

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Sūrah Ṭāhā (3)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī

وَمَا أَعْجَلَكَ عَنْ قَوْمِكَ يُّوسُفُ ﴿٣٧﴾ قَالَ هُمْ أَوْلَاءُ عَلَى أَثَرِي وَعَجِلْتُ إِلَيْكَ رَبِّ لِتَرْضَى ﴿٣٨﴾¹

The preposition عَنْ after أَعْجَلَكَ indicates a verb be considered to be present that collocates with the expression: أَعْجَلَكَ عَنْ. This style has been explained at a number of instances in the Qur'ān that in such cases a *taḍmīn* exists in which the suppressed verb collocates with the preposition. The translation keeps this aspect into consideration.

These verses relate to the instance when the Almighty had asked Moses (sws) to come to the same place as when he was blessed with prophethood so that the Torah could now be give to him. God fixed a time period of thirty days for this. However, in his zeal to meet Him, Moses (sws) assigned Aaron (sws) to look after the nation and reached the place ascertained before time. The Torah mentions this but does not state any time period or the hastiness shown by him:

The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction.”

on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.” (Exodus, 24:12-14)

In Sūrah al-A‘rāf, this is mentioned thus:

وَوَعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فِتْنَةٍ مِيقَاتٍ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً وَقَالَ

1. And what made you leave your people and come over early, O Moses? He replied: “These people are also right behind me and Lord! I have come early to earn your pleasure.”

مُوسَى لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ اخْلُفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ. (١٤٢:٧)

And We took a promise of thirty nights from Moses and completed it with ten further nights; so, as a result of this, forty nights were completed as the time appointed by his Lord.² And Moses said to his brother Aaron: “After me, be in my place among my people and keep reforming them and do not tread the path of the mischief-mongers.” (7:142)

This haste shown by Moses (sws), as is evident from his own words, was the result of his zeal and his passion to earn God’s pleasure. Viewed thus, it had nothing wrong in it. In fact, it was the consequence of love for God. However, this haste became a source of great trial for him and his nation. Taking advantage of his absence, the miscreants among them led the nation to the trial of cow worship. In spite of his full effort, Aaron (sws) was not able to control this situation. Until then, the temperament of Moses’ (sws) nation was of being swayed by emotions. It has been mentioned in Sūrah al-A‘rāf that right after crossing the sea when they encountered idol-worshipping nations, they demanded from him to make an idol for them the way these nations had. This incident took place just before him going to the mount Tūr. He had also scolded these miscreants on this demand. He must have been well aware of them and must have also known how much Aaron (sws) would be able to control these mischief-mongers. In these circumstances, even a few days of his absence could have become a great trial. However, in his zeal and passion, he could not fully gauge the gravity of the situation. The consequence was very grave.

It has been explained at a number of instances that if prophets of God make mistakes, it is never because of any inclination to any base desire or sentiment; at times, however, in their desire for the truth and pleasing God they do exceed the prescribed limits. This attitude in itself is not something bad, yet since prophets of God are standards of the truth and all their words and deeds are examples for others, they are checked by Him for any excess. Thus Moses (sws) was also checked for his hastiness. In

2. Initially, this promise was for thirty days. However, in his eagerness to meet the Almighty, Moses (sws) reached the place before the appointed time. Thus, in order to train and instruct him for showing haste, the Almighty increased the period from thirty days to forty.

the introduction of this *sūrah*, it has been mentioned that Prophet Muḥammad (sws) was taught to show patience. For this reason, this incident from the life of Moses (sws) has been specially mentioned. The purpose is to tell Muḥammad (sws) that showing patience and waiting for God's decree is the right behaviour for such struggles in His cause; otherwise, at times, the most pious of intentions done with haste becomes a pitfall for many.

قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ مِنْ بَعْدِكَ وَأَضَلَّهُمُ السَّامِرِيُّ ﴿٤٣﴾

The words فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ refer to the established practice of God that I have explained in detail under فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ in verse 40. Both individuals and nations constantly pass through various trials. Through these trials, the Almighty distinguishes the right from the wrong. Here the purpose is to say that God made Moses' (sws) nation pass through a test and it failed the test: Sāmīrī led it astray.

Sāmīrī is not mentioned in the Torah. Thus what is known about him is only that which is mentioned in the Qur'ān and what is stated ahead. The narrators of the Torah have ascribed all this mischief to Aaron (sws). It is a favour done by the Qur'ān that it has exposed the name of the actual originator of this mischief and absolved Aaron (sws) of this blame.

Whether Sāmīrī belonged to the Israelites or to the Egyptians who had migrated with Moses (sws) is an irrelevant question that also has no benefit. I would not like to enter into this debate. What is evident from the Qur'ān is that he was a very cunning and mischievous person hypocritical in nature who entered among the followers of Moses (sws) with evil motives. It will be evident from subsequent verses that he was a clever mystic who had the skill of playing mind tricks. Such people can easily deceive simpletons. Taking advantage of Moses' (sws) absence, he tried to trick the masses. It is evident from details already mentioned that Moses (sws) had left before his scheduled time and then later God extended his term by ten days to train and instruct him. Thus Sāmīrī was afforded with opportune time to play his tricks. He gathered all those elements from the Israelites who already had a proclivity for idol-worship. He told them that no one knows where Moses (sws) had gone to search for God,

3. God said: "Then We have put your nation through a trial behind you and Sāmīrī has led it astray."

and if they give him some of their jewellery he would make a deity for them who would guide them; until when will they wait for Moses (sws) who has just disappeared?

Sāmirī was a also very adept idol-maker of Egypt. He made a calf from the jewellery given to him by the people. Such was its shape that when the wind would pass through it, a certain sound came out of it. He regarded this sound, as will become evident later, to be a consequence of his magic. He was thereby able to fool the masses. Aaron (sws) tried his best to protect people from the mischief created by him, but he was not successful in suppressing elements which had been over-awed by Moses (sws). Matters became so worse that Aaron's own life was subjected to danger and he felt that if he now takes any step, instead of any benefit, great harm will come about and the whole community would be dismembered. Thus, he thought it best to leave matters to Moses' return.

فَرَجَعَ مُوسَى إِلَى قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ يَقَوْمِ أَلَمْ يَعِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ وَعَدًا حَسَنًا أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُم مَّوْعِدِي⁴

When Moses receive news of what had happened, he was overcome by emotions that arise on such occasions. He returned to his people in great anger and grief. He was annoyed at the miscreants of his nation who had succeeded in this prank and it is evident from later verses that he was also angry with Aaron (sws) because he did not have full knowledge of the incident; he reckoned that Aaron (sws) had not did enough to protect the nation from the evil of these miscreants. His grief was at the wretchedness of his nation that while he had gone to fetch God's guidance for them, they started worshipping a calf.

The promise referred to in the verse is the one that has been referred to earlier: while going to mount Ṭūr, he had directed all the chiefs of his nation that they should stay at that place until he returns with *sharī'ah* for which he was going. He had told them to follow the directives of Aaron (sws) during this time.

4. At this, Moses returned to his nation in great anger and grief and said: "People of My Nation! Had not your Lord made a very good promise with you? Has much time passed on you or did you want that your Lord's wrath descend on you; for this reason, you have broken My covenant?"

قَالُوا مَا أَخْلَفْنَا مَوْعِدَكَ بِمَلِكِنَا وَلَكِنَّا حُبَلْنَا أَوْ زَادََا مِن زِينَةِ الْقَوْمِ فَقَذَفْنَاهَا فَكَذَلِكَ
أَتَى السَّامِرِيُّ ⁵ 

Because of the rather concise nature of this verse, our exegetes have faced difficulty in interpreting it. After stating its meaning in my own words, I will explain the its individual words.

First of all, Moses (sws), as alluded to earlier, scolded the nation elders who he had given the responsibility of looking after it in his absence. These elders expressed their helplessness and inability. They said that they did not have any role in whatever happened; people had entrusted their jewellery in their care; at their demand, they returned it back to them and in this way Sāmīrī prepared a calf for them. Their implication was that he was responsible for this crime as well as those who were deceived by him. They were forced to consign the jewellery to him when its owners pressurized them.

The word **مَلِك** means “will and power.” They meant that they tried their best to abide by the promise they made. However, circumstances were beyond their control.

The expression **زِينَةِ الْقَوْمِ** refers to the jewellery people had entrusted to the chiefs. It seems that in order to safeguard themselves from the uncertainties of travel, many people had entrusted their jewellery to the elders of the nation, which they accepted as a service to them. The Torah contains conflicting statements regarding the ownership of the jewellery – whether it belonged to the Israelites or to the Egyptians. It is evident from chapter 35 of the book of Exodus that it belonged to the Israelites; however, another narrative from this book shows that while leaving the country, the Israelites had borrowed it from the Egyptians. This second account appears to be illogical. In the first place, the Israelites never had this status that they could borrow jewellery from the Egyptians and the latter agree to this settlement especially when for years a very grave conflict existed between the two. Also the Egyptians thought that the Israelites were preparing to leave the country. Secondly, how could Moses (sws) morally and religiously tolerate the fact that he allow his people to own something they had actually borrowed? Thus this

5. They replied: “We did not break our promise with you out of our own will. In fact, we had been made to carry the burden of the nation’s jewellery. We cast it off and in this way Sāmīrī showed this trick.”

view is untenable. The correct view in this regard is that the jewellery belonged to the Israelites. In verse 148 of Sūrah al-A'rāf, the words used are مِنْ حُلِيِّهِمْ (from their jewellery), which corroborate this view.

The word قَذَفَ means to “to cast down or to throw up.” The chiefs said that they had carried the burden of the people entrusted to them even though they did not like it. The purpose was to be of service to them; however, now that they have been pushed so far, they have cast down the burden. Those who have a flair for the Arabic language know that all the three words قَذَفَ and قَذَرْنَا and قَذَرْنَا allude to heaviness of the burden these chiefs felt. When Moses (sws) scolded them, they thought they since the calf had been made from jewellery, he must have thought that they too had a hand in it. In order to remove this doubt from his mind, they said these words to clarify their own position. Also evident from their word بِمَلِكِنَا is the fact they tried their best to save people from the mischief worked by Sāmīrī. However, circumstances worsened beyond their control. Since their helplessness was evident, it seems that Moses (sws) accepted their excuse.

