

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Surah al-Hajj (1)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī

Theme and Time of Revelation

This *sūrah* is among the last of the Makkan ones revealed when Muslims were being forced to migrate to other areas because of persecution by the Quraysh. The time of the Prophet's migration too had drawn near. It was in those times that this *sūrah* was revealed with a final warning for the Quraysh. They are warned of God's wrath, and monotheism and the certainty of the Day of Judgement is corroborated through convincing arguments. Moreover, in the light of Abraham's preaching and of the purpose for which the House of God was built, they are explained that its actual worthy custodians are not the Idolaters but the Muslims whom they have deprived of it and oppressing and persecuting them to expel them from it. The conquest of Makkah has been hinted at in verse 44 of the previous *sūrah*. In this *sūrah*, this hint has assumed the form of a decisive verdict. The Quraysh are regarded as traitors and usurpers and threatened with expulsion from the House and Muslims are given glad tidings that God will protect them and after expelling the Quraysh make them its custodians.

This *sūrah* is Makkan, as is evident from its tone and contents. Only four of its verses (38-41) were revealed after migration to Madīnah. In those verses, Muslims were permitted to take up arms in defence if the disbelievers of the Quraysh tried to forcibly stop them from doing *hajj*. God would help them. Since this stipulation is an explanation to what is stated earlier, these verses are placed here. The purpose is that the wisdom of this permission becomes evident: Muslims have a right to take up arms because the occupation of the Quraysh over the House of God was an act of usurpation. Its real custodians are the Muslims and not the Quraysh.

It is because of these few verses that our exegetes have differed about the place of revelation of the *sūrah*: whether it was Makkah or Madīnah. However, if a few Madīnan verses are inserted in a Makkan *sūrah* – and the nature too of these verses is that of an explanation – this does not make the whole *sūrah* into a Madīnan one. There are some Madīnan verses in *Sūrah al-Muzzammil* too even though there is a consensus that it is a Makkan *sūrah*. It will be explained ahead that these verses are like that of a stipulation of premise that was stated concisely. When something that was stated in the last phase of the Makkan period was explained in verses revealed in the early Madīnan period, both these set of verses were placed adjacent to one another. Zamakhasharī too has regarded this *sūrah*, with the exception of a few verses, to be Makkan.¹

Analysis of the Meanings

Verses (1-4): The opponents of the Qur'ān are warned of God's grasp and of the horrors of the torment in the Hereafter. Becoming neglectful of the Hereafter and following Satan as a result of associating partners with God without any basis is a call for doom. Satan's real task, for which God has given him respite, is not to provide guidance so that people follow him. He is in fact leading all the wretched people who follow him to the fire of Hell.

Verses (5-8): Arguments in favour of the Hereafter are cited by referring to phases of creation of a human being and by the phenomenon of the earth's revival to life after a dry spell. The purpose is to urge people who are in doubt regarding the Hereafter and have become indifferent to it and are neither reflecting on the nature and wisdom of their creation nor on the world around them. They are urged to open their eyes to the signs within them and in the world around them instead of demanding to observe the torment. The advent of the Hereafter is an obvious and necessary consequence of God's attributes. It is destined to come without doubt.

Verses (9-16): Because of reliance on their alleged deities and intercessors, people who were indifferent to the Hereafter and wanted to always argue and dispute with the Prophet (sws) in support of polytheism are taken to task and refuted. It is explained that the claim of worshipping God while associating

1. Zamakhasharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 3, 142.

partners with Him is a baseless one. God does not give any importance to such hypocrites who want to worship and obey Him as long as they receive its apparent benefits and flee from Him at the time of trial and knock at the doors of others. These are the people who will procure loss both in this world and the next. The harm of those to whom they run for their benefits while leaving God is more than their use. It is only God Who has the authority to harm or benefit people. If someone loses hope in God, he can try to reach the heavens if the greatest of his schemes can solve this problem.

Verses (17-24): Muslims are assured, and all groups who are opposing Islam are informed that God is aware of everyone's behaviour. Not one of a person's words or deeds is hidden from Him. Ultimately, everyone's case will be referred to His court of justice. One the one hand will be those who today are calling others to monotheism and the truth. On the other hand, will be those who had distorted the face of religion by their religious innovations. Then God will deliver His verdict for both. He will admit into Hell all those guilty of polytheism and disbelief. As for those who adhered to monotheism and faith, they will benefit from the luxuries of Paradise.

Verses (25-37): The real objective of Abraham's (sws) religion and of building the House of God is explained. The purpose of this explanation is to make it clear to the Idolaters and their supporters among the People of the Book that they are under a grave self-delusion: they think that it is they who are the real custodians of Abraham's religion and the House of God and hence have the right to close its doors to the Prophet (sws) and his followers. Abraham (sws) never built this House for idolatry and polytheism. They have done precisely what they were not supposed to. Abraham (sws) had built it for worshipping the one and only God and for the purpose of the ritual of *hajj*. In this regard, attention is directed to the real essence of animal sacrifice and other rituals of *hajj* to urge these claimants of Abraham's legacy to evaluate their beliefs. They are to do some soul searching in this regard because they have totally distorted his legacy and his teachings. To make matters worse, they are bent upon expelling those who are trying to revive this legacy.

Verses (38-41): These four verses are Madīnan. Once Muslims migrated to Madīnah, the question arose as to what they should do

if they went for *hajj* and the disbelievers tried to stop them. This question carried great significance because waging war in the sacred months and that too within the vicinity of the House of God was regarded as prohibited even in the times of *jāhiliyyah*. The Quraysh were using the sacred months and the sanctity of the House of God as a shield and Muslims too dared not defy this prohibition unless they were permitted by God. Ultimately, God gave this permission to the Muslims: if such a war became inevitable, they too could retaliate. That war would not violate the sanctity of the sacred months; in fact, it would be a holy war for cleansing the House of God and if Muslims had the power, it was their obligation to liberate the House of God from its unworthy occupiers who were usurpers. At the same time, it is clarified that if such wars are also considered against piety, it would mean that all houses of worship that have been built for the One God are being consigned to the disbelievers and their accomplices. The consequence would be that these wretched elements would either raze them to the ground or convert them into centres of idol-worship. For this reason, Muslims should neither hesitate in waging this war nor give any importance to the accusations of their adversaries. If such a war became imminent, then, in spite of their small number and scarcity of resources, God would help to grant them authority in the land of Makkah. And when this happened, they should cleanse the Ḥaram from the filth of polytheism and disbelief and revive the objectives for which Abraham (sws) had made them inhabit this land.

This permission of cleansing the House of God was an essential consequence of what is stated in the previous section of verses: the Quraysh were unworthy custodians of the House of God and their occupation of this House was illegal for they had distorted its objectives. For this reason, though these four verses were revealed in Madīnah, they were placed here in a Makkan *sūrah* so that it becomes evident that this permission was given because of the prevailing circumstances.

Verses (42-52): Evidence from history is cited that the warning meted out by God to various nations through His messengers always materialized. None of the nations could survive on this earth after denying its respective messenger. The only thing left intact were the remnants of the magnificent buildings they built. They are enough to learn a lesson from if a person has the eye.

However, no healer can cure people whose hearts have become blind. People who demanded the Prophet (sws) to hasten the promised doom are told that God's calendar of events is different from theirs. His one day is equal to a thousand earth years. For this reason, they should not ask to hasten this doom. God's promise is destined to be fulfilled. Just as God had given respite to previous nations, he gave them respite too. So, just as those nations were punished, they too will meet the same fate if they do not desist from their obduracy. The purpose of a Messenger is to warn people and deliver them glad tidings. The decision to send punishment is in the Hands of God.

Verses (53-57): The Prophet (sws) is assured that the tough opposition he is facing against his call is nothing new. Every messenger passed through these circumstances. Whenever a prophet or a messenger tried to show courage against these adversities and reform affairs, devils always tried to impede this and tried to create hurdles. However, God always obliterates the effects of Satan's whisperings and makes His word prevail. The reason that God has given these devils this opportunity is to distinguish true believers from false claimants. The faith of seekers of the truth blossoms as a result of such propaganda by Satan and the hypocrites and the wretched go even more astray. Ultimately, God decides the fate of both. The former enter Paradise after this trial and the latter become the fuel of Hell.

