

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER AL-FĀTIḤAH (The Opening)

Quranic Lesson No. 1

Attributes of Allah	11
The human soul	13
Knowledge of the Holy Quran	13

Quranic Lesson No. 2

The wisdom of <i>Al-Fātiḥah</i>	15
Man's quest after God	17
All praise is for Allah	17
Proof of existence of the Divine Being	18

Quranic Lesson No. 3

Undeniable proof of Divine existence	19
Modern age of Atheism	20
Recognition of Divine Being through His attributes	21
Purpose of man's creation	21
Divine guidance to all nations	22

Quranic Lesson No. 4

Attributes of Allah are infinite	23
Four basic attributes of Allah	24
Lord of the worlds	24
The Beneficent, the Merciful	26

Quranic Lesson No. 5

Master of the Day of Requital	27
Concept of Paradise and Hell	28
Only Allah is to be served with humility	29
Asking for Divine assistance	30

Quranic Lesson No. 6

Man created for a higher objective	32
The path of the righteous	33
Testimony of a righteous servant of Allah	34

Quranic Lesson No. 7

Closeness to God achieved through the Religion of Islam	36
The Perfect Model of righteousness	37
Those who did not benefit from Divine guidance	39
A comprehensive prayer	40

CHAPTER *AL-BAQARAH* (The Cow)**Quranic Lesson No. 8**

Answer to the prayer of <i>Al-Fātiḥah</i>	42
Lessons to be learned from previous nations	42
Significance of the name <i>Al-Baqarah</i> (The Cow)	43
Allah is the Author of this Book	44
The Book of Guidance	45

Quranic Lesson No. 9

Authenticity of the Holy Quran	47
Meaning of the word <i>Taqwa</i>	49
Guidance for the dutiful	50

Quranic Lesson No. 10

Belief in the Unseen	52
Limitations of human vision	54
Vision of the truthful	56

Quranic Lesson No. 11

Proof of Divine existence	57
Basis of all human development	59
The spiritual eye	60

Quranic Lesson No. 12

Prayer the means of Divine realization	62
God is Omnipresent	62
The true spirit of prayer	63
Rules of prayer	64

Quranic Lesson No. 13

Prayer as a means of guarding against evil	66
Spiritual sustenance	67
Spiritual Ascension	68

Quranic Lesson No. 14

Broad concept of charity	71
Universality of Divine Revelation	74
Belief in Life After Death	75

Quranic Lesson No. 15

Message of the Quran is for all nations	77
Service with humility	78
Freedom of will	79

Quranic Lesson No. 16

Guidance for all nations	82
Purpose of Divine guidance	82
Uniqueness of man's physical and spiritual faculties	84
Man's tendency to follow the religion of his forefathers	85
The consequences of following and ignoring Divine guidance	85

Quranic Lesson No. 17

Purpose of man's creation	87
The metaphor of spiritual sustenance	88
Seven realms of spiritual development	88
Revelation a source of life for the spirit	89
A challenge for the critics of Divine Revelation	90

Quranic Lesson No. 18

Quranic teachings are practical for all times	93
A challenge and a prophecy	95
Stones as fuel of fire	95
The concept of Hell and Heaven	96
Spirit - the real sensor of pain and pleasure	97
Addendum to Lesson No.18	98

Quranic Lesson No. 19

Weakness of false deities	102
Guidance of the Holy Quran	103
The transgressors	104
Quranic debate with the Atheists	105

Quranic Lesson No. 20

The incident of Adam and Eve	107
Incident of Adam and Eve applicable to all of humanity	111

Quranic Lesson No. 21

Summary of previous discussion	113
Divine knowledge given through Revelation	114
Purpose of creation of Angels	117
Divine purpose of giving man freedom of will	118

Quranic Lesson No. 22

How Divine knowledge is given to mankind	120
Adam being taught all the names	121
Submission of the angels to man	122
The Devil and his refusal to submit	122
Concept of Paradise and the forbidden tree	123
Salvation of mankind in following the Quran	124

Quranic Lesson No. 23

Divine blessings on the Israelites	127
The cause of Divine wrath	128
Muslims warned	128
Covenant of the Prophet	129
Objective of prayer	131
Keeping up prayer with humility	132

Quranic Lesson No. 24

Muslims warned not to follow the ways of the Jews	135
Divine warning not heeded by Muslims of the present age	136
Spread of Islam in the West prophesied	138

Quranic Lesson No. 25

Quranic Philosophy of trials and tribulations	140
Prayers in adversity strengthen bond between man and God . .	141
Patience, a Divine attribute	142
Adversity a means of spiritual development	143
The Greatest blessing achieved by those who are patient	144

Quranic Lesson No. 26

The true meaning of worship of One God	145
Signs of the existence and Unity of the Divine Being in the universe	146

Quranic Lesson No. 27

Nature's testimony towards Divine unity	150
Submission to Allah appealing to man's intellect	151
Association with God, the greatest inequity	152
False deities unable to assist in time of real need	153

Quranic Lesson No. 28

Dietary laws in Islam	155
Why certain foods are forbidden	156
Dietary laws relaxed in times of necessity	158
Hadith relating to dietary prohibitions	158

Quranic Lesson No. 29

The true meaning of East and West	160
Condition of the Muslim religious leaders during the 19 th century	162
Minor degrees of righteousness exist in all man made cultures .	162
True righteousness lies in higher moral values	163
Quranic code of higher moral values	163

Quranic Lesson No. 30

Belief in the Day of Judgment, a highly effective deterrent against evil	166
Belief in the angels involves listening to the inner voices of guidance	167
Divine Scripture, a guidance in black and white	167
A human role model essential for the teaching of righteousness	168

Quranic Lesson No. 31

Islam discourages asceticism	170
Quranic philosophy of wealth	171

Quranic Lesson No. 32

Quranic Philosophy of wealth (cont. from the previous Lesson) .	174
Prayer and obligatory charity	175
Keeping up promises	175
Patience the greatest virtue	176

Quranic Lesson No. 33

Unbridled passions the cause of spiritual decline of a nation . . .	178
Islamic teachings suited to human nature	179
Fasting the means to regulate human passions	179
Those exempted from fasting	181

Quranic Lesson No. 34.

Control of the animal within self leads to spiritual progress . . .	183
Guidance for all nations	185
A practical demonstration of the truth of the Holy Quran	186

Quranic Lesson No. 35

Summary of the previous lesson	188
Purpose of man's spiritual journey	189

Quranic Lesson No. 36

Quranic expression an example of true eloquence	192
Divine philosophy of the creation of wealth	193
False means of accumulating wealth	193
Injunctions regarding bribery	195

Quranic Lesson No. 37

Condition of women in Arabia and the world before Islam	197
Holy Quran predicts resurgence of women's rights in the modern age	197
Status of women in Islam	198

Quranic Lesson No. 38

Quranic charter of women liberation	201
Criticism of the charter answered	201
Why men are given a degree above women	203
Public discussions on the subject	204

Quranic Lesson No. 39

An example of the purity of speech and eloquence	206
Disruption of family order	207
Quranic remedy for women who desert their husbands	208
Testimony of a woman in Islam	210
The marriage of a Muslim woman to a follower of the Book . . .	211

Quranic Lesson No. 40

Purpose of warfare	214
Similarities between leaders of Israelite nation and modern politicians	214

Divine criteria for selection of leaders	215
Trial of the Israelite forces	217
Divine criteria for granting victory	218
Quranic Lesson No. 41	
Monetary sacrifice required for striving in the way of Allah . . .	219
Spiritual development is the purpose of spending in Allah's way	221
The true meaning of intercession	222
The meaning of 'Allah'—there is no God (Ilaha) but He	223
Wrongdoing of the disbelievers	224
Quranic Lesson No. 42	
Why Islam discourages monasticism as a way of life	227
Wealth as a means of spiritual development of mankind	228
The purpose of man's creation in the words of a righteous servant of Allah	229
Quranic Lesson No. 43	
Concept of the Divine Being in other religions	
Concept of the Divine Being in Islam	231
Quranic Lesson No. 44	
Fighting with the sword lawful only in defensive wars	237
Death is not the punishment of apostasy in Islam	238
Holy Prophet's life—a magnificent example of religious tolerance	239
Freedom of will essential for spiritual development	239
Divine guidance necessary to save mankind	240
Holy Quran—a guidance with clear proofs	241
Quranic Lesson No. 45	
Truth clearly distinguished from error	242
Disbelief in the devil	243
Service of Allah the right way	244
Low desires and the devil	245
Belief in Allah the firmest handle	246
Allah listens and responds to the cries of the believer	247
Quranic Lesson No. 46	
Questions about the creation of the universe	249
Mankind's reformation possible only through reformation of the heart	251
Quranic Lesson No. 47	
Philosophy of accountability of the self	253
The human soul and its stages of development	255
Quranic Lesson No. 48	
Human soul the trust of God	258

The heart of man capable of manifesting Divine presence259
 Why man is capable of bearing the trust of the Divine spirit . . .259
 Allah’s mercy takes precedence261
Quranic Lesson No. 49
 Progress of the human soul262
 Belief with practice essential for human spiritual development .263
 Belief through Divine revelation264
Quranic Lesson No. 50
 How to achieve the objective of belief267
 The example of the Holy Prophet and his companions268
 Burden laid down upon the soul in proportion to its capacity . . .269
Quranic Lesson No. 51
 Limitations in religious law not to exceed those of Allah
 and His Prophet272
 Burdens in accordance with the Law of Divine Measure272
 Burden laid down to increase the capacity of the soul273
 Burden of man’s own sins274
 The prayer of one lost in the love of God276

CHAPTER AL-IMRAN (The Family of Amran)

Quranic Lesson No. 52
 Significance of the name *Āl-‘Imrān*277
 The usage of abbreviations in the Holy Quran278
 Allah, (there is) no God (*Ilāha*) but He280
 The Ever-living281
 The Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist281
 Verification of previous scriptures by the Holy Quran282
 The Holy Quran discriminates between truth and falsehood . . .283
Quranic Lesson No. 53
 Misinterpretations of allegorical verses by previous nations . . .284
 Definition of decisive and allegorical285
 Divine objective behind allegorical verses286
 Difference between the Divine and human perception of time . .288
 Relationship of the decisive verse to the allegorical289
 Those firmly rooted in knowledge290
 Perversity of the heart291
Quranic Lesson No. 54
 Summary of the previous lesson293
 Consequences of going astray293
 Similarities between Pharaoh and the Christian nations295
 Accountability in this life not on basis of belief296
 A sign in the Battle of Badr297

Quranic Lesson No. 55

Holy Quran prophesied the dominance of Christian nations . . .	300
Scheme to convert the colonies to Christianity	301
Christian onslaught against Islam	301
Defense of Islam by the Reformer (Mujaddid) of the 14 th century Hijra	302
Different elements employed in the conversion scheme	302
The fall of the empire	303
Higher goal of man's creation	303
The nature of Paradise	304
The path of spiritual development	306
Stages of the spiritual journey of those, "who guard against evil"	307
The doctrine of Divine Unity to prevail	308

Quranic Lesson No. 56

Allah, the real Source of All Power	311
Allah, the Source of Life and Sustenance	313

Quranic Lesson No. 57

Western domination prophesied by the Holy Quran	316
Scope and objective of western domination	316

Quranic Lesson No. 58

The tribulation of the <i>Dajjāl</i>	320
The crumbling of the cross and the prayer of the Promised Messiah	321

Quranic Lesson No. 59

Relations amongst sovereign Muslims and non-Muslim nations .	324
Muslims suffer as a consequence of not heeding the Quran . . .	325
Rules of conduct for Muslims	326

Quranic Lesson No. 60

Islam the religion of humanity	329
Muslims warned against disunity	330
Holding fast to the covenant of Allah	331
The lesson of history	332
Organization of the purpose of propagation	332

Quranic Lesson No. 61

The true meaning of trust in Allah	334
Example of the Holy Prophet and his companions in the Battle of Uhud	335
Action of the hypocrites and its consequences	336
Actions of the Holy Prophet and his companions	337
Action and patience, essential components of trust in Allah . . .	337

Quranic Lesson No. 62

Forgiveness of the Lord and the Garden of Paradise 339

Quranic Lesson No. 63

Summary of the previous lesson 343

The paradise of the heart and the Hereafter only for the dutiful . 344

Time for reformation is limited 345

The Garden of Paradise achieved through spending of wealth . 345

Islamic teachings regarding wealth, unique means
of spiritual development 346

Quranic Lesson No. 64

Summary of the previous lesson 348

Suppression of anger the key to serenity 349

Consequences of uncontrolled anger 349

Forgiveness and doing of good complement suppression
of anger 351

Suppression of anger, a Divine attribute 351

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 38)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

CH.2:228

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Quranic charter of woman liberation

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

Criticism of the charter answered

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

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

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

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

Why men are given a degree above women

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

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

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

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

Public discussions on the subject

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

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

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

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

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 39)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

CH.2:228

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

An example of the purity of speech and eloquence

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

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

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

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

Disruption of family order

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

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

balance order in the family unit would be disrupted.”

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

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

Quranic remedy for women who desert their husbands

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Testimony of a woman in Islam

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

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

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

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

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 40)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

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

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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلِكِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالَ لِلنَّبِيِّ لَهُمْ ابْعَثْ لَنَا
مَلِكًا نُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَ هَلْ
عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كَتَبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ الْآ
ثِقَاتِنَا أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَنَا إِلَّا نُقَاتِلْ فِي
سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَ
أَبْنَائِنَا طُفَلْنَا كَتَبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْفِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا
إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ط وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ
طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ
عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ
يُؤْتْ سَعَةً مِنَ الْمَالِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
اصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ
وَ الْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مُلْكَهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ط
وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٤٢﴾

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

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

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

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

CH.2:246-250

مِمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحِيَّةً
 الْمَلَائِكَةُ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمْ إِن
 كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ ۖ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ فَلَيْسَ
 مِنِّي ۚ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ
 اعْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ ۚ فَشَرِبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا
 قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
 مَعَهُ قَالُوا الْوَاطِقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ بِجَالُوتَ وَ
 جُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَتَيْتُمْ شُرَكَاءَ
 اللَّهِ كُفْرًا ۖ فَمَنْ دَعَا فَلَئِكَ عَذَابُ ۖ فَسَاءَ
 كَثِيرَةً يَا ذُنَّ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

وَلَمَّا بَرَرُوا الْبِحَاوَاتِ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالُوا اسْرَبْنَا
 أَفْرَعًا عَلَيْكَ صَبْرًا ۗ وَشَدِيتْ أَفْدَامَنَا ۗ وَ
 انصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٨﴾

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

Purpose of warfare

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

Similarities between leaders of Israelite nation and modern politicians

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

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

Divine criteria for selection of leaders

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trial of the Israelite forces

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

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

Divine criteria for granting victory

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

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 41)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

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

CH.2:254-255

Monetary sacrifice required for striving in the way of Allah

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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

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

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

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

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

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

Your asking for money is what I object to.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The true meaning of intercession

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

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

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

Wrongdoing of the disbelievers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 42)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

CH.2:255

The verse quoted above is the famous verse also known as *Āyat-al-Kursi* (verse of Knowledge). Its excellence has been described in the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and emphasis has been laid upon its recitation after the obligatory prayers. In the previous lesson I had mentioned that the Holy Quran tells us that the object of man's creation is not to earn wealth (as we so clearly observe around us in the world today), but to find Allah and strive for closeness with Him. There is no greater treasure than this. Love of amassing wealth and avarice can so influence man's heart and mind that his entire life is consumed by it, and he departs from this world empty handed. The perpetual search and love of wealth makes a man heedless of his spiritual development. In fact, it breeds immorality which results in criminal behavior, robbery and even murder.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Why Islam does not encourage monasticism as a way of life

For this reason, other religions, besides Islam, have condemned wealth, and consider worldly involvement as being extremely dangerous for man's spiritual development. They feel that the way to salvation is through becoming a monk, a nun or an ascetic. There are few individuals, however, who give up the worldly ways and the rejection of such monastic behavior by the majority of the human race indicates that it is contrary to human nature. If all human beings had become monks and nuns, human development would have been impossible, and the human race would have become extinct, as a result of the celibacy practiced by these orders. In addition, even spiritual and moral development is not possible in monasticism, as I will show later on.

Islam, is the natural religion of mankind. It does not prohibit any natural desire of man, but only urges their control as a necessary means to his moral and spiritual development. Let us, for example, consider the matter of wealth. Those who reject affluence and become hermits in a monastery or a temple, not only by their action declare worldly progress as unlawful, but also deprive themselves of many higher moral values. For example telling the truth in face of adversity, when it could be much easier to tell a lie, is an excellent moral and spiritual quality. A person secluded in a monastery, or a cave does not have the opportunity to face such a choice, and is therefore unable to develop such an excellent moral quality. Similarly honesty is an excellent moral and spiritual quality which can only be acquired if one gets involved in worldly affairs, earns wealth, and has the opportunity to be dishonest, or earn wealth by unfair means. If one rejects dishonesty and deceit even when money is desperately needed, virtue of honesty evolves in him in its true color, and excellent form. Similarly moral qualities, like purity and chastity cannot be developed by locking oneself in a convent, or a monastery. These higher moral values can only be developed when men and women while living together in the world and meeting, prefer chastity and purity in the face of all sorts of attractions.

There are great opportunities for men and women to attain higher moral values in the role of a husband and wife, or that of parents. For example, a husband who earns sustenance for his wife and off springs, and sacrifices his just needs to fulfill their needs is reflecting the Divine attribute of nurturing unto perfection. Similarly, a mother who deals with her children mercifully despite their shortcomings and weaknesses, and who sacrifices and faces hardship to provide them with all kinds of comfort, creates the color of beneficence and mercy of Allah in herself.

Wealth as a means of spiritual development of mankind

I can give hundreds of such examples, but I would like to revert to the subject of wealth mentioned in the preceding verse, which we discussed in the last lesson. Other religions have considered the acquisition of wealth as a barrier to communion with Allah. Islam, however, is distinctive in showing wealth to be a means of achieving closeness with God. Allah provides mankind with wealth through His attributes of being the Lord of the worlds (*Rabb ul 'ālamīn*), the Beneficent (*Al-Rahmān*), and the Merciful (*Al-Rahīm*). Even the most destitute of human beings is provided with considerable wealth if all the free blessings like water and air that Allah provides are counted. Allah has permitted man to earn as much wealth as he can with three preconditions. Firstly, the acquisition of wealth must be by honest means and all unlawful means must be strictly shunned, even if it means starvation. Secondly, wealth must be shared unhesitatingly with the indigent, the orphans and those in need, in line with Allah's attribute of beneficence, whereby Allah gives to all of mankind, without their having done anything to deserve it. In particular, wealth is to be spent generously for the need of religion, which includes importantly the defense and propagation of Islam. Failure to do so is culpable before Allah, as repeatedly stated in the Holy Quran. Thirdly, while earning wealth, man should not forget that this is not the real purpose of his creation, which in reality is communion with God. The way to accomplish this is to inculcate the Divine attributes within oneself by spending one's wealth in accordance with Divine injunctions. For example, by spending on one's wife, children, poor relatives, neighbors, widows, orphans, the indebted, and others in need, one inculcates the Divine attributes of nurturing, beneficence and mercy. Thus, wealth becomes the means of developing the Divine within man. Despite this, acquisition of wealth is not the purpose of man's life, but the lofty objective for which man, the best of creation was created, is communion with Allah. This is the greatest treasure of all. Only those who establish such a relationship with God can fully comprehend what a treasure and blessing it is to know God. This is why the prophets, saints, and the righteous servants of Allah ,after receiving this greatest and most excellent treasure, regard worldly wealth and riches as of no consequence.

The purpose of man's creation in the words of a righteous servant of Allah

The Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of the fourteenth century Hijra, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian was one such saintly person who had communion with Allah. I would like for you to read what he has written in a state of ecstasy on achieving such closeness with Allah. He states:

How unfortunate is that person who still does not know that he has a God Who is One, and Who has power over all things. Our paradise is our Lord. Our greatest pleasures lie with Him, because we saw Him, and found every excellence within Him. This treasure is worth taking even if one has to lay down one's life for it. This precious jewel is worth buying, even if one has to relinquish one's self for it. O! Deprived ones quicken your pace towards this fountain, for it will quench your thirst. It is the fountain of life which will save you. What can I do to focus your attention towards this good news? With what kind of drum beat should I proclaim in the streets that 'This is our God,' so that people would listen? What medicine should I prescribe for their ears so that they hear this message? If you give yourself up to God, then be certain that He will be yours. While you slumber, He lies awake for you. When you are unaware of your enemy, God will watch him, and destroy his plans. You do not know yet, the Omnipotence of your God. If you knew about it, you would never grieve for this world. Does he, who owns a treasure ever scream, or cry, or become despondent on the loss of a penny? If you knew that God will help you in time of need, then why would you, knowing about this treasure, be besides yourself in pursuit of worldly gain? God is a beloved and precious treasure. Be cognizant of His blessings; He is your Helper in every step you take. You are nothing without Him, nor are your means and schemes of any consequence. Do not follow the example of other nations who totally rely on their means. Like the serpent eats dust, they have consumed the dirt of their earthly resources; like dogs and vultures, they have partaken of the carrion. They have receded far away from the Lord. They worship human beings, eat of the swine and consume wine like water. By totally depending on their means and not asking for God's help, they have died a spiritual death, and the heavenly spirit has left them like a dove that has flown away from its nest. Their spirits are infected with the leprosy of materialism which has cut off their inner faculties. You should fear this disease. I do not prohibit you from relying on your means with moderation. What I forbid you is to become total slaves to your means like other nations and forget God, Who is the Provider of these means. If you possess real insight, you would perceive that God is the only truth, all the rest is of no consequence (*Kishti-e-Nuh* pages 19-20).

