



The Light — U.K. edition

February 2009

The Lahore Ahmadiyya monthly magazine from U.K.

Published from London by: **Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore (U.K.)**
The first Islamic Mission in the U.K., established 1913 as the Working Muslim Mission
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Assalamu alaikum: Our next meeting —

Date: **Sunday 1st February**

Time: **3.00 p.m.**

Speaker: **Dr Mujahid Ahmad Saeed**

Topic: **Did Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad do service or disservice to Islam?**

Dars-i Quran and Hadith:

Every Friday after *Jumu'a* prayers.

Meetings of the Executive:

First Sunday of every month at 2.00 p.m.

Meeting of the Jama'at:

First Sunday of every month at 3.00 p.m.

Friday prayers and monthly meetings are **webcast live on:** www.virtualmosque.co.uk

Plea for Friday holiday for Muslims

by **Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad**

[*Editor's Note:* After Edward VII became King of the U.K. in January 1901, succeeding Queen Victoria, a ceremony to mark his coronation was held in India, under British rule, in December 1902 to January 1903. This was known as the Delhi *Durbar* (Royal Court) and was attended by Indian princes, *maharajahs*, noblemen and other leaders. On this occasion, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote the following Memorial to the Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon (who is referred to in it as "Your Excellency"). The English translation is reproduced below verbatim from *The Review of Religions*, December 1902, pages 496–500.

Note that the word *Muhammadan* was commonly used in Indian Muslim English writings of the time to mean Muslim. For example, Syed Ameer Ali wrote a book entitled *Muhammadan Law*, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan founded the famous Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh. Note also that in the 2nd paragraph below, the mention of "the old Muhammadan capital of India" refers to the holding of the *Durbar* in Delhi. At that time the capital of British India was Calcutta.]

The Memorial

I, a loyal subject of His Most Gracious Majesty, the King Emperor of India, beg most respectfully to approach Your Excellency on the auspicious occasion of the Coronation of His Majesty with an earnest request involving the interests of the vast Muhammadan population of the whole of India.

The Muhammadans have no better opportunity for preferring their humble request than the joyous occasion of the Coronation of their King Emperor in their own country. They moreover deeply feel and are grateful for the honour which on this blessed occasion has been given to the old Muhammadan capital of India, and see in it a clear proof of Your Excellency's special regard for this loyal portion of His Majesty's Indian subjects, and, therefore, take this opportunity of laying before Your Excellency this their humble petition.

Your Excellency's humble memorialist is the founder of the well-known sect of Islam known as the Ahmadiyya Sect. I have more than a hundred thousand disciples living in different parts of India

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and belonging to all ranks of Society. This sect is specially remarkable for its efforts in uprooting from among the Muhammadans the notorious evil custom known as *Jehad*. I have written about sixty books and pamphlets with the object of remedying this great evil.

I am further encouraged to prefer this request to Your Excellency by the fact that Your Excellency has already shown your sympathy with Muhammadan religious feeling on more occasions than one, by restoring to religious use mosques which had been desecrated and by otherwise showing Your Excellency's regard for these sacred buildings. These tokens of respect for their mosques have kindled a new hope in Muhammadan breasts and for its fulfilment they look to Your Excellency alone. Since the advent of the British rule they have ever looked forward to the occasion for begging this favour from the Government but the absence of a suitable opportunity alone has kept them back from preferring this request. They are now fully conscious that if their expectations are not realised under such a kind and sympathetic Viceroy, and upon such an auspicious occasion, there is little hope of their being ever realised afterwards.

The Muhammadans are a people in whose practical life religion is the most important factor and nothing is calculated to more attract their hearts or make them overflow with loyalty and gratitude to the Government than a religious favour bestowed on them. Therefore the most excellent practical step which the Government can take to completely conquer their hearts is to give them a benefit which affects their religion. And on this auspicious occasion when every class of the subjects of the British Government expects some favour from the Government, the Muhammadans look forward for a religious favour.