Verses (58-64): Glad tidings of success in both this world and the next are given to people who had migrated by that time or were preparing to do so. These glad tidings are corroborated by God's attributes and by His signs in the world around human beings.

Verses (65-70): The wisdom behind granting respite to the disbelievers in spite of their demand for punishment is referred to: God shows haste in mercy and defers torment. The Prophet (sws) is directed to consign their matter to God. He will decide their fate in the Hereafter and this is very easy for Him.

Verses (71-76): A final strike is made at the baseless concepts of polytheism and intercession. The purpose is that the Idolaters clearly know that the deities and intercessors on the basis of whom they are unmindful of the Hereafter will not be of the slightest benefit to them in the court of God.

Verses (77-78): In these concluding verses, Muslims are addressed collectively and are directed to wage war for the cause

of God. They are told that they are now the inheritors of Abraham's religion. God has given them the title of Muslims. It is now their responsibility to bear witness to the truth before other people just as the messenger has borne this witness before them. They should be diligent in the prayer and hold on fast to God. He is their guardian and best of helpers.

This analysis of the meanings suffices to explain its whole sequence and coherence of the *sūrah*. We now, in the name of God and by His grace, begin its explanation.

Text and Translation

Section I: Verses (1-4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ ۚ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١﴾
يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَتَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَمْلٍ حَمْلَهَا وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَارَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ بِسُكَارَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّ عَذَابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ ﴿٢﴾
وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَيَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّرِيدٍ ﴿٣﴾ كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ مَن تَوَلَّاهُ فَأَنَّهُ يُضِلُّهُ وَيَهْدِيهِ إِلَىٰ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٤﴾

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

O People! Fear your Lord. Indeed, the upheaval of the Day of Judgement is a very horrific thing. The day you will see it, every suckling mother will forget her suckled child and every pregnant being will shed her burden and you will see people inebriated even though they will not be inebriated. In fact, the torment of God is a very terrible thing. (1-2)

And there are those among people who without having any knowledge dispute about God's oneness and follow every rebellious wretched devil. About whom it has been ordained that whoever befriends him, he will lead him astray and guide him to the torment of Hell. (3-4)

Explanation

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ ۚ إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١﴾²

Though the words "O People" are general, they refer to the

2. O People! Fear your Lord. Indeed, the upheaval of the Day of Judgement is a very horrific thing.

arrogant Quraysh who were denying the Day of Judgement, and demanding the Prophet (sws) to hasten the punishment. They should fear God and benefit from the respite He has graciously given them. Out of His mercy, He may give time to people, but when He seizes them for their evils, harsh is His accountability. They should not think that the Day of Judgement is an easy affair so that they demand to hasten its arrival. Its cataclysm will be horrific. Refuge should be sought from it instead of asking for it.

يَوْمَ تَرَوْنها تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَنَّا أَرْضَعَتْ وَ تَضَعُ كُلُّ ذَاتِ حَلٍ حَمْلَها وَ تَرى النَّاسَ
سُكْرى وَ ما هُمْ بِسُكْرى وَلَكِنَّ عَذابَ اللَّهِ شَدِيدٌ³

This is the picture of the utter self concern that will overtake every person on that day. People will be totally inebriated – not because of drinking – but because of the horrifying nature of the torment.

The verse simultaneously uses singular and plural forms for the addressees. It has been explained at other instances that when the singular is used for plural entities, the purpose is to address each and every entity of a group and it carries more emphasis.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَ يَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطٰنٍ مَّريدٍ⁴

When something is said by using the style “and there are those among people,” the purpose is to mention the specific after the general. If the occasion warrants praise, it is used for praise and if it is of condemnation, as is the case here, then it is used for this purpose. If this style is to be appreciated in the English language, it would imply something to effect: “There are some stupid, foolish and ignorant among people who say such and such things.” This specially refers to the group that was always ready to debate and argue with the Prophet (sws) against his message of monotheism. Such people are not many in number in a

3. The day you will see it, every suckling mother will forget her suckled child and every pregnant being will shed her burden and you will see people inebriated even though they will not be inebriated. In fact, the torment of God is a very terrible thing.

4. And there are those among people who without having any knowledge dispute about God’s oneness and follow every rebellious wretched devil.

society. They are just a small faction. Their knowledge is based on hearsay and very limited too. However, they are adept in gossip and singing their own praises. For this reason, acting as agents of clever people, they are skilled in leading simpletons astray.

In *مَنْ يُجَادِلْ فِي اللَّهِ*, the expression *فِي اللَّهِ* (about God) is actually *فِي تَوْحِيدِ اللَّهِ* (about the oneness of God) because the disbelievers of Arabia never rejected God. They only rejected His oneness. The only argument they had for rejecting this oneness was blind following of the religion of their ancestors. In verse 8 ahead, it will be explained that neither had they any knowledge of God's religion nor any guidance of intellect and human nature nor any divine book. They would enter into polemical debates without any of these. It may be kept in mind that professional debaters of such sort have nothing except sharp tongues. Their only source of knowledge is their misguided leaders and all that they can do is brag about it.

In *يَتَّبِعُ كُلَّ شَيْطَانٍ مَرِيدٍ*, the devils refer to those both among men and jinn. The word *كُلِّ* (every) points to this inference. Both these "species" of devils have a very deep connection. The devils among the jinn use the devils among men as means to spread mischief. The devils among the jinn inspire them with various thoughts and the devils among men transform this inspiration into a philosophy and give it various names too. Thereafter, they communicate it by various means. The Qur'ān has used the word devil for all such leaders of deception.

The word *مَرِيدٍ* means "mischievous, miscreant and wretched."

These devils, whether they belong to jinn or men always appear in the garb of sincere well-wishers, sympathizers and patriots. In reality, they are very mean scoundrels. They lead astray God's servants to their own ways. Those who succumb to their lures by becoming their followers and spreading the mischief worked by them are led straight into Hell by them.

Monotheism is mentioned right after the Day of Judgement because the latter's importance is related to the former. If partners and intercessors are acknowledged with God, the Day of Judgement becomes insignificant. In the presence of intercessors, how can a day of accountability be feared since they would be able to save people from God's punishment. For

this reason, the topics of the hereafter and refutation of polytheism are always mentioned adjacent in the Qur'ān so that it becomes evident that none can save people from God's grasp. The matter of everyone will be presented before Him and He alone will pass the verdict.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ مَنْ تَوَلَّاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يُضِلُّهُ وَيَهْدِيهِ إِلَى عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿٥﴾

It is mentioned at many instances in the Qur'ān that Satan had asked God for a time of respite until the Day of Judgement in order to lead astray the progeny of Adam. God had granted him this respite after which He will consign him and all his followers to the fire of Hell. The words *كُتِبَ عَلَيْهِ* point to this fact. In other words, this is a duty assigned by God to Satan. The word *فَإِنَّهُ* is coordinated to *أَنَّهُ* and *مَنْ تَوَلَّاهُ* is a conditional clause. The implication is that it is the duty of Satan to lead people astray into Hell. However, this will happen only to those who make him their friend and guardian. Those who regard him to be their enemy and always try to shield themselves from his mischief will not be impacted by his luring. It is like saying that poison is meant to kill; foolish are those who think that it is an antidote and consume it. God has given this respite to Satan to test people and not to make him their leader and receive inspiration from him or to follow him.

