَعِيْدًا ط وَيَحْذَرُهُمُ اللّٰهُ نَفْسًا ط و اللّٰهُ سَرِيْعٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٥٩﴾

Relations amongst sovereign Muslims and Non-Muslim Nations

It has been discussed earlier that in the Quranic verses preceding this lesson there is a prophecy indicating Allah, the Most High, will give sovereignty

to the Muslims. In this lesson, they are warned of a matter of prime importance when they receive such domain. It is enjoined thus, "Let not the believers take the disbelievers for friends rather than believers." This discussion is about sovereign nations and their dominion, does it therefore imply that friendly relations with the disbelievers are not feasible at all? This most certainly cannot be true, for the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did himself periodically establish alliances with the Jews, the Christians and the Polytheists of Arabia. These included agreements to live together in peace, not to commit aggression against each other and in fact to assist each other in case of outside aggression. The words of the Holy Quran clearly point out that what's forbidden is to make friends with the disbelievers, "rather than believers."

Polytheists fear of Islam

In this verse the Muslims are first exhorted that unlike their fellow believers, they will not find fear of God as the motivating force in the hearts of most disbelievers. Thus they will find lack of congruity between what they say and what's on their mind and will find them not firm in their commitments. Historical evidence supports the argument that disbelievers frequently made efforts and covert schemes to destroy the Muslims. The underlying reason for this hostility was the pure monotheism of Islam and the fear of those possessing false beliefs of being annihilated by the truth. All other religions were involved in associating with God. The polytheists, which includes all disbelievers were thus united together in their objectives against the Muslims because of this common bond. They believed that if the Muslims were destroyed, Islam would also be eliminated along with them.

Muslims suffer as a consequence of not heeding the Quran

It is thus essential that the believers, whenever possible, should form agreements of mutual friend-ship and assistance amongst themselves. There are, however, non Muslim nations in the world today and they were also in plurality during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). All kinds of agreements including trade, finance and military pacts have to be concluded with them. Only one word of caution is urged for the Muslims in such matters, and that is not to enter into any covenant with these nations which is against another Muslim state. By not heeding this warning, Muslims have always suffered loss. In fact, in some cases they even lost their independence, as witnessed in recent times by the creation of Israel. During the First World war the British, through the offices

of the world renown Lawrence of Arabia, made all kinds of promises to the Arabs. They urged them to rebel and bear arms against the Muslim State of Turkey, under whose administration the Arabs were at the time. Very few of those promises were kept and the British ended up settling the Jews right in the heart of the Arab lands. The Palestinians numbering in the hundreds of thousands had to abandon their homes, lands, possessions and businesses and were displaced to other lands, where they live in great difficulty in a state of homelessness and destitution. God only knows what consequences ultimately this tribulation of Israel is to bring. The Muslims, however, have still not learned their lesson and I can quote quite a few recent examples of this which are well known to those familiar with the state of world affairs.

Rules of conduct for Muslims

The Holy Quran is a wonderful book of Divine wisdom, a few simple words of which engulf a vast depth of insight and perception. For example over here are the words, “— except that you guard yourselves against them (*minhum*), guarding carefully.” The Arabic word **from them** (*minhum*) in this context can apply both to the believers and the disbelievers, and thus lead one to appropriately deduce the following different meanings, all of which are correct.

- 1) Instead of establishing friendship with the disbelievers, you should fully guard yourselves against them — The reasons for which I have discussed in detail earlier.
- 2) After safeguarding your own rights, and those of other concerned Muslim states, it is appropriate to establish friendly relations with the disbelievers.
- 3) If you have been defeated by a disbelieving nation and are under their domination, for sake of your protection, you may appropriately form an agreement with them where you have no other choice.
- 4) If a situation arises where you perceive a threat from a Muslim state, then to safeguard yourself from such danger you may enter into an alliance with a non Muslim state against your enemy even though he is a Muslim. These sort of situations are conceivable and have actually occurred.

Aside from these special circumstances, if you form an agreement with a non Muslim which is against another Muslim state, then Allah sends you a strong warning of His chastisement in the words, “And Allah cautions you against His retribution.” In such matters do not have fear of other non Muslim nations or of danger itself, but have fear of Allah in your hearts Whose chastisement can overtake you in this world. In another chapter

grave warning against such a grievous sin which leads to the loss or death of fellow Muslims is given in these words, “O you who believe, take not the disbelievers for friends rather than the believers. Do you desire to give Allah a manifest proof against yourselves?” (4:144). In the lesson today we are also told, “And to Allah is the eventual coming,” you have inevitably to return before His Divine Majesty, if He does not chastise you in this world, you will definitely be subjected to it in the Hereafter.

The subsequent verse states thus, “Say: Whether you hide what is in your hearts or manifest it, Allah knows it.” In the field of international relations secret agreements are made all the time, which the concerned parties at times even try to conceal from their own people. Most of the time treaties are made as tactical decisions based upon deceit and as transitory measures by one of the parties, to be discarded at the opportune moment. Adolph Hitler was notorious for concluding treaties with his neighbors, to lull them into a sense of false security and to attack and swallow them into his domain at the earliest opportune moment. In matters of state and politics, with the exception of a believer who keeps his duty to Allah, deceit and deception is a common practice, whether it be false promises made with the people or by politicians amongst themselves. That is why the famous Chancellor Bismarck of Germany said, “Don’t believe a thing until it is officially denied.” Because lies, deception, fraud and breaking of promises in international dealings are quite common, the Holy Quran has warned the Muslims not to manifest such behavior, for Allah is aware of what is in their hearts. Not only is this the case, but it is stated that He is also aware of what is in the heavens and the earth. By the heavens is meant the existential states of life after death, the nature of which is all unknown. What is beneficial for mankind in the Hereafter is known only to Allah. If you as Muslims listen to what He enjoins, even if it means bearing some loss in this earthly life, it is to your advantage in the eternal life hereafter. What is going to happen in the future is known only to Him, it therefore behooves you to benefit from His knowledge and act upon His injunctions. In my career of public service, I have observed that political leaders practice all kinds of strategic maneuvering and intrigue to further their own advantage. Despite being in power and in apparent possession of all the strengths and advantages, their plans failed in the face of concurrent events. That is why this Quranic verse ends with the words, “And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.” He can dismantle the greatest of human powers and machinations in a split of a second. In any case they are sooner or later terminated by the event of death.