Consider next the expression: أَلْفَى السَّامِرِيُّ. The verb أَلْفَى in Arabic has a wide connotation. Just as it means to place something on the ground, it also means to throw dice and show a trick or stunt. In Sūrah al-Hajj, this word will be extensively researched. Here it is in exactly the same meaning as in verse 65 of this sūrah إِمَّا أَنْ تُثَبِّتَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ نَتَكُونَ أَوَّلَ مَنْ أَلْفَى (either you show your trick first or we show our skill).

The chiefs held Sāmīrī to be entirely responsible for this mischief.

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عِجْلًا جَسَدًا آلِهَهُ خُورٌ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ ۖ فَنَسِيَ⁶

The word خُورٌ signifies the bellowing of the calf. In other words, Sāmīrī made a model of the calf from which this sound came out. It seems that he was very adept in the Egyptian art of idol-making. In those times, this art was at its zenith in Egypt. Some relics of those times have been mentioned in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-A'rāf. It was not difficult for anyone skilled with the

6. So, he extracted a calf for them: a body from which the sound of a bull would come out. At this, they said: “Is this your god and that of Moses, but he has forgotten it.”

craft of making idols in those times to extract such a calf from which a bellowing sound would come out. Sāmirī regarded this sound to be a consequence of his magic. In order to fool the masses, he led them to believe that he had thrown the dust created by the hooves of Gabriel's horse in this statue thereby creating this sound.

Even today people fool people by such mind tricks and there exist far greater magicians than Sāmirī in our cities. So how could it have been difficult for him to deceive a simple nation as the Israelites. Thus the miscreants who were the originators of this mischief stirred the propaganda that this calf is the real deity of the masses and of Moses (sws); however, the latter had just ignored it and disappeared in the wilderness of mount Ṭūr. The result of this propaganda was that a vast majority of the Israelites were caught in the quagmire of this mischief.

أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّ يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَوْلًا ۖ وَلَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا ﴿١٩﴾

The implication of this verse is that a deity is the greatest need of a person. What need will such a lame deity fulfil that has made them worship it?

وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُمْ هَارُونُ مِنْ قَبْلُ يَقَوْمُ إِنِّي أَخْتِمْكُمْ بِهِ ۖ وَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ فَاتَّبَعُونِي وَاطِيعُوا أَمْرِي ﴿٢٠﴾

In this verse, Aaron (sws) has expressed his acquittal from this mischief. As indicated earlier, in the Torah he has been regarded as its originator; however, the Qur'ān has vehemently negated it. It is also evident from the word “already” that as soon as this mischief surfaced, he started to warn people about it in the words mentioned in the verse.

قَالُوا لَنْ نَبْرَحَ عَلَيْهِ عَكِفِينَ حَتَّىٰ يَرْجِعَ إِلَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

Aaron (sws) tried his best to warn people of it but they refused to listen to him. Their response depicted in the verse shows that

7. Would not these people reflect that neither can it respond to anything nor can it inflict any harm or give benefit?

8. And Aaron had already said to them: “O People of My Nation! You have been put through trial by it. Your Lord is the Most Merciful God. Hence you should follow me and listen to me.”

9. They said: “We shall now keep worshipping this calf until Moses returns to us.”

in spite of this, though they were deceived by Satan and were guilty of great foolishness, later many of them did realize this folly, as is evident from Sūrah al-A'rāf. However, it is never easy to rectify a foolish act. Thus these people too instead of giving it up immediately adhered to calf-worship until the return of Moses (sws).

10. قَالَ يَهُرُونَ مَا مَنَعَكَ إِذْ رَأَيْتَهُمْ ضَلُّوا ۖ أََلَا تَتَّبِعُنِ ۚ أَفَعْصَيْتَ أَمْرِي ۚ

The directive referred to in the verse is the Moses (sws) had given to Aaron (sws) and the elders when he was departing for mount Tūr. I have also mentioned it under verse 123 of Sūrah al-A'rāf: he directed Aaron (sws) to mind the people in his place and remain aware of the miscreants in the nation and not let them spread mischief. The style in which Moses (sws) has posed this question is that he knew that Aaron (sws) would not deliberately disobey him; he actually wanted to find out his excuse.

Obviously, after أَفَعْصَيْتَ apparently there is no need for لَا. Thus our grammarians regard it to be redundant. However, it is not redundant here but occurs to emphasize the verb in accordance with common linguistic principles of classical Arabic. This style is found in Urdu as well.

قَالَ يَبْنَؤُمْ لَا تَأْخُذْ بِدَحْيَتِي وَلَا بِرَأْسِي ۚ إِنِّي خَشِيتُ أَنْ تَقُولَ فَرَّقْتَ بَيْنَ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ وَ
لَمْ تَرْقُبْ قَوْلِي ۚ

The reaction of Moses (sws) depicted in this verse shows both his affiliation and sense of honour for the truth and his natural love for his brother. In fact, this love entailed that when he realized that Aaron (sws) was guilty of a weakness in the matter of religion, he be overwhelmed with emotions and fervently admonish him. The attitude of the prophets of God is that in worldly affairs they do show tolerance; however, in religious affairs, they do not compromise in any way. In this regard, the closer a person is to them, the more sensitive they are for him. People who are given to the pleasures of this world behave

10. Moses said: "Aaron! When you saw them going astray, what stopped you from not following me? Have you disobeyed My directive?"

11. He replied: "O the one given birth to by my mother! Grasp not my beard nor my head. I feared that you would but say: 'You have created a rift among the Israelites and did not give regard to what I said.'"

entirely differently: they are very cautious and clever in worldly affairs and even call their fathers and sons to account; however, in religious affairs, they do not have any sensitivity; whatever, their close ones do does not effect their sense of honour.

Aaron (sws) expressed his excuse in a very nice way. It has been explained in Sūrah al-A'rāf that he tried his best to stop people from this trial. However, a vast majority was led astray by the spell weaved by Sāmīrī. Such was its extent that Aaron (sws) feared for his life if he persisted to correct them. Now only two options remained: either Aaron (sws) was to separate himself with his followers from others or wait for some days for Moses' (sws) return. The first option would have resulted in divisions among people and bloodshed. In the second option, it could have been expected that Moses (sws) would set right the affairs because of the awe and respect he commanded and because of his acumen. For this reason, Aaron (sws) did not adopt the first option because it would have created disorder rather than any improvement in the state of affairs and he wanted to save his nation from this disorder and bloodshed as much as possible. In the second option, there was a chance that Moses (sws) would be able to control the situation because of his acumen and forceful personality. For this reason, he abandoned the first option as it would create disorder. He obviously wanted this to not happen.

¹² قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكَ يَا سَامِرِيُّ ﴿٤٥﴾

After asking all those who could be responsible for the mischief, when it became evident to Moses (sws) that it was Sāmīrī's handiwork, he posed the question alluded to in this verse.

قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلَتْ لِي نَفْسِي ﴿٤٦﴾ ¹³

When Sāmīrī saw that he could not escape from the grasp of Moses (sws), he made up a clever excuse to absolve himself. In this excuse, on the one hand, he tried to justify his action and on the other confessed that whatever he did was a deception of his

12. Moses asked: "What is your matter, O Sāmīrī?"

13. He replied: "I saw that which others did not; so, I picked up a handful from the footprints of the messenger; then cast it into the calf. Thus did my soul prompt me."

own inner-self and he was led to believe that it was actually the truth.

He said that he had a vision and saw something which others did not; he saw in his vision that Gabriel had come and that he (Sāmīrī) had picked up a handful of dust and put it inside the model of a calf that he had made. As a result of this, it started to speak. He confessed that after Moses' statement, it became evident to him that he had been deceived by his inner-self and that it was not a vision that he had seen. As a result, he perpetrated this crime. In this way, he tried to convince Moses (sws) that it was a misconception and nothing intentional. However, he fully knew that it would not be easy for him to escape from the grasp of Moses (sws) and whatever bluff he was playing would not succeed before him. He thus confessed that whatever happened was because of a misconception: he regarded the deceptive prompting of his soul to be a vision and hence committed this crime.

قَالَ فَادْهَبْ فَإِنَّ لَكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ أَنْ تَقُولَ لَا مِسَاسَ وَإِنَّ لَكَ مَوْعِدًا لَنْ تُخْلَفَهُ^{١٤} وَانْظُرْ إِلَى إِلَهِكَ الَّذِي ظَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا لَنُحَرِّقَنَّهُ ثُمَّ لَنَنْسِفَنَّهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا^{١٥}

This excuse was enough for Moses (sws) to understand Sāmīrī's clever trick.

The word فَادْهَبْ here means "to go and get lost."

The words فِي الْحَيَاةِ imply that this punishment in which he would continuously be cursed was not a temporary one; he will have to endure it for the rest of his life.

The words لَا مِسَاسَ refer to the fact that Sāmīrī will himself call out to people that he was impure and thus should not be touched nor could he himself touch anyone.

In the Mosaic *sharī'ah*, there exists a punishment to sever someone from the community. After stating certain prohibitions in chapter 7 of Leviticus, it is said about those who are guilty of them:

When anyone touches anything unclean, whether human uncleanness, or an unclean animal, or any unclean detestable

14. Moses said: "Then be off with you. Now, for life, you will continue to say: 'No one should touch me,' and there is another promised time too for you which will never be deferred from you. And look at this deity to which you strongly had attached yourself. We shall burn it; then scatter it in the sea."

thing, and eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, that person shall be cut off from his people.

A person who was administered this punishment would virtually become untouchable; he would neither be allowed to participate in any social gathering of grief or festivity nor allowed to enter worship places; also, no one would be allowed to make arrangements of his own burial. A punishment which is even more harsh than this has been prescribed for patients of leprosy. It is stated in the book of Leviticus:

Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp. (13:45-46)

Moses (sws) administered this same punishment to Sāmirī. The only difference is that for lepers this punishment remains as long as they are inflicted with this disease but for Sāmirī it was a life-long punishment since he was afflicted with the leprosy of hypocrisy. Moral leprosy is filthier than physical leprosy. Moreover, Moses (sws) gave him the punishment of cursing him which is the harshest punishment in religion. If the Qur'ānic words *أَنْ تَقُولَ لَا مِسَاسَ* are placed in parallel with the words of the Torah: "and cry out, 'unclean! unclean!'" only then the real emphasis of the Qur'ānic words can be understood. It should be kept in mind that declaring one's self to be unclean is the ultimate of extent of humiliation.