Of all the religions obligations of a Muhammadan, the most important is prayer, and of all the prayers, none is so essential to be recited in congregations as the *Juma* prayer. The *Juma* is in

fact the greatest Muhammadan festival. The Holy Quran regards it as a holiday. A whole chapter of the holy book entitled the *Juma*, has been devoted to it. In that chapter Almighty God commands the Muhammadans to quit all their worldly affairs when they are summoned to prayer on Friday, to assemble in mosques and to say the *Juma* prayers with due observance of all the requirements of the Law. The person who does not act in obedience to these injunctions is regarded by the Holy Quran as guilty of a deadly sin and almost outside the circle of Islam. Far more stress has been laid upon attendance at the *Juma* Sermon and the *Juma* prayers than upon the 'Id. It is on account of this importance of the *Juma* in the Muhammadan faith that Friday has universally been observed as a holiday among the Muhammadans from the very earliest time that Islam took its rise. In India, Friday has been observed as a holiday for about eight hundred years, and on this account, Patiala and some other Hindoo States observed *Juma* as a holiday until very recent times.

India is largely peopled by three great nations, viz., Hindoos, Christians and Muhammadans. On account of the observance of Sunday as a holiday, the first two of these fully enjoy the privilege of performing their religious ceremonies on their appointed sacred day, and the Muhammadans are the only considerable class of people whom this liberty is not allowed; and strangely enough, of these three classes the Muhammadans are the only people who have been expressly enjoined in their sacred scriptures to quit their worldly affairs and assemble in mosques on a named day, i.e., the *Juma* or Friday.

Besides this importance attached to this day in Muhammadan Scriptures and Muhammadan Law, Friday has a great importance and sanctity according to the doctrines of the Christian faith, for Jesus Christ was crucified on a Friday, and according to Christian belief, crucifixion is the source from which all blessings spring. The Jewish Sabbath also before their exodus from Egypt was Friday and the same day was observed as a holiday among the ancient Egyptians. Adam was also created on Friday, and it was on a Friday that Noah's Ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat. Besides being the sacred day of Muhammadans, Friday preserves the memory of so many memorable events that took place on that day.

On these grounds I humbly pray Your Excellency on behalf of all Muhammadans that Your Excellency be pleased to recognise Friday as a holiday in all public offices in the British Indian dominions.

The sympathy which Your Excellency has shown with the religious feelings of the Muhammadans by restoring to them the sacred use of some of their mosques of which they had long been deprived, inspires them with fervent hope that Your Excellency will grant them the privilege of being at liberty to attend in those mosques the *Juma* sermon and prayers which is the chief object of their erection and consecration. The mosques are but like the table on which meals are served, whereas the *Juma* prayers represent the meals themselves. The Muhammadans are fully confident that Your Excellency will not allow the defect to remain unremedied that the table which Your Excellency has so generously spread should not be supplied with bread.

If Your Excellency is pleased to grant this request, this one act alone shall win the hearts of the whole Muhammadan India, and overflowing with gratitude, the Muhammadans shall be drawn with a mighty magnetism towards the love and obedience of the British Government. Of all the favours which the British Government has bestowed upon the Muhammadans, this one indeed shall deserve to be placed at the top and written in letters of gold on the pages of history. It shall cause a deep and profound impression of the kindness and justice of Your Excellency's Government upon their hearts, and the feeling shall really be ecstatic when this great boon shall be conferred by Government on the joyous occasion of the Coronation Durbar in the presence of assembled Chiefs and *Raises* as a favour to its loyal subjects in commemoration of the auspicious Coronation of His Majesty. This act of kindness on the part of Your Excellency's Government shall moreover bring the two religions, Christianity and Islam, into closer relations. No other act can under the present circumstances give the same unbounded joy to the whole Muhammadan population of India. And this glorious deed shall ever shine as the most memorable event of Your Excellency's Government.

The Muhammadans are willing to have some of their unimportant holidays stopped if Your Excellency is pleased to grant them a holiday on Friday. If it is not possible under any circumstances that Friday should be made a whole holiday, a half-holiday may at least be granted in that case. The Muhammadans have every reason to expect this favour from a kind and benevolent Government which has equal regard for the religious feelings of all communities and which has already given a whole day to the Christians and Hindoos for the performance of their religious duties.

Though the wise Government can best judge the manner in which it can do any good to its subjects, yet from my personal experience of, and a personal contact with, large numbers of Muhammadans, I am bound to say that under the present circumstances the Government can place the Muhammadans under no greater obligation than allow them a holiday on Friday, so that they may not break the express injunctions of the Holy Quran requiring them to assemble in mosques the moment they are summoned to the *Juma* prayers.