The Quranic words that follow thus move the heart, “On the day when every soul will find present that which it has done of good ; and that which it has done of evil — it will wish that between it and that (evil) there were

a long distance. And Allah cautions you against His retribution. And Allah is Compassionate to the servants.” This verse has wonderful wisdom in it. In my public service career, I frequently observed that very often in case of a president, a prime minister or a political leader who served his people, his services were not appreciated, and he was deprived of his authority, cursed and downgraded by the very same people whom he served. Such leaders would then become heartbroken and despondent. The Holy Quran tells them not to grieve, for although their nation did not appreciate their services, their acts of goodness were not a waste and they will receive credit for them in the everlasting life hereafter. The applause and appreciation of this worldly life being temporary and short lived. Although those in position of power may be able to do a lot of good for the welfare and benefit of the people, they may also be responsible for committing a great deal of inequity and oppression against the people. When they will witness the chastisement for these sins in the Hereafter, they will regretfully wish for there to be a wide distance between themselves and their evil deeds. I have witnessed remorse even in this worldly life when such chastisement overtakes these people. That is why it is stated that if Allah warns you of His chastisement, it is out of His mercy for He does not want you to suffer the consequences. All Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 60)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O you who believe, keep your duty to Allah (ita-qullah), as it ought to be kept, and die not unless you are Muslims.

And hold fast by the covenant (*ḥablillāh*) of Allah all together and be not disunited. And remember Allah’s favour to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes clear to you His messages that you may be guided.

And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.

(Ch. 3:102-104)

Islam the religion of humanity

These are the first three verses of the eleventh section of chapter Al-Imran. In several sections prior to this, the People of the Book are repeatedly invited to Islam with the following arguments.

- 1) Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the very same promised prophet about whom all the earlier prophets had taken a covenant of acceptance from their followers.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ
وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ٢

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
وَأذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً
فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ
إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ
النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ
لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ٣

وَلْيَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ
وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ٤

- 2) The spiritual center of the Holy Prophet i.e., the *Kā'bah* (House Of God at Mecca) is the very same House of God built by prophet Adam, patriarch of the human race. This unique position therefore makes it possible for all the different nations to abandon their spiritual centers and unite together in facing the *Kā'bah*.
- 3) From this House Of God was raised the last of the Prophets, Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, for whose advent the great patriarch Abraham had prayed. Prophet Abraham is accepted as a prophet by all nations. People should therefore, also accept Islam, which recognizes the prophets of all nations and their scriptures, to be from God. This recognition is granted despite the fact that these scriptures may have been lost altogether or altered by interpolation.
- 4) In the Holy Quran is gathered and preserved all those righteous teachings of these scriptures which needed to be saved for posterity.

In the light of these arguments, one can conclude that the Holy Quran and Holy Prophet Muhammad are in the unique position of uniting all of humanity. This was the sum and substance of the discussion in the few sections prior to this one.

Muslims warned against disunity

In this section, the Muslims are informed that if they are unable to maintain unity amongst themselves, and there is dissension amongst their ranks, they would be committing a grave sin and inequity not worthy of forgiveness by Allah, the Most High. That is why the first verse of this section states, “O you who believe, keep your duty (*taqwa*) to Allah, as it ought to be kept.” In a previous lesson I have explained that in the Holy Quran wherever the word *taqwa* is mentioned by itself, it means guarding one’s soul from evil, for it is only through evil action that man suffers spiritual distress and affliction. Where, however, the words *taqwa Allāh* are mentioned, it means guarding oneself against the accountability and chastisement of Allah, for nothing can be more grievous than these. The words *ittaqu Allāh* (meaning the *taqwa* of Allah) precedes all those injunctions and commandments for which there is a greater degree of accountability and therefore a proportionally higher degree of chastisement. In this verse the words, “as it ought to be kept (*ḥaqqā tuqāti hi*)” have been added on to specially emphasize this point that in the matter which follows there is a particular need for *taqwa Allahi* (i.e., guarding oneself against the accountability and chastisement of Allah). This is further underscored by stating, “and die not unless you are Muslims (i.e., of those who submit)”. The time of death is uncertain and it can overtake a person of any age at any time without prior knowledge. It is therefore, enjoined that your lives should be such that you

are in a state of submission to Allah at all times, so that in case of sudden death you are not caught unprepared.

Holding fast to the Covenant of Allah

Now follows the commandment for which all of this was a prelude, “And hold fast by the covenant (*ḥabli-Allāhi*) of Allah all together and be not dis-united.” Arabic word *ḥabli-Allāhi* also means the *rope of Allah*. The Holy Prophet himself has explained the *rope of Allah* as being the Book of Allah, the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran allegorically being likened to the rope that Allah has made to descend from the heavens, so that by holding on firmly to it Muslims can save themselves from losing their footing while facing the spiritual dangers that lurk in their earthly passage. By holding on to this rope they can also evolve beyond their earthly pursuits and ascend to spiritual heights, i.e., discard their earthly trappings for a higher and heavenly state. Like the group which stays together by holding on to a rope, Muslims should take firm hold of the Holy Quran and save themselves from discord. The Divine words that follow therefore state, “and be not dis-united.” Another great wisdom underlies the use of the Arabic word *ḥabl*, for besides the meaning of a rope, it also means a covenant. It thus also means that Allah, the Most High has taken a covenant from the Muslims, that they will remain united on the Holy Quran, and not become disunited by strife and sectarianism.

Somebody may point out at this juncture that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has stated “the difference of opinion amongst my followers is a blessing.” This only means that if in a certain matter a difference of opinion arises in good faith and is duly expressed, the benefit of expressing such opinion is that different aspects of the matter are highlighted. Its strengths and weaknesses become more apparent and such a discourse thus ultimately proves to be beneficial. If a controversial matter cannot be decided upon, Muslims should use the Holy Quran as the basis of settling such a controversy. The Holy Quran should serve as their Judge and law in such matters, and they are strictly forbidden to form sects on the basis of such a difference of opinion. Muslims, however, did exactly the opposite of this Divine command and formed separate groups and sects which labeled each other as having gone astray and heretical. Instead of deciding controversy on the basis of the Holy Quran, they chose to make their decisions on the basis of their own opinions, or the convictions of their forefathers. Continued emphasis on such controversy has led to a state of permanent civil war and dissent.