The last part of the verse shows portrays the fate of the calf. Moses (sws) mentioned it in this way because not only is it essential to wipe out polytheism, it is also essential to destroy all its manifestations so that all the viruses of this creed are totally uprooted.

At the time of the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet (sws) too had destroyed all the idols forthwith.

Here it is possible that a question arise in the minds of some people: why was Sāmirī not punished by death by Moses (sws) since many perpetrators of this crime were executed by him, as is mentioned in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-Baqarah? The answer to this

question in my opinion is that this curse is more harsh and exemplary a punishment than execution, as I have mentioned in the case of those who had violated the command about the *sabt*. When a person is executed, the punishment finishes the matter immediately and the lesson others people receive from it is also temporary. However, the curse-punishment sticks to a person both in this world and in the Hereafter. Imagine the extent of the wretchedness of a person who calls out from his own tongue that he is unclean and that no one should touch him. It should be kept in mind that the curse of a messenger is a punishment from which none can escape. Such a person will remain accursed wherever he goes – both in this world and in the next.

The Qur'ān has specified here that the statue of the calf was burnt and crushed to bits and its ashes were scattered in the sea. However, the account in the Torah says that Moses (sws) dissolved the ashes in water and made the people drink it. This shows that the narrators of the Torah do not even have the knack of fabricating something. How could Moses (sws) have asked people to drink this “elixir of life”? If this account is regarded to be true, then perhaps it is the consequence of this drink that in spite of being recipients of a divine book, these people became prone to polytheism. Such is its effect that it has become a permanent feature of their lives.

15. **إِنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَسِعَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا**

The verse implies that those who regarded the calf to be their deity were doomed. People should remember that only God is the one they must worship. The words “His knowledge embraces everything” form an argument in favour of monotheism. When this is the case, why should anyone other than Him be made a deity? When He hears and knows everything, He alone is sufficient. What then is the need for anyone else?

Section III: Verses (99-135)

The account of Moses (sws) ended on the previous verse. In these succeeding verses, the same topic is taken up as was

15. “Only God is your deity; there is no other deity except Him. His knowledge embraces everything.”

discussed in the introductory part of the *sūrah* in a new style and with new arguments. Prophet Muḥammad (sws) is addressed and told that the anecdote just narrated to him is not merely a tale of the past; he and his followers are going through similar circumstances. Those who are trying to evade him and lead others away from him will not only bear their own burden of sins on the Day of Judgement but also of those who were led astray by them. That day will be very harsh. None will have a say in it. Everyone will appear before God and before Him no one will be able to intercede for anyone unless He allows. The reminder which has been revealed to the Prophet (sws) warns people of all dangers; he should recite it out to people. Those who have the urge will benefit from it and he who evades it should be left alone by him. He is not responsible for such people. Moreover, he should recite out this Qur'ān to people in a gradual way just as it is being revealed gradually. There is much wisdom in this methodology. He should not show haste in this matter for it will deprive everyone of its blessings. Adam (sws) showed haste and the consequence was that Satan was able to expel him from Paradise. The Prophet (sws) should direct the attention of those who are demanding a sign of punishment from him to the history of their own land. Moreover, he should be patient on their sarcastic remarks and to attain patience fervently adhere to the prayer. He should not go after the rich and the affluent to make them accept faith: neither is he in need of their wealth and resources nor is his preaching dependent on their patronage. God is his patron and sufficient to sustain him and his companions. Those who are demanding signs from him should be told that the greatest sign is the Qur'ān that has been sent to them. It has been sent to them so that the truth can be conclusively conveyed to them. He should also tell them that if they think that this sign is not enough and would like a sign of the promised doom, then they should wait and he too will wait.

Readers may now proceed to study these verses in the light of this background.

Text and Translation

كَذَلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ مَا قَدْ سَبَقَ ۚ وَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ذِكْرًا ۖ مَنِ اعْرِضْ
عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وِزْرًا ۖ خُلِدِينَ فِيهِ ۖ وَسَاءَ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ حِمْلًا ۖ يَوْمَ

يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ وَنَحْشُ الْبُحْرِ مِيزِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ رُزْقًا ۖ يَتَخَفَتُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا عَشْرًا ۝
نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذْ يَقُولُ أَمْثَلُهُمْ طَرِيقَةً إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا يَوْمًا ۝ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ
فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا ۖ فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا ۖ لَا تَرَى فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا ۝
يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَّبِعُونَ الدَّاعِيَ لَا عِوَجَ لَهُ ۖ وَخَشَعَتِ الْأَصْوَاتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ فَلَا تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا هَمْسًا ۝
يَوْمَئِذٍ لَا تَنفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا ۖ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا
خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا ۝ وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ ۖ وَقَدْ حَابَ مِنَ حَبَلٍ ظُلُمًا ۝
وَمَنْ يُعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَا يَخْفُ ظُلُمًا وَلَا هَضْبًا ۝ وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا
وَصَرَفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا ۖ فَتَعْلَى اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ ۖ وَلَا
تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَى إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ ۚ وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ۝ وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَى
آدَمَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نُنْشِئَ الْبَشَرَةَ لَمْ تَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا ۝ وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا
إِبْلِيسَ ۖ قَالَ فَقُلْنَا يَا أَدَمُ هَذَا عَدُوُّكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى ۝
إِنَّ لَكَ أَلَّا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعْرَى ۖ وَأَنَّكَ لَا تَظْمَأُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَصْحَى ۖ فَوَسَّوَسَ إِلَيْهِ
الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا أَدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةٍ الْخُلْدِ وَمَلِكٍ لَا يَبُولُ ۖ فَأَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتْ لَهُمَا
سَوَاتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفْنَ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ وَعَصَى آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَى ۖ ثُمَّ اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ
فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَى ۖ قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ ۖ فَمَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِّنِّي
هُدًى ۖ فَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَى ۖ وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً
ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْلَى ۖ قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْلَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا ۖ قَالَ
كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيتَهَا ۖ وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى ۖ وَكَذَلِكَ نُجَزِي مَنْ أَسَافَ وَلَمْ يُؤْمَرْ
بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبْقَى ۖ أَفَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ
يَسْأَلُونَ فِي مَسَلِكِنِهِمْ ۖ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى ۖ وَلَوْ لَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِن رَّبِّكَ لَكَانَ
لِرِأَمًا وَأَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى ۖ فَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ
غُرُوبِهَا ۖ وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَى ۖ وَلَا تَهِنَنَّ عَيْنُكَ إِلَى مَا
مَتَّعْنَاهُ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ ۖ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى ۖ وَأَمْرُ
أَهْلِكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَأَصْبَحَ عَلَيْهَا ۖ لَا تَسْأَلُكَ رِزْقًا نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُكَ ۖ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلتَّقْوَى ۖ وَقَالُوا

لَوْلَا يَأْتِينَا بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۖ أَوَلَمْ تَأْتِهِمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مَا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٣٣) وَلَوْ أَنَّا أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ
مِّن قَبْلِهِ لَقَالُوا إِنَّا لَوَلَاءُ لِّأَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنُتَّبِعِ آيَاتِكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نُنْذَلَ وَنُخْرَى (١٣٤) قُلْ
كُلُّ مَثَرٍ بِضٍ فَتَرَبَّصُوا ۚ فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَصْحَبُ الصِّمَاطِ السَّوِيِّ وَمَنِ اهْتَدَى (١٣٥)

In this way, We also narrate to you anecdotes of the past and have also given you a reminder specially from Our self. Those who turn away from it will bear a heavy burden on the Day of Judgement. They will always remain under it and on the Day of Judgement it will be a very heavy burden. The Day the trumpet shall be blown and We shall gather the wrongdoers with their eyes turning blue out of fear. They will be secretly saying to one another: “You must have hardly stayed for ten days.” We very well know what they will say when the most clever among them will say: “At most, you have must have stayed for a day.” (99-104)

And they ask you about the mountains. Say: My Lord will scatter them away in the form of dust and level the earth flat. You will neither see any bend in it nor a high place. On that Day, everyone will follow the one who calls out. They shall dare not the slightest deviate from him and all voices shall be lowered before the Most Merciful God. You will only be able to hear hushed whispers. On that Day, intercession will be of no avail except if the Merciful allows someone and approves of him to say something. He knows all that is in front of them and behind them, and their knowledge cannot grasp Him. Everyone’s faces will be bent down before the Ever-Living and Ever-Sustaining God. And he who is guilty of any form of polytheism will face humiliation. And he who does righteous deeds and he is also a believer shall neither fear any injustice nor oppression. (105-112)

And in this way We have revealed it in the form of an Arabic Qur’ān and have mentioned My warning in it in various ways so that these people remain secure from God’s wrath or it may produce some insight in them. So, exalted is God, the real king. Thus you should not show haste in acquiring the Qur’ān before its revelation is complete and keep praying: My Lord! Increase my knowledge further. (113-114)

And before this, We had imposed the obligation of a promise on Adam, but he forgot. And We did not find him strong-willed. And when We asked the angels: “prostrate before Adam,” they prostrated except Iblīs. He refused to do so. At this, We said: “Adam! He is an enemy to you and to your wife. So, he should

not succeed in expelling you and your wife from this orchard so that you end up deprived. Here you have the comfort of not being hungry nor will you need any clothes; neither will thirst bother you nor will you feel the sun.” But Satan tempted him. He said: “Adam! Should I inform you of a tree which has eternal life and of a kingdom which shall never perish?” So, both ate that tree’s fruit. At this, their hidden parts became evident to them and they began covering themselves with the leaves of that orchard. And Adam disobeyed the directive of his Lord; he was thus led astray. Then his Lord blessed him, graciously accepted his repentance and guided him. He ordered: “All of you get down from here. You shall remain enemies of one another. Thus if there comes to you guidance from Me, then he who follows My guidance will neither go astray nor will be deprived. And he who turns away from My reminder, for him is a life of affliction and on the Day of Judgement, We shall raise him as a blind person.” He will say: “Lord! Why did you raise me blind? I was one who had eyesight?” God will reply: “Our revelations came to you in this world in this way; so you ignored them. Today you shall be ignored likewise.” And in this way shall We treat him in exchange who exceeds the limits and does not profess faith in the revelations of his Lord and the torment of the Hereafter will be more severe and more lasting. (115-127)