You will find a further glimpse of this enlightened concept of the Divine Being presented above by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed in the verse of the Holy Quran known as the *āyat-al-Kursi*, which will be the subject of my next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 43)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

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

CH.2:255

I gave an introductory commentary on this verse, commonly known as the *ayat-al-kursi* (verse of Divine Knowledge), in my previous lesson. In fact, there is a great depth of wisdom and knowledge enclosed in the few sentences of this verse. I will attempt a brief commentary of it in this lesson. The concept of the Divine Being that is commonly found in religions other than Islam, can be categorized into three or four types. One type is that of an inanimate stone idol carved by man which he has the power to destroy at will. A second type is that of an animal such as a cow which is inferior to him. Like all other animals, it is created from a non-existential state. It was born and will eventually die a natural death, if not slaughtered for its meat. The third concept of the Divine Being is that of a human like us. Like

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

all human beings, the deity was brought from a non-existential state to life in the mother's womb. Her blood nurtured him, and eventually he was born like any other baby. The deity felt hunger and thirst, possessed all human frailties, and eventually passed away. Such is the Christian concept of the Divinity of Jesus. If the Christians claim that the life experience of Jesus was different from that of a human because he was given life after death, it does not in any way make him superior to the rest of humanity which too has the same fate. In fact, the prophets of God and the righteous are all given a new life, immediately after death. The fourth concept of divinity is that celestial bodies, like the sun, moon, stars etc., are gods. Science has proven that these are nothing, but masses of heated matter, and gas bound by the laws of the Great Master and Creator. In this age of science and knowledge there was the widespread rejection of such concepts, and the consequential spread of atheism on a large scale.

Concept of the Divine Being in Islam

It is quite apparent that the human mind which is a material entity like that of other animals cannot independently acquire knowledge of the Divine Being. The concepts that man formulated independently were so flawed that they have been rejected today. It is, therefore essential that knowledge of His Being and attributes be given by God Himself. He certainly did give such knowledge in different revealed scriptures, but unfortunately these were either completely destroyed, or greatly altered by human hands. This is the reason why Allah Himself became the Guardian of His complete and Final Word, the Holy Quran. Even the critics admit that the Holy Quran we have in our hands today, is exactly the same as was revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The concept of the Divine Being is presented throughout the Holy Quran from its beginning to the end. The verse (*Āyat-al-Kursi*) that I am going to discuss briefly today, also presents this magnificent concept.

“Allah- there is no God (*ilāh*), but He.” As I explained in my first lesson, Allah is the proper name of the Divine Being. When we introduce someone, we first mention his proper name. For example, “This is Mr. Rashid Khan.” It is surprising that no other religion besides Islam has informed us about the proper name of God, although there are names describing His attributes. This is just like saying about someone that he is a Muslim, a very good person etc., but without revealing his proper name. If only the descriptive qualities are given without the proper name, the introduction is not only incomplete, but is also generalized because these qualities could be possessed by several different persons. The name Allah, even before Islam, was used in the Arabic language for the One and Only God,

and for no one else. The proper name Allah means, One Who is perfect in the excellence and goodness of His attributes, and also in their manifestation, so that His creation benefits from them at all times. It is not enough for someone to possess good qualities unless others benefit from them. For example, if a person is a great scholar, his knowledge is useless unless it is of benefit to someone else. The creation of Allah, the Most High, however benefits from His attributes all the time as is quite apparent from His attributes of *Rabb-ul-‘ālamīn* (One Who nourishes the whole creation unto perfection), *Al-Rahmān* (the Beneficent), and *Al-Rahīm* (the Merciful).

After giving knowledge of the name Allah, it is stated that there is no God (*ilāh*), but He. The ordinary meaning of the word *ilāh* in Arabic is One Who is worshipped, i.e., the One served with humility. In this one word a cogent proof of the unity of the Divine Being is given. The question is raised, in whose service is the whole creation obediently bound? This answer which was given fourteen hundred years ago has been confirmed by modern scientific knowledge, that the whole universe is one, and is bound by the same universal law. That is why even the atheist and Christian scientists have now finally accepted that this magnificent universe has all been created by, and is under the control of One Being. Since this whole universe, and even the human body is serving the One God with humility, mankind should also strive to serve the One and Only God. This can only be accomplished by completely following the guidance given in the Holy Quran.

The second meaning of *ilāh* is, the One Who deserves our love. This tells us that submission to God should be with love, only then can it be truly representative of genuine enthusiasm and sincerity. This is the kind of submission which can bring the most beneficial results. For example, the child who appreciates the favors of his parents, considers them his well-wishers, and follows their guidance enthusiastically, will benefit the most from it. If he does so reluctantly, he cannot reap the same rewards. The parental favors towards their offspring are nothing compared to the Divine favors upon mankind. He created the heavens, and the earth and made man His vicegerent upon earth. He made all creation submissive to man and blessed him with innumerable favors. He breathed into him His spirit, and blessed him with His knowledge, and provided him with guidance, so that by following it he can get closer to Him. As I have pointed out in my previous lesson, there is nothing more satisfying, rewarding, or of value that can equal this relationship. The third meaning of *ilāh* is, the One Who is the desired objective or purpose of life. Recognition of the Divine Being and establishment of a relationship with Him is the purpose of man's creation, and giving man knowledge and guidance to accomplish this is the greatest Divine favor upon mankind. Whosoever sets up associates with Allah, fails to achieve the purpose of his creation.

The verse then proceeds to state, “the Ever-living (*Al-Hayy*), the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist.” The Arabic word *Hayy* means One Who was always living, and will live forever. By using the Arabic letter *Alif* and *Lām*, which makes *Al*, with the word *Hayy*, indicate that the Divine Being is also Unique in this matter, i.e., He is the Only One Who was always living and will live forever. Scientists agree that the universe has finite life, though perhaps a long one by our reckoning. There was a beginning, and there will be an end. This is true for everything in the universe, including humans and all other living beings. Every one amongst us did not exist at one time, and will eventually die. The other meaning of *Hayy* is that Allah is not only Himself Ever-Living, but He also gives life to others. This meaning of the word *Hayy* informs us that Allah is our Creator and the Source of life for each one of us. Not only is Allah the initiator of life, but in accordance with the first meaning of the Arabic word *Hayy*, i.e., the One Who is Ever-living. He gives everlasting life, which is a blessed one for those who seek His pleasure. This is a source of immense satisfaction for humans, because the greatest desire of every human being is to abide forever. We are thus informed by this Quranic verse that if you desire a blessed everlasting life, then Allah is the Only One Who can give it. The Arabic word *Qayyūm* means that He is the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist. After the desire for life everlasting, the second greatest desire of man is that he should have stability in life, remain physically active, and in good health. This can also be granted only by Allah, the Most High. He has promised this for the life Hereafter, where mankind is to abide forever.

It is quite surprising that modern science has also come to the conclusion that the existence of this universe is because of the Divine Being. There are several books on this subject, two of the easily comprehensible ones being, ‘The Mysterious Universe,’ by Sir James Jeans, and ‘The Universe and Dr. Einstein,’ by Lincoln Barenett. Sir James Jean writes in his book, “The Universe exists because it exists in a Universal Mind.”

A being that is not ever-living and self-subsisting by whom all subsist does not deserve to be called god, for such a being was born like us, and will likewise die one day. It did not give life, or subsistence to others nor is it self-subsisting. In contrast, the Holy Quran has given such a magnificent and attractive concept of the Divine Being that in this age of science and reasoning no other concept can be acceptable. It is then stated, “Slumber over-takes Him not, nor sleep.” Slumber creates a period of temporary unawareness, while sleep does that for a more prolonged period. Science, today has also established this principle. If the existence of this universe is because of its existence in a Divine mind encompassing the whole universe, if that Being goes into slumber or sleep, then the whole universe would perish. Those who elevate their prophets to the status of god do not deny

that they were prone to slumber and sleep. I have heard from Hindus that their idols do sleep in the temple, or cave. That is why the worshipper rings a bell before commencing supplications. If those prophets or idols were the real Divine Being, then this universe would have ended in a few seconds. How can the Being Who is prone to slumber and sleep be our guardian at all times? I have quoted Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in my previous lesson that, ‘Allah lies awake while human beings are asleep, He sees their enemies, and the dangers they face, and protects them, provided they are His humble servants.’

It is then stated, “To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.” Ordinarily heavens are considered as the physical heavens about which modern science is making novel discoveries everyday. If we accept his meaning momentarily, it is quite obvious that Allah is the Creator of whatever is in the heavens and the earth, for man comes into this world empty handed and leaves it in a similar condition. A better meaning of the heavens, is those spiritual heavens which are the abode of man’s life Hereafter. According to the Quran and the Hadith, these are seven in number and man’s everlasting existence and progress will continue in them after death. Considering this meaning, let us now study the words of this verse, “To Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth.” This implies that whatever you desire in your earthly existence, can only be given by Allah, who owns everything that is in this world, and He is the Creator of all. To Him also belongs whatever is in the heavens, meaning the life Hereafter, for He has created everything over there for you, and only He can give it to you. Mankind is, therefore totally dependent upon the blessed being of Allah, in this world, and in the life Hereafter. What can other human beings, or the ones who have been made into gods give, for they are themselves dependent on Allah for everything?

Further on it is stated, “Who is he that can intercede with Him but by His permission?” I have discussed the subject of intercession in my previous lessons. Unfortunately it is a common misconception that a certain entity can intercede on our behalf, and save us. That is the reason why prophets, saints, holy men, ascetics and even their graves are worshipped. The foundations of Christianity rest on Jesus being the intercessor between man and God. Misunderstanding the concept of intercession has led people associating other entities with God. As I have already discussed, and is apparent even in this verse, that Allah, the Most High, is the One Who gives the permission to intercede. It behooves us to seek His pleasure by submitting to Him with humility, and not His displeasure by associating others with Him. If a certain person has developed a bond with a prophet continuously striving to follow in his footsteps, (Arabic word for intercession *shafa’at* means bonding or forming a relationship), and Allah desires to forgive this person

despite his shortcomings, Allah will give His prophet permission to intercede on the person's behalf and not otherwise. It must be remembered that Allah's permission to intercede is accepted merely to honor the prophet. The same holds true for a person who emulates a righteous person or follows the impulses from angels to do acts of goodness. If Allah desires to forgive such a person, despite his shortcomings, He will give permission to the righteous persons and angels to intercede merely to honor them. The intercession in the hereafter, therefore, is very different from the intercession that we see in worldly affairs. Here the intercessions are unsolicited and the intercessor is generally a person who feels he has some right over the person he is asking for a favor, if the favor is not granted it is implied that it will incur the displeasure of the intercessor. I have worked all my life for the government, and it is my personal observation that if I did not accept someone's recommendation it invariably led to their displeasure even if they did not show it. No one has any right over Allah, the Blessed Most High, or can have the impertinence to think that he can put any kind of pressure on Him on basis of which he can intercede without His permission. Nor can anyone have the audacity to say that if his intercession is not accepted, it will offend him or result in his displeasure.

The subsequent words of *āyat-al-kursi* give another reason why intercession would not be possible without the permission of Allah, and those words are, "He knows what is before them, and what is behind them." Allah only has the complete knowledge of a man's present and past, and no one else. Only Allah, therefore, is in the position to decide whether a person should be forgiven or not. The deeds that are committed by man, his intentions and circumstances and subsequent actions are known only to Allah, and no one else. How appropriate are the words that follow, "And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases." The limits of human knowledge whether it is of this world, or the Hereafter, or of his temporal, or spiritual self are defined by Allah the Most High. We are told not to assess the knowledge of Allah by means of our own imperfect knowledge. Man's knowledge of the past or present is incomplete and defective, as is well known to historians and scientists. That is why science is constantly making new discoveries which show older ideas to be faulty or incomplete. The knowledge of the future and the unseen is possessed only by Allah. He gives proof of this by imparting knowledge of the unseen to His prophets and righteous servants. He has also made the Holy Quran a repository of such knowledge. Quranic prophecies are being fulfilled even today, fourteen hundred years after its revelation and only Allah knows how many more will be fulfilled in the future. Even modern science has accepted Allah's knowledge of the unseen. This a very lengthy subject which I will, if it please Allah, discuss on another occasion by directly

quoting some well known scientists on this subject. We do not however, need the confirmation of the scientists to convince us. The unlimited amount of knowledge of the unseen that is there in the Holy Quran, thousands of prophecies that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) made on being given knowledge by Allah, and the knowledge of the unseen given to other righteous servants and reformers by Allah, is sufficient proof for us.

“His knowledge (*kursi*) extends over the heavens and the earth.” The Arabic word *kursi* commonly refers to an object used for sitting. Without going into the lexicological details, suffice it to say that the word *kursi* also signifies both dominion and knowledge, and both of these meanings are appropriate in the present context. Allah has created the heavens of this physical universe, and also those of the Hereafter. His knowledge and sovereignty, therefore encompasses both the heavens and the earth. with knowledge comes power. For example, as man has gained more knowledge of science, his dominion over the rest of the creation has increased. Allah is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and His control extends over not only this world, but also the Hereafter. Man, whether in this life, or the life Hereafter cannot go outside the domain of Allah, and there is no refuge for him if he displeases Allah. If you desire the benefit in this world, or the Hereafter, seek the pleasure of Allah which can be achieved through humble submission to Him.

“And the preservation of them both tires Him not. If Allah was to tire like humans, the heavens and the earth would cease to exist. These words also indicate that protection in this world and the Hereafter can only be acquired by coming within the protection of Allah and not otherwise.

“And He is the Most High, Great.” Most High (*'Aliyy*) indicates exaltation of status due to His attributes and qualities, and Great (*'Azim*) indicates His dominion and power. Most High is mentioned first because attributes and qualities are the real source of eminence. For example, the honor and eminence attained by prophets and saints by reflecting the Divine attributes within themselves is much greater than the honor and eminence of kings and rulers, although it cannot be denied that worldly power and sovereignty is also a source of honor. The sequencing of *'Aliyy* before *'Azim*, therefore, indicates that it is eminence of character which embellishes worldly prominence and honor. Without character worldly power and honor are of no consequence as is frequently observed in the case of world leaders who get involved in scandals. The sequence of the words the Most High, Great (*Al'aliyyu Al'azim*) also indicates that if you rectify your character and spirit, Allah will also bestow worldly honor upon you.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 44)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

There is no compulsion in religion—the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the devils who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.

CH.2:256,257

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ لَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ
الْعَجْوَةِ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاهُمْ
الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُمْ مِنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

Fighting with the sword lawful only in defensive warfare

Those who have studied my earlier lessons on this magnificent section of the Holy Quran may remember the discussion which is to follow. Preceding this section, the Holy Quran prophesies the battles which the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and the Muslims would have to fight in order to save their faith, life and property. Also discussed was the striving (*jihad*) with the Holy Quran according to the Divine command, “And strive against them a mighty striving with it” (25:52). This latter kind of jihad was the one which was to persist in all ages. Its need is particularly acute in the present time when the opposition is trying to destroy Islam not only militarily, but also with objections,

instigation, innuendo and propaganda. To answer an objection with the sword is not the way of the righteous. In fact, it was the way resorted to by the supporters of falsehood i.e., the disbelievers of Arabia. When they could not rationally counter the strength of Muslim arguments, the fire of wrath and resentment was ignited in their hearts, and they decided to destroy the truth with the sword. Fighting with the sword is lawful only in case of defensive warfare. This is quite apparent from all those Quranic verses where the ordinances for fighting (for which the Holy Quran has used the word *qitāl*) are given. For example, the first ordinance was given thus, “Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed” (22:39). Islam which literally means peace and security, allows fighting only when war is forced upon the Muslims by an enemy guilty of oppression. In another verse it is stated, “And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors” (2:190). The real intent and purpose of the permission to fight in Islam is captured in the verse, “And fight with them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allah” (8:39).

The charter of religious freedom that Islam proclaims is given in the beginning of the verses under discussion today i.e., “There is no compulsion in religion.” Glory be to Allah! How exalted and superior is the teaching of the Holy Quran.

Death is not the punishment of apostasy in Islam

It is essential at this point to remove the misunderstanding that in Islam apostasy is to be punished with death. The verse quoted above clearly shows that this is not the case. This is even admitted by fair minded Orientalists. For example, Heizming, a Christian author of the essay on apostasy in the ‘Encyclopedia of Islam,’ starts his essay with the words, “The Quran has only threatened the apostate with chastisement in the Hereafter.” This statement is absolutely correct. If the apostate is to be put to death, would the following verse be in the Holy Quran? “And if thy Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have believed, all of them. Wilt thou then force men till they are believers?”(10:99). Would the Jews of Medina have schemed to deceive the Muslims in this manner, “And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve in the latter part of it, perhaps they may turn back” (3:72). If in fact, the punishment for apostasy was death, then the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who was the ruler in Medina would have meted out the death penalty to such apostates whether Jews, or otherwise. Under these

circumstances would the Quran contain the following statement? “Those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and again disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will never forgive them nor guide them in the (right) way” (4:137). There are several other Quranic verses on this subject, but time does not permit a more detailed discussion of these verses, nor of some of the misconceptions arising out of certain Hadith. For a more detailed discussion of the subject, I would like to refer the interested reader to the section on apostasy in ‘Religion of Islam,’ by Maulana Muhammad Ali. The gist and essence of that discussion is the blessed verse, “There is no compulsion in religion,” with which I started my lesson today.

Holy Prophet’s life— a magnificent example of religious tolerance

The Holy Quran gave this magnificent charter of religious freedom fourteen hundred years ago when the world was enveloped in the darkness of bigotry and religious intolerance. In modern times the United Nations has accepted this same principle of religious freedom and all of the member nations, by becoming signatories to its charter, have affirmed the truth of this principle of the Holy Quran. What is the relationship of this spiritually luminescent verse, “There is no compulsion in religion,” with the preceding verses of the Holy Quran? The preceding verses mention that the disbelievers have avowed to forcefully impose their beliefs upon the Muslims by waging a war against them. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and his companions are enjoined to uphold, and establish the principle of religious freedom in the world by resisting the onslaught against them through defensive fighting. They are cautioned not to enforce their religion upon their vanquished foes when Allah granted them victory which was to take place in the near future. The most excellent display of this religious tolerance which the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), taught his followers was manifested during the victory at Mecca. Even the worst enemies of Islam cannot site a single example where the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forced the disbelievers of Mecca, or any other subjugated nation to accept Islam. “O Allah! Exalt Muhammad, and have peace and blessings upon him, and the true followers of Muhammad, with Thy Mercy, O Most Merciful of all.”

Freedom of Will essential for spiritual development

If Allah, the Most High wanted to enforce acceptance of faith, He would not have given free will to man and would have bound him into submission, just as He has constrained the rest of the universe into submission. For

example, the instincts of animals have been programmed into their nature by the Divine Being and they are bound to follow it. It is impossible for an animal to go against its natural guidance or instinct. If Allah had treated man in a similar manner, he would not have been able to rise above the animal stage. How great is the beneficence of Allah, the Most High, towards man, that He has opened the path of his spiritual development by granting him the freedom of will. This, in fact, is a Divine privilege for, "Allah does what He intends" (2:253). It is because of this freedom of will that man is rewarded for his good deeds, which is mentioned in almost every page of the Holy Quran. If man is forced to follow or do something against his will, then such a compliance does not qualify as a good deed. For example, if belief in One God which is the basis of faith, and truthfulness which is the foundation of all good deeds, is enforced, then such compliance becomes devoid of all goodness. An act of goodness occurs only when there is an opportunity to make an associate with God, but one rejects it, or there is an opportunity to lie, but one chooses to tell the truth.