The lesson of history

Allah, the Most High, then draws their attention towards the corrupt state of the Arabs before the advent of Islam. It is stated, “And remember Allah’s favour to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes clear to you His messages that you may be guided.” The habitual infighting and strife amongst the pre-Islamic Arabs on trivial matters is a well known historical fact and I need not go into the details of this. I would like to quote only one statement from the book ‘Ins and outs of Mesopotamia,’ by an English author. He states in regards the Arabs, “A more disunited people it would be hard to find, till suddenly a miracle took place.” That miracle was the advent of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the revelation of the Holy Quran. This sacred scripture within a short period of twenty years led to brotherly love and unity amongst the most blood thirsty of enemies, an exemplary feat not met anywhere else in the history of mankind. A shining example of this was that when the followers of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) left Mecca and sought refuge in Medina, they were offered equal rights in their properties and wealth by their Muslim brethren residing in Medina although this was gracefully declined by the former. This miraculous change in the character of the inhabitants of Medina came about within a short period of a year or two of their acceptance of Islam. People who have experienced blood thirsty civil strife can really appreciate this change as being miraculous. If the Holy Quran was instrumental in bringing about a revolutionary change of such magnitude once, it can do so again. What is needed, is for the Muslims to accept the Holy Quran as their guide, to act upon it, and to solve their mutual controversies in the light of its injunctions. Thus they can avoid settling such matters on the basis of their own opinion or inflexible attitude, or the opinion of those before them. It was such controversy regarding the concepts of the jurists which led to dissension in the past.

Organization for the purpose of propagation

Where as the Holy Quran strictly forbids the formation of groups or organizations separate from the parent Muslim body, it permits the formation of one organization with the following mandate, “And from among you there should be a party who invite to good (*Khair*) and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful.” The Arabic word for good used in this verse is *Khair* which means Islam, which is the greatest good and the fountainhead of all goodness. In this verse not only is permission given to form such a body, but in fact it is made incumbent upon

Muslims to do so. The Holy Quran has also used the word *Khair* for itself as in the verse, “Neither those who disbelieve from among the people of the Book, nor the polytheists, like that any good (*Khair*) should be sent down to you from your Lord” (2:105). In the verses under discussion today whereas the word *Khair* has been used for Islam and thus the permission for the formation of a party to carry out this injunction for the propagation of Islam, the usage of the same word for the Holy Quran also indicates that the best milieu for such propagation is the Holy Quran. The world today is in dire need that the Holy Quran should be translated and presented to it, for it is dying spiritually without the life giving waters of this spiritual fountainhead.

This was the reason why the Reformer of this age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed, formed an organization the Ahmadiyya Movement for the propagation of Islam, and made the propagation of the Holy Quran as its objective. Besides the propagation of Islam, the Holy Quran states two other responsibilities for such an organization, “who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong.” This task of reformation has to be carried out amongst the Muslims at all times. It also includes the non Muslims who convert to Islam, for it is essential to teach them Islam which enjoins the right and forbids the wrong. The Reformer of this age realized this deficiency amongst the Muslims and reminded them of this Divine injunction they had forgotten. There can be no greater task than the propagation of Islam, which in former times was carried out by the prophets. With the advent of the Seal of the Prophets, Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) this noble task has been delegated to his followers. What the Seal of the Prophets has bestowed upon his followers, is certainly a great act of benevolence, for he has entrusted them to carry out the task which was previously carried out by the Prophets. Addressing the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has thus expressed his thoughts in one of his poetic verses:

We became the best of the nations because of you, O! most excellent of the Prophets.

By benefiting from your spiritual advancement only, did we make progress.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 61)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

When two parties from among you thought of showing cowardice, and Allah was the Guardian of them both. And in Allah should the believers trust.

(Ch.3 :122)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذْ هَمَّتْ طَّائِفَتَيْنِ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ تَفْشَلَا
وَ اللَّهُ وَ إِلَيْهِمَا وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ
الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

The true meaning of trust in Allah

I have chosen this verse, because it explains in an excellent manner the subject of reliance (*tawakkal*) upon God. Unfortunately, ordinarily it is misunderstood as a lack of individual effort, erroneously believing that in doing so one is relying upon God to accomplish all of one's undertakings. This interpretation is clearly against the decisive verse of the Holy Quran which states, "And that man can have nothing but what he strives for" (53:39). Does this mean that man should rely solely upon his effort? The answer to this question is, "certainly not!", for the Holy Quran also states, "And to Allah are all affairs returned" (3:109). The correct position in this matter is elucidated by the verse I have chosen for our lesson today. In this verse we are told to make a full and concentrated effort, even to the extent that if the need arises, one should be prepared to lay down his life for the cause of truth, and to rely on Allah regarding the outcome of one's effort. The believers are specifically informed in this verse, that Allah is the Guardian over them. Besides exerting oneself, it is therefore admissible to supplicate for Divine assistance. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has given a very fascinating explanation for this. He states that prayer is also a part of an individual's effort to accomplish a task. He has illustrated this with an interesting anecdote. A certain fellow asked his son to remove a heavy stone which was blocking the thoroughfare. The young man tried, but was unsuccessful. His father asked him to try again, which he did unsuccessfully. After he had

been unsuccessful for the third time, his father addressed him thus, “My dear son, your effort is still incomplete, for in spite of trying over and over again, when you were unsuccessful, you should have asked for my help.” Asking someone for help is therefore also a part of the effort. Man should first exert himself to the fullest extent and then also ask for Allah’s help. Effort on part of the individual is, however, necessary before asking for Divine assistance. I have also explained this point in my commentary on the chapter *Al-Fātiḥah* (which is in fact the interpretation of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed) regarding the verse, “Thee do we serve, and Thee do we beseech for help.” In this verse service with humility is the prerequisite to beseech for the assistance of Allah. First man should exert his utmost in the service of Allah, and then ask for His assistance, admitting one’s shortcomings as a human being in this matter. One should implore Allah to rectify his deficiencies and impart him with the ability to serve with complete humility.

Example of the Holy Prophet and his companions in the Battle of Uhud

Now we are going to discuss the meaning of the verse, “When two parties from among you thought of showing cowardice, and Allah was the Guardian of them both. And in Allah should the believers trust.” Maulana Muhammad Ali’s (late president of The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement) commentary on this verse, in his *Bayan-al-Quran* is excellent, and I will reproduce it almost verbatim.