Was this not enough to guide them that We have destroyed many nations before them in whose settlements they walk about? Indeed, there are many signs in this for those who have intellect. And had a matter not been decreed earlier by your Lord and there was not a prescribed time, a torment would have surely visited them. So, show patience on whatever they say and keep extolling your Lord while glorifying Him before the sun rises and before it sets and glorify him in the night times too and on the margins of the day also so that you are showered with favours. And do not even glance at the resources of worldly pleasures We have given some of their groups in it for their trial, and your Lord’s sustenance is better and lasting. And ask your people to offer prayer and adhere to it yourself also. We do not ask for any sustenance from you. It is We Who shall provide sustenance to you, and success in the end is for piety. (128-132)

And they say: “Why does he not bring a sign from his Lord for us?” Has not the testimony of what is written in their earlier scriptures reached them? And if We destroyed them before this

through some torment, they would have said: “Lord! Why did You not send a messenger to us that we may have followed Your revelations before being humiliated and disgraced?” Say: Each one is waiting; so, you also wait. Soon you will know who is treading the right path and who the wrong one and who will reach the destination. (133-135)

Explanation

16. كَذَلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ مَا قَدْ سَبَقَ ۚ وَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ذِكْرًا ۚ

The word refers to the account of Moses (sws) that has just been narrated. The verse implies that these important tales of the past are being narrated to the Prophet (sws) from which it becomes clear how God dealt with His messengers and their rivals. He can see the fate of his rivals in the mirror of these accounts. The word ذِكْرُ refers to the Qur'ān. The Almighty has preserved in the Qur'ān the portion of accounts of the previous messengers and their teachings that was meant to be preserved. Similarly, the guidance that was to be revealed to Muḥammad (sws) as the last Prophet is also found in it.

17. مَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وِزْرًا ۖ خَلِيدِينَ فِيهِ ۖ وَسَاءَ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حِمْلًا ۝

These verses sound a threat to those who will evade this reminder. The antecedent of the pronoun in فِيهِ is for the consequence of the word وِزْرًا (burden) which is punishment. The will forever undergo punishment. The burden is called heavy for this very reason. Moreover, no one will help them in carrying this burden. Everyone will bear his own burden.

18. يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ وَنَحْشُرُ الْجُرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ رُزُقًا ۝

The word رُزُق is the plural of رُزْق. The latter word refers to blue eyes. However, as an idiom, it also refers to a person who is terrified. This is because in extreme fear a person's eyes turn blue.

16. In this way, We also narrate to you anecdotes of the past and have also given you a reminder specially from Our self.

17. Those who turn away from it will bear a heavy burden on the Day of Judgement. They will always remain under it and on the Day of Judgement it will be a very heavy burden.

18. The Day the trumpet shall be blown and We shall gather the wrongdoers with their eyes turning blue out of fear.

The previous verses mentioned the Day of Judgement. This verse portrays it. The indirect style found in “the Day the trumpet shall be blown” reflects the horrific nature of the event: a great cataclysm will ensue but no one will know from where the sound is coming.

19 ﴿يَتَخَفَتُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنْ لَّبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا عَشْرًا ۚ﴾

The verse implies that today these people have absolutely no fear of the Day of Judgement. In the first place they think that it is improbable. If they believe in it to any extent, they ignore it thinking that life, then death, then *barzakh* and then the hereafter are such far off that there is no need to worry about it and spoil the pleasures of this life. Today they may regard it to be far-fetched but when it will come, they whisper about the time of their stay in this world. I have explained at another place that people will have no awareness of their time in *barzakh* when they rise on the day of Judgement. They would think that they had just slept and have now awakened.

As for the life of this world, as long as a person lives through it, he keeps thinking that he has a lot of time left. However, when death stares him in the eye, at that time he thinks that what he thought to be a long span turned out to be so brief. This is especially true about a life spent in indifference: it seems like a dream from which one has woken up. It is on this indifference that the Qur'ān has warned about here: it is not how a person feels here because that is a total deception; the real feeling will be the one when the truth comes before a person.

20 ﴿نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذْ يَقُولُ أَمْثَلُهُمْ طَرِيقَةً إِنْ لَّبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا يَوْمًا ۚ﴾

The implication of this verse is that no one should think that details of what will happen on the Day of Judgement the Almighty is informing them of are baseless and are being presented to strike awe in their hearts. All this is destined to happen.

The word *أَمْثَلُ* means “better and superior.” Here it is used sarcastically. In other words, this would be the statement of the person considered the most clever and superior among them.

19. They will be secretly saying to one another: “You must have hardly stayed for ten days.”

20. We very well know what they will say when the most clever among them will say: “At most, you have must have stayed for a day.”

Those who are adept in classical Arabic poetry know that the deception on which these verses warn is the one with which many poets were afflicted and would thereby regard the Day of Judgement to be *حديث خرافة* (a baseless thing). I am intentionally abstaining from citing relevant couplets and perhaps there is no need too for citing them. This is because this matter is not just specific to the age of *jāhiliyyah*. Even today people are under this deception. The Qur'ān has warned people of precisely this.

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا ۖ فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا ۚ لَا تَرَىٰ فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا ۚ²¹

The word *نَسَفَ* means to uproot something, separate grain from chaff, make something into straw and ash and have it blown away.

The antecedent of the pronoun in *فَيَذَرُهَا* is land. Pronouns are used in this way for obvious and famous things. Several instances of such pronouns can be seen in the Qur'ān for the sky and the earth. Thus in verse 45 of Sūrah al-Fāṭir: مَا تَرَكْ عَلَىٰ ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ the antecedent of the pronoun *هَا* is the earth though it is not mentioned.

قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا refers to barren and flat land, which does not have any high or low surfaces, vegetation or trees.

The word *أَمْت* refers to high ground. Regarding the Day of Judgement, the Arabs had another misconception: they thought that the mountains could never be destroyed. Even their intellectuals had this view, let alone the masses. Zuhayr whose compositions belong to the category of wisdom poetry is reported to have said:²²

أَلَا أَرَىٰ عَلَى الْخَوَاصِثِ بَاقِيَا
الرَّوَاسِيَا الْجِبَالِ وَلَا خَالِدًا إِلَّا

(Except for these mountains implanted so deeply, I do not regard anything else to withstand the calamities of time)

When the Qur'ān warned people of the cataclysm that would take place on the Day of Judgement, because of this very misconception, many would sarcastically ask the Prophet (sws)

21. And they ask you about the mountains. Say: My Lord will scatter them away in the form of dust and level the earth flat. You will neither see any bend in it nor a high place.

22. Al-Zuhayr, *Dīwān*, 48.

about the fate of mountains.

The people of Arabia regarded the mountains to be huge and indestructible; however, today's human beings regard themselves to be unconquerable and proudly think that very soon they will conquer the whole universe. In the presence of this notion, the question of the hereafter does not even pass their minds.

23  يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَّبِعُونَ الدَّاعِيَ لَا عِوَجَ لَهُ ۖ وَخَشَعَتِ الْأَصْوَاتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ فَلَا تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا هَمْسًا

The word *هَمْس* refers to a low and stifled sound like a whisper. The implication of the verse is that today they are not listening to the calls of God's Messenger who is calling them to the truth and vehemently opposing him. But on the day of Judgement they will follow the calls of a caller who will lead them to doom.

24  يَوْمَئِذٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا

The exception mentioned in this verse is severed (*munqata*'). The verse refutes the claim of intercession of the Arabs. They reckoned that the deities they worship are favoured by God. These deities will themselves intercede for whomsoever of their worshippers they want to. The verse negates this claim. It states the two conditions of intercession which can be beneficial. Any concept of intercession that does not take these conditions into consideration is baseless and a person who expects otherwise will come to know of this fact on the Day of Judgement. I will explain this aspect more under verse 28 of Sūrah al-Anbiyā'.

25  يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا

This verse has been explained under the throne verse of Sūrah al-Baqarah. The implication is that God's knowledge is all embracing. None else can grasp the extent of God's knowledge. When this is the case, who can add to His knowledge and on this basis intercede before Him for someone. God does not need to find out the details

23. On that Day, everyone will follow the one who calls out. They shall dare not the slightest deviate from him and all voices shall be lowered before the Most Merciful God. You will only be able to hear hushed whispers.

24. On that Day, intercession will be of no avail except if the Merciful allows someone and approves of him to say something.

25. He knows all that is in front of them and behind them, and their knowledge cannot grasp Him.

about the character of a person. This issue has been discussed under verse 87 of Sūrah Maryam too. Readers can look it up.

26. **وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ ۚ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ حَبَلَ ظُلْمًا**

The word **عَنُو** means to express humility and meekness and the word **ظُلْمٌ** means polytheism, as has been explained at a number of instances.

This verse strikes another blow at the advocates of the wrong conception of intercession. About their alleged intercessors, they thought that they held a very high status before God. They could coax and cajole Him to accept whatever they wanted. They could ask Him with full courage, confidence and insistence to fulfil their desires. Such was the affection God had for them that He would necessary accept their wishes and intercession. The verse negates this concept in an emphatic way.

Here from among the attributes of God, the ones referred to are **الْحَيُّ** and **الْقَيُّومُ**. The have a special significance. It is known about the Idolaters of Arabia that they did believe in God but because of their polytheistic beliefs, they had relegated him to the status of a helpless elder of a house who had delegated all his responsibilities to others and secluded himself in isolation. This conception of God had made them totally indifferent to His existence and made them trust and depend on their alleged deities and intercessors. Here the Qur'ān has also criticized this view by informing them that God is a living God Who is overseeing the matters of His creatures. He has not left them at the mercy of others and it should not be thought that as the first cause has no role in their lives.