Section II: Verses (4-24)

In the coming verses, the subject of monotheism and the hereafter discussed earlier is brought up in another way. The phases of creation of human beings, observation of the sights and signs of this universe and the attributes of God which appear before a sensible person as a result of this observation are presented as arguments in favour of monotheism and the hereafter. It is shown that if a person reflects, these arguments can be seen within his own self as well as in the world around him. He does not need to go far. Foolish are those who deny and dispute such obvious facts. In this regard, are also discussed those who wanted

5. About whom it has been ordained that whoever befriends him, he will lead him astray and guide him to the torment of Hell.

to worship God on their own conditions. As long as His directives were in accordance with their desires, they were prepared to worship Him. However, they evaded all the directives which were against their desires and interests. In this way, seeing the ever-increasing power of Islam, a group of hypocritical people having two faces had come into being. It wanted to believe in God and Satan, belief and disbelief at the same time. In contrast to open rivals, its attitude was apparently conciliatory; however, in reality, this attitude amounted to polytheism; in fact, worse than it. For this reason, the Qur'ān has also criticized it here: such double standards cannot exist in religion. Let people who think that harm and benefit are not in the hands of God and do not want to obey Him in both good and bad circumstances adopt the attitude they want to. However, they should remember that the greatest of their strategies is not going to avail them without God's consent. At the end, the fate of both rivals – the believers and the proponents of polytheism and disbelief – is mentioned: a day will come when everyone's case will be presented before God and both will be rewarded or punished according to their beliefs and deeds.

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

Text and Translation

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّن تَرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّنْ عَلَقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّنْ مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَنُقَرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ آجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لَتَبَلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ ۖ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُّتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُّرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْدَلٍ أَعْرَبَ لِكَيْلَا يَعْلَمَ مِن بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا ۖ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ ﴿١٠﴾ ذٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَن فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿١٢﴾ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُّنِيرٍ ﴿١٣﴾ ثَانِي عَطْفُهُ لِيُضِلَّ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ ۖ لَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ وَنُذِيقُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٤﴾ ذٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتَ يَدَكَ ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٥﴾ وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرْفٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ ۖ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فَتْنَةٌ اِنْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ ۖ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ ۖ

ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿١١﴾ يَدْعُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَضُرُّهُ وَمَا لَا نُنْفَعُهُ ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ ﴿١٢﴾ يَدْعُوا لَكِنِّ ضَرُّهُ أَقْرَبُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِ ۚ لَبِئْسَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَبِئْسَ الْعَشِيرُ ﴿١٣﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٤﴾ مَنْ كَانَ يَظُنْ أَنْ لَنْ يَنْصُرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ بِسَبَبٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ لْيَقْطَعْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ هَلْ يُذْهِبَنَّ كَيْدَهُ مَا يَغِيظُ ﴿١٥﴾ وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ ۚ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يُرِيدُ ﴿١٦﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِغِينَ وَالنَّطَارِ وَالْمُجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿١٧﴾ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالدَّوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ ۚ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُّكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ ﴿١٨﴾ هَذَانِ حَصْنِ احْتَصَمُوا فِي رَبِّهِمْ ۚ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قُطِّعَتْ لَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ مِّن تَارٍ يُصَبُّ مِنْ فَوْقِ رُءُوسِهِمُ الْحَمِيمُ ﴿١٩﴾ يُصْهَرُ بِهِ مَا فِي بُطُونِهِمْ وَالْجُلُودُ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَهُمْ مَقَامِعٌ مِنْ حَدِيدٍ ﴿٢١﴾ كَلِمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿٢٢﴾ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا ۚ وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٢٣﴾ وَهُدًى إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ ۚ وَهُدًى إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْحَنِيدِ ﴿٢٤﴾

O People! If you have doubt on being raised to life again, then reflect that We created you from clay. Then from sperm, then from a clot of blood, then from a lump of flesh: some reach perfection and some remain defective. We have done this so that We fully make evident to you Our power and wisdom. And We lodge in the wombs whatever We want until an appointed time. Then We bring you forth in the form of a child. Then give time so that you may reach your maturity. And some of you die early and some are made to reach extreme of old age so that they even after knowing something, they know nothing. And you see the earth totally dry. Then when We rain down water on it, it becomes lush and grows and sprouts exquisite things of all kinds. All this is because God is the real Lord and He alone gives life to the dead and He has power over all things and the Hereafter is certain to come; there is no doubt about its advent

and one day God shall certainly resurrect all those who are in the graves. (5-7)

And are also those among people who dispute about God without any knowledge, without any guidance and without any radiant book, inebriated with arrogance indulge in argument to lead people astray from the path of God. For them is humiliation in the world, and on the Day of Judgement, We shall make them taste the torment of the fire: this is in exchange for your deeds which your own hands had sent ahead and God is not the slightest unjust to His servants. (8-10)

And there are also those among people who worship God standing at one edge. If they received any benefit, their hearts strongly adhere to God and if they faced any trial, they turn about their heels. This cost them the world and the Hereafter too. It is this which is an open loss. They call upon other beings besides God which can neither cause harm nor benefit. It is this which is extreme error. They call upon those whose harm is nearer than their benefit. How evil are these masters and how evil are these companions of theirs. Indeed, those who professed faith with full sincerity and did righteous deeds, God shall admit them into orchards beneath which rivers shall be flowing. Indeed, God will do what He intends. (11-14)

He who thinks that God will not help him in this world and in the Hereafter should stretch a rope until the sky and then decide his matter and see if this measure of his is able to alleviate his sorrow? And We have revealed this Qur'ān in this manner in the form of open arguments so that people are guided and indeed God guides whomsoever He wants to. (15-16)

Those who accepted faith, those who adopted Judaism and the Sabaeans, the Nazarenes, the Magians and those who adhered to polytheism, God shall decide among them on the Day of Judgement. Indeed, God knows everything. (17)

Do you not see that what is in the heavens and what is in the earth all prostrate before God alone and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the beasts and many people as well? And there are many also for whom the torment of God has become mandatory. And they who are humiliated by God cannot then be given respect by anyone. Indeed, God does whatever He intends. (18)

These are two groups that have differed about their Lord. So,

those who have disbelieved, for them clothes of fire shall be carved out. Boiling water shall be poured on them from above their heads. Whatever is inside their bellies shall all melt because of it and their skins as well. And to deal with them, there shall be iron hammers. Whenever they would desire to come out of any of its torments, they shall be shoved back into it: “Taste now the flavour of the punishment of burning!” (19-22)

Indeed, God shall however admit those who professed faith and did righteous deeds to orchards below which streams shall be flowing. There they shall be adorned with bracelets of gold and necklaces of pearls. And their clothes there shall entirely be of silk. And they will be guided to a pure word of gratitude and they will be guided to the way of the praiseworthy God. (23-24)

Explanation

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبُعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِن نُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَلَقَةٍ
ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ وَنُقَرُّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ آجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ
نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لَتَبَلِّغُوهُنَّ أَشَدَّكُمْ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُّتَوَفَّىٰ وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْذَلِ الْعُجْرِ لِكَيْلَا
يَعْلَمَ مِن بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَ
أُنْبِتَتْ مِن كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ ﴿٦﴾

The Idolaters of Arabia did not outright reject the Day of Judgment: they were doubtful about it and reluctant to accept it. They regarded it to be very improbable. The primary reason of this reluctant behaviour was that they thought it was very unlikely for people to be raised to life again after they died and their bodies decomposed into mud. It was because of this notion

6. O People! If you have doubt on being raised to life again, then reflect that We created you from clay. Then from sperm, then from a clot of blood, then from a lump of flesh: some reach perfection and some remain defective. We have done this so that We fully make evident to you Our power and wisdom. And We lodge in the wombs whatever We want until an appointed time. Then We bring you forth in the form of a child. Then give time so that you may reach your maturity. And some of you die early and some are made to reach extreme of old age so that they even after knowing something, they know nothing. And you see the earth totally dry. Then when We rain down water on it, it becomes lush and grows and sprouts exquisite things of all kinds.

that they did not give any importance to the Day of Judgement. And if they believed in it hypothetically, they trusted their deities and intercessors and thought they would save them from God's accountability. The Qur'ān emphatically discussed the Day of Judgement and stressed that the real life is that of the hereafter; it iterated that this world is a prelude and the next one is its necessary consequence. At the same time, the Qur'ān proved that all their deities and intercessors had no basis. All these things weighed down heavily on them. They thought they were standing on slippery ground. They reckoned that the only antidote they had to salvage the situation was to harass and corner the Prophet (sws). They took to this by demanding him to show them the promised doom if it is such a certain event or show them a palpable sign of it in the form of a torment so that no doubt would remain in their minds about it. Keeping this mentality in consideration, the Qur'ān has directed their attention to their own phases of creation and everyday observations of the world. The implication is that they need not go far to find proof of the oneness of God and the advent of the hereafter; such is the way that God has created human beings and this universe that a person who has a keen eye can always observe God and the Hereafter within him and around him.