Before commenting on this verse, it is essential to understand its historical perspective. The disbelievers of Makkah, in the time of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), after being defeated in the battle of Badr, made a strong effort to destroy the Muslims, and thus make up for their embarrassing loss. The following year with an army of three thousand strong, they gathered at Uhud, a location four miles north of Medina. Their intent in not advancing beyond this point was to draw the Muslims into battle outside the confines of the city of Medina. Those familiar with defensive warfare know well that the Muslim position would have been easier to defend within the confines of the city. The Holy prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) conferred with his followers on this matter before deciding whether to stay within the city and fight, or go outside and meet the enemy. Some of the companions were of the opinion that the Muslims should remain in Medina and defend themselves. The same advise was given by Abdullah ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites. The identity of the hypocrites within the ranks of the Muslims was unknown at that time. The majority of the Muslims were of the opinion that

the disbelievers should be confronted in battle outside of Medina, so that they should not get the impression that the Muslims were intimidated by them. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself was of the opinion that the battle should be fought while remaining inside the city. He also saw three dreams, which he interpreted as indicating that the Muslims would suffer some loss in this battle, and one of them seemed to indicate that defense within the city would be better. Because the interpretation of dreams is a somewhat doubtful matter, and there was no clear cut Divine guidance in this regard, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) followed the consensus of the majority. This is true respect for the majority opinion which the Holy Quran enjoins in the verse, "And whose affairs are (decided) by counsel among themselves" (42:38). Such was the noble example of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who gave preference to the opinion of the majority against his own personal opinion. In fact contrary even to the interpretation of his prophetic dreams. Thus, accompanied by a thousand men, he left for Uhud where the enemy forces were encamped.

Action of the hypocrites and its consequences

At a certain point where the movement of the Muslim forces could be observed by the disbelievers, Abdullah ibn Ubayy along with his three hundred hypocrite followers turned back. His excuse for doing so was that his advise in this matter had not been accepted. The object behind his mischief was two-fold. Firstly, he wanted to show the disbelievers that he and his followers were with them. Secondly, he calculated that in this way, by seeing the desertion of a third of their fighting force, the Muslims will get demoralized. Such a detrimental influence on the morale of the Muslims did occur to some degree as indicated by the verse under discussion, "When two parties from among you thought of showing cowardice, and Allah was the Guardian of them both. And in Allah should the believers trust." The Holy Quran has not revealed the identity of these two groups and Allah, by His mercy, has thus covered over their shortcoming, for both these groups did not eventually desert the Muslim force and fought alongside with them. The companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were so honest and their love for Allah was so exemplary, that both these groups voluntarily disclosed their identity. The reason they gave was that they were happy that this verse was revealed, for in it Allah has said that He was their Guardian. In addition it also states, "And in Allah should the believers trust", thereby confirming them from being amongst the believers.

Actions of the Holy Prophet and his companions

The Arabic word for trust (*tawakkal*) is from the root *wakal*, which means giving up one's affair to someone, and laying one's trust upon him. If one presumes, as is the common misconception that it means inaction on part of man and giving up of one's affairs for Allah to carry out, then the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his companions would not have gone forth to battle, nor gathered intelligence on the movements of the enemy forces, or sent out Muslim forces over far flung regions to check the enemy advance. They would not have made sacrifices, collected money, or gathered equipment for this purpose, and remained armed and ready around the clock to confront the enemy. All of this they did in spite of trying circumstances and adverse climatic conditions, and laid down their lives to accomplish this goal.

Action and patience, essential components of trust in Allah

What then is the meaning of the injunction to the believers to trust (*tawakkal*) in Allah on this occasion? Two groups thought of turning back from confronting the enemy. Allah, who was their Guardian, because of their belief, gave them strength not to manifest such weakness and informed them that believers trust in Allah. This indicates that despite the difficult circumstances, fighting for the truth was manifesting trust (*tawakkal*) in Allah and not doing so would have been contrary to this spirit. The Holy Quran has, therefore, clearly indicated that trust in Allah is the utilization of means and not their rejection. In fact one who does not utilize the means God has created cannot be called a believer. The true spirit of trust in God is to fully utilize even one's weak and limited resources and then leave the result of one's endeavor in God's hands. It is man's duty to strive, while God is the One Who puts together the results of such action. Trust in Allah thus strengthens a man's resolve under adverse circumstances and saves him from despair. That is why the Holy Quran enjoins patience along with trust in Allah. It states in verse, "Those who are steadfast and on their Lord they rely" (16:42). Also in verse, "Excellent the reward of the workers. Who are patient and on their Lord they rely" (29:58-59). These verses clearly indicate that it is man's task to act fully, to remain patient, and to trust in Allah even under the most adverse circumstances.

The Hadith also indicates that leaving the outcome in the hands of Allah after fully utilizing the means at one's disposal is the true meaning of trust in Allah. A certain person asked the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) whether as a result of his trust in Allah, he should let his camel roam freely? To this, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied that he should tie its feet first with

a rope and then trust in Allah. Similarly to those people who would depart for the pilgrimage without making adequate provision, and said they were relying on Allah for their sustenance, the Holy Quran enjoins, "And make provision for yourselves" (2:197). Not utilizing the means at one's disposal is not the meaning of trust in Allah. Conclusions drawn contrary to this from certain Hadith are not correct. For example this Hadith which states, "If you trust in Allah as it ought to be, He will provide sustenance for you as He provides sustenance for the bird which goes forth early in the morning with hunger in its belly but returns in the evening with its stomach full." To draw the conclusion from this that it is not essential to search and strive for the provision of sustenance is absolutely against the meaning of this Hadith. If the Hadith had stated that God provides sustenance for the bird without it leaving its nest, someone could have drawn such a conclusion. The Hadith, however, clearly states that the bird searches for its sustenance from dusk till dawn, and God satisfies its hunger. This clearly means that if you struggle and make an effort like the bird, God will provide for your sustenance.