I humbly request Your Excellency to give a careful consideration to this petition which I beg to submit in accordance with the desires of a large number of Muhammadans. Its acceptance shall furnish me who am always exerting myself to my utmost to create among the Muhammadans a spirit of staunch and sincere loyalty and faithfulness towards the Government, with new arguments, and enable me to count fresh favours of the Government upon the Muhammadans of this country. It is, therefore, my earnest request that Your Excellency be pleased to give this petition a careful consideration.

I have thought it unnecessary to burden the petition with other signatures because being the founder and leader of a Muhammadan sect, I represent more than a hundred thousand respectable Muhammadans who are comprised among my followers, and the request whose acceptance is prayed for, is the common cause of all Muhammadans, being based on clear and plain words of the Holy Quran. ■

Our comments

The "favour" which Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has appealed for here is not a material one, nor one for his own benefit or that of his followers only, but one which would have benefitted *all Muslims equally*, whether they were his followers or his opponents. Also we notice from his appeal that his loyalty to, and praise of, the government stemmed from the religious freedom that *Muslims in general* had been given. That included, of course, the freedom they had to criticise, oppose and abuse Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

The root cause of the problems faced by Muslims was identified by Hazrat Mirza sahib to be their neglect of the basic institutions of Islam, such as the Friday prayer and *khutba*, that were meant for their moral and spiritual reform. His task was to restore these institutions so that they serve their intended purpose. He was treating the root cause of the Muslim malady. Their political subjugation by other nations was a symptom or result.

Friday *Khutbas* of Maulana Muhammad Ali

by Mirza Masud Baig

[*Editor's Note:* The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore has recently completed the valuable publication, in 24 volumes, of the collected *khutbas* of Maulana Muhammad Ali, which he delivered from the year 1914 to 1951. These were to be found in the weekly issues of the Anjuman's Urdu organ *Paigham Sulh* over these years. As relevant to this, we translate below a section from an article by Mirza Masud Baig, then General Secretary of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore, about Maulana Muhammad Ali published in *Paigham Sulh*, 27 October 1976, on the 25th anniversary of the Maulana's death.]

The institution of the Friday *khutba* is of the highest importance for the reform of the life of the Muslim community and the education of society. Before the Ahmadiyya Movement came into being, the importance of the Friday *khutba* had greatly diminished among Muslims. The *Ulama* had issued rulings declaring Friday prayers to be non-obligatory under a whole variety of circumstances, as imagined by them. And wherever the Friday service was held, the *khutba* merely consisted of a reading in Arabic from an ancient published book, from which the congregation did not benefit at all.

Just as the Ahmadiyya community founded the system of *dars-i Quran*, or teaching sessions in the Quran, to make people interested in acquiring knowledge of the Quran — so that today other Muslims are also holding *dars* everywhere — in the same way the Ahmadiyya re-established the importance of the Friday service. The Ahmadiyya *Jama'at* started the practice of the *khutba* being delivered in the language of the congregation so that the hearers can acquire knowledge, receive moral instruction and are able to apply religion in their lives in the changing times. During British rule, the law that was passed giving Muslims leave for two hours to attend Friday prayers was due to a move made by the Promised Messiah and the efforts of the Ahmadiyya community. In short, the Friday service has a very great importance in the practical life of an Ahmadi.

Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Ali used Friday *khutbas* to the fullest extent for the purpose of teaching and training the *Jama'at*. Each of his Friday *khutbas* brought a new message, and he would address the congregation for about 45 minutes. The subjects of his *khutbas* were generally: meanings of the Holy Quran, needs of the *Jama'at*, national issues facing the Muslims, the importance of the propagation of Islam and making the Holy

Quran reach all over the world. His delivery of the *khutba* was like that of a well prepared teacher in front of his class. The substance of his *khutba* was always sound and solid, and full of spiritual inspiration. During his *khutba* there would be no repetition nor would it be a repeat of the previous week's sermon. Every Friday he came with a new lecture and he presented to the *Jama'at* a fresh, delicious and new meal. The congregation listened to his every word with rapt attention. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din once said that whenever he listens to a speaker he knows after hearing a few words what the speaker is going to say next and it is predictable, but with Maulana Muhammad Ali after each sentence you are waiting eagerly to find out what he will say next, as he gives explanations which have not been in the minds of the audience before.