The word عَلَقَةٌ means “a clot of blood” and also “a small living insect.” This phase comes after the sperm is lodged in the womb when it assumes the shape of blood and a foetus, and shows signs of life.

The word مُضْغَةٌ refers to “a lump of flesh.” This is the stage following the previous one when the foetus assumes the form of a lump of flesh. About this مُضْغَةٌ, it is said that some of them reach their final form and some are left defective by God, and none has the authority to set it right.

The words نَسِئًا لَكُمْ point to the real purpose for which attention has been directed at these phases of creation. The implication is that God was not dependent on all these phases in order to create human beings. He did not require the elaborate arrangement in which a drop of fluid first lodges itself in the womb of a female species, then assumes the shape of a clot of blood and foetus and then is artistically perfected to become a grand creation. Had God wanted He could have created scores of human beings in their final forms in one go by making them emerge from the

mountains and the seas without underaking all this arrangement. But God wanted that a human being's creation should become a means of education for him regarding God's power, wisdom, and providence. It is through it that he is able to have cognizance of his own self and of the grand creator of this universe; his own being bears witness that He Who has created him in such an elaborate manner and shown favour to him has not made him a toy for amusement; on the contrary, there is a profound purpose hidden in his creation which is bound to manifest itself. From every single part of his body he comes to know that his creator has made him from the essence of clay and from the drop of a fluid and for this He was not the slightest bothered. If this is the case, then raising him to life again is very easy for the creator.

The following verses of Sūrah al-Mu'minūn point to precisely the same reality:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ. ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ. ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَ لَحْصًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ ۖ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ. ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ لَكَيْتُونَ. ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تُبْعَثُونَ. (٢٣: ١٢-١٦)

And We had created a human being from the essence of clay. Then in the form of a drop of fluid, We placed it in a secure spot. Then made this drop of fluid into the form of a blood clot and made the blood clot into a lump of flesh. Thence created bones in the lump. Thereafter, We covered the bones with flesh. Then We made it into a new creation altogether. Thus, blessed is God, the best of creators. Then after all this you surely have to die. Then you shall be raised to life on the Day of Judgement. (23:12-16)

In these verses of Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, a summary – to which all these phases of creation bear witness – is also presented. However, such is this strange blindness of the philosophers and scientists of current times that do observe all these phases of creation but they are not able to grasp the actual purpose for which God has made all this arrangement.

Consider next the part *وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ* ثُمَّ نَخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا

(And We lodge in the wombs whatever We want until an appointed time. Then We bring you forth in the form of a child). The discourse was still going on when suddenly the words **لِنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ** were inserted in it to caution and prod the addressees and awaken them from their foolish slumber. Once this purpose was achieved, the discourse reverted back. The words “whatever We want” show whether the child is a girl or a boy, attractive or ugly, defective or perfect entirely rests on God’s will. None else has the authority to choose the gender or appearance of the child. Similarly, the time of pregnancy is also in God’s discretion and none has the authority to change its duration.

Consider next the part **ثُمَّ لَتَبْلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ**. The letter **ل** indicates that there is a verb suppressed before it. Several examples of this have passed earlier and a very clear example is coming up in verse 27 of Sūrah al-Mu’min. In other words, God gives time to the newly born child to gradually reach maturity and this pattern is always followed. No one can make an infant reach maturity without the intermediate stages of childhood

Consider next the words **وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْدَلِ الْعُمْرِ**. Parallel words to the effect **فِي صِبَاهٍ أَوْ فِي شِبَابِهِ** are suppressed in the first part. The expression **أَرْدَلِ الْعُمْرِ** in the second part points to this suppression. The implication is that many human beings die in childhood and adolescence and many who reach the extreme of old age. All this too is solely under God’s authority. None can alter the life span of a person.

In **لِيَكُنِيَ لَا يَعْلَمُ مِنْ بَعْدِ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا**, the **ل** refers to the consequence. Examples of this usage can be seen earlier. An accurate translation of this would be “so that” or “until.” The word **عِلْمٍ** occurs in the undefined form to connote degradation (*taḥqīr*) or magnification (*tafkhīm*). In the first case, the meaning would be that he reaches such old age that whatever little knowledge he had acquired is lost by him. In the second case, the meaning would be that after knowing a lot, he forgets everything. I would give preference to the first of these interpretations as parallel verses corroborate it. Thus for example in verse 85 of Sūrah Banī Isrā’īl, it is said: **وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا** (you have been given little knowledge only). The fact is that a person can become a Socrates or an Hippocrates, but he can only acquire a drop from the ocean of knowledge. He does not have any more capacity in him and this knowledge too

deserts him when he reaches a certain age. It is evident from this that no one should show arrogance on his knowledge. It is God-given. He can take it away whenever He intends.

Consider next the last part of the verse: *وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ هَامِدَةً فَإِذَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهَا الْمَاءَ اهْتَزَّتْ وَرَبَتْ وَأَنْبَتَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ رَوْحٍ بِهِيجٍ*. After directing attention to the signs of the Day of Judgement found within the stages of creation of human beings, the external world is focused upon. The implication is that when these people persistently see the earth die and being revived, how can they regard being raised to life being something improbable? At every instant, this pattern is rehearsed before them so that they can observe the Day of Judgement even before its advent. The words *لَتَنْبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ* are understood to be implied here. Since this sign was absolutely evident, repetition was not needed.

ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتَى وَأَنَّ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٦﴾ وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ
لَّا رَيْبَ فِيهَا ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَبْعَثُ مَنْ فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٧﴾

This verse presents a summary of what is stated in the *sūrah* from the beginning up to this point. In other words, it states the purpose of asking people to keep fearing God: He alone is God and all others they worship are mere figments of their imagination. The arguments stated earlier show that God brings back the dead to life and hence whenever He intends, He will bring these Idolaters back to life too. He has power over all things. How can it be difficult for someone to create mankind once again if He can transform a drop of fluid into a cognizant living being and can revive the dry and dead earth to life?

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ ﴿٨﴾

This is an explanation of the attitude of disputation and argumentation referred to in verse 3. It has been explained there that the real enmity of the Idolaters with God was regarding His

7. All this is because God is the real Lord and He alone gives life to the dead and He has power over all things and the Hereafter is certain to come; there is no doubt about its advent and one day God shall certainly resurrect all those who are in the graves.

8. And are also those among people who dispute about God without any knowledge, without any guidance and without any radiant book.

oneness. As far as God was concerned, they acknowledged Him without any dispute. However, at the same time, they had associated many partners with Him. The onus of proof of their existence was on them but they never had any. The only thing that they could say was that they were following their forefathers and would not tolerate any humiliation of them. Obviously, when a debate hinges merely upon blind following of ancestors, it amounts to arrogance and haughtiness. Once a person is inflicted with it, no logic can influence him. For this reason, the Qur'ān calls it an argument without "argument" in the following verses:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ سُلْطَانٍ أَتَاهُمْ^٩ إِنْ فِي صُدُورِهِمْ إِلَّا كِبْرٌ مَّا هُمْ
بِأَعْيُنِهِ (٥٦ : ٤٠)

Indeed, those who indulge in arguments about the signs of God without any reasoning that has come to them, arrogance is entrenched in their hearts in which they will never succeed. (40:56)

In the following verses, is pointed out that motive behind this disputation and argumentation

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُجَادِلُ فِي اللَّهِ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ وَلَا هُدًى وَلَا كِتَابٍ مُنِيرٍ. وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ
اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنَّى اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا^{١٠} أَوْ لَوْ كَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ
يَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ. (٣١ : ٢٠-٢١)

And there are still those among people who dispute about God, without knowledge or reasoning or any illuminating scripture. And when they are invited: "Follow what God has revealed," they reply: "We will only follow the ways of our forefathers." (31:20-21)

ثَانِي عَطْفِهِ لِيُضِلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا خِزْيٌ^٩ وَنَذِيقُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ

The words ثَانِي عَطْفِهِ portray their arrogance. When a person turns away in arrogance, he shakes his shoulders while turning away. If a person does not have any reasoning for his stance and is also

9. Inebriated with arrogance indulge in argument to lead people astray from the path of God. For them is humiliation in the world, and on the Day of Judgement, We shall make them taste the torment of the fire.

not willing to give up his stance, his haughtiness is dented a great deal. He avenges this by a show of arrogance.

