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Essentials of Empathy

One of the most neglected human behaviours is empathy. We seldom put our selves in the shoes of others to understand their feelings. What we often do is that we form an opinion about others by what they express instead of understanding why they express a particular trait.

Surah Anbiya

This sūrah forms a pair with Sūrah Ṭāhā, the previous sūrah. It begins on the same note on which the last sūrah ended. In the closing verses of Sūrah Ṭāhā, the disbelievers of the Quraysh were warned that if they insist on seeing a sign of the punishment, then they should wait because the punishment is at hand. Now, this sūrah has begun with the same note without any prior introduction: the time of accountability of the Quraysh is now imminent but they are engrossed in frivolities.

Hadith on Forced Marriage

ʿĀʾishah reported that God's Messenger (sws) said: "Divorce and liberation of slaves does not take place by ighlāq.



Al-Mawrid

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Stand upright speak thy thoughts, declare
The truth thou hast, that all may share
Be bold, proclaim it everywhere
They only live who dare."
(Lewis Morris)

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Contents

Editorial

Forgiveness 5

Dr Shehzad Saleem

Qur'ānic Exegesis

Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl (1) 7

*Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī/
(Tr. by Dr Shehzad Saleem)*

Scriptures

The word “Muslim” in the Bible 31

Mushafiq Sultan

Forgiveness

Dr Shehzad Saleem

God is Ever Merciful and we always expect that He will deal mercifully with us and forgive our mistakes even if we falter again and again. But often we do not show mercy to others. There are instances which warrant clemency on our part but we choose to become callous instead. If a person commits a mistake accidentally or does so in ignorance and forgetfulness, we still scold and punish him. Similarly, at times, we become harsh and unforgiving even after a person has made amends and is genuinely sorry for his bad behaviour. Sometimes, we do not forgive a person even after we have taken revenge. At other times, we castigate someone for a small mistake or chide him much more than his mistake calls for. Similarly, at times, we adopt an unforgiving attitude towards a person who comes forward and confesses his mistake even before it comes to our notice. No doubt, all these are instances which warrant clemency and compassion from us. But we become callous, cruel and ruthless.

The Qur'ān says that though a person can avenge the wrong inflicted on him by someone, yet forgiving and forgetting this wrong will earn great reward and indeed the pleasure of the Almighty.

Perhaps the most effective way to become a forgiving and forbearing person is to keep a constant and watchful eye on one's own faults and blemishes. We expect God and our fellow human beings to be magnanimous towards us by forgiving our faults. So, we should be all the more ready to forgive the faults of others.

However, there can be instances which warrant an unforgiving attitude on our part. For example, if a person is not sorry for his mistake and repeatedly commits the same mistake. Similarly, if a person does not realize his mistake and in fact shows arrogance in this regard, we need not show mercy or compassion. We may

Editorial

do likewise if a person continues to show carelessness and indifference in realizing that he has done something wrong.

Perhaps, the real test in this regard is to correctly and judiciously choose the instances which merit our forgiveness and those which do not.



Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl (1)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī

Theme and Relationship with Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah al-Naḥl, the previous *sūrah*. For this reason, there is no basic difference in the theme of both. The only difference is that what is stated rather concisely in the first *sūrah* is comprehensively explained in the second one. For example:

In Sūrah al-Naḥl, warning is sounded to both the Idolaters of Arabia and to the Israelites, but for the latter this warning is only in the form of insinuations. However, in this *sūrah* they are addressed in detail in the light of their history and informed that their arrogant notion of being the favourite and chosen people of God is mere self-deception. Their own history bears witness that whenever they rebelled against God, they were severely punished. They were worthy of God's mercy only when they repented and reformed themselves. So, if they wanted to be secure from God's wrath, they were to follow the prophet who was calling them to the same straight path as had been made evident to them by the Torah. Simultaneously, by referring to the incident of *mi'rāj* (ascension) both the Idolaters of Arabia and the Israelites were informed that the custodianship of the mosque of Ka'bah and the mosque of Aqṣā entrusted to them would be confiscated from them because they had embezzled that trust. God had now decided to entrust their custodianship to this unlettered prophet. So those who want to change their attitude should change it; else be prepared to face the consequences of their rebellious behaviour.