Trust in Allah, saves one from idolizing the means. Allah has created all the resources for man to utilize them in a manner similar to Allah. Allah thus carries out all His works through the creation of means although we may not perceive them at all times. Idolizing or relying totally on our resources is associating with Allah (*shirk*). For example, Allah has created a cure for every illness, therefore seeking such a cure is in accordance with the Divine scheme. It is, however, wrong to believe that only the medicine or the doctor is responsible for nurturing us back to health. The Holy Quran has stated this with reference to Prophet Abraham in verse (26:80), "And when I am sick, He heals me," indicating that real healing is the work of Allah. Reliance (*tawakkal*) in Allah means full utilization of the resources at one's disposal, and leaving the outcome upon Allah. Prayer is also a part of the means at one's disposal. It is therefore imperative to make a full and concerted effort, supplicate before Allah, and accept the outcome as it may be.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 62)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth ; it is prepared for those who keep their duty.

(Ch. 3:133)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَى مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ
عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

Forgiveness of the Lord and the Garden of Paradise

In this verse the Holy Quran has enjoined man to hasten. The question that needs to be answered is under what circumstances is the human behavioral pattern of haste manifested? We observe that man either hastens away from danger, or towards something that he keenly desires. Also, he may hasten to complete a task which is essential, but for which the time is running out. As human beings we face all these circumstances in our lives. Before I discuss these, I would like to point out that in the verse above two things are mentioned towards which man is enjoined to hasten, i.e., the forgiveness of his Lord and the Garden of Paradise. The real manifestation of this garden is prepared for man in his life after death in the heavens. He is, however, given the like of it in this world if he guards against evil and keeps his duty. This is the meaning of the verse, “it is prepared for those who keep their duty.”

I have mentioned earlier that man hastens away from extreme danger, for example if he is being pursued by a rabid dog, or is being attacked with a knife, or the city in which he resides is under threat of enemy attack, or it is in danger of being flooded etc. Such hazards, however, only occur periodically. The ever present danger is that of the devil and the *nafs-i-ammārah* or the animal soul of man. In the preliminary stages of man’s spiritual development his soul is liable to be overwhelmed by his animal desires. The devil and the animal soul of man are thus his worst enemies, consistently bent upon leading him astray and leading him to his spiritual

demise. The individual who does not therefore expeditiously enter the forgiveness or protection of Allah, the Most High, is in constant danger. This forgiveness or protection is of two kinds. Firstly, it is from the harmful effects of the sins already committed. Secondly, it is the seeking of protection from repetition of such behavior, for it becomes easier to repeat and keep on doing an evil deed. For example, a person who takes a bribe faces double jeopardy. He may be apprehended for his misdeeds in this world, but even if this is not the case, he certainly will face the consequences of his actions in the life Hereafter. Another adverse effect of such behavior is that it facilitates repetition. Thus, it becomes easier to accept a bribe the second time around. Even if no one else is, Allah certainly is a witness to man's sin. A thief or a murderer hastens away in desperation from the scene of crime to avoid getting caught by earthly authorities. In spite of this, man commits one sin after the other and fears not Divine apprehension. However, when Allah takes him to task, no worldly authority can save him. In any case, he has nowhere to flee from the grip of the angel of death sent by Allah. In this verse, the Holy Quran enjoins man that before he has to face such consequences, he should repent and seek the refuge of Allah from the devil, from one's own animal soul (*nafs-i-ammārah*), from the consequences of one's evil deeds, and from the danger of repeating them. This is the course of action taken by those who guard against evil.

The other situation in which a man makes haste is when there is something so attractive before him that he wants to acquire it as soon as possible. A mother's love for her child exceeds everything else. That is why if she has something good in her possession, she at once calls for her child to give it to him. Who has created this love for her child in the mother's heart? It is Allah, the Most High, Who has created such affection. If one were to gather all the love and caring that the mothers of this world have for their children, it would pale into insignificance before the love and affection of Allah for mankind. That is why He calls upon us to hasten so that we may acquire the good things such as His protection and the Garden He has prepared for us.

The Holy Quran then informs us that this Garden encompasses the heavens and the earth. The actual Garden of Paradise is in the life Hereafter. It is spread over the seven spiritual heavens where man is to advance spiritually in his life after death, for the moral and spiritual progress of man continues after death. Man can, however, also acquire a Garden in his earthly sojourn. The Holy Quran states, "And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two Gardens" (55:46). There is a consensus of opinion amongst various commentators that this refers to the Garden of this earthly abode and to that of the Hereafter. The paradise or Garden of the Hereafter will obviously include all those good things that the Holy Quran

describes in detail. In this world, however, the righteous seldom acquire such material comforts as mansions, gardens with flowing streams, fine foods and choicest fruits. There is one Garden though which comes in the possession of every person who guards against evil, and that is the serenity and contentment of the heart. The Holy Quran has frequently described this paradise as to where, "No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve." Fear arises before the occurrence of an evil action, and grief follows it. For example, when a thief commits a robbery, fear of getting apprehended arises in his heart and when he does get apprehended or punished by the law, a feeling of grief overtakes him. We thus come to the conclusion that whosoever commits a crime or any other misdeed, the chastisement which he faces in this very life is the loss of serenity of his heart. A person who guards against evil, may go to bed hungry, but his sleep is restful. A thief, or a corrupt person, on the other hand may have his hunger satisfied, but his heart is devoid of contentment. In my Quranic lesson on the incident of Prophet Adam and Eve, I have pointed out that the Garden in which every human being is born is the serenity of the contented heart. This serenity is reflected by the innocence in the face of a child. The devil, by tempting towards evil and leading man astray, deprives him of this Garden of contentment.

Our youth who are under the influence of the western materialistic culture do not realize the worth of the serenity of mind. They are under the misconception that if the needs of their material comfort are satisfied, they have entered the Garden of paradise. As I have learnt, and so will they from life's bitter experiences that this is not so. If one has serenity in his heart he is in a Garden of heavenly bliss, even though he may be facing adversity in life and is deprived of material comforts. On the other hand, if a person's heart is full of grief, or it is consumed with the fire of greed, as expressed by the Quranic verse, "On the day when We say to hell: Art thou filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?" (50 : 30), he is in hell, although externally he may be living in the lap of luxury.