All this pride is not meant to support some truth but only to lead people astray just like they themselves have gone astray. It may be kept in mind that with an awareness of one's weaknesses, a person should not lose hope if he has gone astray. There is great chance that he will return to the truth. However, if a person arrogantly wants to impose his baseless ideas on others, nothing good can be expected from him.

Consider now the last part of the verse. The humiliation they will face in this world will be because they showed conceit against the truth. It may be kept in mind that the addressees of the messenger are under discussion. As has been repeatedly pointed out, in their case the established practice of God is that if these people become adamant on opposing the truth after its conclusive communication, they are subjugated and humiliated in this world and in the Hereafter they will be consigned to Hell.

There exists a similarity in the deed and its punishment in the expression *عَذَابُ النَّارِ* (torment of the fire). In other words since in this world they burned and seethed in anger, hate and jealousy, they will face the torment of burning in the hereafter.

ذٰلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْت يَدَكَ وَاَنَّ اللّٰهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلّٰمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٠﴾

This style of the Qur'ān has been explained at various instances ie. when the purpose is to portray the situation, words like *قِيلَ* (was said to them) and *يُقَالُ* (would be said to them) are generally suppressed. Here too, same is the case. In other words, the situation itself will bear witness that what they see is the result of the seeds they had sown; God is not the slightest unjust to them.

The word *ظَلَامٌ* occurs in its exaggerated form. It has been explained at various instances that when such forms are preceded by a negative imperative verb, the purpose is to exaggerate the negative sense. Thus an accurate translation of *وَاَنَّ اللّٰهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلّٰمٍ لِّلْعَبِيدِ* would be: God is not the slightest unjust to His servants.

The implication of the verse is that a person will reap in the hereafter what he sows in this world. If he has sown, in fact,

10. This is in exchange for your deeds which your own hands had sent ahead and God is not the slightest unjust to His servants.

nurtured anger and hate against the truth, the consequence is the fire of Hell. God will make him encounter the results of whatever he has done and not the slightest injustice will be faced by him.

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ حَرْفٍ ۖ فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ ۚ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ ۗ خَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ ۝¹¹

After mentioning the Idolaters who were prepared to argue and debate in favour of polytheism, those people are referred to who wanted to simultaneously have ties with God and Satan and with truth and falsehood. They neither wanted to be devotedly part of the Muslims nor of the Idolaters. They wanted to stand clear of both and watch their own interest. When they saw benefit in siding with the Muslims, they did so and when they saw benefit in aligning themselves with the Idolaters, they became their companions. After witnessing the ever-increasing might of Islam, such two-faced people had also arisen among both the Idolaters and the People of the Book. They wanted to strike a compromise between belief and disbelief. They contended that God should be worshipped and so should the idols and deities their forefathers had been worshipping. They reckoned that those beings should not be forsaken when they were of benefit to them. It was this group which had given the suggestion of altering the Qur'ān, as has been mentioned in Sūrah Yūnus. If such elements entered the fold of Islam, they were never fully dedicated to the belief of monotheism. As long as it served their interest, they aligned themselves with Islam and when they were faced by a calamity, they would stumble and lose hope in God and regard others to be their protectors and guardians. This attitude in its essence is polytheism. Earlier the nature of polytheism of those who would debate and argue in its favour is referred to. If there is a difference between the two, it is only of the tone. Those debate-mongers were very aggressive in their enmity and the ones under discussion were hypocritical in their attitude. There was no other difference between them. The requisites of monotheism are

11. And there are also those among people who worship God standing at one edge. If they received any benefit, their hearts strongly adhere to God and if they faced any trial, they turn about their heels. This cost them the world and the Hereafter too. It is this which is an open loss.

only fulfilled when a person consigns himself entirely to his Lord. If as a result, his Lord provides him with a bed of roses, he remains happy and if his Lord ordains horrible death for him, he still remains happy. If someone wants to worship God as long as it serves his interest, then he is a polytheist and not a monotheist. God has no place for such opportunists.

The style in *وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَى حَرْفٍ* (and there are also those among people who worship God standing at one edge) is that of disgust and hate. The word “worship” here refers both to servitude and obedience to the Almighty. The expression “at one edge” means from afar. In other words, they do not worship God by being fully submissive to Him, as is required by *ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَافَّةً* (fully enter the fold of Islam (2:208)); they vacillate from one side to another *مُذَبْذَبِينَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ لَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ وَلَا إِلَى هَؤُلَاءِ* (wavering in between; neither here nor there (4:143)). Neither are they sincere to the Muslims nor to the disbelievers.

Consider next the portion: *فَإِنْ أَصَابَهُ خَيْرٌ اطْمَأَنَّ بِهِ ۚ وَإِنْ أَصَابَتْهُ فِتْنَةٌ انْقَلَبَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ*. The word *فِتْنَةٌ* here means trial or calamity. This portion is actually an explanation of the words “at an edge.” As long as things are according to their liking, they are happy with God but when they face some trial, they take to their heels and start knocking at the doors of others. They desire flowers without being prepared to bear the pain of the thorns. The fact is that the way that leads to God has trials too besides comforts. Unless a person succeeds in these trials, he cannot please God.

The words *حَسِرَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ* refer to the fact that so foolish are these people that they ruin both their herein and the hereafter. If a person is faced with a trial in this world and is inflicted with some loss in his person or wealth, concealed in this loss is a great benefit for him in the hereafter. The condition is that he must be content with the decision of his Lord and totally submit to Him. All such trials strengthen his faith and multiply his reward manifold in the hereafter. However, if some foolish person gets so worried because of such trials that he loses hope in God and starts having evil estimations about Him, he is set to be ruined in this world as well as in the next. Thus the words *ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْخُسْرَانُ الْمُبِينُ* aptly say that this precisely is open loss. Any worldly loss of a person is actually not a loss since he has reserved his reward with God in lieu of it. However, a person who has incurred

worldly loss as well next-wordly loss, then this obviously is the ultimate loss.

Deliberation on the character of the people discussed in this verse shows that even today people are not much different. Today Muslims who were made responsible for obliterating polytheism want to fulfil the obligation of worshipping God in a very superficial way from afar. On the one hand, they regard the Qur'ān to be the Book of God and on the other follow others in their political, social, cultural, legal affairs. The only utility the Qur'ān now has is that it be recited at the death of a person by students of seminaries to earn salvation for the deceased even though incidentally he may not have even touched the Qur'ān. For them, the Qur'ān is not a Book for the living; it is a Book for the dead. It is not meant to receive guidance but only meant for occasional reverence. In spite of having the Book of God among them, strange is their attitude of following the ways of others.

يَدْعُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَمَا لَا يَضُرُّهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ¹²

The word *يَدْعُوا* here encompasses all such meanings as “to pray, to plead, to beseech and to ask for help and mercy.” If someone is invoked thinking that he has the authority to cause harm or benefit, it is polytheism. Only God has this authority. If a person receives harm or benefit from someone, it is because of God's permission. For this reason, a person should trust God in all circumstances. He should never seek others' help while losing hope in God. At the end of this *sūrah*, the nature of regarding others to have the authority to give benefit or harm is explained through a parable thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ ضُرِبَ مَثَلٌ ۖ فَاسْتَبْعُوا لَهُ ۚ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ لَنْ يَخْلُقُوا ذُبَابًا وَلَوْ اجْتَعَعُوا لَهُ ۚ وَإِنْ يَسْلُبْهُمُ الذُّبَابُ شَيْئًا لَا يَسْتَنْقِذُوهُ مِنْهُ ۚ ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْمَطْلُوبُ. (٧٣:٢٢)

People, an example is cited: So, listen to it attentively. Those who you invoke besides God cannot even create a fly in spite of all of them trying to. And if a fly snatches something

12. They call upon other beings besides God which can neither cause harm nor benefit. It is this which is extreme error.

from them, they cannot even protect it. Those who desire and that what they desire are both frail. (22:73)

The implication of the words **ذَلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ** (it is this which is extreme error) is that while leaving God if these people had taken refuge with someone who could cause harm and benefit, it would still have been a form of error but could not be termed as extreme error. However, fleeing from God and seeking refuge with those who cannot even scare away a fly from their faces is not just error; it is extreme error. They ran away from the blaze of God's trial and ended up in Hell.

13. **يَدْعُوا لَكِنَّا أَقْرَبُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمْ لَبِئْسَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَبِئْسَ الْعَشِيرُ**

I find very convincing the opinion of the grammarians who say that the **يَدْعُوا** of this verse is actually a repetition of the **يَدْعُوا** previous verse and does not have any link to the sentence after it. The repetition of the verb is only for the purpose of expressing sorrow and yearning. Thus **لَكِنَّا أَقْرَبُ** is grammatically not the object of **يَدْعُوا**. It is in fact a supplement to the object mentioned in the previous verse, and the purpose is to explain “extreme error.” The implication is that the deities these people invoke are not only unable to cause harm or benefit, their harm is much more than their benefit. If the refuge of those deities is sought which can neither cause harm nor benefit, this certainly is foolishness. But it is compounded foolishness if refuge is sought with deities whose harm is immediate and proven and whose benefit is absolutely doubtful. Those who have severed their ties from God and regarded others to be their guardians and protectors have actually deprived themselves of their real support. Whether other alleged supports can be of use or not, is something to be seen later and they will come to know of it.

The sentence **لَبِئْسَ الْمَوْلَىٰ وَلَبِئْسَ الْعَشِيرُ** is very similar to the expression **ضَعُفَ الطَّالِبُ وَالْطَّلُوبُ** of verse 73 cited earlier in verse. Just as it is said there that the seeker and the sought after are helpless and weak, it is said here that very evil are the deities which were regarded to be their guardians besides God and also the Idolaters who made them their guardians. If the master and the

13. They call upon those whose harm is nearer than their benefit. How evil are these masters and how evil are these companions of theirs.

disciple, the leader and the led, the imam and the follower are of the same mould and outdo one another in their evil ways, the result is not difficult to guess.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ ﴿١٤﴾

After mentioning the fate of those who, while losing hope in God, seek refuge with others, the fate of those who in comfort and discomfort, conducive and adverse circumstances will adhere to faith and do righteous deeds is referred to here. The verb *آمَنُوا* here is used in its complete and ultimate meaning because it occurs in contrast to *وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَعْْبُدُ اللَّهَ عَلَى حَرْفٍ* (and there are also those among people who worship God standing at one edge). Hence, it would necessarily mean those who diligently adhered to worshipping God with full devotion and were never hypocritical in their attitude.

The last part of the verse *إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ* is a strong remark on the behaviour of these Idolaters: they are depending on the support of the deities which can neither cause harm nor benefit and are not even able to take back a thing snatched from them by a fly. On the other hand, God has power over everything and can do whatever He intends. This expression actually sounds assurance as well as glad tidings: they should not get bogged down by the adverse circumstances they are facing; however much these circumstances be hard and harsh, they should trust their Lord and rest assured that He can do everything.

مَنْ كَانَ يَظُنُّ أَنْ لَنْ يَنْصُرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ فَلْيَمْدُدْ بِسَبَبٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ لِيَقْطَعْ فَلْيَنْظُرْ هَلْ يُذْهِبَنَّ كَيْدَهُ مَا يَغِيطُ ﴿١٥﴾

The antecedent of the pronoun in *يَنْصُرُهُ* is *مَنْ*. The opinion of those who regard it to be Muḥammad (sws) is against the

14. Indeed, those who professed faith with full sincerity and did righteous deeds, God shall admit them into orchards beneath which rivers shall be flowing. Indeed, God will do what He intends.

15. He who thinks that God will not help him in this world and in the Hereafter should stretch a rope until the sky and then decide his matter and see if this measure of his is able to alleviate his sorrow?

context. The verse is referring to the same hypocrites who are mentioned in the previous verses. About them it had been stated that if they face a trial, they lose hope in God and regard others to be their guardians and protectors and think that God will not or is unable to alleviate their sufferings.

The words *فَلْيُمِدُّ بِسَبَبٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ* ie stretch a rope in the sky is a metaphor that means to execute the last and ultimate measure. This metaphor also occurs in *Sūrah al-An'ām* in the following words:

وَإِنْ كَانَ كِبَرَ عَلَيْكَ إِعْرَاضُهُمْ فَإِنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ أَنْ تَبْتَغِيَ نَفَقًا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوْ سُلَّمًا فِي السَّمَاءِ
فَتَأْتِيهِمْ بَأْيَةٌ ۖ وَنُوحَاءُ اللَّهِ لَجَبْعُهُمْ عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ (٦: ٣٥)

If you find their aversion hard to bear, find if you can a trench in the earth or a stairway in the sky by which you may bring them a sign. Had God willed, He could have gathered all of them on guidance; so, do not become of those who are overcome by emotions. (6:35)

Classical poets like Zuhayr (d. 609 AD) and A'shā (d. 625 AD) too have used this idiom for the final effort.

Zuhayr says:¹⁶

وإن يرق أسباب السماء بسلم

A'shā says:¹⁷

ورقيت أسباب السماء بسلم

Consider next the expression: *ثُمَّ لِيَقْطَعْ*

According to Abū Muslim the word *قطع* means “to travel a distance.” In other words, the implication is that he should stretch a rope in the sky and climb to it. Some people say that it means “cause divine revelation to cease.” In other words, they mean that those who think that God will not help His messenger should climb to the sky and stop the coming of divine revelation. Many people have interpreted it to mean “to hand someone to death” or “to suffocate someone to death” ie., he should suspend

16. Zuhayr ibn Abī Salamah, *Dīwān*, 6.

17. A'shā, *Dīwān*, 206.

a rope from the sky and hang himself. Regardless of the impropriety of these interpretations, the meaning ascribed to the word **قطع** in them is itself dubious. It is totally inappropriate to regard the expression to mean ceasing of divine revelation or to hang to death. Linguistic taste abhors this. In the presence of customary and common words to convey a meaning, it is entirely against the eloquence of the Qur'ān to use an inappropriate word. Though the meaning “to travel a distance” cannot be regarded as inappropriate because expressions like **قطع وادي** are used in Arabic. However, here the use of this word for this meaning is totally inapt. This is because since the verse mentions stretching a rope towards the sky, words to the affect **فَلْيَتَّصَّعِدْ** (he should climb) would have been suitable and not **يقطع**.

In my opinion, all these interpretations do not hold water. However, in classical Arabic, this word is conventionally used to decide a matter with determination. An example of this usage is found in the Qur'ān itself. In verse 32 of Sūrah al-Naml, it is stated: **قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنْتُ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ**.¹⁸

After this explanation of the components of the verse, let us reflect on its meaning. It implies that every wretch who loses hope in God and makes evil estimations about Him will not be helped by Him. While adopting this attitude of making others his guardians and protectors, he can do whatever he wants – even reach the heavens and expend all his power to decide his matter and alleviate his sorrow if he can. In other words, God has no concern with such miscreants. They can wander away anywhere they want to and quench their thirst from any pond they may like. They should, however, remember that the thirst found in human nature cannot be quenched by every fountain; it can only be quenched by the fountain of faith. The vacuum found in it cannot be filled by all sorts of things; only the remembrance of the one God can fill this vacuum. Readers may take a look of what I have written while explaining verse 124 of Sūrah Ṭāhā. It will also answer some more questions that may arise regarding the verse under discussion. It may be kept in mind that losing hope in God is a very prominent factor that leads to polytheism. I

18. The queen of Sheba said: “Courtiers! Give your opinion in this matter of mine. I do not take a final decision in a matter unless you people are present to give advice.”

have explained this in my book *Essence of Polytheism*. When a person severs himself from God, he is nonetheless forced by his nature to find some other support. However, since the real support is only and only God, even if he climbs to the sky, all his efforts end up in vain.