The Qur'ān is calling them to the natural and straight path of life. In the previous *sūrah*, only its foundations were alluded to. Among the things that were to be adhered to, justice, goodness and one's obligations to one's relatives were alluded to. Among those things that were to be abstained from, vulgarity, evil and rebellion were pointed out. In this *sūrah*, their details are referred

to. Evident from these details is their correspondence with the ten commandments of the Torah. In other words, human nature and ancient divine teachings are in harmony with one another. For this reason, if the Quraysh rebel against this, they will be punished and if the Israelites conspire against this, they too will earn the curse of God.

In the previous *sūrah*, migration is mentioned in a passing way. In this *sūrah*, it is mentioned very clearly and the Prophet (sws) and his companions are directed to prepare for it. It is evident from the way in which these directions are given that its time is near. It can thus be deduced that this *sūrah* was revealed near the time of migration.

Analysis of the Sūrah

Verse (1): By referring to the incident of *mi'rāj* (ascension), it is shown that the custodianship of the mosque of Ka'bah and the mosque of Aqṣā entrusted to them has been confiscated from them because they have embezzled this trust. Their custodianship has been handed over to the Prophet (sws).

Verses (2-8): The notion of the Israelites that they are God's favourites and chosen people and hence solely entitled to the religious leadership of the world is negated. In these verses, they are told that they had been informed by their prophets that they would twice rebel against God and spread anarchy in the land. On both occasions, they would be severely taken to task. Thus, their history bears witness to the fact that first they were beaten at the hands of the Chaldeans and then by the Romans. They were released from the yoke of the Chaldeans when they reformed themselves. Thus, if they want to become worthy of God's mercy again, they must reform themselves. This unlettered prophet has opened the way of repentance and reformation for them. If they want to remain secure from punishment, they must accept his invitation and share his blessings. If out of jealousy they deny him and arrogantly regard themselves to be the favourite and chosen people, they should remember that God will once again have them beaten the way they were earlier.

Verses (9-21): Both the Idolaters of the Quraysh and the Israelites are invited to profess faith in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is guiding them to the path of human nature which was shown to

them by previous prophets and their scriptures. Glad tidings are for those who accept it and destruction for those who reject it. Sorrow is expressed at those who, instead of accepting this call, demand miracles and signs of punishment. Alas they do not care to see the signs that are spread all around them and which are also alluded to in this book. They rely on their alleged deities whereas no soul shall bear the burden of another. It is God's way that He does not punish people without warning and admonishing them. Now they have been completely warned. If they do not benefit from this warning, then God's torment will visit them. The established practice of God regarding His punishment is explained.

Verses (22-29): Details of the straight path to which the Qur'ān is calling them and which were alluded to in verse 90 of the previous *sūrah* are cited. These details show that the ten commandments of the Torah and these teachings of the Qur'ān are in complete harmony and they are in exact accord with human nature. Without this, no upright society can come into existence. Hence, there is no way for either the Israelites or the Ishmaelites to escape from them. From Abraham (sws) to Moses (sws) and Jesus (sws) – all prophets of God have called people to these things.

Verses (40-52): The real reason for the aversion of the Idolaters of the Quraysh is alluded to: they do not want to profess faith in monotheism and belief in the Hereafter. Hence when the Qur'ān is recited to them, they run away and make fun of the Prophet (sws). The fact is that both these beliefs have been reasoned out so clearly that no sane person can reject them.

Verses (53-55): These three verses address the Prophet (sws) from within the ongoing discourse. He is told to direct his companions that in this heated period of preaching, in their zeal for communicating the truth, they should not say something which may further fuel the sentiments of their rivals and Satan gets a chance to spread his mischief. At the same time, the Prophet (sws) is sounded assurance that his obligation is to only preach. Forcibly making people accept Islam is not his duty. It is God Who gives a person the urge to accept faith and it is He Who deprives whomsoever He wants to. In verse 55, it is explained that God has made all his prophets superior to others in some aspect or the other. Hence, the issue of absolute

superiority should not be raised for it may become a cause of trial for people.

Verses (56-57): Verses 53-55 which addressed the Prophet (sws) formed a parenthetical sentence. As soon as they finished, the topic of monotheism that was under discussion is brought to completion. The Idolaters regarded the angels to be the associates of God. About them, it is said that they themselves continuously strive for the nearness of God and to please Him and at all times are in awe of His punishment, let alone being regarded as His associates.