The word **ظُلْمٌ** refers to polytheism and it is not defined to signify the fact that in whatever form a person indulges in it will not be acceptable to God in the Hereafter. Here it needs to be kept in mind that polytheism is not merely idol-worship; it has some very subtle and blatant forms and each leads to ruin in the hereafter. I have been referring to its various types during the course of this tafsīr and have also penned an independent tract on this subject: *Essence of Polytheism*.

26. Everyone's faces will be bent down before the Ever-Living and Ever-Sustaining God. And he who is guilty of any form of polytheism will face humiliation.

27 ﴿وَمَنْ يَعْصِلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَا يَخَفُ ظُلْمًا وَلَا هَضَبًا﴾

When ظلم and هضم occur together the way they have in this verse, the former refers to usurpation of rights and the latter to embezzlement and injustice. In the first, a person does not fulfil his rights towards others and in the second a person is guilty of extorting from others.

The previous verse pointed out that doomed is the person who indulges in any form of polytheism. Here it is said in parallel that he who does righteous deeds and is also a believer, he will be fully rewarded and should not fear any appropriation or extortion.

The condition of being a believer shows that the person is doing righteous deeds while adhering to monotheism; if these deeds are contaminated with polytheism in any way, then they will not carry any weight before God.

28 ﴿وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا وَصَرَّفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا﴾

This verse is coordinated to what is said earlier from where this subject was brought up. In verses 99-100 it was pointed out that God has specially revealed this reminder from Himself: those who turn away from it will carry a heavy burden on the Day of Judgement. After that a warning was sounded regarding the advent of the Day of Judgement. After this mention, the previous subject is taken up with a new introduction and more details.

It is stated that for this purpose of reminder the Qur'ān has been revealed: the necessary consequences of denying it are explained in it so that if people want to adopt the path of piety and God-consciousness, they are afforded this opportunity; if they do not do so, then they shall stand fully cognizant of the fact that if they are seized by God, then they do not have any excuse to offer for their attitude.

The assertion of revealing the Qur'ān in Arabic has been made as a favour to the Arabs and also as a means of conclusive communication of the truth. In other words, it is a great blessing of God that this Book has been revealed in their own language to

27. And he who does righteous deeds and he is also a believer shall neither fear any injustice nor oppression.

28. And in this way We have revealed it in the form of an Arabic Qur'ān and have mentioned My warning in it in various ways so that these people remain secure from God's wrath or it may produce some insight in them.

remind them and convey the truth to them in this way. Now, they cannot present the excuse that if a messenger had come to with a book in their language, they would have been the foremost in accepting faith. The Qur'ān has done away with this excuse.

The word تصريف means to explain something in a multiple and a variety of ways, as has been indicated at various instances. The implication is that in the first case, the Book has been revealed in their language and in the second place not left any ambiguity in stating the consequences of evading it: they have been fully elucidated on the basis of knowledge, intellect, history as well as on the basis of the signs found within human beings and those around him. If even after this elaborate arrangement, these people do not mend their ways, who is to blame?

The purpose of all this arrangement is to create piety and God-consciousness. If they do not understand this, then at least they should know the purpose of being sent in this world and what they, on the contrary, are guilty of. It may be kept in mind that the Qur'ān has once again reminded the Arabs of that part of their history in which their forefathers Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) had made them inhabit the land of Arabia. The word احداث is pointing to this aspect. The expression اذكركم means to once again remind people of some anecdote.

فَتَعَلَّ اللَّهُ الْهَدْيَ الْحَقُّ ۚ وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ ۚ وَقُلْ رَبِّ
زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ﴿٢٩﴾

In order to understand the correct meaning of this verse, readers are advised to look up what is written under verses 64-65 of Sūrah Maryam. The sole weapon of the Prophet (sws) against the onslaughts of his rivals was the Qur'ān. Thus he was naturally anxious to receive it. It would guide him in his hardships, assure him in his travails and provide him with decisive answers to the never ending sequence of demands and questions posed to him. For this reason, he would always be waiting for new guidance from God much like a soldier waiting for fresh supplies to combat a huge army. To allay these worries, he is assured that he should not hastily demand the revelation of

29. Thus you should not show haste in acquiring the Qur'ān before its revelation is complete and keep praying: My Lord! Increase my knowledge further.

the Qur'ān. The exalted God knows what benefits are there in its piece-meal revelation; He is the real king of the universe and the reminder sounded by him to people is His decree. It is not a request or a pleading. Regardless of the people's response to this Book, the Prophet (sws) should continue to recite it out to them in the gradual sequence it is being revealed. God fully knows the wisdom in the time span He has allocated for it. He should not ask to have it hastily sent down before this time frame and on the contrary keep praying that his Lord may increase his knowledge.

This subject is discussed in the Qur'ān at many instances and everywhere with this background. Our exegetes have confined its meaning to a certain understanding. They contend that when Gabriel would recite the revelation to the Prophet (sws), he would show haste in acquiring it and was hence stopped from doing so. This in itself is correct that intense interest does make a person impatient. When a much awaited letter arrives, we try to read it in one go. This is a natural sentiment and the Prophet (sws) must have had it for the Qur'ān as well. However, it is not correct that the Prophet (sws) has been stopped on expressing this. The real background has already been referred to. This subject is also brought up at other instances in the Qur'ān and if they are read together, the whole matter will become evident.

³⁰ وَلَقَدْ عَهِدْنَا إِلَىٰ آدَمَ مِنْ قَبْلِ فَنَسَىٰ وَلَمْ نُجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا ﴿٣٠﴾

The expression *عَهِدَ إِلَىٰ* means “to impose a responsibility on someone.”

In the previous verse, the Prophet (sws) has been stopped from showing haste regarding the Qur'ān. Here, in this verse in order to explain the harms of haste, the incident of Adam (sws) and Satan is referred to: it was this hastiness that made Adam (sws) commit a mistake. Satan took advantage of this weakness found in human nature and enticed Adam (sws): he disobeyed God's directive regarding the forbidden tree. The result was that Adam (sws) was expelled from Paradise and made to inhabit the earth, as a place of his trial and test. The purpose of citing this incident is that haste never pays. Earlier, in the account of Moses (sws), it was also shown that his hastiness did not produce good results and his nation was afflicted with a grave trial. In the background of these

30. And before this, We had imposed the obligation of a promise on Adam, but he forgot. And We did not find him strong-willed.

incidents, the Prophet (sws) is instructed that he too should not be impatient in his preaching: he should do whatever he is being revealed to him a gradual way. If he shows impatience, it may result in some lacunae in the training of his people, even if his intention and objective is good. It may well be that some devil or Sāmīrī take advantage of this and lead them astray.

The words *مِنْ قَبْلُ* (before this) refer to the past episode of Adam (sws) and Satan. In other words, just as the Prophet (sws) is being asked to not show haste, Adam (sws), his forefather and that of while mankind, was given this directive but he could not comply with it. The result was that Satan succeeded in deceiving him. Since past experiences, especially if they relate to one's own lineage are a means of guidance for present and future generations, it was said that the Prophet (sws) must keep them in mind.

The word *سِيءٌ* refers to something slipping the mind. In other words, the directive given to Adam (sws) slipped his mind once he was overcome with impatience even though it was transient. He was not able to maintain his resolve. Details of the directive given to him and the nature of his mistake are coming up. This verse merely says that all emotions are part of human nature but must be confined within limits. If they remain within these limits, they produce great benefits for individuals and for societies. However, if they become unbridled, they are a great danger to both. People must inculcate in themselves the traits of patience and resolve to keep these emotions in check. In the absence of this control, an emotion can wreak havoc any time. Haste is an emotion among others and it is found in human nature. In verse 37 of Sūrah al-Anbiyā' and in verse 11 of Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl, it is thus respectively stated: *خُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ عَجَلٍ* (human beings are made from the substance of haste) and *كَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا* (human beings are impatient). This emotion is advantageous for people only if it is controlled by patience and resolve otherwise it will jeopardise their life.

The last part of the verse is meant to point to the impatience shown by Adam (sws) and inform the Prophet (sws) of its consequences.

³¹ *وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى*

In the previous verse that part of the incident of Adam (sws) and

31. And when We asked the angels: "prostrate before Adam," they prostrated except Iblīs. He refused to do so.

Satan has been referred to which was needed for the specific objective it was cited. Now the actual incident is described. By summarizing an incident before it is actually mentioned, it becomes very helpful in understanding the coherence of a discourse. The Qur'ān has adopted this style at various instances. In the incident of the seven sleepers in Sūrah al-Kahf too this style has been adopted.

The incident of Adam (sws) and Satan has also been discussed in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah al-A'raf. Repeating it here would be needless. Readers may look up what is written under verses 30-39 of Sūrah al-Baqarah and verses 11-14 of Sūrah al-A'raf. The wisdom behind this directive, the nature of prostration, the reason for including both the jinn and angels in the directive and the arrogance of Satan, all have been explained to the best of my understanding.

32 ﴿فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكَ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى﴾

Not only did Satan refuse prostration, in frenzy of jealousy, he also challenged God, as has been explained under verses 14-22 of Sūrah al-A'raf. He claimed that if he was given this respite, he would prove that neither are human beings worthy of any superiority over him nor do they deserve Paradise; most of them would become his own followers. On the one hand, God gave him this respite and warned him that He will cast him and all his followers in Hell and on the other hand, informed Adam (sws) that he should stay in Paradise but should remember that Satan is his eternal enemy. He should stand guard against him lest he leads them astray and haves him expelled from Paradise and he ends up in deprivation and despair.

33 ﴿إِنَّ لَكَ أَلَّا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعْرَىٰ﴾ وَأَنَّكَ لَا تَظْمَأُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَصْحَىٰ

In these two verses, a very comprehensive picture of the Paradise in which Adam (sws) had been placed. What is said here is that he will neither face the hardships of cold nor of hot weather.

In cold weather, hunger and shelter are needed and in hot

32. At this, We said: “Adam! He is an enemy to you and to your wife. So, he should not succeed in expelling you and your wife from this orchard so that you end up deprived.”

33. “Here you have the comfort of not being hungry nor will you need any clothes; neither will thirst bother you nor will you feel the sun.”

weather protection from the sun and water for drinking are needed. Those who are aware of classical Arabic literature know that they would refer to the pangs of hot and cold weather by mentioning these aspects. Some people are of the view that it would have been more apt to mention thirst with hunger and the heat of the sun with shelter. In our opinion, this is the result of a deprivation of literary flair for Arabic.

