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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 إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جِيعَاتٍ
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 (*adzalla*) 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 (*adzallana*) 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, *adzaltu 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 (*adzallani 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 أَسْبِحُكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ط 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 ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

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

قَالُوا أَسْمِعْنَاكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ 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'ī*. 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 مِنْكُمْ مِنْ مُنْجُونَ ۝

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 ﴿٣١﴾

قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ
مِمَّنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ
عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

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

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰتٰنَا الْكِتٰبَ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتَ اللّٰهِ الَّتِيْ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاَوْفُواْ بِعَهْدِيْٓ اُوْفٍ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَاِيَّايَ فَارْهَبُوْا ٢

وَاٰمِنُوْا بِمَا اَنْزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُوْنُوْا اَوَّلَ كٰفِرِيْهِ ۗ وَلَا تَسْتَفْرِزُوْا بِاِيَّتِيْ نَمُنَّا قٰلِيْلًا وَاِيَّايَ فَاتَّقُوْا ٣

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبٰطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ وَاَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ٤

وَاَقِيْمُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَاَتُوْا الزَّكٰوةَ وَاذْكُرُوْا مَعَ الرّٰكِعِيْنَ ٥

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

وَاَسْتَعِيْنُوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلٰوةِ وَاِنَّهَا لَكَبِيْرَةٌ اِلَّا عَلَى الْخٰشِعِيْنَ ٧

الَّذِيْنَ يَطُوْنُ اَنْهَمْ مُّطٰفُوْا سَرِيْعًا وَاَنْهَمْ اِلَيْهِ 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 Yaqoob (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-Fātiḥah*, 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 يُذَكَّرَ
فِيهَا اسْمُهُ وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ مَا كَانَ
لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ ۗ لَهُمْ فِي
الدُّنْيَا جِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ١١٤

وَاللَّهُ الْمَشْرِقِيُّ وَالْمَغْرِبِيُّ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَانظُرُوا
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 أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِن لَّا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالشَّرَاتِ

وَبَشِيرِ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَهُمُ مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاغِبُونَ ﴿١٥٩﴾

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ

وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾

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 اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ١

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
أنداداً يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ
أَسْنَوْا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ يَرَى الَّذِينَ
ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يَرُونَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ
جَمِيعاً وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعَذَابِ ١٦٥

إِذْ تَبَرَّأَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ
اتَّبَعُوا وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَهُمُ
الْأَسْبَابُ ١٦٦

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّ لَنَا كَرَّةٌ فَنَتَبَرَّأَ
مِنْهُمْ كَمَا تَبَرَّءُوا مِنَّا كَذَلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ اللَّهُ
أَعْمَالَهُمْ حَسَرَاتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِخَارِجِينَ
مِنَ النَّارِ ١٦٧

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

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

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﴾

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

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
المُؤْتُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ
فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالصَّرَآءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ
الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ ﴿١٧٧﴾

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

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
المُؤْتُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ 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.

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
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فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالصَّخْرَاءِ وَرِجَالِ الْبَأْسِ ط أُولَئِكَ
الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ط 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 عَلَى الَّذِيْنَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ﴿۱۸۳﴾

اَيَّامًا مَّعْدُوْدٰتٍ ۗ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيْضًا
اَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ اَيَّامٍ اٰخَرَ وَعَلَى
الَّذِيْنَ يُطِيقُوْنَهَا 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 يَرْشُدُوا ۖ

(١٨٦)

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 وَتُدْخُلُوا
بِهَا إِلَى الْحُكَّامِ لِيَأْكُلُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنْ أَمْوَالِ
النَّاسِ بِالْإِثْمِ وَأَنْتُمْ 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.