Divine Guidance necessary to save mankind

The words that follow this magna carte of a religious freedom makes one truly appreciative of the greatness of the Holy Quran. It is stated, "the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error." The secret of man's eminence and his spiritual and moral development which lie in the freedom of will, are captured in these words. Allah has always clearly defined the right from the wrong way in order to save man from drifting, and losing his way. He has done this through the ages by sending His prophets and Books, but with the passage of time the Books were either lost or adulterated, and the example of the messenger forgotten or misrepresented. This system came to an end with the revelation of the Holy Quran to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) because the guidance in the Holy Quran is in its most excellent form, and Allah guarantees to safeguard it against any form of corruption or alteration. Even the worst enemies of Islam acknowledge the purity of the text of the Holy Quran. Though the Holy Quran reached the four corners of the world about a millenium and a half ago, and has circulated since in many far flung and isolated communities, there is not a verse of the Holy Quran that has been altered anywhere. Similarly the *sunnat* (actions) of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has been preserved, and the smallest detail of his life is recorded in numerous books of Hadith (sayings). If any prophet deserves the title of being a prophet whose life has been recorded in a historical sense, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is certainly the one. If any doubt arises about the authenticity of some

saying, or action of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), the Holy Quran provides us with a simple test. The Holy Quran states, ““Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah” (4:80).” This provides us with the test to authenticate any Hadith or Sunnah. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) followed the command of Allah, or in other words the Holy Quran to such a complete degree that if any doubt arises about a Hadith or a tradition, it can be judged from the Holy Quran. If it is in accordance with the Holy Quran, it is correct. If it goes against the Holy Quran, it is incorrect, for no saying or deed of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was in contradiction of the Holy Quran.

Holy Quran— a guidance with clear proofs

Not only is the Holy Quran a complete guide, but it also supports its guidance with rational arguments as stated in this verse, “The month of Ramadan is that in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance, and the Criterion (separating truth from falsehood)” (2:185). If it invites towards the right path, it supports and proves its point with arguments. For example, the teaching of monotheism is supported by different arguments. Sometimes attention is drawn towards the testimony of all creation and sometimes towards that of man’s own nature. At times, appeal is made to the intelligence of man, or he is reminded of the testimony provided by the prophets and the revealed scriptures. Another rational argument in support of monotheism is given in this verse, “Nor is there with Him any (other) god—in that case would each god have taken away what he created, and some of them would have over-powered others. Glory be to Allah above what they describe” (23:91). Even if men are real brothers, they tend to divide their property and separate in order to avoid future conflict. No country functions with two kings, two presidents, or two prime ministers. How can God be expected to share His Power, and be bound by limitations of shared arrangements? The concept of Trinity—three gods in one is indeed very strange. We observe that two conjoined twins are in such great difficulty! If in reality there were three gods what would their condition be?

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 45)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

There is no compulsion in religion—the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error. So whoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break. And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the devils who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.

CH.2:256,257

Truth clearly distinguished from error

In the previous lesson I had explained that the prime reason for the golden principle, “There is no compulsion in religion,” is given in the words of the Holy Quran which immediately follow this statement i.e., “the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error.” We are thus informed that Allah, the Most High is the one Who has always given this guidance by sending His prophets, and scriptures to the people of every age, and He also clearly defined for them the wrong path that they were following previously because of their ignorance. This was done by means of arguments that were appealing to human nature and intelligence. Unfortunately these nations

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ لَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ
الْغَىِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَهُمُ
الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُوهُمْ مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ
أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥٧﴾

lost their revealed scriptures, or interpolated them in such a manner that true guidance became adulterated with falsehood. The true example of these prophets also met a similar fate. Allah, therefore completed His guidance in the Holy Quran, and guaranteed its protection. The example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in whom the institution of prophet hood has reached its finality and completion, is also preserved in the form of traditions (*sunnat*), to a degree unmatched by any other prophet. If any doubt arises about any action, or tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a simple solution is offered, which is to judge it in the light of the Holy Quran. No action of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was contrary to the Quranic teachings. In fact, they were in complete accord with the Quranic injunctions. I have discussed this in detail in my previous lesson.

Disbelief in the Devil

As guidance towards the right path is clearly defined and separated from the wrong way, man's intelligence naturally encourages him to follow the right course, and avoid the wrong one. However, the worst enemy of mankind, the devil (*shaitan*) constantly instigates his desires and emotions to run out of control by clouding his intellectual faculties, and natural inclination towards the truth. He thus makes him blind to the consequences of his actions, and leads him astray from the right path. One marvels at the wisdom of the Holy Quran, for in the very next verse it states, "So whoever disbelieves in the devil, and believes in Allah, he indeed lays hold on the firmest handle which shall never break."

Disbelief in the devil here does not mean the denial of the existence of the devil, because the Holy Quran itself gives us knowledge of his existence. Disbelief in the devil therefore, means not acting upon his suggestions. This has been repeatedly stated by the Holy Quran. It would greatly lengthen this brief lesson if we discuss all those verses. Therefore, I will only quote from one chapter, "Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not (*lā ta'budū – 'ibādat*, noun) the devil? Surely he is your open enemy. And that you serve Me. This is the right way. And certainly he led astray numerous people from among you. Could you not then understand? This is the hell which you were promised. Enter it this day because you disbelieved" (36:60-64).

There are numerous verses on this subject in the Holy Quran. I have selected this particular verse because it also explains further the verse under discussion in this lesson. Before commenting on the above quoted verse, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that most people translate the

Arabic word *'ibādat* as offering prayer, though, in fact, its literal meaning is 'showing obedience to,' or 'serving someone.' The Holy Quran uses the word *ṣalāṭ* for prayer. If some revered persons take the meaning of *'ibādat* as reciting the prayer, it is only to show that prayer is an expression of service, or obedience to the Creator. Nobody prays to the devil with hands folded in the traditional manner of saying one's obligatory prayers. Thus, in the above quoted verse, the first statement means that on the Day of Judgment Allah will ask the children of Adam that had He not commanded them not to serve the devil? This command was first given through Prophet Adam (therefore the term children of Adam is used), and has subsequently been conveyed through all prophets, and their revealed scriptures. It is clearly and repeatedly described in the Holy Quran, as for example, in the verses of the present lesson, and also in the verses(36:60-64) quoted above. The command, "not to serve the devil," is supported by the argument given that, "Surely he is your open enemy." The devil has been called the open enemy because all his instigation is openly hostile to one's intelligence and nature. That is why human intellect considers them wrong, and his nature abhors them. Even those whose intellect and nature is corrupted by following the devil hate it when somebody does a wrong to them. They may verbally abuse someone, but if someone else metes out the same treatment to them, they dislike it intensely and are willing to commit mayhem.

As I explained in the incident of Adam and Eve, the paradise from which they were removed was not the paradise of the Hereafter. The devil does not have any access to that paradise. Further, the Holy Quran states about the paradise of the Hereafter, "Nor shall they be ever ejected from it" (15:48). Thus, the paradise from which Adam and Eve were ejected after succumbing to the instigation of the devil, was of the contentment of heart and the peace of mind with which man is created in this world. This same tradition continues and anybody from amongst their children who obeys the devil's prompting will also lose their inner peace. For example, contentment of mind is lost, the moment one accepts a bribe, and leads to additional grief if one is caught. That is why it has been mentioned repeatedly in the Holy Quran about the believing men and women, "They shall have no fear nor shall they grieve," this is the paradise of the heart which always accompanies them in this world.

Service of Allah, the right way

In the above quoted verses of chapter thirty six, "Did I not charge you, O children of Adam, that you serve not (*lā ta'budū* – *'ibādat*, noun) the devil? Surely he is your open enemy", these Divine words follow, "And that you serve Me. This is the right way." With the commandment to serve Allah,

the reasoning is given that He will guide you on the right path. The One Who has created man knows best the purpose for which He has created him, and the position He wants him to attain. It is then stated, "And certainly he (the devil) led astray numerous people from among you. Could you not then understand?" For example, human intelligence considers stealing as wrong; even a person who has no qualms about committing robbery stands ready to fight for his share of the loot with his accomplices, if he feels that they are not being fair to him. Thus, Allah has not only clearly defined the right path, but also given man the understanding to distinguish it from the wrong course. If, then a man chooses to tread the wrong path, it is clearly a failing on his part to use his intellect.

One reason for establishing the golden principle of, "There is no compulsion in religion," is that if compliance of a religious principle is enforced, then intelligent thinking is turned off, and is no longer used. The objective (based on wisdom) of Allah, Who is the Creator of the human race, in giving man the most precious and unique gift of intelligence is to enable him to select the right path and to reject the wrong path, not through duress, but through understanding and free choice. It is only through the exercise of such freedom that man can evolve to higher stages of moral and spiritual development. A deed which is enforced, or done under duress cannot be qualified as good or evil. An incarcerated person who does not commit a robbery cannot claim to be a righteous person nor can it be said with assurance that he will not steal again on being released from confinement. Such is the wisdom of the Holy Quran. When I perceive its explanation of the secrets of Divine knowledge, my heart is overwhelmed and I bow down with humility before my Lord, spontaneously uttering the words, "Glory to my Lord, the Most High." My heart wishes that I should keep on repeating this, every moment of my life, "Glory be to Allah, and with His Praise, Glory be to Allah the Possessor of All Greatness."

Low desires and the Devil

The devil has been created from fire. Man's body also requires heat for keeping it alive (that is why the body of a dead person turns cold), and the nature of his emotions and desires is also related to this warmth. Heat, when under control, forms the basis of all movement and action. The devil, however, fuels and ignites this fire to the extent that man's emotions and desires run out of control. One manifestation of this is the fire of greed in a man's heart which never leaves him satisfied and he is always yearning for, "Is there more?" This fire becomes the palpable conflagration of hell, in the life Hereafter. This is clearly described in chapter hundred and four of the Holy Quran, and in the last verse of chapter thirty six quoted earlier in this

lesson as, “This is the hell which you were promised. Enter it this day because you disbelieved.” Allah, the Most High teaches man to control his emotions and desires, to utilize them for the motive power in the struggle of life and to achieve moral and spiritual progress with it. Those who submit to the devil, instead of submission to Allah, ignite this inner fire of discontent in their hearts, and will feel its heat as the external hell-fire in the life Hereafter. This treatment is a remedial measure for their reformation. The more prolonged and deep rooted the spiritual illness, the longer will be the treatment.

I have quoted, and explained this verse of chapter thirty six because it explains the verses being discussed in this lesson. After stating in the first verse, that true guidance has been clearly distinguished from falsehood, it warns man to be on guard against the devil who attempts to lead him astray. The next verse enjoins man to enter into a state of peace through belief in Allah (for *Imān*, the Arabic word for belief also stands for peace). The Holy Quran repeatedly gives arguments on the existence of One God in order to inculcate such a belief. I have described these arguments in my previous lesson based on the verse, *Āyat-al-Kursi*.

Belief in Allah, the firmest handle

Let us now resume discussion on the verses in this lesson. It is stated that by believing in Allah one will hold on to the firmest handle which shall never break. In this worldly existence the waves of wrong ideas and beliefs come like the waves in a stormy sea. Man gets entangled in the whirlpools, and like a swimmer in the sea, is tossed and turned by the waves. When he is about to drown, he may find something secure to hold on to. Most of the time, however, such supports falter under the pressure of the waves, or the flow of the current, and the swimmer drowns. In the modern age of materialism, making associates with God, worship of wealth and worldly life, atheism, communism, and all sorts of new movements and wrong concepts are like these waves which can carry a person away with their flow. Cultural customs and fashion trends are like floods that sweep away people who get involved in such fads. The trials and tribulations of life, like poverty, sickness, deaths and disappointments, that human beings have to face, can also cause some of them to lose their balance, go astray or sometimes even commit suicide.

Belief in Allah, while facing these stormy waves and undercurrents, provides a firm handle which never breaks. Throughout history one finds that those who showed steadfastness during the trials of life were those who had firm belief in Allah. Belief gives them the consolation that whatever difficulties they face are manifestations of Divine Will, and are intended for

the moral and spiritual development of mankind. They should therefore, be borne with patience and prayer.

Allah listens and responds to the cries of the Believer

What a lovely book is the Holy Quran! The Divine words that follow are, “And Allah is Hearing, Knowing.” Man spontaneously calls upon Allah during the tribulations of life. This verse tells us to definitely do so, for Allah hears our supplications. Sometimes a disaster may overtake a person so suddenly that he does not have the time to supplicate. However, Allah is still Aware of his condition, and will come to the aid of His servant. It is my personal observation that Allah saves His servants from dangers that they do not even perceive till after the danger has passed away.

The next verse is, “Allah is the Friend of those who believe—He brings them out of darkness into light (*Nūr*).” What a great honor this is for the true believer! Allah becomes his Friend and Helper. A true believer thus becomes a friend of Allah. The result of Allah’s help is that he receives guidance from darkness into light. It is quite true that worldly distractions, and hedonistic doctrines create spiritual darkness in which man loses his spiritual sight, and does not know which way to turn. But, there is an even greater darkness which prevails in the deep recesses in which man conceals his inner self or real personality. This inner self of man guides him through life. Every action that man takes in this life affects his soul, and shapes his personality. Acts of goodness result in a healthy soul while evil acts make it sick. One marvels at the choice of words of the Holy Quran. It uses the Arabic word *noor* for the light that it provides to the true believer to guide him through the external darkness (of wrongful beliefs and perverse movements), and also the spiritual darkness of his inner self. The difference between *noor*, and ordinary light is that the ordinary light only illuminates external surfaces on which it falls, but reveals nothing of what may be hidden inside. In contrast to this *nūr* is that light which illuminates both the outside and the inside. Thus, a man finds light to guide him through the exogenous darkness of false doctrines and the endogenous darkness of his inner self. The difference between a true believer and an ordinary person is that the latter either gropes in darkness, and keeps falling, or at the most sees only the exterior of things. The true believer can perceive both his inner self, and the outside with the light of perception given to him by Allah. He is thus saved from falling down and going astray. “All praise be to Allah for this.”

The words of the last verse are, “And those who disbelieve (*kafarū*, *kufir*- noun), their friends are the devils (*tāghūt*), who take them out of light into darkness. They are the companions of the Fire; therein they abide.”

Kufr means both disbelief and ungratefulness. Those who reject the guidance, and light that Allah has revealed in the Holy Quran do so either by verbal rejection, or by being ungrateful in the manner that they verbally acknowledge belief, but do not derive benefit from it by putting it into practice. What do such people follow? They follow their own desires and emotions which are fueled by the devil. The word used for the devil in this verse is *ṭāghūt* which means the one who exceeds the limits. The Quran, however, does not allow unbridled freedom of emotions and desires, and puts reasonable constraints on them. Without such constraints two consequences follow. Firstly, emotions begin to override the light of intellect which Allah has bestowed upon mankind. We observe this in the actions of evil persons and criminals. Thus man is deprived of his inner light, falters, and goes astray in the darkness. About this it is said, “who take them out of light into darkness.” Secondly emotions and desires have the nature of heat which ignite the desire for progressively more gratification in man. This creates an inner hell for the person in this world which will assume an external manifestation in the Hereafter. How beautifully and clearly does the Holy Quran manifest the matters of the inner self, or soul of man. This is the purpose of guidance and light as I have discussed earlier.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 46)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدَّلْ مَا فِي الْاَرْضِ اَوْ تَخْفٰوْهُ يَحٰسِبْكُمْ بِهٖ اللّٰهُ فَبِعَظْمِ لَيْسَانَ يَشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَّشَآءُ وَاللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ۝

CH.2:284

This is the first verse of the last section of chapter *Al-Baqarah*. I will *inshā-Allah* (if Allah pleases) give a somewhat detailed commentary on this section. The reason for this is the saying of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that, “I have been given two blessings that no other prophet has received, one is the *Al-Fātiḥah*, and the other is the last section of *Al-Baqarah*.” According to another tradition this section was revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), during the *mihrāj* (Ascension). In any case, this section contains a sea of wisdom, spiritual insight, and guidance for mankind. I hope I can do justice in explaining this section. May Allah help me in doing so, *ameen* (be it so).

Questions about the creation of the Universe

The following questions arise in the mind of a person who contemplates. Who created the heavens and the earth? Who created all that is within them, and what is the purpose of this creation? Who created man, and for what purpose was he created? How did man get pre-eminence over the rest of creation? Is there a Being above mankind? What is death and what comes

after it? Some of the answers to these questions are in the verse that I have related today, and some follow later.

The first truth revealed in this verse, unknown to mankind fourteen hundred years ago, is that the heaven we see with our eyes is not one, but many. This is the reason why the Arabic word *samāwāt* (many heavens) in the plural tense is used, instead of *samā* (heaven), which is in the singular. The extent of this universe is beyond human comprehension. Scientists have attempted to measure the distances in the universe by the speed of light which travels at the speed of a hundred and eighty six thousand miles per second. To gauge the enormity of these distances it helps to contemplate on the following simple mathematical calculation. If the distance traveled by light in one second is multiplied by sixty twice, this gives the distance traveled by light in one hour. By multiplying this further with the numbers twenty four, and then by three hundred and sixty five, the distance traveled by light in one year is obtained. This unit is called one light year in astronomical terms. Current estimates of the diameter of the universe is seventy billion light years. The estimate is likely to be revised upward as more accurate methods are developed. Fourteen hundred years ago, an unlettered person from Arabia could not have had knowledge of the oneness of creation. In fact, even the scientific minds of the day did not know that this amazing universe was made up of the same matter, and was governed by the same universal laws. This discovery has forced the atheistic scientific minds of our age not only to accept the existence of God, but also that He is One. The Holy Quran revealed this amazing truth fourteen hundred years ago, that whatever is in the heavens and on earth, belongs to Allah, Who created them. No human being can even think of claiming mastery over the heavens. Even in his earthly existence, a human child arrives empty handed from the mother's womb, and at the time of his death, is laid to rest in his grave devoid of all possessions. Whatever mankind is given in this terrestrial existence, and which he apparently considers as his own property, belongs to him only temporarily. This includes his life, health, body, honor, happiness, wealth and power. All that we receive in this life is given to us by Allah. Several verses of the Holy Quran relate this, one of which I will quote, "Who so desires this transitory life (*'ājilat*), We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire" (17:18). The Arabic word *'ājilat* stands for things to be received soon, in this transitory life.

As I have mentioned in one of my earlier lessons, Allah has appointed mankind as His vicegerent on earth, and has delegated limited authority to him. We observe that this remarkable system of the universe, including the rising and setting of the sun and the moon works with absolute perfection. It is not possible for the sun, or the moon to be a second earlier or late. Man,

however, frequently mismanages his affairs and spoils the earth which was created as a paradise for him. This is stated in the verse, “And We said: O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the garden” (2:35). I explained in my commentary on this verse that by garden (*jannat*) is meant the garden of paradise on this earth. Man, frequently creates discord and difficulties by his actions. Without dwelling into history, we observe in this age of ours, that mankind has made great progress in science and technology, and has advanced the frontiers of knowledge. Despite this material progress, the world today is more degenerate, and lacking in moral values than ever before.

Mankind’s reformation possible only through reformation of the heart

Unless there is moral reformation of man, who runs the activities of this worldly life, the world cannot be a better place. This is not possible, until the heart of man is reformed. The reason for this is that human intelligence which is centered in his brain gives uniform guidance to all of mankind. Man, however, is motivated by the desires and emotions. Human intelligence is like the driver of a vehicle, or the rider of a horse. Despite intellectual inhibitions, man tends to do what his heart desires when his emotions and desires, which are the motive forces, run out of control.

It is, therefore stated in the verse under discussion today that, “And whether you manifest what is in your minds (*mā fi ’anfusikum*) or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it.” The Arabic words *mā fi ’anfusikum* have been translated as, what is in your hearts, or minds. I will now comment based on this meaning. No other religion, or revealed scripture has mentioned accountability of what is in the mind, or given it importance similar to what the Holy Quran has done. The legal systems of this world only hold men accountable for their actions, and not for what is within their hearts. This is, however, a shortcoming, for the actions of men are manifested much later, they are contemplated first. For example before a thief commits a robbery, he plans it for a long time in his mind. He spies on the occupants of the house which he is going to burglarize. He makes various inquiries, and then ultimately goes through with the decision that brings about the apparent act. A black marketer, or a licentious person cooks the whole scheme in his mind, and in the end commits the action. In short, all the moral and spiritual illnesses of mankind first take root in the mind, and manifest much later on as actions. Until the roots are extracted, one cannot get rid of these illnesses. For example, if a doctor cleans the purulent secretions from an abscess, but does not treat it, the sore will not heal. He has to go to the source, or root of this illness, and get rid of it.

Religions which have not called into accountability the inner thoughts of man, have been unable to accomplish his reformation. Human laws can only address his actions for they are unaware of his inner thoughts. These are only known to the person whose mind is contemplating them, or to Allah Who is the Creator of that mind, and all the systems within it. That is why the Holy Quran calls Allah the Most High as, “The Knower of what is in the hearts (50 : 16),” for He knows very well what is within our minds.

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has described this wisdom very well, he states “Pay attention to this that within the body of man is a piece, which if it is in a righteous state, the whole body becomes well, and if it becomes corrupted it leads to the corruption of man. Be-ware that it is the heart of man.”

Within the hearts of men are all sorts of evil emotions like malice, envy, hatred, enmity and pride, which are spiritual illnesses. When these become the motive forces for his actions, but are camouflaged under the false impression of good intent, other people are misled. Nevertheless, this results in a lot of wickedness and corruption. Hence, it is that unless man is held accountable for his inner thoughts, he cannot be reformed, nor can the sorrows of humanity be remedied. How correctly has the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated this, “The goodness, or evil of an action is based on the intent with which it is done.” For example, the action of a murderer and a doctor, whose operation fails, can both lead to the death of a person. The doctor is paid for his action while the murderer goes to jail. The only difference is that of intent which is motivated by different emotions and desires in the two cases.