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ قَالَ يَا دُمُهُلَ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْغُلْدِ وَمُلْكٍ لَّا يَبْغَىٰ ۚ

Though Satan had been expelled from Paradise for showing arrogance and disobeying God, he had sought respite from Him until the Day of Judgement to entice Adam (sws) and his progeny. Thus he came to him even in Paradise to whisper his suggestions to him cited in the verse. He tried to entice Adam (sws) into eating the forbidden fruit by telling him that this will ensure his eternal stay in Paradise. In the first place, human beings have this weakness to do the very thing they have been stopped from; in the second, Adam (sws) did fear that he may be asked to go out of Paradise because God had warned him that Satan was his eternal enemy and may have him driven out of Paradise. Satan perceived this fear found in Adam (sws) and was successful in convincing him that if he wanted eternal life and an eternal kingdom, he should taste this fruit. Being overwhelmed with the desire to live eternally, Adam (sws) forgot that God had warned him about the enmity of Satan. He regarded his enemy to be his well-wisher and was deceived by him.

It is evident from this that though Satan is an eternal enemy of Adam's progeny, his most successful line of attack is the one he adopts in the garb of being a well-wisher and friend. He comes in this garb and makes people realize that the secret to their cultural and social development lies in the very things God and His Messenger have disallowed to them. Even in current times, we can see that this precisely is the greatest argument presented by the agents of Satan to inveigle human beings.

In verse 20 of Sūrah al-A'rāf, the topic discussed in this verse is stated thus: مَا نَهَكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَن تَكُونَا مَلَائِكَةً أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ (your Lord has only stopped you from this tree lest you become angels or that you may acquire immortality). Here the question

34. But Satan tempted him. He said: "Adam! Should I inform you of a tree which has eternal life and of a kingdom which shall never perish?"

arises that in the verse under discussion, the words used are مُلْكًا لَا يَبْئَلُ (eternal kingdom) and in Sūrah al-A‘rāf, the words are أَنْ تَكُونُوا مَلَائِكِينَ (lest you make become angels). Though these may not be two contradictory statements, but they sure are different. How can they be reconciled? In order to do away with this discrepancy, some people have read the Sūrah al-A‘rāf verse as أَنْ تَكُونُوا مَلَكِينَ (lest you become kings). However, in the first place, this reconciliation is not very sound and in the second the *mutawātir* reading is the one only found in the *muṣḥaf* and *non-mutawātir* readings are not acceptable.

In my view, the answer to this question is that Satan tried to entice Adam (sws) and Eve in various ways. At times, he told them that eating this fruit would turn them into angels and at times he told them that they would gain an eternal kingdom. The basis of my view is that it is explicitly mentioned in verse 22 of Sūrah al-A‘rāf that Satan had tried hard to inveigle Adam (sws). He had to give him a lot of assurances in order to win him over. While explaining the afore-mentioned verse, I had written that the expression فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ means to gradually entice and lead a person away. It is thus evident that Adam (sws) did not succumb to Satan with just one of the outcomes he had mentioned. It is only after he had led Adam (sws) to believe of various fantastic outcomes and that too at different instances that this happened. The purpose was to somehow deceive him.

فَاَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوَاتُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفْنَ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَّرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَ عَصَىٰ آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَىٰ ³⁵

This verse has been explained in Sūrah al-Baqarah and in verse 22 of Sūrah al-A‘rāf too.

The word غَوَى means “to go astray.” The implication of the verse is that Adam (sws) was deceived by Satan and he tasted the forbidden fruit. As a result, he was deprived of his attire of Paradise about which it was mentioned in verse 118 that God had promised never to deprive him. Adam (sws) and Eve began covering their bodies in embarrassment and uneasiness. They

35. So, both ate that tree’s fruit. At this, their hidden parts became evident to them and they began covering themselves with the leaves of that orchard. And Adam disobeyed the directive of his Lord; he was thus led astray.

had taken this step to acquire eternal life in Paradise but the result was that they even lost what they had.

36. **ثُمَّ اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ** ﴿٣٦﴾

Here **اجْتَبَىٰ** is mentioned before Adam (sws) repented and his repentance was accepted. Thus this word means giving Adam (sws) the urge to repent and giving him the words of repentance. In verse 37 of Sūrah al-Baqarah, the words used are: **فَتَلَقَّىٰ آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّوَابُ الرَّحِيمُ** (Thus Adam learnt some words from his Lord and repented; so, his Lord accepted his repentance; indeed, He is one who graciously accepts repentance and is very merciful). In verse 23 of Sūrah al-A'rāf, the words of repentance are cited thus: **قَالُوا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا ۖ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ** (They prayed: Lord! We have been unjust to our souls and if you do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we would end up in loss). It is evident from this that Adam (sws) was very ashamed at his mistake and it is God's law that if a person realizes his mistake, he is blessed with the urge to repent from God and God makes him even more close to Him. It is this status which is called **اجْتَبَىٰ** in this verse. There is no doubt that very fortunate is the person who besides realizing his blemish and having the urge to repent is revealed words of repentance by God.

Consider the expression **فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ**. The preposition **عَلَى** evidences the fact that it encompasses the meaning of **رحم** ie., he once again received God's mercy and guidance. I have referred to this in verse 37 of Sūrah al-Baqarah as well. The word **هَدَىٰ** refers to the fact that God guided him in his future phases so that he could combat the onslaughts of Satan.

This verse also refutes the Christian belief of original sin and also of those who regard Adam (sws) to be the father of human kind only but not a prophet of God. The words of this verse signify that he was a prophet and sense and reason too demand that God gave him a *sharī'ah* to guide him and his progeny. The next verse explains this.

قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ ۖ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى لِّفَمَنِ اتَّبَعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا

36. Then his Lord blessed him, graciously accepted his repentance and guided him.

This verse has been explained from various aspects under verse 36 of Sūrah al-Baqarah and verse 24 of Sūrah al-A'rāf. I have also tried to explain under these verses the wisdom behind Adam (sws) coming into this world and facing the challenge of Satan. I have further explained that these verses do not address Adam (sws) and Eve; the address is towards Adam (sws) and Satan in the capacity of two groups.

The words **بَغْضُكُمْ يَبْغِضُ عَدُوَّ** refer to the fact that Satan will be their enemy and they too should treat him as their enemy if they want to regain Paradise and end up successful in the Hereafter. This is because every sensible person regards his enemy to be his enemy and is always on guard against him. Only foolish people befriend their enemies and follow their advice.

Those who regard the dual form mentioned here to imply Adam (sws) and Eve as being addressed here are grossly mistaken. In the first place, exactly the same statement is cited in Sūrah al-Baqarah in plural form. Secondly, if the dual form occurs here in the verse under discussion, it is also qualified by the word **جَمِيعًا** (all). If Adam (sws) and Eve are addressed here, then this word is absolutely needless here. Thirdly, the natural relationship between Adam (sws) and Eve is not of enmity: it is of love. If there is some hostility between a husband and wife, it is not because they are enemies of one another; it is because of Satan's enticement. However, the enmity between Satan and between Adam (sws) and Eve is natural and extends until the Day of Judgement. The enmity of Satan is based on jealousy and he had openly declared this basis. As far as a human being's enmity for him is concerned, then every sane person should remember that he has been sent out of Paradise to combat this enmity. If he befriends Satan, it would mean that he is calling for his own doom at the hands of his enemy.

Consider next the last part of the verse: "Thus if there comes to you guidance from Me, then he who follows My guidance will neither go astray nor will be deprived." This actually is the weapon which God had blessed Adam (sws) and his progeny with. Since human beings have been sent in this world to combat

37. He ordered: "All of you get down from here. You shall remain enemies of one another. Thus if there comes to you guidance from Me, then he who follows My guidance will neither go astray nor will be deprived."

a very clever foe, it was the will of God that He not only guide them through their nature and intellect but also through divine revelation so that they could fight Satan with double the might and power.

Two things are clearly proven from this verse:

Firstly, the sole means to remain secure from the onslaughts of Satan in this world is the Book of God. He who is deprived of this light will always remain vulnerable to the enticement of devils found both among the jinn and humankind.

Secondly, Adam (sws) was a prophet. He has been sent in this world to counter the onslaughts of Satan for which God's guidance for both Adam (sws) and his progeny is essential. Thus, God must have revealed a *sharī'ah* to him according to the circumstances. I have referred to some directives of his *sharī'ah* under the incident of Abel and Cain in verse 31 of Sūrah al-Mā'idah

38. وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُكَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى

The expression *مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا* refers to a life devoid of peace of mind and inner satisfaction.

There is a vacuum in a human being which is only filled by faith in God. So unless he has this faith in him nothing else can give him peace of mind and assurance. Other things, however grand and attractive they may be, can provide temporary joy but they cannot give relief to the anxiety found in the heart and soul of a person. When a child cries because of hunger, it can be appeased for a little while through a nipple or a soother but it receives satisfaction only when a mother feeds it. Without this arrangement, the child remains restless. Similar is the case with a human being. He may provide himself with various means and resources but if he is deprived of faith in God he will remain dissatisfied, hesitant, fearful, unstable and in a state of spiritual crises however much he may try to hide this. The kingdom of the satisfied soul is acquired by true and firm faith. *أَلَا يَذْكُرُ اللَّهُ تَطْبِيعَ الْقُلُوبِ* (Listen! It is only through God's remembrance that hearts receive assurance).

A question may arise here: there are many people who lay claim to faith but they spend their lives in great worries and straitened circumstances; on the other hand, there are so many

38. And he who turns away from My reminder, for him is a life of affliction and on the Day of Judgement, We shall raise him as a blind person."

who regard faith in God to be a hoax but they lead very comfortable and happy lives. The answer to this question is that in the first place here the discussion is not with those who merely lay claim to faith but with those who have true faith. Secondly, we only see the apparent splendour of those whom we regard to be very happy even though they are indifferent to God. If we were able to creep into their hearts, we would be able to see so many threats, doubts and fears concealed in them but they are not apparent to everyone. Only they themselves can see them or those who have the insight of faith in them.

