

Chapter 2

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

- 1 I, Allah, am the best Knower.
- 2 This Book, in which there is no doubt, is a guide to those who keep their duty,
- 3 who believe in the Unseen and keep up prayer and spend (on good works) out of what We have given them,
- 4 and who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you, and of the Hereafter they are sure.
- 5 These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that are successful.
- 6 Those who disbelieve — (when) it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them — they will not believe.
- 7 Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing; and there is a covering on their eyes, and for them is a grievous punishment.

Brief notes:

V. 1 This verse consists of the letters *alif*, *lām*, *mīm*. The combinations of letters or single letters occurring at the commencement of several chapters of the Quran are, according to the best received opinion, abbreviations standing for words. Translations of the Holy Quran generally leave these abbreviations untranslated. The *alif*, *lām*, *mīm*, occurring here as well as at the commencement of five other chapters are interpreted as meaning *I, Allah, am the best Knower*, *alif* standing for *ana*, *lām* for *Allāh*, and *mīm* for *a'lam*, being respectively the first, the middle and the last letters of the words for which they stand. Others regard them as contractions for some Divine attribute.

V. 2 The application of the word 'book' (*kitāb*) to the Holy Quran occurs in very early revelations, and shows clearly that the

Quran was from the first meant to be a *complete book* that existed not only in the memory of people but also in writing. The Quran is here described as affording guidance to those who keep their duty, because the sense of keeping his duty is innate in man. No guidance would benefit a man who has no regard for his duty.

V. 3 The Unseen here stands for Allah, a belief in Whose existence is the cardinal principle of religion.

In Islam prayer assumed a regularity and a form. However, it is not the mere observance of the form that the Quran requires, but the keeping of it in a right state, i.e. being true to the spirit of the prayer. Spending out of what one has been given stands for *charity* in its broadest sense, or the doing of good to all creatures. This verse lays down the two prime duties which are necessary for spiritual advancement: prayer to God and service to humanity.

V. 4 Islam requires faith in all the prophets of the world and the recognition of truth in all religions. The words *that which was revealed before you (O Muhammad)* include revelations to all the nations of the world, for we are elsewhere told that “there is not a people but a warner has gone among them” (35:24). A Muslim is therefore one who believes in all the prophets of God, sent to any nation, whether their names are mentioned in the Holy Quran or not.

A life after death, according to Islam, implies a state of existence which begins with death, but a complete manifestation of which takes place later, when the fruits of the actions done in this life take their final shape. A belief in God and a belief in the Hereafter, being respectively the first and the last of the fundamental principles of Islam as mentioned here, often stand for a belief in all the fundamental principles of Islam, as in 2:8, 2:62, etc.

V. 6 The passage is parenthetical, meaning that disbelievers of a particular type, i.e., those who pay no heed at all to the Holy Prophet’s warning, cannot benefit by his preaching.

V. 7 Only those disbelievers are spoken of here who so hardened their hearts as not to pay any heed to the Prophet’s preaching and warning, as clearly indicated in the previous verse;

compare 7:179: “They have hearts with which they do not understand, and they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. They are as cattle.” Allah is here spoken of as having sealed their hearts and ears because He made them taste the consequences of their heedlessness.