During the summer months when the Maulana stayed at a hill resort, he sent letters from there addressed to the members of the community which were published in *Paigham Sulh*, substituting for his Friday *khutbas*. This enabled the teaching and training of the *Jama'at* to continue all around the year. Before leaving for the hill resort of Dalhousie, he would devote the last one or two *khutbas* to advising and exhorting the members on the importance of prayer in congregation, attendance at the Friday service, and regular payment of monthly subscriptions, and he would remind the workers to carry out their duties to the best in his absence. ■

Divine Protection for Ka'bah

*Friday Khutba at Darus Salaam,
London, 19th December 2008*

by Nasir Ahmad

Most of the last chapters of the Holy Quran are shorter than the rest of the chapters. There is a chapter which consists of just three verses, *Al-Kausar* (i.e., 'The Abundance of Good'). This smallest chapter in fact is a reply to the objection of the opponents of Islam launched against the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) that as he had no male offspring therefore after his death he will have no one to carry on his mission. But this chapter gives assurance that Allah shall grant him good in such abundance, and to his message and his followers, which will be unique and unprecedented.

Similarly, some of these chapters contain important historical facts about the final success of the Holy Prophet Muhammad which happened during his life. Among these are two such chapters,

Chapter 105 and Chapter 106, called *Al-Fīl* (The Elephant) and *Al-Quraish* (The Tribe of Quraish) respectively. The former chapter briefly mentions the attack of the Christian governor of Yemen on the Ka'bah and the latter contains prophetic news that the Holy Ka'bah and its keepers shall enjoy in the days to come tremendous blessings in the shape of abundance of comforts of life and everlasting safety and sanctity. It is interesting and amazing to find that all compilations of the sayings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) invariably mention that even during the Last Age, when Muslims will be very weak as against the dominant forces of Gog and Magog, Allah shall save the glory, sanctity and safety of Makkah and Madinah. Hadith giving signs of their dominance over all the lands and resources in the world is a vast subject. Here I will quote just three sayings of the Holy Prophet (saw) specifically mentioning that Makkah and Madinah will be safe from the domination of Gog and Magog.

1. Then he (*Dajjāl*) said: If these shackles of mine are untied I will leave no land untrampled by these legs of mine, except the city of Madinah. (*Kanzul Ummal*, Vol. 7, Hadith No. 2991)
2. And there will be no part of the world left which he will not dominate excepting the cities of Makkah and Madinah. (*Kanzul Ummal*, vol. 7, Hadith No. 2028).
3. And very shortly I (i.e. *Dajjāl*) shall be permitted to issue forth. So I will go forth and travel in the land and there will be no habitation which I shall not go through in twenty nights, excepting Makkah and Madinah. (*Kanzul Ummal*, vol. 7, Hadith No. 2988).

I may mention here that the signs about Gog (*Yājūj*) and Magog (*Mājūj*) in the Holy Quran and the Anti-Christ or *Dajjāl* in the Hadith are based on several visions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw). In one of these he saw a person chained in shackles in a church on an island. That is why the three sayings quoted by me are, as if, a person chained is talking to another person about his present condition and what he intends to do in future when he is released from there.

The story of Gog and Magog or Antichrist as described in the sayings of the Holy Prophet (saw) is amazing. The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement has truly interpreted it as referring to the Western nations whose extent of domination and influence we are experiencing these days and the Muslims are suffering from its brunt. Those who would like to read in detail are recommended to read Hazrat Maulana Muhammad Ali's brief but amazingly concise book, *The Antichrist, Gog and Magog*.

By the way, may I mention here that this city of London in its historical Guild Hall has two effigies named Gog and Magog installed on both sides of its main gate. In this Hall, on 9th November 1951 at the Lord Mayor's banquet, Sir Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in his speech, referring to the two effigies, said:

"It seems that they (i.e. Gog and Magog) represent none too badly the present state of world politics. World politics, like the history of Gog and Magog, are very confused and much disputed. I think there is room for both of them.

"On the one side is Gog, and on the other is Magog. But be careful, my Lord Mayor, when you put them back, to keep them from colliding with each other, for if that happens, both Gog and Magog would be smashed to pieces and we should all have to begin all over again — and begin from the bottom of the pit." (*The Times*, London, 10th November 1951, p. 6).