The word *وَالْآخِرَةُ* of the verse is also worthy of attention. The implication is that just as in this world God is the only help and support, in the next world too He is the only help and support. If a person has wrong estimations about God's justice and regards someone else to be his support that will avail him against God, he may do so. This false notion of his will fizzle out on the Day of Judgement.

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ ۖ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يُرِيدُ ﴿١٩﴾

This verse serves as a warning and the word *كَذَلِكَ* points to the clear arguments in favour of monotheism and refutation of polytheism mentioned earlier. Concomitant indications show that after the first part of the verse “and We have revealed this Qur'ān in this manner in the form of open arguments,” words to the effect “those who have the urge in them will profess faith in these revelations and those deprived of it will continue to indulge in frivolous argumentation,” are suppressed as is indicated in verse 8 earlier.

The last part of the verse refers to the established practice of God regarding providing guidance which has been repeatedly explained in this exegesis: only those receive God's guidance who use their insight and intellect; as for those who become deaf and blind in this regard, their hearts are sealed.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالصَّابِئِينَ وَالنَّصَارَى وَالْمَجُوسَ وَالَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

19. And We have revealed this Qur'ān in this manner in the form of open arguments so that people are guided and indeed God guides whomsoever He wants to.

20. Those who accepted faith, those who adopted Judaism and the Sabaeans, the Nazarenes, the Magians and those who adhered to polytheism, God shall decide among them on the Day of Judgement. Indeed, God knows everything.

All groups mentioned in this verse except the Magians and the Idolaters are mentioned in verse 62 of Sūrah al-Baqarah. Readers may look up what I have written there, as a detailed explanation has been given there for the Jews, Christians and the Sabaeans.²¹ The Magians were originally the followers of Zoroastrianism and this religion was based on pure monothesim, as I have explained in Sūrah al-Kahf. However, just as with the passage of time, the shape of every religion changed, its followers too distorted it and ended up worshipping fire and being inflicted with other polytheistic innovations.

This verse also relates to the earlier verses in which the debate and argumentation between the believers and the idolaters is mentioned. The real rivals in this debate were these two denominations but as has been referred to earlier other religious factions too were present in Arabia. So they also took sides in this debate. Since, the message of Islam was against their beliefs, all their sympathies were with the Idolaters. In particular, the Jews and Nazarenes were openly supporting them at every front. The Qur'ān has called each by its name in this verse and informed them that the hostility they are showing against God and His revelations is not going to end here. This dispute will be presented before God on the Day of Judgement. On the one hand will be the believers and on the other will be the Idolaters and their allies: the Jews, the Sabaeans, the Nazarenes and the Magians. On that day, God will decide the proponents of belief and disbelief. Here “decision” actually refers to its consequence: the results of every person's actions here will come before him. The believers will be rewarded for their sacrifices and the idolaters and the disbelievers and their allies will face the results of their misdeeds.

The last part of the verse is meant to assure the believers and warn and admonish the idolaters and their supporters. God is watching everything. He is observing the sacrifices and feats of valour of the believers and also seeing the pranks and conspiracies of their rivals. Hence, He will deal with everyone according to what they are worthy of.

It can be seen that in this verse the believers are mentioned the foremost, the idolaters at the end and in between other sects are

21. See: *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 182-187.

referred to. Its reason, as referred to earlier, is that these were the two factions which held the primary status in the ongoing debate and discussion. The rest of them were secondary. Thus, in verse 19 ahead, it is specified that the real factions are these two: the believers on the one hand and the disbelievers and idolaters on the other. He who is not with the believers is with the disbelievers whatever name he adopts and whichever religion he claims to follow.

The style adopted in the verse in citing various groups is also noteworthy. The Muslims, the Jews and the Idolaters are mentioned in the form of verbs while the Sabaeans, the Nazarenes and the Magians are mentioned in the form of nouns. The reason for this is that practically the contesting forces there were the Muslims on one side and the Idolaters and Jews on the other. The Jews because of their jealousy and malice were very active in supporting the Idolaters and opposing the Muslims. As for the rest of the sects, though their sympathies were with the Idolaters, they were not very active. For this reason, the real factions in the contest are mentioned in the form of verbs and the others in the form of nouns. Those who have a literary taste know that there is a certain amount of stir and commotion found in verbs whereas nouns only serve to be signs of distinction.

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَسْجُدُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَالشَّجَرُ وَالدَّوَابُّ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ ۚ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ ۚ وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُكْرِمٍ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ²²

Cited here is the argument in favour of monotheism which is testified to by every object of this universe by its very existence. We have been referring to this fact in this exegesis that every object of this universe in its instinctive nature has an Abrahamic temperament. The sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the cattle are all following the directives of God. None of them

22. Do you not see that what is in the heavens and what is in the earth all prostrate before God alone and the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the beasts and many people as well? And there are many also for whom the torment of God has become mandatory. And they who are humiliated by God cannot then be given respect by anyone. Indeed, God does whatever He intends.

deviates the slightest from laws prescribed for it by God. The sun, which has been regarded to be a deity and worshipped the most, bears witness from its very existence that day and night it stands, kneels and prostrates before its Lord. At the time of sunrise, it raises its head and remains standing until afternoon; after midday it kneels and at the time of sunset it prostrates before God and remains in this situation throughout the night. This fact is attested to by the moon through its waxing and waning and the stars too at their appearance and disappearance. Same is the case with the mountains, trees and the beasts. The shadow of each of these is always in a state of standing, kneeling and prostration. Deliberation shows that the nature of the shadow is so Abrahamic that it always remains in the opposite side to the sun. If the sun is in the east, the shadow spreads towards the west and vice versa. In other words, the shadow of everything by its very existence teaches us that it is not the sun which is worthy of prostration but in fact its creator.

This argument in favour of monotheism is in the form of an insinuation and hence cannot be grasped by logic. Yet those who reflect on the system of this universe greatly value such insinuations.

In Sūrah Ra'd, this argument is stated thus:

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَظِلُّهُمْ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ (١٣ : ١٥)

And whatever is in the heavens and the earth all are prostrating before God willingly or unwillingly and also their shadows morning and evening. (13:15)

Readers may look up its explanation. The words “their shadows morning and evening” of this verse refer to the fact that if some wretch rebels against prostrating before God in his circle of authority, his own shadow by its very existence detests this attitude. For the shadow persists in its Abrahamic nature and in no way is willing to bear the shame of bowing down to someone other than God.

In Sūrah al-Nahl, this argument is cited in the following words:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ يَتَفَعَّلُونَ ظِلُّهُ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَالشَّيَاطِيلُ سَجَدًا لِلَّهِ وَهُمْ ذُخْرُونَ وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَالْبَلْبَكَةِ وَهُمْ لَا

يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ (١٦ : ٤٨-٤٩)

Have these people not reflected see that whatever God has created, their shadows prostrate before God turning from the right and from the left and [the objects which have these shadows] are meek and submissive? And all living beings in the heavens and the earth prostrate to God only and the angels of God too, they are never arrogant. (16:48-49)

The words *وَكَثِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ وَكَثِيرٌ حَقَّ عَلَيْهِ الْعَذَابُ* imply that same is the case of many servants of God who have an upright nature. Just as all objects of this universe that do not have an intention submit to God's directives and prostrate before Him alone, there are many people who out of their free will and intention submit to His directives and do not prostrate before anyone but Him. However, there are many who have misused this freedom. Thereby they have made the greatest honour that God has bestowed on them – freedom of intent – a means of their own disgrace by going away from the truth. Even though every object of this universe has been made by God to serve human beings, it is not ready to tolerate the humiliation of prostrating before them. However, such are human beings that even though they are best of God's creatures and His vicegerents on earth, they worship deities which are much below their status.

