

DECODING SURAH BAQARAH FOR THE YOUTH

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PREFACE

While being the longest and most comprehensive chapter of the Quran, Surah Baqarah is also the most difficult to comprehend. It is enriched with historical accounts of Bani Israel, the veritable struggles faced by Muslims in their spiritual journey, and the vicissitudes of life that were challenging for even believers with strong iman. The chapter beautifully highlights the gradual transition of believers from a group following the Prophet's message to an ummah spreading that message, detailing the covenant binding upon all those who claim to be the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh).

For a reader approaching the surah for the first time, the verses might appear to be disjointed. While the overall message is clear to anyone studying the chapter, the content seems incoherent, as if the verses are addressing different themes simultaneously without any apparent link between them. As a result, studying the chapter will give the reader ample knowledge, while still leaving him slightly confused. Many young students of the Quran, eager to learn Allah's message, discontinue their study of Quran feeling overwhelmed with the plethora of knowledge present in Surah Baqarah alone.

In this regard, the purpose of this book is to not only explain the verses and the overall message of this chapter, but to highlight the connection between the verses. The content is not incoherent and the verses are not disjointed. On the contrary, they contain a beautiful story that highlights the gradual transition of leadership over time from the first man on earth, Adam (as), to the last and final Ummah. It is a story that explains how everything started, and how everything will end. A story that makes the reader realize where he stands in this journey of mankind and what the Lord expects from him. Surah Baqarah guarantees that any reader who starts the chapter desiring to critically examine the message with a growth mindset and a sincere search for the truth, will feel his heart surrendering towards the end, realizing that it has no other option but to submit to the Lord of the Worlds.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful.

SURAH AL-BAQARAH

This is a Madanī surah that is the longest chapter in the Quran. It is believed by scholars that most of this surah was revealed within the first two years after the Prophet (pbuh) migrated to medina.¹ But what is Surah Baqarah mostly about?

At the end of Surah Fatiha, we asked Allah to show us the path of those who were rewarded in the past (prophets, righteous people) and not the path of those who earn Allah's wrath or who are misguided. One common interpretation given by scholars is that the Jews are those who have earned Allah's wrath while the Christians are those who are misguided. Therefore, since Allah first mentions the Jews and then the Christians, Surah Baqarah primarily addresses the Jews, while the next chapter, Surah Al –e-Imran, addresses the Christians, informing us about their characteristics so that we can abstain from walking on their path. In my opinion, there is a second plausible interpretation that implies the kaafirs as being those who have incurred Allah's wrath and the munafiqs as being those who are misguided. Allah knows best.

Although the entire Quran is a response to the prayer made in Surah Fatiha seeking guidance, Surah Baqarah in particular, is the beginning of the guidance manual. Imagine if someone asked you how they could be like the righteous people — the muttaqeen? What would you tell them? What is the first thing they should do? Unfortunately, many of us wouldn't even know what to say. So, Allah teaches us, and the first set of instructions are in Surah Baqarah where Allah commences by informing us about the characteristics we need to abstain from adopting, and the characteristics we should be trying to inculcate.



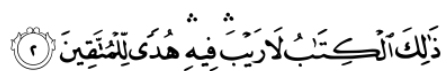
Huroof muqattat (meaning is unknown)

The first verse of this surah contains huroof muqattat — these are Arabic letters that can be seen at the start of some chapters in the Quran. Although many scholars have attempted to decipher its meaning, the true interpretation has been kept hidden from mankind.² Interestingly, we asked Allah for guidance in Surah Fatiha, and in response, Allah starts by telling us something that we do not have the wisdom or knowledge to understand. Why? Allah knows best, but perhaps the purpose of

¹Abdul Rahman, M.S. (2009). 'Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Juz 2.' London: MSA Publication, p.18

² Glasse, C. (2003). 'The New Encyclopedia of Islam.' New York: Rowman & Littlefield, p.187

including such letters is to inform the reader that all knowledge is within the hands of God only. He decides the information He wishes to reveal and that which He wishes to conceal. Therefore, before you start your journey, understand that it is going to be long and arduous. Becoming a muttaqeen requires patience. While answers to most questions will be found in the quran and hadith, some questions will always remain unanswered. Know when to keep digging for the answer and when to stop and make peace with it.



That is the book, wherein there is no doubt, there is guidance for the God-fearing

The surah now emphasizes the need to adopt an ideal attitude and mindset that is conducive to receiving guidance. In doing so, it encourages us to conduct a critical self-analysis of our current attitude and mindset by asking ourselves pertinent questions such as, why are we attempting to study the Quran? What do we want to achieve from this? Are we studying it because it makes us feel less guilty, or are we studying it because we want to transform? A deeper understanding of our current attitude and mindset makes us more aware of our actions, thoughts and emotions making it easier for us to work on ourselves so that we can move closer to adopting the ideal attitude and mindset required for spiritual growth. But, before we attempt to understand the attitude and mindset of a muttaqeen, we need to know what exactly it means to be a muttaqeen.

Muttaqeen is derived from the word taqwa which is best defined as protecting oneself from evil. If a person has taqwa, then that means he is **fearful** of going near that which is considered immoral or evil such as lying, stealing and corruption because it gives him guilt. At the same time, he has **hope** that by doing so he will be able to become a better human being. This balance of fear and hope is important. A person who only has fear will develop many phobias and will be consumed by guilt if he makes even one mistake making it difficult for him to live a purposeful and content life. Instead of having the motivation to do good deeds, he will live a life of depression and anxiety. In contrast, a person who only has hope will never want to struggle to keep himself away from immoral things. Even if he commits evil, he will justify it, still considering himself to be a good person because by only having hope, he becomes devoid of guilt. For this reason, taqwa includes both fear and hope — the fear of being involved in sin and the hope of becoming a better human. Although taqwa cannot be directly measured, it can be improved or worsened.

According to the second verse of the surah, the Quran will only be a source of guidance for people who are muttazeen. Who is a muttazeen? A person who has both taqwa and wants to improve his level of taqwa is considered a muttazeen. The Book of Allah cannot be guidance for an individual who has no taqwa, nor can it be guidance for someone who has taqwa, but is not keen on improving it. After all, how can the Quran be guidance for someone who is not bothered in becoming a better version of himself?

At this stage, it is important to understand that terms such as muttazeen, kaafir and munafiq are not just labels. Rather, they refer to different journeys or paths. For example, if someone believes that lying is wrong and tries to stop lying, he has taqwa and a desire to improve his level of taqwa, implying that he is on the path of muttazeen. However, if over time, he starts lying, even though he continues to admit that lying is wrong, he worsens his level of taqwa implying that now, he is moving along the path of munafiq or kaafir. Therefore, in the journey of muttazeen, an individual is continuously improving his level of taqwa, trying to reach the end of the path where he has maximized it. In contrast, in the journey of kaafir or munafiq, an individual is continuously worsening his level of taqwa until he reaches the end of the path, when he has completely destroyed it.

Moreover, an individual can switch between paths. A believer who is a hypocrite is walking on the path of munafiq. But that does not imply that he will always be on this path. If he repents and makes amends, he will start walking on the path of muttazeen. Similarly, it is not necessary that every kaafir is destined for the hellfire. As long as he has not reached the end of his path where his taqwa is completely destroyed, he can always change, gain guidance and become a muttazeen seeking to perfect his taqwa. The tests and hardships of life might help him accept a truth that he spent years denying. It can open his eyes to reality allowing him to acknowledge the purpose of his existence and work hard to attain the pleasure of Allah. Similarly, a person on the path of muttazeen might move to the path of kaafir.

One common misperception is that a muttazeen must be a Muslim. This would imply that the second verse of Surah Baqarah is suggesting that the Quran will only be guidance for Muslims, which means a non-Muslim needs to first embrace Islam in order for the Quran to become guidance for him. But why would anyone enter Islam before studying the Quran and testifying that it is the word of God? Besides, if taqwa means to abstain from immoral or unjust acts, then is it not possible for a non-Muslim to have taqwa? And if a non-Muslim has taqwa and wants to improve his taqwa, doesn't that qualify him as being a muttazeen by definition?

Regardless of faith, any individual who likes to protect himself from sin and evil has taqwa, and if he wants to improve on his taqwa, that makes him a muttaqeen. The Quran will be guidance for him. Therefore, the path of muttaqeen does not necessarily start with faith in Allah, but it definitely does end with it, suggesting that the individual must eventually believe in God in order to further improve his taqwa. He might have started as a person who wanted to protect himself from sinful and immoral acts simply because he feared guilt and he hoped to be a better human being. As he improved his taqwa, he moved along the path of muttaqeen. But after a while, he had no more incentive to improve himself as a human unless he believed in the akhirah because then he would want to continue improving his taqwa in order to save himself from the hellfire. In fact, this line of reasoning explains why we witness many non-Muslims engaging in charitable deeds. They are kind and generous, eager to improve their level of taqwa and become better human beings. But, after spending years of doing good deeds, they reach a dead end because they don't know how to further improve. After having done so much, what else can they do? At that stage, the only way they can continue walking along the path of muttaqeen is if they embrace the truth. Then they will strive to abstain from evil, not because they fear guilt, but because they fear upsetting Allah. They will strive to do good deeds, not because they hope to be good humans, but because they hope to get into Jannah. Their definition of sinful acts will not just include lying, stealing and corruption, but it will also include shirk, rejection of the truth, worshipping desires or pursuing falsehood. Therefore, towards the end of their journey of muttaqeen, they must have embraced Islam and submitted their will to Allah.

In this context, the correct interpretation of verse 2 is that the Quran will be guidance for the muttaqeen — someone who has taqwa and wants to improve his taqwa, regardless of whether he is a Muslim or not. For example, Umar (r.a) embraced Islam only after he heard the verses of Surah Ta Ha, implying that the Quran became guidance for him, even before he became a Muslim.³ Known for his honesty, integrity and character, he had taqwa and he desired to improve himself as a human

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٢﴾

Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer and spend out of what we have provided them.

³ Samat, T. (2001). 'The 99 most eminent names of Allah.' Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications, p.27

Having informed us that the Quran will only be guidance for the muttaqeen, the chapter now elaborates on the two main prerequisites that an individual must have that will enable him to walk on the path of muttaqeen — a correct attitude and a correct mindset. In particular, Allah first mentions the correct attitude because a prerequisite to adopting the correct mindset is improving the condition of the heart, and for that, the correct attitude is a necessity. Why?

Mindset determines the manner in which a person will perceive life, deal with failure and success and view obstacles and challenges. In fact, our mind-set is largely determined by the beliefs we hold, and since belief resides in the heart, the only way to adopt a positive growth mindset that is ideal for attaining guidance, is to improve the condition of the heart. For example, if I lose a competition and the winner comes up and praises me for my effort, I might initially think that she is being sarcastic and she wants to humiliate me. Why would I think that? Perhaps I have faced sarcasm and humiliation ever since childhood to the extent that my heart now believes that everyone is sarcastic. Therefore, my negative mindset stems from the negative belief in my heart. On the other hand, if I change my beliefs and accept that some people can generally be nice and kind, I can change my perspective. In that case, I will start to think that the winner praised me because she deemed my effort worthy of praise. By changing the condition of my heart, I can change my mindset allowing myself to see the positive aspects in people instead of the negative. But how do you improve the condition of the heart? Adopt the right attitude.

A muttaqeen should be someone who does believe or is willing to believe that there are things that exist in the unseen realm, despite being unable to sense them. This can be seen from the use of the verb 'yuminoona' in verse 3 which implies both present and future tense. Therefore, he might be a non-Muslim who does not currently believe in the unseen, but is willing to believe provided he is given substantial evidence. What does that mean? The individual must adopt an attitude of being a critical thinker who uses logic, observation and rational thinking to deduce a conclusion instead of adopting a rigid approach and jumping to conclusions without even considering alternative options. After all, the very essence of Islam is having blind faith in that which cannot be seen but can only be deduced or inferred using critical thinking such as God, heaven, hell, angels and Satan. When an individual understands that there is more to reality than meets the eye it will affect his decisions, emotions, behavior and thoughts. He will be willing to accept the existence of an entity that is extremely powerful, yet remains hidden. Moreover, since the heart has a mind of its own that reflects and analyzes information before deciding a course of action, being a critical thinker improves the

condition of the heart by forcing it to rid itself of bias and prejudice so that information can be critically examined to arrive at accurate conclusions.

If the person is a critical thinker, then the second stage in adopting the right attitude is to establish prayer. Used in this context, prayer does not necessarily mean the 5 time prayers in Islam. It implies prayer in general because the act of praying symbolizes obedience and submission to a higher authority, characteristics that should be present in a muttazeen. Praying also improves the condition of the heart by inculcating humility. In contrast, an individual who believes that his power, status and intelligence will be sufficient for his survival will only worship himself, unwilling to serve anything else. With this attitude, the Quran can never be guidance for him because Islam centers on submission to a supreme entity. Furthermore, by using the verb 'yuqemo' which means present and future tense, this implies that the individual has established prayer or is willing to start praying provided that he is convinced of the truth.

Finally, adopting the right attitude involves a desire to spend and share sustenance with others. The use of the present, future tense verb 'yunfiqoon' implies that this is a person who currently spends in charity or is willing to start in the future. This is not necessarily referring to the compulsory zakat that has to be paid by Muslims annually on all their wealth. It includes all charitable deeds performed by an individual regardless of his faith, such as sharing money or goods with the poor and sharing knowledge and wisdom with the intention of benefiting others. The act of spending and sharing resources cleans the heart by inculcating empathy. This is a vital condition for guidance because Islam stresses on the community over the individual. A muttazeen should feel sorrow when others are upset and grateful when others are happy.

Critical thinking, submission and empathy help to soften the heart making it easier for it to absorb the words of Allah. Just as a dry piece of land loses its ability to absorb water as compared to a fertile piece of land, a heart that is rigid and consumed with arrogance and pride loses its ability to understand the words of wisdom in the Quran. For example, after Khalid bin Waleed's brother, Al-Walid, accepted Islam, the Prophet (pbuh) told him that a man like Khalid would not be able to keep himself away from Islam for long.⁴ The Prophet's statement proves that the Quran can be guidance for people not only after they embrace Islam, but even before they embrace Islam. Khalid bin Waleed was known

⁴ Tibbetts, J. (2015). '50 Great Military Leaders of all Times.' New Delhi: VIJ Books

for his intellect, critical thinking, humility and morality — qualities that would inevitably help him to deduce the truth.⁵

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

They believe in what has been sent down to you, and what has been sent down before you and are convinced of the last day.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥﴾

They alone are on guidance and they are the ones who will prosper.

Besides cleansing the heart, there must also be a correct mind-set. Psychology highlights the difference between a growth mind-set and a fixed mind-set. A person with a growth mind-set is always willing to change and learn from mistakes. Instead of believing that his fate is sealed, he believes that his journey is dependent on the choices he makes and that his destiny is within his control. He is eager to learn so that he can improve himself. In contrast, a fixed mind-set individual is terrified of failure. Instead of learning from mistakes and improving, he reproaches himself believing that he lacks the skills required for success and will never be able to attain them. Instead of working hard to improve himself, he is busy judging and labeling himself convinced that he can never change. Being extremely risk averse and terrified of change, he only ventures in areas where he feels success is guaranteed.⁶

Quran is guidance for the individual who adopts a growth mind-set with regards to religion, evident from the usage of the present/future tense form of the verb ‘believe’ in verse 4 — ‘yuminoona’. What is religion? Belief in God, prophets, Books sent to the prophets, angels and the hereafter. Therefore, a muttqaen will be someone who either believes in what God has sent to mankind in the form of Books, or is willing to believe if sufficient evidence is provided. He is willing to analyze the message of the Creator to deduce the truth and he isn't afraid to question his own beliefs. Unlike an individual of a fixed mind-set who will stubbornly hold onto the rituals or beliefs of his ancestors even if they don't make sense to him, a person of a growth mind-set is willing and ready for change.

Finally, as explained in verse 4, a muttqaen must have no doubt in the hereafter because it is the certainty of meeting God and being accountable for one's actions that will give him the incentive to

⁵ Tibbetts, J. (2015). '50 Great Military Leaders of all Times.' New Delhi: VIJ Books

⁶ Lyman, L.L. (2016). 'Brain science for principals.' Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p.94

maximize his taqwa and walk on the path of muttaqeen. If the Day of Judgment is doubted, or it is believed that man can evade justice on that day by compensating God in some manner, then the fear of accountability will not exist, making people apathetic towards morals and ethics. After all, if humans can get away with anything then why bother about right and wrong? Moreover, the use of the present/future tense form of the verb ‘certainty’ in verse 4 — ‘yuqinoon’ — again reiterates that a muttaqeen must have a growth mind-set. He should either have certainty in the hereafter or be willing to have certainty in the hereafter provided that sufficient evidence is provided.

It is important to emphasize that cleansing the heart is a necessary but not sufficient condition to adopting a growth mindset. Some people may be empathetic, humble and critical thinkers who accept the beauty of Allah’s message and understand that Islam is the truth. However, due to the fear of change, they remain in a fixed mindset, choosing to hold on to their past beliefs. Waleed Ibn Mugheerah is an example of someone who heard the message of the Prophet (pbuh), reflected upon it and understood it to be true, as explained in the Quran.⁷ But it was his fear of change and the fear of losing his status that made him adopt a fixed mindset, refusing to acknowledge the testimony of his heart.

Having now understood the ideal attitude and mindset required of a muttaqeen, the reader is automatically compelled to examine himself critically. Where does he stand? What is the condition of his heart and his mindset? If he knows that he does not have the right attitude or the right mindset, is he interested in improving himself? If yes, then the Quran can be guidance for him. If no, then this journey of tafseer will be futile for him. Allah’s message is all about empathy, humility, logic, analyzing, risk-taking, jihad and challenging ourselves as humans so that we can push ourselves outside of our comfort zone. A person who fails to identify his flaws or is uninterested in improving himself will not be able to comprehend Islam.

Once the basic condition of the muttaqeen has been explained, Allah then proceeds to discuss the case of the kaafir, a term that is commonly used to refer to the disbelievers. Kaafir means the one who commits kufr — covers or conceals something⁸, and by definition an individual cannot conceal

⁷ Quran (74:18-21)

⁸ Chittick, W.C. (2012). ‘In search of the lost heart.’ New York: SUNY Press, p.8

something that was never revealed to him. So what is the kaafir concealing? If the answer is Islam or the Quran, then a counter argument could be that perhaps an opportunity was not presented to him to understand the religion or the Book, in which case how can he be guilty of committing kufr?

Allah will ensure that every individual will be given enough opportunities to hear the message of Islam so that his heart will testify to the truth. Why the heart? Because that is where the rooh resides. The rooh was blown inside of man directly from God.⁹ Therefore, it is our source of guidance, moral compass, and our hidden testimony to the oneness of God. Since Allah blew the rooh into us from Himself, it is our nature — fitrah — to practice tauheed.¹⁰ Belief in the Creator comes naturally to us. Even a staunch disbeliever of tauheed will start to worship the One True God when faced with the fear of death, as explained later in the Quran. In fact, to deny the existence of God or to choose to worship several deities contradicts the nature of mankind.¹¹ Hence, as soon as the individual hears and reflects on the message of tauheed, his rooh will testify. At that instant, if he chooses to adhere to the voice of the rooh, he walks on the path of muttaqeen. If he chooses to deny or cover the truth, he walks on the path of kaafir.

As a result, a non-believer who has not yet testified to the truth in his heart, but has taqwa and is trying to build his level of taqwa is a muttaqeen and not a kaafir. Once he hears the message, testifies to the truth, and chooses to conceal the silent testimony occurring in his heart, then he becomes a kaafir. But what if he is still doing good deeds in public and trying to be a better human? Is he not a muttaqeen?

When a person isn't certain of the truth or has not reflected on it yet, then the better deeds he does, the better he feels about himself and his taqwa improves. He is a muttaqeen. However, once he knows for sure that he is denying the truth, his heart has testified and there is no more doubt left, then as he continues doing charitable deeds, he no longer feels as if he is becoming a better human. On the contrary, he feels more guilt. By denying the truth and refusing to change his old habits, he knows that he is committing a huge sin every day. So, at this stage, he might be doing many good deeds in public, but his taqwa is not improving. It is actually diminishing because taqwa involves abstaining from things that are considered evil, immoral or sinful. When a person understands that shirk and denying The Almighty is a sin, but he continues doing it, then his level of taqwa will start to decrease.

⁹ See Quran (32:9)

¹⁰ Husain, M.Z. (2006). 'Global studies: Islam and the Muslim world.' McGraw-Hill Companies.

¹¹ Chittick, W.C. (2012). 'In search of the lost heart.' New York: SUNY Press, p.8

That is why such a person is now walking on the path of kaafir. Naturally, since it is impossible to know the true condition of anyone's heart, it is wrong to label or judge people. Allah mentions all these labels so that we can judge ourselves, not anyone else.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أُنذِرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment.

An individual who denies the truth commits the sin of kufr and walks on the path of kaafir, but that does not imply that he has lost all opportunities to repent and gain guidance. Only the individual who reaches the end of the path — the pinnacle of kufr — seals his fate as described in verses 6 and 7 because such a person depletes his taqwa. He no longer has any concept of right and wrong. Such a kaafir has his heart and hearing sealed and a veil placed over his eyes so that he is destined for hell. After being given ample opportunities to believe, he chose to deny the truth even though his heart silently testified to the truth. Therefore, verse 7 does not describe the state of every disbeliever. Rather, it refers to a particular class of disbelievers who have sealed their own fate. These are those upon whom Allah's wrath descends.

In addition, when Allah states in verse 7 that a kaafir of this kind has his heart, ears and eyes sealed, He is referring to the spiritual heart (qalb), spiritual eyes and spiritual ears of the rooh. The physical human body has eyes that allow it to see, and ears that allow it to hear. However, seeing the signs of Allah that are present everywhere can only be done by the spiritual eyes of the rooh. Similarly, the human body has ears that allow it to hear. However, deciphering between words that represent the truth and those that represent falsehood, can only be done by the spiritual ears of the rooh. The heart is responsible for making decisions, but it is the qalb that understands the wisdom of tauheed, reflects, ponders, understands empathy, justice and mercy, allowing the individual to make the best decisions for his spiritual growth. Therefore, when The Almighty refers to a kaafir as having his heart, eyes and

ears sealed, it does not imply that he has become literally blind or deaf. On the contrary, due to his stubbornness and continuous denial, he gradually loses all three channels through which he could gain guidance. The spiritual eyes no longer witness the signs of Allah. The spiritual ears no longer listen and understand the truth. The qalb which could absorb the words of Allah has been covered implying that the individual loses his ability to gain wisdom, reflect on Allah's words, be emotionally intelligent, or display emotions such as mercy, empathy and justice. Such an individual can see the objects surrounding him in the environment, but his spiritual eyes fail to see these objects as flawless creations of Allah. He can hear the verses of the Quran being recited, but he cannot hear the message of love and hope present in the verses. He can gain knowledge to help his heart decide, but he can never attain wisdom. His continuous denial of the truth makes the kaafir weaken his own rooh such that it no longer responds to its Creator's signs. When the kaafir reaches this stage, any attempt to try and warn him is futile. But by placing a seal upon the hearts and hearing, as well as a veil over the eyesight, this gives the impression that the individual might have had a chance to repent and embrace Islam, but that opportunity was taken away from him by sealing his faculties of sight and hearing. So, why would The Almighty retract the chance to seek forgiveness from any individual? Why would Allah seal someone's fate before his death or before the final punishment (azaab)? In doing so, would that not give rise to injustice?

In my humble opinion, this only occurs for those disbelievers who have transgressed severely against people by committing atrocious crimes for a prolonged period of time. They have reached the pinnacle of kufr. Being the All-Merciful and Compassionate, Allah would have to forgive all their past sins and grant them a clean slate if they were to ever repent and embrace Islam prior to their death, and this would be a gross injustice towards mankind. Therefore, for such obstinate transgressors, Allah removes all chances of repentance by sealing their faculties of sight and hearing, so as to ensure that they face the final chastisement. Examples supporting this theory can be found in the Quran. For instance, Musa (a.s) invoked Allah to harden the hearts of the Pharaoh and his ministers so that they would not believe in Allah until the punishment descended and the doors of repentance were shut. Consequently, his prayer was accepted implying that the Pharaoh's heart, eyes and ears were sealed even though the nation's term of respite had not yet ended — Allah withdrew the Pharaoh's opportunity to seek forgiveness, reserving him for the final punishment.

However, it is not for a believer to judge whose faculties of sight and hearing have already been sealed and who might still have a chance to repent. Regardless of the crimes others may have committed, it

is always beneficial to preach Islam to everyone. The purpose of verses 6 and 7 is not to suggest that preaching Islam to kaafirs is useless because their faculties of sight and hearing have been sealed. Rather, it is a warning to mankind to take religion seriously, repent and make amends before they reach the climax of kufr and their fate is sealed while they are still alive.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَيَأْتُونَ الْآخِرَةَ وَمَاهُمْ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾

Of the people there are some who say “we believe in Allah and the last day”; but they do not really believe.

يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَمَا يُخَادِعُونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٩﴾

They seek to deceive Allah and those who believe; but they only deceive themselves and they do not realize it.

فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَّرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْذِبُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

In their hearts is a disease; and Allah has increased their disease. Grievous is the chastisement they incur because they lied to themselves.

The final category is that of the munafiq or the hypocrite. As we asked Allah in Surah Fatiha to not only show us the path of the righteous but also save us from the path of the cursed and misguided, it only makes sense that after talking about the muttaqeen (righteous), the surah discusses the kaafir (cursed) and then the munafiq (misguided). Hence, in my humble opinion, when Surah Fatiha refers to the people who are cursed, it is talking about the kaafirs, not the Jews, and when it mentions the people who are misguided, it is referring to the munafiqs, not the Christians. Allah knows best.

Munafiq is derived from nafiqa which refers to the tunnel created by a rat underground with one hole being concealed while the other is disclosed. This helps it to enter the tunnel from one side and escape through the other. Therefore, a munafiq is one who conceals his true beliefs or feelings regarding Islam while giving the impression of being a believer.¹² As explained in these verses,

¹² Siddiqi, A.R. (2015). Quranic keywords: a reference guide. Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, p.172

hypocrisy — munafqath — is a disease that starts in the heart and has the ability of spreading rapidly unless it is controlled.

Similar to the kaafir, Allah highlights the case of the munafiq who has reached the end of his path — the pinnacle of munafqath. He will attempt to fool the people with his words and actions, portraying the image of being a staunch believer. Since he permits the disease in his heart to spread and refuses to repent, despite being given ample opportunities, he reaches a stage where Allah causes the disease to increase and fully engulf his heart. At that stage, the munafiq becomes deaf, mute and blind, as later explained in verse 18. His rooh loses the ability to see Allah's signs and hear or understand the message of God. He claims to believe in Allah and the last day but in reality, he strongly opposes Islam. Unlike the kaafir, a hypocrite of this nature is more dangerous to the Muslim Ummah because he aims to create confusion about religion while pretending to be a believer. Seeking protection from him requires vigilance because he disguises himself as a muttaqeen. Such people are clearly misguided, claiming to be on the path of guidance but actually being far from it.

Since, the munafiq lives among the Muslims and has ample opportunity to hear the message of God and mend his ways, his choice to continuously deceive Muslims and oppose Islam, results in a punishment in the afterlife that is 'aleem' as mentioned in verse 10. Aleem is greater than the punishment of the kaafir that is 'azeem' — mentioned in verse 7. Hence, the munafiq is exposed to a torment that is more severe than the kaafir by being placed in the lowest depths of the Hellfire.¹³ The extra benefit he receives in terms of living among the Muslims and hearing the message of God frequently, implies an extra cost if he still opposes Islam.

As explained in the Hadith, there are three stages of a hypocrite that coincide with the extent to which the disease of hypocrisy has spread in his heart. During the first stage he will lie frequently. As he proceeds to the second stage, he will start to make false promises. At the final stage, he will develop a habit of always betraying others when trusted:

¹³ See Quran (4:145)

*Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h) said, "Among the signs of a hypocrite are three, even if he fasts and prays and claims to be a Muslim: when he speaks he lies, when he gives a promise he breaks it, and when he is trusted he betrays."*¹⁴

Once an individual enters the first stage of hypocrisy and starts covering up the truth, the initial spots of hypocrisy appear on his heart. Gradually, if he does not acknowledge his mistake and alter his habits, he enters the second stage of hypocrisy permitting his disease to rapidly spread. When he attains the third stage of hypocrisy, he becomes an enemy to the Muslims. For a munafiq, who is at the early stage of hypocrisy, the remedy for cleansing the heart and changing his path to muttaqeen is to repent after sinning and constantly engage in the remembrance (zikr) of Allah:

*"Verily, when the believer commits a sin, a black spot appears upon his heart. If he repents and abandons the sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished, but if he increases in sin, the blackness increases."*¹⁵

The fact that Islam highlights a difference between muttaqeen and munafiq, contrasts it with Christianity and Judaism. Jews believe they will be successful in the afterlife because they are the chosen nation of God — their sacred lineage will ensure that they inevitably attain paradise. Christians believe they will attain salvation based on their belief in Christ.¹⁶ In comparison, in Islam, being a Muslim does not give any guarantee of salvation because it depends on belief and good deeds. Islam differentiates between the muttaqeen and the munafiq. While the former may enter paradise, the latter is destined for the Hellfire even though both call themselves Muslims.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُصْلِحُونَ ﴿١١﴾

When it is said to them "do not make mischief on the earth" they say: "we are the only ones that put things right".

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْمُفْسِدُونَ وَلَكِن لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

For sure, they are the ones who make mischief but they realize it not.

¹⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari 33, Sahih Muslim 59

¹⁵ Sunan Ibn Majah 4244 Grade: sahih

¹⁶ James, P. (2001). 'The Murderous paradise: German nationalism and the Holocaust.' London: Praeger, p.26

وَإِذِ قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا ءَامَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ
وَلَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

When it is said to them “believe as the others believe”, they say: “shall we believe as the fools believe?” No! Of a surety they are the fools but they do not know.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا قَالُوا ءَامَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ
مُتَسَاهِرُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

When they meet those who believe, they say “we believe” but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say “we are really with you, we were only jesting.”

اللَّهُ يَسْتَهْزِئُ بِهِمْ وَيَمُدُّهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Allah will throw back their mockery on them and give them rope in their trespasses so they will wander like blind ones.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالَةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ فَمَا رَبِحَت بِحَدِيثِهِمْ ۖ وَمَا كَانُوا مُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

These are the ones who have bartered guidance for error, but their traffic is profitless and they have lost true direction.

What exactly is the nature of the disease that is spreading in the heart of the munafiq? Just like any disease, when a human starts to suffer from an illness, he remains completely unaware of it until he experiences symptoms. Only then does he visit a doctor and get treatment. In the same manner, when the heart of a believer becomes ill, he will exhibit symptoms signaling the need to visit the Quran and get treatment. But what exactly are these symptoms?

Firstly, the individual’s ego will stop him from ever pointing the finger at himself. This is a kind of person who does not like to be corrected and if he is politely warned, he becomes extremely defensive. He refuses to accept that his actions are creating confusion and disarray among the Muslim Ummah, arguing that he is actually establishing peace and promoting a greater understanding of Islam, as mentioned in verse 11. When he is warned to not innovate or alter the interpretation of commands in the Quran, he refuses to stop, claiming that he is on the right path and all others are misguided. As mentioned in verse 13, he refuses to believe as the rest of the Ummah believes, considering others to

be fools for adhering to Shariah and Islamic laws, and certain that he is intellectually and spiritually superior to them.¹⁷

Secondly, as the disease in his heart spreads, he will lie, deceive and betray the trust of his loved ones as mentioned in the hadith and further explained in verse 14. He will profess his sincerity and true faith to the Muslims while concealing his support for their enemies. He will appear to be helping the believers, while contracting secret meetings with the enemies of Islam to divulge information about Muslims and their future plans. In doing so, he aims to attain the approval of both the Muslims and the non-Muslims, granting him leverage to side with the party that wins in future battles. A clear example of this behavior can be seen in the leader of the hypocrites in Medina, Abdullah Ibn Ubayy, during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He would confess his belief in Allah and the Prophet (pbuh), abiding among the Muslims, while secretly conspiring with the Jews against Islam.¹⁸ But why would a Muslim in the present era, bother to agree with other Muslims in public while secretly going against them? What would he stand to gain by portraying the image of being a good Muslim? Why not openly go against Islam?

The munafiqs in Medina during the time of the Prophet (pbuh) would side with the Muslims because of their love for power. They wanted to receive the same benefits as other Muslims so they would pretend to be muttqaen. At the same time, the fear that power might shift to the Jews in the future would encourage them to secretly befriend the Jews as well. Similarly, in the present era, love for power, fame, acceptance, likes and followers on social media encourage people to behave in a manner deemed acceptable to those around them. When surrounded by a Muslim community, they will appear religious, while behaving in the exact opposite manner when surrounded by their non-religious friends.

Once the disease of hypocrisy has covered the heart, the individual becomes deaf, mute and blind. His heart cannot be a recipient of the message of Islam anymore and his fate has been sealed because he intentionally chooses to be misguided by exchanging guidance for error. This is the reason that verses 8-13 keep emphasizing that such a munafiq continues doing wrong but he doesn't know it or he doesn't realize it. Having reached the end of his path where he has no taqwa and his heart is

¹⁷ Wohlman, A. (2009). 'Al-Ghazali, Averroes and the interpretation of the Quran.' London: Routledge, p.38

¹⁸ Buyukcelebi, I. (2005). 'Living in the shade of Islam.' New Jersey: Light, p.141

covered with the disease of hypocrisy, he simply fails to see or understand where he is going wrong becoming deaf, mute and blind.

As mentioned in verse 15, once this stage has been attained, Allah 'gives him rope' implying that The Almighty no longer grants opportunities for him to attain guidance. On the contrary, the gates of all good things are opened for him, so he can thoroughly enjoy his life.¹⁹ This proves that wealth and assets can easily distract man from the path of Allah. The desire to accumulate, compete and race towards dunya can be so strong that tests and hardship become the only means by which man can realize the truth and once again realign his goals towards Islam. By granting someone rope, Allah removes calamities, distress and tests in the individual's life, thereby removing any hope that he can decipher between truth and falsehood. Having rejected guidance, such an individual lives his life with a lack of purpose, wandering blindly between different goals but lacking any sense of direction.

In fact, this might be the means by which Allah increases the disease in the heart of a munafiq as mentioned in verse 10, by granting him wealth, assets and power so that he may be further deluded from the path of Islam and reserved for a severe chastisement on the Day of Judgment. This would imply that Allah can grant rope to the hypocrite even before his heart has been fully covered with hypocrisy, in order to allow the disease to grow.

Furthermore, just as a disease can be contagious requiring others to protect themselves from the one who is afflicted with the disease, Muslims needs to remain vigilant of those who are munafiqs so that the disease of hypocrisy does not spread. That does not mean that Muslims should boycott those who appear to be munafiqs because admonishing them is equally important as every munafiq is not deaf, mute and blind. Therefore, while boycotting them is not advised, continuously surrounding oneself in the company of munafiqs is dangerous.

There is an important distinction to be made here between the kaafir and the munafiq. In the case of the former, there is no mention of a disease in the heart. On the contrary, when a kaafir reaches the end of his path, it is God who places a veil over his eyes, ears and heart, sealing his fate and reserving the disbeliever for Allah's final punishment. However, in the case of the latter, there is mention of a disease in the heart. Why is there a difference?

¹⁹ See Quran (6:44)

When the munafiq reaches the end of his path, Allah grants increase to his disease of hypocrisy allowing his heart to be completely enveloped. In that situation, he loses his chance to ever understand Islam, weakening his rooh and becoming spiritually deaf and blind. However, Allah does not seal his faculties of sight and hearing because unlike the kaafir, the munafiq has already embraced Islam. He was already awarded a clean slate on the day that he became a Muslim. After becoming a Muslim, he gradually developed the disease of hypocrisy, and while being conscious of it, he permitted the disease to grow. Eventually, he reached a stage where Allah allowed his disease to increase and inevitably his own actions caused him to become deaf, mute and blind, eliminating the possibility of ever repenting. Therefore, in the case of the rebellious kaafir, it is Allah who seals his fate because of the atrocious crimes he has committed, preventing him from embracing Islam and being given a clean slate. In contrast, in the case of the munafiq, it is the individual himself who seals his fate, preventing him from ever repenting and mending his ways. Allah does not have to intervene by sealing his eyes, ears and heart. He simply has to open up the gates of all good things and the munafiq ends up sealing his own faculties of hearing and sight.

The next few verses provide analogies that describe two types of munafiqs. The first kind is the extreme munafiq whose traits were mentioned in verses 10-16. He advances in his hypocrisy despite being given ample opportunities to attain guidance. After years of denying the message of God, he enters final stage of hypocrisy, becoming an enemy of Islam and sealing his own fate.

مَثَلُهُمْ كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي اسْتَوْقَدَ نَارًا فَلَمَّا أَضَاءَتْ مَا حَوْلَهُ ذَهَبَ اللَّهُ بِنُورِهِمْ وَتَرَكَهُمْ فِي
ظُلُمَاتٍ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Their similitude is that of a man who kindled a fire; when it lighted all around him, Allah took away their light and left them in darkness so they could not see.

صُمُّوا بِكُمْ عَمَىٰ فَهُمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

Deaf, mute and blind; they will not return to the path.

The analogy in verse 17 shifts between pronouns of ‘he’ and ‘them’ suggesting that initially there was one person who kindled a fire. The resulting blaze produced light all around and removed the darkness for everyone. However, the verse then refers to a group of people for whom the light was

taken away and they were plunged into darkness, but the fire was not extinguished. It still provided light for those who wished to see.²⁰

Similarly, Muhammad (pbuh) was able to bring light or guidance to the whole world in the form of revelation. The light continues to exist for those who wish to benefit from it but it cannot be seen by the extreme munafiqs who have destroyed their moral compass and are now spiritually deaf, mute and blind. Allah took away their light by permitting the disease in their hearts to grow. Having reached the end of the path of munafqath, they are now unable to ever understand the message of God because they have lost their spiritual faculties. Allah has extended them rope allowing them to continue trespassing and enjoying this worldly life, while being unable to see the path of God. There is nothing for them in the afterlife except the Hellfire. Although their death has not yet arrived and the doors of repentance are still open, they cannot repent because their own actions have caused them to lose their faculty of hearing, speech and sight. Having surrounded themselves with darkness, they cannot understand the words of the Quran nor can they see the signs of Allah, nor can they ever speak the truth. While being misguided, they truly believe that they are on the right path.

The second kind of munafiq is the fearful munafiq described in verses 19 and 20. In this case, the individual has not yet sealed his fate and still has the ability of attaining guidance, provided that he makes the right choices.

أَوْ كَصَيْبٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فِيهِ ظُلُمَاتٌ وَرَعْدٌ وَبَرْقٌ يَّجْعَلُونَ أَصْوَعًا فِي أَذَانِهِم مِّنَ الصَّوَاعِقِ
حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ وَاللَّهُ مُخِيطٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

Or another similitude is that of a rain-laden cloud from the sky; in it are zones of darkness and lightning; they press their fingers in their ears to keep out the stunning thunder-clap while they are in terror of death. But Allah is ever round the rejectors of faith!

يَكَادُ الْبَرْقُ يَخْطِفُ أَبْصَرَهُمْ كُلَّمَا أَضَاءَ لَهُمْ مَشَوْا فِيهِ وَإِذَا أَظْلَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ قَامُوا وَلَوْ شَاءَ
اللَّهُ لَذَهَبَ بِسَمْعِهِمْ وَأَبْصَرِهِمْ إِنَّا اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

²⁰ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

The lightning all but snatches away their sight; every time the light helps them, they walk; and when the darkness grows on them, they stand still. And if Allah willed, He could take away their faculty of hearing and sight for Allah has power over all things.

Unlike the continuous light that comes from a fire kindled by a man, as mentioned in verse 17, the light mentioned in these verses is temporary and it comes directly from the sky. Therefore, in this case, light does not symbolize guidance that came from the Prophet (pbuh). Rather it is analogous to ease that comes from Allah, while darkness represents difficulty. Furthermore, in the previous analogy, the light from the fire is described as being a source of joy and happiness for those surrounding it because it provides warmth and direction to someone lost in the darkness. But in the case of lightning, the light is described as terrifying, sharp and intense almost snatching away sight, even though it is also providing direction to a person lost in the dark. So, why the difference?

In the first case, Allah is describing Islam from the perspective of the *muttaqeen* who will see the light, rejoice, take benefit of it and use it to gain direction. The extreme *munafiq* will have the light taken away from him so that he cannot benefit from it. In contrast, in the second case, Allah is describing Islam from the perspective of the fearful *munafiq* who sees it as something terrifying, scary and fearful. So, imagine a person walking in the forest, surrounded by darkness. When there is lightning, he is able to see far and wide. The lightning grants him sight. But instead of behaving like a *muttaqeen* who would be happy and thankful to Allah for the fact that he can now see in the darkness, the *munafiq* remains in fear, terrified of the thunder that accompanies lightning, implying that he is terrified of the consequences that will follow. He will walk when there is light, suggesting that he will tread on the path of Islam when he finds ease in religion, but he will stop when there is complete darkness, implying that he ignores the commands of Allah when Islam becomes too difficult. Another interpretation is that he will walk on the path of Islam, abiding by the commands and practicing the rituals only when he is experiencing a period of ease. However, when he experiences a period of test and hardship, he stops making any effort in Islam as if to reveal his displeasure at Allah for sending him tests. But, regardless of whether the *munafiq* is walking or stopping, he is always in fear implying that even while walking on the path of Islam, he does not feel peace and contentment. Rather, he is terrified of the consequences he might have to face in the future such as rejection from society, family and friends or perhaps fear of a future test or hardship that might affect him.

Moreover, verse 19 also mentions the hypocrite as fearing death. This could be taken literally or figuratively implying that perhaps he fears losing his life and having to face the consequences of his

deeds on the Day of Judgment, or his love for dunya makes him fear jihad. At times, the fear of losing validation from loved ones can result in extreme anxiety and the feeling of life coming to an end.

To summarize, the fearful munafiq is a believer who sways back and forth from the path of Islam, lacking any sense of direction and exhibiting traits of hypocrisy. In certain gatherings he will feel comfortable talking about Islam and behaving like a pious Muslim, and in other gatherings, preaching Islam or behaving like a pious Muslim will be too difficult causing him behave in the exact opposite manner. When faced with tests, the munafiq lives in fear that Allah's mercy will not come to remove his hardship and he is doomed. As a result, he may choose to abandon Islam, beg others for help and work hard to please society in the hope that society will be able to remove his hardship. He does not trust Allah and fears that reliance only on Allah will not be sufficient.

Regardless of whether the fear of death is literal or figurative, it is because the heart does not have certainty or trust in Allah that a believer like this fails to gain peace and contentment. However, since Allah does not mention the fearful munafiqs as being deaf, blind or mute, this implies that they have not lost their moral compass entirely.²¹ The Almighty could have taken away their faculty of hearing and sight, but He has not. They still have the ability to change once they learn to control their fears and submit truly to the will of God. Unlike the extreme munafiqs, the disease of hypocrisy has not completely engulfed their hearts.

Surprisingly, Allah refers to the hypocrites in verse 19, as the rejecters of faith or the kaafir, even though the verse is depicting the case of the munafiq. Why is this? Kufr does not just mean to cover or hide something, it also means to be ungrateful. The munafiqs in these verses are called ungrateful, even though they are not yet blind and deaf because regardless of how many times Allah has shown them mercy and showered them with blessings, they still live in fear. They still seek validation from people and fear losing society. They still fear future tests and hardships and doubt Allah's ability to help them, forgetting the number of times Allah has already removed their previous hardships. They still fear death while forgetting that Allah is always ready to accept repentance and He is the Most Merciful.

But, if a believer understands that he is walking on the path of a fearful munafiq, why is it so hard for him to challenge his negative thoughts and irrational fears? Can he not see the power and might of Allah by observing the universe? Can he not see multiple examples of Allah's mercy? Can he not

²¹ Abdul Rahman, M.S. (2008). 'Tafsir Ibn Kathir.' London: MSA Publications

understand that the society he worships is incapable of giving him anything? Why does he set up rivals for Allah? When he knows that Allah is in control of everything and that He has been granting them food and sustenance since the beginning of time, why does he beg in front of others? This is the exact line of reasoning used by Allah in verses 21 and 22, forcing hypocrites and Muslims of weak iman to question their baseless fears and irrational beliefs.

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

O you people! Worship your guardian Lord who created you and those who came before you that you may be righteous.

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ فِرَاشًا وَالسَّمَاءَ بِنَاءً وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجَ بِهِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ رِزْقًا لَكُمْ فَلَا تَجْعَلُوا لِلَّهِ أَنْدَادًا وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

The one who has made the earth your couch and the heavens your canopy and send down the rain from the heavens and brought forth fruits for your sustenance; then do not set up rivals when you know the truth.

Unfortunately, even if the brain deduces that the fears consuming an individual are truly baseless, a fearful munafiq will never be able to completely rid himself of such fears as long as he has doubt in his heart. Intellectual reasoning can help identify mistakes that we are making and unhealthy behavioural patterns that we might be exhibiting. It can also help to highlight the correct path. But it will not give the strength and motivation to break away from our typical patterns and tread the path of Islam. For that, the believer needs to have absolute certainty in Allah and the Day of Judgment because only then will he be willing to struggle in the cause of Allah regardless of the consequences. For example, a Muslim with weak iman might be able to pray 5 times a day in private, but does not have the courage to pray in public. He might find it easy to talk about Islam in religious gatherings, but fears talking about Allah when he is surrounded by friends. He faces pressure to conform to the standards of the people who surround him. Logically he understands Islam and it appeals to him, but the fear of judgement by family and friends terrifies him and it is only doubt that stops him from pushing himself out of his comfort zone and doing that which he knows is right. He does not truly

believe that he will be facing Allah on the Day of Judgment. He does not truly believe that there is a hellfire. He does not truly believe that there is a beautiful paradise awaiting those who struggled in the cause of Islam. If he did have certainty, he would not hesitate to do the right thing. So, after discussing the need for logic and rational thinking, Allah now focuses on the need to remove doubt.

وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ۚ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ
مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٢٣﴾

And if you are in doubt as to what we have revealed from time to time to our servant then produce a sura like it and call your witnesses or helpers besides Allah if you are truthful.

فَإِنْ لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا وَلَنْ تَفْعَلُوا فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ ۗ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ
﴿٢٤﴾

But if you cannot, and of a surety you cannot, then fear the fire whose fuel is men and stones which is prepared for those who reject faith.

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ
كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رَزَقُوا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ
مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness that their portion is gardens beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are fed with fruits from it, they say “why, this is what we were fed with before” for they are given things in similitude; and they will have spouses purified and they will abide in it forever.

The only means of removing doubt is to analyze, ponder and research Allah’s Book so that you can be convinced of His message. This is the reason why Allah challenges the doubters to produce a surah similar in content. If a man like Muhammad (pbuh) was making up these words, then surely similar verses could be made by others. The disbelievers were not told to produce an entire book that resembled the Quran or even a few surahs; just one surah would suffice. The challenge had been designed to encourage people to study the verses, identify the patterns, reflect on the wisdom, and then ask themselves if they could come up with something similar. Eventually, when they realize the superiority of the message, those who continue to reject it will be losers on the Day of Judgment.

In contrast, the successful in the afterlife will be those who truly believed in Allah, removed all doubt and performed good deeds. This message is essential for believers to understand. Just because a believer performs a few rituals or good deeds when it suits him, does not mean that he will be safe on the Day of Judgment. If his practice of Islam is only restricted to his comfort zone, and outside of his comfort zone he behaves like a non-believer, he cannot expect Allah to reward him with paradise. Jannah is reserved for those who truly believed and strove hard to earn the pleasure of Allah by using the strengths, capabilities, courage and patience that Allah had gifted them in order to follow the truth.

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَّا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفٰسِقِينَ ﴾

Allah is not ashamed to use the similitude of things, be it a gnat or something above it; those who believe know that it is the truth from their lord; but those who reject faith say “what does Allah mean by this similitude?”

By it, he causes many to stray and many He leads to the right path; but he causes not to stray except those who forsake the path.

Another important condition to removing doubt is that any research conducted should be conducted with sincerity. When investigating and examining the Quran, the only agenda should be to decipher whether or not this really is a Book from God and if there really is going to be a hellfire prepared for the disbelievers and doubters. A person who is sincere in his research, has cleansed his heart and has a growth mindset will reflect upon each and every word trying hard to understand the wisdom. In contrast, a person who is not sincere in his efforts will question insignificant things, jumping to conclusions and ultimately rejecting the Quran without much evidence to support his claims. For example, as mentioned in verse 26, they will question Allah's use of a mosquito, bee, spider or fly as an analogy in the Quran. But, if they had bothered dedicating some time to studying such creations they would be able to see the power and might of Allah. The fact that something as minute as the fly can have a body that performs such complex functions accentuates the everlasting power and wisdom of the Creator. By using such analogies, those who are not sincere in discovering the truth will be further plunged into doubt, and those ardently seeking the truth will find concrete evidence to submit to Allah. Therefore, the use of such examples will bring some closer to Allah and will cause some to go further astray, but it is not Allah who misguides them. They choose to forsake the path by making a mockery of Allah's verses instead of studying it and taking it seriously.

Who are those not sincere in understanding the message? As mentioned in verse 27, they are those who love to break Allah's covenant and spread mischief, as previously highlighted in verse 11.

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

Those that break Allah's covenant after it is ratified and who break what Allah has ordered to be joined and do mischief on the earth — these cause loss only to themselves.

Despite calling themselves Muslims, they love to promote disarray through arguments and debates, severing the strong relationships between Muslims by spreading disloyalty, distrust, hatred and jealousy. They convince believers to be intolerant towards others and love to break family ties. Such

rebellious people might call themselves Muslims, but because they worship their desires, they do not submit to Allah nor are they concerned about following the path of Islam. The Quran does not make sense to them and they end up adopting a version of religion that suits them, further spreading confusion amongst the naïve Muslims.