The Holy Quran is an amazing book of wisdom. The wisdom underlying the words, “whether you manifest what is in your mind, or hide it,” is that a person’s mind is expressed first by his tongue. A child for example, does not know how to hide his inner feelings. As he grows older, the fear of antagonizing people, or of punishment arises and he begins to hide what is in his mind. With maturity he becomes an expert at hiding his intentions, and inner secrets from fear of people, or the law. The Being Who has created the human mind, and all its inner systems is aware of these hidden secrets, and as a form of chastisement creates the fire of discontent in the heart of such a man. Quite frequently, He manifests the hidden detriment, and evil of such a person in this world leading to his dishonor and disgrace. Such a person then receives chastisement for it in this world, which is a proof for the accountability, and punishment of the Hereafter.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 47)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

CH.2:284

In the previous lesson I commented generally, on this verse, but did not get into finer details, which I intend to cover now. I have mentioned the importance of this section of *Al-Baqarah*. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “I have been given two blessings no other prophet has received, one is the *Al-Fātiḥah*, and the other is the last section of *Al-Baqarah*.” I urge the readers to first read the previous lesson, if they have not already done so, in order to fully benefit from the spiritual knowledge contained in this section.

Philosophy of accountability of the self

Two truths are revealed in this verse. Firstly, whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. No one can claim proprietorship, in fact, even in this earthly existence, the human child comes empty handed from his mother’s womb, and returns to his grave devoid of all material possessions. As I have discussed in detail in my previous lesson, every thing belongs to Allah. Secondly, we are told that man is accountable before Allah for whatever is in his mind, whether he manifests it or hides it. To understand this section fully, the reader is advised to study section thirty-nine of *Al-Baqarah*, before reading on. Three fundamental statements are made in

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اللَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدَّوْا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ فُبِعْضُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

section thirty nine.

- 1) Loans should be evidenced in writing and a maturity period fixed for the return of the loan.
- 2) The loan agreement should be witnessed by two persons.
- 3) If a scribe is not available to put the loan agreement into writing, as for instance in a journey, a collateral should be taken for the return of the loan.

Now if we read the verse under discussion, it states that whatever is in the heavens and the earth, belongs to Allah Who created every thing. Man enters into and leaves this world empty handed. Whatever he receives from Allah is a loan. The terms of this loan are also similar. It was enjoined in the previous section to put down in writing the amount, and the duration of the loan. Similarly, Allah writes down, and fixes a time limit on whatever he gives to man as stated in, "And no soul can die but with Allah's permission - the term is fixed" (3:145). The life term of every human being is thus fixed and written down. All that is given during this period is a loan from Allah for which he is answerable to Him. The terms on which human beings are given this loan are included in the revealed scripture given to every nation, and these terms have also been put in writing and preserved in the Holy Quran. The acceptance of Divine scriptures is, therefore mentioned in the next verse.

In the preceding section it was also mentioned that the writing of a loan should be witnessed by two witnesses. Similarly whatever is loaned to man in this life, is also witnessed by two witnesses. One of them is the angel who brought this scripture from the Divine Being, and the other is the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who carried its message to mankind. The Holy Quran mentions the angels as witnesses, as in this verse, "But Allah bears witness by that which He has revealed to thee that He has revealed it with His knowledge, and the angels (also) bear witness" (4:166). The witnessing by the messengers is mentioned thus, "But how will it be when We bring from every people a witness and bring thee as a witness against these" (4:41).

Man will be held accountable for all that he is given in this worldly life. That is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once remarked, "They are at a loss, they are at a loss." When asked by one of the companions as to who these people were, he replied, "those who are given abundance of wealth, except those who say, take this in the way of Allah, and take this, and also this." Allah has mentioned this accountability in several places, in the Holy Quran. I will only refer to one verse, "Then on that day you shall certainly be questioned about the boons" (102:8). Who can estimate the blessings that Allah has given to man. The Holy Quran states, "And if you count Allah's favors, you will not be able

to number them” (14:34)? The blessings for which man will be specially held accountable are the various parts of his body, for example, his hands, feet, tongue, eyes etc. and the way in which he used them for doing good or evil. The wealth and power, that is given to a man, will also be called into account. He will be answerable for, whether he used it to serve Allah, and His fellow human beings, or utilized it only for the benefit of his self, spouse and offspring. The latter is a basic animal instinct, for we observe that even animals provide for their mates and offspring. The topic of man’s accountability is very vast, and beyond the scope of this brief lesson. I urge the reader to study the Holy Quran in full with its translation for a complete description of the process of accountability. The reader will find that it has been explained in a simple and easily understandable language.

The human soul and its stages of development

The last condition of a loan mentioned in section 39, of Ch.2:283, is of offering property as a security trust. If what is given to mankind is a loan, the spirit which Allah breathes into man is a trust which He takes back at the time of his death. In the Holy Quran this spirit, when it is first given, is described by the Arabic word *ruh*, as in the verse, “So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit (*ruh*), fall down making obeisance to him” (15:29). After the initial creation, the Holy Quran does not use the Arabic word *ruh*, but uses the Arabic word *nafs*, to describe the soul. At the time of death it is the soul (*nafs*) which is taken away as in the verse, “And no soul can die but with Allah’s permission” (4:144). On the Day of Judgment it is the soul (*nafs*) which will appear before Allah as stated in the Holy Quran, “And every soul comes, with it a driver and a witness” (50:21). This soul (*nafs*) will be given a different body after death, and will enter into hell or heaven. In short, since soul is the essence of man, everything that is given in this earthly life is given to the soul, and so too will be the rewards and punishment of the Hereafter. In light of this fact, if we study the words of the verse under discussion once more, it states, “To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.” It is because of this that Allah is the One Who gives everything to mankind. The human soul is mentioned after this, for it is the common factor between this life and the Hereafter.

The spirit which is placed in man at the time of birth is exposed to all the stages and experiences of his life. For example, childhood, teenage, youth, old age, good health, sickness, joy, grief, worries, knowledge, wealth, struggle for worldly things, good deeds, evil deeds, hard work and laziness, usage of time wisely or its wastage, the good and evil thoughts in one’s mind, etc. In fact, the spirit is affected by all of this, and evolves into

an individual, or personality. All the good and evil deeds done by an individual cast their reflection on his soul. That is the reason why the Holy Quran states in the verse under discussion, “And whether you manifest what is in your minds (*'anfusakum* - souls) or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it.”

In regards to the soul I have discussed earlier that it is given to man as a trust from Allah, and is taken back by Him at the time of death. Man is accountable before Allah for how he took care of this trust. The Arabic word *'amānat* for trust is from the root *aman* which means, “the realization of peace by the human soul and the removal of the state of fear.” We, therefore fulfill our duty towards the trust of Allah when our soul becomes the soul at rest, or the *nafs-i-muṭmainnah*, and there remains no fear and sadness in it. That is why the Holy Quran says about the true believers, “they have no fear nor shall they grieve.” Fear or apprehension is an *ex ante* feeling while, sadness or grief is an *ex post* feeling. For example, the fear of being caught exists in the heart of a person who has lied, but once he is caught, it is replaced by sadness. The heart of a true believer is protected against such innocuous elements for he does not commit wicked and evil deeds. Even when confronted by difficult circumstances, righteous persons do not fear or grieve, because of their strong belief. The Reformer of this century, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has shed great light on the soul at rest (*nafs-i-muṭmainnah*) in his momentous lecture, “The Teachings of Islam.” In brief, he states that the Holy Quran calls the first stage of the human soul as the *nafs-al-ammāra* i.e., one wont to command evil. In this stage man does whatever his self commands. This is the animal stage because an animal also does what the provocation of his emotions, and desires leads him to do. In this stage man is liable to commit wrongful deeds as stated in, “Surely (mans) self is wont to command evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy” (12:53). The *nafs-al-ammāra*, or the animal soul commands evil, except for those upon whom Allah has mercy. After receiving the Divine guidance, man initiates the reformation of his soul by opposing evil inclinations and his soul passes into the stage which the Holy Quran calls the *nafs-i-lawwamah*, or the self accusing soul. An animal never reprimands itself. This stage has been called the moral stage by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed. At this level man rises above his animal instincts, and acquires human, or moral values. The Holy Quran has called the last stage of the soul’s development as the *nafs-al-muṭmainnah*, or the soul at rest as stated in, “O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing, So enter among My servants, And enter My Garden!” (89:27-30). This is the spiritual stage in which the spiritual and moral values become so dominant and established in the human soul that the earlier struggle between good and evil, which was waged in the stage of the

self accusing soul, ends with a victory for good. With this stage, man at this stage enters into the paradise of contentment in this life, and after death he is given the paradise of the Hereafter. The trust of the Divine Spirit that Allah has breathed into man is thus truly fulfilled when it becomes the 'Soul at Rest.' This trust has been mentioned in another verse of the Holy Quran which, if God willing, is the subject of my next lesson.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 48)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and chastises whom He pleases. And Allah is Possessor of power over all things.

CH.2:284

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدَّلُوا مَا فِي الْاَرْضِ اَوْ تَخْفَوْهُ يَحْسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ فَيَعْفُو لِمَنْ يَّشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَّشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

Human soul the trust of God

How true is the statement of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that he has been given two blessings of the like of which no other prophet received, one the *Al-Fātihah* and the other the last section of *Al-Baqarah*. My previous two lessons were on the later, but the subject is far from complete. The last point I made in my previous lesson was that the Divine spirit breathed into man at the time of his creation passes through all the experiences of an individual's life. It is affected by his good and evil, thoughts, words and deeds, and shapes into a personality of its own for which the Holy Quran uses the term *nafs* or soul. The spirit which comes from the Divine Being, and gets transformed into the *nafs* or soul is a trust from Allah, the Most High, which is taken back from man at the time of death. The Holy Quran mentions this trust in these words, "Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains and they refused to bear it and feared from it, and man bore it. Surely he is ever unjust ignorant" (33:72). The Arabic word *ẓalūman* translated as unjust, also means ready to bear loss, and the word *jahūlan* translated as ignorant, also means oppressor. This verse states that the burden of trust of the spirit,

which Allah has given to man, is so heavy that the heavens and the earth and the mountains are unable to bear it, but man has the capability to do so.

The heart of man capable of manifesting the Divine Presence

When man truly fulfills this trust, his heart becomes larger in magnitude than the heavens, wider in expanse than the earth, and greater in strength than the mountain. It is only then that God, Who cannot be contained by the heavens and the earth, manifests His glory in the heart of man. One may recall here the events of Prophet Moses narrated in the Holy Quran. When Prophet Moses asked God to show Himself to him, he was told that he would not be able to see Him with his physical eye. The human eye is a very delicate structure. It cannot even tolerate a flash of regular light, much less the manifestation of Divine glory. To get this point across, Allah the Most High manifested His glory on a nearby mountain which was rent asunder as a consequence, and Prophet Moses fainted (7:143). Thus we see that Allah, Whose manifestation cannot be borne by mountains or contained by the heavens and earth, manifests Himself in the heart of a true believer. Based on a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), Maulana Rum, the famous Persian saint and poet, expresses this point succinctly thus, “The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said that Allah stated, ‘I cannot be contained within the heavens and the earth, but it is strange that I can be in the heart of a true believer. So if you want to find Me, look for Me inside that heart.’”

Hazrat Khawaja Moin-ud-din Chishti, another saintly person states in a couplet, “There is a King in the palace of my heart; if He pitched a tent on the outside, He would not be contained by the dry land and the oceans.”

Hazrat Khawaja Mir Dard, a saintly poet puts it thus, “The heavens and the earth cannot comprehend Thy magnitude, it is only my heart that can accommodate Thee.”

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Reformer of the 14th. Century Hijra said, “I do not visualize a throne greater than the heart of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) on which Allah the Most High was manifest.”

Why man is capable of bearing the trust of the Divine Spirit

In summary if man can truly bear the trust of the spirit that Allah has given him, he gets to know Allah, which is the real purpose of man’s creation. The reason why man can bear the burden of this trust is given in the verse that I quoted earlier from chapter thirty-three. Man is ever ready to bear loss

and oppression. In Arabic, the words *ẓalūman* and *jahūlan* when taken in the negative sense can mean unjust and ignorant. However, the Arabic word *ẓulm* also means causing a loss and *jahūl* also means oppressing. For example there is a couplet from the days of ignorance before Islam which reads thus in Arabic, “*lā lā yujhalna ‘aḥadun ‘alainā fa najḥal fauqa jahūl al jāḥilīnā*—Beware no one should use force upon us, for we shall oppress more than the greatest oppressor.” The word *Jahāla* (verb form of *jahūla*) is therefore used in this blessed verse of the Holy Quran in a positive sense to describe that quality of man, as a result of which he can suppress and discipline his self, and thereby bear the burden of the trust. All righteous deeds, and supplications entail some discipline of the self. For example, offering the five obligatory prayers, or getting up late at night for the *tahajjud* (late night prayer) all require a great measure of self discipline. A similar effort is involved in performing ablutions, or concentrating one’s wandering thoughts towards God. The other quality of man that is praised, and because of which he can bear the burden of the trust is that he can bear repeated loss to his self. Sacrifice in the way of Allah, in particular monetary sacrifice, appears on the surface to be a loss. Similarly, man can even sacrifice his life in the way of Allah, despite the fact that there can be no greater loss than this for the welfare of his family. When, however he does all this, then Allah, the Most High, creates in the heart of such a person the magnitude that does not exist in the heaven, the expanse that is not there in the earth, and the strength is not possessed by the mountain. Can this really happen to the heart of a true believer? Consider an atom which cannot even be seen with the naked eye, yet it contains within its tiny mass the same structure and relative magnitude as the astronomical universe. Thus, it has its own heavens, stars, and planets, a true replica of the real universe, despite being a sub microscopic speck. If Allah can create a whole universe in a tiny speck, why is it difficult to comprehend that He does something similar in the heart of a believer? He certainly can and does, as is the experience of all prophets, saintly persons and even the true believers.

A psychologist has written that it is the natural desire of man to bring the expanse of the earth under his control. This found an expression in the behavior of such conquerors, as Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Genghiz Khan. The super powers of this age follow a similar policy of domination over the world, and spend a great deal of effort, and millions of dollars to achieve this objective. Similarly, man has the desire to climb mountains, and risks his life to do so, although there is no apparent benefit. The desire to go into the heavens is the motivating factor behind space exploration, and billions of dollars are spent for this purpose. In the physical world it is not possible for every human being to ascend into the heavens, or to climb mountains, or to control the expanse of the earth. In every

human being, however, Allah has created the capability to achieve this and much more in a spiritual dimension, by truly fulfilling the trust of the soul placed within him.

Allah's Mercy takes precedence

Let us now ponder on the remaining verses of this lesson. It is stated, that Allah will call man to account for the condition of His trust, whether man manifests it by his words and deeds, or hides it. There will be accountability for all the worldly boons that Allah has given to man as a loan, but in particular Allah will ask man about the way he handled the spirit that came from Allah, and was the most precious trust given to him. All the deeds and words of a man, and the thoughts that dwell in his mind are recorded in his soul. In holding the soul accountable, therefore, all things given as debt to man are accounted for.

The burden of this great responsibility and the fear of reckoning makes the heart of man to shudder. Divine words of comfort, however, follow immediately, "So He forgives whom He pleases." In the matter of reckoning, chastisement should have been mentioned first, but Allah mentions His forgiveness first. The Holy Quran is full of such consolations. For example, it is stated, "Say: O My servants who have been prodigal regarding their souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah; surely Allah forgives sins altogether. He is indeed the Forgiving, the Merciful" (39:53), or as in verse, "He has ordained mercy on Himself" (6 : 12,54) ; And "My mercy took precedence over my anger", as stated in *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet.

A warning is also given in the words, "And chastises whom He pleases." Allah's forgiveness, and mercy is for the person who continues to strive in the way of Allah with good intentions, but is still prone to mistakes and shortcomings. However, it is necessary to subject a person who is intentionally evil to the remedial hell fire for the purpose of his reformation, and purification. The Divine words at the end of this verse are, "And Allah is Possessor of power over all things." Allah can forgive whom He pleases, and chastise whom He thinks deserves punishment. The Divine Being in Islam is not constrained like the gods of other religions who cannot forgive on their own free will, and are bound to dispense punishment (as is the basis of the Christian concept of atonement), or who cannot reward more than a person deserves (as is the basis of the Hindu belief of transmigration). Before the Possessor of Power over all things, the soul of man can bow down in humility, and ask for repentance and reform.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 49)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers. And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course.

CH.2:285

Progress of the human soul

Two statements were made in the verse preceding this. Firstly, that whatever is given to man in this life is a debt from Allah for which he will be accountable after death. Secondly, the Divine spirit placed in man evolves through his life experiences into a distinct personality, which the Holy Quran calls *nafs* or soul. The soul is a trust from Allah which is taken back at the time of death. The soul is held accountable for whatever deeds a man performs, the words he speaks out and the thoughts he harbors in his mind. The image of each one of these is cast upon his soul, and embellishes, or deforms it accordingly.

These statements raise two questions. If every thing an individual receives in this life is a debt, what are its terms that need to be fulfilled? The second question is, how can man carry out his obligation to the precious trust of the Divine spirit placed within him, for which he is to be held accountable? The answer to both these questions is given in the verse to be discussed in this lesson.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَمِنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ
وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ تَدَارَأْتُمْ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ
مِّنْ رُّسُلِهِ قُلْ قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا
عُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

Belief with practice essential for human spiritual development

Human soul is not a material entity whose growth and condition can be evaluated by physical examination, or by instruments. Nor can it be fixed by means of medication, or an operation. Only one element can illuminate the inner darkness of man, and that is the light (*nūr*) of belief. When the lamp of this inner light is placed in a man's heart it illuminates his inner self. It should be remembered that when one declares his belief, it is only a verbal expression. Until belief gets firmly entrenched in a person's heart, he cannot be called a true believer. This is confirmed by the Holy Quran in the verse, "The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You believe not, but say, We submit: and faith has not yet entered into your hearts And if you obey Allah and His Messenger He will not diminish aught of your deeds. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware" (49:14). The dwellers of the outlying villages, and the bedouins, who only occasionally came to Medina, unlike the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), had not yet become true believers. The way in which true belief is established is given in the following words of the Holy Quran, "And if you obey Allah and His Messenger He will not diminish aught of your deeds." Belief begins with a verbal acceptance of the unity of Allah as God and the apostleship of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), but it only truly enters the heart when man follows the guidance given by Allah, and exemplified by His Messenger. That is why our lesson today starts with these Divine words, "The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the best exemplar of the Holy Quran revealed to him. This is also the reason why in another place the Holy Quran states, "Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah" (4:80). Similarly, after the death of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when some young people came to visit his widow, Hazrat Ayesha, to inquire about his morals, she advised them to study the Holy Quran. She said, "His character was the Quran." All the virtues taught in it were there in the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

It is then stated in the verse under discussion, "and (so do) the believers," i.e., they also believe and act upon the teachings of the Holy Quran. This refers to the companions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who are stated in the Holy Quran as having earned the 'the pleasure of Allah,' in this world. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave them a similar endorsement when he said, "My companions are like the stars, whichever amongst

them you follow, you will be guided towards the right path.” The Arabs used to find their way in the desert by means of the stars, as there were no roads. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, “My companions are your guides towards the right direction in the darkness of your inner self.”

Belief through Divine Revelation

It is worth noting that the verse, “The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord,” clearly shows that it is the Divine revelation which engenders faith. This is the reason why Imam Bukhari introduces the first chapter, entitled ‘The Book of Belief,’ in his famous collection of Hadith with the section on, “How the Revelation Began.” The Holy Quran is the result of the highest and most complete form of revelation, lesser forms of divine communion are granted to reformers (*mujaddids*) who come from time to time, usually at the beginning of each century. They receive the gift of Divine communion in the form of revelation (*wahy*), and words heard by a person spoken to as from behind a veil (*ilhām*), which rejuvenates their belief, enables them to engender a new faith in those who follow them. It is with reference to such individuals that the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, “Like the Children of Israel, amongst my followers, there will also be such individuals with whom Allah communicates without their being prophets.” (*Bukhārī—Kitāb Fazā’il Ashāb-Al nabi bab Munāqib—Umar bin Al Khatab*).

Belief essential for serenity: The remaining portion of this blessed verse states, “They all believe in Allah. The Arabic word *Āmana*, is ordinarily understood to mean, “He believed,” but its dictionary meaning is, “He entered into peace.” Peace, signifies serenity of the heart. Just like a child is not satisfied till he holds on to his parents, the spirit which comes from Allah is not at peace till it holds on to Allah. The inherent connection of man’s nature with the Divine, which I have previously explained as the, “covenant of nature,” does not allow man to be at peace till he forms a spiritual bond with Allah, the Most High. In the world today, particularly in Europe and America, there is no dearth of material comforts, but there is no contentment of mind, because of a break in the relationship with God. Members of this materialistic society try to acquire this contentment through the use of alcohol, drugs, and music, but this is at best a temporary fix and their real condition keeps on getting from bad to worse. Serenity of the mind, in practice, can only be acquired through acts of goodness. For example, a person who accepts a bribe loses his serenity. On the contrary an honest person can go to bed hungry, but he does have peace of mind. This holds true for all acts of righteousness.