Now coming back to chapter *Al-Fīl* (The Elephant), it contains a warning regarding the fate of those haughty ones to whom wealth was the touchstone of greatness and who in their time and with their wealth and with their own hands brought agony to the Holy Prophet (saw) who was to undergo persecution after persecution. They were told that before their very eyes stood the Ka'bah which they believed to be the House of Allah and that they should remember the time when Abrahah, the viceroy in Yemen of the king of Ethiopia, came with his army, which had an elephant or elephants, to demolish the Ka'bah but suffered destruction himself.

The purpose of recalling this incident was to inform them that not only was the Holy Prophet's heart like the House of Allah but so, too, was the heart of every sincere and righteous believer. That is why the Holy Prophet (saw) is reported to have said the following words which Allah revealed to him: "Allah, Most High, said: The heavens and the earth cannot contain Me, but the heart of a true believer can." It is indeed a fact that if Allah resides in the heart of a man, there can be no greater House of Allah. And certainly Allah will ultimately come to protect him as He protected the House of Allah, the Ka'bah. Even the unbelievers of Makkah, his bitterest enemies, bore witness to this fact when they confessed: "Muhammad is lost in the love of his Lord." And in a later age, European historians had to admit that Allah was so uppermost in the heart of the Holy Prophet (saw) that he saw Allah everywhere and in everything. If he happened to see something good, or a flourishing habitation, he would exclaim: "This has pleased my Lord so He

has blessed it with happiness.” If he passed by a ruined place, or a ruined city, he would say: “It has been ruined because its people have displeased my Lord so He has destroyed it.” In short, the Holy Prophet’s heart was so full of love and praise for God that he saw the hand and glory of Allah demonstrated in each and every creation not only in the world but in the whole of the Universe.

The time when the People of the Elephant came to destroy the Ka’bah is an important date in the history of the Arabs. It is equally a memorable date for the Muslims as well, as in this very year the blessed birth of the Holy Prophet (saw) took place. And because of the important event of the attack of the Christian viceroy of Yemen and his miraculous destruction by tiny birds with pebbles in their beaks and claws, the year was called the Year of the Elephant.

As you all know, Abrahah’s plan was that the people of Arabia should visit annually his magnificent church built in San’a, the capital of Yemen, rather than the Ka’bah in Makkah. He hoped that in this way the Ka’bah would eventually lose its sanctity and the Arabs would be trapped into Christianity. But as the Arabs paid no heed to this church, he conceived the idea to destroy the Ka’bah so that when this central gathering point was pulled down, people would of their own accord throng to his church. When the invading forces of Abrahah reached somewhere near Makkah, they seized some of the camels belonging to Abdul Muttalib, the Holy Prophet’s paternal grandfather. Abdul Muttalib went to Abrahah and asked him to return the camels, whereupon Abrahah, in great astonishment, remarked to him: “You are asking for your camels and you make no mention of the Ka’bah which I have come to demolish!”

To this, Abdul Muttalib replied: “I am the owner of the camels so I have come in search of them. The Ka’bah has a Lord and Master Who will take care of it Himself.” And so Allah did save it in His own mysterious way.

On seeing the large army of these people with their pompous parade of elephants and knowing his people’s own inability to confront them, Abdul Muttalib evacuated the inhabitants of Makkah from the city and asked them to seek refuge in the neighbouring mountains. Before leaving, he held on to the latch of the door of the Ka’bah and addressed the Almighty: “We have no fear whatever. Man protects his home, so do Thou, O Lord, preserve Thy own House. Surely their cross and their might can never triumph over Thy power.” Before Abrahah could reach the Ka’bah, an epidemic spread through his army and destroyed it. A part of

the army was also swept away by floods (Muir: *Life of Muhammad*, page c). It must have occurred due to heavy rains, as it happens even now. The spread of the epidemic of smallpox was inflicted through the agency of flocks of birds. We find a report from Ikrimah mentioned in the well-known commentary of the Quran, *Ruh-ul-Ma’ani* by Abul Fazal Alusi, also from Yaqub in the commentary of the Quran, *Ibn-i Kathir*, which says that those on whom the stones fell were struck down by smallpox. Abrahah himself, his army men and even his elephant were afflicted by this disease. Most of his army men died of the disease and when he returned to Yemen, he died a totally broken man and his elephant too perished. Most probably what happened was that the birds had alighted on a swampy area that was filled with germs and had then flown away. Dried up pebbles from this place were picked up by the birds in their beaks and claws and when these fell on Abrahah and his army an outbreak of smallpox resulted.