These words of the verse say that it is these people for whom God's torment has been ordained because they disgraced themselves and also tried to belittle their Lord.

The last part of the verse *وَمَنْ يُهِنِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ مُّكْرِمٍ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يَشَاءُ* refers to the fact that the status granted to human beings by God is dependent on their character and conduct. If they conform to moral standards, their rank and status are kept intact by God and even increased. On the other hand, if they do not do so, they are let fall into the pit they themselves want to fall into. Verse 115 of Sūrah al-Nisā': *نُوَلِّهِ مَا تَوَلَّى* (We shall direct him in the direction he has chosen) and other similar ones allude to this established practice of God. None can save those for whom this practice has been ordained. These words also sound assurance to the Prophet (sws) that he may try as hard as he can but he cannot save them from the humiliation they have chosen for themselves. After conclusive communication of the truth, this disgraceful fate has

become their destiny from God.

One aspect that becomes evident from this verse is that the real distinction of a human being is to acknowledge monotheism. If he deprives himself of this distinction, he becomes lowlier than the lowliest things in this universe. The second aspect that becomes evident is that human beings remain in harmony with this universe as long as they do not prostrate before others besides God. If they accept this humiliation, they become misfits and detach themselves from the temperament of this universe. So much so, their own shadow is in discord with them. Then there exists such a conflict between them and their shadows.

هَذَانِ حَصْنِ احْتَصُوا فِي رَبِّهِمْ ۚ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قُطِّعَتْ لَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ مِّنْ نَّارٍ يُصَبُّ مِنْ فَوْقِ رُءُوسِهِمُ
الْحَبِيمُ ۖ يُصْهَرُ بِهِ مَا فِي بُطُونِهِمْ وَالْجُلُودُ ۚ وَلَهُمْ مَقَامِعٌ مِّنْ حَدِيدٍ ﴿٦٦﴾ كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَنْ
يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ غَمٍّ أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ۚ ۞²³

Now these verses mentions the fate of the two rivals referred to earlier in verse 17. There it was said that a day will come when God will decide between them; however, the details of their fate were not mentioned. In these verses, these details are mentioned.

In verse 17, many groups were mentioned while here only two are alluded to. Thus, the question arises that if this verse is referring to those groups, why are only two referred to? It seems that in the light of classical Arabic literature, my mentor Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī is of the opinion that if the groups are two or more than two they can be referred to in the dual as well as in the plural. The plural *اِحْتَصُوا* also corroborate his opinion. However, I am inclined to believe that in spite of the fact that many groups are mentioned, in reality only two groups existed. If the opposition and enmity towards monotheism and Islam are taken into consideration, the Jews, the Nazarenes, the Idolaters, the Sabaeans and the Magians were one. True that the nature of their

23. These are two groups that have differed about their Lord. So, those who have disbelieved, for them clothes of fire shall be carved out. Boiling water shall be poured on them from above their heads. Whatever is inside their bellies shall all melt because of it and their skins as well. And to deal with them, there shall be iron hammers. Whenever they would desire to come out of any of its torments, they shall be shoved back into it: "Taste now the flavour of the punishment of burning!"

opposition was different, but all of them were united against Islam. Thus, the Qur'ān on the principle that “all disbelievers are one” regarded them to be one faction and regarded Muslims to be the other faction. In this capacity, their fates are stated.

The words “have differed about their Lord” refer to the dispute and argumentation that was going on between these two factions regarding monotheism and polytheism and has been referred to earlier in verses 3 and 8. It may be kept in mind that in this conflict between monotheism and polytheism, the People of the Book in spite of being the People of the Book openly aligned themselves with the Idolaters.

The words “those who have disbelieved” refer to all factions who in this conflict sided with polytheism. It has been explained at several instances that the reason polytheism is called disbelief is that in its essence polytheism is disbelief. The view of those who regard polytheism to be a lesser evil than disbelief is against the Qur'ān.

Consider next the words “for them clothes of fire shall be carved out.” Since in this world these people in their enmity against the truth seethed and burnt in the fire of hate, anger and jealousy, an attire from fire will be carved out from them in the next world. Boiling water will be poured on their heads that will melt all their internal organs and their external skins.

Consider next the words “And to deal with them, there shall be iron hammers; whenever they would desire to come out of any of its torments, they shall be shoved back into it.” It is apparent from the words “from any of its torments” that there will be no chance for them to escape from any of the torments of Hell. At best they will try to find refuge in some other torment but that too would not be possible.

The words “Taste now the flavour of the punishment of burning” portray the situation. In other words, the prevailing circumstances themselves will make them know that there is no place to escape to. It has been referred to various instances that there is no need to suppose the suppression of words like قِيلَ (it will be said to them) on such occasions. What is portrayed by the situation is more potent than what is portrayed by the tongue.

Here in accordance with linguistic principles of Arabic, a co-ordinated clause is suppressed. Thus, the discourse would be: إِخْسَوْا فِيهَا دُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ. Examples of such a suppression can be

seen in the earlier *sūrahs*.

Here readers may note the similarity between deed and its fate. People for whom the Prophet (sws) and his companions expended all their efforts to save them from destruction not only refused this favour, but also became their enemies merely because they had tried to save them from this destruction. So now when they face this very destruction in the hereafter, what is making them run away from it? They should now taste what they dearly loved in the previous world.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا²⁴ وَلِبَاسُهُمْ فِيهَا حَرِيرٌ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَهُدُودًا إِلَى الطَّيِّبِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ²⁵ وَهُدُودًا إِلَى صِرَاطٍ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٣٤﴾

After mentioning the fate of the adversaries of Islam, now the fate of those people who strongly adhered to the truth in the wake of grave opposition is referred to .

In يُحَلَّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَلُؤْلُؤًا the word لُؤْلُؤًا is coordinated to grammatical placement of أَسَاوِرَ. The implication is that in Paradise they will be made to wear bracelets of gold and necklaces of pearl. It is evident from the words “and their clothes there shall entirely be of silk” that in Paradise everything related to their attire will be of silk. They will wear it, sleep on it and even their quilts and all other related material will be of silk.

The words “and they will guided to a pure word of gratitude” refer to the continuous chants of the believers. They will express their gratitude when they see that all the promises of their Lord have been fulfilled. In verse 74 of *Sūrah al-Zumar*, the words used are: وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ²⁵. Similarly, in verses 34-35 of *Sūrah al-Fāṭir*, it is said: وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزْنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ

24. Indeed, God shall however admit those who professed faith and did righteous deeds to orchards below which streams shall be flowing. There they shall be adorned with bracelets of gold and necklaces of pearls. And their clothes there shall entirely be of silk. And they will guided to a pure word of gratitude and they will be guided to the way of the praiseworthy God.

25. And they will say: “Gratitude be to God who has fulfilled His promises made with us.”

الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ النُّعَامِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ²⁶

The words “and they will be guided to the way of the praiseworthy God” in my opinion refer to the “place of residence” mentioned in the above quoted verses of Sūrah al-Fāṭir. The word “guidance” here refers to guidance to one’s destination and the passive voice in it is meant to express honour for them. The implication is: through a group of angels these people will be guided to the way that will lead them to the place of residence that God has chosen for them.

Here it may be kept in mind that the circumstances and environment of Paradise and Hell relate to an unseen world. In order to make them comprehensible, there is no option but to use words with which the addressees are accustomed to. The Arabs were deeply influenced by the culture of the Egyptians and the Persians. Thus, to portray luxury and comfort, the style adopted by the Qur’ān reflects the notion of luxury of the Arabs or the one they were generally influenced with. These notions and concepts change with the times. For this reason, instead of words, their essence should always be kept in mind. Thus, it should be accepted that the people of Paradise will receive the favours mentioned in the Qur’ān. As far as their actual reality is concerned, only God knows it. The words and phrases adopted are meant to merely convey what is best comprehensible to the addressees.

26. And they will say: “Gratitude be to God Who has taken away grief from us. Indeed, our Lord is Forgiving and One Who accepts; Who through His grace has admitted us to this place of residence.”