The evolution and progression of belief: Allah, the Most High is the Source of all excellent virtue. The concept of righteousness evolved in the human mind through the awareness of Divine attributes, otherwise the human mind is like that of other animals. This concept of righteousness developed in the human mind through Divine revelation which mankind has received off and on from the beginning of its creation, starting with Prophet Adam. The revealed word of God gave man the knowledge of Divine attributes and exhorted him to create those same attributes in himself. I have discussed this topic in my previous lessons with reference to the Holy Quran and Hadith in my previous lessons, and will therefore avoid repetition here.

After belief in Allah, the second element of belief is stated in the Divine words, "And His angels." I have also discussed this in one of the previous lessons, to summarize Allah has created spiritual agencies called angels which help and guide mankind, by inviting it to acts of goodness. Belief in angels means conviction that the urge to do good within man is motivated by angels, under the command of Allah, the Most High. Man should, act upon this urge with exigency lest the opportunity to do good be lost. For example, if is an opportunity to do good, and a person does not act immediately on the prompting of the angel, the opportunity may pass by and leave him guilty of falling a prey to the instigation of the devil, who caused the complacency.

In contrast to Allah, and His angels who cannot be seen, the Beneficence of Allah has provided spiritual guidance in the form of revealed scriptures, which can be seen and read. The most complete form of such revelation has been preserved in writing, and given to man in the form of the Holy Quran. That is why immediately after belief in Allah and the angels, the Holy Quran mentions belief in the revealed books of Allah. Belief in the prophets is mentioned next. The prophets show by their example that it is practical and feasible to follow the teachings of the Books in every detail. In addition, the life of a prophet is a living example, which is always more effective than just words. How excellent is the teaching of the Holy Quran! Followers of other religions have strayed away from true guidance because they accept only their own prophets and scriptures, and reject those of other nations. Not only do they find faults with the prophets of other nations, but in reality by rejecting their revealed scriptures, they accuse them of falsehood and deceit. That is why this amazing Book, the Holy Quran states, "We make no difference between any of His messengers," meaning that we consider all of them to be truthful and from Allah. Some people find it difficult to reconcile this statement with the one in another verse which states, " We have made some of these messengers to excel others" (2:253). In this verse it is clearly the excellence of some

prophets over others that is mentioned. As prophets they are all the same, just as we, as human beings are the same. Amongst us there are some who excel over others. However, this does not mean that as human beings we are different.

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 50)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

And they say: We hear and obey; our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave), and to Thee is the eventual course.

Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us ! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.

CH.2:285,286

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
أَمِنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَيْكَتِهِ
وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ تَقُولُ لَا نُخَافُ مِنْكُمْ
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مَنْ سَأَلَهُ تَقَالُوتًا وَسَمِعْنَا
وَاطَعْنَا أَمْرًا وَعُفْرَانًا
عُفْرَانًا رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾
لَا يَكْفُرُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وَسَعَهَا طَهْرًا
مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا النَّسَبُ رَبَّنَا لَا
تُؤْخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا
وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا رَبَّنَا
وَاعْفُرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا وَارْحَمْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا
فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا رَبَّنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾

How to achieve the objective of belief

The Holy Quran is a unique and comprehensive Book, that does not omit the discussion of any essential matter. Belief is an elementary component of man's spiritual life, as I explained in the previous lesson. I also discussed the necessary constituents of belief. Belief is not something that can be perceived visually, or gauged with a measuring device in order to determine its presence, or strength. I also pointed out that without belief man cannot obtain peace of mind, reform his deeds, or understand the purpose of his life. However, just being aware of this purpose is not enough unless one is

able to fulfill it. Belief leads us to recognize this purpose, but what is the means of attaining it? The answer to this is given at the beginning of this lesson's verse, in the words, "And they say (*qālū*): We hear and obey" i.e., the believers say, they heard the word of Allah, and His Prophet, and submitted to the Divine commandments fully. In one of my earlier lessons I had explained that the word *qāla* (plural form is *qālū*) in the Arabic language, does not only mean verbal expression of a matter, but also making it a part of one's action. Therefore, "And they say: We hear and obey," means that the believers hear the word of Allah, and His Prophet, with rapt attention, and then act upon it immediately.

The example of the Holy Prophet and his Companions

The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the best example of what is meant by complete submission to Allah. He said about himself, "I am the first of those who submit." The life of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was a practical expression of all the Quranic injunctions. The Holy Quran bears testimony to this by not only calling him the first of those who submit, but also by stating that, "Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allah" (4:80).

The lives of the companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are also an excellent demonstration of the Quranic statement, "We hear and obey." Before the prohibition of alcohol, Muslims consumed alcohol like the rest of the Arabs. Those who have observed people addicted to alcohol know that it is a very strong addiction, and very hard to get rid of, particularly for those with a lifelong habit. In a civilized and educated society like America, attempts to prohibit the consumption of alcohol by legislation failed, despite the full use of law enforcement, and the law had to be abrogated. In Medina, however, all the Muslims gave up drinking without any hesitation as soon as the commandment for prohibition was revealed, despite the fact that they were frequent users of alcohol like the other Arabs of the time. They demolished their wine kegs, and it is said that wine flowed like rain water through the streets of Medina. There are other similar incidents which exemplify how the early Muslims complied with the Quranic injunction, "We hear and obey." I will describe only one more such incident. The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was giving a sermon in the mosque, and noticed that some people were standing in the back row. He, therefore, asked them to sit down. It so happened that a companion of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was walking in the street outside the mosque at that very moment. No sooner that he heard the command of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to sit down, he

sat down immediately right where he was. Somebody pointed out to him that he was not the one being addressed by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). To which he replied that he was well aware of that, but he did not want to delay in submitting to the command of the Holy Prophet, for who knows, he might die before entering the mosque, and be a sinner for not obeying the Prophet.

Instantaneous submission on hearing the command of Allah and His Prophet is sufficient testimony to the righteous state of a person's belief. Any procrastination in the matter of obeying Allah and His Prophet after accepting them as one's benefactors, totally negates belief. The individual who, "Hears and obeys," is also the one who achieves the purpose of his creation. However, despite this complete and excellent degree of belief attained through the injunction of hearing and obeying Allah and His Prophet, the words that follow are, "Our Lord, Thy forgiveness (do we crave)." This prayer is a realization on the part of a true believer that the devil, and his own animal self (*nafs-al ammara*) are constantly instigating him to falter from the right path and his heart cries out for the protection and forgiveness of Allah. The words that follow, "and to Thee is the eventual course," are even more remarkable because they bring home the essential point that if man remains focused on his ultimate meeting with the Creator, he is not likely to vacillate, or become careless.

Burden laid down upon the soul in proportion to its capacity

"Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope." In the verse before this it is stated that belief is in a state of righteousness when the spiritual condition is a manifestation of, "We hear and obey." Along with this is a reminder of the accountability which will occur when the eventual return takes place to Allah. These injunctions create an apprehension in a responsible person whether he will be able to achieve that high standard of belief which leads to instantaneous compliance of Allah's commands. Allah, therefore, assures man that He does not impose upon him a burden that he cannot bear. Accountability is for acts of omission and commission which are in the control of a person. Man should not, therefore, be apprehensive of his accountability before God, for it will be in proportion to the capacity of his soul, or ability to undertake an action.

Three types of Burdens: From the Holy Quran it appears that Allah, the Most High, imposes only three kinds of burdens upon mankind. The first kind consists of the commandments of religious law (*shariat*) such as prayer, fasting, pilgrimage (*Hajj*), poor rate (*zakāt*), and other religious injunctions and prohibitions. The second kind consists of the trials and

tribulations that fall to the lot of man as part of his destiny i.e., in accordance with the law of Divine measure (*taqdir*). This includes illness, death, hunger, monetary difficulties, and other losses. The third kind consists of tribulations which are a chastisement for man's sins. This chastisement can be persistent and may even lead to a person's demise. The first two burdens, i.e., that of religious law, and tribulation of destiny are from Allah, and His law in the matter is that He does not put upon man a burden which is beyond his limit of tolerance. The third burden, however, is a result, and in proportion to man's sins. It is quite possible that he may be crushed under its weight.

Let us examine these three categories separately. First, is the burden of religious law. About this it is stated that it is in proportion to a man's strength and forbearance. For example, let us take the obligatory prayer. If a man cannot recite his prayer while standing, he is allowed to say it while sitting, or lying down, or even by using sign language with a finger. Thus, facility is provided to accord with the difficulty a person may be in. The wayfarer is allowed to combine, or shorten the prayer. If a person has other pressing obligations such as invitation to a dinner, religious gathering, or a marriage ceremony etc., he is allowed to combine the prayers. When combining prayers, the *sunna* portion of the prayers is not recited, and therefore the prayer also becomes shortened. Similarly, in the case of fasting, provision is made for the sick, the wayfarer, and the elderly who do not have the strength to fast. It is permissible, in case of the first two, to fast on other days. The elderly and the one who cannot fast at any other time during the year due to prolonged illness may issue redemption by feeding a poor man. The Holy Quran states, "Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you" (2:185). The Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed also stressed this point by stating, "Religious law is based on facility and not harshness."

Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

(Quranic Lesson 51)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people.

CH.2:286

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
لَا يَكْفِيكَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وَسَعَهَا طَاهَرَهَا
مَا كَسَبْتَ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَرَبُّنَا لَا
تُوْاْخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا
وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ
عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْنَا
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا رَبَّنَا
وَاعْفُ لَنَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا
فَاغْصِرْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ٢٨٦

In the preceding lesson I mentioned that Allah lays down two burdens upon mankind. These are the injunctions of religious law and the burden laid down in accordance with the Divine law of measure, such as illness, death, grief, hunger, the loss of wealth, and failure after a hard struggle. Both these burdens are such that Allah lays them down in proportion to the capacity, and strength of a person. The third burden, which we shall discuss in this lesson, is the burden of man's own sins, and the chastisement that results. This burden is a punishment from Allah, the Most High, and since it is based on man's own misdeeds, it can exceed his capacity to bear if the burden of sin is too great.

Limitations in religious law not to exceed those of Allah and His Prophet

I discussed the burden of religious law (*shariat*) in my previous lesson. Allah has granted all kinds of facilities to fulfill these requirements, so that the burden may not become excessive. For example, in the injunctions about fasting, a sick person, or a wayfarer is allowed to forego fasting during the prescribed period and to meet the requirement at a later time. If the health of the sick person does not permit even that, redemption can be offered by feeding a poor man. These facilities have been granted by Allah and His Prophet without any limitation about the length of the journey, or the nature of a person's sickness, and hence it is not proper for any person to curtail these concessions by imposing restrictions. Similarly if water is not available to perform ablution, the Holy Quran has allowed an alternative by stating, "betake yourselves (*tayammamū*) to pure earth, and wipe your faces and your hands therewith" (5:6). It is ludicrous to put a restriction, as some have done, to conduct search for water for twenty four miles in all directions, before availing oneself of this facility. If this condition was to be fulfilled seriously, the time for the prayer would be long gone before the search was over, and such attempts would be a serious distraction in completing the journey. In interpreting the religious law, one should remember that, "Allah desires ease for you, and He desires not hardship for you." That is why the Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed stated that the religious law (*shariat*) is based upon facility, and not harshness.

Burdens in accordance with the Law of Divine Measure

Now I will discuss the other burdens put down upon mankind by Allah, the Most High. They are mentioned in another place in the Holy Quran as follows, "And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient" (2:155). Further on it is stated, "Who, when a misfortune befalls them say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course." These are burdens which come in accordance with the law of Divine measure, and sometimes these tribulations appear unbearable. Out of fear and anxiety, some people faint, bang their heads against a wall, become mentally deranged, or even commit suicide. One should, however, always remember that there can be no burden in accordance with the law of Divine measure which is beyond human forbearance. Such burdens should be borne with patience and assent, and those who do so, are given the spiritual rewards and blessings mentioned by the Holy Quran. In fact Allah, the

Most High, eventually makes such difficulties tolerable for them, or totally eliminates them.

Burden laid down to increase the capacity of the soul

The two burdens imposed by Allah, the Most High, are those of religious law, and the difficulties that arise as a result of the Divine law of measure. Both these burdens are never beyond the level of human endurance. There is another interpretation of this verse, as well. It states that Allah never puts down a burden upon the soul of man except to increase its capacity i.e., advance it in spiritual terms. I like this interpretation a lot. The Creator of the soul is the only One aware of its capacity, which is unknown to man himself. By subjecting it to the burden of religious law, Allah intends to advance the capacity of that soul to its maximum potential. In accordance with this interpretation, Hazrat Imam Raghīb, the famous lexicologist, states that the paradise, whose extent the Holy Quran says is similar to the extent of the heavens and the earth, is created within the soul of a man, only when its capacity becomes akin to that of the heavens and the earth. This capability is developed by bearing the burdens of religious law and the law of Divine measure. At this level of spiritual development Allah, Who cannot be contained within the heavens and the earth, manifests Himself in the heart of such a person. Because of the spiritual benefits that accrue from bearing these two burdens, even the prophets were not exempted from bearing these burdens. In fact, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) states that the prophets encounter trials and tribulations of a degree not faced by other humans. About himself, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who possesses the greatest degree of excellence from amongst the messengers, said, "I have been tormented more than any other prophet."

Let us now examine the words of the Holy Quran, "For it is that which it earns (of good) and against it that which it works (of evil)." This means that while facing the burdens of religious law, or those of the law of Divine measure, if someone does a good deed, or sets a good example, it is for his own benefit. On the other hand, if someone sets a bad example, or commits an evil deed, he will be the one to suffer its evil consequences. These burdens are imposed for the spiritual benefit of mankind, and those who do not take advantage by bearing them patiently will surely incur a loss upon themselves. We can give the analogy of two students who are both administered an exam. One of the students passes his exam is successful in the world and satisfied. He is akin to the person who bears his burdens patiently. The other student keeps failing, remains unsuccessful, and spends the rest of his life in an abject and disappointed state. Such is the person who

does not benefit from the Divine burdens imposed upon him.

In the trials of life that fall to the share of man by the will of Allah lies the success or failure, and the happiness or sorrow of not only this life, but also of the everlasting life after death. The realization of one's own weaknesses and shortcomings, on the one hand and the momentous nature of the struggle that has to be waged to bear the Divinely imposed burdens on the other, man's soul cries out spontaneously, "Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us." The burden refer to here is the same one that I mentioned earlier, i.e., the burden imposed in accordance to the Law of Divine Measure. This prayer is totally in accordance with the nature of man which desires to shun difficulties that are likely to arise from the Law of Divine Measure, and desires relief as and when they do arise.

Burden of man's own sins

"Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear." Allah does not impose a burden upon man that he does not have the strength to bear. Such a burden that is unbearable for man, therefore cannot be a burden of religious law, or one that is in accordance with the law of Divine measure. It is the burden of man's own misdeeds that he has himself earned, and the punishment of Allah as a consequence of such evil actions which is referred to in this part of the verse. The laws in accordance with which such punishment is meted out are made by Allah, the Most High, that is why Allah refers to the consequences of such actions to be from Him. The Reformer of this age Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed has explained the use of this language form with a very good example. If there is only one window in a room, and the person residing in the room closes it, then Allah will describe it thus, "This person shut the window and We turned his room dark." Allah ascribes the consequences of man's actions to Himself, because the laws which bring about those consequences are laid down by Him. In short, the burdens that can break a man's back, or lead to his demise are the burdens of his own sins. Man, therefore cries out to Allah, knowing that the burden of his own sins are such that they could crush him, but hoping that the most Merciful Who does not impose unbearable burdens under the laws of religion and measure will extend the same mercy to the burdens of his sins. Hence, he pleads to Almighty to save him from such burdens, or their consequences, which he does not have the strength to bear.

How appropriate are, therefore the words that follow, "And pardon us!" Man, even when he does evil to someone else is actually being iniquitous to his own soul, because he commits a sin against Allah Who gave him that

soul to fulfill a higher purpose, and not to waste it. As I mentioned in the first lesson of this section, the spirit which has come from Allah is a trust from Him within man. Whoever pollutes this spirit, or does not guide it properly, betrays the trust of Allah, and thus commits a crime against Him. “And grant us protection!” so that we do not commit any further misdeeds. This is so when man has committed evil once, it becomes easier to commit it the second time around. For example, if a person accepts a bribe once, his inhibition is broken and it becomes easier for him to accept bribes in the future. Therefore, after asking for forgiveness of previous sins, protection is sought from their commission in the future. “And have mercy on us!” In the Holy Quran the mercy of Allah signifies spiritual blessings. Therefore, asking for Allah’s mercy means asking Him to give back to us through His mercy the spiritual blessings we have lost as a consequence of our misdeeds. “Thou art our Patron,” our Helper our Friend, who can we beseech besides Thee? “So grant us victory over the disbelieving people.” The leader of the disbelievers is the devil himself, who was the first of the disbelievers, and about whom the Holy Quran tells us, “ And he is one of the disbelievers.” (2:34). Those who fall to his temptation become his helpers. These helpers are from amongst one’s friends as well as enemies. Man faces a lot of grief because of the devil, and his helpers as we learn from the prayer of Prophet Job, “ When he cried to his Lord: The devil has afflicted me with toil and torment” (38:41). The true believer cannot succeed against the devil and his friends without the assistance of Allah Almighty.

Another interpretation is also possible. This verse started out with the mention of man’s self. Man has to strive with his self in order to bear the burdens of the religious law, and those of Divine measure. The other striving (*jihād*) of the true believer is externally against disbelief. Allah’s help is asked for in both these forms of striving. We can observe that a prophet, or a reformer first strives against his own self by means of worship, devotion and guarding against evil. Subsequently, when they are appointed for the reformation of other souls, they face a storm of mighty opposition and they have to strive against it. They receive Divine help, which they ask for, in carrying out both these struggles. We stand in great debt of the Reformer of this age for emphasizing that we need to strive against our self by means of guarding against evil (*taqwā*), and also that we need to strive against disbelief by means of propagation of Islam. He asked us to contribute a portion of our income monthly for this purpose. By doing this, we can fulfill both forms of striving at the same time; against the self, by giving in the way of Allah what we could have spent on the self, and also against disbelief.

The Prayer of one lost in the love of God

There can be yet another interpretation of this verse, which is of my own rendering, and which I like very much. In this prayer, the one who is in love with Allah, beseeches Him thus, "O Allah do not punish me for my mistakes, or shortcomings, and do not impose upon me the burdens imposed upon those before me. If, however, You do impose upon me a burden like that imposed upon those before me, I will be able to bear it. There is one burden, however, which I cannot bear, and that is the burden of your displeasure. If you have to chastise me, go ahead and do so, but do not be displeased with me for that I cannot bear. You have been forgiving me all my life, please do so once again. You have always kept me under your protection, do not deprive me of it now. You have always had mercy on me and I have become used to it. Now have mercy on this weakness of mine that I only know your mercy. I do not know your wrath. You have always been my Patron, and I cannot be saved without you. Therefore, please help me against the devil, and his companions, for they will try to destroy me when they observe me to be your servant. If Your help is with me, I will be able to overpower the devil and his helpers." When the Imam recites this prayer of *Al-Baqarah*, the congregation should say *Āmin* (be it so) in a loud voice.

Āl-‘Imrān (Family of Amran)

(Quranic Lesson 52)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

I, Allah, am the best Knower, (Alif-lam-meem)

Allah, (there is) no god (Ilaha) but He, the Ever-living (Al-Haye), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (Al-Qayyum).

He has revealed to thee the Book with truth, verifying that which is before it, and He revealed the Torah and the Gospel.

Aforetime, a guidance for the people, and He sent the Discrimination. Those who disbelieve (kafaru) in the messages of Allah — for them is severe chastisement. And Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution.

(Ch. 3:1-4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْمَع

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ

مِن قَبْلُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَنزَلَ الْفُرْقَانَ
إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انتِقَامٍ

Significance of the name Āl-‘Imrān

These are the first four verses of the chapter Āl-‘Imrān. ‘Imrān is same as Amran the father of prophet Moses and Aaron. Āl-‘Imrān meaning the Family of Amran. The history of the descendants of these two prophets is spread over thousands of years. The Holy Quran has very elegantly given expression to this, by calling them Āl-‘Imrān, The Family of Amran thus illustrating the usage of a single word in a brief and most comprehensive manner. This is real eloquence, i.e., the expression of a very broad meaning in a few simple words. It is quite in contrast to the common misconception about eloquence as being the usage of difficult and rhyming words, delivered in a speedy manner. By doing so the speaker usually intends to

create a false impression upon the audience about the extent of his knowledge. The chapter preceding this discusses the Israelites and the causes of their decadence. This chapter discusses the sequential chain of prophethood within the house of Israel, beginning with Prophets Moses and Aaron and ending with Jesus. It also sheds light on the reasons for its termination amongst the Israelites and its subsequent bestowal upon their brethren the Ishmaelites. From the descendants of prophet Ishmael arose the last of the Prophets, Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. It also discusses events relating to Jesus, the last prophet of the Family of Amran, and shows how these events were exaggerated to lay down the foundation of his divinity and the creed of Christianity.