Verses (58-60): The demand of the Prophet's enemies that they be shown the torment of God is answered and the established practice of God in this regard is cited.

Verses (61-65): The real reason for the aversion and denial of the disbelievers is alluded to: instead of being grateful to God on His favours, they took to disbelief and became arrogant. In this matter, they followed Satan exactly and Satan's thought about them was made to come true by him.

Verses (66-72): A parable is cited that depicts the arrogance of a person once he is blessed with favours. After that, the fate of those who lead their lives with open eyes and those who wander about with eyes shut is alluded to.

Verses (73-77): The Prophet (sws) is directed to fully adhere to his preaching endeavour of calling people to the truth in spite of the opposition he is facing. It is declared that if the Quraysh turn him out from this land, then they too will not be able to reside in it for long. After that, the practice of God regarding migration of a prophet (sws) is explained.

Verses (78-81): It is emphasized on the Prophet (sws) to be patient and steadfast in his duty by being diligent and vigilant in the prayer. It is indicated that the time of migration is near. He is directed to supplicate for it. Glad tidings are then given of dominance of the truth in spite of the existing circumstances.

Verses (82-89): Sorrow is expressed on the misfortune of the Prophet's rivals for not valuing a great favour of God as the Qur'ān. The fact is that it is a cure and mercy for them. If all of mankind and jinnkind together try to author such a Book, they will not be able to do so. Then in a passing way, an objection about divine revelation and Gabriel raised by the Prophet's rivals is cited and answered.

Verses (90-100): The demand of the disbelievers to show certain miracles is alluded and wisely responded to. The arrogant among the Quraysh are warned that they are not the sole owners of God's treasures and thus have no right to think that they are the sole recipients of propethood. This is God's favour and He has given it to whomsoever He wanted.

Verses (101-104): The nine miracles worked by Moses (sws) are referred to. The fate of the Pharaoh's rebelliousness in spite of witnessing these miracles is alluded to.

Verses (105-111): This is the concluding section of the *sūrah*. It is asserted that the Qur'ān is truth in entirety. The responsibility of the messenger is only to deliver glad tidings and to warn people. If the Qur'ān is being revealed gradually, it is because it is a requisite of its teaching. The Prophet (sws) should leave to themselves the wretched who are not professing faith. Only those profess faith who have the light of knowledge within them. Allāh and Raḥmān are God's names. The Prophet (sws) should not go after those who discriminate between these names and make them a cause of objection. The spirit of this religion is moderation and he should adhere to moderation in his worship and remain engaged in extolling and glorifying God.

A look at this analysis of the *sūrah* will show the readers how it stands out as a whole under a single theme.

We now begin with the explanation of the *sūrah*.

اَللّٰهُمَّ اَرِنَا الْحَقَّ حَقًّا وَاَرِزُقْنَا اِتِّبَاعَهُ، وَاَرِنَا الْبَاطِلَ بَاطِلًا وَاَرِزُقْنَا اجْتِنَابَهُ
(God! show us the truth the way it is and make us follow it and show us evil the way it is and make us abstain from it).

Section 1 (Verse 1)

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ
سُبْحٰنَ الَّذِىْٓ اَسْمٰى بِعَبْدِهٖٓ كَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ اِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْاَقْصَا الَّذِىٓ بَرَكْنَا
حَوْلَهٗ لِنُرِيْهِ مِنْ اٰيٰتِنَا ۚ اِنَّهٗ هُوَ السَّمِیْعُ الْبَصِیْرُ ﴿١﴾

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

Exalted is the Being who one night took His servant from the Sacred Mosque to that Distant Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed so that We can make him observe some of Our signs. Indeed, only He hears and knows all. (1)

Explanation

سُبْحَنَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِّنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَا الَّذِي بَرَكْنَا
حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ¹