As this discussion of muttazeen, kaafir and munafiq comes to an end, it is interesting to note that the characteristic features of a muttazeen are described in 4 verses and the features of a kaafir are mentioned in 2 verses, but several verses are dedicated to describing the hypocrite with analogies to illustrate his behavior. What is so important about hypocrites that require so many verses to be dedicated to describing them in such immaculate detail?

The logical placement of Madanī surahs at the beginning of the Quran, such as Surah Baqarah, Surah Al-e-Imran, Surah Nisa and Surah Maida suggests that Allah wishes to address the Muslims first before addressing the rest of mankind. Muslims need to prioritize the establishment of a strong Ummah before they can adopt the role of preaching Islam, and their biggest challenge will be the hypocrites that weaken the community from within. Munafiqs strive to spread confusion regarding religion and aim to disunite the believers by promoting animosity, jealousy, greed and hatred. Therefore, a detailed description of hypocrites cautions the believers to be vigilant and to protect themselves from the disease of hypocrisy. The Ummah must be cleansed from within before it can propagate the message of Islam.

The surah started by Allah highlighting the path we need to be following and the paths we need to avoid by ensuring that we do not exhibit the characteristics of a kaafir or a munafiq. Now the surah shifts to discussing our fitrah by asking us a fundamental question. How can we possibly deny or doubt Allah when it is in our fitrah to have certainty in Him? As humans, we are predisposed to worshipping One God. This is precisely why walking on the path of kaafir or munafiq might grant us fame, power and status, but it will never grant us contentment and peace as it goes against our nature.

كَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَكُنْتُمْ أَمْوَاتًا فَأَحْيَاكُمْ ثُمَّ يُمَيِّتُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُحْيِيكُمْ
ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless and He brought you to life; then He will cause you to die, then He will bring you [back] to life, and then to Him you will be returned.

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَسَوَّاهُنَّ سَبْعَ
سَمَوَاتٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١﴾

It is He who created for you all of that which is on the earth. Then He directed Himself to the heaven, [His being above all creation], and made them seven heavens, and He is Knowing of all things.

The Almighty explains that man is given life and death twice. Initially, before he descended to earth, he existed in spiritual form in the heavens, not in physical human form. During this period of time, each soul made a covenant with Allah testifying to the oneness of God. This is further elaborated in Surah al-Araaf verse 172, when Allah questioned each soul, “Am I not your lord?” and each one answered “yes”. The souls were then put to sleep which explains the first part of verse 28 that states ‘you were without life’. This constitutes our first death. Consequently, as human beings were born in the world, the respective soul would be awakened and sent to the earth to commence its journey in this life. This constitutes our first life. After spending a predetermined time on earth, each human must eventually experience death on earth — our second death. Finally, each of us will be given life again when we are resurrected to face The Almighty on the Day of Judgment — our second life. This concept of being granted life and death twice is also explained in Surah Ghafir verse 11. Allah uses the concept of life and death being granted twice to question how mankind could deny Him. But, how exactly does the concept of two lives and two deaths justify that Allah cannot possibly be denied?

The testimony that was made to the Lord Himself in the heavens has a direct impact on our fitrah because the same soul that signed a covenant with Allah, exists within ourselves. Perhaps the first death — when our souls were put to sleep — is the reason why we cannot remember making this covenant with God. Just as a person who wakes up from a deep sleep is not fully conscious of his surroundings, the rooh is not conscious of its exact meeting with Allah.

Naturally, it was important to remove the memory of meeting and testifying to God because otherwise this life would not be a test and we all would be staunch believers. Islam would not require blind faith in the unseen if we all remembered meeting God. As a Muslim, the test is to believe with certainty that we will be held accountable for our actions and that God’s commands have to be followed in order to gain salvation, even though God, heaven and hell cannot be seen. However, even though the memory of meeting God might have been removed from our conscious mind, the testimony to tauheed directly affects our natural instinct. The soul might not remember meeting God, but the message of tauheed sounds familiar. For example, if a patient wakes up from a coma and loses his

memory, doctors advise taking him to visit the place where he was raised and allowing him to meet close family members and friends because such experiences can jog his memory. Similarly, when our roohs woke up from a deep sleep and we forgot meeting Allah, it is the message of tauheed that jogs our memory — tauheed sounds familiar.

This is the reason that the message of tauheed is spread throughout the Quran and it is also present everywhere in our surroundings, as emphasized in verse 29. By simply observing and reflecting, we are easily convinced that everything in nature is a testimony to the Oneness of God. Therefore, by using our faculties of reasoning and intellect, guided by our fitrah, we all can reach the conclusion that only one God must exist and Islam is the truth. As humans, we are naturally inclined towards tauheed. In contrast, polytheists or atheists are fighting against their fitrah as explained in the following Hadīth:

Abu Huraira reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “No child is born but that he is upon natural instinct. His parents make him a Jew, or a Christian, or Magian. As an animal delivers a child with limbs intact, do you detect any flaws?”²²

“I have created My servants as one having a natural inclination to the worship of Allah but it is Satan who turns them away from the right religion”²³

As explained in these hadith, the concept of fitrah also implies that every individual is born pure and free of sin. This is in direct contrast to Christianity that argues every human is born sinful or has an inclination towards disobedience of God which it inherited from Adam (a.s), who committed the original sin.²⁴ He disobeyed God’s command by going near the forbidden tree.²⁵ In Islam, just as each animal is born with a natural instinct implying that it knows what to eat, where to live, how to hunt and how to reproduce, humans are also born with a natural instinct to worship One God. They are naturally inclined towards submission. This is why Allah is questioning us. Despite being programmed to be a muttaqeen, submitting our will to the one true God, why do we choose to behave like a kaafir or munafiq?

²² Sahih Bukhari, 1358

²³ Sahih Muslim 2865a

²⁴ Davies, B., Nevitt, T. (2019). ‘Thoman Aquinas’s Quodlibetal Questions.’ Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.331

²⁵ See Quran (2:35)

In fact, the concept of muttaqeen, munafiq and kaafir existed even before the first man descended on earth. To further explain this, the Quran now shifts to the story of Adam and Iblis — a clash between a muttaqeen and a kaafir.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن
يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا
لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

The angels were informed that Allah was going to create a khalifah on earth. The term khalifah means successor, representative or leader. In this regard, man was placed on earth with a responsibility to use the resources available with the intention of establishing a just and equitable system centered on tauheed. His role on earth is not to maximize wealth, fall in love with dunya and chase his dreams. Rather, he is designed to be a manager and caretaker who has to understand and implement the commands of Allah.²⁶

However, when the Almighty declared that a khalifah would be placed on the earth, the angels could not understand why God would choose to create a specie that would spread mischief and bloodshed, never engaging in the continuous praise of Allah, like the angels. At first, it seems surprising how the angels immediately reached this conclusion. According to Islamic literature, the first khalifah that was placed on earth was the jinn. Having the freedom to choose and make its own decisions similar to man, the jinn abused power spreading mischief and bloodshed. Therefore, upon hearing that another creation would be placed on earth that would also have the ability to choose and make decisions independently, the angels inferred that this new khalifah would make the same mistakes as the jinn.²⁷ In addition, given that a khalifah on earth would never be able to see Allah, paradise, angels or the hellfire, the angels assumed that such a creation would never continuously engage in the praise of Allah because it could never appreciate Allah's true power and might. Allah's response is simple and

²⁶ Raju, K.V., Manasi, S. (2017). 'Water and scriptures: ancient roots for sustainable development.' Cham: Springer, p.186

²⁷ Reynolds, G.S. (2012). 'The emergence of Islam: classical traditions in contemporary perspective.' Minneapolis: Fortress press.

concise — I know that which you do not know. This response is followed by a practical demonstration to address the concern of the angels.

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

And He taught Adam the names - all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful."

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

They said, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who is the Knowing, the Wise."

قَالَ يَتْلُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ أَنْبِئْتُهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ
 السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

He said, "O Adam, inform them of their names." And when he had informed them of their names, He said, "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed."

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ
 الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers.

The demonstration involved Adam (a.s) being taught the names of certain things which he revealed to the angels when they were not able to reveal it themselves. There are different opinions regarding these 'names'. One popular opinion is that names refer to all the nouns that exist in the heavens and earth, as well as the terminologies that are used in different fields of knowledge. Adam (as) was able to demonstrate the extent of his knowledge and his ability to deduce and infer conclusions. Upon witnessing this, it became clear to the angels that based on man's intellectual capacity, he is superior to Allah's other creations. With such profound knowledge he will be equipped with the skills to not

only be an effective steward of the earth, but to also establish justice and religion as commanded by Allah.

However, there is a possibility that this was not just a demonstration of knowledge and deduction, but a lot more. For instance, we could ask that if Adam (as) could name all the nouns and terminologies because Allah taught him, while the angels could not because Allah had not taught them, then how is this a demonstration of Adam's superiority? Man knew the names only because he was taught. If the angels had been taught, they might have known it too. Besides, even if it is true that the man has an immense amount of knowledge, how does that refute the original concern of the angels regarding the ability of man to spread corruption and mischief? In addition, when the angels were asked about the names, they were told to tell the names if they were truthful. But, being made out of nur, angels do not have the ability of lying. So, why would Allah say this?

In my opinion, the event being narrated is linked to the previous discussion regarding two lives and two deaths. In particular, Surah Araaf verse 172 explains how the children of Adam were all removed from the loins of Adam and testified to tauheed before being put to sleep — the first death. Therefore, after creating Adam (a.s) from clay and breathing into him a rooh, Allah then took out all the roohs from the loins of Adam and had them testify to the Oneness of God. In this context, the 'names' that were taught to Adam (as) could be referring to the fitrah, strengths, potential and capabilities of each rooh.

Moreover, the angels made a claim suggesting that khalifahs can only spread corruption and bloodshed. They cannot do good nor can they always praise Allah. So now, they are being told, that if they are truthful about their claim regarding khalifahs, they should name the features and characteristics of the roohs standing before them. Can they claim that each rooh is going to spread mischief and bloodshed? Surprisingly, the angels that were previously so confident in their statement regarding khalifahs, suddenly appear confused and respond that they have no knowledge. Why were they not confident in their claim anymore? What made them change their opinion?

The reason the angels retracted their claim against khalifahs was because they were seeing roohs for the first time. Man was the first creation to be given a rooh that was blown into it directly from Allah.²⁸ This is the reason that man has the ability of showing mercy, compassion, wisdom and justice better than any other creation. It is also the reason why man's intellectual capacity surpasses that of any

²⁸ See Quran (33:72)

other creation. Witnessing roohs coming from a Divine source, the angels could not make a claim of corruption and bloodshed anymore because although they might have witnessed the jinn spreading mischief, they had never seen a rooh like this before. Subsequently, when Adam (as) proceeded to explain the names, capabilities, unique strengths and intellectual capacity of each rooh, the angels were astounded because firstly, it became clear that man is a unique creation with an amazing potential to do good. Secondly, the angels were mesmerized by Adam's ability to memorize the names and attributes of each and every rooh. That is why the verse stresses on the magnitude of information — 'He taught the names, all of them'.

However, was this demonstration purely done to address the concern of the angels? Allah could have simply created Adam (a.s) and told the angels and Iblis to prostrate. The angels would have still prostrated because they always fulfill the command of Allah, while Iblis would have still not prostrated because of his pride and arrogance. So, what was the benefit of displaying man's potential, nature and intellectual capacity to everyone? In my opinion, the demonstration was mostly a means of teaching the children of Adam that in their battle against Iblis, their best chance of winning is if they take advantage of their strength and Iblis's weakness — wisdom. The more wisdom a human has, the more difficult it will be for Iblis to deceive him. How do you gain wisdom? By using the rooh. As mentioned previously, it is the spiritual eyes of the rooh that will show us the signs of Allah. It is the spiritual ears that will help us understand the message of Allah, and it is the qalb that will help us ponder on the words of Allah so that we can internalize His message and submit to His will.

So, what is the overall message? We should build our taqwa, overcome our fears, learn beneficial knowledge and gain wisdom by listening to the voice of our rooh that pulls us towards tauheed. More importantly, this also means that regardless of how much Iblis tries to convince us that we are worthless or incapable, no soul should underestimate the power of the rooh that it has been gifted. No soul should make the claim that it cannot understand the Quran or it cannot gain much knowledge. If Adam, being a human could memorize all the names and have so much knowledge and wisdom, so can we. In fact, just as Allah taught Adam the names, He has taught us something as well. In surah Rahman, Allah mentions teaching us the Quran. In other words, if Adam has the capacity to retain all the knowledge and wisdom of what he was taught, we too have the capacity to retain the knowledge and wisdom of what we were taught. So why do we run from the Quran? Why do we complain that the Quran is too difficult to comprehend?

As mentioned in verse 33, by conducting such a demonstration, the Almighty reminded the angels that only He knew the unseen of the heavens and earth. This could be referring to the fact that the future is only known to Allah. The angles made a prediction about the khalifah, but it is only Allah who knew that this khalifah would be different. Only He knew that the gift of the rooh will cause some humans to walk firmly on the path of Islam, striving against evil and worshipping only one God despite having free-will. In addition, through this demonstration, Allah was not only able to address that which was being revealed, such as the evident concern of the angels, but He was also able to highlight that which was being concealed — arrogance and pride of Iblis.²⁹

For many of us, arrogance and pride can easily enter our hearts, but we never realize it until we are faced with a test. Only then do we bother to critically examine the condition of our hearts, implying that through tests and hardships, Allah helps us realize our mistakes granting us a chance to repent. Similarly, in order to reveal Iblis's mistake so that he could have the opportunity to repent, Allah commanded the angels and Iblis to prostrate to man. This command formally instated man's superiority over the angels, Iblis and all of God's creations. Consumed with envy and animosity, Iblis refused to prostrate, rejecting Allah's command and arguing with Him when he was questioned for his behavior.³⁰ Although it became clear to Iblis that he was being tested, and his refusal to comply to Allah's command revealed that his heart needed to be cleansed, he refused to repent. This is the reason he was punished and dismissed. Allah is not unfair to anyone. He gives opportunities to His slaves to repent and mend their ways. It is the rebellious slave who is unfair to himself. But, in the case of mankind, it is clear that Allah gives us multiple opportunities to repent. Why did He give Iblis only one chance?

Humans are granted more leverage because Allah knows that we have not seen Him, heaven or the angels. We must have blind faith in the unseen which makes life more challenging. In contrast, since Iblis could see Allah and the angels, that gave him an added benefit which resulted in an added cost. Iblis was given only one chance to repent and mend his ways. A chance that he refused to take.

Surprisingly, verse 34 states that Iblis is among the rejecters of faith. Even though he used to worship Allah, he is not called a munafiq. Iblis is called a kaafir because by rejecting Allah's command blatantly and publicly, he demonstrated that he did not have faith. He doubted God's decision. In contrast, a munafiq is one who publicly gives the impression of following Allah's commands and believing in

²⁹ See Quran (7:12)

³⁰ See Quran (7:12)

His supremacy, while silently trying to spread mischief as he conceals disobedience in his heart. Being a devout worshipper of God, Iblis was initially a muttateen, but as self-righteousness and arrogance entered his heart, he started to tread on the path of munafiq. Ultimately, by openly defying God, he moved to the path of kaafir. When Iblis refused to seek Allah’s forgiveness for the mistake he had made, he reached the climax of his journey, maximizing his kufr and sealing his fate.

Although Iblis’s refusal to prostrate identified him as Adam’s greatest enemy, the demonstration did not reveal the strategy Iblis would adopt to attack man. Therefore, instead of instructing Adam (a.s) of the challenges that he would face from Iblis, The Almighty planned a second demonstration. While the first one was designed to accentuate the strength of man, the second one was designed to accentuate his weakness — man forgets easily. Humans are blessed with a rooh that gives them immense potential, superior intellect and profound reasoning abilities, allowing them to acquire wisdom. The more wisdom they acquire, the less likely that Iblis can deceive them. But acquiring wisdom is a continuous process. If man deviates from the Quran and gets easily distracted by this world and its temptations, he will experience a decline in his wisdom granting an opportunity for Iblis to deceive him. Without even realizing it, he will start to fall in love with this world, forgetting Allah’s commands and the purpose of his life. He will forget that the seen world is a mere delusion, while the unseen is reality. Therefore, the purpose of the second demonstration was highlight man’s weakness and Iblis’s strategy of deception. As suggested by the proverb, ‘keep your friends close and your enemies closer’, man needs to know his enemy if he is going to have a chance at saving himself.

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ
الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

And we said “O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden and eat of the bountiful things in it, where and when you will; but do not approach this tree or you will run into harm and transgression.”

فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ
فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ ﴿٣٦﴾

Then did satan make them slip from the garden and get them out of the state of felicity in which they had been. And we said “Get you down, all you people with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time.”

فَلَقِيَ آدَمَ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣٧﴾

Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.

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

We said, "Go down from it, all of you. And when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance - there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.

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

And those who disbelieve and deny Our signs - those will be companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally."

As part of the second demonstration, both Adam (a.s) and his wife were allowed to roam in jannah with only one restriction. They were commanded not to approach a particular tree. It seems peculiar that something evil or harmful could be present in jannah, a place known for its goodness and purity. Why was a tree present in jannah that was prohibited to Adam (a.s) and his wife? By introducing one tree that should not be approached, Allah wished to demonstrate that the task of Iblis is to tempt man towards that which is prohibited. If everything was permissible in the garden, then there would be no need for Iblis. This further reinforces the fact that this garden was not Jannat-ul-firdous, the paradise prepared for the righteous believers in the afterlife, because nothing is haram in that paradise and Iblis is not permitted to enter it. On the contrary, since jannah translates to garden, this jannah was simply a beautiful garden prepared for the purpose of this demonstration.

As expected, Iblis made Adam (a.s) and his wife transgress the order that was given to them. However, the error that they both committed was already expected because Allah knew that it would be impossible for them to pass the test when they were unacquainted with Iblis's tools of deception. In fact, there are many differences between the story of Adam and Iblis in Islam and Christianity. Christians believe that Adam's wife caused him to error by encouraging him to come closer to the forbidden tree. Hence, as a punishment to women, childbirth has been made painful, and women are subject to men. In addition, since Adam disobeyed the command of God by listening to his wife, the

punishment for men is that they will have to toil on earth and work hard to earn a livelihood.³¹ Therefore, not only is Adam's wife blamed for the sin, but all men and women born in the world will have to suffer the consequences of this original sin. In contrast, the Quran makes it clear in verse 36 that Iblis was the culprit who made Adam (a.s) and his wife slip from the state of felicity, making them both equally accountable. Moreover, Adam (a.s) was taught a prayer by God seeking Allah's forgiveness. Upon reciting the prayer, The Almighty forgave him and his wife, promising them that guidance will be given to mankind and whoever chooses to follow that guidance, will be successful in this life and the next. Since God forgave them both, this negates the concept of men and women suffering because of the original sin committed by their parents. Besides, in Islam, an individual cannot be held responsible for the sins committed by another.³² Such a system would be unjust. Therefore, even if God chose not to forgive Adam and his wife, it is senseless to attribute their sin to the rest of mankind. Humans are not born with the original sin of Adam and his wife. On the contrary, they are born in a pure and blessed state, free of sin.³³

Furthermore, Christians believe that Adam and his wife were removed from the garden and placed on earth as a punishment for their mistake of transgressing Allah's command. Had Adam adhered to God's command, mankind would have dwelled in Paradise and would never have been sent to earth. In contrast, Islam clarifies that mankind was destined for the earth. As mentioned in verse 30, even before Adam (a.s) was created, Allah informed the angels that He was about to create a khalifah for the earth. Therefore, mankind was predestined to live on the earth.

In addition, verse 36 reveals that the command to get down, 'ihbithu' was given to more than 2 people — the plural form is used that refers to more than 2. This suggests that Adam (a.s), his wife and Iblis were placed on earth with this warning that there will be enmity between them all. If the punishment was only to be given to Adam and his wife, then why was Iblis also being sent to earth? Why wasn't Iblis sent to hell instead? Adam was always destined to be down on earth because khilafath can only be established on earth. How can a khalifah establish khilafath in the heavens?

In addition, according to verse 37, Allah then accepted Adam's repentance after teaching him a prayer of forgiveness. But wasn't Allah going to accept it anyway, since He was the One who taught the prayer in the first place? This teaches us that simply reciting a prayer of forgiveness is not sufficient.

³¹ Ferguson, G. (1961). 'Signs and symbols in Christian art'. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.52

³² See Quran (6:164)

³³ Sahih Muslim 2659a

Adam (a.s) did recite the prayer, but it was not just the recital that resulted in his forgiveness. It was the fact that he felt guilt and tried to earn the pleasure of His Lord that resulted in his repentance being accepted. This proves that tauba, repentance, is a process that involves prayers seeking forgiveness, accompanied by a struggle to reform oneself by doing good deeds.

After forgiving Adam, Allah promised to send assistance in the form of guidance to Adam (a.s) and his offspring in order to help them fight Iblis and gain salvation. In particular, those who follow guidance will not fear or grieve. Since we fear the future and grieve over events that have occurred in the past, a pious Muslim has tawakal to the extent that he does not fear the future because he knows that no matter what test might be destined for him, Allah will be there to help him with it. Similarly, he does not grieve over mishaps that have affected him in the past because he truly believes that there was khair in everything. His tests have helped him grow spiritually and have made him aware of his strengths and potential allowing him to become a better version of himself.

Interestingly in verse 38, Allah uses the pronoun 'kum' when instructing Adam and his wife to go down to earth and promising that guidance will be sent to them. 'Kum' is used for plural, and we have established that Adam, his wife and Iblis were being instructed to go down to earth. But when Allah is promising to send guidance to all of them, how can He be talking to Iblis as well? Iblis is not getting any guidance, so who is 'kum' referring to in this case?

This proves that perhaps at this moment, all of the roohs of Bani Adam had not yet been put to sleep. So, we all testified to tauheed and witnessed the angels, with the exception of Iblis, prostrating to Adam, as well as the mistake made by Adam and his wife in the gardens. This helped us all identify the enemy and understand how he plans to deceive us. It was only after Adam and his wife were placed down on earth that the remaining roohs were put to sleep, thereby experiencing their first death. Perhaps this is the reason that we all feel guilt when we go near haram or commit a sin. Having had witnessed the mistake made by Adam in the gardens and the subsequent guilt that he felt, committing a sin makes us remorseful because we realize that we have earned the displeasure of Allah. In fact, this would explain why guilt is universal.

As Adam (as) became the first prophet and leader to be placed on earth, he was also the first muttaqeen. Therefore, having provided a practical example of a muttaqeen and someone who shifted from being a muttaqeen to a kaafir, Allah now provides yet another example. Hence, the immediate shift from addressing mankind to suddenly addressing a particular nation — Ya Bani Israel! This is a

nation that was also selected to be a leader. While some remained muttaqeen and fulfilled their role, others lost focus of their mission.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا بَنِي إِسْرٰٓءِيلَ اذْكُرُوۡا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِيۤ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلٰٓيْكُمْ وَاَوْفُوۡا بِعَهْدِيۡ اُوۡفٍ بِعَهْدِكُمْ وَاِيۡنِيۡ
فَاَرْهَبُوۡنَ ﴿٤٠﴾

O Children of Israel, remember My favor which I have bestowed upon you and fulfill My covenant [upon you] that I will fulfill your covenant [from Me], and be afraid of [only] Me.

وَعٰمِنُوۡا بِمَاۤ اَنْزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُوۡنُوۡا اَوَّلَ كٰفِرِيۡنَ بِهٖ وَلَا تَشْتَرُوۡا بِآيٰتِيۡ ثَمٰنًا
قَلِيۡلًا وَاِيۡنِيۡ فَاتَّقُوۡنَ ﴿٤١﴾

And believe in what I have sent down confirming that which is [already] with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it. And do not exchange My signs for a small price, and fear [only] Me.

وَلَا تَلْبِسُوۡا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكُنُوۡا الْحَقَّ وَاَنْتُمْ تَعٰمُوۡنَ ﴿٤٢﴾

And do not mix the truth with falsehood or conceal the truth while you know [it].

وَأَقِيۡمُوا الصَّلٰوةَ وَاَتُوۡا الزَّكٰوةَ وَاَرْكَعُوۡا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِيۡنَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And establish prayer and give zakah and bow with those who bow [in worship and obedience].

﴿٤٤﴾ أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ اَنْفُسَكُمْ وَاَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتٰبَ ؕ اَفَلَا تَعْقِلُوۡنَ

Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason?

وَأَسْتَعِيۡنُوۡا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلٰوةِ وَاِنَّهَا لَكَبِيۡرَةٌ اِلَّا عَلَى الْخٰشِعِيۡنَ ﴿٤٥﴾

And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah]

الَّذِيۡنَ يَظُنُّوۡنَ اَنَّهُمۡ مُّلٰقُوا رَبِّهٖمۡ وَاَنَّهُمۡ اِلَيْهٖ رٰجِعُوۡنَ ﴿٤٦﴾

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

The Children of Israel, or Bani Israel, refer to the descendants of Yaqub (a.s), a Messenger of God who was given the title 'Israel' meaning 'warrior of God'.³⁴ Since Jews and Christians share the same lineage, they both are referred to as Bani Israel. This was a nation that was elevated in status by being appointed as an Ummah which was sent multiple Prophets and Books. Just as Allah had promised Bani Adam that He would send guidance and those who adhered to it would not fear or grieve, Bani Israel received guidance in the form of rituals, rules and laws. These instructions represented the covenant being mentioned in verse 40. As long as Bani Israel fulfilled the covenant by following Allah's guidance and only worshipping Him, Allah would fulfill the covenant that they had with God, granting them success in this life and the next. But why were the Jews being addressed so early on in the surah when the Muslim Ummah had yet to be addressed? Why does Allah mention the covenant made with the previous Ummah before discussing the covenant made with the new Ummah?

As aforementioned, the Quran starts with a cluster of Madanī surahs because there is a need for the Ummah to build itself upon a strong foundation before it can preach Islam to others. Muslims are being instructed about laws, customs, rituals and the significance of the community at the start of the Quran. In this context, Bani Israel were the early Muslims. During the time of Musa (a.s), his followers were called Muslims as they were submitting their will to Allah. During the time of Eesa (a.s), his followers were also known as Muslims who had submitted their will to God. Therefore, every Israelite prophet preached the message of Islam and his followers were called Muslims.³⁵ As a result, it seems appropriate that the message should first target the Jews and Christians whose ancestors were the early Muslims, before it addresses the followers of Muhammad (pbuh). Having received multiple Prophets and Books, the Jews and Christians should be able to instantly recognize the Quran as a message from God rendering their support to Muhammad (pbuh), as mentioned in verse 41. While the Arabs might take time to accept the message, given that they never received a Prophet of their own, the Children of Israel have no excuse for not recognizing the revelations to be the truth.

The fact that Allah directly addresses the Children of Israel immediately after narrating the story of Adam and Iblis is a severe admonition to the Jews and Christians. Just as Iblis's rebellion was

³⁴ Khalil, S.A. (2003). 'Atlas of the Quran.' Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, p.63

³⁵ Baig, M.Y. (2011). 'Islam for beginners.' Hyderabad: Standard Bearers Academy, p.95

inexcusable given the multiple opportunities and benefits he received, the same is the case for the previous Ummah. For example, if a person belongs to a pious family and is known to have many righteous ancestors, it is expected that he will be righteous and pious as well. He should follow religion better than the rest with a deeper understanding of God's message. Any deviation from the truth would be inexcusable given that he had multiple opportunities to learn and understand religion and the truth was made evident to him since childhood. This is precisely the case of Bani Israel. Given the multiple prophets that were sent to them, the numerous miracles witnessed and the multitude of Books received, Allah expects them to be ahead of the rest in the race towards the truth. He expects them to render their support to the final Prophet, helping him in building a Muslim community and spreading the message of Islam. So, if they are denying the truth, what excuse could they possibly have? They should have been the vanguards of Islam. Therefore, immediately after narrating the story of Adam and Iblis, Allah addresses the Children of Israel as a means of forcing them to reflect on their rebellious behavior. They know this is the truth, so why are they denying it? By challenging God, can they expect an outcome any different from the punishment given to Iblis?

A careful analysis of verses 40-46 reveal a similarity with the first 4 verses of Surah Baqarah where Allah highlights the correct attitude and mind-set that an individual must have to attain guidance from the Quran. In both cases belief in the unseen, faith in the hereafter and in the revelations, prayer and charity are being emphasized, but there are some important differences. Firstly, in the first 4 verses of this surah, the verb tense used to describe belief in the unseen and belief in the revelations is present/future tense — *yuminoona* — implying that the individual should be a believer or willing to become a believer if he discovers the Quran as being the word of God. Similarly, the verb tense used for establishing prayer — *yuqimoo* — or giving zakat — *yunfiqoon* — are also present/future tense. In contrast, in verses 40-46, commanding verbs are used implying that Allah is ordering belief in the current and previous revelations and demanding that prayer be established and charity be given.

Secondly, in the first 4 verses of this surah, Allah mentions belief in the unseen, prayer and charity first, before talking about belief in present and past revelations. In contrast in verses 41-43, the order is reversed so that belief in present and past revelations is mentioned prior to belief in the unseen, prayer and charity. Why is there a difference?

These differences arise because of the target audience being addressed. In the first 4 verses of the surah, Allah is addressing all of mankind and explaining the criteria for guidance as having the right

attitude and a growth mind-set. The message being given is that a correct attitude will help to soften the heart which is a prerequisite for developing a growth mindset as beliefs reside in the heart. It is only when the words of the Quran enter someone's heart that his negative or wrong beliefs can change, and he can develop the courage to face his fears, challenge himself and adopt a growth mindset. Therefore, when addressing mankind, Allah first talks about the need to be a critical thinker, humble and empathetic before He discusses belief in revelation and the hereafter. Moreover, by using present/future tense verbs, Allah was giving mankind time to reflect on the message instead of expecting instant submission.

In contrast, verses 40-46 address the Jews and Christians who were already well aware of God's message. Having received a multitude of Books and Prophets, they were referred to as the People of the Book who should not have found it difficult to identify the Quran as the message of God. Unlike the Arab polytheists who were hearing the message of God for the first time, the Jews and Christians should have been supporting Muhammad (pbuh) instantly. Allah's high expectation from them can be seen in the commanding verb used when addressing them. They were not being given time to reflect and ponder over the message. They were being instructed to immediately submit by believing in the revelation because it is impossible for them to not recognize this message as one of their own given that even the arrival of Muhammad (pbuh) had been prophesized in their Books:

"I will establish a prophet for them from among their brothers like you and I will place My words in his mouth; and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him".³⁶

After accepting all the Books of God, including the Quran, they are being commanded to use critical thinking to examine their own behaviour and how they choose to admonish others but forget to admonish themselves. They preach honesty and truthfulness to others but choose to deny the truth themselves. Now, they must bow down with those who bow down in worship, strive to do good deeds and follow the rituals in Islam. They must pray with the Muslims five times a day and pay charity, instead of praying separately in their synagogues or churches and following their own mode of worship. Prayer must now be with the Muslims in the mosque. Therefore, unlike the opening verses of Surah Baqarah where prayer symbolized humbleness and charity symbolized empathy, in these verses, Allah is specifically talking about the 5 time prayers and Zakat that form the pillars of Islam because the target audience is different. At this stage, Allah is addressing the descendants of the

³⁶ Brenner, A., Yee, G, A. (2012). 'Exodus and Deuteronomy'. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, p.187

early Muslims informing them that excuses will not be entertained. They must acknowledge the truth by accepting the revelation brought by Muhammad (pbuh), and then, they must follow the rituals of the believers by submitting their will to God.

In addition, Bani Israel should seek Allah's help with patience and have absolute certainty of meeting their Lord. Allah never instructs His slaves to fight on their own. Knowing the challenges that they have to face, He tells them to fight while seeking help from The Almighty through patience and prayer, something that will only be possible for those who have certainty in Allah, who truly believe that Allah's mercy will come and that there is khair in every test and hardship. But if Allah was certain that the Children of Israel acknowledged the message of Quran to be the truth and knew it was similar to the message in their own Books, then why were the Jews not accepting Islam?

The forefather of Judaism, Christianity and Islam was Ibrahim (a.s), who had 2 sons: Ismail and Isaac. Since Yaqub (a.s) was the son of Isaac, Bani Israel were the descendants of Isaac. The Children of Israel considered themselves the 'chosen nation' because they had received ample Prophets and Books from God. They believed that being the primary recipient of God's message, they were preferred by The Almighty over the descendants of Ibrahim's second son, Ismail. However, in contrast to all the past Israelite prophets that Allah had sent, Muhammad (pbuh) was an Arab who belonged to the descendants of Ismail.³⁷ As the Jews and Christians considered themselves superior to Bani Ismail, they refused to believe in an Arab prophet. Their denial of Muhammad (pbuh) purely stemmed from pride. If they truly believed in Allah and the hereafter, they would follow God's command, embrace Islam and support the final Prophet instead of being consumed by arrogance.

Just as Iblis's downfall stemmed from jealousy because he believed he was superior to Adam, Bani Israel's downfall stemmed from jealousy because they believed that they were superior to Bani Ismail. To be successful in the hereafter, man needs to humble himself and bow down to the Supreme entity instead of being consumed with arrogance and pride. God's message must be accepted and implemented regardless of whether the Prophet sent is an Israelite or an Arab because all Prophets were Muslims, regardless of race and ethnicity.

Once Bani Israel had been admonished and commanded to follow that which they know is the truth, a series of events are now being narrated that illustrate how the ancestors of the Jews and Christians

³⁷ Muda, A.A. (2015). 'Islam and its challenges in the Globalized World.' Singapore: Partridge Publishing, p.45

fell into a habit of receiving Allah’s mercy, following Iblis’s footsteps by choosing to transgress, and then subsequently facing punishment, only to repeat the cycle again.

يَبْنَئِ إِسْرَائِيلَ أَذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

O Children of Israel! Call to mind the special favor which I bestowed upon you and that I preferred you to all others.

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

Then guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted for her, nor shall compensation be taken from her, nor shall anyone be helped from outside.

Jews have always revered their ancestors to the extent that even converting to Judaism is cumbersome because it is believed that salvation can only be granted to ‘pure Israelites’ who are direct descendants of Yaqub (a.s) — the chosen people of God. In particular, Yaqub (as) had 12 sons. The descendants of each of those sons formed a tribe resulting in the formation of 12 tribes within Bani Israel. Belonging to any one of those tribes implied that a person was a “pure Israelite”. Although people were allowed to convert to Judaism, they were given a lower status than Jews since they did not share the same lineage.³⁸

In this context, the Quran now describes the revered ancestors of Bani Israel as transgressors who were ungrateful and eventually faced punishment because of their pride and arrogance. This was a clear warning to the Jews in Medina and to the whole of mankind. Although it is true that Bani Israel was preferred and chosen for God’s message having receiving many prophets and Books, belonging to a certain tribe or lineage cannot save anyone on the Day of Judgment. Everyone will be held accountable for their beliefs and deeds.

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ مِّنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يَدْبَحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ
وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ وَفِي ذَلِكُمْ بَلَاءٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

And remember We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh; they set you hard tasks and chastisement and slaughtered your sons and let your women folk live; in this there was a tremendous trial from your Lord.

³⁸ Cohen, S.J.D. (1999). ‘The beginnings of Jewishness’. California: University of California Press, p.182

وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمْ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ وَأَغْرَقْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَأَنْتُمْ نَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

And remember We divided the sea for you and saved you and drowned Pharaoh's people within your very sight.

وَإِذْ وَعَدْنَا مُوسَىٰ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ثُمَّ أَخَذْنَا مِنَ الْعِجَلِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَنْتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

And remember, We appointed forty nights for Moses and in his absence you took the calf for worship and you did grievous wrong.

ثُمَّ عَفَوْنَا عَنْكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Even then, We did forgive you; there was a chance for you to be grateful.

The first story summarized is that of Prophet Musa (a.s) and the escape of the Children of Israel from the Pharaoh. Since the Red Sea splits into the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba, it is believed that the Gulf of Suez miraculously parted allowing the Israelites to pass through and enter the Sinai Peninsula where they remained for 40 years, while the Pharaoh and his army drowned.³⁹ The Exodus reveals that approximately 600,000 Israelites were emancipated that day from the torture of the Pharaoh, and upon entering the Sinai Peninsula they were able to form a community of their own.⁴⁰ Musa (a.s) was ordered to spend 40 nights at Mount Sinai engaged in the worship of the Lord, while his nation remained under the supervision of his brother, Haroon (a.s). At Mount Sinai, Allah gifted Musa (a.s) with the stone tablets containing the ten commandments which marked the first set of divine laws, Shariah, given to the Israelites signaling their transition from a nation to an Ummah. Hereafter, they would have the responsibility of establishing religion, enforcing the divine laws of Allah and spreading the truth. Although the entire Shariah given to Musa (as) comprised of 613 laws that were gradually sent over the 40-year period, the ten commandments were the fundamental morals and values which represented the foundation of Islam. As a result, prior to the arrival of Muhammad (pbuh) and his Ummah, Bani Israel was the previous Ummah that had the responsibility of understanding and propagating the message of Islam.

³⁹ Wiersbe, W.W. (2002). 'The bible: exposition and commentary'. Colorado: David C Cook, p.407

⁴⁰ Shapiro, S. (2001). 'Jews in Old China.' New York: Hippocrene Books, p.73

Unfortunately, while Musa (a.s) spent 40 nights at Mount Sinai, some of the Israelites started to worship a cow in his absence. Although details of the cow are provided later on in the Quran, at present Allah focuses on the shirk committed by the Israelites. Despite being saved from the oppression and slavery that they were subjected to for over 400 years⁴¹, they still resorted to polytheism instead of worshipping The Almighty alone. The muttaqeen believers who were freed from the Pharaoh, surprisingly started walking on the path of munafiq. Just as the fearful munafiq who walks during lightning and stops when there is darkness, as mentioned in verses 19 and 20, the Israelites worshipped One God while Musa (as) was with them, but as soon as he left for 40 nights, they feared that he had abandoned them. They lost hope in Allah's mercy and were terrified of the future, uncertain of how they would survive in a desert. In addition, since God was unseen and Musa too had disappeared, many Israelites started to desire a deity that could be seen and worshipped, as mentioned later in the Quran. So, when a cow emerged from a fire, they believed it to be God and started worshipping it. Once Musa returned, they were willing to walk on the path of Islam again. Their behaviour illustrated their lack of tawakal and faith in Allah which resulted in them being ungrateful and always fearing the future, characteristic of a fearful munafiq.

The wisdom of Allah's verses is evident from the fact that He does not explain the details of the cow because given the context, that information is not necessary right now. At this moment, Allah is explaining how people can transition from muttaqeen to munafiq and kaafir, just like Iblis, necessitating that we all remain vigilant regarding the condition of our hearts.

وَإِذْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَالْفُرْقَانَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

And remember We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion. There was a chance for you to be guided aright.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا لِقَوْمِي إِنَّكُمْ لظالمونَ أَنفُسِكُمْ ياتخذكم العجل فتوبوا إلى
بارئكم فاقبلوا أنفسكم ذلكم خير لكم عند بارئكم فتاب عليكم إنه هو التواب
الرحيم ﴿٥٤﴾

⁴¹ Shapiro, S. (2001). 'Jews in Old China.' New York: Hippocrene Books, p.73

And remember Moses said to his people “O people! You have indeed wronged yourselves by your worship of the calf; so turn in repentance to your Maker and slay yourselves (the wrong-doers). That will be better for you in the sight of your Maker. Then He turned towards you in forgiveness for He is Oft-Returning and Most Merciful.

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَىٰ اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّاعِقَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ
نُنظَرُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And remember, you said “O Moses, we shall never believe in you until we see Allah manifestly.” Thereupon, thunderbolt seized you.

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُم مِّن بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٥٦﴾

Then We raised you up after your death; you had the chance to be grateful.

Having witnessed the parting of the sea and their enemies facing an azaab, the Children of Israel had been gifted with furqan, a Criterion, that made the truth unequivocally distinct from falsehood, as mentioned in verse 53. The fact that God saved the followers of Musa (a.s) and drowned his enemies, removed any doubt regarding the truth. It was clear that the followers of Musa (a.s) were on the path of salvation and were being protected by God, while the followers of the Pharaoh were on the path of falsehood. In fact, nations in the past have faced azaab as well for their disbelief. Each time, their respective prophets and the believers would be saved while the remaining nations would perish. But the azaab would not be shown to the believers. On the contrary, they were told to evacuate the city, and after leaving, Allah would send the azaab. However, in the case of Bani Israel, Allah chose to show them the azaab faced by their oppressors. This is why the punishment given to the nation of the Pharaoh also ended up being furqan for the believers — a miracle that removed any doubt in their hearts regarding the truth. But, why did Allah have to show the Israelites the miracle?

The Israelites were going to become an Ummah. They were going to become leaders who had to establish deen and propagate the message of truth, and for them to do this, they needed to remove any doubt in their hearts regarding the truth. Moreover, the Israelites were also given the Scripture in the form of the ten commandments, as a divine gift providing guidance. However, despite receiving all these benefits, they still committed shirk by associating a partner with Allah. If they were given a significant benefit of receiving the Scripture and witnessing furqan, there had to be a significant cost for deviance. Hence, Allah forgave those who repented after worshipping the cow, but those who persisted in its worship were executed. The punishment for apostasy was death. But, what about the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh)?

Studying the Quran and Sunnah reveals that the punishment of apostasy is not that extreme for the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh). An apostate cannot be killed. On the contrary, he should be given an entire lifetime of opportunity to repent and re-enter Islam.⁴² Why is the punishment lenient for the present Ummah but so strict for the previous Ummah? The Ummah of Bani Israel were given scripture and witnessed the sea parting as furqan to remove any doubts regarding the truth. In contrast, the Quran is both the Scripture and furqan for the present Ummah. An in-depth study of the Book reveals its intellect and wisdom which is in itself a miracle. However, a clear sign such as the sea parting, has never been shown to the Muslims. Since, the benefit received by this Ummah was not as significant, the cost of deviance is also not as significant.

Upon hearing the death sentence prescribed for those who continued to worship the cow even after Musa returned and admonished them, many of the Israelites declined to follow God's command. They believed that the Almighty could not possibly decree such a strict form of punishment and this must be Musa's own verdict. In their refusal to comply, they argued that they would only administer the punishment if they could see Allah Himself for personal confirmation. As a result of their obstinacy and blatant rejection to fulfil God's command, thunderbolt seized them and they died instantly. Allah then raised them up again, and they realized their mistake, immediately repenting to God for their sins. The chiefs among the 12 tribes proceeded to kill all those who worshipped the cow and were guilty of apostasy. Such incidents that reveal the stubborn and ungrateful attitude of the ancient Israelites were humiliating for the Jews in Medina who had constantly boasted about their ancestors to the Arabs. They had claimed that they were the chosen nation and God loved them because their ancestors were pious and righteous. Through the Quran, Allah makes it very clear that this was not true. Their ancestors were not given any preferential treatment. Those who transgressed were punished severely.

Besides shirk, the ancient Israelites were always ungrateful for the blessings they had been provided as explained in the follow verse.

وَوَلَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ كُلُوا مِن طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ
 وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِن كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

⁴² Rahman, S.A. (2006). 'Punishment of Apostasy in Islam.' Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, p.95

And we gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you manna and quails saying “eat of the good things we have provided for you”; But they rebelled. To us, they did no harm, they only harmed themselves.

Special clouds would accompany the Children of Israel to protect them from the scorching heat of the desert while they were living in the Sinai Peninsula. In addition, God sent them food directly from the heavens as sustenance — ‘manna’ and ‘salva’. The Exodus describes manna as a small round produce that fell from the sky during the early hours of the morning. It was used to make bread. Salva is described as a bird that could not fly or run fast, allowing it to be caught easily.⁴³ Therefore, by providing manna and salva, the ancient Israelites had a sufficient supply of bread and meat to eat every day. Despite these blessings from the Almighty, verse 61 explains that the Israelites were ungrateful yet again, demanding that God give them a greater variety of food products similar to that which used to be available in Egypt. They were tired of eating manna and salva and wished for more.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا ادْخُلُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ فَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ رَغَدًا وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا
وَقُولُوا حِطَّةٌ نَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ خَطِيئَتِكُمْ وَسَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

And [recall] when We said, "Enter this city and eat from it wherever you will in [ease and] abundance, and enter the gate bowing humbly and say, 'Relieve us of our burdens.' We will [then] forgive your sins for you, and We will increase the doers of good [in goodness and reward]."

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ فَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا رِجْزًا
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

But the transgressors changed the word from that which was given; so we sent on the transgressors a plague from heaven because they repeatedly infringed Our command.

After Musa (a.s) was gifted the stone tablets, Allah ordered the Children of Israel to prepare for war and enter the ‘Promised Land’ — Canaan. It was referred to as the ‘Promised Land’ because it was believed that God promised Ibrahīm (a.s) this land as a gift for his descendants as long as they did not transgress.⁴⁴ However, at the time, Canaan was occupied by two main tribes referred to as the Canaanites and the Philistines,⁴⁵ and the only means of entering was through battle. Hence, the Israelites were ordered to declare war for the sake of God, occupy the land and cleanse it of all idols. Fearing death, the Children of Israel refused God’s command to fight. This was another example

⁴³ Berlin, A., Brettler, M.Z. (2004). ‘The Jewish Study Bible’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.140

⁴⁴ Berlin, A., Brettler, M.Z. (2004). ‘The Jewish Study Bible’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.91

⁴⁵ Jeffs, S., Williams, D. (2000). ‘Bible stories and amazing facts.’ Tennessee: Upper Room Books, p.45

proving the obstinacy and ungratefulness of the Israelites who continued rejecting God’s commands despite receiving multiple blessings. As a punishment for their refusal to enter the land of Canaan and fight for the cause of Allah, the Children of Israel were destined to wander in the desert for 40 years.⁴⁶

By the end of the 40-year period, most of the Israelites who had escaped the Pharaoh with Musa (as) and Haroon (as), had passed away with the exception of a few including Joshua. Unlike their parents, the next generation of Israelites that were born and raised in the Sinai Peninsula were eager to fight. Under the leadership of Joshua they were able to enter the Jericho city — the first city of Canaan taken over by the Israelites.⁴⁷ Victorious in battle, Allah commanded them to enter Jericho city prostrating, as a sign of humbleness. This meant entering the city with their heads bowing down. They were also ordered to continue asking forgiveness for their faults and to utter the word ‘hittah’ which was a prayer meaning ‘relieve us of our sins’. In doing so, Allah was grooming them to abstain from arrogance by reminding themselves that they were not capable of winning the war on their own had it not been for the help of Allah — all victory belongs to Allah alone. Unfortunately, the Israelites ridiculed the command, refused to enter prostrating and changed the divine word to ‘hinhah’ which meant ‘grain seed’. Instead of understanding the significance of the land that had been reserved for them so that they could establish deen and propagate the message of Islam, they were only keen on entering the city to eat food after spending years living on manna and salva. Therefore, as a punishment for their ingratitude, a plague was sent from heaven for the transgressors.⁴⁸ Yet again, a pattern can be seen where the ancient Israelites received Allah’s mercy, still transgressed and were punished.

وَإِذْ أَسْتَسْقَىٰ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ فَانْفَجَرَتْ مِنْهُ
 اثْنَا عَشَرَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرِبَهُمْ كَلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ اللَّهِ وَلَا
 تَعْتَوْا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

And remember Moses prayed for water for his people; we said “strike the rock with your staff”; then gushed forth 12 springs. Each group knew its place for water. So eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah and do no evil or mischief on the face of the earth.

⁴⁶ Berlin, A., Brettler, M.Z. (2004). ‘The Jewish Study Bible’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.351.

⁴⁷ Berlin, A., Brettler, M.Z. (2004). ‘The Jewish Study Bible’. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.474.

⁴⁸ Ayoub, M.M. (1984). ‘Quran and its interpreters. Vol. 1’. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 107

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَى لَنْ نَصْبِرَ عَلَىٰ طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ فَادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُخْرِجْ لَنَا مِمَّا تُثْمِرُ الْأَرْضُ
 مِنْ بَقَائِهَا وَقَشَائِهَا فَمَوْهَا وَعَدْسِهَا وَبَصَلِهَا قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ
 أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ أَهَيْطُوا مِضْرًا فَإِنَّ لَكُمْ مِمَّا سَأَلْتُمْ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ
 الذَّلِيلَةُ وَالْمَسْكَةُ وَبَاءَ وَعَبَّ مِنْهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ
 وَيَقْتُلُونَ النَّبِيِّنَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ ذَٰلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

And remember you said “O Moses! We cannot endure one kind of food always; so beseech your Lord for us to produce of what the earth grows — its herbs, cucumbers, garlic, lentils and onions.” He said “Will you exchange the better for the worse? Go to any town and you shall find what you are looking for.” They were then covered with humiliation and misery for they drew on themselves the wrath of Allah; this because they went on rejecting the signs of Allah and slaying His Messengers without just cause; this because they rebelled and went on transgressing.

Allah now mentions another blessing that was given to the Israelites in the form of water being provided separately for each of the 12 tribes. Tired and thirsty, the Israelites required water to quench their thirst which was difficult to find in the desert. To ease their journey, Allah commanded Musa (a.s) to strike a rock with his staff and immediately 12 springs gushed out, each one designated to a particular tribe. These stories highlight the extent of Allah’s mercy on the Israelites. They did not have to traverse long and difficult paths to obtain food and water. Everything was available at an instant, despite being in a desert. Moreover, every time the Almighty bestowed His grace on them and eased their journey, the only condition given was that they should adhere to His commands and be grateful. Unfortunately, a large number of the Children of Israel failed on this account.