What accompanies man on his spiritual journey after death are not the luxuries of this worldly life, but the spirit that is within him. This spirit while inside the human body evolves through different stages as it is influenced by the effects of good and evil deeds and forms a personality of its own, which in Quranic terms is called the *Nafs* or soul. If this soul evolves to the highest level which is, the soul at rest or the *nafs-i-muṭmainnah*, it will enter the Garden as the Holy Quran states, "O soul that art at rest, Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing, So enter among My servants, And enter My Garden!" (89 : 27-30)

In short, only the soul which in this worldly life is in a state of contentment, will enter the higher external form of paradise in the life after

death. The last verse of this lesson states that the Garden whether it is that of internal serenity in this life or of a more external and palpable form in the life after death, has been prepared only for those who keep their duty and guard against evil. I will discuss this more in detail and also comment further on this verse in the next lesson.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 63)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden, as wide as the heavens and the earth ; it is prepared for those who keep their duty. Those who spend in ease as well as in adversity and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others).

(Ch. 3:133,134)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ
عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالصَّرَّاءِ
وَكَظِيمِينَ الْعَبْثِ وَالْعَاقِبِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ
وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Summary of the previous lesson

I have almost completed my discussion on the first verse of this lesson. In order to understand the remaining portion of this discussion, I will briefly summarize the points already discussed so that it is easier to understand the subject matter to be presented here.

This verse enjoins man to hasten towards a certain goal. Ordinarily man is inclined to hasten under the following circumstances.

- 1) If he is facing danger. Besides the ordinary dangers of physical existence which man has to face occasionally, there are two persistent threats to his spiritual well being. These include the devil and man's own animal soul or the *nafs-i-ammārah*. This is the beginning level of mans spiritual existence in which the soul is subject to control of his animal desires. Man is in constant danger of being overwhelmed and led astray, even to the point of spiritual demise, by the devil and his own animal soul. The Holy Quran informs us that refuge from both of these elements can be obtained by seeking the protection of our Lord, and urges us to hasten towards it.
- 2) Another situation in which a man hastens is when the task he has

undertaken is important and the time to complete it is short. Nothing can be of greater importance than man's own spiritual salvation and success. The time to achieve this great task is, however, very short and can run out at any moment.

- 3) Man also hastens towards something which is so very attractive and supreme par excellence as to be a great blessing for mankind. The protection of Allah is certainly such a blessing for man. Besides it, this invitation is also for the great blessing which is the Garden of paradise and is to be experienced in the Life after Death as seven levels of heavenly life. It can, however, also be acquired in this life in the form of the Garden of serenity of the heart. Whosoever has contentment of heart, he is in heaven, although he may not have the luxuries of life at his disposal. Moreover the one who achieves the serenity of heart in this life is also the one who enters paradise in the Life Hereafter.

The Paradise of the heart and the Hereafter only for the dutiful

This verse tells us that the Garden, whether it be that of the serenity of the heart or of the paradise in the Hereafter is prepared only for those who keep their duty. These are the ones who guard against evil. What an excellent Book of Wisdom is the Holy Quran! It tells us that if we desire the paradise of contentment of the heart in this life or its more palpable form in the Hereafter, the way to acquire both these states is only by guarding against evil. Evil, is what the Holy Quran forbids us to do, and that is why the Holy Quran is called the complete guide for those who guard against evil. When the evil elements are eliminated from a man's deeds, they becomes righteous. For example, man strives around the clock in pursuit of wealth which can be earned both by fair and foul means. If a person safeguards against dishonest practices, he will be earning wealth through honest means, which then becomes a righteous deed. Those who earn an honest living are the ones blessed with contentment, which is the paradise of the heart. Another aspect of the great wisdom that underlies the Garden of paradise being prepared only for those who guard against evil is that it would cease to exist as such if it were the abode of murderers, thieves, dishonest, corrupt and immoral individuals where they could commit such evil deeds. The Garden of paradise, will therefore, be free of crime and evil, without police or prisons, an abode where there will be peace and order, as the Holy Quran states, "And are met therein with greetings and salutation" (25 : 75). This would only be possible if entry to this dwelling is restricted to those who are so firm in the commitment to their duty that they cannot do criminal or evil acts. Such strength demands a striving of a lifetime. To achieve excellence

in the performance of one's duty is a difficult task and takes time. Man is therefore enjoined to hasten towards the protection of Allah, for he has a tendency to waste his life time in pursuit of evil, thus leaving little time behind for good.

Time for reformation is limited

Every human being is under the misconception that he is innocent and free of evil. Even those who are aware of some of their shortcomings, do not know what other faults are latent within them. These may show up only at the opportune time or when one is subjected to trial. To achieve perfection in guarding against evil, requires a lifelong effort and striving. It is not only that one may waste his life in misdeeds and remain oblivious to his spiritual calling, but also no one really knows how much longer he has to live. A child, a young person or an older individual, is unaware of when an accident, illness or death itself may strike. That is why the Holy Quran draws our attention to the immensity of the task of reformation, the very limited time we have at our disposal and urges us to hasten and seek the refuge and protection of our Lord (*Rabb*— One Who Nurtures us unto perfection). The one who has the good fortune of doing so, enters the Garden of serenity of the heart in this life. In fact, man was created in this state of tranquillity which we observe so manifestly in the innocence of a child. Involvement in worldly life, however, makes him lose this serenity. The question that comes to mind is how in this life can man remain in a state of contentment, or repossess such a state after its loss? The answer to this secret has also been unveiled by Holy Quran— the Book of Wisdom, in the two subsequent verses.

The Garden of Paradise achieved through spending of wealth

It states, "Those who spend in ease as well as in adversity," i.e., the dutiful are those who spend in ease as well as adversity. Ease and adversity are two extreme conditions within which are included all other states of variable intensity. Thus for example when we state that someone works day and night, it also includes the period in between.

The most time consuming affair of this world is the earning of wealth. Everyone spends his hours of the day and night in this pursuit. This desire for wealth may reach the degree of hellish proportions described by the Quranic verse, "On the day when We say to hell: Art thou filled up? And it will say: Are there any more?" (50:30). The greed of man for more and more is described as a sign of hell in the verse quoted above and is never satisfied. One who is earning a hundred thousand is anxious to make a

million and so on and so forth. This desire for material possession and consumption deprives a man's heart of its contentment. Thus we come to the conclusion that the peace of mind and contentment which are the signs of the Garden of serenity of the heart are lost by the unchecked desire for more and more material possession and consumption. Other religions have spoken against the earning of wealth and prescribed monasticism, nunnery and asceticism as a remedy to combat this illness. Such a course would, however, lead to the end of hard work, which is a great human asset, and lead to the demise of all human progress. Thus avoiding marital relationship which is part of this monastic commitment would cause the demise of the human race in a few years. The teaching of such religions to abstain from worldly life and earning of wealth cannot therefore be an appropriate one.