The word سُبْحَنَ is meant to distance God from every blemish and shortcoming. When a discourse begins with this word, the purpose is to remove any wrong estimation or misconception about God. Here the Prophet's ascension (*mi'rāj*) begins with its mention because this incident was meant to dispel a grossly incorrect estimation of God in the mind of the Jews and the Idolaters. Both these groups were the sole occupants each of two great centres of religion. Contrary to the basic objective of these centres, they had made them a den for polytheism and idolatry. In fact, they had done what precisely Jesus (sws) is reported to have said: you have made it a den of robbers (Luke, 19:46). Both these sacred places were under the control of those dishonest and corrupt factions.² They were doing whatever they wanted in those houses as if its real owner was unaware of their doings and would never hold them accountable for them. As referred to earlier, the incident of the Prophet's ascension was a prelude to the fact that the custodianship of the houses of God will now be entrusted to those who will fulfil their real objective. For this reason, the verse began with the word سُبْحَنَ. The attributes of God mentioned at the end clarify that the naïve who think that

1. Exalted is the Being who one night took His servant from the Sacred Mosque to that Distant Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed so that We can make him observe some of Our signs. Indeed, only He hears and knows all.

2. The above cited words of Jesus (sws) are sufficient to give an idea of the situation of the Distant Mosque at that time. If readers need to understand the situation of the Ka'bah at that time, they may look up my exegesis of Sūrah al-Lahab. It will become evident from it how Abū Lahab had ravaged its sanctity.

God is blind and deaf should open their eyes and ears. Time is now near for their accountability. It is God Who actually sees and hears and now He will administer justice among people on the basis of His perfect knowledge.

The word *أسَّاهى* means to journey at night. When it is converted to a transitive verb through the preposition *بِ*, it means to take someone to some place at night. Although “night” is an inherent part of this word, yet at times this word occurs without this qualification to merely connote a journey. It is precisely for this reason that the word *لَيْلًا* (night) is mentioned separately to emphasize that this incident took place at night.

The use of this word for the Prophet (sws) on this occasion evidences explicitness for him, God’s extreme love and affection for him and his perfection in being God’s servant. It is as if no other introduction and description of the Prophet’s personality is needed. The word *عَبْدٌ* (servant) pinpoints in a very specific manner the person who best represents it. “Sacred Mosque” obviously refers to the Ka’bah. As for the other mosque, it has been introduced by two attributes: “distant” and one “whose surroundings We have blessed.” This distant mosque was situated in Jerusalem at a distance of about 40 days from the inhabitants of Makkah, the foremost addressees of this *sūrah*. Its introduction by this name easily transferred their mind to it. The second attribute refers to the nature of the land it is situated in. It refers to both its material and spiritual benefits. In ancient scriptures, it is called the land of milk and honey. This alludes to its extreme fertility and luxuriance. As for gauging its spiritual blessings is concerned, no other land has the status of being the birth and death place of so many prophets of God.

The words “so that We can make him observe some of Our signs” express the objective of this journey. Readers may note an aspect of eloquence in the style of this verse. The earlier part of the verse did not reveal the speaker which signifies the majesty of an event. This part expresses the speaker which signifies affection and attention. No details are provided of the signs referred to. However, it is evident from concomitant indications that they refer to grand manifestations and divine disclosures which those two houses of God were replete with. The purpose of showing them to the Prophet (sws) obviously was that God’s

intention become evident to him that all the glorious entities entrusted to the dishonest people will be confiscated from them and handed over to him. In other words, in this very difficult period of his preaching, the glad tidings of help and support that were being given to the Prophet (sws) were further strengthened by this journey of his ascension and he was also shown what was to transpire.

As for the question as to what he was shown was in a dream or while he was awake is concerned, its answer has been given by the Qur'ān in this very *sūrah* ahead. It is stated:

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ ۚ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّءْيَا الَّتِي آتَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ ۚ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ ۖ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا. (١٧: ٦٠)

And remember when We said to you: Your Lord has surrounded the people. And that dream We showed you, We only made it a trial for the people and that tree as well which has been cursed in the Qur'ān. And We frighten them, but this thing is merely increasing them in their extreme rebelliousness. (17:60)

It is obvious that the dream alluded to in the above cited verse can only be applied to what is referred to in the verse under discussion by the words *يُنَبِّئُهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا* (so that We can make him observe some of Our signs). The word *إِراءات* is used in the Qur'ān at numerous instances to connote something shown in a dream. Our exegetes also say that it refers to this. Hence its meaning is very clear. However, it should be kept in mind that the dreams of God's prophets are not mere dreams – for many dreams are wayward – they are true dreams which have a number of distinctive features that must be kept in mind.