Verse 61 reiterates the fact that the ancient Israelites were ungrateful by constantly complaining about the availability of only manna and salva. They missed the variety of vegetables that were present in Egypt. While, objecting to the kind of food that was given to them in the desert and recalling the food they used to have in Egypt, they forgot all the torture and persecution they had experienced for centuries. Consequently, Musa responds to them in disappointment, reprimanding them for wanting to exchange the better for the worse. Were they honestly willing to exchange their freedom for a greater variety of food?

He reminds them that the cucumbers, onions, garlic and lentils that they were craving could be found in any town, but freedom from slavery and oppression, the right to form an ummah, and the ability to practice religion freely, could not be found everywhere. As a result of their continuous transgression, they faced the wrath of Allah on several occasions and drew upon themselves misery

and humiliation. These were some accounts of the ancient Israelites who were being revered by the Jews and Christians. Such narrations in the Quran reiterate that lineage or race will not be able to grant anyone salvation. Only those who struggle to fulfil the commands of Allah, have certainty in the Last Day and act righteously will be granted success in the afterlife, as mentioned in the next verse. If Bani Israel was destined for Paradise, being the chosen nation, God would not have inflicted multiple punishments on them in this life.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّٰلِحِينَ وَالصَّٰبِغِينَ مَن ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ



Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans - those who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.

From the beginning of time, Prophets have been sent to propagate the message of Islam and their followers have been called Muslims. The word Muslim means one who submits his will to that of Allah so that his desires, preferences, behavior, thoughts and actions are all subject to his Creator. In contrast, Christian refers to people who believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and Hindu refers to people who are geographically located around the Indus river.⁴⁹ Originally, it is believed that the word Jew was derived from the word Yahudi which refers to the descendants of Yahud (Judah) — the 4th son of Prophet Yaqub (a.s). Others argue that the term Jew arose after Solomon's Kingdom was split into two parts with the Southern Kingdom called the Kingdom of Judah, or Yahud, and its inhabitants were called Jews or Yahudi.⁵⁰ Regardless, Jew is a term that has no relation to faith or God. On the contrary, it is only the word Muslim that stresses on deeds and belief. The remaining labels either stress upon a location, belief in one person or special ancestry.

Surprisingly, verse 62 states that all those who believed in Allah and the Final Hour and did good deeds from among the Jews, Christians and Sabeans will gain salvation. Sabeans refer to a nation that originally followed the teachings of Ibrahim (a.s), but subsequently started worshipping the stars.⁵¹ Therefore, this verse suggests that it is not necessary to be a Muslim to enter paradise. Non-Muslims can also gain salvation provided they believe in God and the Day of Judgment and perform good

⁴⁹ Raju, K.V., Manasi, S. (2017). 'Water and Scriptures'. Cham: Springer, p.152

⁵⁰ Umar, W.D. (2009). 'Judaology: a study of the science of Judaism.' Indiana: Xlibris, p.94

⁵¹ Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam: Vol. 26-27?. Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, p.222

deeds. However, there are many verses in the Quran that argue the necessity of entering Islam. So, how can we reconcile this apparent difference?

With the arrival of the final Messenger of God, it is compulsory to believe in him and follow the Quran in order to gain salvation. However, many people questioned the fate of their ancestors. Will the people who lived in the past be companions of the Hellfire because the Quran and Muhammad (pbuh) only came after them? Verse 62 addresses such questions by clarifying that all Jews, Christians and Sabeans of the past who believed in Allah, did good deeds, and followed the prophet that was sent to them during their time period will gain salvation. This is where Islam differs radically from Christianity and Judaism. Christians require belief in Jesus Christ as the son of God for salvation without considering the fate of those who lived before Jesus. Jews believe that being part of the chosen nation, a descendent of Isaac, is essential for salvation, without considering the fate of those who were outside of this special lineage such as Adam (a.s), Nuh (a.s) or even Ibrahim (a.s), who was the father of Isaac, but not his descendant.

In contrast, in Islam, salvation depends on the good deeds performed, belief in One God and the Final Hour and belief in the prophets sent by God. Since Jews, Christians and Sabeans were Muslims of their time period, they will attain salvation provided they fulfil the criteria. Jews who lived during the time of Musa (a.s) and followed him will be granted salvation as long as they performed good deeds because they were the Muslims of that time. Christians who lived during the time of Eesa (a.s) and strictly followed his teachings will be granted salvation as long as they did not transgress because they were the Muslims of that time. Although little is known about the Sabeans, it is believed that they were a group of people who initially believed in One God, but subsequently introduced idol worship. Therefore, those among them who remained firmly on the right path, followed Ibrahim (a.s) and believed in tauheed, will be rewarded because they were the Muslims of that time. Now, with the arrival of the final prophet, salvation requires following Muhammad (pbuh), worshipping the One God and performing good deeds. Therefore, verse 62 refers to the righteous Jews, Christians and Sabeans of the past only who had submitted their will to Allah.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

And remember We took your covenant and We raised about you the Mount Sinai saying: “Hold firmly to what We have given you and bring to remembrance what is in it, perchance that you may fear Allah.”

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ



Then you turned away after that. And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.

Yet another example illustrating the ingratitude of the ancient Israelites can be seen in verse 63 which describes an incident where the entire Mount Sinai was raised above the Children of Israel as a warning to take religion seriously and adhere to the commands of Allah. However, instead of fearing the consequences, the Israelites turned away, resorting to the same behavior that had previously been reprimanded.

Interestingly, the verses have highlighted two main characteristics of the ancient Israelites that caused them to slip from walking on the path of muttaqeen to munafiq. Firstly, they committed shirk, worshipping their desires over Allah. When they desired an idol, they started worshipping one. When they desired comfort and ease, they refused God's command for jihad to enter the promised land. When they desired a more lenient punishment for apostates, they refused to fulfill Allah's command for capital punishment until they could see God. When they desired a greater variety of food, they agreed to enter the promised land but refused to enter in the manner that Allah had ordained. Secondly, they were ungrateful. Regardless of how many blessings they received or how many times Allah forgave them, they still kept complaining and demanding more. The next few verses identify a third characteristic that caused the Israelites to deviate from the path of righteousness — greed.

In fact, the rebellious nature of the ancient Israelites highlights an important aspect of human nature. The same Israelites who were showing resilience, taqwa and tawakal while surviving in harsh conditions and facing persecution by the Pharaoh, started chasing dunya and demanding ease and comfort as soon as they were granted freedom. This reveals that freedom in itself is a test. If it is used to practice Islam, spread the truth and worship Allah as He has commanded, freedom becomes a blessing. If it is used to chase dunya and worship our desires, freedom becomes a punishment, making us forget our morals and principles.

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنْكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِئِينَ ﴿٦٥﴾

And you had already known about those who transgressed among you concerning the sabbath, and We said to them, "Be apes, despised."

فَجَعَلْنَاهَا نَكَالًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهَا وَمَا خَلْفَهَا وَمَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

And We made it a deterrent punishment for those who were present and those who succeeded them and a lesson for those who fear Allah.

For the Israelites, the Sabbath is the holy day of the week that lasts from sundown on Friday till sundown on Saturday. On this day, Jews are commanded to engage in the worship of Allah, strictly abstaining from all other activities including trade and business. As mentioned by Ibn Kathir, some ancient Israelites were residing in a town located in present day Aylah, near the Red Sea.⁵² Being located near the sea, their primary occupation was fishing. Therefore, Allah tested them by sending fish in large supply to the surface of the water during the day of Sabbath. On the remaining days of the week, the supply of fish would be few in number. Many succumbed to greed and decided to catch the fish on Saturday, even though they were instructed to abstain from all worldly activities. Not only did they persist in transgression, but they also ignored the warnings that were given to them by the pious men amongst them. As a result, they incurred the wrath of Allah. The transgressors were transformed into apes making an example of them for everyone else.

Yet again, this proves that The Almighty severely punished the previous ummah for negligence in adhering to His commands because they were shown many signs that made their transgressions inexcusable. As a consequence of being shown miracles, any deviation would be given an exemplary punishment. In contrast, God adopts a more lenient approach with the present ummah, even though there are many Muslims who are oblivious of the Friday prayer and are also involved in shirk. Miracles such as the sea parting, food from the heavens and springs gushing forth in the desert are part of the unseen for the ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) implying that they have to believe such miracles occurred without being able to witness it. Muslims must simply deduce the truth using intellect and wisdom without any miracles to help them. Since their test is harder, Allah is more lenient. Similarly, present day Jews do not face a punishment from the heavens if they were to violate the Sabbath because, like the Muslims, they too have not witnessed the kind of miracles sent to their ancestors.

⁵² Abdul Rahman, M.S. (2009). 'Tafsir ibn Kathir Juz 9: Al-Araf 88 to Al-Anfal 40 2nd edition.' London: MSA Publications, p.89

This is just one example of Allah's justice. The more of the 'unseen' that has been witnessed, the greater the punishment for transgression.

A fourth and final attribute of the ancient Israelites was that they loved to challenge and mock Allah's commands, as explained in the next few verses.

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَذْبَحُوا بَقْرَةً قَالُوا أَتَذْبَحُهَا وَنَاهُرُ قَالَ
أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾

And recall when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allah from being among the ignorant."

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ لَا فَارِضٌ وَلَا بِكْرٌ عَوَانُ
بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ فَأَفْعَلُوا مَا تَأْمُرُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." Moses said, "Allah says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded."

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا لَوْ نُهَا قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ صَفْرَاءُ فَاقِعٌ
لَوْنُهَا تَسُرُّ النَّاظِرِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." He said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color - pleasing to the observers.'"

قَالُوا ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا مَا هِيَ إِنَّ الْبَقَرَ تَشْبَهُ عَلَيْنَا وَإِنَّا إِن شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, all cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allah wills, will be guided."

قَالَ إِنَّهُ يَقُولُ إِنَّهَا بَقْرَةٌ لَا ذَلُولٌ تُثِيرُ الْأَرْضَ وَلَا تَسْقِي الْحَرْثَ مُسَلَّمَةٌ لَا شِيَةَ فِيهَا
فَالْوَالِقُنَّ حَتَّىٰ بِالْحَقِّ فَذَبَحُوهَا وَمَا كَادُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٧١﴾

He said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.' "They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it.

وَإِذ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسًا فَآذَرْتُمْ فِيهَا وَاللَّهُ مُخْرِجٌ مَّا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾

And recall when you slew a man and disputed over it, but Allah was to bring out that which you were concealing.

فَقُلْنَا اضْرِبُوهُ بِبَعْضِهَا كَذَلِكَ يُحْيِي اللَّهُ الْمَوْتَى وَيُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾

﴿٧٣﴾

So, We said, "Strike the slain man with part of it." Thus does Allah bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs that you might reason.

Verses 67-73 narrate another incident that occurred when the Children of Israel were in the Sinai desert where a person was murdered and the murderer could not be found. This was a direct violation of the ten commandments as murder was strictly prohibited. As a result, Musa (a.s) ordered his nation to slaughter a cow and place a piece of it on the dead body. By doing so, Allah had planned to show the Israelites yet another miracle to reinstate their faith — the dead body would be given life and it would point to its murderer. Unfortunately, Musa's nation presumed that this must be a command of their prophet and not a direct order from God because they could not comprehend why God would want them to slaughter a cow when He could simply inform them of the murderer. Therefore, they started asking Musa (a.s) a series of irrelevant questions regarding the cow to be sacrificed in order to reveal their mockery of the command. Just as verse 26 described the hypocrites as questioning Allah's verses and saying "What does Allah mean by this similitude?", the Israelites raised doubt regarding Allah's command.

There was also wisdom in this miracle that the Israelites initially failed to understand. Given that the Children of Israel had recently committed the crime of worshipping a cow in the absence of Musa (a.s), commanding a cow to be slaughtered in order to reveal the murderer was a means of eliminating the belief that the cow could be a sacred creature or even a deity. If it could not save itself, how could it do anything for anyone else? Therefore, ordering a cow to be sacrificed was both a sign to reveal the true murderer and a lesson of tauheed for Bani Israel.

The sarcasm in the attitude of the Israelites is clear from the questions they started asking Musa (a.s) regarding the age and color of the cow that should be sacrificed. What they failed to understand was that every time they asked a question in ridicule, Allah was going to answer it making it an additional requirement from God that had to be satisfied. Therefore, because of their own deeds, the initial

command that was simple and easy, eventually became cumbersome to fulfil. This habit of disagreeing and challenging their prophet was characteristic of Bani Israel and was strongly condemned by Muhammad (p.b.u.h). A believer should be inquisitive and should strive to thoroughly understand the commands of God, but not by asking irrelevant questions, which if answered, would simply increase the burden of religion for him, as explained in the following Hadīth:

Abu Hurairah (r.a) narrated that one day the Prophet (p.b.u.h) addressed people saying:

“O people! Allah has prescribed Hajj upon you, so perform it.” A man asked, ‘Every year, O Messenger of Allah?’ The Prophet (p.b.u.h) kept silent. When the man repeated his question thrice, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: “Had I answered in the affirmative, it would have become a yearly obligation, and this would have been beyond your capacity.” Then he added: “Be content with what I leave with you. What caused the destruction of the people before you was that they used to ask so many questions, and disagreed with their prophets. So when I command you to do something, do it to the extent of your ability, and if I forbid you from doing something, avoid it.”⁵³

From the brief summary given in the past few verses narrating the events that occurred in Musa’s nation, it is clear that God sent Bani Israel many miracles as a means of reinstating their faith even though they kept transgressing and making mistakes. But why did Allah show them so many miracles? Since the parting of the sea was furqan for them, why demonstrate more miracles when all doubt had clearly been removed?

One possible answer could be that the ancient Israelites had a wrong understanding of religion. They believed that God sent them Musa (a.s) so that all their obstacles and hardships could be removed. They were not mentally prepared for jihad. As a result, when they were told to enter Canaan, they defied the order of Allah stating that they would only enter once the Canaanites left.⁵⁴ When they were given heavenly food to withstand the hurdles of living in the desert, they complained that it lacked variety. When they were told to abide by a simple law of 10 commandments, they transgressed, forcing the Almighty to raise a mountain over them. They failed to understand that Islam has always been about struggle. Allah did not send them a prophet to free them so that they could live a life of ease.

⁵³ Sahih Muslim, 1337

⁵⁴ See Quran (5:24)

In fact, the lifestyle they had experienced in Egypt for approximately 400 years could have contributed to this misunderstanding of religion. Having lived as slaves for centuries, the ancient Israelites were not mentally mature enough to reflect, ponder and gain wisdom. They did not understand the concept of leadership, khilafath and the need to propagate the message of truth. Being simple minded, they required more miracles to boost their iman, grant them the strength to face their challenges and obstacles, and motivate them to continue in their journey as an ummah. Furthermore, this may also be the reason that despite their constant transgressions, God kept forgiving them. Hence, the time they spent in the desert was their grooming period designed to change their mind-set, teach them the essence of jihad, improve their resilience to tests and strengthen their faith.

In contrast, when Muhammad (pbuh) brought the gift of Islam, the Arabs were not subjected to slavery. On the contrary, they were known for being warriors and traders. They had a very different mind-set, ready to face challenges and eager to struggle in the cause of Allah. While the ancient Israelites were terrified to engage in jihad after they were granted freedom, even though they witnessed a miracle, the muhajireen were passionate to engage in jihad despite not being shown any miracles. The comforting words of wisdom in the revelations of Allah were enough to motivate the Muslims to fight in the cause of Allah. This teaches us that Allah is not unfair. He understands the situation and unique circumstances of each and every nation and He provides it with exactly what it needs to walk on the path of Islam so that no one can complain on the Day of Judgment.

Similarly, given that each individual faces his own unique challenges, tests, traumas and childhood experiences, Allah knows that jihad is easy for some people and hard for others. As a result, He will provide exactly what is needed for each person to walk on the path of Islam. The right kind of opportunities will be provided, but the ultimate choice to take advantage of those opportunities and walk on the path of truth, rests with the individual.

In conclusion, four main characteristics are being highlighted in the ancient Israelites that hardened their heart causing them to move from muttaqeen to munafiq. Firstly, they loved to worship their desires instead of practicing tauheed. Secondly, they were ungrateful for Allah's blessings. Thirdly, they were greedy for wealth, power and fame. Fourthly, they loved to mock or challenge Allah's commands. Surprisingly, all four features can also be seen in Iblis. He committed shirk by worshipping himself and his desires, thereby becoming self-righteous. He was greedy for power, believing himself to be superior to the angels and Adam. He was ungrateful for everything Allah had given him resulting in his refusal to repent. Finally, he challenged and mocked Allah's command by not only refusing to

prostrate, but attempting to misguide Adam in the gardens in order to prove that this new creation is not worthy of his prostration. By providing such examples, the surah highlights the kind of characteristics we need to abstain from before we harden our hearts, moving away from the path of *muttaqeen* without even realizing it.

ثُمَّ قَسَتْ قُلُوبَكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَهِيَ كَالْحِجَارَةِ أَوْ أَشَدُّ قَسْوَةً وَإِنَّ مِنَ الْحِجَارَةِ لَمَا
يَتَفَجَّرُ مِنْهُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَا يَشَقُّ فَيَخْرُجُ مِنْهُ الْمَاءُ وَإِنَّ مِنْهَا لَمَاءٌ يهْبِطُ مِنْ
خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِيلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾

Then your hearts became hardened after that, being like stones or even harder. For indeed, there are stones from which rivers burst forth, and there are some of them that split open and water comes out, and there are some of them that fall down for fear of Allah. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.

Allah highlights a crucial aspect about the Israelites. Initially their hearts would humble when they would see a miracle. But, eventually their hearts hardened so much that not even a miracle softened it. A more detailed explanation of the state of hearts can be seen in verse 74 with the use of an analogy. Three types of rocks are examined: a rock from which rivers gush forth, a rock from which water seeps out when it is cracked, and a rock which sinks in the fear of Allah. The first kind of rock is similar to geysers where water from the surface seeps into the ground and is captured in a layer of the earth that is close to magma. Due to the downward pressure from layers of rocks above and the heat of the magma below, the trapped water heats up and once it reaches a certain temperature, it rapidly moves upwards gushing out from the surface of the land in the form of steam.⁵⁵ The second kind of rock is porous in nature. It allows water to seep in and traps it inside the rock. During cold temperatures, the trapped water converts into ice putting inward pressure on the rock and eventually causing it to crack. When the rock is cracked, water slowly starts to flow out of the rock as the ice melts.⁵⁶ The third kind of rock, does not allow water to seep in or flow out. Instead, the rock itself sinks when placed inside water.

These three types of rock are analogous to the three states of faith as described in the Hadīth: Islam, Iman and Ihsan.

⁵⁵ Considine, D.M., Considine, G.D. (2013). 'Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia.' New York: Springer Science + Business Media, p.1439

⁵⁶ Goudie, A. (2013). 'Encyclopedia of Geomorphology.' London: Routledge, p.658

Umar ibn al-Khattab reported: We were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.b) one day when a man appeared with very white clothes and very black hair. There were no signs of travel on him and we did not recognize him. He sat down in front of the Prophet and rested his knees by his knees and placed his hands on his thighs. The man said, "O Muhammad, tell me about

Islam." The Prophet said, "Islam is to testify there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to establish prayer, to give charity, to fast the month of Ramadan, and to perform pilgrimage to the House if a way is possible." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully." We were surprised that he asked him and said he was truthful. He said, "Tell me about iman." The Prophet said, "Iman is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, the Last Day, and to believe in providence, its good and its evil." The man said, "You have spoken truthfully. Tell me about ibsan." The Prophet said, "Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He surely sees you." The man said, "Tell me about the final hour." The Prophet said, "The one asked does not know more than the one asking."⁵⁷

The porous rock is analogous to a Muslim who is at the level of iman. When he observes the signs of Allah or listens to the revelations of the Quran, nur (light of guidance) seeps into his heart, but he fails to make any drastic change to his behavior or actions, refusing to race forward in good deeds. Instead, he ponders for a while and then goes back to his lifestyle where the role of religion is minimal. However, after facing a calamity or severe hardship, his heart cracks and all the accumulated nur seeps out. The individual gradually makes amends and engages in jihad, participating in activities such as helping the poor, performing charitable deeds, fighting the norms of society to propagate the message of Islam, or migrating and fighting in the cause of Allah. Over time, he allocates more and more resources in the cause of Allah, building his taqwa as he starts to take religion seriously. He becomes more conscious of his thoughts, deeds and intentions, and at this stage, he has truly believed in the unseen (Allah, His Books, angels, messengers and the last day). The nur that seeps out, enables him to positively influence the people around him, drawing them closer to Islam.

The geyser is analogous to a Muslim who has reached the stage of ihsan — he worships God as if he can see Him. Like the Muslim at the stage of iman, the heart of this individual also absorbs nur when he sees the signs of Allah or listens to revelation. However, in contrast to the believer at the stage of iman, this kind of individual spends a prolonged period of time reflecting on the signs of Allah. He asks pertinent questions and struggles to seek the answer while pondering over the purpose of life.

⁵⁷ Sahih Muslim, 8

His desire to learn and his hatred for ignorance, oppression and injustice performs the role of the heated magma. Combined with the pressure he faces through tests and difficulties, that is analogous to the layers of rock placing downward pressure, the accumulated nur comes gushing out. Unlike the person at iman who will make gradual changes when the heart is cracked, the person at ihsan will make drastic changes in his thoughts and actions as he struggles extensively in the cause of Allah, releasing a surge of positive energy and attracting many individuals to Islam because of his light.

The final rock that only sinks in the fear of Allah without permitting any water to enter or flow out is analogous to the stage of Islam. It is the lowest level of faith where an individual is doing the bare minimum to qualify being a Muslim. He actively follows the 5 pillars of Islam and fears God, but *nur* has not yet entered his heart. He is content keeping religion simple and easy by practicing the basic rituals, but is not keen on jihad because it requires sacrifice and struggle. This was the condition of the heart for some of the Bedouin Arabs.⁵⁸

Although it is impossible to know which stage a Muslim is at, every believer should try to strive for *Ihsan* by reflecting on revelation and asking relevant questions. It is also necessary to soften the heart so that it can absorb nur in the same way that a fertile piece of land absorbs water easily. A heart that has become hard due to arrogance, pride, hatred and insolence will not allow nur to enter just as a dry and hard piece of land will not absorb water, as explained in the hadith:

*The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said, "The example of guidance and knowledge with which Allah has sent me is like abundant rain falling on the earth, some of which was fertile soil that absorbed rain water and brought forth vegetation and grass in abundance and another portion of it was hard and held the rain water. Allah benefited the people with it and they utilized it for drinking, making their animals drink from it and for irrigation of the land for cultivation while a portion of it was barren which could neither hold the water nor bring forth vegetation (land gave no benefits). The first is the example of the person who comprehends Allah's religion and gets benefit from the knowledge which Allah has revealed through me. The last example is that of a person who does not care for it and does not take Allah's guidance revealed through me (like that barren land.)"*⁵⁹

The key to softening the heart lies in altering the mind-set and attitude. As explained in the first few verses of Surah Baqarah, the individual needs to inculcate humility, empathy and critical thought. He must demonstrate willingness to believe and sincerity to find the truth. Unfortunately, the ancient

⁵⁸ See Quran (49:14)

⁵⁹ Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 1 Book 3 No. 79

Israelites had reached a stage where their hearts had hardened to the extent that not only could the light of guidance not enter, but the heart would not even sink in the fear of Allah. Therefore, they were pugnacious towards their own prophets, refusing to accept a message they knew to be true. That is why, just like Iblis, they eventually moved from munafiq to kaafir, openly defying God's message and rejecting His messengers.

Having described the behaviour of the ancient Israelites and the main characteristic features that made them similar to Iblis, the Quran now shifts to discussing their descendants. If the ancestors were greedy, ungrateful, violating tauheed and challenging God's commands, what about the case of their descendants? Were they doing the same thing?

﴿أَفَنظَمُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلِمَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ
يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾^(٧٥)

Do you have the hope, O believers, that they would believe in you while a party of them used to hear the words of Allah and then distorted it after they had understood it while they were knowing?

Many of the Arabs in Medina were confounded at the response of the Jews to the Prophet (pbuh). Jews were considered to be literate in the sense that they had received many Messengers and Books. Moreover, when Jews migrated and settled in Medina, they informed the local Arabs that a messenger would be coming, as prophesized in their Books.⁶⁰ In fact, the Jews would often engage in skirmishes with the Arabs and every time they lost, they would warn the Arabs that their prophet is coming and when he comes, they will defeat the polytheists. So when the prophesized messenger finally arrived, the local Arabs could not understand why the Jews denied him, even though he was propagating the same message as the Torah. As a response to this confusion, Allah explains the transgressing behaviour of the Jews in Medina, just like He described the transgressing behavior of their ancestors, but with a slight difference. In the case of the ancient Israelites, Allah narrated the multiple cases of transgression and then explained the punishments given. However, in the case of Jews in Medina, after narrating their transgressions, Allah provides a logical argument forcing the polytheist Arabs and

⁶⁰ Powers, D.S. (2014). 'Zayd.' Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p.118

the Jews to reflect so that they can repent and embrace the truth. Punishment is withheld because, as mentioned before, the Jews in Medina had not witnessed miracles like their ancestors, necessitating a lenient approach. Therefore, Allah continues to admonish them. Punishment is now reserved for the Day of Judgment.

The first charge being made against the Jews was that they loved to distort Allah's commands, concealing the truth. This is explained with multiple examples provided from verses 76-86. So, while the ancestors would challenge or mock God's commands, their descendants went a step further by making alterations to it in their attempt to prevent their own people from embracing Islam. In doing so, they would argue that Muhammad (pbuh) was not a prophet because he was not bringing a message that was identical to the message in their own Books. As their argument against Muhammad (pbuh) did raise speculation and confusion regarding the legitimacy of the Quran, Allah provides a counter-argument. If history has revealed that the ancient Israelites were characterized by rebellion and transgression spanning centuries, can it not be expected that their descendants would behave in the same way? Given the history of Bani Israel, why were the Arabs confused at the reaction of the Jews and Christians? For example, if a child is raised in a family known for lying and deceiving, can it not be expected that the child will grow up to lie as well? Is it not normal for the child to exhibit the same traits of his family members? Imagine the case of the Jews who had witnessed generations of lying, deceit and ingratitude. Would it not be normal to expect the same reaction from the Jews in Medina to the Prophet's message?

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنُوا وَإِذَا خَلَا بِبَعْضِهِمْ إِلَىٰ بَعْضٍ قَالُوا أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُمْ
بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لِيُحَاجُّوكُم بِهِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾

And when they meet those who believe, they say, "We have believed"; but when they are alone with one another, they say, "Do you talk to them about what Allah has revealed to you so they can argue with you about it before your Lord?" Then will you not reason?

أَوْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسْرُونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾

But do they not know that Allah knows what they conceal and what they declare?

Despite acknowledging the similarity between the Quran and the Old Testament, Jews in Medina were instructed by their scholars, also known as Rabbis, and their religious elders to not share the

contents of their Books with the Arabs as this would only give further confirmation to Muhammad (pbuh) as being the Messenger of Allah. In doing so, they would only be providing proof against themselves. Unfortunately, the local Arabs were not well-rehearsed in the Hebrew language and could not read the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) themselves to confirm that Muhammad (pbuh) was bringing a message that was a continuation of the message already received by the previous ummah. In planning to conceal the truth from the Muslims, the Jews failed to realize that nothing can be concealed from Allah. He will hold them accountable on the Day of Judgment for hiding the truth. In addition, through the Quran, Allah will also make evident everything that they were attempting to conceal. So, if they were trying to hide the stories of their ancestors who transgressed repeatedly, Allah will reveal those stories in the Quran. Nothing can be hidden from The Almighty.

وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِي وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ ﴿٧٨﴾

And among them are unlettered ones who do not know the Scripture except in wishful thinking, but they are only assuming.

There were three main influential Jewish tribes that were residing in Medina at the time of the Prophet (pbuh): Banu Qurayza, Banu Nadir and Banu Qaynuqa⁶¹. Although they appeared to be Arabized Jews — Jews who were living in Arabia and spoke Arabic — verses in the Quran suggest that perhaps some of them were just Arabs practicing Judaism. They were calling themselves Jews but lacked knowledge of the Hebrew language and were oblivious of God's message in the Hebrew Bible. This is why Allah refers to some of the Jews as illiterates, merely conjecturing about what was written in the Hebrew bible without knowing with certainty. They would make false assumptions about their own Books, so that they could argue that Muhammad (pbuh) was not bringing the same message.

فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِء
ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah," in order to exchange it for a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn.

⁶¹ Shameem, A. (2014). 'The Fascinating story of Muhammad.' Indiana: AuthorHouse, p.75

The Quran was sent to not only guide people towards the truth, but to also provide the correct interpretation of events that occurred in the past in order to highlight distortions made in the previous Books. As an example of the kind of innovation made by the Jews whose hearts had become so hard that it no longer feared Allah, they attributed grave sins such as adultery and idolatry to their own prophets. The Old Testament claims that Prophet Suleyman (a.s) committed the crime of apostasy by worshipping other deities because of his love for one of his foreign wives.⁶² Similarly, the Old Testament also mentions that Haroon (as) helped the Israelites build a cow in the absence of Musa and encouraged the nation to worship the cow.⁶³ In contrast, the Quran clears all prophets of committing such heinous crimes, reiterating that messengers of God were all role models for mankind who were continuously being guided by Allah.

Moreover, the Rabbis would also alter God's message for personal gain. For example, despite knowing that *riba* was haram, Rabbis insisted that it was halal to charge interest on loans extended to non-Jews, arguing that Allah would hold them accountable for how they treated Jews.⁶⁴ He would not hold them accountable for how they treated the gentiles. As mentioned in the verse, they were willing to alter God's message in exchange for a small price — temporary power and wealth. This is the reason that the Rabbis saw the arrival of Muhammad (pbuh) as a direct threat to their status quo.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَ مَاءٌ مَعْدُودَةٌ قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ
يُخْلِفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُمْ أَمْ يُقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾

And they say, "Never will the Fire touch us, except for a few days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant with Allah? For Allah will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allah that which you do not know?"

بِكُلِّ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ
فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

Yes, whoever earns evil and his sin has encompassed him - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally

⁶² Keulen, P.V. (2005). 'Two versions of the Solomon narrative.' Boston: BRILL, p.204

⁶³ Exodus 32:1-4

⁶⁴ Rachik, C., Tamer, G. (2022). 'The concept of human rights in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.' Berlin: De Gruyter

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ



But they who believe and do righteous deeds - those are the companions of Paradise; they will abide therein eternally

Just like their ancestors, the Jews believed that being the 'chosen nation' they were destined to go to heaven. Allah tells the Muslims to challenge the Jews and ask them if this is mentioned in their Books. Has Allah made a promise with them or are they saying something about Allah that is mere conjecture? In reality, God's message has always been centered around accountability implying that those who earn evil will gain evil in the hereafter, and those who earn good will gain good in the hereafter.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ
وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتُوا
الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٨٣﴾

And recall when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel, enjoining upon them, "Do not worship anyone except Allah; and to parents do good and to relatives, orphans, and the needy. And speak to people good words and establish prayer and give zakah." Then you turned away, except a few of you, and you were refusing.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ مِن دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ
أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾

And recall when We took your covenant, saying, "Do not shed each other's blood or evict one another from your homes." Then you acknowledged this while you were witnessing.

ثُمَّ أَنتُمْ هَٰؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنْكُمْ مِّن دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهَرُونَ
عَلَيْهِمْ بِالْإِتْمَانِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسْرَىٰ تَقْتُلُوهُمْ وَهِيَ مُحْرَمَةٌ عَلَيْكُمْ
إِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَفْتُو مِمَّنُونَ بَعْضُ الْكُتُبِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضِ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَن يَفْعَلُ
ذَٰلِكَ مِنكُمْ إِلَّا خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا
اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾

Then, you are those same ones who are killing one another and evicting a party of your people from their homes, cooperating against them in sin and aggression. And if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, although their eviction was forbidden to you. So do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part? Then what is the recompense for those who do that among you except disgrace in worldly life; and on the Day of Resurrection they will be sent back to the severest of punishment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يَخَفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ



Those are the ones who have bought the life of this world in exchange for the Hereafter, so the punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be aided.

Just as the ancestors were guilty of transgressing God's commandments, their descendants were guilty of the same crime. They were told to do good and speak the truth, but instead they concealed and distorted the truth, spreading evil and confusion. In fact, the Shariah given to Muhammad (pbuh) is so similar to the Shariah of the Jews that it is impossible to conceive that Jews could not identify the message brought by Muhammad (pbuh) as being from the same God.

A further example illustrating how the Jews would blatantly challenge or mock God's commandments while their Rabbis would silently condone their behavior, can be seen in verses 84-86. Before the arrival of Islam, Medina was dominated by two main Arab tribes, Aus and Khazraj. The latter being considerably larger than the former. The Jewish tribes that had settled in Medina formed allies with these tribes. Banu Qanuqa allied with Khazraj, while Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza allied with Aus.⁶⁵ As a result, when the two Arab tribes would fight between themselves, their Jewish allies would join to support them, resulting in Jews fighting each other on the battlefield which was a direct violation of God's law making them guilty of fratricide. Furthermore, when captives were taken at the end of the battle, Jews would pay ransom for their own captive brothers, as commanded in their Books, even though they were prohibited from fighting and banishing them in the first place.⁶⁶ Therefore, they seemed to adhere to a part of God's message, while ignoring commands that conflicted with their personal interest. Since building alliances with the Arab tribes was more important for personal

⁶⁵ Shameem, A. (2014). 'The Fascinating story of Muhammad.' Indiana: AuthorHouse, p.75

⁶⁶ Abdul Rahman, M.S. (2009). 'Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Juz 1: Al-Fatiha 1 to Al-Baqarah 141' London: MSA Publications, p.170

security than abiding by God's rules, the Jews were willing to breach divine law by killing each other on the battlefield, only to later pay ransom to free their captive brothers as a means of appeasing God.

In fact, it is possible to draw similarities between the actions of the Jews prior to the arrival of Islam and after the advent of Islam. As mentioned previously, Jews in Medina were making alliances with the polytheist Arabs and were harming their own brothers in the process. After the arrival of Muhammad (p.b.u.h), the Jews should have included the Muslims as their brothers in faith. However, instead of protecting them, they resorted to attacking them by making alliances with the polytheist Arab tribes outside of Medina that were enemies of Islam. In this manner, they repeated the offence by making alliances with the polytheists to harm their own brothers in faith.

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ ۚ وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ
الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ ۚ أَفَلَمَّا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ
فَفَرِّقَهَا كَذَبْتُمْ ۖ وَرَقِيقًا نَقُلُّونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

And We did certainly give Moses the Torah and followed up after him with Messengers. And We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Pure Spirit. But is it not that every time a messenger came to you, O Children of Israel, with what your souls did not desire, you were arrogant? And a party of Messengers you denied and another party you killed.

The second charge made against the Jews in Medina was that they were ungrateful. Unlike the unlearned Arabs who had never received a prophet, the Jews had many Books that comprised of the Old Testament explaining the teachings of the Israelite Prophets sent to them. Having received all that guidance, they still chose to deny a message that they could clearly identify as being the truth. Instead of guiding the unlearned, they chose to spread confusion and disarray taking advantage of the fact that many Arabs considered the Jews as being wise and knowledgeable. Following the footsteps of their ancestors who challenged their prophets, the Jews in Medina denied Muhammad (pbuh), strove to execute him and wanted to destroy Islam, revealing their ingratitude for all the guidance, prophets and Books that God had sent them.

Consistent with Allah's methodology, He now provides a counter-argument encouraging the Jews to reflect. If they disbelieved in Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) because he belonged to the descendants of Ismail and not Isaac, then why did they disbelieve and disobey their own Prophets too? Prophet Micah criticized the income inequality that existed among the Jewish tribes and strongly condemned

the priests and judges who would accept bribes to alter the scriptures or rulings. Hence, the Jews went against him. Prophet Isaiah was murdered by the Jewish King Manasseh for accusing him and his followers of transgressing the commands of God. Attempts were made to kill Prophet Elijah for showing miracles to prove that the deities being worshipped by some Jews were powerless.⁶⁷ Finally, Eesa (a.s) was sent to Bani Israel and he strongly condemned the Rabbis for their misrepresentation of God's religion which resulted in him being charged with blasphemy. Moreover, as an attempt to give a logical explanation for the miracles he could perform, the Rabbis accused Eesa (a.s) of being possessed by demons.⁶⁸ Therefore, Allah reminds the Jews of all the prophets He sent them with the same message. Not only were the ancestors ungrateful by challenging their prophets, but their descendants, the Jews in Medina, were repeating the offence. Allah had now sent a final prophet to guide mankind and instead of being grateful to Allah for this act of mercy, they chose to deny the prophet and his message.

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ ۚ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٨٨﴾

And they said, "Our hearts are wrapped." But Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so little is it that they believe.

The third charge made against the Jews in Medina was that they worshipped their desires. Due to arrogance and the false belief that being the chosen nation, they were destined for heaven, they refuted the concept of accountability for them on the Day of Judgment. Confident that they would attain salvation, they claimed that they already possessed all the knowledge required in religion. Their hearts were wrapped with all that they needed to know and they were not interested in the message of Muhammad (pbuh). In reality, they just wanted to follow a version of religion that suited them and their needs. In doing so, they chose to worship their desires instead of Allah.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ كِتَابٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ وَكَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ يَسْتَفْتِحُونَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ مَا عَرَفُوا كَفَرُوا بِهِ فَلَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٨٩﴾

⁶⁷ Practical Christianity Foundation. (2020). 'John — The Word Made Flesh.' Michigan: Baker Publishing Group.

⁶⁸ Gladding, S. (2010). 'The story of God, the story of us.' Illinois: InterVarsity Press, p.171

And when there came to them a Book from Allah confirming that which was with them - although before they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved - but [then] when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so the curse of Allah will be upon the disbelievers.

بِسْمَا أَشْرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أَنْ يَكْفُرُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بَعِيًّا أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ
فَضْلِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ فَبَاءُ وَيَعْصِبُ عَلَى عَصَبٍ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ
مُهِينٌ ﴿٩٠﴾

How wretched is that for which they sold themselves - that they would disbelieve in what Allah has revealed through their outrage that Allah would send down His favor upon whom He wills from among His servants. So they returned having earned wrath upon wrath. And for the disbelievers is a humiliating punishment.

Having skirmishes with the local Arabs in Medina, the Jews were eagerly awaiting the final prophet in the hope that he would grant them victory over the disbelievers, as mentioned in verse 89. However, when the final prophet arrived, they rejected him because not only were his revelations condemning the distortions and innovations made to the Old Testament by the Rabbis and religious elders, but he was also from a different tribe altogether. After centuries of sending prophets to Bani Israel, Allah broke the chain with the final prophet being sent to Bani Ismail. Accepting Muhammad (pbuh) as a prophet would mean accepting that Bani Israel and Bani Ismail were equal. As this was against the desires of the Jews, they decided to challenge Muhammad (pbuh) despite testifying in their hearts to the truth of his message.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا نُوْمِنُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْنَا وَيَكْفُرُونَ بِمَا
وَرَاءَهُ، وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَهُمْ قُلْ فَلِمَ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْبِيَاءَ اللَّهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٩١﴾

And when it is said to them, "Believe in what Allah has revealed," they say, "We believe [only] in what was revealed to us." And they disbelieve in what came after it, while it is the truth confirming that which is with them. Say, "Then why did you kill the Prophets of Allah before, if you are indeed believers?"

When the Jews were told to believe in Muhammad (pbuh), they would respond by arguing that they only believe in messengers sent to them. This is an extension of the argument centered around the concept of the 'chosen nation' implying that since Bani Israel was selected by God for His special

mercy and His message, God could not possibly send a prophet to another nation. Just like Iblis refused to accept Adam's superiority and started to justify his actions with an irrational argument, the Jews also refused to accept Muhammad (pbuh) as a prophet and justified their actions with a baseless argument. Allah challenges the Jews by asking them to consider the number of Israelite Prophets denied, rejected or even murdered by their ancestors. If the Jews only follow what was revealed to them, why did their ancestors strive hard against their own Israelite prophets?

In reality, the problem was not the nation or tribe of the prophet. The problem was in the message itself. A message that enforced justice, equality and eradication of all evils was not going to be accepted by the Rabbis because it terminated their status quo. Had the message been consistent with their desires, they would have accepted it. Through these arguments, Allah is encouraging the naïve Jews to reflect and question their Rabbis instead of blindly following them. While the Rabbis were instructing the Jews to ignore Muhammad (pbuh) because God had promised that He would only send prophets to Bani Israel, the Jews should have questioned their Rabbis that if this is the case, why did their own ancestors strive against their own prophets? The more they question, the more they will be able to understand the truth, and the more difficult it will be for the Rabbis to deceive them.

﴿ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مُوسَىٰ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ اتَّخَذْتُمُ الْعِجْلَ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَأَنتُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴾

And Moses had certainly brought you clear proofs. Then you took the calf in worship after that, while you were wrongdoers.

﴿ وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ
وَأَسْمِعُوا قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا وَأَشْرَبُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْعِجْلَ بِكُفْرِهِمْ
فَلْيَسْمَأْ يَا مُرْكُم بِهِ إِيمَنُكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴾

And recall when We took your covenant and raised over you the mount, saying, "Take what We have given you with determination and listen." They said instead, "We hear and disobey." And their hearts absorbed the worship of the calf because of their disbelief. Say, "How wretched is that which your faith enjoins upon you, if you should be believers."

As the argument continues, Allah highlights that the Israelites even disobeyed Musa (a.s) by creating and worshipping a calf and breaching the ten commandments. They were so steeped in insolence that when Allah raised Mount Sinai over them, forcing them to hold fast to the divine laws, they still had the audacity to say, 'we hear and we disobey', concealing the love of the calf in their hearts. They had

witnessed countless miracles, but secretly still wished to pray to a god that could be seen. Was Musa (a.s) not a prophet of their own? If the Jews claim to only follow messengers sent to them, then why did their ancestors rebel against Musa (a.s)?

قُلْ إِنْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَالِصَةً مِّنْ دُونِ النَّاسِ فَتَمَنَّوْا الْمَوْتَ
 إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٩٤﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "If the home of the Hereafter with Allah is for you alone and not the other people, then wish for death, if you should be truthful.

وَلَنْ يَتَمَنَّوْهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٩٥﴾

But they will never wish for it, ever, because of what their hands have put forth. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers.

After making several solid arguments, The Almighty ends with a challenge proving that the claim of the Jews to salvation was contrived because there was no verse in the Old Testament to justify it. In reality, even the Jews were skeptical of their claim to salvation knowing that their Scriptures did not make any such promise. Therefore, when asked to earnestly seek death if paradise was guaranteed to them, Jews refused to accept the challenge, well-aware of the evil deeds they had committed. Despite their claim to salvation, they understood that the Day of Judgment will be a time of accountability where every soul will be held accountable for their deeds. Therefore, the Quran highlights a contradiction in the beliefs and practices of the Jews. They claimed that they were destined for salvation, yet, at the same time, their fear of death suggested the opposite.

A fourth charge made against the Jews in Medina was that they were greedy for dunya, yet another similar characteristic to their ancestors. Having monopolized most of the business and trade in Medina, the Jews had accumulated assets in gold and silver. Striving for salvation in the hereafter was not an immediate concern.

وَلَنَجِدَنَّهُمْ أَحْرَصَ النَّاسِ عَلَى حَيَاتِهِمْ وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا يُوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرَ أَلْفَ
 سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُرْحَرَاجِهِ ۚ مِنْ الْعَذَابِ أَنْ يُعَمَّرَ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٦﴾

And you will surely find them the greediest of people for life - even more than those who associate others with Allah. One of them wishes that he could be granted life a thousand years, but it would not remove him in the least from the coming punishment that he should be granted life. And Allah is Seeing of what they do.

Surprisingly, the Jews have been compared to the idolaters when ranking them in terms of greed. Allah could have compared the Jews with any other group of people, or He could have simply stated that Jews were very greedy, but instead He describes them as being worse in greed than the polytheists. What is unique about the idol worshippers that renders this comparison?

Jews were not compared with Christians because devout Christians believed that being spiritually connected to God implied denouncing all worldly luxuries and desires. This is the reason that nuns give up their rights to luxuries, marriage and worldly comfort. In contrast, polytheism often results in a power struggle between the spiritual leaders (priests) and the aristocrats, both desiring to amass wealth. Aristocrats gain power through their control of economic resources, while the invention of idols and a religion gives special power and privilege to priests. The priests would demand more rights and power from the leaders in order to gain wealth. In exchange, they would convince the nation that the leaders are divinely appointed. The gods approve of them so the leaders must be followed. This naturally gave the leaders more power. This power struggle was present in Egypt between the priests and the Pharaoh — the former trying to negotiate deals with the King that would grant them more wealth. The Magi that existed in Iran continuously struggled for power with the secular rulers. In India, priests belong to a special cast called Brahmins that grants them privilege and superior rights. They can exert considerable influence on rulers owing to their religious status.⁶⁹ Similarly, Arabia was also immersed in polytheism prior to the advent of Islam and the Kaaba was infiltrated with 360 idols. Idols of Jesus and Ibrāhīm (a.s) were also maintained in the House of God to satisfy the wishes of Christians and those that only believed in the Abrahamic faith. The strategy of the Quraysh was to convert Mecca into a religious hub by ensuring that the Kaaba contained all the idols being worshipped in the region so that tribes would migrate to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. Thousands of people entering the city every year to worship their gods was a great source of revenue for the Quraysh, and it also granted them the status of being the ‘keepers of the Kaaba.’ While caravans traveling in the region would often be attacked by other tribes, a caravan belonging to the Quraysh was never harmed because it was believed that the wrath of the gods would descend. Therefore, history proves that polytheists have been known to engage in a constant struggle to amass power, prestige and wealth. It is in this context that The Almighty compares the Jews with the idol worshippers.

⁶⁹ Cawley, J. (2018). ‘Beliefs and the world they have created.’ Leicestershire: Troubador Publishing, p.26-27

While Jews and polytheists were immersed in greed, and devout Christians were denouncing wealth and power, Islam adopted a middle approach arguing that wealth and power are tests that must be used to seek the pleasure of Allah. This is the reason that the Quraysh felt threatened by the advent of Islam, fearing that their status of being the ‘keepers of the Kaaba’ would be removed. Their concern was not the introduction of a monotheistic religion because Hanifs had already propagated the concept of monotheism even before the arrival of the last Prophet (p.b.u.h). The Hanifs believed in One God but they also accepted the special status granted to the Quraysh as the protectors of the Kaaba. In contrast, Islam argued that all people and tribes were equal in the eyes of God. The Quraysh did not have the right to any special power or status quo.⁷⁰ For this reason, it was not the concept of tauheed that threatened the Quraysh. Rather it was the relegation of their special status.

Driven by their ingratitude, worship of their desires, greed and mockery of Allah’s commands, the Jews in Medina resorted to innovation, bid’ah, claiming things about Allah’s angels and prophets that were incorrect. This was a fifth and new characteristic that is being mentioned about the Jews in Medina. Bid’ah implies that the Rabbis started to preach things that were not in their Books, but it was believed to be part of religion, and instead of questioning the authenticity of such beliefs, Jews blindly accepted it as the truth. In this regard, these are not alterations made to the Books. These are new claims being made which are not in the Old Testament but are found in Rabbinical literature — conjectures made by the Rabbis. In fact, through bid’ah, Rabbis also attempted to raise doubt about the legitimacy of Muhammad (pbuh) amongst the Jews who could not ignore the fact that he was giving a message that was similar to the message in their own Books. He did not know Hebrew nor was he literate, so the only explanation was that the same God who had send prophets to Bani Israel had now chosen his last and final Prophet as Muhammad (pbuh). To dissuade the Jews from pondering and believing in Muhammad (pbuh), the Rabbis introduced false concepts and ideas to raise confusion and doubt.

قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ، عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ
وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

⁷⁰ Aslan, R. (2008). ‘No God but God’. Random House.

Say, "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - it is none but he who has brought the Qur'an down upon your heart, O Muhammad], by permission of Allah, confirming that which was before it and as guidance and good tidings for the believers."

مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ
لِلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٩٨﴾

Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His angels and His Messengers and Gabriel and Michael - then indeed, Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers

وَلَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ وَمَا يَكْفُرُ بِهَا إِلَّا الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾

And We have certainly revealed to you verses [which are] clear proofs, and no one would deny them except the defiantly disobedient.

One such example of an innovation made by the Jews was their claim that Jibreel had become their enemy. Gabriel (Jibreel) and Michael (Mikayeel) are among the most respected angels mentioned in the Books of God. Jibreel is described in the Hebrew bible as an archangel of God who sits alongside the throne of the Lord. A similar account is mentioned in the Quran. However, since Jibreel was responsible for bringing revelation, the Jews in Medina argued that he had become their enemy because he brought revelation to an Arab prophet. Instead of questioning God for His decision, they reproached the angel, claiming that only Mikayeel was their friend.⁷¹ Basically, their argument was that Allah chose someone from Bani Israel to be the prophet, but it was Jibreel who went against Allah's command and sent revelation to an Arab. Allah now responds to their ridiculous innovation by making it clear that whoever is an enemy to Allah, anyone of His angels, any of His messengers and Jibreel and Mikayeel, Allah becomes an enemy to such disbelievers. This was the greatest admonition being given to the Jews at the time. If they do not submit their will to the truth, the Creator of all will become their enemy. Who could possibly grant them help against The Almighty?

أَوْ كَلَّمَا عَاهَدُوا عَهْدًا أَبَدَهُ، فَرِيقٌ مِنْهُمْ بَلَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٠٠﴾

Is it not [true] that every time they took a covenant a party of them threw it away? But [in fact], most of them do not believe.

⁷¹ Irumbuzhi, M.M. (2010). 'The soul of the Quran: Volume 1.' Kerala: Straight path Quran Education, p.133

وَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقٌ لِّمَا مَعَهُمْ نَبَذَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
 الْكِتَابَ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٠١﴾

And when a messenger from Allah came to them confirming that which was with them, a party of those who had been given the Scripture threw the Scripture of Allah behind their backs as if they did not know what it contained.