Islamic teachings regarding wealth — a unique means of spiritual development

Islam is the only religion that has sanctioned worldly pursuits and the earning of wealth by honest means. Even while earning wealth, the greed and fire for the acquisition of more and more can be ignited in the human heart. What then is the remedy for this? The answer to this question lies in what the Holy Quran has stated over here. It enjoins us to spend in the way of Allah no matter what our state of finances may be. The Holy Quran describes in detail all the matters in which such spending is enjoined. In the time of need, the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would give all their wealth in the way of Allah. Hazrat Abu Bakr manifested this spirit of sacrifice by giving up all that he had in his house in the way of Allah on one occasion, leaving behind his house as he put it in the hands of Allah and His Apostle. Hazrat Usman, another noble companion similarly gave large amounts of his wealth in the way of Allah, including hundreds and thousands of camels for the use of the Muslim forces. The poor on the other hand would exhibit a similar spirit of giving and sacrifice. Out of the pittance in dates that they earned as wages for a days hard work, they would feed the family with half of it, and give up the remaining portion in the way of Allah. This was how the early Muslims complied with the Quranic injunction of spending in the way of Allah in ease as well as adversity.

Spending one's wealth only for the benefit of oneself, or one's wife and children is a basic animal quality. We observe that most animals share food with their mate and offspring. To rise from this animal to a human or a spiritual level is to spend one's wealth for the upkeep of widows, orphans, the needy, those burdened by credit and the sick, in other words to lessen the burden of the poor. Above all, to spend one's wealth in the way of

enhancement of the religion of Allah. Thus, practically give thanks to one's greatest Benefactor, Who incessantly provides for us throughout our lives. In the hearts of those who save their wealth only for their spouses and children, worship of low desires, niggardliness and the love of wealth ignite the quality of greed and hellish fire described by the Holy Quran as, "Are there any more?" (50:30). In contrast those who sacrifice the fiery elements of these low desires and open up their hearts for God and His creatures, their hearts are blessed with the coolness and joy which is the Garden of contentment of the heart. Thus, the earning of wealth which carries the risk of losing one's serenity not only becomes a means of enhancing it, but also at the same time puts out the fire of greed in one's heart.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

(Quranic Lesson 64)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

.. And those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others).

And those who, when they commit an indecency or wrong their souls, remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their sins. And who forgives sins but Allah? And they persist not knowingly in what they do.

(Ch. 3:134,135)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ ٢
وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ٣

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا
أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ
وَمَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَاعْلَمُوا
بِصِرْطِ اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ٤

Summary of the previous lesson

In my previous lesson I mentioned that the Holy Quran has promised two kinds of paradise for those who guard against evil. One of these is the garden or the external paradise of the Life Hereafter, the other being the garden of internal tranquillity with which the heart of such a person is blessed. This condition accompanies him in his journey to the Hereafter. The Holy Quran has unveiled some of the secrets of achieving and maintaining such a state. I also described in detail, how most of the human race is involved around the clock in an endless search to acquire wealth. This desire turns into greed for acquisition of more and more wealth in a man's heart and is likened to the appetite of hellfire described by the Holy Quran as, "Are there any more?" (50:30). Other religions have proposed monasticism, nunnery and asceticism as a cure for this spiritual malady. Such a course if adapted by whole of humanity would not only spell an end to all human effort, hard work and progress, but without marital relationship, the human race itself would end. These teachings are therefore not practical. Islam has endorsed the earning of wealth by honest means. By laying emphasis on the

spending of earnest wealth for the benefit of others besides the spouse and offspring, and for other good works, Islam has attempted to elevate man beyond the animal stage and to create in him the attributes or coloring of the Divine. Detailed injunctions in this matter are mentioned elsewhere in the Holy Quran. Spending only for the benefit of one's wife and children puts man only at the basic level of an animal, for all animals instinctively share with their mates and offspring. Unlike the hellfire created by hunger for wealth and greed, spending in the way of Allah, irrespective of personal circumstances of poverty or abundance, creates within the human heart the coolness of the Garden of Paradise.

Suppression of anger the key to serenity

In the first verse under discussion today, we are made aware of another action on our part which can help us acquire and sustain this state of tranquillity. The Holy Quran states that those who keep their duty are the ones who, "who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others)." All human emotions and desires carry the element of fire within them, but in comparison with anger they are easier to restrain. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has done us a great favor by informing us that anger is part of the flames of hellfire. We have all observed that anger can burst like the flames of a fire and under its influence a man can totally lose control, turn abusive or violent and even commit murder. Even if it is not openly manifested, the desire to seek revenge burns inside a man. All forms of conflict, break up of relationships including divorce, wars between nations etc., are provoked by the feeling of anger. Psychiatrist may advise against the suppression of anger, but in my opinion such advise is absurd. All the adverse situations that I have mentioned above, arise as a consequence of such behavior. Anger instead of calming down smolders on, resulting in internal and external difficulties, in the form of grief within and the hellfire of suffering without. Just as a real fire if not immediately doused, tends to spread and results in great loss, the fire of anger progresses, if not promptly controlled. This fact has been described in the Chapter *Al-Humazah* (104) of the Holy Quran, where this fire is described as first appearing in the hearts of men, and then spreading into the external environment and engulfing mankind like huge pillars of fire. If anger which arises inside, is not controlled immediately, it can erupt outside and result in anguish lasting decades and affecting the hearts and minds of men.

Consequences of uncontrolled anger

It is the mistaken ideas of modern times which have caused the lives of men

to be a living hell. I want to discuss this in detail so that those who come across this writing or hear about it can spread the word that the real remedy for anger is the one which the Holy Quran prescribes. We observe that the closest tie of kinship is the one between parents and their offspring. It would be appropriate if the parents tremendous love, tenderness and numerous acts of kindness towards their children were reciprocated by them with respect and obedience towards their parents. On the contrary, we observe that most young people in this day and age are unhappy and dissatisfied with their parents. They claim that the reason for this rift is the gap between generations i.e., the difference between their ages and their likes and dislikes. Such a difference is not a new phenomenon and has always existed. Children have always resented parental interference and advise. Religious influence which existed in prior times, by its endorsement of respect for parents and parental guidance, made it more acceptable. There was also a certain amount of fear of God in the hearts of men. In this day and age, religion and faith in God are no longer there and the problem is further compounded by the advise that psychiatrists give to get rid of anger. What we observe, therefore, are the consequences of these actions. As a result, the great majority of children are unhappy with their parents, and rebel against their authority. In extreme cases, this has resulted in open enmity between them even leading to murder. Similarly parents also do not suppress their anger and mistreat or physically abuse their children. In short, this relationship of love and pleasure for both parties has turned into one of pain and grief.