Those who professed belief in Jesus exaggerated his teachings. The Jews who rejected him, in particular the Jewish religious leaders, were in a state of obvious moral decadence. Fourteen hundred years had passed between the advent of Prophet Moses and Jesus. In this lengthy span of time despite the advent of hundreds of prophets (thousands, according to the Torah), all attempts towards the reformation of Jews had failed. Because they attempted to crucify Prophet Jesus, the Jews became, “those upon whom wrath is bestowed”(Holy Quran 1:7). Time had therefore arrived that a prophet like Moses should be “ raised ” from amongst their brethren the Ishmaelites, as Prophet Moses had prophesied. It was also time to give prophethood to those who would bear its fruit in a timely manner as foretold by Jesus, the last of the Israelite Prophets.

The usage of abbreviations in the Holy Quran

The Arabic letters *Alif-lām-mīm* are abbreviations (*huruf-e-muqatta'āt*). These letters are to be read separately and each letter stands for a word. This is a form of expression common to all languages. Such expressions were used in the Arabic language even prior to their use by the Holy Quran and their usage is in fact quite common in the modern languages. For example we find in the English language the use of the abbreviations, B.A , M.A., Phd., O.K., etc. Most commentators usually avoid interpreting the abbreviations found in the Holy Quran. The reason given for this by some is that only Allah knows their meaning. If this was in fact so and Allah did not intend to tell man the meaning of these letters, then one may question (may Allah protect us from doing so), the usefulness of Allah's intent in revealing these letters. The real reason for the commentators confusion was that in the early period different meanings were ascribed to these abbreviations. There is, however, nothing wrong with this practice for as the Holy Prophet has stated, “the difference of opinion amongst my followers is a blessing.” It is quite appropriate to choose different meanings of these

letters by following the same rules by which other words of the Holy Quran are subject to different interpretations. In the books of lexicon we find that a single word of the Holy Quran will have several different meanings and one frequently finds a difference of opinion amongst the commentators. One may therefore question why different meanings cannot be ascribed to these abbreviations and why such practice is a source of confusion?

Another interpretation of these letters that I have come across in a commentary is that these letters stand for the initials of the earlier scribes of the Holy Quran. The person giving this interpretation did not perceive how such a notion could undermine the veracity of the Holy Quran itself. If the names of the scribes could become a part of the Holy text (may Allah protect us from this), then there is no guarantee to the Divine promise of protecting the text of the Holy Quran, and its freedom from extraneous materials. In fact the meaning of these abbreviations has been conveyed to us by the companions of the Holy prophet and from the very beginning not only have they been a part of the Quranic text, but have also been a part of the prayers in which the Quranic text containing these abbreviations was recited. If one presumes that the scribes had (may Allah protect us from this) tagged their names on to the Quranic text, then one also has to question the judgment of those who memorized the Quranic text for they kept on reciting these letters. This presumption is therefore totally erroneous.

The meaning of *Alif-lām-mīm*, as stated by the renowned commentator of the Holy Quran, Hazrat Ibn Abbas, is that these letters are abbreviations for, *Anā-Allah-‘alamu* (I Allah am the best Knower). This is an excellent rendering of the meaning. The first letter *alif* of the word *Ana* has been taken, while the middle letter of *Allah* the word in the middle is taken and the ending letter *mīm* of the last word *‘alamu* is used thus comprising the abbreviation *Alif-lām-mīm*. This abbreviation *Alif-lām-mīm* is also used in the beginning of the chapter *Al-Baqarah*.

I have explained the meaning of, “I Allah am the best Knower,” while discussing the opening passage of *Al-Baqarah*, in an earlier lesson, but I will repeat the gist of it over here as well. It forms an excellent link with the Quranic words that follow immediately after i.e., “This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty,” for guidance is always asked from the one who possesses more knowledge. For example a patient seeks guidance from a doctor because he possesses more knowledge than the patient, and when a doctor himself is in need of further guidance, he seeks the assistance of a specialist in that disease. No one possesses knowledge more perfect than Allah, regarding the purpose of man’s creation and the spiritual direction in which he should proceed in order to achieve this objective.

In this chapter *Al-Imran*, the meaning of *Alif-lām-mīm* is the same,

“I Allah am the best Knower,” but carries a slightly different connotation, which is excellently suited to the present text. This chapter discusses matters dealing with the external physical existence and the internal spiritual life of man. Knowledge of understanding the Holy Quran and of events dealing with the past present and the future is given. Who can have a better knowledge of all of this than Allah the Most High? By stating, “I Allah am the best Knower,” The Holy Quran therefore succinctly draws our attention to the fact that in worldly matters such as a doctors prescribed treatment, (in taking a potentially harmful pill or undergoing a risky operation) you readily follow the advise of one who possesses more knowledge than you although he is not even a claimant to perfection in knowledge. Why is it then, that you deny the guidance of Allah, Who is the only Being in possession of complete and perfect knowledge in all matters?

Allah, (there is) no god (Ilaha) but He

In the verse, “Allah, (there is) no god (*Ilāha*) but He,” the Arabic word *Ilāha* is ordinarily taken to mean the One Who is worshipped with obedience. This word, however, also implies, the One Who deserves our love and the One Who is the purpose or Objective of our existence. The Holy Quran states that everything in the universe is bound within the laws laid down by Allah the Most High (this fact made known to the world through the revelation of the unlettered Prophet peace and blessings of Allah be upon him was unknown to the scientific minds of the day). Mankind has been given unique intellectual ability and freedom of will. He is, however, directed to use his intellect to recognize the unity Of Allah the Most High and to obey Him, like the rest of creation, which by doing so benefits from Divine nurturing unto perfection. By willingly doing so, man can benefit from the Creators nurturing unto perfection (*rabubiyyat*), and be rewarded for it not only in this world but also in the Hereafter. Goodness and higher moral values can develop only when man is given the freedom of will. This is not the case in animals who cannot act with free will and are thus unable to develop morally and spiritually. Besides obedience to Allah, His goodness (*ḥusn* — attributes) and beneficence (*Iḥsān*—eternal dispensation of those attributes), should inspire love in the heart of the believer. Obedience with love is most beneficial, unlike submission that is devoid of it and is considered only a burden. The third meaning of the Arabic word *Ilāh* is the one Who is the aim and aspiration of our life, establishing a relationship with Allah thus being the purpose of mans creation. We are directed to obey Allah with love and humility, thus creating the ideal conditions to mold our spirits in accordance with His attributes and getting closer to Him as we advance spiritually. It is quite obvious that only those of us will obtain nearness to

Him, who have colored their self with the coloring of His attributes and goodness.

The verse, “Allah, (there is) no god (*Ilāha*) but He,” also encompasses the subject that since He is the only One in His Being, He has always given mankind the lesson of His unity through His prophets and revealed scriptures. All other false deities are the creation of mans own mind and those who waste their lives in seeking and following them will do so to their own disadvantage. This verse is followed by mention of the Divine attributes of, “the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist.” I will very shortly comment on these attributes, but the Beholder of these attributes is described further in the Quranic text that follows i.e., “He has revealed to thee the Book with truth.” This shows that He will always keep alive the principle of the unity of His Being, which is the truth, through the revelation and complete preservation of this Book — the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran is the only revealed scripture whose main subject is the unity of the Divine Being, which has remained unaltered in its original text, and it lays claim to protection by the Divine hand.

The Ever-living

The Arabic word *Al-Hayy* means, “the Ever-living.” By the addition of the Arabic letters *Alif and lām (Al)* to the word *Hayy*, this attribute has been made specific for Allah, Who is its only Possessor in the most complete and comprehensive meaning of the word. The Ever-living also indicates that all life is from Him, i.e., He is The Creator. Development of Scientific thought has not been able to identify the Creator of life itself. It now, however, recognizes that the universe and every thing within it was once inert matter, and will ultimately come to an end. The Holy Quran expresses this idea in the verse, “Every one on it passes away — And there endures forever the person of thy Lord, the Lord of glory and honor” (55: 26, 27).

The Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist

The Arabic word *Al-Qayyūm* means, “the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist.” God is Great! Today even the scientists say that this universe exists because it exists in a universal mind. The Holy Quran and the Holy Prophet informed the world of this fourteen hundred years ago, thus providing irrefutable evidence that the source of this knowledge is Allah, Who is unique not only in His Being, but also His attributes. Another profound piece of knowledge is also conveyed to us in the words, “the Ever-living (*Al-Hayy*), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyūm*)”. The greatest desire of mankind is to live forever, that is why those who worship wealth and power are ready to part with all their possessions at the time of

their death in return for a lease on life. One also desires that he should be in a state of good health, with all the means of subsistence at his disposal. This meaning is conveyed by the Arabic word *qiyām*, (verb form of the word *Qayyūm*). This worldly life is, however, neither everlasting, nor does one remain in good health all the time, or has all the means of subsistence at his disposal. In any case all of man's possessions are lost at the time of his death. The Holy Quran thus directs us that if you want everlasting life and sustenance, then turn towards Allah Who is, "the Ever-living (*Al-Ḥayy*), the Self-subsisting, by Whom all subsist (*Al-Qayyūm*)". Unfortunately, however, man has always made this worldly life and its fineries the object of his love, aspiration and purpose in life. None of these elements can give him everlasting life, eternal well being, or contentment. The gods he created were either stone idols, animal deities like the cow or helpless human beings like himself whose eternal needs were similar to his own. This includes venerable and righteous beings like Jesus, Buddha, Ramachandra and Krishna, all of whom were raised to the status of divinity by man. The teaching of the unity of the Divine Being given by all revealed scriptures and prophets of God was thus adulterated by human hand in order to justify his polytheistic beliefs. The Holy Quran states, "He has revealed to thee the Book with truth," because by revealing the Holy Quran Allah has restored this truth, which had been lost to mankind, thus fulfilling his greatest need.

Verification of previous scriptures by the Holy Quran

The Quranic words that follow, "verifying that which is before it", have a general application i.e., the Holy Quran verifies all of the scriptures revealed before it. In the very beginning of the Holy Quran it is stated, "And who believe in that which has been revealed to thee and that which was revealed before thee" (2:4). A Muslim believes not only in the Book revealed to the Holy Prophet, but all the Divine scriptures revealed before the Holy Quran. What a marvelous Book of wisdom is the Holy Quran! It mentions belief in the other scriptures after the Holy Quran, though they were revealed before it. This is because the condition of these scriptures today is such that they contain material which is accepted as erroneous, either from a historical or knowledge based perspective. Their teachings today are so defective that those who profess belief in them seek guidance elsewhere. Thus it would have been very difficult for any intelligent person to accept these scriptures to be from God, had not the Holy Quran confirmed this as it also states in this verse "verifying that which is before it". Once again the profound wisdom of the Holy Quran shows! By confirming the source of these scriptures to be the revealed word of Allah, it provides

a cogent proof to affirm the unity of the Divine Being, for no one actually says, or can say that the source of these revelations was other than the One Divine Being. From amongst the previously revealed scriptures the Torah and the Gospel are particularly mentioned over here. This is not only because these scriptures, in comparison with others, mention the unity of the Divine Being more often, but they are also the first and the last scriptures of the Mosaic dispensation, which was now being discontinued. Thus the mention of the first and last scriptures includes all of the scriptures revealed to this order. The Holy Quran, however, states that not only the books of the Mosaic dispensation, but all the previously revealed scriptures were, “a guidance for the people,” when they were revealed. They no longer remain so because their texts have either been completely lost, or as is generally accepted, the truth in them has been adulterated abundantly with falsehood.

The Holy Quran discriminates between truth and falsehood

The words of the Holy Quran which follow, “and He sent the Discrimination.”, inspire great admiration in the mind of the reader. The Holy Quran has been called the Discrimination because it clearly discriminates between the truth and falsehood. It not only identifies the truth that remains behind in the previous scriptures, but is also capable of making this distinction between truth and falsehood in the future, and is therefore the only scripture capable of guiding mankind. The closing words of this section are, “Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*) in the messages of Allah — for them is severe chastisement. And Allah is Mighty, the Lord of retribution.” This verse indicates, now that Allah has sent the word which clearly distinguishes between truth and falsehood, if man continues to be ungrateful and disbelieves (the *Arabic* word *kafarū* carries both these connotations) and remains astray, his reformation will be brought about through remedial punishment. This situation is analogous to the remedial course of action taken by parents who wish their children well, and want to bring about their reform. Allah the Most High is Mighty in His authority, and if man does not submit to His command through love and affection, He brings about his correction through remedial chastisement. If correction does not occur by remedial castigation in this life, such reproof nevertheless, serves as proof for the therapeutic chastisement of the life Hereafter, where reform will be accomplished with certainty.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch. 3)

Quranic Lesson 53

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

Surely nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah.

He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god (Ilaha) but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee ; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say : We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none mind except men of understanding.

(Ch. 3:5-7)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ ۝

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَوِّرُكُمْ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ كَيْفَ
يَشَاءُ ۚ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ
آيَاتٌ مُّحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخْرَى
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ طُ بَلَّغْنَا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ ذُرِّيعةً

فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ
الْفِتْنَةِ ۚ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ۚ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ
تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ ۗ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ
يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا
وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ۝

Misinterpretation of allegorical verses by previous nations

These are verses five, six and seven of the chapter Āl-‘Imrān. I have commented on verses one, two, three and four in the preceding lesson, which mention the revealed scriptures prior to the revelation of the Holy Quran. These scriptures were a source of guidance for the people at the time of their revelation, however, those who follow them today are not guided towards the right path through them. This is proven by the fact that in spite

of following their guidance, the followers of these scriptures are unable to establish communion with God. The proof of such communion has always been, that Allah the Most High spoke with such persons. Now that falsehood has entered these religions, the Holy Quran has been revealed to discriminate between truth and falsehood and forever sustain the truth. Those who believe in the Holy Quran should not commit the same errors committed by the ones before them. I will discuss this at length later on. What they did was to ignore the decisive verses of the scripture in favor of the allegorical ones and interpret them in accordance with their desires. In this way not only did they go astray from the truth, but also lead others astray and created disunity.

Definition of decisive and allegorical

Before any further comments, it is essential to explain what is meant by decisive and allegorical verses. The famous lexicologist, Imam Raghīb has defined the Arabic word *muhkam* (decisive), “as that in which there is no doubt between the word and its meaning.” For example the verses of the Holy Quran dealing with the unity of the Divine Being, the reward for good and punishment for evil are so clear and uniform that no doubt can arise concerning their meaning. The allegorical verses are such that they can be interpreted in one or more ways and though their meanings have a certain similarity, those in whose hearts is perversity, instead of interpreting these verses in light of the decisive ones, interpret them in accordance with their own desires. In this manner, they create a climate of dissension and turn away from the truth. Another example to illustrate this is that the Bible clearly teaches and enjoins the unity of the Divine Being. When Jesus was questioned about the first amongst the commandments, he replied, “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel ; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment. And the scribe said unto him, Well Master, thou hast said the truth : for there is one God : and there is none other but He. (Mark 12:29, 30,32).

In places, however, he called God, “father,” and himself the, “son of God.” For this the Jews accused him of blasphemy i.e., calling himself God and tried to stone him. To this accusation, he replied, “ Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods (referring to Psalms 82 : 6 —I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.) If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken: Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest : because I said, I am the Son of God? (John 10:34-36).

All his life Jesus called himself, “son of man,” and two of the gospels in his genealogical tree mention Joseph the carpenter as his father. Later on, however, Paul and others took advantage of the allegorical statements of Jesus and created the doctrine which considers Jesus as son of god in a real sense. In fact, not only that, but considers him as one god, out of three. This is the perversity of the heart which has led to the interpretation of allegorical verses in accordance with one's desires, the result of which is deviation from the truth. As a consequence of this deception, a great majority of mankind today has gone astray.

I have intentionally quoted Christian sources to illustrate this tendency of setting aside the decisive verses in favor of the allegorical ones and interpreting them according to one's desires. This behavior led these nations to go astray and caused dissension. I preferred to highlight these biblical references because the Chapter *Āl-‘Imrān* mentions the Christian beliefs. In conjunction with these, the Holy Quran also mentions Prophet Jesus (*Isa*) peace be upon him, as healing the sick, raising the dead to life, or creating birds, which is also in an allegorical sense. There are decisive verses of the Holy Quran which state that the healing of physical ailments, raising of the dead, and the task of creation is only the work of Allah The Blessed Most High. I will, if Allah please, discuss in detail the reasons Why the Holy Quran has mentioned these in an allegorical sense for Jesus when I am discussing those verses. I am bringing up this reference at this point, because unfortunately our own commentators forgot the difference between the decisive and the allegorical verses of the Holy Quran. As a result of this error, they interpreted these works of Jesus in a literal sense. In doing so, they provided the Christian missionary with a very effective weapon for his missionary propaganda. These missionaries would refer to the Holy Quran and argue that since these tasks performed by Jesus were distinctly Divine, they provided (may Allah protect us from this) proof of his divinity. They would then effectively use these arguments to convert Muslims to Christianity. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed (Reformer of the 14th Century Hijra) was the first person to clarify this matter and effectively demolish their arguments.

Divine objective behind allegorical verses

The Holy Quran contains prophecies which are based on the knowledge of the future. They are mostly in the form of allegorical verses. The wisdom behind this arrangement is that their meaning does not become apparent until they are fulfilled. This has two advantages. Firstly, a dishonest and untruthful person cannot take advantage of these prophecies and apply them to his own person, since he is unaware of their real meaning. Secondly

when these prophecies are fulfilled, they provide cogent proof of the truthfulness of the Holy Prophet, and of the Holy Quran being a Divinely revealed scripture.

The other kind of allegorical verses are those, that in order to unravel their meaning, the researcher of the Holy Quran has to stay within the limits set by the decisive verses, work hard, use his intellect, and supplicate before Allah The Most High. When Allah The Most High illuminates the meaning of these verses for him, the suppliant commentator is overwhelmed and prostrating humbly before Allah admits in the words of the Holy Quran, “ Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise” (2:32). A world of humanity then benefits from these disclosures. Faith is strengthened in the truth that the Quranic revelation is from Allah and contains limitless treasures of spiritual knowledge. One should remember that just as the human mind cannot progress in the worldly sciences unless man works and struggles hard to dig for these hidden treasures, a similar situation exists in the matter of religious and spiritual knowledge.

I will illustrate this with an example from the physical sciences to make it easily understandable. Allah created electricity with its defining principles and characteristics. For example we have negative and positive charges, alternate current, direct current etc. and the various laws governing them. By creating electricity, Allah has given man the opportunity to use his God given intellect, hard-work and effort to make all the useful appliances which are of such great benefit for mankind today. All these appliances are based on the fundamental principles and laws of electricity. They are controlled by and evolve out of the knowledge of these fundamental principle. These are the basic definitive principles, similar to the decisive elements of religious law upon which man can capitalize to interpret the allegorical verses and utilize them for his spiritual development

In a similar manner, the allegorical verses are overruled by the decisive ones and in a way evolve from them. The criterion for the good and evil of a mans actions and his accountability for them is based on the decisive verses. All the verses describing hell and heaven are, however, allegorical and only after death will their true nature be revealed. That is why the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said after he was given knowledge from Allah regarding the blessings of paradise that no one has seen or heard of them, nor have they been perceived by the human mind. Some similarity does, however, exist between them and the worldly blessings, that is why it is stated in the Holy Quran, “and they are given the like of it” (2:25). Allegorical language is essential for our understanding in this earthly existence and this is again expressed in the Holy Quran, “A parable of the Garden which the dutiful are promised” (47:15). For example the

mention of rivers of milk and honey in this regard is not at all in the real sense of the meaning of these words, but by way of metaphor. The meaning of these allegorical references are disclosed upon the commentator of the Holy Quran as a result of his hard work, effort and supplications. I will, if Allah please, discuss these at the opportune time.

The gist of this discussion is that the allegorical verses of the Holy Quran contain within them a great knowledge of the unseen, which evolves or becomes apparent from the decisive verses at the appropriate time. Keeping these two facts in view, we return to the verses under discussion.