The Jews were known for their pugnacious attitude when divine commands did not serve their personal interest. The same archangel that was deeply-respected for providing revelation to the thousands of messengers sent to Bani Israel was now being seen as an enemy. For the priests and religious elders, declaring Jibreel as their enemy was necessary else there would be no justification for not accepting Muhammad (pbuh). This is how the Jews ‘threw away the Book of Allah behind their backs’ as mentioned in verse 101. Despite being aware of Jibreel’s elevated status in their Books, they had the audacity to suggest that he had renounced his position from being a worshipper of God and a friend of mankind by deliberately sending revelation to someone else. In fact, every time Muhammad (pbuh) brought a message that was the same as the message in the Old Testament, the Rabbis would ignore it, make alterations to the Old Testament, or resort to bid’ah just to deny him. Unfortunately, not only did they misguide themselves, but they misguided many Jews who blindly followed them. In doing so, they were simply repeating the behavior of their ancestors — Each time a covenant was taken from them, they would eventually go against it.

وَاتَّبِعُوا مَا تَنَلُّوا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ عَلَىٰ مَلِكٍ سُلَيْمَانَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ
 الشَّيْطَانَ كَفَرُوا يَعْلَمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ الْمَلَائِكَةِ بِبَابِلَ
 هَارُوتَ وَمَرْوَتَ ۗ وَمَا يَعْلَمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۗ
 فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ ۗ وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ
 أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ ۗ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ
 اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلْقٍ وَلَٰئِنَّ مَا اشْتَرَوْا بِهِ أَنفُسَهُمْ لَوْ
 كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

And they followed [instead] what the devils had recited during the reign of Solomon. It was not Solomon who disbelieved, but the devils disbelieved, teaching people magic and that which was revealed to the two angels at Babylon, Harut and Marut. But the two angels do not teach anyone unless they say, "We are a trial, so do not disbelieve [by practicing magic]." And [yet] they learn from them that by which they cause separation between a man and his wife. But they do not harm anyone through it except by permission of Allah. And the people learn what harms them and does not benefit them. But the Children of Israel certainly knew that whoever purchased the magic would not have in the Hereafter any share. And wretched is that for which they sold themselves, if they only knew.

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ ءَامَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَمَثُوبَةٌ مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لَّو كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

And if they had believed and feared Allah, then the reward from Allah would have been far better, if they only knew.

Another innovation of the Jews surrounded Suleyman (as). Although the Quran explains a few significant events that occurred during his reign, verses 102 and 103 of Surah Baqarah focus on one particular issue that created much controversy — magic. According to the Old Testament, Solomon was a King and Prophet of God who was gifted a ring (seal of Solomon) by the archangel Michael giving him special powers that included being able to control jinn and understand the language of animals. According to Rabbinical literature, Solomon practiced magic as well that enabled him to obtain a kingdom like none before. As a result of this, many grimoires — books of magic spells — were written during the renaissance period and were attributed to Solomon.⁷²

The Islamic interpretation of these events is radically different. Suleyman (a.s) never practiced magic as it was prohibited in religion. Hence, as mentioned in verse 102, he was not a disbeliever. The kingdom granted to the prophet was because of the blessings of the Almighty. The ring of Solomon only granted him powers as much as Allah had ordained, in the same way that Musa's staff allowed him to perform miracles with the permission of God. However, the evil jinn sought to gain the powers of Suleyman (a.s). They resorted to magic, writing books of spells which they falsely attributed to the prophet. Moreover, the Israelites were keen to learn magic from the jinn, eager to cast spells that would enable them to gain wealth, power or love.⁷³ Therefore, in verse 102 Allah clears Suleyman (a.s) of any wrongdoing, emphasizing that the jinn were to blame for the magic that was being practiced. This further reinforces the admonition given to the Jews in verse 98. By falsely accusing God's

⁷² Roderick, T. (2015). 'WICCA: 366 days of magical practice in the craft of the wise'. Oregon: LLeWellyn

⁷³ Verheyden, J. (2012). 'The figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic tradition'. Leiden: Brill, p.248

prophet of magic, they were making Allah their enemy. But if Suleyman (as) never practiced magic, then why was Allah testing Bani Israel with magic as mentioned in verse 102?

When Suleyman (a.s) passed away, his Kingdom was split between the north and south. The north, known as the 'Kingdom of Israel', was ruled by Rehoboam whilst the South, known as 'Kingdom of Judah', was ruled by Jeroboam.⁷⁴ During this period of time, magic had become rampant among the Israelites. As a punishment, God sent them a calamity through the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar. After the Kingdom split, the Israelites were no longer united and Nebuchadnezzar took advantage of this by attacking Jerusalem in the South. Not only did he destroy Solomon's temple, but he also burnt all the religious texts and massacred approximately 600,000 Israelites. The remaining were taken as captives back to Babylonia.⁷⁵

After punishing them, Allah showered His mercy on the Israelites even while they were captives, by sending them prophet Ezekiel⁷⁶ who made them realize their mistake of practicing magic and encouraged them to repent. Once the Israelites repented, The Almighty sent them a final test, fitna, in the form of two angels named Harut and Marut. These angels came to teach magic, only after warning people that those who learn magic can never attain salvation. The Israelites were clearly informed that the angels were a test. However, given their love for magic, many ignored the warnings and went to the angels to learn magic. In particular, they were eager to learn the means to sow discord between husband and wife. Their return to magic proved that they had never sincerely repented in the first place. Through this test, Allah was teaching them to remove the love of magic from their hearts if they wished to seek His forgiveness.

A few questions can be asked regarding verse 102. Firstly, of all the tests that Allah could send, why choose magic? Secondly, if the black magic learned had negative consequences by sowing discord between couples and harming innocent people, then was this kind of test not unjust and unfair?

The destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian King was a calamity faced by the ancient Israelites because of their obsession with magic. Therefore, the fitna sent to them had to be related to a practice that they secretly loved, even though it was prohibited in religion. That is what makes it a fitna because by definition, fitna is something that tests the individual through temptation. If Allah sent them a test

⁷⁴ Hendrickson Bibles. (2013). *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, pp.185-186

⁷⁵ King, M.L. (2002). *Western Civilization: a social and cultural history.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p.177

⁷⁶ King, M.L. (2002). *Western Civilization: a social and cultural history.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p.178

relating to an activity that they abhorred, it would not be a fitna. By testing them through magic, Allah wished to reveal whether or not they had truly repented and altered their behavior, detesting something that they once loved.

In fact, this was not the first time that Bani Israel was being tested through a fitna. After the Israelites were emancipated from the Pharaoh, they requested Musa (as) for an idol.⁷⁷ Musa (as) strongly rebuked them. This was followed by a test. Allah placed the nation in a fitna by testing them with a calf that emerged from the fire.⁷⁸ As the nation had already made a request from Musa (as) for an idol, Allah knew that their love for an idol was consuming their hearts. Therefore, the calf became a fitna for them. Moreover, after being severely punished, many of them still had love for the cow in their hearts, as stated in verse 93. Similarly, in the case of magic, despite facing a calamity and repenting, the Almighty knew that many of the Israelites still had love for magic in their hearts and this had to be exposed.

In addition, verse 102 clarifies that although many Israelites failed miserably in the test, the magic they learned could not harm others except by the leave of Allah. Therefore, the angels were sent to decipher between those who had truly repented and those who still loved magic. The magic in itself could not hurt innocent people without the will of God.

Therefore, according to verse 102, not only were the ancestors of Bani Israel in love with magic, but their descendants were obsessed with magic as well. For this reason, Rabbinical literature attributes magic to Solomon. In fact, it is because of the love for magic, power, wealth and dunya that the greatest supporters of Dajjal will be the Jews.

Having described the characteristics of Iblis, the ancient Israelites and their descendants, Muslims should now reflect upon their own behavior. Is the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) not walking on the path of Bani Israel? Do they not make alterations to Allah's commands as well, ignoring some and following others, loving dunya and being ungrateful? Are they not involved in bid'ah too, blindly following what some religious elders might have taught them without questioning its authenticity? Are many of them not walking on the path of munafiq while believing that they are walking on the path of muttaqeen? As a result, Allah now addresses the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) with a message telling them to focus on four main areas.

⁷⁷See Quran (7:138)

⁷⁸See Quran (20:85)

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا لَا تَقُوْلُوْا رَاعِنَا وَقُوْلُوْا اَنْظُرْنَا وَاَسْمَعُوْا
 وَلِلْكَافِرِيْنَ عَذَابٌ اَلِيْمٌ ﴿١٠٤﴾

O you who have believed, say not to Allah 's Messenger, "Ra'ina" but say, "Unthurna" and listen. And for the disbelievers is a painful punishment.

Firstly, Muslims should clearly differentiate themselves from the Jews. They should be seen as bringing a religion of truth implying that they should strictly adhere to the commands of Allah, refrain from challenging or mocking their Prophet and ensure that they do not imitate the behaviour of the Jews. For example, the Jews in Medina used to throw insults at the Prophet (p.b.u.h) in a discreet manner to reveal their disbelief in him as the Prophet of God. One such example of that can be seen in verse 104. As a means of grooming the believers who were accustomed to calling each other's names, the Muslims were told to use the term 'raina' when addressing the Prophet (pbuh), meaning 'kindly listen to us'.⁷⁹ With a slight twist of the tongue, the Jews would alter the word giving it a derogatory meaning. Therefore, to eliminate such possibilities, Allah instructed the believers to abstain from using raina and to use the word unzurna instead. Unzurna had a similar meaning to raina but could not be altered in any manner to belittle the Prophet (p.b.u.h). By altering the word entirely, the believers were differentiating themselves clearly from the Jews who would continue to use the original word as a means of demeaning the Prophet (pbuh).

مَا يُوَدُّ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْا مِنْ اَهْلِ الْكِتٰبِ وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِيْنَ اَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ
 خَيْرٍ مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ يُخَيِّرُ بِرَحْمَتِهٖۙ مَنْ يَّشَآءُ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيْمِ
 ﴿١٠٥﴾

Neither those who disbelieve from the People of the Scripture nor the polytheists wish that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord. But Allah selects for His mercy whom He wills, and Allah is the possessor of great bounty.

⁷⁹ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

﴿ مَا نَنْسَخْ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْهَا أَوْ مِثْلَهَا أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴾
 (١٠٦)

We do not abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten except that We bring forth one better than it or similar to it. Do you not know that Allah is over all things competent?

Secondly, they were being told to be vigilant and cautious. A true believer should not be easily fooled by his enemies. For this reason, it is incumbent upon every Muslim to gain as much knowledge as he can. For example, taking advantage of the knowledge they had acquired from the Old Testament, the Jews would engage Muslims in intellectual debates with the intention of promoting disarray and confounding the naïve believers. They would ask questions such as why did Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) alter the laws of Moses if he was indeed a prophet that had been sent by the same God? Why was camel meat prohibited for the Jews but permissible for the Muslims? Why was the fat of ox and sheep prohibited for the Jews but made permissible for the Muslims? If the message is coming from the same God, why were the rules being changed?

The Quran addresses these concerns in verse 106 by stating that certain laws given to the previous ummah were abrogated and substituted for new laws by the wisdom of Allah. It was not the prophet's prerogative to alter the divine laws. These were commands given to him by God who knows best which laws to retain and which laws to rescind. Besides, there were certain laws that the Israelites had imposed upon themselves, such as the prohibition of camel meat explained in Surah Al-e-Imran.⁸⁰ Furthermore, even though certain laws were substituted or abrogated, the basic ten commandments that were given to Musa (a.s) and formed the foundation of the previous Shariah, are equally applicable to the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh): adultery, fornication, stealing, infanticide and murder are still condemned while respect for parents, women and orphans is given the utmost importance.

Similarly, the West increasingly argues that Islam wishes to oppress its women by forcing them to cover themselves. In the name of liberty, they argue that women are being treated unfairly. Unfortunately, Muslim women who lack knowledge fail to realize that the West is in fact responsible for oppressing women. It is Islam that has given women liberty. Women in the West become slaves to society having to conform to the pressure of looking, dressing and behaving a certain way in order

⁸⁰ See Quran (3:93)

to be considered beautiful. In contrast, women in Islam are told to cover up because their beauty lies in their intellect, wisdom, dignity, honor and self-respect, not in their body. Uncovering and revealing your body only to gain approval by society is humiliating. So if men do not have to face that ordeal, why should women have to face it? Women are slaves of only Allah, so pleasing Him is only important, and what pleases Him is to see a woman who sees herself as an intelligent, powerful and strong khalifah, as opposed to a puppet who has to please members of society, regardless of how vulnerable it makes her feel.

أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُ الْمُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ
وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١٠٧﴾

Do you not know that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and [that] you have not besides Allah any protector or any helper?

أَمْ تُرِيدُونَ أَنْ تَسْأَلُوا رَسُولَكُمْ كَمَا سَأَلَ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ
الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ سَوَاءَ السَّبِيلِ ﴿١٠٨﴾

Or do you intend to ask your Messenger as Moses was asked before? And whoever exchanges faith for disbelief has certainly strayed from the soundness of the way.

Thirdly, Muslims were told to trust Allah and obey the prophet (pbuh) blindly instead of adopting the same rebellious attitude of the ancient Israelites who loved to be a trifling annoyance to Musa (a.s). Pugnacity can only breed amongst the Muslim ummah if they lack tawakal and decide to worship their own desires as opposed to the One True God. When everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Allah and there can be protector or helper besides Him, should His message and His Prophet not be trusted and followed?

وَدَكَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفْرًا
حَسَدًا وَمِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا نَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ فَاعْفُوا وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّىٰ
يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرٍ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾

Many of the People of the Scripture wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy from themselves [even] after the truth has become clear to them. So pardon and overlook until Allah delivers His command. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١٠﴾

And establish prayer and give zakah, and whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you will find it with Allah. Indeed, Allah of what you do, is Seeing.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ يَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ إِلَّا مَنْ كَانَ هُودًا أَوْ نَصْرَىٰ تِلْكَ أَمَانِيُّهُمْ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١١١﴾

And they say, "None will enter Paradise except one who is a Jew or a Christian." That is merely their wishful thinking, Say, "Produce your proof, if you should be truthful."

بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ وَجْهَهُ لِلَّهِ وَهُوَ مُحْسِنٌ فَلَهُ أَجْرُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

Yes on the contrary, whoever submits his face in Islam to Allah while being a doer of good will have his reward with his Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.

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

The Jews say: "The Christians have nothing (to stand) upon; and the Christians say: "The Jews have nothing (to stand) upon." Yet they (Profess to) study the (same) Book. Like unto their word is what those say who know not; but Allah will judge between them in their quarrel on the Day of Judgment.

Finally, the Muslims were being reminded that it is not race, lineage or the deeds of ancestors that will determine the fate of any individual on the Day of Judgment. Rather, the belief of each individual and the extent to which he strove to perform good deeds will determine his success in the akhirah. Therefore, unlike the Jews who argued that paradise was reserved for them, while the Christians believed it was reserved for them, the new ummah is being reminded that Jannah is not reserved for

anyone. An individual has to earn paradise by struggling in the cause of Allah, implementing Islam in his life and working hard to do righteous deeds.

As it was the responsibility of the ummah to spread the message of Islam, the initial command given to the believers in Medina was to forgive and overlook the evil deeds of the People of the Book. While the ummah needed time to firmly establish itself and strengthen the iman of the believers before it could fight its enemies, the Jews and Christians were also being given time to reflect on their behaviour, repent and change.

As for those Jews who refused to reflect and repent, and worked tirelessly to spread confusion by engaging the Muslims in intellectual debate, The Almighty directly intervened to help the Muslims respond by sending them revelation that could strengthen their argument against the People of the Book. This was particularly necessary given that the Muslims were not acquainted with the Old Testament. Therefore, Allah sent verses highlighting the contradictions and inconsistencies in the arguments of the enemy. As a result, the surah now shifts to providing multiple examples where the Muslims could now challenge the People of the Book.

For example, if both Jews and Christians were recipients of the same God's message, why did they not follow each other? If they confessed to studying the same Scripture, Hebrew Bible, then why did each group believe that only it would attain salvation and not the other. If both Jews and Christians shared the same lineage, believed in the same Mosaic laws and followed the same Scripture, then why did they disagree with each other? In reality, the People of the Book know that their arguments are baseless. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Judgment.

In addition, verse 111 provides a challenge to the People of the Book asking them to use their Scriptures to prove their claim that God promised them salvation. This challenge was particularly effective because a study of the Scriptures reveals that the word 'Jew' does not even appear in the first five books of the Old Testament, known as the *Pentateuch*.⁸¹ These were the books that contained the teachings of Musa (a.s), implying that Musa (a.s) never referred to himself or the Israelites as Jews. Similarly, the word Christian does not appear in the Bible.⁸² Jesus refers to the believers as disciples or saints, not Christians. Therefore, the Scriptures could not have possibly guaranteed salvation to

⁸¹ Katanacho, Y. (2013). 'The land of Christ.' Oregon: Pickwick Publications, pp.22-23

⁸² Schneider, R.K.A. (2019). 'The Lion of Judah: How Christianity and Judaism Separated.' Florida: Charisma House, p.23

the Jews or the Christians when both terms are not even mentioned. The religion of God from the very beginning has always stressed that salvation is strictly dependent on beliefs and deeds and no group, race or tribe has any reserved right to it.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّن مَّنَعَ مَسْجِدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ يُذَكَّرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ، وَسَعَىٰ فِي خَرَابِهَا أُولَٰئِكَ مَا
كَانَ لَهُمْ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوهَا إِلَّا خَائِفِينَ لَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَلَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١١٤﴾

And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of Allah from being mentioned in His mosques and strive toward their destruction. It is not for them to enter them except in fear. For them in this world is disgrace, and they will have in the Hereafter a great punishment.

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُولُوا فَجْهُ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١١٥﴾

And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا سُبْحٰنَهُ ۗ بَلْ لَّهُ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ كُلُّ لَّهُ قٰنِیْنُوْنَ
﴿١١٦﴾

They say, " Allah has taken a son." Exalted is He! Rather, to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him,

بَدِیْعُ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَاِذَا قَضٰی اَمْرًا فَاِنَّمَا یَقُوْلُ لَهٗ ۗ كُنْ فَاَیْکُوْنُ ﴿١١٧﴾

Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, "Be," and it is.

Consensus of many scholars is that it appears that Allah is referring to the Quraysh in verse 114 because they prevented the Muslims from entering Mecca, thereby, preventing the name of Allah from being mentioned in His mosques. So it appears as though Allah is warning the polytheists that they will have a great punishment and will face disgrace in this life as well.

However, in my opinion this does not appear consistent with the theme of the surah that has been focusing on Jews and Christians. Firstly, Allah does not mention Kaaba. Instead masjids of Allah are being used. A Masjid is any place earmarked for the worship of Allah. In specific, it is called a masjid because it is a place where the prostration, sajda, occurs. Secondly, the verse mentions that such unjust people strive towards the destruction of masjids. Although the Quraysh did prevent the Muslims from entering Mecca, they were not striving to destroy the Kaaba. If anything, they saw themselves as the keepers of the Kaaba.

In my opinion, Allah is referring to the Jews and Christians who had prevented the name of Allah alone from being mentioned in their places of worship and strove to destroy it. What does that mean? Synagogues and Churches were originally masjids. They were meant to be places where only Allah would be worshipped and all believers would be united in their prostration towards one qibla. In fact, prostration has always been a characteristic feature of prayer in Islam.

Although the Jews do worship God in their synagogues, they have removed its status as a masjid by eliminating the prostration from their prayer entirely, thereby destroying the concept of a masjid. The synagogue that was meant to be a masjid where believers would prostrate to Allah, ended up becoming a place where no one prostrated. Christians have also destroyed the concept of a masjid by not only removing the prostration, but by also preventing the name of Allah alone from being mentioned in their Churches. With the concept of trinity, Jesus and the Holy Ghost were considered to be God as well. The place earmarked for tauheed became a ground for shirk. As a result, Allah clarifies in verses 116 and 117, that Jesus was born with the word 'be'. It was a miraculous birth and there was no need of a father. Given the capabilities, unlimited power and strength of The Almighty, it is not befitting for Him that He require a son. Jesus was only a Messenger of God and the Messiah, nothing else.

In addition to removing the prostration and committing shirk, the People of the Book also altered the qibla. Being the early Muslims, the Jews and Christians should have faced the same qibla to signify unity. But, instead, the Jews face Jerusalem, while the Christians face East arguing that the rising of the sun symbolizes the coming of Christ.⁸³ Therefore, the entire concept of a masjid that involved tauheed, prostration and unity was completely destroyed by the People of the Book.

⁸³ Bargos, M. (2021). 'From the Ancient Near East to the Christian Byzantium.' Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p.178

Allah responds to their destruction of the masjids by informing them that no matter how much they aim to distort the original message given to them, they cannot abolish Islam because it is Allah's prerogative to ensure that the truth remains. Allah is not in their synagogues nor is He in their churches. Allah is everywhere, and eventually it is the truth that will prevail. In this regard, this Quran is an example of how the truth will always triumph because in a world immersed in confusion and chaos, the path of salvation was still made evident through the last and final Prophet. The Quran clarifies all the distortions and falsehoods created by the polytheists, Jews and Christians.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ لَوْلَا يُكَلِّمُنَا اللَّهُ أَوْ تَأْتِينَا آيَةٌ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ الَّذِينَ
 مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِثْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ تَشَبَهَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ



Those who do not know say, "Why does Allah not speak to us or there come to us a sign?" Thus spoke those before them like their words. Their hearts resemble each other. We have shown clearly the signs to a people who are certain in faith.

While the polytheist Arabs in Mecca demanded a sign to be shown to them to prove Muhammad's legitimacy, the Jews and Christians demanded the same. They wanted to see miracles similar to those performed by Eesa (as) or Musa (as). They also complained why Allah would choose to speak to Muhammad (pbuh) and not to them? Being the chosen and preferred nation for over 2000 years, they believed Allah would rather talk to them than a non-Jew. Allah teaches the Prophet (pbuh) to respond by reminding them that there were people before them who said the same thing. Their hearts were equally hard, unable to accept the truth. So, which kind of people are being referred to here?

The ancient Israelites, who Allah has already mentioned had hardened their hearts, made similar demands to Musa (a.s). For example, as evident in verse 55, the ancestors refused to obey Musa's command until they could see Allah directly. They wanted Allah to speak to them just as He spoke to Musa (as). When told to do jihad and enter the promised land, Surah Maida informs us that the Israelites responded by telling Musa that he and his God should go and fight and clear the land for them to enter. Just as Allah had parted the sea to destroy their enemy, the Jews demanded another miracle so that the enemy residing in the promised land could be defeated. When given manna and salwa, food from the heavens, the Jews demanded more variety from Allah, tired of eating the same food. Therefore, despite having witnessed many miracles, they kept asking for more.

Therefore, Allah warns the People of the Book that by choosing to make such futile arguments they are walking on the path of their ancestors. If the ancient Israelites incurred the wrath of Allah, so will the Jews and Christians. The signs are clear for those who are sincerely searching — an illiterate man who has profound knowledge of the previous Books and has brought the same message as the previous prophets.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَا تُسْأَلُ عَنْ أَصْحَابِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١١٣﴾

Indeed, We have sent you, [O Muhammad], with the truth as a bringer of good tidings and a warner, and you will not be asked about the companions of Hellfire.

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ قُلْ إِنْ هَدَىٰ اللَّهُ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ وَلَئِنْ
 اتَّبَعْتَ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ بَعْدَ الَّذِي جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَكَ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿١١٤﴾

And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion. Say, "Indeed, the guidance of Allah is the [only] guidance." If you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, you would have against Allah no protector or helper.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَتْلُونَهُ حَقَّ تِلَاوَتِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ ۗ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِهِ ۗ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
 الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿١٢١﴾

Those to whom We have given the Book recite it with its true recital. They [are the ones who] believe in it. And whoever disbelieves in it - it is they who are the losers.

After providing such intellectual arguments, Allah concludes by emphasizing that the duty of the Prophet (pbuh) is just to deliver the message. He will not be held accountable for the actions of others. Revelation has been sent to Muhammad (pbuh) as well as to prophets in the past. Those who study it with sincerity will be sure to believe. They will acknowledge the similarity in the message given to all the prophets and will not hesitate to embrace the truth. In contrast, the more rebellious among the Jews and Christians will ask many questions and continue debating till the end. But, even if they attain all the right answers that compel them to ponder and reflect, they will never be satisfied because they do not ardently seek the truth in the first place.

Muslims should not be perturbed by the refusal of the Jews and Christians to accept Islam nor should they feel compelled to alter the truth in order to appease the disbelievers. In this context, Allah mentions that even if the Prophet (pbuh) were to mend the truth in order to please the disbelievers, he would not be able to find a protector or helper against Allah. This final warning does not imply that the Prophet (pbuh) was in any means inclined to distort the message of God. It was a stern warning being given to the Muslims. If the Prophet (pbuh) would not be forgiven for distorting the truth, the believers of the ummah should not expect any leniency to be shown towards them. Muslims should not be seeking validation from non-Muslims nor should they alter their behaviour and their attitude just to please others. The path of truth is unique and distinct. Anyone who alters his behaviour or his beliefs just to please others will not be walking on the path of Islam anymore.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا اِسْرٰٓءِيْلُ اذْكُرُوْا نِعْمَتِيْ الَّتِيْ اَنْعَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاِنِّيْ فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَي الْعٰلَمِيْنَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

O Children of Israel, remember My favor which I have bestowed upon you and that I preferred you over the worlds.

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا تَنْفَعُهَا شَفَعَةٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

And fear a Day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all, and no compensation will be accepted from it, nor will any intercession benefit it, nor will they be aided

Interestingly, verse 122 appears to be identical to verse 47 where the Children of Israel are being directly addressed and reminded that they were the chosen nation that had received many benefits and blessings from Allah in the form of miracles, prophets and Books. But, there is a slight difference between verse 123 and verse 48. In verse 48, Allah instructs the People of the Book to guard themselves against a day where intercession will not be accepted. But, in verse 123, He states that intercession will not benefit. Similarly, in verse 48 Allah states that compensation cannot be taken but, in verse 123 He states that compensation will not be accepted. Why the subtle difference?

The overall message given between verses 48 and 123 drew comparisons between the ancient Israelites and the People of the Book. Both wanted to worship their desires, amass dunya due to greed, show ingratitude to Allah and challenge God's commands. So, the Jews and Christians are being told that intercession will not be accepted, as mentioned in verse 48 because no one will be

allowed to speak in Allah's presence. But, even if someone is allowed to intercede, it will not benefit them, as mentioned in verse 123, because whoever does intercede will only speak the truth. Falsehood or lies cannot prevail on the Day of Judgment. Hence, even if their Israelite Prophets are allowed to intervene for them, they will only speak the truth highlighting the stubborn and rebellious attitude of their people that makes them deserving of the hellfire.

Similarly, compensation will not be accepted, as mentioned in verse 123 nor will it be taken, as mentioned in verse 48. What is the difference in both these statements? Accepting compensation for someone implies that an individual who deserves the hellfire is requesting that someone else take his place so that he can go to Jannah, or an individual deserving of Jannah is requesting that he be thrown into the hellfire so that he can save someone else. Allah makes it clear that this is not possible. Compensation will not be accepted. In contrast, to take compensation means that Allah decides to take an individual in place of someone else implying that Allah decides on His own accord to throw a person into the hellfire in order to save someone else. Allah makes it clear that even this is not possible. No soul can ask Allah for someone else to take his place in the hellfire nor can he expect Allah to save him by throwing someone else in the hellfire. Everyone gets exactly what they deserve based on their deeds. Requests for compensation will not be accepted and compensation will not be taken.

Furthermore, it is beautiful to note how Allah mentions that intercession will not benefit anyone, but He is careful not to say that compensation will not benefit anyone. Why? While it is true that intercession cannot benefit the evil soul as only truth will prevail on the Final Day, the same cannot be said about compensation. Compensation would definitely benefit an evil soul because it would allow him to go to Jannah while someone else suffers in hellfire for him. Allah chooses His words beautifully. Intercession will not be accepted, and if accepted it will not benefit the evil soul. At the same time, compensation will not be accepted for someone or taken from anyone.

Naturally, this concept was difficult for the People of the Book to understand because they had been raised with the idea that they were the chosen nation. They were the followers of the Abrahamic faith and they were the descendants of the righteous Yaqub (as). By default, intercession from Ibrahim (as) and Yaqub (as) should easily get them into Jannah given their sacred lineage. Therefore, the surah now shifts to a detailed discussion of the actual message that Ibrahim (as) and Yaqub (as) preached so that the Jews and Christians could reflect on this and ask themselves if they were actually following

Ibrahim (as) and Yaqub (as). If not, how could they possibly believe that these prophets would argue before Allah in favor of a nation that did not even pay heed to their message?

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ
لَا يَتَأَلَّ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٢٤﴾

And mention, O Muhammad, when Abraham was tried by his Lord with commands and he fulfilled them. Allah said, "Indeed, I will make you a leader for the people." Abraham said, "And of my descendants?" Allah said, "My covenant does not include the wrongdoers."

Ibrahīm (a.s) was told to make many sacrifices in his life that are explained in detail throughout the Quran. It was his determination and faith in Islam that enabled him to pass all his tests and be rewarded with leadership, imam, over religion. Hence, he has always been a revered figure in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But in this verse, two misconceptions of Bani Israel are being addressed. Firstly, Ibrahim (as) made a prayer asking Allah that leaders should be made from his descendants as well. Since his descendants included Ismail and Isaac, the People of the Book should not be shocked that Allah has sent the final Prophet amongst Bani Ismail. Secondly, God never promised Ibrahim (as) that his descendants from Isaac will always remain leaders till the end of times. Leadership will be given to those who are righteous believers and strive to propagate the truth. When a group deviates and becomes among the wrongdoers, leadership will be taken from them.

Given the rebellious nature of the Jews and Christians who repeatedly distorted Allah's message and transgressed His commands deliberately, it only makes sense that leadership would be taken from them. So, instead of blaming Jibreel, they should understand that their status of ummah was revoked as a result of the covenant made with their forefather — Ibrahim (as). If Jews and Christians are truly sincere to their forefather, Ibrahim (as) they should not have any difficulty accepting a messenger from among his descendants regardless of whether that messenger is from Bani Israel or Bani Ismail.

وَإِذْ جَعَلْنَا الْبَيْتَ مَثَابَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَأَمْنًا وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى وَعَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ
وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَن طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْقَائِمِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ ﴿١٢٥﴾

And mention when We made the House a place of return for the people and a place of security. And take, O believers, from the standing place of Abraham a place of prayer. And We charged Abraham and Ishmael, saying, "Purify My House for those who perform Tawaf and those who are staying there for worship and those who bow and prostrate [in prayer]."

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا بَلَدًا آمِنًا وَارْزُقْ أَهْلَهُ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ مَنْ آمَنَ مِنْهُمْ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ قَالَ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَأُمَتِّعُهُ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ أَضْطَرُّهُ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ النَّارِ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٢٦﴾

And mention when Abraham said, "My Lord, make this a secure city and provide its people with fruits - whoever of them believes in Allah and the Last Day." Allah said. "And whoever disbelieves - I will grant him enjoyment for a little; then I will force him to the punishment of the Fire, and wretched is the destination."

وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ
الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٢٧﴾

And mention when Abraham was raising the foundations of the House and with him Ishmael, saying, "Our Lord, accept this from us. Indeed You are the Hearing, the Knowing.

When Prophet Ibrahīm (a.s) was instructed by God to go to Mecca, he was commanded to leave his second wife, Hajra, and son, Ismail, there. Despite this being a difficult test, Ibrahīm (a.s) obeyed his Lord's order. Although he returned to Jerusalem to his first wife, Sarah, he would frequently visit Mecca. Several years later, he was commanded by Allah to build the Kaaba in Mecca with the aid of Ismail. The Kaaba was to be made a place of assembly and security for all men, as explained in verse 125. It would be sanctified for all those who would come there to perform pilgrimage or use it as a place of retreat, and it would become a qibla — a direction of prayer. The Quran does not mention that the Kaaba was built only for the Children of Ismail. On the contrary, it was a structure designed for all men and women to come and worship God. Symbolic of tauheed, the Kaaba was a qibla that was meant to unite all people under One God.

As the message of God has always been consistent, the qibla that was followed by all the messengers and prophets since the beginning of mankind must have been the same. They all must have been praying in the same direction or performing pilgrimage to the same place. Therefore, as many prophets came to mankind before Ibrahīm (a.s), it is not plausible that the House of God was first built by Ibrahīm (a.s) and his son. Moreover, in Surah Al-e-Imran verse 96, Allah mentions that the first house of worship assigned for mankind was the one at bakka, reinforcing the fact that the Kaaba

must have existed before Ibrahim (a.s). Based on this, some scholars argue that the Kaaba was originally built by Prophet Adam (a.s), the first man, but as the structure was damaged over the years, it was reconstructed by Prophet Ibrahim (a.s).⁸⁴ Others suggest that perhaps it was first built by the angels. Allah knows best. Regardless, the Jews and Christians are being told to reflect and ask themselves if they have followed the tradition of Ibrahim (as) in visiting the Kaaba as a place of pilgrimage, performing tawaf and bowing and prostrating there just as their forefather did?

Once the Kaaba was rebuilt, Ibrahim (a.s) prayed that Mecca be made into a city of peace with ample provision of sustenance so that believers would migrate to the city from all over Arabia. In response, Allah answered his prayer by promising that all inhabitants, both Muslims and non-Muslims, would be provided sustenance, as mentioned in verse 126, but the final place of peace and rest would be reserved for the servants of Allah only. Therefore, a desert that was unsuitable for growing crops and food, eventually thrived into a city dependent on trade between Yemen and Syria. The caravans of the Quraysh would travel to Yemen during the winter and to Syria during the summer. By monopolizing the trade route, Mecca was converted to a religious and financial hub — the central core of Arabia.⁸⁵

Clearly, Mecca had such significance for Ibrahim (as) that he prayed to Allah for the safety and security of those in it who were true believers. It was in this same city that the final Prophet arrived to reinforce the message of Ibrahim (as). How could the Jews and Christians still not understand that Allah's selection of the final Prophet being an Arab from Mecca who was a descendant of Ibrahim (as) was based on the prayer of their forefather? Muhammad (pbuh) was not randomly selected nor was it a mistake of Jibreel, rather it was the dua of Ibrahim (as) that Mecca be made a secure city, the center of tauheed. Therefore, while monotheists who only worshipped the One God of Ibrahim (as) did exist in the Arab region even before the arrival of Muhammad (pbuh), the fact that idols had infiltrated the Kaaba made it necessary to send the last Prophet to Mecca.

Moreover, in verse 127 Ibrahim (a.s) prayed for the acceptance of his efforts in building the House of God. This short, yet beautiful prayer is a reminder that there are no guarantees of good deeds being accepted by Allah, regardless of how significant they might be. It is this uncertainty that humbles the servants of God and protects them from arrogance. The decision of acceptance rests only with Allah

⁸⁴ Ghazi (2013). 'The one and only face of Islam'. Indiana: Xlibris, p.16

⁸⁵ Glasse, C. (2003). 'The New Encyclopedia of Islam.' New York: Rowman & Littlefield, p.303

because only He is truly aware of man's intentions. In specific, a person's intent can be made clear by the words that he speaks or by the sincerity of his heart. For that reason, the dua ends by referring to Allah as the All-Hearing and All-Knowing. He knows the words uttered from the mouth of His slaves and only He knows what resides in their hearts. While man's intent can vary for a short period of time given the whispers of Iblis and the attraction of dunya, Allah's forgiveness is vast. He knows that slight deviations can occur, but it is the overall sincerity of intention and purpose that will be rewarded.

رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٢٨﴾

Our Lord, and make us Muslims [in submission] to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation [in submission] to You. And show us our rites and accept our repentance. Indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.

رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١٢٩﴾

Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise."

وَمَنْ يَرْغَبْ عَنِ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدْ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١٣٠﴾

And who would be averse to the religion of Abraham except one who makes a fool of himself. And We had chosen him in this world, and indeed he, in the Hereafter, will be among the righteous.

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٣١﴾

When his Lord said to him, "Submit", he said "I have submitted in Islam to the Lord of the worlds."

Ibrahim (as) prayed that he and his son be made Muslims who submit to the will of Allah, with Muslims among their progeny as well. Furthermore, in his ardent desire to please Allah, he asked to

be shown the appropriate means of worshipping God at the Kaaba — the rituals and rites of pilgrimage.

Of all the prayers that Ibrāhīm (a.s) made to God, Allah chose to mention those in the Quran that help to clarify many of the misconceptions propagated by the People of the Book. For example, in his prayer, Ibrāhīm (a.s) refers to himself as a Muslim because he wishes to submit his will to God, and he prays that his progeny should also be Muslim. Not once does he mention the term Jew or Christian.

Moreover, being the leader of religion and the founding father of the Jews and Christians, Ibrāhīm (a.s) seeks Allah's guidance in term of the rituals that must be performed at the Kaaba for pilgrimage. Jerusalem or any other religious site is not mentioned. In addition, he prays to God that a messenger be sent to his descendants from Ismail who will instruct them in scripture and wisdom. This reiterates the message in verse 124 with more clarity. Bani Ismail received the last Prophet (pbuh) because of Ibrāhīm's prayer. He wished for a prophet to be sent from among the Children of Ismail who would teach and instruct them. Therefore, given that the religion of Ibrāhīm centers on the concept of submission to the will of One God, and not on the sacred lineage of Yaqub (as) or the Messiah, Jews and Christians have clearly deviated from the teachings of their founding father, necessitating that leadership be taken from them.

Interestingly, the Jews did not deny Ismail as being the son of Ibrāhīm (a.s). On the contrary, they believed that because he was a son of a prophet, God promised him 12 sons who would be strong and mighty princes forming a nation of their own. However, they argued that God made a covenant with Ibrāhīm (a.s) that messengers and prophets would only be sent to the progeny of Isaac because Ismail was the son of a slave woman. It would not be appropriate or suitable to send God's message to Ismail's progeny.⁸⁶ This argument can easily be refuted on the basis that Hajra was not a slave woman but the daughter of the King of Egypt. Even prior to becoming the wife of Ibrāhīm, she was a princess of high status and authority.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the prayers of Ibrahim (as) have been recorded

⁸⁶ Bakhos, C. (2006). 'Ishmael on the border.' Albany: State University of New York Press, p.16

⁸⁷ Mansurpuri, M.S. (2002). 'Muhammad (SAW) Mercy for the Worlds.' Karachi: Darul Ishaat, p.21

in the Quran to prove that he prayed for all his descendants, and Allah accepted his prayers. There is no proof that Allah promised prophets only to Bani Israel.

وَوَصَّىٰ بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبَ يَبْنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَىٰ لَكُمْ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا
وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٢﴾

And Abraham instructed his sons [to do the same] and [so did] Jacob, [saying], "O my sons, indeed Allah has chosen for you this religion, so do not die except while you are Muslims."

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتَ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن بَعْدِي
قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًُا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ
مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٣﴾

Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob, when he said to his sons, "What will you worship after me?" They said, "We will worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac - one God. And we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٣٤﴾

That was a nation which has passed on. It will have the consequence of what it earned, and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do.

Allah now discusses the case of Prophet Yaqub (a.s) — the father of the twelve tribes of Bani Israel. Not only did Yaqub (a.s) tell his twelve sons to submit their will to Allah as Muslims, but he also emphasized the importance of following their forefathers that included Ibrahim, Ismail and Isaac. So, if Prophet Yaqub (a.s) was also calling himself a Muslim and regarded both Ismail and Isaac as messengers, then why were the Jews and Christians relegating Ismail's status?

As mentioned in verse 134, the People of the Book should know that they cannot benefit from the good deeds of their righteous prophets nor can they benefit from being part of a lineage. They have

deviated so much from the message of their prophets that they cannot truly call themselves followers of Ibrahim or Yaqub. It is incumbent upon them to conduct their own research and search for the truth. They will not be able to reproach their ancestors for misguiding them when the truth has now arrived through the last Prophet (pbuh).

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ
 الْمُشْرِكِينَ ﴿١٣٥﴾

They say, "Be Jews or Christians [so] you will be guided." Say, "Rather, [we follow] the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth, and he was not of the polytheists."

The religion of Ibrahim (as) was Islam. It centered upon submission to the will of God, making him a Muslim. He was not a Jew nor was he a Christian. In addition, while discussing Ibrahim (a.s), the Quran also clarifies a grave charge that was made against him in the book of Joshua claiming that, initially, he too was an idol worshipper like his father, who only converted to Monotheism once he embraced prophethood. In contrast, verse 135 clarifies that at no point in time was Ibrahim a polytheist. This is true for all prophets because The Almighty takes it upon Himself to safeguard His messengers from committing sins even before they become prophets. If messengers were idol worshippers before embracing prophethood, their nation would have reservations about them when they started to propagate the message of God, and they would not be ideal role models for mankind. By emphasizing that Ibrahim (as) never associated anyone or anything with God, this also suggests that Christians believing in the concept of trinity are not following the religion of Ibrahim. Associating Jesus with God defies the concept of monotheism.

قُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ
 وَالْأَسْبَاطَ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ
 مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

Say, [O believers], "We have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him."

فَإِنَّمَا آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ فِي شِقَاقٍ
 فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٣٧﴾

So if they believe in the same as you believe in, then they have been [rightly] guided; but if they turn away, they are only in dissension, and Allah will be sufficient for you against them. And He is the Hearing, the Knowing.

Unlike the People of the Book who refused to acknowledge the last Prophet (pbuh) simply because he was from a different tribe, the Muslims are being told to believe in all of God's prophets and respect them equally. The nation or race of the messenger should not be important because Allah can choose any of His servants as He pleases. It is the content of the message that should be focused upon, and in this regard, all the prophets of God have always propagated the same religion and the same message.

صَبَّغَهُ اللَّهُ وَمِنَ أَحْسَنِ مِرْكَاتٍ اللَّهُ صَبَّغَهُ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ ﴿١٣٨﴾

And say, "Our religion takes its color from Allah. And who can give a better color than Allah? And we are worshippers of Him."

قُلْ أَتَحَاجُّونَنَا فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ وَلِنَا أَعْمَلُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَلُكُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ
 مُخْلِصُونَ ﴿١٣٩﴾

Say, [O Muhammad], "Do you argue with us about Allah while He is our Lord and your Lord? For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. And we are sincere [in deed and intention] to Him."

أَمْ نَقُولُونَ إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطَ كَانُوا يَهُودًا
 أَوْ نَصَارَى قُلْ أَأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمِ اللَّهُ وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَتَمَ شَهَادَةً عِنْدَهُ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَمَا
 اللَّهُ بِغَفِيلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٠﴾

Or do you say that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants were Jews or Christians? Say, "Are you more knowing or is Allah?" And who is more unjust than one who conceals a testimony he has from Allah? And Allah is not unaware of what you do.

تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُمْ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ



That is a nation which has passed on. It will have [the consequence of] what it earned, and you will have what you have earned. And you will not be asked about what they used to do.

As a concluding message, Allah gives a beautiful explanation of religion explaining how it differs from spirituality. In simple terms, spirituality is defined as the individual connection that a person has with God. Therefore, in the absence of religion, spirituality undermines the role of rituals and laws. Each individual can have his own unique relationship with God and he is not bound by religious laws or specific rituals. Even if he does not pray 5 times a day or fast during Ramadan, he can still be considered spiritually connected to God as long as God is in his heart.⁸⁸

The problem with this is that in the absence of religion, spirituality leads people to worship their desires instead of Allah. By giving people the freedom to choose their behaviour and the rituals and laws they wish to follow, ultimately each person is just worshipping himself. He conjures up his own personal idea of God, believes those to be true, and assumes that he has connected with the Creator, when in fact, he has only connected with his desires.

In contrast, religion focuses on spirituality that is attained only when the Divinely guided laws, rules and rituals are all fulfilled with true intent and meaning. In this way, the individual develops a connection with The Almighty by worshipping Him as He wishes to be worshipped. Therefore, when spirituality is considered separate and distinct from religion, it will cause people to worship their desires, not God. It is only when spirituality is considered a subset of religion, that people can learn to truly worship and connect with The Almighty. For example, in the three stages of Islam, Iman and Ihsan, previously mentioned, the first stage involves entering the religion by following the rituals and practices as prescribed in the five pillars of Islam. The second stage involves conviction and struggle to seek the pleasure of God by adhering to His laws and performing good deeds. These two stages of religion combined help a person achieve true spirituality which culminates at Ihsan. After all, it is only through prayers, fasting, zakat and jihad that a person can control his desires, tame his nafs and learn to strengthen his rooh, thereby worshipping Allah instead of his desires.

⁸⁸ Cooper, D. (2015). 'I'm spiritual not religious.' Tennessee: Pathway Press.

In this context, verse 138 identifies a Muslim as one who takes on the ‘colour of Allah’ which means completely submitting to the will, desire and preference of his Lord. He does not wish to appease society, his desires, a group of people or a particular person. From head to toe, inside and outside, he is just one colour — the colour of God. His words, actions, thoughts, ambitions, goals and vision are all focused on attaining the pleasure of Allah, and that is why a person like this can have ultimate peace in his life. Instead of worshipping multiple masters, he worships only One. It is his complete submission to One God that enables him to enter Islam and eventually gain a strong spiritual connection with his Lord.

Moreover, verse 140 explains that religion does not belong to a certain group. It only belongs to Allah and so it is His colour that should be taken. Bani Israel, or any other nation does not have a reserved right to God’s message or any special status in God’s eyes. It is not Bani Israel or any other group that should be followed. Only those who submit their will to Allah and take on His colour by becoming Muslim, will gain success in the afterlife. In this regard, Abraham, Ismail, Isaac and Yaquub were all Muslims because of their submission to God. They all had adopted the colour of Allah. Had they been Jews or Christians, they would have mentioned it unequivocally in their Books.

In addition, there is also a brilliant argument made in this verse regarding Ismail (a.s). If the Jews claim that only Jews will go to heaven, and they believe that Ibrahim was also a Jew, then being Ibrahim’s son, Ismail should be a Jew too. But then in that case, Bani Ismail should also be considered as Jews. So, why then does Bani Israel consider themselves as superior to Bani Ismail? Similarly, if Christians claim that only Christians will go to heaven and Ibrahim (as) was a Christian, even though he came before Eesa (as), then by default, doesn’t that make Ismail a Christian too? In fact, while discussing the concept of ummah, it is necessary to address another question. If all the nations in the past were given a certain period of time to follow their messengers, after which the final punishment would descend saving the believers and destroying the disbelievers, why is this pattern not seen in the case of Bani Israel?

Many prophets were sent to the Children of Israel with some being denied and others being killed, yet the nation still exists. Being selected as an ummah, it was Bani Israel’s responsibility to spread the message of God to the rest of the world. They received a multitude of prophets and Books and were supposed to propagate the message of the Creator to mankind but instead they distorted the message itself. Despite these transgression and violations, Allah kept sending them prophets until the arrival

of Prophet Eesa (a.s) when the ummah split with intense animosity between the two groups — Jews and Christians. So why hasn't Allah sent the azaab and destroyed the ummah?

Since Bani Israel had an added responsibility of being leaders, spreading the message and implementing an extensive Shariah comprising of 613 laws, one possible explanation is that in order to compensate for the extra responsibility placed on them, Allah gave them an extra benefit, granting them respite for a longer period of time. Hence, the doors of repentance are still open and they can still embrace the truth by following Muhammad (pbuh).

Therefore, Allah concludes his argument in verse 141 by repeating His message in verse 134 that no individual should think that he can benefit from the deeds of his righteous ancestors. That is a nation that has passed away, it will have the consequence of what it earned and you will have the consequence of what you earned. Ibrahim, Isaac, Ismail and Yaqub implemented tauheed and propagated the truth. If they do intercede on the Day of Judgment, they will reiterate their message of Islam. They never mentioned their descendants as being blessed, chosen or designated for Jannah. The Jews and Christians are being told to reflect again upon their behaviour. If their prophets never guaranteed them Jannah nor did they highlight the significance of a scared lineage, then why do they believe that they are a chosen nation destined for paradise? Are they following their prophets or are they being fooled by their religious elders who have distorted the message?

This is a moment for Muslims to reflect as well. Are we following the message of Muhammad (pbuh) or are we following a version of Islam presented to us by our elders that may or may not be true? Have we conducted our research? We spend years studying at college and university, but do we dedicate any time to the study of Allah's Book? If we are not actually following the message of Ibrahim (as) and Muhammad (pbuh), then we too cannot benefit by the deeds of our righteous ancestors. In this regard, a final question that needs to be addressed is that if Allah was going to send a prophet to the Arabs as acceptance of Ibrahim's dua, why did that messenger have to be the last prophet sent to mankind?

As a result of Bani Israel's continuous transgression, leadership was transferred to the descendants of Ibrahim's second child, Bani Ismail. Being designated as the new ummah, Bani Ismail had to safeguard the message, protect it from distortions, use it to clarify the misconceptions created by Bani Israel and spread it to the rest of the world. If the prophet sent to Bani Ismail was not the final prophet, and Allah decided to send yet another prophet to Bani Israel, there would be uncertainty regarding

whether the ummah to be followed was the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh), the Ummah of Bani Israel, or perhaps both. Since there can only be one leader, if the Arabs considered themselves as leaders, while the Jews and Christians considered themselves leaders, there would be chaos in the world. It would be uncertain who should be followed. By sending the seal of the prophets to Bani Ismail, the official status of the Israelites as being the ummah was relinquished permanently removing any doubt.

Moreover, by sending the last prophet to Bani Ismail who were settled in Mecca, it was now time to permanently cleanse the Kaaba of all gods and purify it once again so that it may become the center of worship for mankind. While Bani Israel was the ummah for over 2000 years, they failed to cleanse the Kaaba of idols because the Jews and Christians were never concerned with the Kaaba. As the Kaaba symbolized tauheed, the only way of cleansing it of idol worship permanently was to send the last prophet to Bani Ismail, the very group of people who were responsible for spreading idolatry in Mecca in the first place.