The other relationship which is the closest and extends over a lifetime is that of a husband and a wife. The difference in temperaments which exists between two individuals has always been there. Also the nature of this relationship is such that there is frequent contact between the two. A difference of temperament can, therefore, result in dislike and resentment for the words or actions of the opposite spouse. In the past such differences were tolerated. The influence of western culture has, however, unbridled the inner animal of man which by its very nature is incapable of suppressing its anger. As a result of this, mutual tolerance has been replaced by daily conflict, open fights, and a high rate of divorce amongst married couples.

Within the household, besides the relationship of the husband and wife there exists an interaction between the master of the household and his domestic employees. In the past such employees would tolerate any action of their master even though they may have disliked it. This is not the case now. They immediately show their anger and become abusive and disrespectful. They threaten to leave the job and at times may even become violent and commit murder. A similar situation exists between employees and

owners in factories, offices, stores and on the farms. Mutual tolerance has deteriorated significantly as a result of which employee shutdowns and other undesirable actions are quite common. Once again, this is because the animal within man has been allowed to go unrestrained, and a beast by its very nature does not know how to suppress its anger. The only remedy for this is the one given in the Holy Quran, i.e., the injunction to suppress one's anger. How very true is the Holy Prophet's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying that the real manifestation of strength is not to wrestle someone down, but the truly strong are those who can suppress their anger. This is a match of strength between a man and his animal soul (*nafs-i- ammara*).

Forgiveness and doing of good complement suppression of anger

On another occasion, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated that whosoever suppresses his anger and forgives, Allah fills his belly with faith and security. The Quranic verse under discussion also enjoins us, not only to restrain our anger, but also to forgive the object of our ire.

How great is the wisdom in these words! If one only curbs his anger, he still seethes and burns on the inside, however, if this is also coupled with the act of forgiving, the fire inside one's soul is extinguished and is replaced with a sensation of coolness. If one goes a step further, and does good to the one who provoked his resentment, then the feeling of peace and tranquillity that is thus generated in his heart becomes in reality the Garden of Paradise on earth.

Suppression of anger a Divine Attribute

Is this teaching of the Holy Quran beyond man's capacity to act? This is certainly not so. In fact, it teaches man the great moral attribute which is manifested by Allah every day. Are the actions of man not enough to provoke Allah's wrath? For example, association with God is quite common. The Divine ire that this provokes can be experienced to some degree by a married person who experiences spousal infidelity. Similarly atheism has flourished under communism in recent times. Even in those countries where communism is not the dominant force, atheism is increasingly popular. It is being said that either God never existed or He is (may Allah protect us from saying so) now dead. Can there be anything more disrespectful than this to provoke Divine wrath? Indeed are all the sins, evil actions and deeds of depravity that are committed in front of His eyes not enough to make Him angry? They certainly are, however, Allah suppresses His anger

and forgives man every moment of the day as the Holy Quran states, “and He pardons much” (42:30). In fact, He continues to manifest His infinite benevolence towards mankind. His Grace encompasses those who associate with Him, the atheists, the evil doers and the morally corrupt. There is a well known anecdote about Prophet Abraham (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). It is related that every evening he would seek out a wayfarer, feed him, and give him shelter for the night in his home. One day, he noticed that a person he had brought in failed to invoke the name of Allah while beginning to consume the meal offered to him. On being questioned by Prophet Abraham, his reply was that he did not believe in God. This answer made Prophet Abraham very angry and he asked the stranger to leave his house. Thereupon, Abraham received Divine revelation stating, “ O Abraham this man has always denied My existence, has been disrespectful to Me, and has even tried to convince others to follow his footsteps, but I never stopped his sustenance.” On receiving this Divine admonition, Prophet Abraham hurried to find the wayfarer, asked his forgiveness and brought him back to his house to give him food and shelter. This is a practical example of creating the moral attributes of Allah within oneself, something which the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has enjoined. This is also taking the coloring of Allah in accordance with the Quranic teaching, for no one suppresses His anger more than Allah, or is more Forgiving and Benevolent than Him.

The life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was an example of the manifestation of such High moral characteristics. There are innumerable incidents to illustrate his noble character. For sake of brevity I will refer to only two of them. During the Battle of Uhud, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) fell down to the ground after receiving numerous injuries from the volleys of stones, spears and swords directed at him. One of his companions asked him to pray to Allah at that moment for the chastisement of those responsible for these acts. Instead, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) supplicated before Allah with the following plea on their behalf, “O Allah forgive my people for they know not what they are doing.” This incident shows that not only did the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) suppress his anger, he forgave his enemy ,and in addition, bestowed a favor upon them by pleading for their forgiveness before Allah.

Also on the occasion of the fall of Makkah, he had opportunity to seek vengeance for twenty years of atrocities, crimes, murder and torture that he and his followers had been subjected to by the Makkian disbelievers. The bloodthirsty enemy that had committed all this barbarity against him and his companions, was now standing helplessly before him. They had killed and maimed many of his companions. For twenty years, they had made

every attempt within their power to take his own life. The woman who had arranged the murder of his beloved uncle, Hamza and committed the heinous act of chewing his liver in front of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was also there. It was also the opportunity to punish the savage who had murdered the pregnant daughter of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) with the thrust of a spear while she was riding a camel. How magnificent an example of suppression of anger, forgiveness and benevolence was set by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on this occasion! when he said, “No reproof be against you this day, may Allah forgive all of you,” with these words he exonerated all of them.

This is the high moral standard set by Allah and His Prophet. By meeting this standard man can rid himself of all his mutual conflicts, anguish, displeasure and anger. He can thus achieve the paradise of heart which not only blesses this life with true serenity and contentment, but also shows the way to the paradise of the Hereafter.