If Allah, Most High, could bring about the destruction of a whole big army through a flock of small birds, why could He not make the powerful group of unbelievers at Makkah taste defeat at the hands of Holy Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his insignificant band of followers? Of course He could, and later events fulfilled this prophecy to the letter, for one can clearly see how the powerful armies of the Makkan unbelievers were overcome by a weak band of the Holy Prophet’s companions.

Plain as daylight, too, was the manner in which Allah, Most High, protected the Ka’bah, the House of Allah, from destruction, and also the believers, in each of whom the Holy Prophet had built a house of Allah and which he had purified of idols as he did to the physical Ka’bah itself.

There is a great warning in this: If any nation should try to demolish the house built by the Holy Prophet (saw), that is, Islam, and to destroy Muslims in whose hearts the Oneness of Allah and love for Islam have found root, then Allah will spring to their rescue just as He did in the time of the People of the Elephant.

In this chapter, specially addressed are the Christian opponents, who, like their counter part, the Christian viceroy of Yemen, are determined to destroy Islam and look with contempt at the belief in the Oneness of Allah, all for the sake of enhancing the glory of their churches and cathedrals and increasing their political dominion. Allah, the Most High, will give assistance to Islam through the weak hands of Muslims in whose hearts Allah lives, just as He did in the time of the People of the Elephant, because He, Himself, is the Guardian not only of

this House of Islam, but also of the belief that Allah is One. He can make use of any instrument, however feeble it may appear.

Today the elephants are represented by all kinds of criticism aimed at the hearts of the Muslims in the attempt to erase the love of Allah from their hearts, and replace it with something else — the love of this worldly life.

To be continued in the next issue.

The Opening of *Sura Baqara*

*Friday Khutba at Darus Salaam,
London, 26th December 2008*

by **Zahid Aziz**

“This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty.” — 2:2

The first chapter of the Holy Quran, the *Sura Fatihah*, contains the prayer: “Guide us on the right path”. The second chapter, entitled *Al-Baqara*, meaning ‘The Cow’, begins by telling us that the Quran is the book that will guide us. Thus it is a very logical opening and apt beginning for the second chapter. Even without linking it with the prayer “guide us on the right path”, it is a very logical opening, for it tells the reader what the purpose of the book is, which is to guide people. This refutes the common objection raised against the Quran that it has no organised arrangement. It is a most fitting beginning to a book, after its ‘preface’, for it to open with the statement: “This Book...”.

Title *The Cow*

What is the significance of the title of this chapter *The Cow*? Why is the cow so important that the 2nd chapter of the Quran, its longest chapter, which starts so near to the commencement of the book, is called by this title?

This name is said to refer to the incident in its verses 67–71, in which the Israelites were told by Moses to sacrifice a certain cow but they were hesitant and reluctant to obey this command. They only sacrificed the cow after trying to avoid doing it by claiming they could not identify which cow was meant. The reason they were told to sacrifice it was that they had started to worship it. Cow worship was prevalent in many cultures and religions at the time. Most famously, it is in the Hindu religion that the cow is regarded as sacred.

The reason for cow worship was that this animal played a central role in the establishment of human civilization. When human beings settled down on the land and formed habitations and cities, the cow or bull fulfilled their crucial needs. It gave them milk, a vital part of diet, it ploughed the land so that food could be grown, it provided fuel by its dung, and its skin could be used to produce leather which, along with wood, formed the basis of much ancient technology. The cow was absolutely indispensable to the physical life of people living in a settled society. This is why it came to be revered.

The cow is a symbol of the fulfilment of the physical and material needs of civilized man. The Quran relates that a king of Egypt saw in a dream that seven lean cows ate seven fat cows (and he saw also seven green ears and seven dry ones). The prophet Joseph, on being called to interpret this dream, said that the seven fat cows represented seven years of good harvest and the seven lean cows represented seven years of famine. They should store surplus food in the seven good years, to be consumed in the seven lean years. See 12:43–49. The cow was thus a symbol of material prosperity.