As a new ummah had been designated with the task of spreading the message of truth, a new covenant had to be signed. Since the previous covenant was taken from the Children of Israel, their relegation invalidated their covenant. A new covenant had to be signed with the new ummah explaining its task and responsibilities. But before this covenant could be signed, a problem had to be resolved. The Muslims were still following the qibla of the Jews, Jerusalem. In fact, the first constitution signed in Medina mentioned the ummah as comprising of both Jews and Muslims. So, how could a new covenant be signed with a new ummah that included the previous ummah in it as well? For the new covenant to be signed, Allah had to clearly define and separate the new ummah from the previous ummah removing any confusion or doubt regarding the leader that needs to be followed. This happened precisely when the qibla changed earmarking the followers of Muhammad (pbuh) as being the new ummah comprising only of the Muslims.

❁ سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَدَهُمْ عَن قِبَلِهِمُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا عَلَيْهَا قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ
وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٤٤﴾

The foolish among the people will say, "What has turned them away from their qiblah, which they used to face?" Say, "To Allah belongs the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path."

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ
 شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَيَّ
 عَقْبِيهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضَيِّعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ
 اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٤٣﴾

And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you. And We did not make the qiblah which you used to face except that We might make evident who would follow the Messenger from who would turn back on his heels. And indeed, it is difficult except for those whom Allah has guided. And never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith. Indeed Allah is, to the people, Kind and Merciful.

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ
 الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
 لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَفِيلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٤﴾

We have certainly seen the turning of your face, [O Muhammad], toward the heaven, and We will surely turn you to a qiblah with which you will be pleased. So turn your face toward al-Masjid al-haram. And wherever you [believers] are, turn your faces toward it [in prayer]. Indeed, those who have been given the Scripture well know that it is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do.

Initially, when the system of revelation started in Mecca, Allah ordered the Muslims to pray in the same direction as the Jews — Jerusalem. Even though the People of the Book refused to acknowledge the final Prophet (pbuh), the Muslims considered themselves as being brothers in faith with the Jews and Christians. As a result, the Arab polytheists did not perceive Muhammad (pbuh) as bringing a new religion. On the contrary, because the message and qibla were the same, they saw his message as a continuation of what was already present with the Jews. As mentioned previously, the Arabs held the Jews in high esteem because they believed that the Jews had always received many Books and prophets. Therefore, witnessing a man who was bringing the same message and following the same qiblah as the Jews convinced them in their hearts that he was the last prophet whom the Jews had prophesized. If the Prophet followed a different qiblah from the very start, it would have spread confusion and hardened the hearts of everyone. Allah needed to soften the hearts of the Jews, Arabs and Christians so that their hearts would testify to the truth because it is that testimony that will be questioned on the Day of Judgment.

Since the qibla remained Jerusalem even after the Muslims migrated to Medina, the Jews considered themselves to be superior because it appeared as if Muhammad (pbuh) was following them. Muslims revered the Israelite Prophets, respected the Torah, preached the same message of tauheed and even had the same qibla. However, 17 months after migration to Medina, Allah had given the Jews, Christians and polytheists several years to soften their hearts and testify. It was now time to reveal the true qiblah and earmark the arrival of a new ummah. Hence, the Muslims were ordered to pray in the direction of the Kaaba.⁸⁹

As evident in verse 144, the Prophet (pbuh) was perturbed when he would pray in the direction of Jerusalem while being in Medina because that would imply turning his back to Kaaba. He understood that the Kaaba represented the origin of the Abrahamic faith. It was a symbol of tauheed and it was the place of pilgrimage. Although Jerusalem also had its own significance, it could not be compared to the Kaaba. Therefore, the Prophet had already started to make dua that the truth be revealed and for this reason, Allah informs him that he will be turned towards a qibla that will give him satisfaction.

The change in the qibla was a sign that a new ummah was being established. Muhammad (pbuh) was not bringing the same religion as the People of the Book with minor alterations. Islam was an entirely new way of life which superseded Judaism and Christianity. The distortions made by the previous ummah had to be corrected. More importantly, since the message of Allah has always been consistent since the beginning of time, the qibla followed by all the messengers and prophets was always the Kaaba given that the Kaaba symbolizes tauheed. This is further explained in Surah Al-e-Imran. But then why did Allah instruct Bani Israel to face Jerusalem? Why were the previous ummah facing Masjid al –Aqsa?

The previous ummah altered the qibla to Solomon's temple in Jerusalem to pursue their own personal interest refusing to perform pilgrimage to a place that was occupied by Bani Ismail. Acknowledging the Kaaba as a qibla and place for pilgrimage would have raised the status of Bani Ismail equating them to Bani Israel, which the latter could not accept. As Muhammad (pbuh) was the final Prophet for mankind, it was important to eradicate all falsehood and innovation introduced by the previous ummah, ensuring that only the truth remains.

Furthermore, the timing of the qibla change was also significant. The battle of Badr was about to commence, and Allah knew that He was going to grant a decisive victory to the Muslims making the

⁸⁹ Irumbuzhi, M.M. (2010). 'The soul of the Quran: Volume 1.' Kerala: Straight path Quran Education, p.159

battle a day of furqan, where truth would become very distinct and clear from falsehood. If the qibla had not changed by then, a clear victory for the Muslims at Badr would also be seen as a victory for the Jews because both Muslims and Jews were seen as being a part of the same ummah. This would imply that following Muhammad (pbuh) was not necessary as both Islam and Judaism were acceptable in the eyes of Allah.

For example, when Allah protected the Kaaba from Abraha by sending a flock of birds, it was a miracle, but it was not considered a day of furqan because it did not remove all doubt regarding the path of truth. Hanifs believed that the One True God of Ibrahim had saved the Kaaba, while the polytheist Arabs, who had housed 360 idols in the Kaaba, believed that all their deities protected the House of God from being destroyed. Therefore, despite being a miracle witnessed by many, it was not furqan. Similarly, with regards to leadership, a miraculous victory at Badr would not remove all doubt if the qibla was the same for the Jews and Muslims. Changing the qibla prior to the battle of Badr is precisely what made Badr a day of furqan. The clear and decisive victory signaled that success was only in joining the new Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh), and Islam is the only religion acceptable to God.

With the change in qibla, the Jews increased their hostility and aggression towards the Muslims as the creation of a new ummah implied that Bani Israel had lost its status of leadership. Not only did they start to conspire against the Muslims but they also worked hard to raise doubt and confusion amongst the naïve believers. In retaliation, Muslims adopted a stricter stance towards Jews who transgressed their peace treaties as both were no longer considered brothers in faith.

One of the obvious means by which Jews aimed to spread confusion amongst the new ummah regarding the Prophet's legitimacy was by questioning the change of the qibla. If the qibla was supposed to be the Kaaba, then why was the Prophet first facing Jerusalem? If Muslims were facing the wrong qibla for such a long period of time, then doesn't that imply that all previous prayers were wasted? Was the Prophet merely following the Jews without knowing the actual qibla?

Allah answers all these queries by arguing that East and West all belong to Allah because He is always present everywhere all the time. He is aware of all the prayers that are made to Him regardless of the direction in which they are being made. Just because Muslims were previously facing Jerusalem does not invalidate those prayers because God does not live in the Kaaba. God is everywhere. The change in direction was only to signal the emergence of a new ummah, independent of the rest. An ummah

that would be justly balanced following a middle path and avoiding extremes. While the Jews adopted an orthopraxy approach, focusing entirely on rituals, and the Christians adopted an orthodoxy approach, focusing entirely on beliefs, Islam adopts a middle approach stressing on the importance of both beliefs and rituals. Therefore, the qibla change was not just a mere change in direction. It was the establishment of a new leader that would be responsible for spreading the truth and that would have to bear witness over mankind, just as Muhammad (pbuh) would bear witness over his people.

This highlights a very important feature of the Day of Judgment. Even though Allah will bear witness over all, He still ensures that there are people who will also testify against others so that every individual will know for certain that Allah's judgment has been fair. Even those destined for the hellfire will testify that sufficient evidence was presented against them making them deserving of the hellfire. For this reason, Muhammad (pbuh) will testify against all those who ignored his message during his lifetime. But after his demise, it is the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) that will testify against all of mankind. Representing the message of truth, they will provide evidence confirming that they did admonish the wrong doers and they did try to propagate the truth, but the disbelievers turned a deaf ear to their call. This is what it means to be an ummah. In fact, these verses encourage Muslims to reflect and ask themselves, that if this is what it means to be part of the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh), did they fulfill their role? Did they admonish and lead, or did they start following the disbelievers in fear of society?

Moreover, as a test of blind faith in Allah and His Messenger, the command for changing the qibla from Jerusalem to Kaaba was given to the Prophet (p.b.u.h) in the middle of the congregational prayer. With Muslims following the Prophet (pbuh) and initially facing Jerusalem, the change was a momentous occasion testing to see how many Muslims would blindly follow the Prophet, turning to face the Kaaba in the middle of the prayer, without doubting their leader. As explained previously, the Israelites incurred the wrath of Allah because they refused to obey their prophets. For the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) to thrive, the Muslims cannot make the same mistake. They need to understand that the Prophet's actions always abide by the command of Allah. An ummah that refuses to obey its messenger can never succeed. This was the first lesson being taught to them on the day that their status was raised to an ummah that was separate and distinct from the People of the Book. However, given that no prior hint was given suggesting that the qibla would change, how is it that every believer changed his qibla immediately without even appearing confused?

Realizing the magnitude of this test, Allah's incredible mercy can be seen in verse 143 where He mentions that He was not going to let the Muslims lose their faith. This implies that Allah would help boost the iman of the believers so that they could overcome doubt and follow the Prophet (pbuh) instantly as soon as the qibla changed, explaining how so many Muslims immediately turned around in the middle of the prayer without even appearing confused. Therefore, the qibla change was not just a lesson about trusting the Prophet (pbuh), but it was also a practical demonstration of how The Almighty will intervene and help His righteous slaves follow His commands so that they remain firm on the path of Islam.

وَلَيْنَ آتَيْتَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ بِكُلِّ آيَةٍ مَا تَبِعُوا قِبْلَتَكَ وَمَا أَنْتَ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَتَهُمْ
 وَمَا بَعْضُهُمْ بِتَابِعٍ قِبْلَةَ بَعْضٍ وَلَيْنَ آتَيْتَهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ
 مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِنَّكَ إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٤٥﴾

And if you brought to those who were given the Scripture every sign, they would not follow your qiblah. nor will you be a follower of their qiblah. nor would they be followers of one another's qiblah. So if you were to follow their desires after what has come to you of knowledge, indeed, you would then be among the wrongdoers.

الَّذِينَ آتَيْنَاهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يَعْرِفُونَهُ كَمَا يَعْرِفُونَ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّ فَرِيقًا مِنْهُمْ لَيَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ
 وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].

الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿١٤٧﴾

The truth is from your Lord, so never be among the doubters.

وَلِكُلِّ وُجْهٍ هُوَ مُوَلِّيًا فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ أَيْنَ مَا تَكُونُوا يَأْتِ بِكُمْ اللَّهُ جَمِيعًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٤٨﴾

For each [religious following] is a direction toward which it faces. So race to [all that is] good. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you forth [for judgment] all together. Indeed, Allah is over all things competent.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِنَّهُ لِلْحَقِّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَمَا
 اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٤٩﴾

So from wherever you go out [for prayer, O Muhammad] turn your face toward al- Masjid al-haram, and indeed, it is the truth from your Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what you do.

With the change in the qibla, the believers were being cautioned. As explained in verses 144 and 146, the People of the Book recognized the Kaaba as being the true qibla just as they recognized their own sons. They had no doubt. The religious elders knew that the qibla they faced was only the result of personal innovation. It was not a command from God. Jews were facing the direction of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem knowing that there was no evidence in the Hebrew Bible that Moses, Ibrahim, Isaac or Israel prayed in this direction, especially since Solomon's temple did not exist at that time. Christians faced eastward knowing that this practice only started in the second century after Jesus.⁹⁰ There was no evidence in the Bible that Jesus prayed in the direction of the rising sun. The learned among the Jews and Christians understood that the Muslims were on the right path, and the change in qibla only further confirmed that Muhammad (pbuh) was truly the Prophet of God, but they concealed the truth. Therefore, believers should not be easily deluded by the arguments of the Jews against the changing of the qibla. If the Jews and Christians were not accepting the new qibla, it was not because they did not recognize it. Their denial simply stemmed from arrogance and refusal to follow any other tribe. In fact, the Jews and Christians did not even follow each other's qibla despite both being from Bani Israel. Therefore, Muslims should understand that Muhammad (pbuh) is the truth and there can be no room for doubt as mentioned clearly in verse 147.

With the new ummah having been identified, Muslims are now being reminded that success lies in both faith and good deeds. Islam is about struggling towards one goal - tauheed. Anyone who wishes to pursue his own personal desires after the truth has become evident will be from among the wrongdoers. So as mentioned in verse 148, with the truth being revealed and with the arrival of the last Messenger, everyone should strive as one ummah towards seeking the pleasure of Allah by embracing Islam and racing towards all good. There should be unity, a common vision and a sense of brotherhood among all believers, facing the same direction in worship and obeying their Prophet

⁹⁰ Lang, U.M. (2007). 'Ever directed towards the Lord'. London: T&T Clark, p.93

(pbuh). They need to adopt the colour of Allah. Those who choose to race towards dunya or their own personal version of Islam cannot escape judgment on the Final Day.

With the new ummah being established and the basic criteria being explained, it was now time for the followers of Muhammad (pbuh) to sign a new covenant with Allah. Hereafter, the Muslims will be assigned the status of being leaders for mankind, the Messenger's messengers, with the responsibility of conveying the truth.

وَمِنْ حَيْثُ خَرَجْتَ فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ۚ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا
 وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ ۚ لِئَلَّا يَكُونَ لِلنَّاسِ عَلَيْكُمْ حُجَّةٌ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ فَلَا
 تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِي ۚ وَلِأَتِمَّ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٠﴾

And from wherever you go out [for prayer], turn your face toward al-Masjid al-haram. And wherever you [believers] may be, turn your faces toward it in order that the people will not have any argument against you, except for those of them who commit wrong; so fear them not but fear Me. And [it is] so I may complete My favor upon you and that you may be guided.

As mentioned in verse 150, the qibla had to change to the Kaaba so that the truth could be revealed, and so that the Jews could not have any argument against Muhammad (pbuh). Since the Rabbis knew that the true qibla followed by all their prophets was always Kaaba, they could have used this information to question the legitimacy of Muhammad (pbuh). After all, if the Israelite prophets were facing the Kaaba because the Kaaba is the true qibla, then why was Muhammad (pbuh) facing Jerusalem? Was he just copying the Jews while being oblivious of the truth? Naturally, if the Rabbis made this argument and subsequently the qibla changed to the Kaaba, people would have been skeptical of the Prophet (pbuh). They would have argued that he has now changed the qibla because he has just been informed by the Rabbis that the true qibla was always Kaaba. So, to ensure that no one had any argument against him, Allah changed the qibla in time.

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِنْكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ
 وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٥١﴾

Just as We have sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses and purifying you and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know.

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكَرْتُكُمْ وَأَشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

O you who have believed, seek help through patience and prayer. Indeed, Allah is with the patient.

The covenant being signed with the new Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) is identical to the covenant signed with the previous ummah illustrating that the ummah might have changed, but Allah's methodology is exactly the same. In verses 40-45, Allah was instructing the Children of Israel to remember His favours upon them, accept the truth instead of denying it or making changes to God's message, fear only Him and fulfill the covenant binding upon them after which Allah will fulfill the covenant binding upon Him. They had to believe in what Allah had sent down in terms of the Quran and the final Prophet (pbuh) who was bringing a message that was a confirmation of the Torah and Bible. They were also instructed to soften their hearts by exercising humility and empathy through prayer and charity, showing patience during hard times and striving to perform good deeds. The same pattern can be seen in verses 150- 153 where the Muslims are being told to fear no one but Allah and do as commanded so that Allah can complete His favours upon them. They are being told to fully enter the fold of Islam by believing in the Quran and the final Prophet (pbuh), praying and showing patience during hard times. If they remember Allah by fulfilling the covenant that is binding upon them, Allah too will remember them by fulfilling the covenant that is binding upon Him. They should not commit kufr by denying God's commands or making alterations to it. However, unlike the previous covenant, Allah now mentions an additional criterion. Muslims need to be grateful. Ingratitude was the main reason for the downfall of the previous ummah. They were told multiple times to be grateful to Allah for His favours, but they continued complaining and demanding more.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ ﴿١٥٤﴾

And do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, "They are dead." Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not.

This verse refers to fighting in the way of Islam. The specific mention of jihad and battle in the cause of Allah stands out as a slight difference between the covenant signed by the previous ummah and the covenant signed by the new ummah. So, why the difference? The previous ummah was able to enter the promised land by engaging in one battle. After that, the land was promised to them provided they did not transgress. In the case of the Muslims, they did not enter Medina through battle. Medina was prepared for them. But, after entering, they had to fight for years to defend their land from the enemy surrounding them and to spread Islam in the whole of Arabia. Since battle in the cause of Islam was a prominent feature for this new ummah, it had to be mentioned in the covenant as an added command binding upon the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) — be prepared to fight in the cause of Islam. Those who are killed in the way of Allah are not dead. Rather, they are alive, enjoying their sustenance in the heavens.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ
الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿١٥٥﴾

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient,

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return."

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.

The main problem with the Israelites was their passion for power, status and worldly luxuries. This made them forget the commands of God. Given that their ancestors had transgressed for centuries, they believed that they could also transgress and still gain salvation owing to their special status as being the chosen nation. Instead of worshipping Allah, they started to worship their desires. Yet, God kept sending them messengers and Books, showering His mercy upon them. Therefore, as a lesson

to the new ummah, Allah explains that success depends on the continual remembrance of Allah that will inculcate humility and patience.

Days of success and victory should humble the believers, while days of distress and anguish should make them seek Allah's help with patience and prayer. Every believer should be prepared to be tested in this life. Embracing Islam does not grant salvation until the individual proves his level of iman and his willingness to strive in the cause of Allah. Hardship will come in different forms including a loss of lives, hunger and loss of sustenance, but the test is to not let these difficulties harden the heart. On the contrary, the believer should remain firm on the path of Islam having complete trust in Allah's plan, never losing hope. He should understand that regardless of how much he loses in this life, he was never placed on earth with the intention of amassing wealth, gaining comfort or becoming emotionally dependent on people, constantly seeking their approval or validation. His mission was always to be a khalifah and he will have to return to Allah so that his performance on earth can be assessed. As mentioned in verses 156-157, it is the strong conviction and patience of the humble servant during times of hardship that will qualify him to be a recipient of Allah's special mercy implying that when he learns to implement tauheed, he will be granted honor, respect, barakah and sustenance. Hence, the true believer will have no fear or grief. He will not grieve over his losses in the past and he will not fear what is destined for him in the future.

The difference between the true believer and the hypocrite becomes evident in the face of hardship. The true believer will immediately try and find solutions to overcome the obstacles while remaining firm in his belief and having complete trust in God's plan. In contrast, the hypocrite will fall into despair, give up hope and question God's plan. This stark contrast in behavior is explained beautifully in the following Hadith which compares the true believer to a fresh plant that can withstand storms and strong winds because of its flexibility. The hypocrite is analogous to a firm tree that appears strong but is easily uprooted in a storm because of its rigidity:

*The Prophet (p.b.u.h) said, "The example of a believer is that of a fresh tender plant, which the wind bends sometimes and some other time it makes it straight. And the example of a hypocrite is that of a pine tree which keeps straight till once it is uprooted suddenly."*⁹¹

The tree is straight, strong and appears firm. So, naturally it is believed that it can withstand anything. But, in reality, it can only withstand minor winds. A storm can uproot it instantly because it is rigid.

⁹¹ Sahih Muslim, 2809

Similarly, a hypocrite appears strong and firm on the path of Islam. Small tests will not affect his iman. But when he faces a calamity or severe hardship, he abandons Islam and falls into despair because being rigid, he cannot accept any outcome other than the outcome he desired. What appeared strong enough to withstand anything was in fact quite weak.

In contrast, the believer is like a plant. While it appears to be weaker than a tree, its flexibility grants it more strength. During a storm, the plant will bend left and right, eventually standing straight again once the storm subsides, but it will not be uprooted. Similarly, the believer will despair, grieve and feel sad when severely tested, just as a plant bends left and right, but he will never give up on Allah. Being flexible grants him tawakal, implying that he will accept whatever Allah has destined for him and will always have hope that Allah's mercy will come. Therefore, just as the plant stands straight again once the storm subsides, the believer stands firm once again on the path of Islam, once Allah's mercy arrives.

﴿إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِن شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا وَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾
 ﴿١٥٨﴾

Indeed, as-safa and al-Marwah are among the symbols of Allah. So whoever makes Hajj to the House or performs 'umrah - there is no blame upon him for walking between them. And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, Allah is appreciative and Knowing.

With the covenant being signed, explaining the need to enter the fold of Islam, practice rituals to soften the heart, be prepared for jihad and be patient during hard times, Allah now discusses the Shariah — laws and rules upon which the new ummah will be built. Initially, from verses 159 to 209, Allah explains the basic rules that will form the foundation of the Shariah. These basic fundamentals are very similar to the 10 commandments, the first set of rules that were given to Bani Israel when they were emancipated and formed an ummah for the first time. For example, the first three rules of the 10 commandments pertain to Tauheed ar-Ruboobeeyah, Tauheed al-Asma was-Siffat and Tauheed Ibadah. Tauheed ar-Ruboobeeyah, means unity in Allah's Lordship. He is the Sustainer, Provider, Protector, Maintainer, Owner and Controller of the entire Dominion⁹². He owns and controls all tangible and intangible assets implying that all things can only happen with the will of Allah. This can be seen in the first commandment — You Shall have no other gods before Me.

⁹² Philips, A.A.B. (2006). 'Fundamentals of Tawheed.' Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, p.1

Tauheed al-Ebaadah states that all acts of worship can only be exclusively reserved for Allah. Nothing else can share partnership with The Almighty. This is the second commandment — You shall not make idols. Idols imply stone idols or anything that man might be obsessing over in dunya. Tauheed al-Asma was-Siffat implies that all the Divine attributes of Allah only apply to Him and none can be attributed to anyone else. This is the third commandment — You shall not misuse the Lord's name. The same pattern can be seen in this new Shariah with the first few commands pertaining to the three types of tauheed. Firstly, idols cannot be worshipped. All prayers and acts of worship should only be reserved for The Almighty — Tauheed al-Ebaadah. With the changing of the Qibla towards Kaaba and the establishment of a new Muslim ummah in Medina, questions arose regarding the rituals that were to be performed during umrah given that the Kaaba was still infiltrated with idols. Gods such as Isaf were stationed on the Saffa hill while Nailah was on Marva hill raising doubts among the Muslims regarding which rituals to perform and which to avoid. During the period of ignorance people used to circumambulate between both hills while touching or kissing the two gods. After embracing Islam, some perceived the tawaf of the two hills as a continuation of the period of ignorance which should be avoided.⁹³ To clarify this misconception, Allah explains in verse 158 that the tawaf of these two hills is symbolic of an act performed by Ibrahīm (a.s) and is therefore part of the rituals of Hajj or umrah. The idols on the hills can be ignored for now, but the ritual cannot be abolished or temporarily abandoned.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَهْدَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا بَيَّنَّاهُ لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ
أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّعِينُونَ ﴿١٥٨﴾

Indeed, those who conceal what We sent down of clear proofs and guidance after We made it clear for the people in the Scripture - those are cursed by Allah and cursed by those who curse,

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَأَصْلَحُوا وَبَيَّنُّوا فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنَا التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿١٦٠﴾

Except for those who repent and correct themselves and make evident [what they concealed]. Those - I will accept their repentance, and I am the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.

⁹³ Abdul-Rehman, M. (2009). 'The Quran with Tafsir Ibn Kathir: Juz 2.' London: MSA Publication

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارًا أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمُ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ



Indeed, those who disbelieve and die while they are disbelievers - upon them will be the curse of Allah and of the angels and the people, all together,

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ

Abiding eternally therein. The punishment will not be lightened for them, nor will they be reprieved.

وَاللَّهُمَّ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

And your god is one God. There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.

With the final Prophet (pbuh) having arrived, if the Jews and Christians acknowledge the truth, repent and reveal what they were concealing, Allah is the All-Merciful. But, if they continue behaving like their ancestors and deny the truth, they will experience the wrath of God. In that respect, the Muslims were now being admonished that being the recipient of the Quran, they should not make the same mistake as Bani Israel, otherwise they would face a similar fate. It is the responsibility of the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) to understand Islam and spread the truth to all as a means of raising awareness. Believers should not alter the verses or conceal information in their desire to acquire power by pleasing the non-believers. In doing so, they will incur the curse of Allah, angels and mankind unless they repent and make amends.

The fact that Allah is the One who knows what is being concealed and revealed, He is strict in punishment and accepts repentance, and He is Ar-Rahman and Ar-Raheem is a testimony that there is no other deity that can share the same qualities as God Almighty. All the beautiful attributes only belong to Him — a testimony of Tauheed al-Asma was-siffat. Interestingly, Allah focuses on His attributes of punishing but also being merciful. A reminder to the ummah to live between fear and hope. Fear His punishment but have hope of His mercy.

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

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَشَدُّ
حُبًّا لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ رَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِذْ يُرُونَ الْعَذَابَ أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ
الْعَذَابِ ﴿١٦٥﴾

And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they [should] love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah. And if only they who have wronged would consider [that] when they see the punishment, [they will be certain] that all power belongs to Allah and that Allah is severe in punishment.

Although Allah has sent Books, the rooh and the intellect that has been gifted to mankind are sufficient for every individual to recognize his Master once he starts observing the signs around him. Allah being the Creator and sustainer of all is a testament to Tauheed ar-Ruboobiya. Even in the absence of Books, this truth can be deduced given that the fitrah allures man towards tauheed, and the intellect convinces him of a hidden reality. The polytheist Arabs insisted that signs and miracles be shown to them as proof that there was only one God and Muhammad (pbuh) was His messenger. Their argument was itself baseless because Allah had already provided ample signs that existed all around them. The only problem was that they refused to ponder and reflect.

The creation of the heavens and earth cannot be a coincidence particularly with everything working in such an orderly fashion. Had many gods existed, nature would operate in a haphazard manner. The alteration of the night and day are also signs because it is evidence of how the sun follows the command of its Lord by rising and setting every day so that mankind can have night to rest and day to earn sustenance. The sailing of the ships on the ocean is a momentous sign because Allah has made something as powerful as the ocean subservient to man. The ocean is characterized as being tranquil

and peaceful, allowing ships to sail seeking sustenance. If the ocean was violent and aggressive, not only would man be unable to traverse across it, but all land would be enveloped by the sea terminating the existence of mankind. Even rainfall is a sign from God. The rain that descends gives life to a dead earth in the same way that the dead will be given life on the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, from a spiritual perspective, rain that comes from the sky is analogous to revelation that descends from the heavens, giving life to every soul that is spiritually dead and seeks guidance. The variety of creatures that exist in the world, many of which still have not been discovered, are further examples of Allah's innumerable signs. Each one differs in terms of size and color, yet they all function perfectly giving balance to nature.

Since Allah is the Creator, all worship has to be reserved only for Him — Tauheed al-Ebaadah. Any ritual or good deed performed should only be done with the intention of attaining His pleasure. Unfortunately, man still worships deities, even though the gods he creates with his own hands have not created anything nor have they the power to protect or harm others. Surprisingly, people continue to devote themselves to the worship of idols, loving them as they should love the Creator. Idols created do not just refer to stone idols but also the multiple things that man becomes obsessed with in dunya and starts chasing. He starts to believe that these things can protect him, provide for him and just be enough for him, when in reality, such things have no power to harm or protect.

In contrast, Allah mentions that believers can have a love for this world too. Muslims are not being told to hate dunya or anything materialistic. They are being told to make sure that their love for Allah is stronger than their love for anything or anyone else so that it is only Allah and His pleasure that is being worshipped.

إِذْ تَبَرَّأَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا وَرَأَوْا الْعَذَابَ وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمُ الْأَسْبَابُ



When those who have been followed disassociate themselves from those who followed them, and they all see the punishment, and cut off from them the ties of relationship

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوا لَوْ أَنَّا كَرِهْنَا لَمَا كَرِهُوا وَمَا كَرِهُوا لَنَا كَذَلِكَ يُرِيهِمُ اللَّهُ

أَعْمَالَهُمْ حَسَرَاتٍ عَلَيْهِمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِخَارِجِينَ مِنَ النَّارِ



Those who followed will say, "If only we had another turn [at worldly life] so we could disassociate ourselves from them as they have disassociated themselves from us." Thus will Allah show them their deeds as regrets upon them. And they are never to emerge from the Fire.

The spiritual leaders who create such gods and fool mankind are revered in society because of their association with the deities. They encourage mankind to follow them and continue propagating conjectures to misguide people so as to increase their power and authority. However, on the Day of Judgment, when all of mankind witness the Hellfire, the spiritual leaders will disassociate themselves from their followers. They will deny even knowing them while the followers will be hoping that their leaders can save them. As explained in verse 166, leaders and followers will reproach each other hoping to save themselves, and both will be unsuccessful. The leaders strove to distract and fool mankind, while their followers refused to use the intellect that God had gifted them and ignored the Prophets, allowing themselves to be easily fooled.

Moreover, the verse is also applicable for those who start to follow and worship others without their consent. For example, Prophet Eesa (a.s) will disassociate himself from the Christians who worshipped him as God. Similarly, many pious believers or scholars who lived in the past will refuse to acknowledge those who started worshipping them in later times. In such situations, only the followers will face the punishment of the Hellfire for attributing false statements to the Prophets, saints or scholars. On that day the losers will wish for a second chance to return to the world so that they may strictly follow the religion of God, but it will be too late.

يَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ كُلُّوْا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ
عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿١٦٨﴾

O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمَرُكُمْ بِالسُّوْءِ وَالْفَحْشَاءِ وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا نَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾

He only orders you to evil and immorality and to say about Allah what you do not know.

When Adam (as) and his wife were permitted to be in the gardens of paradise, they were told to eat and enjoy everything in the garden with the exception of one tree that was designated as being haram. While being in the garden, they would never go hungry or be naked.⁹⁴ They were also warned that Satan was their enemy who would try to get them out of the garden, implying that either they would face hunger or they would lose their clothing. To achieve his aim, Iblis lied about Allah claiming that God did not want them to approach the haram tree because He did not want them to become angels or immortals living in paradise forever.⁹⁵ The consequence of their negligence was that both Adam and his wife lost their clothing, and it was this indecency that caused them to be removed from the state of felicity that they had enjoyed in the garden.

In the same manner, Bani Adam is being told to eat and drink all that is available on earth which is labelled as halal, pure, good and permissible. They should abstain from going near haram and should understand that Satan is a clear enemy to them. He conjures up false hopes and ideas about God, encouraging them to say things about Allah that are not true. Iblis wishes for mankind to commit indecent deeds such as adultery and fornication, causing them to move away from the path of Islam while believing that they are rightly guided. Similarly, the ten commandments also mention the need to abstain from immoral, indecent acts such as zina. Hence, Allah warns all of mankind to follow guidance, stay away from haram, reflect on His signs and to not follow the footsteps of Satan. But, what does it mean to not follow Satan's footsteps?

وَإِذْ أَقِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْلَوْكَاتِ
ءَابَاءَهُمْ لَا يَعْقلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾

And when it is said to them, "Follow what Allah has revealed," they say, "Rather, we will follow that which we found our fathers doing." Even though their fathers understood nothing, nor were they guided?

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً وَنِدَاءً صُمُّ بِكُمْ عُمَى
فَهُمْ لَا يَعْقلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾

The example of those who disbelieve is like that of one who shouts at what hears nothing but calls and cries cattle or sheep - deaf, dumb and blind, so they do not understand.

⁹⁴ See Quran (20:118)

⁹⁵ See Quran (7:21)

Iblis was punished and removed from the heavens because he committed shirk by worshipping his desires. He agreed to follow certain commands of Allah while refuting others, such as bowing down to Adam, simply because he believed that he knew better than God. Therefore, to follow his footsteps implies following religion only when it is suitable. This is a violation of tauheed because such an individual is actually worshipping his desires while believing that he is worshipping God.

The polytheist Arabs are an example of those who had been deceived by Satan and followed his footsteps. They blindly followed their forefathers by worshipping idols that had been created by hand. The Arabs acknowledged Allah as the Master and Creator of all and worshipped Him. However, just like Iblis, they committed shirk. By pursuing their own desires, they decided to worship a myriad of other gods, despite not having any Scripture or messenger to prove the validity of the idols. Giving such people guidance was futile because they acknowledged the truth in their hearts, but fervently chose to deny it and strove against the truth. As mentioned in verse 7, such people ultimately have their fate sealed by Allah so that they will not understand the truth becoming deaf, mute and blind.

However, this does not imply that it is futile to give guidance to all polytheists. Verse 171 only applies to a certain group of idol worshippers who spend years testifying to the truth, but refuse to embrace Islam owing to their arrogance and insolence. Moreover, they strive to extinguish the light of Islam by misguiding others from the truth. As aforementioned, it is not possible to ascertain who has reached the ultimate stage of becoming deaf, mute and blind. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every believer to continue admonishing others in the hope that they will repent and mend their ways, instead of judging them.

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا كُلُوْا مِمَّنْ طَيَّبْتُمْ مَا رَزَقْنٰكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوْا لِلّٰهِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ اِيَّاهُ
تَعْبُدُوْنَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

O you who have believed, eat from the good things which We have provided for you and be grateful to Allah if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.

اِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ الْمَيْتَةَ وَالْدَّمَ وَلَحْمَ الْخِنْزِيْرِ وَمَا اَهْلَ بِهِ لِغَيْرِ اللّٰهِ فَمَنْ
اَضْطَرَّ غَيْرِ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ فَلَا اِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ ﴿١٧٣﴾

He has only forbidden to you dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which has been dedicated to other than Allah. But whoever is forced [by necessity], neither desiring [it] nor transgressing [its limit], there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَيَشْتَرُونَ بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَٰئِكَ
مَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ إِلَّا النَّارَ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ
وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٤﴾

Indeed, they who conceal what Allah has sent down of the Book and exchange it for a small price - those consume not into their bellies except the Fire. And Allah will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them. And they will have a painful punishment.

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الضَّلَالََةَ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَالْعَذَابَ بِالْمَغْفِرَةِ فَمَا أَصْبَرَهُمْ
عَلَى النَّارِ ﴿١٧٥﴾

Those are the ones who have exchanged guidance for error and forgiveness for punishment. How patient they are in pursuit of the Fire!

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْكِتَابِ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ
﴿١٧٦﴾

That is because Allah has sent down the Book in truth. And indeed, those who differ over the Book are in extreme dissension.

Except in dire straits without willingly transgressing the commands of Allah, Muslims are forbidden from eating dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, or meat on which any other name has been pronounced besides Allah. Pronouncing Allah's name before sacrificing an animal is compulsory as a means of showing gratitude to God for His blessings to mankind.

A common debate among Muslims is whether or not pronouncing Allah's name at the time of sacrifice is necessary. Some argue that the verse does not state that Allah's name has to be pronounced. It simply states that any other name should not be mentioned. Therefore, they believe that even if no name has been pronounced at the time of sacrifice, the meat is permissible to eat. This line of reasoning can easily be refuted through careful analysis of the words used in the verse. Allah mentions that meat on which the name of any other besides Allah has been mentioned at the time of slaughter is forbidden. This implies that Allah's name being mentioned is a precondition. Not saying

Allah's name, or saying other names in addition to Allah at the time of sacrifice make the meat of such an animal forbidden.

This reveals a stark contrast with both the Jews and the Christians. Although Jews pronounce the name of God on the meat they sacrifice as ordered in their religion, there were certain food products forbidden to the Israelites in the past, which Allah subsequently revoked with the arrival of the final Prophet (pbuh). At the same time, certain food items were always permissible, but Israelites made it haram for themselves without any command from God, such as the meat of camel.⁹⁶ In comparison, some Christians believe that consuming the flesh of swine is permissible because of the teachings of the Apostle Paul, even though the Old Testament states it is haram to eat and touch the carcass of the pig.⁹⁷ Paul argued that all food was clean, thereby making the flesh of pig permissible.

As a response to all these innovations, Allah states in verse 174 that those who conceal the truth in their revelations, swallow nothing but the fire. Now that the truth has been revealed in the form of the Quran and all innovations have been exposed, those among the People of the Book who continue to follow their desires will not be able to present any excuse to The Almighty on the Day of Judgment. Evident from the verses, every time Allah mentions an injunction for the new ummah, He takes a moment to warn the previous ummah once again. For instance, after discussing each type of tauheed, Allah gives a warning to those who know the truth and conceal it, blindly following others who will not be able to help them on the Day of Judgment. Similarly, after discussing food that is halal, again a warning is being given to the previous ummah to acknowledge the truth and accept Islam.

﴿لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ
الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّنَ وَءَاتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ
وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَأَبْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَى
الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُؤْتُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ
الْبَأْسِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ﴾

Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah , the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the Prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah; [those who] fulfil their promise when they promise; and [those who] are

⁹⁶ See Quran (3:93)

⁹⁷ Leviticus 11:27

patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous.

Being a justly balanced ummah, it was necessary to include a definition of righteousness in the covenant. Unlike the Jews who restricted righteousness to rituals and facing Jerusalem when praying, while the Christians restricted righteousness to accepting Christ as the son of God, Muslims are being reminded that righteousness is not about direction or acceptance of any Prophet. Rather, it is about both Haqooq Allah and Haqooq ul Ibad. In Islam, the qiblah is just a direction. It does not mean that every prayer made while facing the qiblah will be accepted and that the Muslim is righteous just because he is praying in the direction of the Kaaba. On the contrary, righteousness is a far more complex term that incorporates a believer's intention, belief and deeds. There must be a firm belief in Allah, the angels, His Books, Messengers and the last day. The believer must strive to do good deeds, spending on kin, orphans, beggars, travelers and the impoverished, as well as spending to free slaves or those under the burden of debt only with the intention of earning Allah's pleasure. It is also important to not only worship Allah as He has prescribed but to also fulfill contracts and promises made with others and look after the needs of others, in addition to the contract made with Allah. In fact, the significance of Haqooq ul ibad (respecting the rights of others) can also be seen in the ten commandments that mention the need to spend money instead of hoarding it, abstain from stealing and be honest and truthful in all dealings. Righteousness also depends on how the believer behaves, particularly when afflicted with a calamity. It implies being firm and patient during times of hardship, while having trust in Allah's plan and removing all fears and doubts that might cause panic.

It is now easy to appreciate this verse, ayat – ul – birr, being introduced after a discussion about tauheed and consuming halal. How can the Christians assume that they are righteous simply because they believe in Jesus while they are busy committing shirk and consuming food products that even Jesus had delineated as haram? How can the Jews believe that they are righteous simply because they face Jerusalem while they are busy distorting God's Books, concealing part of God's message and practicing bidah by forbidding certain food products that Allah had never forbidden?

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ ءَامَنُوْا كُنِبْ عَلٰىكُمْ الْقِصَاصُ فِى الْقَتْلِ ۗ الْحُرُّ بِالْحُرِّ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْعَبْدِ ۗ وَاَلَا تُنۢبِئُ
بِاَلَا تُنۢبِئُ فَمَنْ عَفِيَ لَهُ مِنْ اَخِيهِ شَيْءٌ فَاَنْبِئْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاَدِّءْ اِلَيْهِ بِاِحْسَنِ ۗ ذٰلِكَ تَخْفِيۡفٌ
مِّنْ رَّبِّكُمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۗ فَمَنْ اَعْتَدَىْ بَعْدَ ذٰلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ اَلِيۡمٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered - the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct. This is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment.

وَلَكُمْ فِي الْقِصَاصِ حَيٰوةٌ يَاۤأُولِيۤالْاَلْبَابِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُوْنَ ﴿١٧٨﴾

And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous.

Just as the ten commandments informed the Israelites to not murder, these verses instruct the believers that any soul who is deliberately killed is a huge sin that deserves a severe punishment — life for life. The fact that the same law was prescribed in the Hebrew Bible⁹⁸ is further evidence for the Jews and Christians that the Quran is confirming their own Books. The law of equality described in verse 178 abolished the laws that used to prevail during the period of ignorance in Arabia where status and power were significant in determining the value of life. A slave and a master were not considered equal nor were men and women.⁹⁹ If a slave killed a master, it was possible to demand the lives of two or more slaves as retribution.

With the advent of Islam, all human beings are considered equal in the eyes of God. Hence, the law of Qisas prescribes capital punishment for the person guilty of intentionally killing another individual. This is a law applicable to all regardless of status, religion, gender or race. Although the law of ‘life for life’ was already present under the Mosaic Law, Islam provides an alternative to capital punishment that is solely based on the decision of the victim’s family. They could ask for financial compensation, blood money, in which case a suitable amount would be decided and capital punishment would no longer be applicable. However, in the event that blood money is accepted, it would not be permissible for the murderer to be harmed in any way. Any attempt to take revenge after accepting blood money would be seen as a violation of God’s command resulting in a severe chastisement.

As explained in verse 179, strict punishments were required for heinous crimes such as intentional murder in order to act as an effective deterrent. However, in Islam the option for forgiveness was provided because in certain cases it seemed that taking life for life would result in greater hardship for the victim’s family. For example, if a man killed his only brother, then life for life would demand

⁹⁸ Glasse, C. (2013). ‘The New Encyclopedia of Islam.’ New York: Rowman & Littlefield, p.372

⁹⁹ Ali, A. (2008). ‘The Rights of Muslim Women.’ New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, p.48

the murderer's death in which case the father would lose both his sons. By granting the option of forgiveness, Allah provides a solution in such circumstances. The Prophet (pbuh) would also encourage forgiveness where it seemed appropriate. However, he was firm in demanding Qisas particularly when a brutal murder took place, such as the case when a Jewish man was guilty of killing his female slave by crushing her head between two rocks.¹⁰⁰

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا حَضَرَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ إِنْ تَرَكَ خَيْرًا الْوَصِيَّةَ لِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ
بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٨٠﴾

Prescribed for you when death approaches [any] one of you if he leaves wealth [is that he should make] a bequest for the parents and near relatives according to what is acceptable - a duty upon the righteous.

فَمَنْ بَدَّلَهُ بَعْدَ مَا سَمِعَهُ فَإِنَّمَا إِثْمُهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ يُبَدِّلُونَهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨١﴾

Then whoever alters the bequest after he has heard it - the sin is only upon those who have altered it. Indeed, Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

فَمَنْ خَافَ مِنْ مَوْصٍ جَنَفًا أَوْ إِثْمًا فَأَصْلَحَ بَيْنَهُمْ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٨٢﴾

But if one fears from the bequeather [some] error or sin and corrects that which is between them, there is no sin upon him. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

As the ten commandments instructed the Israelites to honor and look after their parents, Muslims were being instructed that during their lifetime and even after their death, the needs of parents must be taken into consideration. During the period of ignorance, men would bequeath all their wealth to their sons leaving nothing for the widow, his daughters, poor relatives or his old parents making them dependent on others to fulfill their basic needs.¹⁰¹ This placed tremendous difficulty on women as well as the old and exacerbated the problem of gender inequality in Arabia. Without any inheritance, women became more dependent on men for their survival and this made them vulnerable to abuse.

¹⁰⁰ Kamali, M.H. (2019). 'Crime and punishment in Islamic law: a fresh interpretation'. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 208

¹⁰¹ Nasir, J.J. (2009). 'The Status of Women Under Islamic Law and Modern Islamic Legislation.' Boston: BRILL, p.19

Since the Arabs had spent a prolonged period of time in ignorance and were not accustomed to sharing their inheritance with widows, daughter or parents, the initial command given to them was lenient encouraging them to leave a suitable amount for their remaining family members and parents. A penalty was also set for those who changed the bequest after hearing it and an option was introduced for a third person to intervene and alter the inheritance shares if he feared bias or wrongdoing on the part of the testator. However, over time as Muslims became accustomed to sharing their wealth with parents and females in the household, specific shares were stated to determine how the inheritance would be split between all parties. This removed any possibility of injustice or bias against the vulnerable in society including women, children and the elderly.

When it comes to inheritance, there is a stark difference between the Islamic Shariah and the Mosaic law. Interestingly, under the Mosaic law, wealth should be distributed among the sons only with daughters receiving a share in the event that there are no sons.¹⁰² The wisdom behind this radical change between the laws of inheritance given to the ancient Israelites and the laws given to Muhammad (pbuh) owed to the declining role of the tribe. During the time of Musa (a.s) the Israelites lived in tribes. It was incumbent upon all the seniors in the tribe to ensure the well-being of each and every individual including orphans and widows. Men were responsible for fulfilling the financial needs of their wives and children as well as their unmarried sisters. Furthermore, the Mosaic Law stated that a widow without any children would be betrothed to her brother-in-law.¹⁰³ In such circumstances the duty of providing and protecting was solely the burden of men in the tribe. This is the reason that men would receive all the inheritance. However, over time, the tribal system deteriorated and was eventually replaced by communities. People started living more independently which necessitated a change in the inheritance laws to safeguard the rights of the weak and vulnerable.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُنِبَ عَلَيْكُمْ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُنِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

¹⁰² Smallwood, T.M. (2005). 'Is the Bible really the law?' Indiana: AuthorHouse, p.83

¹⁰³ Smith, W. Fuller, J.M. (2005). 'Encyclopaedia dictionary of the Bible'. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, p.246

O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous –

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى
الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مَسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ، وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا
خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٨٤﴾

[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom as substitute of feeding a poor person each day. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew.

Besides introducing new laws to the ummah pertaining to Qisas and inheritance, the Muslims had to also be prepared physically and spiritually for fasting, one of the pillars of Islam. While the ten commandments focused on the significance of the Sabbath day to inculcate taqwa, Allah introduced a month of fasting and the pilgrimage to inculcate taqwa in the final ummah. Fasting inculcates self-restraint and controls animal desires helping to weaken the nafs-ul-ammaraah and strengthen the rooh. The nafs-ul-ammaraah is a component of the self, nafs, that is directly associated with the needs of the physical body, arousing animal desires. It commands us to fulfil our body needs and satisfy our desires regardless of Allah's laws and rules. The nafs-ul-ammaraah is also associated with negative emotions such as greed, jealousy, hatred and anger. Hence, it is this portion of our nafs that is prone to sin.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, fasting improves taqwa by preventing the nafs ul ammarah ('id') from gaining dominance over the individual.

As explained by Freud, every human has an 'id' from which emerge animal desires and all evils, a 'super-ego' which acts as a moral compass enabling him to become a compassionate and caring human being, and an 'ego' that aims to mediate between the 'id' and the 'superego'. In Islam, the heart or intellect (ego) mediates between the nafs ul ammarah (id) and the rooh (super-ego).¹⁰⁵ Every time the heart chooses to listen to the 'id', moving towards evil, there is a stain that appears on it.

¹⁰⁴ Abdur-Rahman, K.H. (2019). 'Solving the Riddle'. New York: Page Publishing

¹⁰⁵ Abdur-Rahman, K.H. (2019). 'Solving the Riddle'. New York: Page Publishing.

Repentance helps to remove the stain, while a conscious effort to further adhere to the demands of the 'id' causes the stain to grow like a disease. Ultimately, when an individual reaches the stage where his entire heart is engulfed in the disease, he loses all concept of morality and relegates himself from an intellectual human, to an animal striving to satisfy his desires.

Since fasting does not just involve abstaining from all animal desires, but also includes monitoring behavior, actions, words and thoughts, the entire purpose of fasting in Islam is to strengthen the 'super-ego' against the 'id', thereby improving taqwa. Being the need of the physical body, animal desires cannot be completely abolished, but they can be controlled so that they are satisfied within the boundaries set by Allah. This is the reason why Allah mentions in verse 183 that fasting was prescribed to people in the past as well as it helps to inculcate taqwa. For example, Jews and Christians agree that fasting is a means of seeking atonement and God's mercy with several examples in the Old Testament suggesting that Messengers would fast in order to avoid the punishment of God or to receive His mercy. In many cases the ancient Israelites would fast during wars to invoke Divine intervention and help them gain victory.¹⁰⁶

Just like inheritance, Allah initially adopted a policy of leniency towards the believers. Instead of commanding them to fast for an entire month, the first command for fasting was limited to only three days of the month. Unlike the fasts prescribed in the Old Testament that last for 24 hours, the fasts for the Muslim Ummah last from fajr to maghrib. All Muslims were told to fast, except for those who were ill or on a journey. They would have to make up for the missed fasts during later days. Despite the emphasis on the benefits of fasting, Allah knew it would be hard for believers who were not accustomed to fasting, and so an alternative was provided for those who could only fast with immense difficulty — feeding a poor person each day a fast was missed.

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَى
وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ وَمَن كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ
فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ
وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَيْتُمْ وَلِعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ



¹⁰⁶ Taus, E.R. (2008). 'Torah for Today.' New York: University Press of America, p.115

The month of Ramadhan in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.

With sufficient time given to Muslims to train them in fasting, the month of Ramadan was instituted as the month of obligatory fasting and one of the five pillars of Islam. Instead of fasting three days every month, Muslims would have to fast for the entire month of Ramadan. The command was introduced prior to the Battle of Badr 2 A.H.¹⁰⁷ Unlike the previous three day fasts, strict adherence was now required. It was compulsory for every Muslim to spend the month in fasting, with the exception of those who were suffering from an illness or were on a journey, in which case the missed fasts would have to be kept later in time.