The verse goes on to say that those who evade God's remembrance will be resurrected blind on the Day of Judgement. The reason is that it is this remembrance which removes hurdles from the faculties of sight, hearing and intellect. The Qur'ān has specified that he who evades this remembrance is blind, deaf and intellectually deprived in spite of having the afore-mentioned faculties. As a punishment of grossly disrespecting His favours, God will raise such foolish animals as blind. These favours were not given to people so that they become slaves of what is palpable and tangible; on the contrary, they were given to them to observe signs that are etched in every nook and corner and every particle of this universe. If a person sees but cannot see what is most obvious, then he may see everything but understands nothing.

Here a question arises. In verse 22 of Sūrah Qāf, it is stated: فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ (so, now We have removed that veil which covered you; thus sharp is your eyesight today). On the other hand, it is stated here that God will raise up that person as blind. How can this discrepancy be reconciled? The answer is that there is no discrepancy. In Sūrah Qāf, the subtle implication is that people remain slaves to their faculties in this world; not only do they not realize their blindness, they in fact regard themselves to be intellectuals; however, on the Day of Judgement, they will realize their blindness. Today such is the case that in spite of the fact that the eyes of our scientists are fully equipped with telescopes and microscopes, they are unable to see their own eyes. Yet a day will come when everything will become evident and no would be able to deny the reality. It is to this revelation that the verse of Sūrah Qāf points to.

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِيْ اَعْمٰی وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيْرًا ﴿٢٢﴾ قَالَ كَذٰلِكَ اَتَتْكَ اٰیٰتُنَا فَنَسِيْتَهَا ۚ وَكَذٰلِكَ

The word نسي here means “to ignore.”

The implication of this verse is that if they had been given eyes, why did they not get opened in spite of reminders and warnings? The punishment of such eyes is that they remain shut. Their complaint is of no use. Just as they had ignored God’s revelations, they deserve to be ignored themselves.

40  وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ أَسْرَفَ وَلَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبْغَى

The word إسراف means “to exceed the limits.” The expression مَنْ أَسْرَفَ refers to people who wasted their talents in the very things they had to abstain from and ignored things they were required to do.

أَفَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ يَيسُوْنَ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى 

The correct meaning of أَفَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ would be “was not such and such a thing not enough to open their eyes and give them guidance?”

This is an answer given to those who were demanding a sign for the punishment. Were not the ruins of the destroyed nations like the ‘Ād and the Thamūd they pass by in their trade journeys sufficient to open their eyes? Arab poets have versified the destruction of their cities. These cities were situated along the main trade-routes. In the presence of these blatant signs, what more do they want? A sensible person is one who learns from the fate of others and not when his own fate stares him in the eye. If human beings adopt this attitude, then what difference remains between them and animals?

39. He will say: “Lord! Why did you raise me blind? I was one who had eyesight?” God will reply: “Our revelations came to you in this world in this way; so you ignored them. Today you shall be ignored likewise.”

40. And in this way shall We treat him in exchange who exceeds the limits and does not profess faith in the revelations of his Lord and the torment of the Hereafter will be more severe and more lasting.

41. Was this not enough to guide them that We have destroyed many nations before them in whose settlements they walk about? Indeed, there are many signs in this for those who have intellect.

42 وَلَا كَلِمَةً سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَكَانَ إِزَامًا وَأَجَلَ مُّسَمًّى

The expression أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى is coordinated to كَلِمَةً. This verse answers the demand of showing a sign of punishment. In other words, if this punishment is not visiting them, it is because its time is fixed according to God's established practice and prescribed law. No one should think that this is a bluff or God does not have the resources to bring it about. This subject is brought up in the Qur'ān at a number of instances. Thus in verse 14 of Sūrah of Sūrah al-Shūrā, it is stated: وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى لَفُضِّى بَيْنَهُمْ⁴³. It is evident from this that God has appointed a day of accountability for the deniers. For this reason, in spite of the haste shown by the hasty, God is giving them respite. Unfortunate are the people who instead of benefitting from this respite become even more rebellious.

The word **كَيْدَةً** here refers to the fact that God has already fixed a time of punishment and the expression **أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى** is pointing to the fact that a certain time of its advent has been prescribed; its time of arrival is not ambiguous or vague in any way. In God's calendar, its time of arrival is fixed to the second.

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ آنَاءِ
الَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَى ⁴⁴

The Prophet (sws) is now urged to exercise patience at the nonsense he is facing from his adversaries and to do this he is asked to be diligent in the prayer as much as he can. Patience is based on the belief that whatever happens, happens with God's will, which is based on the greater good of everyone. The greatest and most effective means to fully implant this belief in one's mind is the prayer.

Consider now the expression: **وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ**. The general meaning

42. And had a matter not been decreed earlier by your Lord and there was not a prescribed time, a torment would have surely visited them.

43. And had not a thing been ascertained by God till an appointed term, He would have decided among them today.

44. So, show patience on whatever they say and keep extolling your Lord while glorifying Him before the sun rises and before it sets and glorify him in the night times too and on the margins of the day also so that you are showered with favours.

of *tasbīh* is God's remembrance and this is required all the time. However, here its mention is qualified by time. For this reason, it refers to the prayer. The word *ḥamd* is mentioned right after it to delineate the true form of God's remembrance. While the dominant element in *tasbīh* is to absolve God from all negative attributes, the dominant element in *ḥamd* is to affirm all positive attributes in God. If any of these aspects is not kept in mind, the true conception of God is sacrificed, as a result of which the whole system of person's life is ruined. Some religions gave so much importance to the first aspect that God became aloof and inaccessible to them. As a result, they ended up needing mediators and intercessors. In order to safeguard people from this trial, the Qur'ān has directed people to keep in mind both aspects so that their relationship with God is established on the right footing. Without this relationship, a person cannot adhere to the right path.

Consider now the words: قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَ قَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا. Before sunrise and sunset come the prayers of *fajr* and '*aṣr*. This is also mentioned in a narrative in the *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Bukhārī. The reason that both these prayers are mentioned the foremost is their importance in religion.

The words وَمِنْ أَمَّا الْإِيلَ فَسَبِّحْ refer to the night prayers. One of them is *ishā'* and the other is *tahajjud*. The verb is repeated here for emphasis. The emphasis laid is because both these prayers need extra effort.

The words أَطْرَافِ النَّهَارِ point to the three prayers on the boundaries of the day: *chāsh*t, *zuhr* and *maghrib*. It is very evident that both *chāsh*t and *maghrib* are at the boundaries of the day. Deliberation shows that *zuhr* too is at the boundary since the day is divided into two by it. Its time is at the last edge of the first part of the day and at the opening edge of the second part.

This verse clearly negates the view of those people who claim that the timings of the prayer are not mentioned in the Qur'ān. Not only does the Qur'ān mention the obligatory prayers, it also mentions the *tahajjud* and *ishrāq* prayer. The Prophet (sws) has crystallized these timings through his own practice. He has also determined the forms of the prayers and also designated the obligatory and the optional ones. Obviously, it was his task to delineate all these details and to determine the extent and limits of each prayer. This is because he was not merely a person who

was to recite out the Qur'ān to people; he was also its teacher.

Here it may be kept in mind that the prayer is stressed upon as a means to acquire perseverance. These verses were revealed in the very tough phase of the struggle between truth and evil. In them, the Prophet (sws) and through him all the *ummah* are informed of a measure that will make them persevere in trying circumstances and make them worthy of God's help as well. In such circumstances, it is not merely the obligatory prayers which are needed; to be diligent in the optional ones is also required. This view of ours is corroborated by the Qur'ān, the sayings of the Prophet (sws) and the practice of the righteous. In general circumstances, the prayers of *tahajjud* and *ishraq* are optional prayers but in challenging and difficult circumstances, whether they are individual or collective, these prayers must be adhered to as well.

This issue will *insha'Allāh* be discussed in detail in Sūrah al-Muzzammil and at an appropriate instance also shed light on the wisdom behind the timings of the prayers.

Consider next the last expression of the verse: لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَى (so that you are showered with favour). In verse 5 of Sūrah al-Ḍuḥā, it is similarly said: وَكَسَوْفُ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَى⁴⁵

Concealed in the two words of the verse under discussion is a world of meaning. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should adhere to his stance and be diligent in offering the prayer; as a result, God will bless him with so many successes of this world and the next that he will be drenched. Found in these prayers is everything that he needs and there is no need for him to look up to anyone else.

وَلَا تَبْذَنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَى مَآمَتِّ غَنَابَةٍ أَوْ أَجَا مِنْهُمْ زُهْرَةً الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ ۖ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى⁴⁶

In this verse, the Prophet (sws) has been stopped from pampering and showing concern for the rich and affluent of his nation. The affluent elements of a nation are responsible for its development or decadence. If they become corrupt, the whole nation follows suit and if they remain upright, uprightness of the

45. And your Lord will give you so that you shall be pleased.

46. And do not even glance at the resources of worldly pleasures We have given some of their groups in it for their trial, and your Lord's sustenance is better and lasting.

whole nation can be expected. For this reason, it has remained the established practice of the prophets of God that they address the elders and chiefs of their nations the foremost. Until and unless they lose hope in them due to their stubbornness and obduracy, they continue to reform them. As per this established practice, Muḥammad (sws) too first called upon the leaders and the affluent elements of the Quraysh. Prophets reckon that if the rich accept the truth, their influence and resources would significantly help the cause and also the poor among the Muslims. This desire is solely based on the sincere well-being of these affluent elements and to keep aloft the word of God. However, when these elements from their attitude showed that their hearts will not melt before the truth, the Almighty stopped the Prophet (sws) from being worried and concerned about them. He was told to not the slightest care about their wealth; his preaching has its own means and resources and God will provide for him and his companions. If these people are not siding with the truth, it is their own deprivation. God does not need their wealth and resources.