Difference between the Divine and human perception of time

The first verse states, “Surely nothing in the earth or in the heaven is hidden from Allah”. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth is hidden from human perception, until its knowledge becomes apparent. Allah The Most High, Who has created all of this, is aware of all His creation and has knowledge of it. This is because He is the creator of both its outer form and internal composition. In a similar manner, Allah is aware of what has occurred in the earth in the past or present for He has been an eyewitness to all of these occurrences and whatever happens in the future will also be in accordance with His law of measure. For mankind knowledge of the future is an unknown dimension, but it is not hidden from Allah. Scientific knowledge now informs us that that the past, present and the future occur in the human perception as a series of events, however, they are there all the time. To check this reference see page seventy two of the book, “The Universe and Doctor Einstein”, written by Lincoln Barnett. One is amazed at the knowledge and the wisdom of the Holy Quran. The Holy Quran has compared the knowledge of Allah to an open book. The page of this book which is open is the present, the preceding pages are the past, and the pages that follow are the future. In Allah’s knowledge they are present simultaneously. For the human eye looking at an open page of a book the preceding and following pages of the book are invisible, however, for a book which encloses all these pages, they are all the same. It does not visualize them with the human visual faculty but its own visual dimension which includes all the pages within it. What a simple and easily understood example the Holy Quran has given to explain a very complex problem!

Why may one ask has the all encompassing knowledge of Allah the Most High been mentioned in this context? It is because this verse is followed by verses discussing the allegorical and the decisive. Allah has given knowledge to mankind in both these ways. The decisive verses are in front of our eyes like the open pages of a book. The allegorical verses are like

those closed pages of the book which are not apparent to the human eye, but are open before Allah, and He can when He so wishes, turn over the unturned pages of the book and display their contents before man.

Relationship of the decisive verse to the allegorical

The verse that follows is even more amazing! “He it is Who shapes you in the wombs as He pleases. There is no god (*Ilāha*) but He, the Mighty, the Wise.” It is a well known fact that no human being, either on his own, or with the assistance of a doctor or midwife can shape the features of his children. The unborn child which is hidden in the confines of the mother’s womb is not hidden from Allah and He gives shape to its form as He pleases.

How amazing is the work of the Creator! With the same number of muscles and bones and other tissue elements, He creates so many beings all differing in their features to the extent that differences exist even between twins. The Holy Quran tells us that the One who shapes your forms is your *ilāh*, the meaning of which I have already discussed. The Arabic word *ilāh* is ordinarily taken to mean the One Who is worshipped with obedience. This word, however, also implies the One Who deserves our love. When obedience is shown out of love for Allah for His supreme beneficence towards mankind, it generates the greatest benefit for mankind, unlike obedience which is only undertaken as a burden. This word also means the One Who is the purpose or Objective of our existence. This communion with Allah which is the purpose of man’s existence can only be achieved through obedience with love. Why then is the word *ilāh* used in this context?

The Holy Quran has given us knowledge which is not to be found anywhere else. As the human child is developing within the mother’s womb, within its body is also developing its spirit. After the demise of the physical being, this spirit, which has by now evolved into the human soul i.e., it has formed a distinct personality, is born into the life Hereafter, in a manner similar to the birth of a child in this world. To those who doubt the life Hereafter, the Holy Quran poses the question that is it not possible for the one Who has created you the first time to recreate you again? The wisdom behind the usage of the word *ilāh* in this context is to emphasize that the soul evolves into the most pleasing form in the Hereafter. This is a result of spending a lifetime in the obedience of Allah, the Most High, striving for His pleasure and thus fulfilling its purpose, i.e., communion with Allah.

This verse also has another very elegant meaning which pertains to the verse that follows in which the Holy Quran mentions the decisive and the allegorical verses. It indicates that the decisive verses in the Book have the

position and the status of the mother to the allegorical ones. They bear the same relationship to the allegorical ones as the mother to its unborn child. The form of the allegorical verses is evolved in the shelter of the decisive ones, just as the features of the child are formed in the womb of its mother, therefore more than one meaning of the allegorical verses which are periodically deduced in this manner, are the manifestations of the great wisdom of Allah. However, just as it is necessary for the shape of the unborn child to be formed within the womb of its mother, it is also essential that no interpretation of the allegorical verse should be done outside the meaning of the related decisive verse.

The next verse is, "He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee ; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say : We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none mind except men of understanding."

Those firmly rooted in knowledge

I have already discussed the greater part of the subject matter of this verse. I only need to comment on the last part of this verse i.e., "And none knows its interpretation save Allah." In this Allah states that He has already indicated the status of the decisive verses is akin to that of a mother , we should therefore remain within these bounds, while interpreting the allegorical verses. In other words the interpretation of the allegorical verses should be subject to the decisive verses of this Book. Since knowledge of both comes from Allah there cannot be any disparity between them. It is also enjoined to seek knowledge of their interpretation from those firmly rooted in knowledge. By inserting a period at both ends of the Arabic words of this commandment, it is connected with both the preceding and the following portion of the verse in the following manner. Firstly, that the meaning of the allegorical verses is known only to Allah or those firmly rooted in knowledge. Secondly, if we form the connection at the other end, it means that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge, they believe both in the decisive and allegorical verses and say it is all from our Lord (*Rabb*) i.e., they are both meant to nurture us in our spiritual knowledge and progress, even if we temporarily lack the understanding of an allegorical verse. It can also mean that those who are firmly rooted in knowledge interpret the allegorical verses by referring to the decisive ones, for they firmly believe that both are from Allah and hence there cannot be any disparity between them. In the end it is stated, "And none mind except men of understanding." This

statement appeals to our intellect to ponder and ask ourselves the question, how can there be a disparity between Allah's word? We should therefore interpret the different branches of religious doctrine in light of the principles and thus benefit from both types of Quranic knowledge.

Perversity of the Heart

Because perversity of the heart led other nations to go astray, and they forgot the decisive commandments in favor of the allegorical which they interpreted in accordance with their desires, the verse that follows teaches the Muslims to pray, "Our Lord, make not our hearts to deviate after Thou hast guided us and grant us mercy from Thee; surely Thou art the most liberal Giver." Only the grace and bounty of Allah can protect ones heart from perversity, for besides Allah no one is aware of the inner secrets of the heart. In the end in order to warn that one is to be held accountable for the perversity of heart and for going astray, this segment of the Holy Quran is closed with the verse, "Our Lord, surely Thou art the Gatherer of men on a day about which there is no doubt. Surely Allah will not fail in His promise." A promise is broken only by one who cannot fulfill what he has promised. Allah the Most High, is Mighty and possesses all power over His creation, therefore it is easy for Him to fulfill His promise.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 54)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*), neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against Allah. And they will be fuel for fire.

As was the case of the people of Pharaoh (*Ālīfir‘aun*), and those before them! They rejected (*Kadh-dhabū*) Our messages, so Allah destroyed them on account of their sins. And Allah is Severe in requiting (evil).

Say to those who disbelieve : You shall be vanquished (*satughlabūn*), and driven (*tuhsharūn*) together to hell ; and evil is the resting place.

Indeed there was a sign for you in the two hosts (which) met together in encounter— one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other disbelieving, whom they saw twice as many as themselves with the sight of the eye. And Allah strengthens with His aid whom He pleases. There is a lesson in this for those who have eyes.

(Ch. 3:10-13)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ تُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ
وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأُولَئِكَ
هُمْ وَقُودُ النَّارِ ۝

كَذَابٍ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا فَآخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ
بِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ۝

قُلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَسْتَغْلَبُونَ وَتُحْشَرُونَ
إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ۝

قَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فِي فِئَتَيْنِ الْتَقَتَا
فِئَةٌ تَقَاتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَأُخْرَىٰ
كَافِرَةٌ يَرَوْنَهُمْ مِثْلَيْهِمْ رَأَى الْعَيْنُ
وَاللَّهُ يُؤَيِّدُ بِنَصْرِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِنَّ
فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّأُولِي الْأَبْصَارِ ۝

Summary of the previous lesson

With these verses begins the second section of the chapter *Al-Imran*. I have given two lessons on the previous section. As I have stated, this Chapter deals mainly with Christianity and its followers. The important subject matter of the preceding section was that revelation from Allah The most High contained both decisive and allegorical verses. We discussed the Divine wisdom behind the rule that interpretation of the allegorical verses was always subject to the authority of the decisive ones, and how one could benefit from such an arrangement. It was pointed out that contrary to this, pursuit of only the allegorical verses and their interpretation in accordance with ones wishes, misguided people and caused dissension. All of these basic principles were discussed. It was pointed out that Christianity and its followers, by not adhering to these principles, have faltered and gone so far astray that they serve as an example to illustrate such deviant behavior. That is why the Holy Quran calls them *Al dzālin* i.e., those who go astray (1:7). It is inappropriate on their part to show such lack of concern and audacity in this matter only because Allah does not hold them accountable in this life for their beliefs. This was also to warn the Muslims that they should not adapt a similar course in the matter of decisive and allegorical verses. In the end of the last section, there was a general warning that all generations past and present will be gathered and questioned about their beliefs, on the Day of Resurrection. It is therefore not righteousness to innovate a matter of belief or faith out of what our desires dictate. Such behavior, not only leads the individual concerned to go astray, but also leads others on to this path, by setting a wrong example.

Consequences of going astray

The Christian nations today have in general lost faith in God and the Day of Accountability. Even those religious minded people who profess such a belief are lulled into a sense of false security because of the Christian doctrine of atonement. They believe it is enough to declare faith in the sacrifice of Christ for the atonement of their sins and that his intercession on their behalf will save them on the Day of Judgment. Lack of such concern for accountability leads them to act according to their desires. This behavior is further strengthened by pride in the superiority of their monetary resources and numerical strength. One is amazed at the wisdom of the Holy Quran which leads it to discuss such behavior in the very first verse of this lesson. This verse states, “Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*), neither their wealth nor their children will avail them aught against Allah. And they will be fuel for fire.” Man earns and accumulates wealth for the benefit of his children. The Holy Quran states that both of these will ultimately fuel the

fire which Allah, the Most High, will impose upon these Christian nations, from time to time. This will be a consequence of the evil actions committed by them in this worldly life as a result of lack of concern for accountability on the Day of Judgment. I interpret this fire as the conflagration of war. This interpretation is supported by the Holy Quran in verse (5:64) which states, "Whenever they kindle a fire for war Allah puts it out." The Arabic commentary *Ruh-al-ma'ānī* states regarding this verse that it was customary amongst the Arabs to light a fire on an elevation or a hill to indicate a declaration of war.

Such a chastisement was brought upon the Christian nations in the form of two world wars. The fire that rained from the earth and the sky during these wars was unique in that it had never before been witnessed by mankind. God save us from the destructive consequences of a conflict now if the arsenal of modern atomic and hydrogen bombs were to be deployed. These deadly confrontations would not have been possible without the great monetary resources of the Christian nations. In previous ages wars could be fought with bows, arrows and swords which did not require a great commitment of financial resources. In the present day and age, however, the weapons of war are so costly that only the great wealth and earnings of the western nations can support such undertakings. In comparison to them the possessions of the Muslim nations are meager and they rely heavily upon the Christian nations. That is why these nations are fearless of consequences of their actions and strive to sustain their dominance.

The Holy Quran states that their war machinery and arsenals will not help them against Allah The Most High. In these internal conflagrations of war levied upon them by Divine will, the youth of these nations will be drafted and consumed. That they were in fact brought about by Divine commandment is established by two distinct signs. Firstly, by the prophecies of the Holy Quran and the Hadith (also by the revelations of the Reformer of this age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed). Secondly, despite the fact that these nations are acutely aware of the destructive consequences of such conflicts, and try their best to avoid them, they are nevertheless dragged helpless and fearful into their midst.

It is true that in the verse above the Arabic word *kafarū* means those who disbelieve and does not specifically refer to the Christians. It is, however, equally true that it also applies to those who disbelieve and confront Allah and can therefore be applied to the Christian nations. The disbelievers of Arabia, when they tried to annihilate Islam and the Muslims by means of the sword, were consumed by the fire they ignited. Because the chapter *Āl-Imrān* specifically deals with the Christian nations, this verse is, therefore, in particular applicable to them. Their wealth and children also became the fuel of these fires as prophesied amazingly by the Holy Quran

fourteen hundred years ago.

Similarities between the Pharaoh and the Christian nations

The verse that follows states, “As was the case of the people of Pharaoh (*Ālifiraun*), and those before them! They rejected (*kadhhabū*) Our messages.” They rejected the messages of Allah and committed evil deeds, as a consequence of which Allah, the Most High, held them accountable in this very life. The exemplary punishment thus meted upon them went down in history. I would first like to draw your attention to a few points regarding this verse. The Arabic word *ālifir‘aun* used in this verse has been ordinarily and mistakenly translated as the children of Pharaoh. It is correctly and appropriately translated as people of Pharaoh. It would be easier to understand this when we consider that when we evoke blessings upon *āli muḥammad* during the obligatory prayers it includes not only the descendants of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) but also his followers. The other question that arises in ones mind is why this comparison with Pharaoh was made by the Holy Quran? Pharaoh was the most powerful king of his time. He subjugated the Israelites and for a long period of time and issued orders for their male progeny to be killed while allowing their female children to live. He became so inebriated by the strength of his imperial power and kingdom, that he proclaimed himself god and was eventually destroyed as a result of his evil actions.

If we study the history of the Christian Colonial Powers, we find close parallels with the history of Pharaoh. The Christian nations of this day have already succumbed to the accountability and chastisement of Allah The Most High. A hundred years ago, however, at the zenith of colonial power, their condition was such that they were dominating the whole world and no one could stand up to them. It was said that the sun never sets over the British Empire. They dominated the land and the sea and the map of the world appeared red with British colors, as a consequence of this supremacy. From amongst the subject nations those who showed manly courage and stood up to them were dealt with by imprisonment and thus eliminated. Those who exhibited feminine qualities and became weak and submissive were left alone and thus survived. This demonstrates the similarity to Pharaoh’s treatment of the Israelite male progeny. Those who flattered them and served them well with feminine acquiescence were given entitlements in the British Raj like *Khan Sahib*, *Rao Sahib* etc. In this day and age, the Christian nations are openly spreading atheism either by completely denying the existence of the Divine Being, or by stating that there was no God, or if He was there at one time, He is (may Allah protect us from

saying so) now dead. Even prior to this they tried to assume the position which fell only into the Domain of the Divine. What does God expect from mankind after all ? Only this that submission should be shown to him with humility. This was exactly what the Christian colonial powers demanded of their subjects. God also wants that His commandments should be obeyed, and people after being made aware of His reward and chastisement should act righteously. The Colonial Christian Powers expected similar behavior from their subjects. They expected them to be humble and submissive, to be acutely aware of the masters pleasures and displeasure, and to do their bidding. They felt empowered to reward and punish, give life or bring destruction upon a nation and to provide them with food and sustenance according to their wishes. These were the powers of God which the colonial Christian nations tried to assume and impose upon their subjects. This resemblance with the Pharaonic attitude is therefore quite striking.

Accountability in this life not on basis of belief

The third point which is noteworthy is that Allah does not hold one accountable in this worldly life on the basis of his faith or belief. I have discussed the wisdom behind this in my discussion on the verse, “ There is no compulsion in religion”(2:256). If someone therefore only denies the truth, he is not held accountable for it in this world but in the Life Hereafter. In the verse under discussion, the disbelievers (whether they be those from amongst the tribes of Makkah or the Christian nations) have not been blamed for not accepting the truth. They were blamed for rejection (*kadh-dhabū*). Such rejection involves spreading false propaganda and lies about the truth (i.e., it was falsehood) so that others may not accept it . It also includes attempts to annihilate the truth or the supporters of truth as was done by the disbelievers of Makkah. The attempts of the Christian propagandists through false allegations against Islam and the founder of Islam or by means of character assassination also fall under this category. This is a very serious offense, for which Allah mandates accountability even in this life. If Allah, the Most High, did not chastise those who attempt to eliminate the upholders of truth, or cause their power to lessen, it would eventually lead to annihilation of the truth and its adherents, something that Allah does not allow. Besides rejection of the truth in the manner described above, the disbelievers of Makkah, similar to the rampant moral depravity so visible in the western society today, were also guilty of other evils mandating immediate accountability.

The next verse states, “so Allah destroyed them on account of their sins. And Allah is Severe in requiting (evil).” Allah held them accountable for their sins in this life. His chastisement is severe, although it takes a long

time for it to come. Only the one who has experienced such chastisement can speak for its severity. The verse after this states, “Say to those who disbelieve : You shall be vanquished (*satughlabūn*), and driven (*tuhsharūn*) together to hell ; and evil is the resting place.” The Arabic letter *sa* as in *satughlabūn* indicates an occurrence in the near future, in this case it indicates the occurrence of this vanquishment within the lifetime of the disbelievers. When this verse was revealed, the strength and power of the disbelievers of Makkah was such that no one could have imagined that it would be broken so soon. The situation of the Christian nations was analogous to this. The Arabic word *tuhsharūn*, means to be driven out of ones resting place towards conflict. The Christian nations were likewise driven to war in areas of the world where they had no concern and had to face bloody conflict, for example in North Africa, Korea and Vietnam. They were driven to death helplessly in the, “evil resting place.” These fiery conflicts were replaced by the cold war, financial crisis and other difficulties.

A sign in the Battle of Badr

The closing verse of this lesson is, “Indeed there was a sign for you in the two hosts (which) met together in encounter — one party fighting in the way of Allah and the other disbelieving, whom they saw twice as many as themselves with the sight of the eye. And Allah strengthens with His aid whom He pleases. There is a lesson in this for those who have eyes.”

The battle which is called a sign in this verse was the Battle of Badr. The Holy Quran had prophesied regarding it in verse (54:45), “Soon shall the hosts be routed, and they will show (their) backs.”

This sign was also prophesied in the Bible, which is read by the Christians. Isaiah 20 : 13-17 states, “ The burden upon Arabia. In the forest in Arabia shall ye lodge, O ye traveling companies of Dedanim. The inhabitants of the land of Tema brought water to him that was thirsty, they prevented with their bread him that fled. For they fled from the swords, from the drawn sword, and from the bent bow, and from the greivousness of war. For thus hath the Lord said unto me, Within a year, according to the years of an hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail : And the residue of the number of archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, shall be diminished: for the Lord God of Israel hath spoken it. These biblical verses clearly speak of the flight of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from Makkah and the Battle of Badr a year later.

On one hand was a well equipped and experienced force of the Makkan disbelievers. Facing them was a group of three hundred and thirteen Muslims which included children, young and old men who did not even have enough swords (the minimum fighting equipment of the day) to

go between them. The outcome of this historic conflict, a clear victory for Muslims, was certainly miraculous.

Similarly in this age during the colonial times particularly in India we witnessed on one hand a well trained army of Christian missionaries, who had the backing of the government and its resources at their disposal. Facing their vitriolic onslaught against Islam and the Holy prophet were The Founder of the Ahmadiyya movement (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed) and a few of his followers who did not possess any material resources. The help of Allah was, however, with them and the result was a clear victory over the enemy. For those with spiritual insight, there is a great admonition and a sign in these events. Such spiritual insight is, however, a faculty of the heart. This discussion will be continued in the next lesson.

Āl-‘Imrān (Ch.3)

(Quranic Lesson 55)

I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

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

Fair-seeming to men is made the love of desires, of women and sons and hoarded treasures of gold and silver and well-bred horses and cattle and tilth. This is the provisions of the life of this world. And Allah – with Him is the good goal (of life).

Say : Shall I tell you of what is better than these ? For those who guard against evil are Gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them , and pure companions and Allah’s goodly pleasure. And Allah is Seer of the servants.

Those who say: Our Lord, we believe, so forgive our sins and save us from the chastisement of the fire. The patient and the truthful, and the obedient, and those who spend and those who ask Divine protection in the morning times.

Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

(Ch. 3:14-18)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ۝

مُرِينَ اللَّكَايِسِ حُبَّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ
وَالْبَنِينَ وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ
الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ
وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ
الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَاكِ ۝١٤

قُلْ أَوْ نَبِّئْكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ لِلَّذِينَ
اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَ
رِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ۝١٥

الَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا
ذُنُوبَنَا وَتَنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ۝١٦

الصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالْقَانِتِينَ وَ
الْمُسْتَقِيمِينَ وَالْمُسْتَغْفِرِينَ بِالْأَسْحَارِ ۝١٧

شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ
وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا
هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝١٨

Holy Quran prophesied the dominance of Christian Nations

In my discussion of the first four verses of this chapter, I have pointed out that although the subject matter of this section appears to be of a general nature, by close examination of the context, we find that its subject matter has a particular relevance for Christianity and the Christian nations. The history of religion for the last two to three hundred years shows us that during this period, Christianity as a religion, attacked Islam with great intensity. What is known as the Industrial revolution in Europe started with the invention of machines and the urgent need for raw materials arose in order to make progress through mechanization. The search for such raw materials took the European nations to the less developed regions of the world including the countries in Asia and Africa. They went there under the guise of trade, but because of their industrial might and superior armaments were soon successful in subjugating these countries.