Reserving an entire month for fasting was not a requirement for the previous ummah. Therefore, while Allah reduced the length of a fast from 24 hours to fajr till maghrib, He also increased the number from a few fasts during the year to an entire month of fasting. Perhaps the fact that Muhammad (pbuh) was the seal of the Prophets implied a need to further increase the taqwa of the final ummah so that it could perform the role of being leaders for mankind. Otherwise, if it got distracted just like Bani Israel, there would be chaos in the world with no one knowing the actual message of God. Therefore, the greater responsibility placed on the shoulders of the final ummah implied the need for greater taqwa, guidance and resilience. Allah knows best.

Moreover, according to verse 185, Ramadan is not only the month chosen for fasting, but it is also the month which contains laylatul Qadr — the special night in which the Quran was sent down. But, since Muhammad (pbuh) received revelation that spanned many years, the entire Book was not sent down to him in one instant. So, how could the Quran have been sent down in Ramadan? Scholars differ in their opinion with some arguing that the Quran being sent implies that the system of revelation to Muhammad (pbuh) commenced on this night. Others argue that this was the night in which the whole Quran was sent down from the Lawhul Mehfuz in the seventh heavens to the first heavens so that the system of revelation could commence.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Iqbal, M. (2008). 'Definitive Encounters: Islam, Muslims and the West.' Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, p.62

¹⁰⁸ See Quran (97:1)

The Lawhul Mehfuz is considered to be a tablet that stores all kinds of knowledge and information, implying that even before mankind was created, knowledge of everything, including the Quran, was stored in this tablet. When the system of revelation had to start, Allah sent down the entire Quran from the Lawhul Mehfuz to the lowest heavens, after which every time verses had to be revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), they would be sent down to earth via Jibreel (as). Allah knows best.

More importantly, Allah could have chosen any month for fasting, but He decided to choose the month in which the Quran was revealed, implying a connection between the revelation of the Quran and fasting. Why should Muslims be fasting in the same month that the Quran was revealed as guidance for mankind?

Ramadan is the only time during the year that the level of taqwa is at its peak for every Muslim who spends it in fasting. As mentioned in verse 183, a conscious effort has to be made to abstain from food, drink and all evils in society only for the sake of pleasing Allah which helps a believer increase his level of taqwa. At the same time, the first few verses of Surah Baqarah highlight that the Quran will be guidance for the muttaqeen — those who have taqwa. The greater the level of taqwa, the greater the ability to understand the Quran. Hence, the increase in taqwa from fasting automatically makes it easier to connect with the Quran so that God's message can console, guide, enlighten and spiritually revive Muslims.

To summarize, fasting promotes self-restraint which helps to strengthen every Muslim spiritually. It weakens the nafs, strengthens the rooh and softens the heart preparing it to receive and absorb the words of Allah. Since Muslims will make greater effort to study the Quran in the month in which it was revealed, if Allah had chosen any other month, the Quran would not have had the same impact on believers as it does during the month of fasting. It is a special act of mercy from Allah that the month in which the Quran was revealed is also the month designated for fasting. As a result, Allah mentions in the end of verse 185 that fasting has not been prescribed to make religion difficult for believers. On the contrary, it has been done so that Allah can guide His slaves.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And when My servants ask you, [O Muhammad], concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.

It is necessary to reflect on the wisdom of the placement of this verse. At this stage, the basic foundations of the Shariah, which are identical to the ten commandments, have been discussed. Allah has made it clear what constitutes righteousness. The main rituals in Islam including prayer and fasting have also been formally introduced to the Muslim Ummah. Therefore, it now became compulsory for all believers to respond to Allah by worshipping Him as He has commanded. Allah responds to the call of every suppliant, but He expects that His slaves should also respond to His call by fully entering Islam, being cognizant of halal and haram, practicing all the rituals and obeying Allah's orders regarding Haqooq Allah and Haqooq-ul-ibad. When Muslims ignore Allah's call and are negligent towards His commands, it is regarded as an act of defiance similar to Iblis where certain commands are followed and others are ignored.

Verse 186 accentuates this bi-directional relationship that exists between man and God. Both call out to each other and both expect a response. The only difference is that one is impatient and wants his call to be answered immediately. While the other waits an entire lifetime for a positive response. Furthermore, as a sign of Allah's magnanimity, He first addresses man's expectations from Him, before addressing His own expectations. Therefore, the first half commences with man calling out to God and being told that He is near and responds, while the second half explains that God also calls out to man and expects him to respond. This suggests that even if His slaves are not responding to His call, Allah is already responding to their call by being Ar-Rahman. He is still providing everyone with sustenance, resources and bounties. However, those slaves who choose to respond to His call by embracing Islam and submitting to Him will be selected for His special mercy. Allah will be Ar-Raheem for them, granting them wisdom, knowledge, guidance and qalb-e-saleem — a heart that is at peace.

At this stage, a comparison can be made between this verse and a hadith Qudsi narrating how Allah will come running to us if we are walking to Him.¹⁰⁹ In that situation, man has to first walk and only then will Allah come running. But, when it comes to responding, Allah takes the lead instructing man to follow suit. This further reinforces the fact that Allah is already responding to everyone. So, if a believer wants things in dunya, he should ask Allah. Allah is responding. He grants sustenance and opportunities to all including those who deny Him. But this favorable response only lasts in this life. For the individual who refused to respond to Allah, he will never have contentment in this life and in the afterlife, he will have the hellfire waiting for him. But for the individual who chose to reciprocate

¹⁰⁹ Sahih Muslim 2687

the response, he will have to walk to God first, then The Almighty will come running to Him, granting him guidance, wisdom, peace in this life, and paradise in the afterlife. Simply choosing to respond is not sufficient to receive Allah's special mercy. The believer has to make the effort by taking the first few steps in the right direction, struggling in the cause of Allah, revealing his sincere intentions and controlling his desires. Allah will then come running to Him with blessings in this life and the next.

In addition, when mentioning the slaves of God calling out to Him, Allah refrains to use the word 'if' and instead uses the word 'when'. Had The Almighty used the word 'if', it would imply that not all slaves of God will call out to Him during their lifetime. The humble believers will invoke Allah when facing grief and hardship, while the disbelievers will choose to invoke others. Instead, by using the word 'when', Allah implicitly guarantees that every human will invoke Him at some point in his lifetime. Just as God has promised to test everyone to their limits, He also promises that everyone will invoke only Him when they are overcome by hardship and difficulties. Regardless of whether the individual is a believer or not, every human has been gifted with the rooh that guides him towards the truth. Even the pagan worshippers in Mecca would only invoke Allah when faced with hardship at sea knowing that no deity could help them except The Almighty.¹¹⁰ However, even though every man will inevitably call out to Allah alone in moments of difficulty knowing that God will respond, he will have to decide if he wishes to respond to Allah's call. A choice for which he will be held accountable.

As a final comment on this verse, Allah mentions that He responds to the call of the suppliant, but this does not necessarily mean that the prayer will be answered instantly or the test will be immediately removed. On the contrary, as mentioned in the Hadith, a sincere prayer made to Allah by a believer who is on the path of muttaqeen might be fulfilled immediately, or at a later date in time:

It was narrated from Abu Sa'eed that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: "There is no Muslim who does not offer any du'a in which there is no sin or severing of family ties but Allah will give him one of three things in return: either He will answer his du'a sooner, or He will store it up for him in the Hereafter, or He will divert an equivalent evil away from him because of it." They said: "We will say a lot of du'a'." He said: "Allah is more generous."¹¹¹

As humans, we become impatient and strongly believe that being granted that which we demand is definitely in our best interest but only Allah has complete knowledge and knows when it is best to grant something to someone. For example, a period of hardship helps to strengthen our bond with

¹¹⁰ Quran (17:67)

¹¹¹ Musnad Ahmad (10749)

Allah and spiritually enlighten us, but when the hardship is removed and a period of ease follows, we gradually move away from God, getting easily distracted. Hence, at times, it is in man's best interest for his hardship to be prolonged, allowing him to progress on the path of Islam spiritually and gain wisdom. In this manner, God grants His slaves the opportunity to realize their potential, capabilities and hidden strengths before He gives them what they desire.

At the same time, Allah might choose to never give the believer what he desires. In that case, the slave will either find all his unanswered prayers awaiting him as a reward on the Day of Judgment, or the unanswered prayers will be used to ward off an evil or calamity that was decreed for him in this life. Regardless of how Allah chooses to respond to an individual's prayer, He is responding for sure.

أَجَلٌ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ الرَّفْعُ إِلَى نِسَائِكُمْ هُنَّ لِيَاسٍ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِيَاسٌ لَهُنَّ عَلِمَ
 اللَّهُ أَنْتُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَانُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ فَالْتَنَنَ
 بَشِيرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ
 الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتُمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُنْبِشُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي
 الْمَسْجِدَاتِ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
 يَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾

It has been made permissible for you the night preceding fasting to go to your wives [for sexual relations]. They are clothing for you and you are clothing for them. Allah knows that you used to deceive yourselves, so He accepted your repentance and forgave you. So now, have relations with them and seek that which Allah has decreed for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn becomes distinct to you from the black thread [of night]. Then complete the fast until the sunset. And do not have relations with them as long as you are staying for worship in the mosques. These are the limits [set by] Allah, so do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His ordinances to the people that they may become righteous.

Since the fast for the Jews would last from one sunset to the next, they were prohibited from engaging in any marital relations with their spouse for the 24-hour period. Muslims assumed that the same rules would apply to them and they abstained from any marital relations, even after breaking the fast at night. However, some believers started to secretly approach their spouse to satisfy their sexual needs, repenting later to silence their guilty conscience. Muslims were also not certain how long they were permitted to eat and drink before the next fast would commence. Some assumed that they could

continue eating and drinking all night until they fell asleep, after which consuming anything would be prohibited even if they woke up in the middle of the night.¹¹²

As there were so many queries regarding fasting, Allah removed all misconceptions in verse 187 stating that men are permitted to approach their wives after the fast has been broken, and Muslims can eat and drink until the white thread appears distinct from the black thread — till the morning prayer. In addition, Muslims who retreat to the Mosque for the last 10 days of Ramadan (Ithiqaf) are not permitted to associate with their wives for the entire period. Regarding the believers who approached their wives in secret while believing that they were sinning, Allah forgave them for ignoring their conscience. In doing so, the general lesson being taught is that indulging in an act which one believes is haram, is a sin in itself, even if the act is permissible. Therefore, it is not just the deeds that will be weighted but also the intention behind them.

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

And do not consume one another's wealth unjustly or send it [in bribery] to the rulers in order that [they might aid] you [to] consume a portion of the wealth of the people in sin, while you know [it is unlawful].

With the establishment of a strong Muslim community and a flourishing market in Medina, Jews started losing market share and Muslims started to accumulate wealth.¹¹³ This necessitated verses to groom the believers in controlling their greed and ensuring that all assets were attained in a halal and permissible manner without violating any of the commands of God. Just as the ten commandments forbade wealth, luxuries and greed, and ayat –ul –birr encouraged Muslims to spend their wealth, this verse also reminded the believers to refrain from behaving like the previous ummah that made alterations to God's commands because of their love for power and wealth. A believer cannot illegally consume the property of others or use his wealth to bribe judges in order to influence the decision of the court. Justice must be upheld at all times. Wealth cannot be used to promote corruption and injustice. On the contrary, such assets have to be used for the benefit of Islam. In fact, multiple verses in this Surah constantly warn the believers to control their love for wealth, fame, power and assets.

¹¹² Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abdul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

¹¹³ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abdul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

These are things that are strongly craved by the nafs. A Muslim who has not been granted much wealth or power is in a smaller test than a Muslim who has been granted everything.

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْأَهْلِ قُلْ هِيَ مَوَاقِيتُ لِلنَّاسِ وَالْحَجِّ وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا
الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مِنْ اتَّقَى وَأَتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا
وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾

They ask you, [O Muhammad], about the new moons. Say, "They are measurements of time for the people and for Hajj." And it is not righteousness to enter houses from the back, but righteousness is [in] one who fears Allah. And enter houses from their doors. And fear Allah that you may succeed.

While the previous ummah was obsessed with magic, the Arabs were gripped with superstitious beliefs. In particular, the waxing and waning of the moon drew much attention. People started attributing certain omens with particular phases of the moon. In addition, it was believed that once an individual departs for pilgrimage, he cannot enter his home again through the front door as that would be a bad omen. He has to enter through the back door.

Being centered on tauheed, magic and superstition are foreign to Islam because it undermines the capability and power of Allah. It is a form of shirk in which Iblis instills baseless fears regarding the power of the supernatural to the extent that people lose trust in Allah's ability to protect them.¹¹⁴ Therefore, verse 189 refutes all such false beliefs and innovations in religion. The phases of the moon are marked to designate time as per the lunar calendar. It can be particularly useful when embarking on a journey and it can also help to mark the months such as the month of Haj. In addition, there is no evil omen associated with entering homes from the front. Performing pilgrimage is a spiritual journey and is not affected by the manner in which one chooses to enter his home. Unfortunately, many Muslims today are also obsessed with baseless superstitious beliefs such as 'touch wood' to protect oneself from the evil eye. Using common sense, intellect and knowledge can defy all such superstitious beliefs.

﴿وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقْتَلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُعْتَدِينَ﴾

¹¹⁴ Abdul Rahman, M.S. (2003). 'Islam: questions and answers.' London: MSA Publication, p.4

Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress. Indeed. Allah does not like transgressors.

وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ ثَفَفْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَخْرَجْتُمُوهُمْ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوهُمْ
عِنْدَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ حَتَّى يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنْ قَاتَلُوكُمْ فَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ كَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكٰفِرِينَ ﴿١٩١﴾

And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and fitnah is worse than killing. And do not fight them at al-Masjid al-îaram until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.

فَإِنْ أَنهَوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٩٢﴾

And if they cease, then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ وَيَكُونَ لِلدِّينِ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أَنهَوْا فَلَا عُدْوَانَ إِلَّا عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٩٣﴾

Fight them until there is no [more] fitnah and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors.

The Quraysh realized that the growth of Islam would negatively affect their own power in the Arab region. Islam did not consider them as the protectors of the Kaaba, and the idea of equality removed the special status that men had over women, masters had over slaves, or the Quraysh had over remaining tribes. Therefore, the Quraysh made continuous attempts to attack the Muslims by collaborating with the Jews in Medina. As a result, the Muslims were initially ordered to fight as a defensive strategy to protect themselves and their city, as explained in verse 190. The attempt to defend themselves from external threat led to the Battle of Badr, Battle of Uhud and the Battle of the Trench. However, at the same time, they were sternly commanded to not transgress. Allah had ordered them to fight the enemy as a defensive strategy only, not offensive.

When the command to fight was issued, the disbelievers were being informed that their aggressive stance towards the Muslims would no longer be tolerated. While Muslims were in Mecca, they were patient and lenient, but after migrating to Medina, they would now retaliate. Initially showing leniency to the enemies of Islam can be seen in the nations of the past as well. Ibrahîm (as) had to patiently deal with his enemies while being a messenger in his city. However, once a significant amount of time had been given to the disbelievers to embrace Islam, an aggressive strategy was adopted marked by

the arrival of the final punishment, azaab. Similarly, when Musa (a.s) had to spread Islam to the Pharaoh, the Israelites had to patiently deal with the oppression and torture inflicted upon them as the primary objective was to give the Pharaoh and his nation enough time to embrace the religion of God. But once the designated time ended, an aggressive strategy was adopted as seen by the azaab that drowned the enemies of Islam. In the case of the Ummah of the Muhammad (pbuh), the Muslims tolerated oppression and torture for almost 12 years while living in Mecca. However, once they migrated and formed an ummah, an aggressive strategy or azaab descended on the enemies of Islam through the hands of the Muslims as they fought on the battlefield.

The close companions of the Prophet (pbuh) who had been forced into exile by the Quraysh were eager to face the disbelievers on the battlefield, but the remaining Muslims were reluctant. Accustomed to spreading Islam through peaceful preaching, they were terrified of fighting and sacrificing their lives for God. In addition, some Muslims were hesitant that a battle might imply having to fight their kaafir brothers, uncles or fathers on the battlefield and kill them. They wondered how Islam could permit a believer to kill his own family members?

As a result of these apprehensions, Allah reminds them of the need to fight. They were not being told to adopt an offensive strategy and launch attacks on peaceful tribes. On the contrary, they were being ordered to defend themselves from those who wished to annihilate them. Bloodshed is not encouraged in Islam. But, persecution of believers is far worse than slaughter. Under such circumstances, it is justified to fight and slaughter the enemy in order to end injustice, tumult and oppression. In this manner, the Muslims were being taught that family does not refer to those who raised them. Rather, it refers to those who pull them towards Jannah. People who pull them towards the hellfire cannot be considered family even though they might be blood relations.

Moreover, fighting at the sacred Mosque was prohibited unless the enemy instigated a battle, in which case Muslims were ordered to retaliate. If their own Muslim brothers and sisters were being oppressed in Mecca, then the ummah needed to fight the disbelievers putting an end to this fitna and giving victory to Islam. However, fighting was not permitted under any circumstance if the enemy ceased hostility or aggression towards the Muslims. This confirmed that the command for fighting revealed at this stage was only for the purpose of a defensive strategy, not offensive.

الشَّهْرُ الْحَرَامُ بِالشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَالْحُرُمَتُ قِصَاصٌ فَمَنْ أَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَأَعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا
 أَعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

[Fighting in] the sacred month is for [aggression committed in] the sacred month, and for [all] violations is legal retribution. So whoever has assaulted you, then assault him in the same way that he has assaulted you. And fear Allah and know that Allah is with those who fear Him.

In the pre-Islamic period, the Arabs followed a custom of prohibiting any warfare during the months surrounding Zul-Hijjah so that people could safely travel to Mecca and back home. The four months in which fighting was forbidden included Zul-qa'da, Zul-hijjah, Muharram and Rajab. After the advent of Islam, although the policy of forbidding warfare during these four months continued, the law of equality prevailed. If the disbelievers violated the prohibition and fought during the forbidden months, Muslims were commanded to fight back to defend themselves. Evident in the verses, Muslims were being constantly reminded to fear Allah and show self-restraint. The believers should not be initiating war but at the same time they need to learn to defend themselves.

وَأَنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تُلْقُوا بِأَيْدِيكُمْ إِلَى التَّهْلُكَةِ وَأَحْسِنُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٩٥﴾

And spend in the way of Allah and do not throw [yourselves] with your [own] hands into destruction [by refraining]. And do good; indeed, Allah loves the doers of good.

Once again, the ummah is being encouraged to control its greed and craving for this world by spending in the way of Allah, Fee-Sabeelillah. For example, funds can be collected to acquire weapons, supplies and arms to equip the Muslim army. Particularly given that the Muslims were actively engaged in trade and the economy in Medina was flourishing, believers had accumulated sufficient funds that needed to be spent in the cause of Allah. The compulsory Zakat only required 2.5% of their wealth to be given in charity and for the benefit of Islam. There was a need to promote additional charity expenditure so that the army could equip itself for frequent battles with the enemy. Instead of falling in love with wealth and dunya, as the previous ummah did, the Muslims needed to learn to remain focused on their mission and vision.

وَأَتِمُّوا الْحَجَّ وَالْعُمْرَةَ لِلَّهِ فَإِنْ أُخْصِرْتُمْ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ وَلَا تَحْلِقُوا رُءُوسَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ الْهَدْيُ مَحَلَّهُ، فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَّرِيضًا أَوْ بِهِ أَذًى مِنْ رَأْسِهِ فَفِدْيَةٌ مِنْ صِيَامٍ أَوْ صَدَقَةٍ أَوْ نُسُكٍ فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَمَنْ تَمَنَّعَ بِالْعُمْرَةِ إِلَى الْحَجِّ فَمَا اسْتَيْسَرَ مِنَ الْهَدْيِ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ فِي الْحَجِّ وَسَبْعَةٍ إِذَا رَجَعْتُمْ تِلْكَ عَشْرَةٌ كَامِلَةٌ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ أَهْلَهُ حَاضِرِي الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
 وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١٩٦﴾

And complete the Hajj and 'umrah for Allah. But if you are prevented, then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of slaughter. And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary must offer] a ransom of fasting [three days] or charity or sacrifice. And when you are secure, then whoever performs 'umrah [during the Hajj months] followed by Hajj [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] - then a fast of three days during Hajj and of seven when you have returned [home]. Those are ten complete [days]. This is for those whose family is not in the area of al-Masjid al-haram. And fear Allah and know that Allah is severe in penalty.

الْحَجُّ أَشْهُرٌ مَعْلُومَاتٌ فَمَنْ فُضِّضَ فِيهَا فَلَا رَفْعَ وَلَا فُسُوقَ وَلَا جِدَالَ فِي الْحَجِّ وَمَا تَفَعَّلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يَعْلَمُهُ اللَّهُ وَكَرَّوْا فَاِتِّخِرُوا خَيْرَ الزَّادِ النَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقْوَاهُ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١٩٧﴾

Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made Hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of ihram], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during Hajj. And whatever good you do - Allah knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding.

Being a journey where individuals have to forego all forms of comfort and luxury and show sabr and self-restraint, the Hajj is the best means of strengthening taqwa. With the changing of the qibla, the significance of the Hajj and Umrah was being re-introduced in Islam. Prior to the advent of Islam, the Arabs had distorted the rites followed by Ibrahim (a.s) to give special privilege to the Quraysh. In this regard, these verses explain the appropriate rituals and rites to be followed during pilgrimage, as well as the actions that need to be taken in the event that the believer is prevented from performing Hajj or Umrah, as in the case of the Muslims who were prohibited from entering Mecca in 6 A.H.

A believer who is unable to complete the Hajj or Umrah because of an obstacle in the journey must send an offering for sacrifice and should refrain from shaving his head until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice, Haram. If he is forced out of necessity to shave his head before the offering reaches

the place of sacrifice due to an ailment in his scalp, then as compensation he must fast, feed the poor or offer an additional sacrifice. This is further explained in the Hadīth mentioning that the Muslim must fast for three days, feed six indigent or slaughter an animal.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, the Arabs considered it a sin to combine both the Umrah and Hajj together in one journey.¹¹⁶ This raised difficulties for believers who lived far from Mecca. To grant them ease, Allah ordained that believers who do not live in Mecca and have traveled to perform the Umrah, but subsequently wish to perform Hajj as well, can combine both the Umrah and Hajj in one journey, provided they sacrifice an animal as an offering. If they cannot afford sacrificing an animal, they must fast three days during the Hajj and seven days after returning home, making ten days in total. This leverage is not provided to those who live within Mecca who can easily perform both Umrah and Hajj separately.

During the days of ignorance people did not understand that the purpose of the pilgrimage was not just a test of physical endurance but also a time to spiritually connect with God. A pilgrim is meant to devote himself to the worship of God instead of indulging in any form of obscenity, wickedness or vain talk. Every Muslim should strive to do as much good as possible. In addition, because of the financial cost and the travel distance involved in undertaking such an arduous journey, verse 197 states that it is advisable to take extra provisions as a means of preparing for contingencies. Instead of the believer traveling to Mecca with no extra provisions causing him to have to beg to fulfill his basic needs, it is better that he takes extra provisions with him so that he can focus his time and energy in the worship of Allah. But, of course, the best provision to take is the fear of Allah. It is the fear of Allah that forces the Muslim to show sabr during such a long and arduous journey.

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ أَنْ تَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَإِذَا أَفْضَيْتُمْ
مِنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ وَاذْكُرُوهُ كَمَا
هَدَىٰكُمْ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿١٩٨﴾

There is no blame upon you for seeking bounty from your Lord [during Hajj]. But when you depart from 'Arafat, remember Allah at al- Mash'ar al-haram. And remember Him, as He has guided you, for indeed, you were before that among those astray.

¹¹⁵ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abdul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

¹¹⁶ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abdul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

ثُمَّ أَفِيضُوا مِنْ حَيْثُ أَفَاضَ النَّاسُ وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ
رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٩٩﴾

Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart and ask forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, extra privilege was granted to Quraysh as being the keepers of the Kaaba. It was believed that they did not have to travel to Arafat. Instead they could go directly to Muzdalifah after Mina. The Quran now clarifies that the rites of the Hajj are equal for all. Everyone must go to Arafat to engage in zikr and then make their way to Muzdalifah to celebrate the praises of Allah.

Furthermore, given the financial and physical difficulty of travelling to Mecca, Allah permitted trading during Hajj provided that the intention of the believer when commencing his journey is to perform Hajj and not trade goods. However, the verses stress the need to engage in constant zikr during pilgrimage implying that even though trading is permissible, the primary focus should be on zikr and not amassing wealth.

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمْ مَنَسِكَكُمْ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ
ذِكْرًا فَمَنْ الْكَاسِرُ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَمَالُهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ
مِنْ خَلْقٍ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

And when you have completed your rites, remember Allah like your [previous] remembrance of your fathers or with [much] greater remembrance. And among the people is he who says, "Our Lord, give us in this world," and he will have in the Hereafter no share.

وَمِنْهُمْ مَن يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةٌ وَقِنَا
عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿٢٠١﴾

But among them is he who says, "Our Lord, give us in this world [that which is] good and in the Hereafter [that which is] good and protect us from the punishment of the Fire."

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿٢٠٢﴾

Those will have a share of what they have earned, and Allah is swift in account.

﴿۲۰۳﴾ وَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ فِي أَيَّامٍ مَّعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَن تَعَجَّلَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ وَمَن تَأَخَّرَ فَلَا إِثْمَ عَلَيْهِ لِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿۲۰۳﴾

And remember Allah during [specific] numbered days. Then whoever hastens [his departure] in two days - there is no sin upon him; and whoever delays [until the third] - there is no sin upon him - for him who fears Allah. And fear Allah and know that unto Him you will be gathered.

While the Muslims required training in terms of pilgrimage rites and rituals, they also needed to be taught about the significance of prayers. Those who specifically ask only for worldly luxuries will get as much sustenance as Allah has destined for them in this world, but they will have no portion in the hereafter. The content of their prayers suggests that they are not concerned about performing good deeds, attaining guidance, earning the pleasure of God and achieving success in the afterlife. In contrast, those who ask for both the world and the hereafter will be allotted what they earned, implying that The Almighty does not offer any guarantees. As emphasized many times in the Quran, every soul will be tried fairly on the Day of Judgment. Simply asking for salvation during Hajj does not guarantee anything because deeds must be weighed. However, sincerely praying for salvation reflects the goal and desire of an individual. He seeks to earn the pleasure of his Creator and yearns for guidance. Hence, God can gift him guidance by highlighting the right path and granting him the courage to walk on the path so that it increases his chances for salvation. Ultimately, success in the hereafter must be earned through struggle, dedication and commitment.

Finally, as mentioned in verse 203, believers must return to Mina after Muzdalifah where they will engage in the worship of Allah for three days. However, there is no blame on a Muslim who wishes to leave for Mecca after just two days, provided that his intention is sincere.

﴿۲۰۴﴾ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُعِجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهَدُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا فِي قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ ﴿۲۰۴﴾

And of the people is he whose speech pleases you in worldly life, and he calls Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the fiercest of opponents.

﴿۲۰۵﴾ وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ أُنْحُرَتِ وَالنَّسْلُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
﴿۲۰۵﴾ الْفُسَادَ

And when he goes away, he strives throughout the land to cause corruption therein and destroy crops and animals. And Allah does not like corruption.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِأَلْسِنِهِ فَبِئْسَ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

And when it is said to him, "Fear Allah," pride in the sin takes hold of him. Sufficient for him is Hellfire, and how wretched is the resting place.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ ﴿٣٧﴾

And of the people is he who sells himself, seeking means to the approval of Allah. And Allah is kind to [His] servants.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلَابِ كَافَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.

فَإِنْ زَلَلْتُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْكُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

But if you deviate after clear proofs have come to you, then know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Just as the covenant signed by the new Ummah started by instructing the Muslims to not walk on the path of Satan by worshipping their own desires, as mentioned in verse 168, the covenant now ends with the same lesson being reiterated. Being self-righteous, Satan believed he was worshipping Allah, when in fact, he was only worshipping himself and his desires. Muslims must not follow the path of Satan by becoming proud and over-confident in their iman. The disease of self-righteousness can enter an individual's heart and gradually increase to the extent that he performs his rituals with the intent of impressing others with little regard for the happiness of Allah. He likes to make a public display of his good deeds, bragging about his prayers, fasts, zakat and pilgrimage as a means of demonstrating his piety. He loves to call people to witness the immense love he has for Allah and the Prophet (pbuh) in his heart, as if he is desperate to prove his iman, and many people will succumb to this display of self-righteousness. However, his deeds will be the opposite of what he preaches. He will willingly engage in activities that are prohibited in Islam because he prioritizes his desires over the hereafter. When such an individual is corrected, his pride and ego prevents him from

understanding his mistakes. Instead of acknowledging his shortcomings and repenting, he will use his rituals as a screen to hide his true beliefs and intent, eventually becoming a hypocrite.

There is profound wisdom in the placement of this verse given that Allah has just discussed the rituals that have to be performed including prayers, fasting, charity and Hajj. The basic message being given to believers is to be vigilant. Rituals can lead to the disease of self-righteousness especially when Muslims are praised for it, causing them to think of themselves as being better than others, just as Satan perceived himself as being superior to man. At the same time, believers are being warned that those who love to make a public display of their iman should not be blindly followed simply because they appear to be religious. The only man who should be blindly followed is the Prophet (pbuh). A man who is truly righteous and pious will target all his efforts, both deeds and rituals, towards attaining the pleasure of Allah. He will constantly hold himself accountable for his actions and will readily acknowledge his mistakes.

Therefore, just as Allah warned the believers about Iblis in verse 168, Allah reiterates in verse 208 the need to enter Islam whole-heartedly and completely without following the footsteps of Iblis. He appeared to be worshipping Allah but in reality he was only worshipping his desires and his ego. Not only did he refuse to accept God's command to bow down to Adam (as), but when he was condemned, his pride overcame him and he refused to acknowledge his mistake and humble himself. Instead, he blamed and challenged God.

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلُلٍ مِّنَ الْعَمَامِرِ وَالْمَلَكِ وَفُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ
وَالِلَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿٢٠٨﴾

Do they await but that Allah should come to them in covers of clouds and the angels [as well] and the matter is [then] decided? And to Allah [all] matters are returned.

With the Quran having been revealed, a new Islamic state established and a new covenant signed, the truth has been made evident from falsehood. For decades, people were confused about the religion of God given the distortions made by the Jews and Christians. Now, with the truth having arrived, what are people waiting for? How many more signs are required for them to repent and mend their ways? If they are waiting for God Himself to come down with angels, then they should be aware that on the day that happens, the doors of repentance will be closed and it will be too late to repent because the entire purpose of religion is having blind faith in Allah and his angels. If God and the angels could

be seen, then everyone would be a devout worshipper and Islam would no longer be a test of blind faith.

This is an important moment of reflection for many Muslims as well. How many people call themselves Muslims but choose to ignore important commands of Allah? How many procrastinate on their rituals? How many Muslims are willing to do whatever it takes to be successful in this world but are ignorant of Allah's instructions that teach them how to be successful the afterlife? Why don't they just change themselves today? What are they waiting for?

سَلِّ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِلَكُمْ ءَاتَيْنَهُمْ مِنْ ءَايَةٍ بَيِّنَةٍ وَمَنْ يُبَدِّلْ نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٢١٣﴾

Ask the Children of Israel how many a sign of evidence We have given them. And whoever exchanges the favor of Allah [for disbelief] after it has come to him - then indeed, Allah is severe in penalty.

رُزِقَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ تَقَوَّأُوا فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَاللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ ﴿٢١٤﴾

Beautiful for those who disbelieve is the life of this world, and they ridicule those who believe. But those who fear Allah are above them on the Day of Resurrection. And Allah gives provision to whom He wills without account

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّينَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اختلفُوا فِيهِ وَمَا اختلفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَغْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لِمَا اختلفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٢١٤﴾

Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the Prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners and sent down with them the Scripture in truth to judge between the people concerning that in which they differed. And none differed over the Scripture except those who were given it - after the clear proofs came to them - out of jealous animosity among themselves. And Allah guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. And Allah guides whom He wills to a straight path.

One of the main contentions that the People of the Book had against the Prophet (pbuh) was his inability to show signs and miracles like the Prophets in the past. Muhammad (pbuh) could not split the sea in half or cure the blind. He could not give life to the dead nor could he speak at childbirth. Many signs were asked from him by the polytheist Arabs and the Israelites to prove that he was indeed the Messenger of God, but Allah had decided that the final Ummah would not receive such signs. As mentioned in these verses, there were two reasons for not showing signs.

Firstly, ancient Israelites were shown a myriad of signs from their Prophets but that did not stop them from disobeying, transgressing and even trying to kill the Messengers of God. The signs brought by Musa (as) did not stop the Children of Israel from worshipping a cow as a substitute to God. Raising a mountain over them, did not prevent the ancient Israelites from continuously violating the commands of God. On the contrary, the more miracles they were shown, the more reluctant they were to submit to God. When Eesa (as) showed numerous signs to prove that he was the Messiah, the priests and religious elders denied him and charged him with blasphemy. Why would things be any different with the final Messenger? On the contrary, if they use their intellect and ponder on the message, they will realize that the Quran is the greatest sign. Those who blatantly reject the Quran will not believe even if a miracle is shown to them such as the miracles shown by the Prophets in the past.

Secondly, as mentioned in verse 211, when the previous Ummah witnessed miracles that convinced them of the existence and power of God, any transgression or defiance would be strictly punished. There would be no room for leniency. Being converted into apes for violating the Sabbath, having a plague sent from the heavens to kill those who transgressed the commands of Allah and ordering the death penalty for apostates were all examples of severe punishments that were administered to the Children of Israel because of the numerous miracles witnessed. In contrast, leniency is shown to the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) because it has not seen miracles. Therefore, it is a blessing that the Almighty provided the Quran as the most important sign for believers, but did not send any miracle like those sent to the previous Ummah.

Mankind is being reminded in verse 212 that the main reason the previous Ummah failed, despite seeing miracles, was because of the love of the world in their hearts. For example, Bani Israel was strictly told to abstain from consuming interest on loans. However, since interest was the easiest means of accumulating wealth, the Rabbis altered the command of Allah stating that interest was only

prohibited on loans extended to other Jews.¹¹⁷ Therefore, in order to accept the truth, it is necessary to rid the heart of its love for this world. Islam is about preferring the desires of Allah over and above the desires of the individual.

Regardless, what could possibly be the reason for disbelievers failing to understand the message of Muhammad (pbuh)? After all, this was not the first time they were hearing a message of tauheed. Jews and Christians had heard a similar message from their prophets while the Arabs had heard a similar message of tauheed from their forefathers, Ismail and Ibrahim (as). In fact, all of mankind was one Ummah, as mentioned in verse 213, following one religion which is why the message from God has always been the same. The very first man on earth was also the very first Prophet of God who propagated the message of Islam. However, in every era, groups of dissidents would emerge, contesting the message of God, not because they could not recognize the truth but because of their desire to amass power and wealth. They would start challenging the scriptures and fighting against the believers out of jealousy and animosity. In the battle between truth and falsehood, Allah kept sending Prophets with Books to guide mankind towards the truth while transgressors kept emerging who would strive to misguide mankind towards conjecture. In every nation, those who would strive to uphold the truth, continued receiving guidance from Allah while the rest would ultimately face the wrath of God for their mischief. In this regard, Muhammad (pbuh) is the seal of the Prophets — the last and final Prophet to be sent to mankind. His message is no different than the message sent to the prophets before. It is the same message that has been repeatedly sent by the same God to mankind. So, what could possibly be confusing the disbelievers?

Allah makes it clear that those who choose to follow the final Messenger, will ultimately attain success in this life and the next, while the rest will face the wrath of God as did the transgressors in the past. Allah's methodology of dealing with His slaves will be the same.

أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسْتَهْمِكُمْ
 الْبِئْسَاءُ وَالضَّرَاءُ وَزُلْزَلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصْرُ اللَّهِ أَلاَ إِنَّا نَصْرُ
 اللَّهُ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٢١٤﴾

Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their]

¹¹⁷ Levine, A. (2010). 'The Oxford handbook of Judaism and Economics.' Oxford: Oxford Publishing, p.240

messenger and those who believed with him said, "When is the help of Allah?" Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near.

While still addressing the question of what was stopping the disbelievers from embracing Islam, Allah asks another question — did you all think that you could enter Jannah without facing severe tests like those faced by the people in the past? Is this the reason disbelievers are having doubts about Islam? Are they confused about why the believers are still being severely tested, facing tremendous difficulty even though they are following the truth? Were they expecting the Muslims to be gifted a life of ease, luxury, power and comfort as a reward for following the Prophet? But why? Did Allah not make it clear in the covenant that even believers will be continuously tested and Allah is with those who are patient? In fact, many of our Muslim youth today become disheartened with Islam simply because they are tested. They actually believe that by praying and studying the Quran, Allah should bless them a life of ease and comfort.

As explained in verse 214, life is a journey of tests. It was never meant to be easy. Muslims cannot expect that embracing Islam will make all calamities and obstacles disappear. Salvation cannot be attained without jihad — sacrifice and struggle in the cause of Allah. Tests and hardship allow the individual to grow spiritually, helping him to realize his true potential. Why would Allah grant a reward as massive as Jannah to someone who accepted Islam and then spent his entire life in enjoyment and comfort? On the contrary, as mentioned in verse 212, this life is beautified and made into jannah only for the rebellious disbelievers because in the afterlife, they have to face an everlasting azaab.

When discussing the difficulties and tests that the Muslims had to endure despite following the truth, it is surprising why these verses were revealed in Medina and not Mecca, given that the believers faced the worst persecution during their time in Mecca. Why was the verse being revealed after migration? Although this verse carried a profound message to the disbelievers, it was necessary to reveal it in Medina given the difference in lifestyle between the Ansar and Muhajireen. The Muhajireen were believers who had faced persecution and were forced into exile from Mecca. In contrast, the Ansar were believers who were already residing in Medina. While the Muhajireen had experienced tremendous trials and difficulties after embracing Islam, the Ansar accepted Islam when an Islamic community was established giving them freedom to practice religion as they wished. They never experienced the torment, persecution and oppression that the Muhajireen were subjected to in Mecca. Therefore, some of the Ansar were expecting a life of success and ease given that they had embraced

the truth. They were not thoroughly prepared for difficulty and hardship such as fighting with the enemies of Islam. In this context, verse 214 aimed to educate the believers and the disbelievers regarding the purpose of life and the benefit of tests reiterating the message given in verse 155.

When life is easy and comfortable, all believers appear to be pious, following the rituals, engaging in zikr and praising Allah. It is only when calamities strike that the true believer is distinguished from the hypocrite and those with weak iman. During a test, the true believer will remain firm on the path of Allah, never despairing of God's mercy and will continue to focus all his efforts on pleasing Allah and helping mankind. In contrast, the hypocrite will question Allah, disassociate himself from Islam and will fall into complete misery and despair. The believer with weak iman will oscillate between both extremes, being miserable at times and then repenting and having hope in the mercy of Allah. Naturally, it is important for Allah to expose to each individual his true level of iman so that no one can complain about Allah's decision on the Day of Judgment. The hypocrite will know exactly why he is destined for hell and the muttateen will know exactly why he is going to Jannah.

Moreover, the tests of life are designed to groom and train man to reach his true potential. For example, Musa (a.s) was known for being aggressive particularly in the face of injustice. The Quran quotes an event where he punched an Egyptian, taking the side of an Israelite, assuming that the latter was being dealt with unjustly.¹¹⁸ This level of aggression had to be tamed otherwise it would be too difficult for Musa (a.s) to guide an entire Ummah of 600,000 Israelites in the desert of Sinai, particularly an Ummah that was known for being disobedient and pugnacious. Therefore, after he embraced prophethood and returned to the Pharaoh with the message of God, he had to witness the persecution and torture of Bani Israel, while being commanded to show patience and engage in zikr. Musa (a.s) was not permitted to do anything except wait patiently for the command of God. Once his test reached a climax, he strengthened his qualities of patience and perseverance, while learning to control aggression. Having attained his true potential, he was then commanded to take Bani Israel across the sea and become the leader of an Ummah.

Another example can be seen with Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Despite losing both his parents when he was young, he was blessed with wealth, a flawless reputation, a loving wife and a beautiful family. However, such blessings of Allah led to a life of comfort and ease which makes an individual vulnerable. Strength to endure difficulty and pain is only obtained when tests are faced and comfort

¹¹⁸ See Quran (28:15)

is withdrawn. Hence, slowly all his blessings were taken away as he embarked on his mission to spread the message of Islam. He was ridiculed and berated, gradually lost his wealth, and ultimately was left alone after the demise of his uncle and beloved wife. As his uncle was the chief of the Banu Hashim tribe, his death caused Muhammad (pbuh) to lose protection from his tribe resulting in death threats from the Quraysh and forcing him to leave Mecca. But as he learned to deal with all these tests, he gained endurance, resilience, patience and strength. Such qualities allowed him to successfully form an ummah, challenge his enemies and inevitably become the leader of mankind.

Therefore, as Allah mentions in verse 214, even the Messengers of God were tested so severely that they would be shaken in spirit crying out to Allah for help. They were all tested to the climax and once they were groomed and trained, reaching their potential, the help of Allah came as expected.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ ۗ قُلْ مَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلِلْوَالِدَيْنِ وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ
وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ ۗ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢١٥﴾

They ask you, [O Muhammad], what they should spend. Say, "Whatever you spend of good is [to be] for parents and relatives and orphans and the needy and the traveler. And whatever you do of good - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it."

Just as Allah initially sent Musa (as) the ten commandments defining the basic laws, later proceeding to explain the entire Shariah that included 613 laws, the same strategy is adopted with Muhammad (pbuh). After explaining the basics, Allah now provides additional laws and simultaneously answers many questions that the Muslims had at the time. For example, with charity being a crucial aspect of Islam, how much charity should be given? What are the different forms of charity and to whom must the charity be given? These questions were particularly relevant given that such extensive forms of charity did not exist in the pre-Islamic period. Verse 215 clarifies that charity should be given to parents, kindred, orphans, wayfarers and those in want, emphasizing that charitable deeds do not necessarily have to be restricted to people outside of the family that are in need. Relatives and parents are deserving of charity if they face financial difficulties. Moreover, acknowledging how difficult it is for people to share wealth, Allah reassures them that He is fully aware of whatever good they do. Everything will be more than compensated on the Day of Judgment.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
 وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢١٦﴾

Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not.

While the need to fight in the cause of Islam and to end oppression had already been mentioned, jihad raised concerns for those who were not willing to fight. Hypocrites were unwilling to sacrifice their lives for Islam, and those with weak iman feared death, preferring peaceful preaching to fighting. Having adopted a myopic view, they were unable to understand that disbelievers would never permit Islam to exist in Medina. If Muslims wanted to respond to the aggression of the non-believers by preaching and showing tolerance, Islam will never survive because while the believers might have good intentions towards the non-Muslims, the latter only hate them.

Understanding the apprehensions of some Muslims towards fighting, Allah chose to console them in verse 216 by explaining the concept of tawakal, blind trust. As humans we can never know what is truly best for us because we have no knowledge of the future. We might detest something that could be good for us, while loving something that might be bad for us. Since the past, present and future is known to Allah with complete certainty and everything is in His control, it is best to have trust in His decisions. Therefore, if fighting has been prescribed by Allah, then the true believer will understand that there must be good in it. A Muslim who fights for the sake of Allah can only expect victory — either he embraces martyrdom or he continues to live in this world having attained the pleasure of Allah. Living in fear of society, never being able to fight for your rights and not having the courage to stand up for what is just is a waste of life.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ قِتَالٍ فِيهِ قُلْ قِتَالٌ فِيهِ كَبِيرٌ وَصَدٌّ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
 وَكُفْرٌ بِهِ وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَإِخْرَاجُ أَهْلِهِ مِنْهُ أَكْبَرُ عِندَ اللَّهِ وَالْفِتْنَةُ أَكْبَرُ
 مِنَ الْقَتْلِ وَلَا يَزَالُونَ يُقْتَلُونَكُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَرُدُّوكُمْ عَن دِينِكُمْ إِنِ اسْتَطَعُوا وَمَنْ
 يَرْتَدِدْ دِينَكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَيَمُتْ وَهُوَ كَافِرٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي
 الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢١٧﴾

They ask you about the sacred month - about fighting therein. Say, "Fighting therein is great [sin], but averting [people] from the way of Allah and disbelief in Him and [preventing access to] al-Masjid al-haram and the expulsion of its people therefrom are greater [evil] in the sight of Allah. And fitnah is greater than killing." And they will continue to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able. And whoever of you

reverts from his religion [to disbelief] and dies while he is a disbeliever - for those, their deeds have become worthless in this world and the Hereafter, and those are the companions of the Fire, they will abide therein eternally.

Approximately a year after migrating to Medina, the Muslims were commanded by the Prophet (pbuh) to raid Quraysh caravans that were traveling to and from Syria, bypassing the outskirts of Medina. Since the Muhajireen were persecuted and compelled to leave their homes while having their property and wealth usurped by the Quraysh, Allah permitted the Muslims to raid the caravans of the Quraysh as a means of claiming compensation for their own property that was unlawfully taken. In one instance, during the month of Rajab 2 A.H. the Prophet (pbuh) sent a group of people to Nakhla, a place located between Mecca and Taif, with the aim of gathering intelligence. At Nakhla, the Muslims intercepted a small caravan belonging to the Quraysh that was proceeding from Taif to Mecca and was being led by four people. During the encounter, one of the Quraysh was killed and the Muslims took the goods in the caravan back to Medina. The entire incident happened during the last days of Rajab when fighting was prohibited. This caused an uproar among the enemies of Islam who argued that the Prophet was encouraging his followers to violate the divine laws. When informed of the incident, Muhammad (pbuh) expressed extreme disapproval and refused to accept the booty that the Muslims had collected.¹¹⁹

Subsequently verse 217 was revealed where The Almighty cleared the Muslims of any blame by explaining that even though fighting during the month of Rajab was prohibited, the Quraysh had no ground of complaint because they were guilty of a graver offence. Oppressing, torturing, forcing the Muslims into exile from Mecca and forbidding Muslims access to the Holy Kaaba were more severe crimes than fighting during a prohibited month. Moreover, Allah confirmed that the enemy did not intend to stop attacking the Muslims until Islam was extinguished implying that the Quraysh were staunch opponents of the Muslims at that time. There was no peace treaty between the Quraysh and the Muslims. Therefore, although the incident at Nakhla was unfortunate, the Muslims could not be punished for it given the circumstances. This illustrates an important point about the Shariah. While the laws and rules are strict and it is incumbent upon believers to abide by them, if circumstances are such that there appears to be a clash between two laws, justice for the weak and oppressed always takes precedence.

¹¹⁹ Stewart, P. (2008). 'Unfolding Islam'. Berkshire: Garnet Publishing

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَتُوبَتِ لَهُمْ جُورُهُمْ وَأَنَّهُمْ يُرْجَوْنَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢١٨﴾

Indeed, those who have believed and those who have emigrated and fought in the cause of Allah - those expect the mercy of Allah. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

For those believers who were still apprehensive about sacrificing their lives for Allah or leaving their tribe and possessions to migrate and join the Muslim community in Medina, Verse 218 reminds them to prioritize their goals. If it is the mercy of Allah that is being sought, then it is necessary to struggle and be willing to give up all resources and luxuries for the sake of pleasing God instead of falling in love with dunya and making the same mistake that led to the downfall of the previous ummah. Muslims should be prepared to fight in the cause of Islam and migrate to Medina for the sake of strengthening the Muslim community. The goal of pleasing Allah must supersede personal preferences, desires or fears.

﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنْفَعَةٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٢١٩﴾﴾

They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, "In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit." And they ask you what they should spend. Say, "The excess [beyond needs]." Thus Allah makes clear to you the verses [of revelation] that you might give thought.

When introducing laws that required Muslims to abstain from harmful activities, Islam always adopted a lenient approach initially, given the excessive indulgence in such activities during the pre-Islamic period. Adopting a harsh and stern approach would have caused many to abandon Islam. The same stance can be seen with verses pertaining to alcohol and gambling that were initially focused on simply alerting the believers that there was more sin attached to these activities than benefit. Once gambling and alcohol were labeled as a great sin, Muslims immediately curtailed their consumption of alcohol and their involvement in gambling.

During the period of ignorance, the Arabs were more accustomed to accumulating wealth through means such as gambling than to give out in charity. As a result, the numerous verses promoting charity

created a problem for some believers who kept inquiring about how much was necessary to spend in charitable deeds. Their constant questioning revealed their reluctance to spend in the cause of Allah. Despite being repeatedly told the benefits of charity and the need to help others in order to acquire the satisfaction of Allah, their continuous questioning resulted in a stern response given in verse 219 — give what is beyond your needs.

There is an important lesson for us to learn in this. Our reluctance to fulfill certain commands of Allah causes us to ask a series of irrelevant questions even though we understand exactly what Allah is commanding. Yet again, this was a characteristic feature of the previous ummah such as the case when they were given a simple command to slaughter a cow, but due to their reluctance, they kept asking irrelevant questions that made the simple command difficult to execute. When Allah had repeatedly encouraged the Muslims to spend as much as they could on charity and in the cause of Islam, why could they not understand such a simple command? In fact, at times, due to the whisper of Iblis and the fear of jihad, we keep repeating the same question even though it was sufficiently answered the first time. In reality, we choose to ignore the answer given and keep asking the same question hoping that eventually an answer will be given that suits our desires.

فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْيَتَامَىٰ قُلْ إِصْلَاحٌ لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ وَإِنْ تُخَاطَبُوا فِيهِمْ
فَإِخْوَانُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْمُفْسِدَ مِنَ الْمُصْلِحِ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَعْنَتَكُمْ إِنْ اللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ
حَكِيمٌ

To this world and the Hereafter. And they ask you about orphans. Say, "Improvement for them is best. And if you mix your affairs with theirs - they are your brothers. And Allah knows the corrupter from the amender. And if Allah had willed, He could have put you in difficulty. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Islamic injunctions continuously stressed on the need to look after orphans and warned believers that negligence in this area can cause the believer to lose his akhirah. Based on the severity of the punishment, Muslims had many questions in this area. Therefore, verse 220 clarifies that any decision taken regarding the wealth of orphans should be with the intention of doing what is best for them. If an individual decides to take the property of an orphan, it has to be with the intention of safeguarding and protecting it. Confiscating any asset of an orphan or exchanging his property with property owned by the guardian, in the event that the former owns land that has a higher market value than the land owned by the latter is strictly forbidden.

As a mercy, Allah emphasized the need to care for orphans but He did not necessitate a certain portion of a believer's wealth or assets to be distributed to orphans. Allah could have put the ummah into difficulty by introducing such laws, but He did not. Instead, each Muslim should decide how much financial help he can give orphans that is within his capacity.

وَلَا تَنْكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكَةَ حَتَّىٰ تُؤْمِنَ ۚ وَلَا مُمِئَةً مُّؤْمِنَةً خَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكَةٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَتْكُمْ ۗ
وَلَا تُنكِحُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَتَّىٰ يُؤْمِنُوا ۚ وَلَعَبْدٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ مُّشْرِكٍ وَلَوْ أَعْجَبَكُمْ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ
يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَالْمَغْفِرَةِ بِإِذْنِهِ ۗ وَبَيِّنُا آيَاتِهِ ۗ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe. And a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe. And a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you. Those invite [you] to the Fire, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that perhaps they may remember.

Marriage with the mushrikeen was another common question. Although the Muslims did understand the concept of tauheed, many of them had lived a life of idol worship prior to embracing Islam. They still had family members, relatives and close friends who were worshipping idols. In this context, while it might be easy for a believer these days to refrain from having intimate relationships with idol worshippers, it was not as simple for Muslims 1400 years ago. For this reason, it was necessary to not only forbid intermarriage between Muslims and idol worshippers, but to also provide a justification. Therefore, the verses clearly state that Muslim men cannot marry mushrik, polytheist, women and Muslim women cannot marry mushrik men. Regardless of how friendly or kind the polytheists may be, they only aim to pull the believer towards the hellfire, trying to promote shirk by encouraging the worship of other gods. In contrast, Allah aims to pull the believers towards paradise by introducing such stringent commands that forbid a Muslim from marrying a pagan worshipper.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْمَحِيضِ ۗ قُلْ هُوَ أَذَىٰ فَأَعْتَزِلُوا ۗ وَالنِّسَاءَ فِي الْمَحِيضِ ۗ وَلَا تَقْرُبُوهُنَّ
حَتَّىٰ يَطْهَرْنَ ۗ فَإِذَا تَطَهَّرْنَ فَأْتُوهُنَّ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ وَيُحِبُّ
الْمُطَهِّرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

And they ask you about menstruation. Say, "It is harm, so keep away from wives during menstruation. And do not approach them until they are pure. And when they have purified themselves, then come to them from where Allah has ordained for you. Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves."

Raising awareness about hygiene and sanitation after the formation of a Muslim community was important to prevent the spread of disease and infection. In particular, verses revealed focused on the condition of women during menstruation. The Quran states that men can maintain sexual relations with women only after the period of menstruation is complete and women have purified themselves by taking the ritual bath, *ghusl*, as explained in the Sunnah. However, unlike the period of ignorance, that does not mean that women cannot stay in the same house or be in the presence of other family members because they are impure. It does not mean that they cannot engage in zikr because although they might not be physically pure enough to pray or hygienically clean enough to engage in physical intimacy, their tongue and their soul are still pure.

نَسَاءُكُمْ حَرَّتْ لَكُمْ فَأْتُوا حَرْثَكُمْ أَنْى شِئْتُمْ وَقَدِّمُوا لِنَفْسِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَعْلَمُوا
 أَنْكُمْ مُلْقَوَةٌ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٢٣﴾

Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers.

In pre-Islamic Arabia, the two most vulnerable groups in society were orphans and women. Women were considered to have been created solely for the purpose of satisfying men. They had no rights or privileges. Having addressed the need to protect the rights of orphans, the surah now focuses on the rights of women. Initially, it alters the mind-set of men by explaining to them that wives are also intellectual humans that have rights and privileges which must be honored. The purpose of marriage is not just to reproduce but to also allow both husband and wife to enjoy each other's companionship. The husband has to understand that he is not bringing a slave into the marriage. He is bringing another human who also has intellect, dreams, desires, needs, aspirations and emotions, making her deserving of respect. Marriage is about mutual love and respect.

This has been beautifully explained by comparing the relationship of husband and wife to a farmer who sows seeds in his land. The farmer has to work tirelessly to protect and safeguard his land, crops and plants from potential dangers. Moreover, when he sows seeds, he has to be patient allowing time

for the seeds to germinate and the plants to grow so that he can harvest and derive benefits. If the land deteriorates in quality, he has to work hard to add nutrients and fertilizers to maintain its quality otherwise he loses all his investment and hard work. Most importantly, he derives pleasure and comfort by just looking at his land, particularly when it is fertile and well-maintained.

Marriage involves a very similar relationship. The husband has to work tirelessly to protect and safeguard his wife and children from potential harm. While he wishes for his children to quickly mature and become responsible and successful adults making him proud, he has to be patient, grooming and training them, looking after their needs and teaching them morals and principles. Being the head of the family, he is responsible for the mental well-being of all members of the household. Just as deteriorating land requires fertilizers to protect the crops, a wife who might be stressed or physically exhausted requires extra care from her husband so that she can be mentally fit to look after the kids and provide a healthy environment for the children. Most importantly, the wife should be seen as a companion with her own rights, preferences and desires. Her needs and opinion should be respected and a husband who truly loves, appreciates, acknowledges and respects his wife, will always look upon her with admiration and affection. With such a beautiful analogy, this removes any possibility of physical, verbal or emotional abuse being permitted in a marriage. On the contrary, it teaches men to be vigilant of how they behave with their wives.

Finally, the verse also clarifies that while the husband can approach his wife to satisfy his needs, he must fear Allah knowing that he will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment for any injustice or ill-treatment. But why would Allah mention fearing Him while at the same time giving men the freedom to approach their wives when and how they wish? Why does Allah tell men to put forth an act of righteousness when approaching their wives? This clarifies that marital rape is prohibited in Islam. Just because two people are married does not give the husband the right to fulfill his desires in a manner that might cause physical or mental harm to his wife. By putting forth an act of righteousness, men are being told to do a good deed, recite a dua or engage in zikr before they are involved in physical intimacy so as to control their nafs and ensure that they do not harm their partner.

وَلَا تَجْعَلُوا اللَّهَ عُرْضَةً لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ أَنْ تَبَرُّوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَتُصَلِّحُوا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ
 وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

And do not make [your oath by] Allah an excuse against being righteous and fearing Allah and making peace among people. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ قُلُوبُكُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٥﴾

Allah does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.

لِّلَّذِينَ يُؤَلُّونَ مِن نِّسَائِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍ فَإِن فَاءُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٦﴾

For those who swear not to have sexual relations with their wives is a waiting time of four months, but if they return [to normal relations] - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

وَإِن عَزَمُوا الطَّلَاقَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

And if they decide on divorce - then indeed, Allah is Hearing and Merciful.

When making promises, believers were being warned not to take Allah's name as an excuse to do ill, promote evil, harm someone or break ties of friendship and loyalty. There is no blame on those who take God's name in an oath merely as an expression for example, "I swear to God, this food is amazing". However, those who intentionally take an oath by Allah's name must make sure they are taking it to do good, promote honesty and justice.

In this regard, a significant problem that prevailed during the period of ignorance concerned the tradition of men taking an intentional oath of abstention from their wives implying that they would abstain from engaging in any physical contact with their wives. This resulted in a grave injustice towards women as their husbands were still free to satisfy their sexual needs by approaching other wives. Therefore, Allah revealed in verse 226 that in compensation for an oath of abstention taken in the name of Allah, men would have a period of four months to decide whether or not they wished to reconcile with their wives. If they did not wish to reconcile, a divorce would entail giving the women freedom to marry elsewhere. This proves the significance of physical relations and intimacy between

husband and wife. Even if the husband is kind and nice to his wife, the fact that he refuses to be intimate with her based on an oath is an act of cruelty to his wife.

وَالْمُطَلَّقَاتُ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي
 أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنْنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَعُولُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا
 وَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٢٨﴾

Divorced women remain in waiting for three periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have more right to take them back in this [period] if they want reconciliation. And due to the wives is similar to what is expected of them, according to what is reasonable. But the men have a degree over them [in responsibility and authority]. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

Laws were also introduced pertaining to the appropriate means of divorce. Women have to perform iddah in the same home as their husband before the marriage can be annulled and she can be free to marry someone else. The period of iddah is a waiting time period of three menstruations. It is beneficial because it helps to ensure that the woman is not pregnant. If women were allowed to marry elsewhere instantly after a divorce without any iddah, any immediate pregnancy would cast doubts regarding the biological father of the child. The introduction of such laws are designed to protect the rights of children and women. The father of an unborn child should be ascertained with complete clarity so that he can bear the responsibility of meeting the financial needs of both the mother and the child.

Moreover, an additional benefit of keeping a long waiting period that lasts three menstruations and must be completed with both husband and wife living in the same home is that it increases the chances of reconciliation. Since divorces are often given in a moment of anger and rage, a period of reconciliation spent under the same roof can help both parties accurately assess the journey ahead and its implications for themselves and their children so that they can make a mature and wise decision. Spending the iddah together in the same house helps to soften the heart as compared to spending the iddah apart from each other.

Furthermore, in order to promote reconciliation, the husband is permitted to take back his wife during the period of iddah, if he decides for a reconciliation. As he was the one who initiated the divorce, he also has the right to end the divorce and reconcile. But as explained in verse 228, men and women

will both be given rights in the area of divorce. Hence, women who do not wish for a reconciliation, will have the right to annul the marriage as well by forgoing a portion of their dowry, as explained later in the surah. Khula can be obtained by having the woman return a portion of the dowry that she received from her husband as compensation for her freedom. This right is provided to further protect women from any harm or injustice. However, despite both having rights in the marriage and during a divorce, men will have rights that exceed that of women owing to the added responsibility of being the bread earner and protector during marriage and even during the period of iddah. Despite a divorce having been given, the husband still has to continue protecting and meeting the financial needs of his wife while she remains in iddah. The added responsibility deserves superior rights. As a result, men have the right to initiate a divorce instantly and can choose to reconcile during the period of iddah, while women have to forgo a portion of their dowry to attain their freedom. In addition, men can divorce their wives on two separate occasions while still being able to reconcile during the period of iddah. The same is not true for a wife who initiates a divorce through khula.

الطَّلَاقُ مَرَّتَانٍ فَإِمْسَاكٌ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ تَسْرِيحٌ بِإِحْسَانٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا مِمَّا
 ءَاتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ
 عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ ۗ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ



Divorce is twice. Then, either keep [her] in an acceptable manner or release [her] with good treatment. And it is not lawful for you to take anything of what you have given them unless both fear that they will not be able to keep [within] the limits of Allah. But if you fear that they will not keep [within] the limits of Allah, then there is no blame upon either of them concerning that by which she ransoms herself. These are the limits of Allah, so do not transgress them. And whoever transgresses the limits of Allah - it is those who are the wrongdoers.

The rights that men and women have in a marriage and particularly during a divorce are further elaborated in verse 229. Just as the man has the right to initiate a divorce, the woman can also terminate the marriage contract by applying for a khula, even if her husband is keen on reconciliation. In addition, in the event that the husband initiates a divorce, he is forbidden from demanding that the gifts he gave his wife during their marriage be returned. This helps to grant financial security and independence to women, preventing men from dealing unjustly with them.

فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ حَتَّى تَنْكِحَ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ، فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ
يَتَرَاجَعَا إِنْ ظَنَّا أَنْ يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٠﴾

And if he has divorced her [for the third time], then she is not lawful to him afterward until [after] she marries a husband other than him. And if the latter husband divorces her [or dies], there is no blame upon the woman and her former husband for returning to each other if they think that they can keep [within] the limits of Allah. These are the limits of Allah, which He makes clear to a people who know.

When the husband initiates a divorce, the right to reconcile during iddah is only applicable till two divorces. This right is abolished once a third divorce is pronounced after which it is compulsory to terminate the marriage so as to prevent men from continuously divorcing their wives only to reconcile after a few months. Allah recognizes the fact that although a divorce can be an emotionally traumatizing event for both husband and wife, it has a greater impact on women than men. Women will be concerned about their financial situation and shelter. Where will they go after the period of iddah? Who will look after them? How will they meet their financial needs if they do not work? Therefore, if men are given the right to repeatedly divorce their wives only to reconcile later, women would have to suffer this emotional turmoil throughout their lives. To prevent this, a divorce is only reconcilable twice.

A final injunction is provided in the event that a husband divorces his wife on three separate occasions after which reconciliation is not permissible unless the woman marries someone else and is divorced again. However, the Quran keeps emphasizing the importance of keeping within the limits ordained by Allah. The woman should not enter into a second marriage with the intention of getting a divorce so that she can reunite with her former husband. In Islam, the household is the most important unit in the community, so treachery and deceit cannot be the basis of any marriage.

Moreover, having already lived together in the past, both the woman and her former husband will have to seriously consider if they can respect and love each other once again, forgiving each other for past mistakes and giving each other the rights deserved. If they feel they can live within the limits ordained by Allah, then they may reunite after the woman is divorced in her second marriage. This proves the weightage given to marriage in Islam. It is by far one of the most important relationships because it affects not just the husband and wife, but the children as well. Therefore, if a man and woman are considering reuniting, it must be a wise and calculative decision, acknowledging the sentiments of everyone involved. In fact, there is immense wisdom in allowing a woman to reunite with her former husband, who has divorced her thrice, only after she enters into another marriage

contract and subsequently faces divorce. Having received three divorces and marrying someone else, the woman can experience two different lifestyles and relationships, drawing comparisons between them. Thereafter, if she is divorced again by the second husband, she will be in the best position to decide what is truly best for her.

وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلْيُنَّ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَلَا
تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ ضَرَارًا لِنَعْتِدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ، وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ
هُزُوءًا وَادْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ لِيُعْظِمَ بِهِ
وَأَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣١﴾

And when you divorce women and they have [nearly] fulfilled their term, either retain them according to acceptable terms or release them according to acceptable terms, and do not keep them, intending harm, to transgress [against them]. And whoever does that has certainly wronged himself. And do not take the verses of Allah in jest. And remember the favor of Allah upon you and what has been revealed to you of the Book and wisdom by which He instructs you. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Knowing of all things.

To further protect women from any kind of injustice, verse 231 clarifies that a man who gives his wife a revocable divorce (either one or two divorces have been given) can reconcile within the period of iddah provided that he sincerely wants the marriage to be successful and does not wish for the household unit to be disrupted. His intent of revoking the divorce and taking back his wife should not be to take revenge or cause her harm. Moreover, he should not ridicule the divine injunctions, divorcing his wife for no reason only because he knows he can reconcile within the specified period of time, or reconciling only to mentally torture his wife and prevent her from moving on. A divorce can have severe negative impacts on both the wife and the children, even if it is revocable. Allah is fully aware and will take retribution for any injustice done to anyone in the marriage. So, men should not assume that they can be unjust because their wives are alone and helpless, unable to defend themselves. Allah will never forgive the oppressor and will ensure that full compensation is given to the oppressed both in this life and the next.

وَإِذَا طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلْيُنَّ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَنْ يَنْكِحْنَ أَزْوَاجَهُنَّ إِذَا تَرَاضَوْا
بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ذَلِكَ يُوعِظُ بِهِ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَُمْ أَنْزَلْنَا
لَكُمْ وَأَطَهَّرُ اللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

And when you divorce women and they have fulfilled their term, do not prevent them from remarrying their [former] husbands if they agree among themselves on an acceptable basis. That is instructed to whoever of you believes in Allah and the Last Day. That is better for you and purer, and Allah knows and you know not.

Furthermore, if a husband initiates a revocable divorce and fails to reconcile with his wife during the period of iddah, both can still reunite by entering into a nikah again. These injunctions prove how Islam aims to protect and safeguard women from injustice or abuse while simultaneously giving priority to the household unit. A divorce does not imply that the marriage terminates immediately. Plenty of opportunities are provided for the couple to reunite for the betterment of the children and the household. Verse 232 strictly states that in the event that a husband and wife wish to reunite after a revocable divorce, other members of the family or society should not intervene to prevent the reconciliation.

﴿ وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنَمِّمَ الرِّضَاعَةَ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ لَا تُكَلَّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بِوَلَدِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَالِدِهِ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنِ تِرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرًا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ تَسْتَرْضِعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَأَنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ وَأَعْمَامُ أَنْ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿۲۳۲﴾

Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing [period]. Upon the father is the mothers' provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable. No person is charged with more than his capacity. No mother should be harmed through her child, and no father through his child. And upon the [father's] heir is [a duty] like that [of the father]. And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon either of them. And if you wish to have your children nursed by a substitute, there is no blame upon you as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Seeing of what you do.

Allah also ensures that the rights of infants are protected during a divorce. Therefore, if a marriage is terminated, the father will have to pay a suitable amount of financial compensation for food and clothing to satisfy the needs of his child and the mother during breast-feeding. Allah refrains from fixing the amount that has to be given because it depends on the financial situation of the father. Islam does not permit the mother to be harmed by not having her needs met during the breast feeding period, but neither does Islam permit the father to be harmed by forcing him to pay an exorbitant amount to the mother which is beyond his capacity.

In the event that the father dies and he has an heir from another wife, the heir will have to meet the financial demands of the mother and baby. If the mother declines to breastfeed, Islam ensures the

rights of all members in the family are taken into consideration including the right of the baby to be breastfed. Therefore, if the mother declines to breastfeed, a wet nurse can feed the baby provided that the father financially compensates her based on what is reasonable. But, what if the father refuses to allow the baby to be breastfed by the mother or a wet nurse? In that situation, Allah makes it clear that if the baby has to be weaned during the first 2 years, it must be a decision taken by both mother and father. The father, on his own, cannot deprive the baby of its right to be breastfed. This verse also clarifies that from an Islamic perspective, a divorce places greater responsibility on the father than it does on the mother. He is responsible for meeting the financial needs of his children while the mother is free to enter into another nikah after her iddah and move on. This reiterates why the man has more rights than the woman. Given the added responsibility he faces during marriage, during a divorce and after a divorce, it is only fair that he should be given superior rights.

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا
بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ
خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٣٤﴾

And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - they, [the wives, shall] wait four months and ten [days]. And when they have fulfilled their term, then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable manner. And Allah is [fully] Acquainted with what you do.

وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا عَرَّضْتُمْ بِهِ مِنْ خِطْبَةِ النِّسَاءِ أَوْ أَكْتُمْتُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَلِمَ
اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ سَتَذَكُرُونَهُنَّ وَلَكِنْ لَا تُوَاعِدُوهُنَّ سِرًّا إِلَّا أَنْ تَقُولُوا قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا وَلَا
تَعْزِمُوا عَقْدَةَ النِّكَاحِ حَتَّى يَبْلُغَ الْكِتَابُ أَجَلَهُ، وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي
أَنْفُسِكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُ وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣٥﴾

There is no blame upon you for that to which you [indirectly] allude concerning a proposal to women or for what you conceal within yourselves. Allah knows that you will have them in mind. But do not promise them secretly except for saying a proper saying. And do not determine to undertake a marriage contract until the decreed period reaches its end. And know that Allah knows what is within yourselves, so beware of Him. And know that Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing.

The surah then addresses the rights of widows. During the pre-Islamic period, widows were not permitted to leave the home of their deceased husband or marry again. Islam abolished these tribal laws by stating that a widow will have to perform iddah of four months and ten days based on the lunar calendar, after which she is free to marry someone else if she wishes. The iddah period helps to

confirm pregnancy, and if the widow is pregnant, then she will remain in iddah until the baby is born. Those who wish to propose to a widow directly, seeking her in marriage, can only do so after she has completed her iddah. But why keep the iddah 4 months and 10 days? If the idea is to confirm the possibility of a pregnancy, can that not be done in just one month? A long iddah period for a widow illustrates the fact that Allah knows best how much time a woman would need to grieve before she could move on, and how much time society would need so that it does not point a finger at the woman's character and honor for moving on so quickly. Allowing proposals to be sent to the widow after a long iddah period protects the widow's honor. If proposals were permitted immediately after the death of the husband, society could start making false and inappropriate accusations regarding the widow's character and chastity.

لَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنْ طَلَقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ مَا لَمْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ أَوْ تَقَرَّبُوا لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً وَمَتَّعُوهُنَّ عَلَى
 التَّوَسُّعِ قَدْرَهُ وَعَلَى الْمُقْتَرِ قَدْرَهُ مَتَاعًا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿١٣٦﴾

There is no blame upon you if you divorce women you have not touched nor specified for them an obligation. But give them [a gift of] compensation - the wealthy according to his capability and the poor according to his capability - a provision according to what is acceptable, a duty upon the doers of good.

وَإِنْ طَلَقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمْسُوهُنَّ وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا فَرَضْتُمْ إِلَّا
 أَنْ يَعْفُوبَ أَوْ يُعْفُوا الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عَقْدَةُ الزَّكَاجِ وَأَنْ تَعْفُوا أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَى وَلَا
 تَنْسُوا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١٣٧﴾

And if you divorce them before you have touched them and you have already specified for them an obligation, then [give] half of what you specified - unless they forego the right or the one in whose hand is the marriage contract foregoes it. And to forego it is nearer to righteousness. And do not forget graciousness between you. Indeed Allah, of whatever you do, is Seeing.

The dowry is another example of how Allah seeks to honor women and protect their rights by granting them financial security. Dowry is given by the husband to the wife in marriage as a sign of his intention to seek chastity and to start a new life with sincere intention. In return, the acceptance of the dowry by the wife is symbolic of her willingness to start a new life with her husband with complete sincerity, while also desiring chastity. Therefore, once determined, the dowry should be given before consummation of the marriage.

Verses 236 and 237 explain what is due to the wife in case a divorce occurs after the dowry has been determined or before the dowry has been determined. In both cases the verses deal with a marriage in which divorce occurs before consummation. If the dowry has not yet been determined, then it is still better for the husband to free his wife with some suitable gift depending on his financial situation. This proves that Allah understands the impact that a divorce can have on a woman. Divorce has always been a social taboo and it has always had a greater negative impact on the woman than on the man. Realizing this, Allah wishes to protect the financial security of the woman by making sure that she receives some compensation even in the event that the marriage was not consummated.

In the event that the dowry is determined but divorce occurs before consummation, then half of the dowry should still be given to the woman unless she forgoes her claim or unless the husband decides to forgo his half and wishes to pay the entire dowry to the woman. A man who rids himself of all greed, ego and anger, wishing to please Allah by giving the woman the entire dowry instead of half, will earn an immense reward for his sacrifice and his righteous deed. Likewise, a woman who intends to forego her half in order to rid herself of greed, ego and anger, wishing to please Allah will also have an immense reward. Allah provides injunctions to protect the basic rights of men and women, but He rewards any additional act of kindness shown in order to teach mankind the significance of piety, good deeds and sabr especially during a time like divorce where there is a need to control ego, pride and anger.

حَفِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلَاةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ ﴿٢٣٨﴾

Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers and [in particular] the middle prayer and stand before Allah , devoutly obedient.

فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالًا أَوْ رُكْبَانًا فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَأَذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَمَا عَلَّمَكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٣٩﴾

And if you fear [an enemy, then pray] on foot or riding. But when you are secure, then remember Allah [in prayer], as He has taught you that which you did not [previously] know.

After explaining the basic laws that form the foundation of the Shariah, addressing the basic queries of the Muslims regarding fighting, spending, wine and gambling, treatment of orphans and women, explaining the sanctity of marriage and the rules for divorce, Allah now stresses upon the need to safeguard the prayer. But why now? Perhaps because Allah knows that no Muslim will be able to

adhere to Allah's commands and injunctions if he does not discipline his nafs on a daily basis. He needs to remind himself that he is nothing but a slave of God who has to implement deen in his life regardless of the consequences and challenges he might face. Even if he does not wish to look after the needs of his wife during iddah, he has to. Even if he does not wish to fight in the cause of Allah, he has to. Even if he does not wish to empathize with women and orphans, he has to. How will he do so many things that oppose the demands of his nafs if he does not inculcate taqwa daily by being strict regarding his obligatory prayers?

Just the mere act of leaving dunya related activities and rushing towards the prayer weakens the nafs, which demands that the prayer be delayed and priority be given to dunya, while strengthening the rooh, which demands that the prayer be done immediately. Moreover, the word 'wustha' is taken by many scholars to mean the focal point, middle or center of something. This does not necessarily mean that Allah is telling the Muslims to protect the middle-prayer, Asar. Rather Allah is telling them to safeguard the focal or center of the prayer — khushoo. Khushoo means humility, sincerity and tranquility. A believer who prays with khushoo stands in awe of his Creator and feels extremely humbled. Therefore, while performing the prayer is in itself an act that strengthens the rooh and negates the nafs, it is the prayer that has khushoo in it that will provide the greatest boost to taqwa.

Naturally, as Muslims started to engage in battle with the enemy, praying in congregation or while standing in one place became difficult. It was also hard to pray with extreme concentration and khushoo. Therefore, believers were instructed to guard their prayers when fearing the presence of an enemy by praying on foot or riding as per convenience. Once the threat has subsided, they can pray once again in congregation and with khushoo so as to further strengthen their spiritual connection with God.

The message being conveyed is that the mode of prayer can be altered in the event of a war, but prayers cannot be avoided even if the believer finds it hard to focus during his prayer. This again reiterates that even the act of prayer itself is sufficient in boosting taqwa and strengthening the rooh. Just because khushoo is not present and the believer's mind is distracted does not mean he should underestimate the value of his prayers.

وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذُرُونَ أَزْوَاجًا وَصِيَّةً لِأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَتَاعًا إِلَى الْحَوْلِ
غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ
مَعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٠﴾

And those who are taken in death among you and leave wives behind - for their wives is a bequest: maintenance for one year without turning [them] out. But if they leave [of their own accord], then there is no blame upon you for what they do with themselves in an acceptable way. And Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise.

وَاللَّمْطَلَقَتِ مَنَعٌ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ حَقًّا عَلَى الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٤١﴾

And for divorced women is a provision according to what is acceptable - a duty upon the righteous.

كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٢٤٢﴾

Thus does Allah make clear to you His verses that you might use reason.

Since the act of jihad and battle was continuously being stressed, a final concern involved the needs of widows. In this regard, the initial injunctions taught the believing men to leave a suitable amount of financial wealth for widows so that they could satisfy their basic needs while living in their deceased husband's home for a year. This law was designed to protect the rights of widows who did not have any other residence or place of refuge. In this manner, they were guaranteed a home and financial compensation for a year. However, if they chose to leave their deceased husband's home immediately after the period of iddah, then there was no blame on them. Living in a patriarchal society where men and their needs were always the focal point, Allah reiterates that women and their needs must always be considered alongside men. If a man is fighting in battle, the sacrifice his wife is making and the challenges she might have to face should also be taken into consideration. Similarly, if a man divorces his wife and ends a marriage, the sacrifice and challenges of his partner should also be taken into consideration.

As aforementioned, these were the initial injunctions given to the ummah, training believing men to cater for the needs of all members of the family including widows they may leave behind. Subsequently, verses were revealed introducing a fixed and pre-determined share for widows, parents and children of the deceased to prevent any injustice against the vulnerable.

﴿ أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ خَرَجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَهُمْ أُلُوفٌ حَذَرَ الْمَوْتِ فَقَالَ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ مُوتُوا ثُمَّ أَحْيَاهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَشْكُرُونَ ﴾ (٢٤٣)

Have you not considered those who left their homes in many thousands, fearing death? Allah said to them, "Die"; then He restored them to life. And Allah is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude.

﴿ وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَعَلِمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴾ (٢٤٤)

And fight in the cause of Allah and know that Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

﴿ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضْعِفُهُ لَهُ أَضعَافًا كَثِيرَةً وَاللَّهُ يَقْبِضُ وَيَبْصُطُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴾ (٢٤٥)

Who is it that would loan Allah a goodly loan so He may multiply it for him many times over? And it is Allah who withholds and grants abundance, and to Him you will be returned.

Although the Shariah has been explained, there was still a need to mitigate the fear of death while fighting or struggling in the cause of Allah. This was particularly cumbersome given that hypocrites formed a substantial part of the ummah, convincing others that Islam should be limited to peaceful preaching without the need to engage in battles. Therefore, just as a parent has to constantly reiterate to the child the need to engage in certain activities which the child might not enjoy but the parent knows is best for him, Allah had to constantly reiterate the need to fight and spend in the cause of Islam. Muslims were repeatedly told to control their fears by detaching themselves from the love of this world because jihad is vital for success in this life and the next, even though Muslims might not be keen for it. For this reason, every time Allah repeats the injunctions, He provides different expressions, words and examples to motivate the believers to follow His commands.

In this case, Allah narrates an incident in verse 243 that took place with the Children of Israel. According to Jewish literature, a plague had infected the land of Canaan after the Israelites had successfully occupied it. In order to prevent the plague from spreading, they were commanded to not flee from the land. In fact, a similar command can be seen in the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which states:

*“If you hear about an outbreak of plague in a land do not go to it; but if plague breaks out in a country where you are staying, do not run away from it.”*¹²⁰

Unfortunately, many of the Israelites ran from the land in fear of death. Therefore, as mentioned in the verse, God gave death to all those who transgressed His command. Subsequently, they were given life again and Hizqeel (a.s) — Ezekiel — was then commanded to spiritually strengthen them after their resurrection. Upon being given life again, they realized that they cannot run from death, so they sought forgiveness and repented.¹²¹ A similar incident is explained in the Old Testament where Ezekiel was shown a vision by God of a valley filled with bones which were subsequently joined together and resurrected. This story is referred to as the ‘valley of dry bones’ in the book of Ezekiel.¹²²

The significance of revealing this story during the early Medinee period, when Muslims had not yet fought many battles was to remind them to not emotionally attach themselves to this life so that they start fearing death. Death is always in the hands of Allah and it is not possible to run from it. It is better to die while obeying the commands of Allah than to die in transgression.

Some scholars believe that verse 243 could also be referring to an incident when the Israelites ran from their promised land when they were being attacked by a strong enemy, as will be mentioned in verses 246 onwards. Allah knows best. Regardless of the exact incident being narrated, the Israelites were punished because they transgressed Allah’s commands in fear of death. So, the moral of the verse is that the righteous slaves of Allah should not fear anything other than God. They should not love life to the extent that they despise sacrificing it for the sake of Allah. Death will approach each individual as ordained by God and none can escape it.

¹²⁰ Sahih Bukhari, 5728

¹²¹ Mehar, I.A. (2006). ‘Al-Islam: Inception to Conclusion’. South Carolina: BookSurge Publishing, p.130

¹²² Vang, P., Carter, T.G. (2006). ‘Telling God’s story: the biblical narrative from beginning to end.’ Tennessee: Publishing Group, p.149

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الْمَلَكِ مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مُوسَى إِذْ قَالَ لِلرَّبِّ لَهْمُ أَرْسَلْ لَنَا مَلِكًا
 نُقَاتِلْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ قَالَ هَلْ عَسَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ أَلَّا تُقَاتِلُوا
 قَالُوا وَمَا لَنَا أَلَّا نُقَاتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَقَدْ أُخْرِجْنَا مِنْ دِيَارِنَا وَأَبْنَاءِنَا فَلَمَّا
 كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقِتَالُ تَوَلَّوْا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿١٤٦﴾

Have you not considered the assembly of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses when they said to a prophet of theirs, "Send to us a king, and we will fight in the way of Allah"? He said, "Would you perhaps refrain from fighting if fighting was prescribed for you?" They said, "And why should we not fight in the cause of Allah when we have been driven out from our homes and from our children?" But when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except for a few of them. And Allah is Knowing of the wrongdoers.

A historical event took place with the Children of Israel where a small army of believers were able to vanquish a large army with the help of Allah. This incident occurred after the ancient Israelites were able to enter the city of Canaan with the help of Joshua. Despite their large numbers, the Israelites continuously faced a threat from the neighboring Philistines who inevitably waged war on them. The Israelites believed that the Arc of Covenant — which contained the relics of Musa (a.s) and Haroon (a.s) — had magical powers that would enable them to defeat any enemy. When facing war with the Philistines, they proceeded in battle with the Arc in hand. As the enemy brutally attacked them and the arc failed to reveal any magic, the Israelites were consumed in fear and ran from the battlefield facing a miserable defeat. They lost their Arc to the Philistines and fled in fear of their lives, leaving behind their homes, wives and children. Afraid of sacrificing their lives, they preferred to flee than fight on the battlefield. But, why did the Israelites fear jihad so much when the same Israelites had previously engaged in jihad to take over the land of Canaan?

After entering the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, many of the Israelites started to prioritize wealth and worldly comfort over jihad and sacrifice. When they were experiencing hardship in the desert, they became spiritually strong. When they experienced comfort in Canaan, they became spiritually weak. Their decline in spirituality coupled with their rising love for life and wealth resulted in the fear of death which caused many to run from the Philistines and leave their own homes and families behind. To spiritually strengthen them, Allah sent the Israelites a prophet, Samuel or Shammil (a.s). Realizing their mistake, the Israelites decided to fight back in order to reclaim their land and

waited for God's command. However, when the command of God came to fight, as mentioned in the verse, many of them hesitated and were reluctant to face the enemy.¹²³

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ بَعَثَ لَكُمْ طَالُوتَ مَلِكًا قَالُوا أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ
الْمُلْكُ عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ أَحَقُّ بِالْمُلْكِ مِنْهُ وَلَمْ يُؤْتَ سَعَةَ مَالٍ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
أَصْطَفَاهُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَزَادَهُ بَسْطَةً فِي الْعِلْمِ وَالْجِسْمِ وَاللَّهُ يُؤْتِي مَلَكَهُ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٤٧﴾

And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, Allah has sent to you Saul as a king." They said, "How can he have kingship over us while we are more worthy of kingship than him and he has not been given any measure of wealth?" He said, "Indeed, Allah has chosen him over you and has increased him abundantly in knowledge and stature. And Allah gives His sovereignty to whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing [in favor] and Knowing."

Those keen on fighting asked Prophet Samuel to appoint a suitable king who would lead them into battle against the Philistines. Witnessing their eagerness to fight and their promise to obey the will of God, the Prophet appointed Talut, or Saul, as commanded by Allah. Upon hearing the selection, the Israelites retaliated because they felt that Talut was not fit to be a king. He was not known to be wealthy and he also belonged to the Children of Benjamin. Benjamin was one of the children of Yaqub (as) and his tribe was the least popular among the Children of Israel.¹²⁴ The Israelites failed to understand that despite his lack of affluence and popularity, Talut was blessed with knowledge and strength which was ideal for training the army and devising war strategies. In fact, the selection of Talut was a means by which Allah placed the Israelites in a test. If they really were ashamed of abandoning their land and families, and they really were serious about fighting in the cause of Allah, then they should accept whoever Allah appoints as King. They need to have tawakal if they are going to fight the enemy.

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ
سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ آءَالُ مُوسَىٰ وَآءَالُ هَارُونَ تَحْمِلُهَا
الْمَلَائِكَةُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمُ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٤٨﴾

¹²³ Mehar, I.A. (2006). 'Al-Islam: Inception to Conclusion'. South Carolina: BookSurge Publishing, p.130

¹²⁴ Gamboa, E. (2017). 'The Holy Book of El-Shaddai'. Michigan: Book Venture Publishing, p.266

And their prophet said to them, "Indeed, a sign of his kingship is that the chest will come to you in which is assurance from your Lord and a remnant of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left, carried by the angels. Indeed in that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

Characteristic of the ancient Israelites, they disobeyed the decision of their Prophet believing that the appointment of Talut was Samuel's own personal decision, and could not possibly have been commanded by God. Therefore, as proof that the decision of appointing Talut was Divine, they asked for a sign to be shown.

They were told that the sign would be that the lost Ark would be returned to them. This was just another example of how The Almighty continued satisfying the demands of the Israelites by showing them miracles, yet they still transgressed and disobeyed. The ark had been previously confiscated by the Philistines when they attacked the Israelites in Canaan. According to the Book of Samuel, after confiscating the ark and taking it back to their homeland, the Philistines believed that the Ark was cursed, holding it responsible for a series of calamities and mishaps. To rid themselves of the evil omen, they decided to place the Ark on a bull cart and let it ride out of the city without any rider to guide it. The cart left the city as expected and charged towards the area where the Israelites were residing. It was believed that the angels were guiding the bull, just as promised. This was a miracle and the sign that the Israelites were demanding.¹²⁵

فَلَمَّا فَصَلَ طَالُوتُ بِالْجُنُودِ قَالَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُبْتَلِيكُمْ بِنَهَرٍ فَمَنْ شَرِبَ مِنْهُ
فَلَيْسَ مِنِّي وَمَنْ لَمْ يَطْعَمْهُ فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي إِلَّا مَنِ اغْتَرَفَ غُرْفَةً بِيَدِهِ فَشَرَبُوا مِنْهُ إِلَّا
قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَهُ هُوَ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ فَقَالُوا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا الْيَوْمَ
بِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَظُنُّونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُلَاقُوا اللَّهَ كَم مِّن فِتْنَةٍ
فَلِيلَةً غَلَبَتْ فِئَةً كَثِيرَةً بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ ﴿٢٤٦﴾

And when Saul went forth with the soldiers, he said, "Indeed, Allah will be testing you with a river. So whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is indeed of me, excepting one who takes [from it] in the hollow of his hand." But they drank from it, except a [very] few of them. Then when he had crossed it along with those who believed with him, they said, "There is no power for us today against Goliath and his soldiers." But those who were certain that they would meet Allah said, "How many a small company has overcome a large company by permission of Allah. And Allah is with the patient."

Talut managed to assemble a large and powerful army to combat the Philistines. He trained them well and one of his soldiers was David, or Daud (a.s), who was a young boy at the time. When the army

¹²⁵ Gamboa, E. (2017). "The Holy Book of El-Shaddai". Michigan: Book Venture Publishing, p.266

commenced its journey to face the enemy, they were tested once again to ascertain their level of discipline, obedience and tawakal.¹²⁶ Allah knew that the army would fail miserably regardless of its size, if its soldiers did not trust Him and the commander chosen by Him. Knowing that the Israelites had previously objected to Talut, it was necessary to ensure that everyone had now accepted his position as king and commander. Therefore, Talut instructed them to abstain from drinking water when they crossed the lake, informing them that this was a test from Allah. A mere sip would be excused but not more than that. Naturally, given the long distances involved, everyone would be thirsty. A command ordering them to control their desire to drink would be a test of obedience and discipline — a test that would tame and control their nafs. Unfortunately, many men refused to obey the order and were subsequently unable to accompany the army in battle.

وَلَمَّا بَرَزُوا لِجَالُوتَ وَجُنُودِهِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَثَقِّبْ
أَقْدَامَنَا وَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٥٠﴾

And when they went forth to [face] Goliath and his soldiers, they said, "Our Lord, pour upon us patience and plant firmly our feet and give us victory over the disbelieving people."

فَهَزَمُوهُمْ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَقَتَلَ دَاوُدُ جَالُوتَ وَءَاتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَهُ مِمَّا يَشَاءُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ بَعْضَهُم بِبَعْضٍ
لَفَسَدَتِ الْأَرْضُ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٥١﴾

So they defeated them by permission of Allah, and David killed Goliath, and Allah gave him the kingship and prophethood and taught him from that which He willed. And if it were not for Allah checking [some] people by means of others, the earth would have been corrupted, but Allah is full of bounty to the worlds.

تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴿٢٥٢﴾

These are the verses of Allah which We recite to you, [O Muhammad], in truth. And indeed, you are from among the Messengers.

The remaining believers who successfully passed the test accompanied Talut to fight the enemy. Initially, when they saw the size of the Philistine army, they felt fear as mentioned in verse 249, praying

¹²⁶ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

to Allah for strength, courage and conviction. But those who had strong iman reminded the rest that regardless of their small size, they can be victorious because Allah is with the patient. Inevitably, they defeated the enemy and David was able to kill the leader of the Philistine army, Goliath (Jaluth) with a stone aimed at his forehead.

Victories and losses at battle are a means by which The Almighty keeps a check on people and holds them accountable for their actions. Although the Israelites were following the religion of God unlike the Philistines, the reason for their initial defeat was their disobedience to God's commands, unwillingness to fight in the cause of Allah and belief in superstition such as the Ark carrying magic powers. God made them accountable for their actions by punishing them through the hands of the enemy. Subsequently, when the Israelites repented, regained their spiritual strength and were willing to fight, God granted them a miraculous victory over the disbelievers.

Similar to the story of Ezekiel and the valley of dry bones, the story of Talut-Jaluth was also introduced during the early years at Medina, possibly prior to the battle of Badr. Badr was the first battle that was fought between the Muslims and the Quraysh and many similarities are evident between the battle of Badr and the battle between Taluth and Jaluth. Firstly, as evident in the story, the Israelites were not keen on fighting for the sake of Allah because they feared death. They were content following God's commands as long as they were easy, but as soon as a strict command was given that required sacrificing life and worldly luxuries, believers became reluctant. Similarly, many Muslims in Medina who suffered from weak iman were willing to follow Islam as long as it stressed upon peaceful preaching, but they were reluctant to fight.

Secondly, to combat the fear of death in the battlefield, Prophet Samuel was sent to spiritually strengthen the Israelites. In the same manner, prior to the battle of Badr, verses were sent to Muhammad (pbuh) with the aim of spiritually strengthening the believers and preparing them for war. For example, as aforementioned, verses regarding the need to struggle to attain the pleasure of Allah, spend money to strengthen the Muslim community and loan Allah a beautiful loan that would be multiplied many times would help to motivate the Muslims to fight and sacrifice in the cause of Allah. Even narrating stories such as that of Jaluth and Talut were necessary to make the Muslims understand that honor, power and victory are only in the hands of Allah.

Thirdly, the Israelites refused to accept Talut as their king and required a sign to make sure that this decision was Divinely guided. In the same manner, many signs were shown at Badr to calm Muslims

with weak iman who still had doubt regarding the Prophet's decision to fight at Badr. Since Muslims had initially planned to raid Abu Sufyan's caravan, they were not prepared for a battle with the strongest army in Arabia. Being a small and ill-equipped army, many feared a battle with the Quraysh, unable to understand that this was a Divinely guided decision. Witnessing the signs revealed by Allah at Badr strengthened and motivated the believers and resulted in a decisive victory. These signs are covered in detail later in the Quran.

Fourthly, in both cases a small army was able to vanquish a big army through a miracle. In the case of the Israelites, a giant was killed by a small stone flung at him by a young boy. Jaluth was massive and was always covered in body armour making it difficult to kill him. The only part of his body that was exposed were the eyes and the forehead. Daud (as) used a slingshot to throw a stone at high speed aiming for the giant's forehead that miraculously killed him. In the case of Badr, the angels that descended enabled the small ill-equipped army of Muslims to crush the enemy. As a result of these miracles, both battles became furqan for the people. The group that was following the path of right and being unequivocally supported by God became clear and distinct from the rest.

Subsequently, years later, Daud (as) was appointed King and prophet for the Israelites. Therefore, Allah concludes in verse 252 that just like Prophet Samuel and Prophet David (Daud (a.s)) were sent to the Israelites, in the same manner Muhammad (pbuh) too is a Prophet who has been sent by Allah. The Muslims need to trust him while the Jews in Medina need to acknowledge his legitimacy, believe in him and support him in his mission instead of denying him and placing impediments in his path. These verses were sent to not just strengthen the Muslims spiritually, but to act as a reminder for the Jews who were very well acquainted with the story of David and Goliath. They knew that victory is only with those who follow Allah and prophets ultimately succeed in battle regardless of the size of the army. Therefore, they should accept the truth being certain that the Muslims will ultimately be victorious in the land.

﴿ تِلْكَ الرُّسُلُ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ كَلَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَهُمْ دَرَجَاتٍ
 وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ ۗ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَقْتَلْنَا
 الَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَلَكِنْ اٰخْتَلَفُوا فَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ ءَامَنَ
 وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ كَفَرَ ۗ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا أَقْتَلْتُمْ أَوْلَٰئِكَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴾

Those Messengers - some of them We caused to exceed others. Among them were those to whom Allah spoke, and He raised some of them in degree. And We gave Jesus, the Son of Mary, clear proofs, and We supported him with the Pure Spirit. If Allah had willed, those [generations] succeeding them would not have fought each other after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed, and some of them believed and some of them disbelieved. And if Allah had willed, they would not have fought each other, but Allah does what He intends.

Messengers have been sent from time to time to remind people about the Day of Accountability. Although each messenger brought with him different signs, the message has always been the same. For example, Allah spoke directly to Musa (as), while Prophet Eesa (a.s) was strengthened by the Holy Spirit, Jibreel (as), allowing him to perform many miracles with the leave of Allah. Despite receiving clear signs and hearing the same message of tauheed, the ancient Israelites rebelled against their prophets and after the arrival of the Messiah, they broke their ummah into two groups. Both Jews and Christians continue to fight with each other even though each party acknowledges that multiple distortions have been made to their Books.

Similarly, Muslims have now formed an ummah and signed a covenant with Allah. They too have been sent a Prophet who has given the same message of tauheed and has brought with him a special sign — Muhammad (pbuh) speaks the words of God. The Quran is not a message conveyed to the people in the words of the Prophet. The Quran is a message of truth conveyed in the words of God through His messenger. The verses are the exact revelations received by Muhammad (pbuh). That is what differentiates the Quran from the Bible and the Torah. As a result, Muslims can now choose to follow their Prophet and be successful in the afterlife, or they can choose to behave like Bani Israel by breaking the ummah from within and challenging their Prophet's orders. It is a choice for which they will be held accountable.

As this surah now completes its discussion on shariah and has answered the questions and queries of the Muslims, Allah now ends by reminding the Muslims that mankind has always been one ummah, as aforementioned in verse 213. Prophets sent by God might have brought different miracles or signs but the message to mankind has always been the same.

Muslims today read about the people in the past and wonder why they transgressed and refused to comply with Allah's commands, without realizing that on the Day of Judgment their stories will be mentioned as well. How did they respond to God's message? This is now the final Messenger with the final Book coming to warn mankind for the last and final time.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَنفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن قَبْلِ أَن يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعٌ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا
شَفَعَةٌ ۗ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٣٥٤﴾

O you who have believed, spend from that which We have provided for you before there comes a Day in which there is no exchange and no friendship and no intercession. And the disbelievers - they are the wrongdoers.

As the covenant and Shariah discussion ends, Muslims are given the same reminder as was given to the previous ummah. Save yourself from the Day of Judgment — a Day in which there will be no friends, no intercession and no exchange will be accepted. Once again, Allah reminds His slaves to spend freely in the cause of Islam. The constant repetition of this command reveals that greed and love for this life are the primary causes of spiritual decline. A heart that obsesses over wealth and material assets will find it difficult to comprehend the concept of struggle and jihad. So, Muslims are being reminded to spend out of the bounties they have received and strengthen their spiritual connection with Allah before the Day of Judgment arrives when no intercession or friendship can be of any help. Salvation can only be attained when belief is complemented with good deeds.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ 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 ﴿٣٥٥﴾

Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Most High, the Most Great.

The famous Ayat-ul-Kursi now appears, and again its placement in the Quran is worth reflecting upon. Muslims in Medina had to battle their fears, in addition to the constant arguments of the Jews and hypocrites who tried to spread mischief amongst the ummah. With such challenges, there was a need to emphasize the power and capability of the One God. Although Allah had already been formally introduced to the believers in Mecca, given that the Arabs had spent decades in the period

of ignorance worshipping hundreds of different idols, there was still a lot about God that the Muslims needed to know. The Ayat-ul-Kursi was perfect for this purpose.

Similar to the opening chapter of the Quran, the Ayat-ul-Kursi focuses on two main traits of Allah. In the case of Surah Fatiha, those traits were Rahman and Rahīm because when Fatiha was revealed, there was a need to stress on God's infinite mercy. In contrast, when Ayatul-Kursi was revealed there was a need to stress on God's unlimited power, strength and capabilities to encourage Muslims to fight in the cause of Allah without fearing the enemy.

Al-Hayy suggests that not only is God the One that gives life but He has also achieved perfection in life. Perfection stems from the fact that He has always existed and will always continue to exist but He does not require any food, drink, sleep or rest for survival. His life is perfect in the sense that it is infinite and without any dependencies that otherwise might lead to vulnerability. This was relevant information for the Arabs given their past obsession with worshipping idols that had to be continuously protected from harm.

Al-Qayoom means that Allah is providing rizq and sustenance, carefully watching every action, listening to every conversation, monitoring every thought and guiding every single creature of His every second. He has no weakness and He is perfectly capable of anything. Everything animate and inanimate within the heavens and earth are all in His control. There is nothing that He is unaware of. No one can intercede in His presence except as He permits.

Being informed about Allah's infinite Might and Power comforted the believers particularly before entering a battle with the most powerful Arab tribe in the region — Quraysh. In the pre-Islamic era, the Quraysh might have been perceived as keepers of the Kaaba and God's special people, forbidding anyone from fighting them, but in the eyes of Allah they had no special status. Allah's special mercy was not reserved for the Quraysh. Rather it was reserved for those who fought in the cause of Islam and stood by the Prophet of God. Such a powerful message helped to strengthen the Muslims and removed their fear of fighting the Quraysh.