The words “and do not even glance at the resources of worldly pleasures” refer to the groups of the Quraysh who held political authority in Makkah and Ṭā’if. Obviously, the Prophet (sws) did not look towards their wealth because of any greed. In fact, the affluent people of these cities were prepared to offer a lot of wealth to the Prophet (sws) on the condition that he desist from his preaching. However, instead of accepting it, he recited before them some verses of the Qur’ān calling them to faith. Prophets of God have never given any importance to the wealth and resources of people who have not consigned their hearts to God. If a sensible person sees that someone is wasting the vigour of his youth and all his abilities to realize a wrong objective, he yearns to see this young foolish man giving due importance to his abilities. In a similar way, the Prophet (sws) too desired that the affluent elements of his nation give due importance to the blessings and favours they have received from God and they do not squander their wealth and abilities to realize the mission of Satan. This desire has its roots in sympathy and concern for others. It has not the slightest semblance of any greed in it. However, this sincerity and concern should have a limit. As soon as it was reached, the Almighty stopped the Prophet (sws) from it.

When the verse says that these favours have been given to the groups by the Almighty, it expresses a fact. If someone has

wealth and resources in this world, it is neither because of the inheritance he receives from his forefathers nor the because of his intelligence; they are God's bestowal and by it, He sees whether a person is grateful or ungrateful. Foolish is the person who does not understand the actual reality and uses God's favours to rebel against Him.

The expression زُهِرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا is an accusative of state from the genitive pronoun in يه. Such accusative of states are common in eloquent Arabic and many examples of it have been pointed out in this exegesis. The implication is that the wealth and resources God has blessed them with are transient. If there is any use of them, then it is using them to earn for the Hereafter. Its brightness will whither away soon and leave it scarred.

The words لِنَفْسِنَهُمْ فِيهِ refer to the established practice of God. It has been explained under 40 verse of this very *sūrah*. God blesses people with favours in this world and also makes them pass through calamities. When He inflicts them with hardships, the purpose is to test their patience and when He blesses them with favours, the purpose is to test how grateful they are. In other words, if God blessed these groups with favours, it is not because they had a right to them but to try them. If the actual right they have recognized is to show ingratitude, they will soon see its fate.

The words “and your Lord's sustenance is better and lasting” inform the Prophet (sws) that he does not need the patronage of these ingrates for his preaching. What he and his companions will soon receive from God would be a thousand times better and lasting too. What these arrogant people have will last and shine for a few days only but what God will bestow will be everlasting. It will never fade away. It may be noted that the plant of piety grows from the elixir God has revealed for its nourishment. If someone tries to nurture it through stagnant water, then in the first place, it is against its nature to grow because of filthy water and in the second, if it seemingly does grow, then it will bear fruits of vice and not virtue.

47 وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَسْأَلْكَ رِزْقًا نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُكَ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلتَّقْوَى ﴿٧٧﴾

The word أَهْل is not used merely for the family of the Prophet

47. And ask your people to offer prayer and adhere to it yourself also. We do not ask for any sustenance from you. It is We Who shall provide sustenance to you, and success in the end is for piety.

(sws). In Arabic, it has a wider connotation. For example, it is used thus in *اهل الكتاب*، *اهل الإنجيل*، *اهل القرية*، *اهل القرون*، *اهل الله* الحديث. It is mentioned in the *Lisān al-‘arab*: *اهل الرجل أخص الناس به* (the expression *اهل الرجل* refers to people who have a specific relation to a person). It similarly records *اهل كل نبى امته* (the expression *اهل نبى* refers to the nation of a prophet).⁴⁸ It is narrated from Abu Bakr (rta) that when on the day of Judgement his Lord will ask him as to who he made in charge of the Muslims, he will reply:⁴⁹ *اهل ليت عليهم خير اهلك* (I made the best *ahl* as the ruler). In verse 55 of Sūrah Maryam, about Ishmael (sws), it is stated: *وَكَانَ يَأْمُرُ أَهْلَهُ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ* (He would direct his *ahl* to the prayer and the *zakāh*). Obviously, the wife and children cannot be implied by the word *اهل* (*ahl*) here; all those associated to him are meant.

In the verse under discussion too, the word *اهل* refers to all those who professed faith in Muḥammad (sws) whether they were specifically related to him or were other Muslims regardless of belonging to the Quraysh or the Hashimites or being slaves or free men and women. All these are called *اهل* of the Prophet (sws). This is because all those who profess faith in a prophet in fact become his family; at the same time, a prophet is concerned about them just as he is concerned about his own family. Deliberation shows how much the use of the word *اهل* has increased respect and status of poor Muslims. The Almighty included those into the Prophet's family who until then had no one to depend upon.

Thus the verse asks the Prophet (sws) to direct his followers to offer the prayer and adhere to it himself as well. The prayer here refers to the same prayer mentioned in the previous verse: the Prophet (sws) should vigilantly and diligently adhere to it and also ask his followers to the same too so that this creates patience and perseverance. The true meaning of the expression *وَاضْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا* is that just as a farmer tills his soil, sows deeds, waters it and continues to guard it, the Prophet (sws) too should tend to his land, and then see the blessings it produces. Such will be these blessings they he will feel drenched by them and not need to look up to others in this matter.

48. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 11, 29.

49. See: Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn Taymiyah, *Minjhāj al-sunnah al-nabawīyyah*, 1st ed., vol. 7 (n.p: Mu’assasah Qurṭubah, 1406 AH). 461.

The words “it is We Who shall provide sustenance to you” imply that the Almighty will provide livelihood to the Prophet (sws) and his followers and they are not required by Him to make any effort in this regard. He should continue with his task and show vigilance in the prayer and not worry about this. Pointing towards this reality, Jesus (sws) is reported to have said: “The labourer is worthy of his hire.” (Luke, 10:7)

Readers must keep the singular pronoun in **نَرْزُقُكَ** in mind. It was not said: “We will provide for you and your followers.” It was said: “We will provide for you.” This address to the Prophet (sws) is in his capacity of the head of the Islamic family and its sustainer. When the promise is being made with the head of the family, obviously it is made with the whole of the family ie. all Muslims. In the Islamic political system, the ruler is the provider of his whole Islamic family. For this reason, he is concerned about every individual the way the head of a family is concerned about his wife and kids. If I go into the details of how Abū Bakr (rta) and ‘Umar (rta) maintained this standard, the discussion will be prolonged. In current times, we do find many people wailing publicly while grieving for the masses but there are none like ‘Umar (rta) who thought that if even in the farthest corners of his kingdom a dog died of hunger, then he was responsible and did not merely express these emotions but took practical steps to prevent this from happening; so much so that this intense sense of accountability made him ignore even his own wife and children.

Consider next the words: “and success in the end is for piety.” In the previous part of the verse, promise for worldly sustenance was made; now glad tidings of success in the hereafter are given: none except the pious will succeed.

It may have looked odd to those who are slaves to the apparent that how can the prayer guarantee sustenance for a person. It is true that those who are neither aware of the real essence of the prayer nor aware of those who offer such prayers cannot be made to understand this; this thing can only be known and felt. Only experience can convince a person about its truth. Only those who taste the true flavour of the prayer know that is concealed in it. Readers should not regard this statement to be a claim made by me. I am not that practicing a Muslim. However, I have seen with my eyes both in real life and in pages of history

people whose foreheads gleam with the signs of prostrations. Such is their glitter that they even overshadow the sun's brightness. And such is the extent of their seeking forgiveness of God that the greatest treasures of earth have not the slightest weight before them.

50. وَقَالُوا لَا يَأْتِينَا بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ ۖ أَوَلَمْ تَأْتِهِم بَيِّنَةٌ مَّا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَىٰ

When the Prophet's adversaries would feel helpless and cornered in countering him through arguments, as a last resort, they would demand from a sign of him being God's envoy. A sign would mean a miracle and also the torment that the Qur'ān has promised them in case they deny him. The People of the Book were more responsible for raising this question. Just as in those times they would implant many questions in the minds of the Idolaters whose examples can be seen the previous *sūrahs*, they would also advise them to demand a sign from Muḥammad (sws) just as the previous messengers did so. As per own their knowledge, these People of the Book claimed that the nations of these previous messengers were even inflicted with punishments, so why can't this messenger show such miracles? The Qur'ān has answered this question and while answering it, also kept in consideration those who were implanting it and those also who were presenting it. In this verse, the first group is answered and in the next verse the second.

The answer given to the first group – the People of the Book – is that is this not a sufficient sign for them that the last messenger whose advent was predicted in their scriptures has now come and ratified all these prophecies? I have cited these prophecies in the exegesis of Sūrah al-Baqarah and Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān. I have also attempted to explain that if Muḥammad (sws) is called an attester of the previous scriptures, it means his advent has ratified all the prophecies made in his favour. This ratification is called *بَيِّنَةٌ* (sign) in this verse.

وَلَوْ أَنَّا أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ مِّن قَبْلِهِ لَقَالُوا إِنَّا لَنَرِيَّاءَ لَوْلَا أَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ آيَاتِكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ

50. And they say: "Why does he not bring a sign from his Lord for us?" Has not the testimony of what is written in their earlier scriptures reached them?

This verse gives an answer while keeping in view the Idolaters. The implication is that in order to do away with their excuse mentioned in the verse, God sent a messenger to them. Now the truth has been conclusively communicated to them. If even now they do not profess faith, the very thing they demand will manifest itself.

The words ذلت and خزی are generally used synonymously but when they occur together the way they do here, there is a subtle difference between the two. In this case, ذلت refers to the humiliation which a person feels internally and خزی refers to one which is before others. Their implication was that they would neither have been disgraced before their own selves nor before others.

52  قُلْ كُلُّ مُتَرَبِّصٍ فَتَرَبَّصُوا ۚ فَسَتَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَصْحَبُ الصِّمَاتِ السَّوِيَّ وَمَنْ أَهْتَدَى

This verse sounds the last warning. The last two verses were indirect in their address. In this verse, the address has become direct to express the intensity of anger.

In this verse, because of concomitant indications, the parallel sentence to is suppressed. Examples of such suppression can be seen in earlier *sūrahs*. I have translated the verse accordingly.

With these words, the explanation of this *sūrah* comes to its completion. May God forgive our blemishes and guide us to accept the truth.

Lahore

25th January 1973



51. And if We destroyed them before this through some torment, they would have said: “Lord! Why did You not send a messenger to us that we may have followed Your revelations before being humiliated and disgraced?”

52. Say: Each one is waiting; so, you also wait. Soon you will know who is treading the right path and who the wrong one and who will reach the destination.