The Holy Quran prophesied this dominance 1400 years ago in the verses, “And it is forbidden to the town, which We shall destroy, that they shall not return. Until when Gog and Magog are let loose (*yansilūn*) and they will sally forth from every position of vantage” (21:95-96). The word *Qaryah* (town) is used here in the singular to denote greatness, prominence, uniqueness. Makkah has been called, in another place in the Holy Quran, ‘Mother of Towns,’ because it was the place where Adam and Eve lived, Adam building the first house for the remembrance of Allah at Makkah (‘verily the first house of Allah built for mankind was at Mecca — Holy Quran 3:95). What the Holy Quran says in the verse quoted above is that the opposition to Islam and the Muslims (which was represented by the city of Makkah at the time of the Holy Prophet) will be destroyed (as it happened with the fall of Makkah). It will not return until Gog and Magog (then held in invisible chains of Divine destiny as the holy Prophet saw in a vision about them) will be let loose, and they will sally forth from every position of vantage. Strange stories about the identity of Gog and Magog persisted until the Reformer (*Mujaddid*) of this century (14th century Hijra) Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed identified them to be the Western Christian Nations. His position was ridiculed at the time, but is now generally accepted by the Muslim intelligentsia. That is why the famous poet of the East, Sir Muhammad Iqbal wrote in one of his poetic verses,

“All the armies of the Gog and Magog have been let loose
The eye of the Muslim should behold this explanation of the
(Quranic) word *yansilūn*” (See above verse 21: 96).

Scheme to convert the colonies to Christianity

The Western Christian nations found in these underdeveloped nations, not only a source for the raw materials they needed, but also a market for their manufactured goods, thus enabling them to maintain a balance of payments. To perpetuate their control over the wealth of the colonies, they embarked upon a scheme to convert the subject nations to Christianity, and to this end launched an army of Christian missionaries into these areas. In the highly backward areas of the African continent, where the only religion was based upon superstition, they did not meet with great resistance towards their designs. Enticement by means of medical aid, offers of employment and education were enough to convert people to Christianity. Christian religious propaganda, however, met opposition in those areas where other major religions were already in existence. Even in these regions, for example in the Indian subcontinent, hundreds and thousands of individuals belonging to the untouchable class were converted to Christianity. This was accomplished by offers of greater opportunity in education, employment, financial incentives and land grants etc. In reality though, the principles of Christianity are such that they cannot be understood either by the primitive African or the untouchable of India. Where religious confrontation did arise, for example with Hinduism, the missionary did not face a very difficult task, for it was easy to gain acceptance for three gods in place of three hundred and seventy million Hindu deities.

Christian onslaught against Islam

The real confrontation took place between Christianity and Islam, for trinity could not stand up to the pure monotheism of Islam. Monotheism is in accordance with human nature, a fact now even being confirmed by modern scientific thought. The missionary and the orientalist alike could not say anything against this principle, so instead they attacked the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They also took advantage of certain misconceptions about Prophet Jesus prevalent amongst the Muslims. These included the belief that he was sitting alive in heaven and possessed certain divine attributes such as raising the dead to life and the creation of birds. The Christian missionaries played upon these misconceptions, and used them in their arguments to prove the divinity of Jesus. The difference between Islam and Christianity is only this that Islam regards Jesus as one of the chosen Prophets of God, while Christianity holds him to be son of god, and one of three gods. If the divinity of Jesus could be proven from the Holy Quran itself (we seek the protection of Allah), then the superiority of Christianity over Islam becomes established. This argument was further fueled by the prevalent misconception

amongst the Muslims, that in the later days when they would be in dire straits, Jesus would descend from heaven and save them. The logical question thus put forth by the Christian missionary was, why do the Muslims not accept him as their savior now and guarantee their salvation? No one could stand up to this line of argument and Muslims estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands, including those belonging to well educated prominent families converted to Christianity.

Defense of Islam by the Reformer (Mujaddid) of the 14th century Hijra

During such difficult times for Islam and the Muslims, Allah who always protects His true faith, sent Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed to accomplish the task as the Reformer of the century and as the Promised Messiah. Through Divine revelation Hazrat Mirza's attention was directed towards those references of the Quran and the Hadith which prove that like all prophets and other mortals, Prophet Jesus had passed away, and the Messiah to come, in accordance with the *Sahih Hadith of Bukhari and Muslim* was, "to be your *imam* (spiritual leader) from amongst yourself (i.e., from amongst the Muslims)."

After these revelations, Hazrat Mirza Sahib and his followers provided such a strong refutation to the arguments of the Christian missionaries, that they soon began to abstain from religious debate with them. The Christian Government which was backing the missionary movement was, however, still in power, and together they evolved schemes which were referred to earlier in this lesson.

Different elements employed in the conversion scheme

The Holy Quran points out that the love of certain desires has great attraction for mankind. This includes the love and desire for women, the children they bear particularly their male offspring, the acquisition of wealth, land holdings and fine means of transportation. These material things were not only greatly desired by the Christian nations (and remain so till this day), but they also utilized them as a means of enticing others towards Christianity. Although they were soundly defeated in the field of religious debate by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed and his followers, governmental power, jobs and the allure of wealth remained in the hands of the Christian rulers. In those days Muslim women stayed mostly in their homes, involved with household work and the upbringing of children. If at all they did venture outside, they were covered up in veils. In contrast Christian women and young girls would go out wearing make up and dresses which would either expose a part of their body or make their figures more attractive. Because

of this also many Muslims faltered in their steps and converted to Christianity. In a pattern similar to this, the western nations have frequently used women for intelligence gathering, and diplomatic maneuvers.

The fall of the Empire

Because the Christian Governments were using their power and enticing people by means of wealth, land and material offerings to lead them astray, Hazrat Mirza in accordance with a Hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prayed for their demise. He was informed by means of Divine revelation that wars would occur which would lead to the decline of their worldly power, and so it did come about by means of the great world wars. Another momentous change occurring in these nations, was the decline of the Christian faith (which they had tried to enforce upon others) within their own societies. Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) had prophesied such an occurrence in one of his Hadith comparing it to, “the dissolution of salt in water.”

A great majority of them abandoned their religion in pursuit of the very same desires mentioned in the Quranic verses under discussion, “fair-seeming to men is made love of desires of women and sons.” Like the disbelievers of Arabia, amongst the Christian nations, the uncontrolled desire for love of women and a tendency towards preferential treatment of the male heirs from amongst their progeny was also prevalent. In Islam the female children of the deceased also have the right of inheritance, whereas in Europe, America and the Christian nations this is only limited to the male offspring. Also included in this relentless pursuit are hoarded treasures of gold and silver (which the Arabs in those days did not have, but which still exist in abundance in possession of the Christian nations). Acquisition of large land holdings called ranches and luxury automobiles which have replaced the fine bred horses is also eagerly pursued. These desires are so pervasive that even those with limited means are striving to have their own car. The Holy Quran which has to go to the west and influence the western mind, draws attention in these verses to the fact that these acquisitions are not the purpose of mans creation. They are temporary and provide a means only for this worldly existence.

Higher Goal of man’s creation

Man we are told has been created for a much higher and abiding purpose—the recognition of Allah the most High, and getting close to Him. That is why the Holy Quran states, “And Allah – with Him is the good goal (of life).” In comparison with the tranquillity and serenity acquired by getting close to Allah, the fire of dissatisfaction generated by the thirst for worldly

acquisitions is contemptible. The Holy Quran then states, “Say: Shall I tell you of what is better than these ? For those who guard against evil are Gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them , and pure companions and Allah’s goodly pleasure. And Allah is Seer of the servants.”

In this verse Allah, the Most High, states that instead of being totally consumed by the attractions mentioned earlier, it is better for you to guard against evil. In the end of the last verse it was stated that instead of making the fineries of this world as your *ilāh* i.e. the object of your veneration love and purpose of life, come towards Allah, for this is the goal of your creation. In the verse under discussion it is pointed out that seeking this purpose does not forbid the attractions of this worldly life. Allah only wants you to spend your life in this world guarding against evil. In order to teach you how to guard against evil, He has revealed the Holy Quran as a guide for those who keep their duty. It gives guidance to differentiate between right and wrong, good and evil, that which is beneficial or harmful to the human soul and between righteous action and sinful behavior. There are two sides to mans earthly existence i.e., the good and the evil. By running blindly in pursuit of the worldly attractions, man loses the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. One could see an example of this in the western society today where the purpose of human existence is mainly to earn wealth. Wealth in itself is not something bad, it is the manner of its practice which determines the righteousness or impropriety of an action. The Holy Quran guides us with regards to the good and evil of every action, belief or saying. In fact, it clearly elaborates upon these aspects even in the matter of our thoughts. It does so by means of reasoning and by clearly distinguishing between right and wrong. I have explained this in my discussion on the subject of fasting in the chapter *Al-Baqarah*. The Holy Quran thus teaches man to guard against evil. The *muttaqī*, or the one who guards against evil, has to sacrifice a lot to achieve this end. Let us take wealth as an example. Because of his honest living, it is possible that one who guards against evil may have to face poverty and starvation. One has to make a similar sacrifice for all worldly attractions. The Holy Quran states that Allah intends for man to face such worldly attractions, and thereby practically learn how to guard against evil. When he who is successful in these worldly trials goes to meet his Lord, his reward is paradise.

The Nature of Paradise

The gardens of paradise have streams of water running beneath them. These gardens are a reward for his belief and the streams a reward for righteous action. In this earthly existence, belief creates serenity and pleasure in his heart similar to the feelings engendered by visiting a beautiful garden.

Righteous actions leads him not only towards the protection of the rights of other individuals but humanity in general benefits from them, and such actions flows forth from these individuals like streams of running water. The rewards of paradise are such that as the Holy Prophet has stated, "There is not an eye in this world that has seen them, nor an ear that has heard of them nor a mind that would understand them." The Holy Quran has thus explained them beautifully in an allegorical manner by giving examples of elements which are a part of mans physical experience such as gardens and streams. The gardens and streams of this world are not forever. They experience decline in autumn, face destruction by drought and other natural calamities, and man can loose access to them. The Holy Quran informs us, however, that the gardens and streams of paradise are everlasting. These and other blessings would have been devoid of pleasure, if mankind were to be without companionship in paradise. The best pair, created by Allah, the Most High, is that of a man and a woman. They are a source of comfort and happiness for each other. The Holy Quran states that such companionship will exist in paradise. In this worldly existence, the union of a man and woman, if one of them is impure, can be a source of pain instead of pleasure for either individual. Therefore we are told, that the companions in paradise would be pure, but more then anything else, "Allah's goodly pleasure," will be the source of happiness and delight for mankind. In the end of this verse it is stated that, "Allah is Seer (*Baṣīrun*) of the servants" which implies He not only sees their actions, but is also aware of the true intentions and inner thoughts behind such actions. That is why, until the inner thoughts of a person as well as his outward actions do not attain purity, he cannot truly be the one who guards against evil (*mut-taqi*) and will not be able to enter paradise in the Hereafter. Paradise cannot be called as such, unless it has people of this caliber, for if its inmates were thieves, robbers, con-artists and people of low character then it would be very much like the hell in this world. If policemen, prisons and judicial courts were required over there for the criminals, then it could not remain a paradise but would turn into hell.

In the end I need to mention that The Most Merciful has ordained the real reward for one who keeps his duty in the Hereafter (that which is everlasting), the rewards of this worldly existence being temporary. In a way, however, the reflection of the paradise of the Hereafter is created in the heart of those who guard against evil in this life. They may not be in a garden in the physical sense but their heart is blessed with the garden of serenity. An honest person has no fear or grief, while these always exist in the heart of a dishonest person. An honest individual may go to bed hungry, but his mind is free of worries. A dishonest person on the other hand may feast on the finest foods, but his heart is engrossed in the hell of restlessness and

anxiety. In a similar manner in this worldly life, the nurturing streams of beneficence flow at all times for the benefit of others, from the person of one who guards against evil. On the other hand no one benefits from a person lost in the love of this material world. The pleasure of Allah is also manifest for those who guard against evil. The companions of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were given the honor by the Holy Quran of being called, “those with whom Allah is pleased,” in their very lifetime. Whosoever follows their footsteps and treads on the path laid down by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he can witness proof of the pleasure of Allah in this very life. Besides true dreams and visions, he is also blessed with the honor of communion with Allah. As an indication of His pleasure, Allah creates respect and reverence for such a pious person amongst righteous souls. The first step in the path towards guarding against evil is mentioned in the next verse.

The Path of spiritual development

“Those who say: Our Lord, we believe, so forgive our sins and save us from the chastisement of the fire.” Those who guard against evil are directed in this verse not to stop their spiritual journey after professing belief in Allah Almighty. The Being Who is the most merciful of all is also their nurturer unto perfection (Rabb) at all times and wants them to progress from the lowest to the highest stage of spiritual development. Not only does He want to rectify their spiritual illnesses and moral deficiencies, but also wants to create moral and spiritual qualities in them. The first essential step towards reformation is the realization and admission of ones shortcomings and sins. Satan went astray and was driven away from Divine presence because, “He refused and was proud” (2:34). By instigating mans pride and insolence, the devil thus falsely leads him to believe that he is free of all faults and sins. If someone else tries to create awareness of these faults, the devil misleads, and by instigating refusal and disobedience within man makes him deny his shortcomings. Those who have tried to reform human behavior have ample experience of this.

The essential and basic step for guarding against evil is to have such a belief in Allah, the Most High, that He is with us where ever we are. The Holy Quran creates awareness of this by stating that, “He is with you wherever you are” (57:4), He is *Sami‘* (the Hearing), *Baṣīr* (the Seeing), *‘alimun bi dhāt alṣudūr* (He is Knower of what is in the hearts). It is not sufficient For such a belief to be professed only once, it needs to be refreshed over and over again. One should strengthen the bond with his Lord by affirmation of his belief in the words, “*Rabba nā ‘āmannā* (our Lord we believe),” and by means of prayer, which this blessed verse teaches. The word

which the Holy Quran has used for obligatory prayer is *ṣalaat*, which also means prayer. Obligatory prayers are therefore a means of creating a living faith in Allah The Most High, provided they are kept up in their proper manner, and not merely undertaken as a compulsory recitation. In short our Lord is our patron, witnesses all our deeds, listens to what we say, and is aware of the innermost secrets of our hearts. The one who guards against evil supplicates before Him thus, “O my Lord, you are well aware of the sins I have committed, so please forgive them (*maghfirat*), although the devil and my animal soul (*nafs-i-ammāra*), by turning me spiritually blind, may have led me not only to the commission of these sins but also made me unaware of them.” The Arabic word *maghfirat* means covering over and protection. The supplicant thus requests the Lord to cover over his sins from their being manifested before others, and also seeks His protection from repeating these evil deeds, for the commission of every evil deed is difficult the first time around but becomes easier with repetition. The final supplication in this verse is, “and save us from the chastisement of the fire.” The supplicant knows that the remedial punishment for the sins he has already committed is the chastisement of fire, but he begs for the mercy of his Lord, to save him from this. All sins are committed by man when he becomes overwhelmed by his emotions and desires, the nature of these being akin to fire. If they are not controlled by guarding against evil, they can ignite into the chastisement of fire.

Stages of the spiritual journey of those, “who guard against evil.”

In the subsequent verses the various stages of the spiritual journey and qualities of those who guard against evil (*muttaqin*) are discussed. The first amongst these being *as-ṣabirīn*, those manifesting the quality of patience. A man may have been living comfortably, but as soon as he accepts the truth, he has to face all kinds of opposition, trials and tribulations. To be patient during these circumstances, prevents a man from being led astray in his spiritual quest. Then come the difficulties that he may have to face as a consequence of the law of Divine measure. He may have to face a state of fear, disease, death and loss of the fruits of his hard work. Being patient under these conditions also saves him from faltering in his footsteps and falling down. Remaining steadfast in one’s belief and actions, despite the instigation of the devil from within, in the form of the prompting of one’s own animal soul, or from without through the suggestions of evil minded people is also a manifestation of the quality of patience.

“*Wa-AlṢādiqīn* (and the truthful),” mentioned in this verse are those who remain steadfast in the trials mentioned above, they are the ones who

proved the truth of their belief by their actions. They attain the status of being the truthful ones (*ṣādiq* or *siddiq*).

The third stage is of those, “*Wa-alqānītīn* (and the obedient).” At this stage submission which is initially carried out with effort, is now manifested with humility, true feelings and inner love. This the stage of *qanūt* or obedience.

“*Wa-almunfiqīn* (and those who spend). At this stage one is ready to sacrifice all he has in the way of Allah, this includes not only his wealth and time but also his life and children. Spending, does not mean spending only out of ones wealth, but also giving away in the time of need, all of ones God given bounties in His way. This willingness is portrayed beautifully in a couplet by the famous Urdu poet *Ghalib*,

“I gave up my life, which was in fact given to me by Him,
the truth of the matter is that I did not quite fulfill my obligation.”

“*Wa-al mustaghfirīna bi-Al Aṣḥār* (and those who ask Divine protection in the morning times). Having reached such an advanced stage of spiritual development, does not however generate in them feelings of pride and arrogance, and they get up in the later part of the night to bow down humbly before Allah. At the break of dawn they seek the protection of Allah so that the coming day should not lead them to the commission of frail or sinful behavior. The pleasant hour of the morning is the time when the angels descend upon the human heart and attract it towards goodness. Seeking the protection of Allah with humility assists in the completion of their inner light (*nur*). That is how exactly the words of those who have entered the paradise are mentioned in the Holy Quran. “They will say: Our Lord, make perfect for us our light, and grant us protection ” (66:8). Thus even after entering paradise the moral and spiritual development of the one who guards against evil (*muttaqī*), does not come to an end. *Nūr* is the light which illuminates inner or spiritual matters. Within the spirit or soul of the man (which has been breathed into him by Allah, the Most High), thus lie latent those means of moral and spiritual improvement which can forever manifest and lead towards his spiritual development. In seeking this spiritual progress they ask for the protection of Allah, for He is the only Perfect Being. Only when His mantle of protection covers the deficiencies and weaknesses which are a part of human striving, can they successfully travel through these inner and unseen realms of their spiritual journey.

The Doctrine of Divine Unity to prevail

The final verse of this lesson is, “Allah bears witness that there is no god but He, and (so do) the angels and those possessed of knowledge, maintaining justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.” This verse

is placed here as a prophecy that eventually the doctrine of Divine unity will prevail in the world. This thought is reinforced by the subsequent verse which states, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam," further indicating that Islam which establishes this principle of Divine Unity is to become the dominant religion of the world. Also in this verse three types of arguments are put forward to establish the truth of the Islamic principle of the unity of the Divine Being and to prove the falsity of the Christian doctrine of Trinity.

The first of these is the witnessing by Allah of His own unity, which also proves the falsity of Trinity. This witnessing is of two types, i.e., by His word and by His action. All Divine revelation starting from Prophet Adam and going down to the last Prophet of God, The Holy Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, witnesses the Unity of the Divine Being, and strongly condemns association with God. In all the revealed scriptures found today, despite the generally accepted adulteration of their text, there exists evidence of the Unity of the Divine Being. No evidence of association with the Divine Being is found in the words of any prophet in any tradition. This, therefore, is the evidence provided by the word of God. The evidence provided by Gods action is that the whole universe is one, made of the same kind and is obligated to follow the same type of law. Marvelous scientific discoveries about the universe have occurred in our age, for example, from the existence of a whole universe of its own within an atom to the existence of the amazing immensity and vastness of the universe on the outside. All of these discoveries have proven the oneness of the universe. That is why modern science has accepted this, and it is factual testimony to the oneness of its Creator, whose creation follows His command and Who is the All Powerful and Supreme Sovereign.

The other piece of evidence mentioned in this verse is that provided by the angels. As I have mentioned in my previous lessons, the relationship of the angels is with the hearts of men. Mans own nature testifies to the unity of the Divine Being although it may be temporarily inhibited by the contemporary teachings of polytheism. In times of need, for example, in dire difficulties, this natural tendency of man is brought to the surface by the working of the angels on the human mind and even the most impenitent atheist or polytheist cries out for Divine assistance.

The third kind of testimony is provided by those possessing knowledge who are fair minded, and these fall into two categories. To one class belong those who have knowledge of religious matters. If they are just in their testimony, they will admit to the unity of the Divine Being as the teaching of the founder of their religion. For example, many fair minded scholars today admit openly that the teachings of Jesus or the Bible are none other than the unity of the Divine Being. The other class of knowledgeable individuals is

that of the scientists. The Holy Quran tells us that even the fair minded amongst them will also testify to the unity of Allah, the Most High. I have in fact read such testimony myself.

In the end, the Holy Quran states that no one else besides Allah is the god *ilāh* (sole object of worship, love and purpose of mans existence), He is the Mighty, the Wise and as a manifestation of these attributes, monotheism will predominate in the world. Although Allah manifests his works with wisdom and it takes time to do so, it is always based on a firm and lasting foundation. This dominance of the principle of Divine unity will come about by Islam being made the prevailing religion of the world, that is why it is stated in the subsequent verse, "Surely the (true) religion with Allah is Islam." It is therefore quite in accordance with the Divine intent to spread the religion of Islam in the world, this being the duty of every Muslim. With this in mind the Reformer (*mujaddid*) of the 14th century Hijra, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmed formed an organization. The Holy Quran itself enjoins this, "And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. And these are they who are successful." This is the work of the Lahore Ahmadiyya movement.