By giving this important chapter the title *The Cow*, the Quran is conveying the message that just as man needed the cow for his physical needs in his civilized state, similarly he needs spiritual and moral guidance given by revelation in order to live in that civil society. In settled societies, people had to deal with each other in many different, complex ways, much more so than when human beings lived as nomads and hunters in caves or forests previously. For this, they required increasingly advanced guidance, as given by the Quran.

By mentioning the incident about the Israelites being required to sacrifice a cow, and their hesitation and vacillation, the Quran teaches us not to worship the things that we need for the satisfaction of our material needs of this world, and that we must be prepared to sacrifice them from time to time to avoid becoming so attached to them that they rule us, rather than we ruling them. Hence the Quran says in the same chapter that while some people pray “Our Lord, give us (things) in this world” (2:200), what people should pray for is as follows:

“Our Lord, grant us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the punishment of the fire” (2:201).

The cow is the symbol of “good in this world”. But man also requires “good in the Hereafter”, i.e. his moral and spiritual good, which is supplied by the Holy Quran.

“This Book, there is no doubt in it”

Turning to the verse quoted at the beginning, the Holy Quran is the only scripture that speaks of itself as a book, introduces itself, and tells the reader much about itself as a book. Thus even just its two words “This Book” show the uniqueness of the Quran among all world scriptures.

The word translated as ‘this’ is *dhālika* which literally means ‘that’ (something remote) rather than ‘this’ (something near). However, it is also used instead of ‘this’ when speaking of something which is honoured. It indicates that the Quran will be greatly honoured and held in high estimation.

As to the statement that “there is no doubt in it”, one meaning of it is that the Quran leaves no doubt about what it claims to be. A person might not accept its claims but no one can be in any doubt as to what its claims are. The Quran tells us that it is revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad (47:2), its name is the Quran (15:1), its revelation began in the month of Ramadan (2:185), it is in Arabic (12:2, 20:113), it was revealed to the Holy Prophet’s heart through the angel Gabriel (26:192–195), it was revealed gradually, not all at once (25:32, 75:16), it has scribes (80:11–16), it will be collected in book form according to the will of God (75:17). It tells us how it should be read (73:4), when it should be read (17:78), how it should be listened to (7:204), and how it should be interpreted (3:7, 4:82).¹ In each one of these characteristics the Quran is unique among world scriptures. Questions have been raised regarding other scriptures, as to what they are, whether they are revelations or human writings, who composed them in book form and when, what were their original languages, etc. These questions create *doubts* about these books, but no such doubts exist about the Quran. As to the content of the Quran, no one has any doubt, not even the most hostile critics of Islam, that it came from the lips of the Prophet Muhammad.

“Guide to those who keep their duty”

The word for “those who keep their duty” is *muttaqīn* (singular: *muttaqī*). It may be considered equivalent to God fearing, pious, or righteous. In this connection two related questions are often asked. Firstly, Does this mean that the Quran is *only* a guide for the very pious, and not for the ordinary person who is a sinner? Secondly, if someone is already pious and righteous, why does he need the guidance of the Quran? It is argued that the words of this verse seem to suggest that the Quran cannot

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guide those who actually need guidance, but is a guide for those who are already guided!

The answer is that in the word *muttaqīn* the Quran is including those who wish to find guidance, however low or high a degree of piety they may possess. Being a *muttaqī* is a matter of degree. It is not the case that a person is either a *muttaqī* or he is not. The Quran has here dignified all those who have the sincere desire to be guided, though they may be ordinary sinners, by calling them *what they wish to become*, that is, God fearing or righteous.

Christian preachers are often declaring that they welcome sinners to join them, that Jesus came for sinners and not for the perfect, and that we are all sinners. No doubt the Quran provides guidance for sinners to lift them out of sin, but to keep on calling them as sinners is discouraging for them and it suggests that they can never rise above that level. So the Quran here is emphasizing the positive side of such people, by describing them as what they wish to become and what they should become.

On the other hand, the word *muttaqīn* here also indicates that there is no end or limit to the stage of righteousness that a person may rise to, and however high someone may have risen the Quran will continue to be a guide to him for further progress. From the spiritual novice to the *wali* of the highest order, all have a path before them along which to advance, and the Quran provides them with the light and guidance to proceed along it. May Allah grant all of us the yearning, strength and opportunity to progress along this road, *amin!*

1. The references given here are only to some selected verses. Other verses can also be cited in support of these statements.