Allah has complete knowledge of everything that has been done in the past and all that will happen in the future to each and every creation. He is extremely vigilant and encompasses all the knowledge in the world which nobody else can obtain except as much as Allah permits. His throne extends over all and He feels no fatigue in guarding it. Therefore, the decisions, actions, thoughts and feelings of

every creature are in the control of The Almighty — nothing escapes Him. This implies that although each person has free will and choice, the decisions he makes can only be executed by the will of Allah. At times, his decisions might even be guided by Allah, especially when Allah wants to show His slaves furqan.

For instance, the Muslims were not commanded to go and fight at Badr. On the contrary, they were given a choice to either pursue and raid the caravan of Abu Sufyan or fight the Quraysh at Badr. Allah had revealed that they would face victory in only one of the two. The Prophet (pbuh) wished for the Muslims to fight at Badr but the believers were hesitant as they were not fully equipped for battle and the odds were against them. In the end, the Muslims understood and respected the Prophet's wish, marching on towards Badr even though believers with weak iman had fear and doubt about the decision.¹²⁷ Similarly, the Quraysh decided to assemble an army and attack the Muslims despite being informed that Abu Sufyan's caravan had safely returned to Mecca. While all these decisions by the believers and the enemy were based on free will, they were also under the control and guidance of God because He wanted the battle of Badr to occur so that it could be a day of furqan. The decision to fight that day was not a haphazard choice made by the Muslims and the Quraysh. It was being monitored and controlled by The Almighty. With God having this level of power, control and knowledge, the Muslims need not fear their enemy. If Allah destines them to win, there is no might in the universe that can make them face defeat. It was this message of hope that gave the believers the courage and strength to fight an army three times their size. Therefore, the throne verse was a means of re-introducing Allah to the Muslims by focusing on two important qualities that they needed to hear at that time – Al Hayy and Al Qayoom.

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمَرْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٥٦﴾

There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

¹²⁷ Ansari, Z.I. (2016). 'Towards understanding the Quran: Syed Abdul Aala Mawdudi' Leicester: The Islamic Foundation

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ءَٰوَلِيَآءُهُمُ
 الظَّالِمُونَ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ ؕ ءَٰوَلِيَآءُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا
 خَالِدُونَ

Allah is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out from darknesses into the light. And those who disbelieve - their allies are Taghut. They take them out of the light into darknesses. Those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.

After such a beautiful introduction of God and His powers, a clear covenant and Shariah having been explained, there is no need for compulsion in religion. Truth and falsehood has now become clear to every soul and the rooh has testified to the legitimacy of Islam. Now it depends on the individual and the choice he wishes to make using the power of free will that he has been granted. Whatever path he chooses to adopt, Allah will grant him ease in that direction. If he chooses to hold onto Allah, he has selected a trustworthy handhold that will never break. No matter how many difficulties or challenges he has to face, Allah will never abandon him. No matter how many mistakes he makes, Allah will not be disappointed in him. No matter how many times he gets distracted and forgets Allah, Allah will not forget him.

In contrast, if he wishes to adopt the path of evil, then Allah will grant him ease in that direction leading him away from light towards darkness, in the same way that Allah mentioned taking away the light of the extreme hypocrites and plunging them into darkness in verse 17. In this context, taghut refers to deities, leaders, institutions, ideologies or concepts that aim to move people away from the path of Islam towards evil; from light to darkness.¹²⁸ They inculcate false hopes, desires and a love for dunya, misguiding the individual from attaining the pleasure of Allah.

The Quran then shifts to briefly describing three events that took place with the messengers of God. Although the connection between these events and the previous verse of Ayat-ul-Kursi does not seem apparent, a close study reveals that these stories provide practical examples of Allah being Hayy and Qayoom, the main traits stressed in Ayatul-Kursi.

¹²⁸ Wirba, A.V. (2017). 'Leadership from an Islamic and Western perspective.' Oxford: Chartridge books Oxford, p.31

أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّي
الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالسَّمْسِ مِنَ
الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥٨﴾

Have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and causes death," he said, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." So the disbeliever was overwhelmed [by astonishment], and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people.

The first story in verse 258 addresses the debate that occurred between Prophet Ibrahīm (as) and a King. It is believed that Ibrahīm (as) commenced his journey of prophethood in the city of Ur located in Iraq, where the King presiding at the time was Nimrod. The nation of Ibrahīm (as) used to worship idols in addition to worshipping the King who also considered himself a god.¹²⁹ During the dispute, Ibrahīm (as) argued that his God was the one that gave life and death, while Nimrod refuted the claim by suggesting that he was the one who granted life and death. Surprisingly, Ibrahīm (as) did not negate the King but instead changed his argument to the rising of the sun. Why?

God in his infinite wisdom and knowledge understood that continuing the argument regarding life and death would be futile. Nimrod believed that he granted life and death because he reserved the right to take someone's life or save it. If he decided to execute someone, he believed that he had granted that person death, and if he chose to save someone from execution, he believed that he had granted that person life. It would be hard for Nimrod to comprehend that everyone has a fixed period of time on this earth determined by God and death can only come if God wills. A compelling argument would require understanding the mind-set of the enemy. Therefore, Allah commanded Ibrahīm (as) to provide the King with a simple challenge. The sun rises from the East every day, which the Prophet claimed to be the work of God. Naturally, the King would respond by arguing that it was all in his control. Therefore, Nimrod was asked to provide a demonstration of his powers which confounded him. If the sun rising from the East was entirely in control of the King, then he should make it rise from the West. This challenge reflects the beauty of Allah's wisdom and knowledge. He understands the thoughts and mind-set of each and every individual and with that

¹²⁹ Khan, M.W. (2001). 'Muhammad: a prophet for all humanity'. New Delhi: Goodword, p.419-420

infinite knowledge, He helps guide His slaves in the best possible way ensuring that the enemies of Islam face defeat.

أَوَكَلِّدِي مَرَّ عَلَى قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّى يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا
فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَيْفَ لَيْتَ قَالَ لَيْتُ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ
لَيْتَ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَى طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ وَانظُرْ إِلَى حِمَارِكَ
وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَانظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ
نَكْسُوهَا لِحَمًّا فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٥٩﴾

Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, "How will Allah bring this to life after its death?" So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years; then He revived him. He said, "How long have you remained?" The man said, "I have remained a day or part of a day." He said, "Rather, you have remained one hundred years. Look at your food and your drink; it has not changed with time. And look at your donkey; and We will make you a sign for the people. And look at the bones [of this donkey] - how We raise them and then We cover them with flesh." And when it became clear to him, he said, "I know that Allah is over all things competent."

The second incident describes an event that occurred with the ancient Israelites where a Prophet was passing by a town that was completely ruined. Shocked at the extent of devastation, he questioned how Allah would ever be able to give life to the city again? Instantly, God gave him death for a hundred years and raised him up again. On being informed that he had been given death for a hundred years and yet his food and drink showed no signs of aging while his donkey had been reduced to bones, the Prophet was shown another miracle. His donkey was given life right before his eyes so that it may be a sign of God's infinite powers and capabilities. Some scholars claim that the Prophet being referred to in this story was Uzair (Ezra), while others suggest it was Prophet Irmiya (Jeremiah).¹³⁰ Regardless, the city is believed to be Jerusalem that was in a state of ruin because God sent wrath upon the Israelites through Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia who killed approximately 600,000 Israelites, took many back as captives and burnt the whole city including the Solomon's temple.¹³¹ The miracle shown helped to reassure the Prophet that The Almighty could accomplish anything, including resurrecting the city of Jerusalem again. Life and death is completely within His control. While He chose the donkey to die and decompose, He chose the food to remain fresh and

¹³⁰ Wheeler, B. (2002). 'Prophets in the Quran: an introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis.' London: Continuum, p.288

¹³¹ Wheeler, B. (2002). 'Prophets in the Quran: an introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis.' London, Continuum p.289

the Prophet to remain alive despite not eating or drinking anything for a hundred years. Similarly, by giving life to a dead animal, Allah proved that He can also give back life to a dead city. When an entity so powerful is on the side of the believers, why should any Muslim fear anything at all except Allah?

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ أَرِنِي كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى قَالَ أُولَئِمُتُؤْمِنٌ قَالَ بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قُلُوبِي قَالَ فَخُذْ أَرْبَعَةً مِنَ الطَّيْرِ فَصُرْهُنَّ إِلَيْكَ ثُمَّ أَجْعَلْ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ جَبَلٍ مِّنْهُنَّ جُزْءًا ثُمَّ ادْعُهُنَّ يَأْتِينَكَ سَعْيًا وَاعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴿٢٦٠﴾

And [mention] when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." [Allah] said, "Have you not believed?" He said, "Yes, but [I ask] only that my heart may be satisfied." [Allah] said, "Take four birds and commit them to yourself. Then [after slaughtering them] put on each hill a portion of them; then call them - they will come [flying] to you in haste. And know that Allah is Exalted in Might and Wise."

The final incident refers to a time when Prophet Ibrahim (as) requested Allah to show him how He gives life to the dead. So, he was told to take four birds, train them and then slaughter them, distributing their portions on different hills. Then he was told to call out to them. Upon doing this, the four birds were given life again and came flying back to Ibrahim (as) as they had been trained to do. More importantly, verse 260 makes it clear that the reason for such a request was not that the Prophet had any doubts about the abilities of Allah. Given the extreme impediments faced by the Messengers of God in their mission of spreading religion, at times miracles are required to remind them of Allah's unlimited powers so that they can gain the strength needed to endure the hardships of the journey. The Prophets of God have strong belief and iman, but they are still humans with emotions and physical weaknesses. Witnessing a miracle can help rejuvenate their faith and provide them with the energy and motivation needed to continue in their endeavors.

All three aforementioned stories confirm that Allah's throne extends over everything and His knowledge and powers are beyond our comprehension. Being Al Hayy and Al Qayoom, all His creations depend on Him for sustenance, life, wisdom and guidance. He is aware of the mindset, feelings and decisions of His slaves before they are even made. Just as He understood the mindset of Ibrahim's enemy, Nimrod, He can understand the mindset of the Muslims' enemy, Quraysh. Allah is not oblivious.

He also has the ability of accomplishing the impossible such as resurrecting a demolished city. So, if life and death are entirely in His control and nothing can happen without His will, then why should

the Muslims fear the enemy? Why should they believe that they will die and the enemy will succeed, eventually destroying the Islamic state of Medina? Can Allah not easily accomplish the exact opposite of what they fear?

The Almighty even has the ability to provide His righteous slaves with the signs that their hearts desire, such as Ibrahim's desire to see life being given. Allah does not pass a strict command and then expect His slaves to muster the courage on their own to fulfill the command. He gives the command and then provides the strength that His pious slaves require to help them earn His pleasure. Therefore, if the Muslims fear the enemy, they should know that Allah never abandons. Through miracles and signs, He will show them what their hearts desire to boost their iman and ensure that they do not run from the battlefield. This is Al Hayy and Al Qayoom.

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ
سُنْبُلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٦﴾

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ لَا يُتَّبِعُونَ مَا أَنْفَقُوا مَنًّا وَلَا أَذَىٰ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ
عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and then do not follow up what they have spent with reminders [of it] or [other] injury will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve

﴿٣٨﴾ قَوْلٌ مَّعْرُوفٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ صَدَقَةٍ يَتْبَعُهَا أَذَىٰ وَاللَّهُ غَنِيٌّ حَلِيمٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

Kind speech and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. And Allah is Free of need and Forbearing.

The significant role of charity in Islam is evident from the next twenty verses of this surah which focuses on motivating the believers to spend in the cause of Allah, identifies the criteria for charity to be accepted by God and introduces the concept of barakah. Allah reassures the Muslims that any wealth spent as charity for the sake of Allah is returned multiple times just as one grain of corn gives rise to 700 further grains. Allah is completely aware of what has been spent in His way and

encompasses knowledge of everything. The exact amount of increase that anyone will receive for the sadqa given is dependent on the will of Allah. He gives as much as He wills to whomsoever He wills.

However, in order to receive the benefits of giving out in charity, the criteria of sadqa has to be fulfilled which includes, firstly, ensuring that the money is spent only to seek the pleasure of Allah and not for any worldly gains. Secondly, it is important to not follow up gifts or aid given to others with reminders so as to humiliate them or expect some reward from them in exchange. Thirdly, it is necessary to ensure that any aid or gifts given to others in need are not used as an excuse to insult or harm them. Being kind to others and covering up faults is better and more acceptable in the eyes of God than charity followed by injury.

Allah continuously emphasizes that He is not in need of anyone's charity. The Almighty is perfectly capable of helping His slaves. The purpose of charity is entirely designed to benefit those endowed with wealth so that they may gain the blessings and forgiveness of Allah, cleanse their soul, inculcate empathy and love for mankind, free themselves from greed and gain barakah in their wealth. Therefore, the act of distributing and sharing wealth in Islam is designed to benefit both the rich and the poor.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَأَنْبَطِلُوا صِدْقَتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ مَالَهُ رِثَاءَ النَّاسِ
وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ ءِآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ
صَلْدًا لَا يَفْقَدُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾

O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury as does one who spends his wealth [only] to be seen by the people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is dust and is hit by a downpour that leaves it bare. They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.

The charitable deeds of a believer who spends money with reminders of his generosity in order to degrade others or compel them to be obliged to him are canceled by God because his intention was not to please Allah alone. Such a form of charity is like wealth that is spent on the needy by disbelievers. Since they do not believe in Allah, they are only willing to help others if there is some worldly benefit in exchange. Moreover, at times people spend in charity to reduce the guilt they feel of deliberately transgressing the commands of God or choosing to remain ignorant to the truth. In such cases, acts of charity are again not acceptable because helping the poor cannot be used as

compensation to deny the truth and continue engaging in evil deeds without seeking Allah's forgiveness, repenting and submitting to God's will.

The parable of such forms of charity is like a hard barren rock with soil on it that eventually looks green and beautiful as grass starts to grow and cover it. It amazes the onlookers and people admire it. However, heavy rain inevitably leaves the rock exposed and bare. In the same manner, those who spend money on the poor in exchange for some worldly benefit are held in admiration by others who can witness their good deeds. But when a difficult test falls upon them, analogous to heavy rain, they immediately stop giving out in charity, fall into despair and complain to Allah of their condition. Their true intention becomes exposed. Such charity does not benefit them in the present world or in the hereafter because it fails to purify them, cleanse their heart or eliminate the love of dunya.

In contrast, a true believer understands that whatever he spends in the cause of Allah will be returned to him multiple times through barakah and Allah is aware of all the sacrifices he makes no matter how large or small. Barakah is often defined as 'blessings' which can manifest itself as an increase in quantity or quality of resources owned, or it can also manifest itself as asset protection for the owner. For example, after spending in charity solely for the pleasure of Allah, the money might be returned with a manifold increase in quantity. It is also possible that the quality of money increases implying a rise in purchasing power so that more can be purchased with the same amount of money. Also assets owned might be granted protection, saving them from calamities that could cause a significant outflow of money. The next three verses give examples of what it means to have barakah in quality, quantity or asset protection.

وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ وَتَثْبِيتًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ
 كَمَثَلِ جَنَّةٍ بِرَبْوَةٍ أَصَابَهَا وَابِلٌ فَآتَتْ أُكُلَهَا ضِعْفَيْنِ فَإِن لَّمْ يُصِبْهَا وَابِلٌ
 فَطَلَّ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٢٦٥﴾

And the example of those who spend their wealth seeking means to the approval of Allah and assuring [reward for] themselves is like a garden on high ground which is hit by a downpour - so it yields its fruits in double. And [even] if it is not hit by a downpour, then a drizzle [is sufficient]. And Allah , of what you do, is Seeing.

A true believer realizes that hardships are a means of testing his faith and his love for God. It is a time to continue spending to help those who are less-fortunate, instead of falling into despair, complaining to God and restricting spending on the needy. The likeness of such an individual is as a garden that

is high and fertile. If there is light rain, the garden still remains fertile and green implying that it has received barakah in the form of an increase in quality. While the garden should deteriorate because of restricted rain, it remains fertile and green. Therefore, if light rain is analogous to small tests that might cause a loss of money, the individual's quality of life remains the same despite the test. The barakah he received in terms of a rise in quality, increased his purchasing power allowing him to maintain the same lifestyle despite the apparent loss in income.

During periods of heavy rain that are analogous to difficult tests, the garden yields a double harvest, implying that despite a significant decline in assets, the believer refuses to become parsimonious and continues to be grateful to God, paying out as much as he can to help the poor. Instead of complaining about his situation, he still empathizes with others providing support to those in need. Therefore, the reward in this life and in the next is a manifold increase in sustenance. In this case, barakah manifests itself in the form of an increase in quantity, double harvest, which again grants the individual contentment and satisfaction. Despite facing significant losses, his wealth and assets increase in the long run, as Allah returns everything with a substantial increase in amount.

Furthermore, regardless of whether the rainfall is light or heavy, the garden is on high ground suggesting that it is protected from floods. Unlike the previous analogy where the grass growing on a rock was entirely wiped out when it rained, this garden is protected implying that the rewards of this believer are safeguarded with Allah. He will be fully compensated for everything in both this world and the next.

In addition, since rain is important for plants and grass to grow, this analogy also suggests that tests, small and big, are important for the growth of the soul. Just as a drought can destroy a garden, a prolonged absence of tests can destroy the soul making it forget its purpose of creation as it gradually slips away from the path of Islam. Similarly, just as heavy rain fall can expose a rock, heavy tests can expose the true state of our iman revealing to ourselves whether or not we truly have tawakal and tauheed.

أَيُّدُ أَحَدِكُمْ أَنْ تَكُونَ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُ
 فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَأَصَابَهُ الْكِبَرُ وَلَهُ ذُرِّيَةٌ ضُعْفَاءُ فَأَصَابَهَا إِعْصَارٌ فِيهِ نَارٌ
 فَاحْتَرَقَتْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Would one of you like to have a garden of palm trees and grapevines underneath which rivers flow in which he has from every fruit? But he is afflicted with old age and has weak offspring, and it is hit by a whirlwind containing fire and is burned. Thus does Allah make clear to you [His] verses that you might give thought

The final analogy given refers to an individual who does not face protection in assets, a third form of barakah. He does not give out anything in charity and is only consumed by his greed to accumulate as much wealth as he can in this world. He tries to maximize the value of his assets, strives to make the right investments and starts to build a fortune for himself, analogous to a large garden with date-palms, streams flowing underneath and all kinds of fruit. His entire youth is dedicated to building his garden, but when he is old and his children are still dependent on him, he loses everything. Although he tried to plan for every possible contingency, he forgot that rizq is only in the hands of Allah. He gives it to whom He pleases and He withholds it from whom He pleases. The garden that took years to build is deprived of barakah. It is not protected by The Almighty and suffers a calamity. Such an individual loses in both this world and the next. Now, at such an old age he has to focus on rebuilding his assets, failing to dedicate any portion of his life in the service of Allah.

A similar lesson can be learned from the following Hadith regarding the five questions that will be asked from everyone on the Day of Judgment reminding us about the importance of charity and barakah. A certain portion of our youth must be dedicated to struggling in the cause of Allah, our intention must be solely to please God and we must ensure that we earn income through halal means so that we can receive Allah's blessings in this life and the next.

“The son of Adam will not pass away from Allah until he is asked about five things: how he lived his life, how he utilized his youth, with what means did he earn his wealth, how did he spend his wealth, and what did he do with his knowledge.” (Tirmidhi)

يٰۤاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْا اَنْفِقُوْا مِنْ طَيِّبٰتِ مَا كَسَبْتُمْ وَمِمَّا اَخْرَجْنَا لَكُمْ مِنَ
الْاَرْضِ وَلَا تَيَمَّمُوا الْخَبِيْثَ مِنْهُ تُنْفِقُوْنَ وَلَسْتُمْ بِرٰكِبِيْهِ اِلَّا اَنْ تُعْمِضُوْا فِيْهِ
وَاعْلَمُوْا اَنَّ اللّٰهَ غَنِيٌّ حَمِيْدٌ ﴿٣٦٧﴾

O you who have believed, spend from the good things which you have earned and from that which We have produced for you from the earth. And do not aim toward the defective therefrom, spending [from that] while you would not take it [yourself] except with closed eyes. And know that Allah is Free of need and Praiseworthy.

While the previous verses have clarified the need to spend in the cause of Allah in order to gain barakah, Allah now dictates the rules of spending. A believer must be conscious of the quality of the

goods he is sharing with others. The idea is not to share fruits that are rotten or goods that are damaged and can be of no use to anyone. Adhering to these stringent conditions for sadqa to be accepted are necessary because it is only then that the soul of the believer can be replenished. Choosing to only give things as sadqa that are disliked because of its poor quality or condition does not reduce greed nor does it make the individual deserving of a reward. In fact, it only fuels greed because the believer continues hoarding things that are excellent in quality for himself, refusing to share it with others unless the quality deteriorates.

الشَّيْطَانُ يَعِدُكُمُ الْفَقْرَ وَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَاللَّهُ يَعِدُكُم مَّغْفِرَةً مِّنْهُ وَفَضْلًا
 وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

Satan threatens you with poverty and orders you to immorality, while Allah promises you forgiveness from Him and bounty. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

يُؤْتِي الْحِكْمَةَ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا وَمَا
 يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٦٩﴾

He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.

وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِّن نَّفَقَةٍ أَوْ نَذَرْتُمْ مِّنْ نَّذْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُهُ. وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ
 أَنْصَارٍ ﴿٧٠﴾

And whatever you spend of expenditures or make of vows - indeed, Allah knows of it. And for the wrongdoers there are no helpers.

Besides monitoring the quality of the things that are being shared, barakah also requires a person to ensure that he is not worshipping his money. A person who obsesses over his wealth will restrict the amount that he distributes to a bare minimum, in fear of facing a decline in his assets. Such a person will not feel contentment and peace when he gives out in the cause of Allah. On the contrary, he feels stressed and anxious, constantly counting his assets and grieving over the money that has left him. His greed fuels negative emotions such as stress, depression and fear of the future.

An individual's hunger for worldly gain will only grow if he tries to satisfy it because the more he has, the more he wants and the more he is terrified of losing. This is the main principle of Economics — needs are limited but wants are infinite. Greed and the negative emotions associated with it can be triggered by the whispers of Satan who threatens an individual with poverty if he decides to spend in the way of Allah. Stress and anxiety that arise from the fear of losing money, restricts a person from sharing resources with those in need despite Allah's numerous promises that acts of charity will be fully compensated in this world and the next. Such fear also causes the individual to obsess over safeguarding his wealth, terrified that it might lose value over time. Therefore, not only is such a person unable to spend his wealth on the poor, but he is also unable to spend it freely on himself in fear of it suffering a decline.

Only those are saved from the whispers of Satan who are able to ponder and reflect on the words of Allah, detach themselves from the love of this world and truly comprehend that this world is nothing but deception. They reorganize their priorities, strive for the pleasure of Allah and control their negative emotions and desires. Such people have been granted the gift of wisdom. They understand that every act is recorded and witnessed by Allah and that deeds of charity are not only a means by which Allah can reward His believers, but it also helps to save them from being deceived by this world and its glamour.

إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعْمًا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ
وَيُكْفِرْ عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿٢٧١﴾

If you disclose your charitable expenditures, they are good; but if you conceal them and give them to the poor, it is better for you, and He will remove from you some of your misdeeds [thereby]. And Allah, with what you do, is [fully] Acquainted.

Barakah also requires proper intention. The believer must be helping the poor only with the intention of satisfying Allah. The intention should not be to gain popularity by revealing his acts of kindness. This does not imply that acts of kindness can never be disclosed. At times it is beneficial to share good deeds because it encourages others to follow. However, there is a risk that the believer will start to become arrogant and self-righteous. Therefore, while it is permissible to disclose acts of kindness, it is best to conceal charitable acts and make the utmost effort to ensure that it reaches those who are truly in need. The effort involved in finding those who are deserving and the ability to

control greed and ignore the whispers of Satan helps to remove the stains of evil on the heart. It is also a means of removing some of the sins that the believer might have committed in the past.

“Charity (Sadaqah) extinguishes sin, just as water extinguishes fire.”¹³²

لَيْسَ عَلَيْكَ هُدَاهُمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
فَلَا تُنْفِسْكُمْ ۖ وَمَا تُنْفِقُونَ إِلَّا لِأَنْتُمْ ۖ وَجَهَ اللَّهُ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ يُؤَفِّ
إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تظَلُمُونَ ﴿٢٧٢﴾

Not upon you, [O Muhammad], is [responsibility for] their guidance, but Allah guides whom He wills. And whatever good you [believers] spend is for yourselves, and you do not spend except seeking the countenance of Allah. And whatever you spend of good - it will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged.

Although wisdom can save an individual from greed, nobody has the power to grant the gift of wisdom except The Almighty and He grants it to those who sincerely seek guidance. Moreover, a person who has been given the gift of wisdom can understand that running after material possession and wealth cannot grant peace or contentment as it will lead to a life that is deprived of barakah.

To summarize, sadqa in any form should only be given with the aim of seeking the pleasure of Allah with constant reassurance that everything is within the knowledge and sight of Allah — every good deed will be paid back in full with no-one being dealt with unjustly. Furthermore, sadqa grants an individual barakah provided that the believer shares things that are of good quality, finds those who are truly in need, and refrains from reminding or humiliating those he has helped.

لِلْفُقَرَاءِ الَّذِينَ أُحْصِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ضَرْبًا فِي
الْأَرْضِ يَحْسَبُهُمُ الْجَاهِلُ أَغْنِيَاءَ مِنَ التَّعَفُّفِ تَعْرِفُهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ لَا
يَسْأَلُونَ النَّاسَ إِحْكَافًا وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٧٣﴾

[Charity is] for the poor who have been restricted for the cause of Allah, unable to move about in the land. An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint, but you will know them by their [characteristic] sign. They do not ask people persistently [or at all]. And whatever you spend of good - indeed, Allah is Knowing of it.

¹³² Tirmidhi 614

الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ سِرًّا وَعَلَانِيَةً فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ
عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٤﴾

Those who spend their wealth [in Allah 's way] by night and by day, secretly and publicly - they will have their reward with their Lord. And no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve.

Although general acts of charity are for all of mankind, it is necessary to ensure that aid reaches those who are truly in need. Otherwise financial aid can do more harm than good. People who are indigent and find it hard to move about seeking rizq are especially deserving of charity. They cannot earn on their own because of poor health or other obligations which prevent them from being able to leave their homes in search of rizq. Their modesty confounds some in believing that they are free of need because they do not like to beg or complain. Moreover, when giving out in charity it is best to try and help reduce the dependency of the poor by alleviating them from the poverty cycle. For instance, money should be spent in such a manner that it increases the chances of the poor getting employed, helps them start a business, equips them with new skills or allows them to obtain an education that can raise their future prospects.

Evident from these preceding verses, Allah understands how much man loves wealth and fears losing it. Therefore, The Almighty continuously gives reassurance at the end of these verses, promising the believer that charitable acts done for His sake and with good intention will be rewarded and compensated. The believer simply has to learn to trust God. Besides, if Satan promises him poverty and Allah promises him barakah, why is he so certain that Satan's promise will be fulfilled?

الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ الرِّبَا لَا يَقُومُونَ إِلَّا كَمَا يَقُومُ الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّمَا الْبَيْعُ مِثْلُ الرِّبَا وَأَحَلَّ اللَّهُ الْبَيْعَ وَحَرَّمَ الرِّبَا فَمَنْ جَاءَهُ مَوْعِظَةٌ
مِّن رَّبِّهِ فَآتَنَّهُمْ فَلَهُ مَا سَلَفَ وَأَمْرُهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَمَنْ عَادَ فَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ
فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿٢٧٥﴾

Those who consume interest cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity. That is because they say, "Trade is [just] like interest." But Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden interest. So whoever has received an admonition from his Lord and desists may have what is past, and his affair rests with Allah. But whoever returns to [dealing in interest or usury] - those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide eternally therein.

With greed and the desire to accumulate wealth comes the problem of usury or interest consumption. Riba or usury is the exact opposite of sadqa, and for this reason it is strongly prohibited in Islam

because it seeks to take advantage of the financially weak in order to grant further wealth to the financially strong. In addition, it increases the income gap between the rich and the poor by ensuring that the latter become victims of the debt trap. The debt trap occurs when the poor borrow funds to satisfy their basic needs, but due to the high interest payments that have to be paid on loans, they are compelled to borrow more in the future. In this manner, the financially strong are able to take advantage of the poor trapping them in a cycle of debt.

Unfortunately, usury is the easiest means of gaining wealth. Hence, verse 275 states that the one who devours usury stands as one whom Satan has touched and driven to madness. Not only does he become desperate to justify usury and rebels against the command of Allah but he also craves for more, resulting in a life of stress and anxiety. He is never satisfied with the amount that he has and in his obsession to amass more, he lives in fear of losing his wealth. Such a person is unable to have strong relationships of love and trust with family and friends because he is always skeptical and dubious about everyone's intentions, convinced that people just want to steal from him.

A common justification put forth by the rebellious is that trade is like usury. Just like trade is a form of business where goods are exchanged, usury is a form of business where the present value of money is being exchanged for a future value. However, Allah negates the argument by stating that trading is permitted in Islam while usury is strictly forbidden. Trading is a means by which goods and services can be exchanged for the benefit of all. It is fueled by productivity and efficiency. In contrast, usury is fueled by greed. It aims to benefit one party at the expense of another, and ultimately it encourages behavior that is the exact opposite of charity.

Allah makes it clear that in the case of riba, only those will be forgiven who repent and mend their ways. They may keep what they have earned in the past, but they must refrain completely from indulging in such acts again if they wish for Allah to accept their repentance.

يَمْحَقُ اللَّهُ الرِّبَا وَيُرِي الضَّادَفَاتِ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿٢٧٦﴾

Allah destroys interest and gives increase for charities. And Allah does not like every sinning disbeliever.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتَوْا الزَّكَاةَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٢٧٧﴾

Indeed, those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish prayer and give zakah will have their reward with their Lord, and there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.

Where sadqa grants barakah to an individual, usury deprives a person of barakah. He will not be content with his accumulation of wealth, continuously craving for more, and his assets will not be protected from harm and calamities. Despite amassing more, he will face a decline in the quality of life from an Islamic perspective. Therefore, he might own more houses and cars, alluding to a more luxurious lifestyle and a higher quality of living from a worldly perspective. But, from the perspective of his spiritual health, the quality of his life will deteriorate. He will be consumed with stress and anxiety, ardently searching for peace and contentment. As he is deprived of wisdom, he fails to understand that faith, good deeds, prayers, zakat and submitting to God's will are the only means of attaining peace because it is only then that a person stops grieving over the past or fearing the future. This is precisely where Satan aims to deceive mankind. Allah promises gains in charity-related activities and losses in usury-related activities. Satan promises losses in charity-related activities and gains in usury-related activities. The former promises the truth while the latter only aims to deceive.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَذَرُوا مَا بَقِيَ مِنَ الرِّبَا إِن كُنتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٧٨﴾

O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers.

فَإِن لَّمْ تَفْعَلُوا فَأْذَنُوا بِحَرْبٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ۗ وَإِن تُبْتُمْ فَلَكُمْ رُءُوسُ أَمْوَالِكُمْ لَا تَظْلِمُونَ وَلَا تُظْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٧٩﴾

And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal - [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged.

A final warning is then given to those who continue in their transgression consuming interest and justifying it through various means. If a person is truly a believer, he must abstain from usury else he initiates a war with Allah and His messenger. If he repents, he is allowed to retain his principal sum of money but not any accumulated interest on it. Allah will not treat him unjustly if he desists from treating the poor unjustly.

There is a slight difference between verses 275 and 279. In the case of the former, the believer is told that he can keep his gains but that his case now rests with Allah. In the case of the latter, the believer is told that he can keep the principal amount only, not any gains, and in doing so, he will not be

wronged if he does not wrong others. Perhaps the difference in wording stems from a difference in jihad. It is more difficult to give up all interest earned on capital than to retain everything with the promise that further acts of usury will be avoided. The greater struggle requires greater reward. Therefore, the Muslim who chooses to only keep his principal has completely rid himself of greed by understanding the weight of his crime. He has clearly repented and is deserving of Allah's mercy, hence he will not be wronged. In contrast, the Muslim who retains all his wealth but promises to not engage in usury again, may or may not be deserving of Allah's mercy, hence his case rests with Allah. The extent of his tauba is not clear and it is only for Allah to judge.

وَإِنْ كَانَ ذُو عُسْرَةٍ فَنَظِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ مَيْسَرَةٍ وَأَنْ تَصَدَّقُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٨٠﴾

And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew.

وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا تُرْجَعُونَ فِيهِ إِلَىٰ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ تُوَفَّىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ
﴿٢٨١﴾

And fear a Day when you will be returned to Allah. Then every soul will be compensated for what it earned, and they will not be treated unjustly.

In contrast to usury, Islam is about sacrifice and empathy, extending love and kindness to others with the intention of attaining Allah's pleasure. A debtor should only have to pay the principal amount he owes. If he faces difficulty in paying back the sum during a specified period of time, then the period of repayment should be extended to grant him ease. However, it is best for the creditor to remit the amount owed by means of charity. It is the fear of Allah that should be the driving force for such behavior. If a person deals harshly with one who is financially weak and burdened, Allah will deal harshly with him. Every soul will return to God and will be accountable for what he has done. Every act of injustice will be repaid in full while every act of sacrifice and charity will be fully compensated.

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا تَدَايَنْتُمْ بِدَيْنٍ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى فَاكْتُبُوهُ وَلْيَكْتُبَ
بَيْنَكُمْ كَاتِبٌ بِالْعَدْلِ وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ فَلْيَكْتُبْ
وَلْيَمْلِكِ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْحَقُّ وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ وَلَا يَبْخَسْ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا فَإِنْ كَانَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ
الْحَقُّ أَوْضِعِيًّا أَوْ ضَعِيفًا أَوْ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ أَنْ يُمِلَّ هُوَ فَلْيَمْلِكْ وَلِيَّهُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَاسْتَشْهِدُوا
شَهِدَيْنِ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ
الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَىٰ وَلَا يَأْبَ الشُّهَدَاءُ إِذَا مَا دُعُوا
وَلَا تَسْمَعُوا أَنْ تَكْتُبُوهُ صَغِيرًا أَوْ كَبِيرًا إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ ذَٰلِكُمْ أَفَسَطَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ
لِلشَّهَادَةِ وَأَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَرْتَابُوا إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تِجَارَةً حَاضِرَةً تُدِيرُونَهَا بَيْنَكُمْ فَلَيْسَ
عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحٌ لَّا تَكْتُبُوهَا وَأَشْهَدُوا إِذَا تَبَايَعْتُمْ وَلَا يُضَارَ كَاتِبٌ وَلَا شَهِيدٌ
وَإِنْ تَفَعَّلُوا فإِنَّهُ فُسُوقٌ بِكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ
شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٨٢﴾

O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down. And let a scribe write [it] between you in justice. Let no scribe refuse to write as Allah has taught him. So let him write and let the one who has the obligation dictate. And let him fear Allah, his Lord, and not leave anything out of it. But if the one who has the obligation is of limited understanding or weak or unable to dictate himself, then let his guardian dictate in justice. And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses - so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her. And let not the witnesses refuse when they are called upon. And do not be [too] weary to write it, whether it is small or large, for its [specified] term. That is more just in the sight of Allah and stronger as evidence and more likely to prevent doubt between you, except when it is an immediate transaction which you conduct among yourselves. For [then] there is no blame upon you if you do not write it. And take witnesses when you conclude a contract. Let no scribe be harmed or any witness. For if you do so, indeed, it is [grave] disobedience in you. And fear Allah. And Allah teaches you. And Allah is Knowing of all things.

Although Allah made it clear that trade is not like usury because trade is permitted and usury is not, that does not mean that there are no rules when engaging in business transactions. In fact, rules are crucial particularly when dealing with business contracts that involve a future obligation because in those situations, there is a debtor who owes money or goods that have to be delivered at some future date, and there is a creditor who is a recipient of that money or goods. Whenever, there is debtor and creditor, there is a possibility of injustice even in the absence of riba. Therefore, the Quran explains the steps that have to be taken to ensure smooth dealing.

Firstly, the transaction must be written by a scribe. The debtor will dictate in the presence of the creditor stating the amount that has to be paid and the period of time given. In the event that the

debtor is unable to dictate, his guardian will assume the role. This entire event must occur in the presence of two male witnesses. If two men are not available, then one man and two women will suffice. The benefit of having two women is that if one forgets, the other can remind her of the details of the transaction. Writing transactions that involve a future obligation are important to prevent any party from being dealt with unjustly and helps to act as evidence removing any doubts between the parties involved. In the case of a transaction that occurs on the spot, it is not necessary to write the details of the transaction since there is an absence of money owed in the future.

But when talking about witnesses, why is one man substituted for two women? Although the verse makes it clear that the injunction is for the benefit of women allowing them to remind each other in case one forgets, science has also proven that men and women have brains that function in different ways. While men are incapable of multi-tasking, they can focus intensely on any one specific task. In contrast, women are experts at multi-tasking, but because their attention is distributed, they cannot focus as intensely on any one task.¹³³ Therefore, in the matter of business transactions where facts must be remembered with complete accuracy to avoid injustice towards any party, men are more likely to be able to recall the details than women who have a greater tendency to forget. In addition, in every era, men have mostly assumed the role of trading and conducting business as compared to women. Their greater experience in the field grants them an advantage over women. However, despite this weakness, Allah does not forbid a woman from playing the role of a witness for a business transaction. He only specifies that two women should be present to help each other remember.

Most importantly, the witnesses and the scribe are instructed that their presence implies accountability. If they are ever told to bear witness to what they saw or what they wrote, they have to come forward. They cannot lie nor can they refuse. Bearing witness is a significant testimony that can help ensure justice and prevent any party from being dealt with unjustly.

﴿ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ وَلَمْ تَجِدُوا كَاتِبًا فَرِهَيْنَ مَقْبُوضَةً فَإِنْ أَتَىٰ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا
فَلْيُؤَدِّ الَّذِي أُؤْتِمِنَ أَمْنَتَهُ، وَلْيَتَّقِ اللَّهَ رَبَّهُ، وَلَا تَكْتُمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ وَمَنْ يَكْتُمْهَا
فَأِنَّهُ إِثْمٌ قَلْبُهُ، وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ ﴾ (٤٨٣)

And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then a security deposit [should be] taken. And if one of you entrusts another, then let him who is entrusted discharge his trust [faithfully] and let him fear Allah , his

¹³³ Barletta, M. (2003). Chicago: 'Marketing to women'. Chicago: Dearborn Trade Publishing, p.59

Lord. And do not conceal testimony, for whoever conceals it - his heart is indeed sinful, and Allah is Knowing of what you do.

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبَدُّوْا مَا فِيْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَوْ تَخْفُوْهُ يُحٰسِبْكُمْ
بِهٖ اللّٰهُ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Whether you show what is within yourselves or conceal it, Allah will bring you to account for it. Then He will forgive whom He wills and punish whom He wills, and Allah is over all things competent.

Finally, in the event that a transaction is made while a person is on a journey and a scribe cannot be found, collateral or security must be given by the debtor to the creditor as a promise of repayment. However, it is incumbent upon the creditor to safeguard the security until repayment is made, after which the asset must be returned to the debtor. Since the terms and details are not written down in this case, Allah emphasizes that both parties should fear Allah and fulfil the terms of the agreement without concealing any evidence or doing any injustice.

ءَاٰمَنَ الرَّسُوْلُ بِمَا اُنزِلَ اِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَّبِّهِۗ وَالْمُؤْمِنُوْنَ كُلُّۢءَاٰمَنَ بِاللّٰهِ وَمَلَٰٓئِكَتِهٖۙ وَكُتُبِهٖۙ
وَرُسُلِهٖۙ لَا نَفَرَقَ بَيْنَۙ اَحَدٍ مِّنْ رُّسُلِهٖۙ وَقَالُوْا سَمِعْنَا وَاَطَعْنَا غُفْرٰنَكَ رَبَّنَا
وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيْرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His Messengers, [saying], "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers." And they say, "We hear and we obey. [We seek] Your forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the [final] destination."

The last two verses have much significance in the Hadīth. They are believed to be treasures found under the throne of Allah and given to the Prophet (pbuh) as gifts for this ummah, not given to any other Messenger:

"While Jibreel was sitting with the Prophet, he heard a creaking sound from above him, so he raised his head and said: "This is a door in Heaven that has been opened today, and it has never been opened before today. An angel descended from it, and this angel has come down to the Earth. He has never descended before this day ever. So the angel gave the salutations of Salaam and said: Receive glad tidings of two lights that have been given to you that were never given to

a Prophet before you: The Opening Chapter of the Book (Al-Faatihah), and the closing verses at the end of Al-Baqarah. You will not recite a single letter from them but you will be given reward.”¹³⁴

As Surah Baqarah comes to a closing, the last two verses beautifully summarize the lessons to be learned from the entire chapter. Verse 285 commences with a statement that the Messenger has believed in what has been revealed to him as do the men of faith. Although there are many verses in the Quran that mention Prophets having submitted their will in Islam such as Ibrahīm (as), Yaqub (as), Eesa (as) and Suleiman (as), focusing on the beliefs of Muhammad (pbuh) and giving this reassurance that he has truly believed is unique. The obvious question is the relevance of this statement. Is it not obvious that a Messenger of God must have truly believed in God?

Among many things, this chapter has focused on the ancient Israelites and the distortions they made to their Books, accusing their Prophets of having committed atrocious sins. In this aspect, the surah frees the Prophets of any blame — Suleiman (as) did not practice magic or polytheism, Ibrahīm (as) never worshipped idols even before he embraced prophethood, Eesa (as) never called himself the son of God and Yaqub (as) and his children never denied Ismail (as) as being a messenger of God. The primary reason that the Israelites attributed such sins to their Prophets was because they considered the messengers of God to be average humans relaying information between God and mankind. From their perspective, prophets were capable of committing the same sins that an average human commits.

In contrast, the Quran makes it clear that the duty of the messengers was not to just relay information, but to implement the teachings of Allah in their own lives so that they could be role models for their nation. In fact, Allah has always guided His prophets so that they would be respected and taken seriously by their people. For this reason, verse 285 starts with a clear statement regarding the final Prophet — he was not only a Messenger, but a true believer in the religion of God. He not only conveyed the messages he would receive through revelation, but he also implemented them in his own life. Muhammad (pbuh) was a practical implementation of the Quran itself and he stands as a perfect role model for mankind.

In addition, the verse states that no distinction is made between the messengers of God suggesting that all the past messengers were excellent role models for their people and were free from any blame or sin. This is how the Quran is a confirmation of the Books that have been received in the past.

¹³⁴ Sunan an-Nasa'i 912

While it confirms certain stories, it clarifies misconceptions. Being human, prophets did make mistakes, but their errors were insignificant in comparison to the sins committed by an average individual.

Moreover, verse 285 groups the final Prophet with all the men of faith stating that they all have truly believed and hear and obey the commands of Allah. They seek God's forgiveness and comprehend that their end is to Allah. But why is the Prophet's belief being grouped with the men of faith? The companions had excellent faith, but how can they be grouped together with the Prophet?

This surah thoroughly examined the laws, rules, rituals and basics of iman. The Muslims have witnessed tests such as the changing of the qibla, fighting and struggling in the cause of Allah and sacrificing their lives for Islam. They experienced significant changes introduced to the laws in the areas of inheritance, divorce and marriage that were initially difficult to implement given the decades spent in ignorance. They were told to spend freely in the cause of Allah while prohibiting usury that they were accustomed to in the past. Alcohol and gambling, which were a common part of life during the period of ignorance, were now being demarcated as evil acts. Such radical changes introduced in the ummah helped to purify the iman of the Muslims who had no choice but to show strict compliance. Those who blindly followed the commands of Allah and obeyed the Prophet (pbuh) had been polished and purified, attaining the stage where they would now aid the Prophet in spreading the light of Islam.

Just as the light from a lighthouse is only required during times of darkness, helping to spread light all around so as to guide ships away from danger, the Prophet's companions were analogous to a lighthouse. When they were in the company of the Prophet, they would quietly listen, absorbing the nur of Muhammad (pbuh) and the light of the Quran. But when they were surrounded by darkness and evil, they would emit their own strong light, bursting with positive energy to uplift the morale of those around them, guiding people towards Islam.

The struggle of the companions proves that certainty in belief and blind trust —taqwa and tawakal — comes when the heart is thoroughly convinced of the message of Islam and truly testifies to the Oneness of God. However, the process of conviction and firm belief takes time because the heart can be wrapped with layers of envy, hatred, hostility, greed, lust and love for this world. In this condition, it is difficult for the light of Islam to penetrate the heart. Therefore, through a series of tests and calamities, Allah puts His slaves through a tough journey, slowly peeling away at the layers

surrounding the heart. The hardships coupled with verses from the Quran to comfort and console, help to guide the individual. As he is granted wisdom, he is able to understand the beauty of Allah and His message. His heart is slowly rid of its layers until it is left bare and willing to submit completely to its Master.

Having understood this, we can now have a better appreciation for why Surah Baqarah focuses so much on charity, kindness, empathy, forgiveness, patience, jihad, humbleness and humility. Inculcating these traits helps to remove layers covering the heart and purifies it so that the light of Islam can enter. Whether we are dealing with parents, spouses, friends, family, business partners, relatives, the poor or the needy, a constant control is required on our attitude and behaviour to keep the heart clean and free from disease. This is the stage that the Muslim Ummah had attained by the end of their journey and this is why the verse groups the Prophet (pbuh) and the men of faith together. More importantly, if Allah can group other Muslims with the Prophet (pbuh) because they struggled so much in the cause of Allah, then we should try and raise our level of iman as well so that on the Day of Judgment, we can be standing in the same group as the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions.

Finally, when the surah commenced, Allah made it clear that guidance is only for the muttaqeen. At that time, He was referring to Muslims and non-Muslims who are critical thinkers, empathize and are humble. They have a growth mindset. Now, as the surah ends, Allah makes it clear that the Prophet (pbuh) and his companions were those who had reached the climax of muttaqeen. While the ancient Israelites said, “we hear and we disobey”, the companions of the Prophet (pbuh) truly believed in Allah, the Last Day, His Books, angels and all the prophets, and they submitted to His will by saying “we hear and we obey.” They prayed the compulsory 5 time prayers and they gave zakat. They respected all the messengers without making any distinction between them. These are the people who will be rewarded because they are on the path of sirat-ul-mustaqeem. Therefore, the concluding message is that if we started Surah Baqarah having the qualities of a muttaqeen, trying to understand Islam with sincerity and a growth mindset, by the end of this surah, we should have truly submitted to Allah’s will in Islam. There is no compulsion in deen. Everything has been made clear. So, what are we waiting for?

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا
 إِن نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إَصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن
 قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لِطَآئِفَةٍ لَّنَا بِهِ ۗ وَأَعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا إِنَّكَ مَوْلَانَا
 فَانصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨١﴾

Allah does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned. "Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people."

On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. Every individual will be held accountable for his actions based on his circumstances. Instead of having a universal benchmark, each person will be compared to his own standard determined by his capacity, skills and potential. Every human was born with a particular fitrah that determined his unique combination of qualities and traits. This is precisely what makes every human unique. No two people can share the same nature and fitrah or the exact same environment in which they gained experiences of life. Since Allah takes everything into account and promises that no soul will be dealt with unjustly, He does not expect any individual to reach the standard of another. He simply expects each believer to do the best that he can, continuously struggling to become a better version of himself given his environment and his potential.

As Surah Baqarah mentioned tests and hardships in the covenant signed by the Ummah of Muhammad (pbuh) where The Almighty promised that He will be with those who are patient and grateful, the surah now ends making another promise. Our tests and hardships are not random. They are carefully designed for each person based on his potential. No soul will have a burden placed on it more than it can bear. So if someone is being tested, for sure he has the ability to survive it, else Allah would never have placed the test upon him.

At the same time, we are told to ask Allah to not place a burden on us similar to that placed on those before us. The previous ummah faced persecution and torture twice on account of their rebellion against Allah. We pray that this ummah remains firm on the path of Islam and that Allah grants it power over its enemies so that it is not subjected to fitna. Furthermore, just as the covenant signed by the Muslims warned them that the Last Day will be a Day when no soul can avail another nor will intercession or friendship benefit, in the same manner, the surah concludes with the same message

being reiterated. Every soul will be accountable for its deeds. It will get the reward of the good that it has done and it will be held accountable for the evil it has done. Given that humans are prone to sin, we pray that Allah does not hold us accountable for the sins we make on account of our forgetfulness or unintentional mistakes.

Furthermore, there is a similarity between Surah Fatiha and Surah Baqarah. As aforementioned, Surah Fatiha ended with a dua asking Allah for guidance to the right path. Therefore, Surah Baqarah gave us guidelines teaching us how each of us can individually monitor ourselves to make sure we walk on the right path. However, after showing us the right path, many of us keep getting distracted, falling into error and chasing dunya while forgetting the path Allah highlighted. Many of us fall into despair when severely tested and lose our iman. We were supposed to end fitna, spread the truth, establish deen, help the poor, be fearless against the enemy, speak up on behalf of the weak, but instead, we became consumed by fear, desperate to seek validation. Hence, Surah Baqarah ends with a dua teaching us to seek forgiveness for our constant shortcomings, to implore Allah to ease our tests by giving us courage, conviction, tawakal and taqwa and to help us gain victory over the enemy by granting us power.

In fact, by asking Allah to ease our burden, forgive us and grant us power over our enemies, the ending verses are beautifully linked to the opening verses of the next chapter, Surah Al-e-Imran, where Allah starts by reminding us that He is Al- Hayy and Al Qayoom, and He has granted us furqan in the form of Quran. So, if we want forgiveness, if we want our burden to be eased by being granted courage, conviction and the strength to gain power over the enemy, we need to remind ourselves that The Almighty is Al Hayy Al Qayoom, the Most Powerful Ever-Living and Sustainer of All, and we need to hold fast to the Quran. Whenever we get distracted, we will fail. But if we repent, we will be granted success, contentment, honor and victory over the enemy.