Firstly, such true dreams are a means of God's revelations. Just as God speaks to his prophets and messengers through his angels, he also at times guides them through dreams.

Secondly, such dreams are absolutely clear and unambiguous – like the whiteness of dawn. A prophet receives full assurance about them. If there is anything in them which is in symbolic form, its implication is also conveyed to him by God.

Thirdly, this is the most effective way when the purpose is to

make a prophet observe certain facts and incidents. This is because through this he is able to see them with all details and at the same time things which cannot be expressed in words easily are shown to him in symbolic form.

Fourthly, what is observed through a dream is a great deal more certain, all-embracing, deep and invasive than what is observed through the eyes. Eyes can be deceived but true dreams carry no deception. Eyes can only see in a limited scope but dreams are all-encompassing. Eyes are unable to understand meanings and have their own constraints. On the other hand, dreams are able to grasp meanings and interpretations. Moses (sws) wanted to see God's manifestation with his eyes but he did not have the capacity to do so. On the other hand, Muḥammad (sws) had the capacity to observe what he was shown during this journey and his eyes were not dazed.

The context and occasion of the words "indeed, only He hears and knows all" has been explained earlier. These words carry a great amount of emphasis in them. In other words, only God actually hears and sees. Nothing is beyond his hearing and sight. If others are able to see and hear, it is because He has granted them a very limited part of these faculties. As indicated earlier, the purpose of alluding to these attributes of God is to warn the Idolaters of the Quraysh and the Israelites that they should not think that God is unaware of their doings. He sees and hears everything.

Section II (Verses 2-8)

In the succeeding verses, the arrogant notion of the Jews that they are the progeny of Jacob (sws) and the favoured ones of God and hence religious leadership is their sole prerogative is criticized. Because of this notion, the Jews, in the first instance were not even prepared to accept a prophet or a messenger outside their race and for this reason opposed the Prophet (sws) right from the beginning. Then when he narrated to them his observations of this journey and they became aware of them, their anger further increased. At no cost, could they accept the claim that Muḥammad (sws) had become the heir to their prophets and was now also their religious leader. In order to dispel this haughtiness from them, the Qur'ān has explained that no nation

is entitled to His favours and blessings because of their lineage. It is faith and righteous deeds which earn them. Evidence from their own history is cited to them: it is evident from their own scriptures that they twice rebelled against God on a huge scale and spread anarchy in the land and on both occasions, they were utterly routed by God's fierce servants. Thus, these predictions materialized word for word. When they reformed their state of affairs, God was merciful to them and when they spread disorder, God severely punished them. At this time too, they are facing the same situation. God's messenger has opened the way to success and salvation for them. If they accept his call, they will have an equal share in his blessings and if they reject it, then they should remember that God has not left them to themselves. He will once again punish them the way He did before.

Readers may now proceed to study these verses.

Text and Translation

وَآتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَلَّا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْ دُونِي وَكِيلًا ﴿٢﴾
ذُرِّيَّةَ مَنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ ۖ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا ﴿٣﴾ وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ
لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوقَ كَبِيرًا ﴿٤﴾ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ
عِبَادًا لَّنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ ۖ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا ﴿٥﴾ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ
الْكُرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا ﴿٦﴾ إِنَّ أَحْسَنْتَ أَحْسَنْتُمْ
لِأَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا ۖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسُوءَ وُجُوهُكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا
دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبِّرُوا مَا عَلَوْا تَتْبِيرًا ﴿٧﴾ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ أَنْ يَرْحَمَكُم ۚ وَإِنْ عُدتُّمْ عُدْنَا ۚ وَ
جَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

And We had given Moses the Book and had made it a memorandum of guidance: "Do not make anyone your guardian except Myself, O progeny of those whom We had boarded with Noah!" Undoubtedly, he was a grateful servant. (2-3)

And We had informed the Israelites about this decision of Ours in the Book: "Twice shall you surely create disorder in the land and show great rebelliousness." Thus, when the time for that first promise arrives, We let loose on you extremely powerful people of Ours. So, they barged into the houses and that certain promise

was fulfilled. Then We rotated your turn to them and helped you with wealth and children and made you a large group. If you do good deeds, it will be for yourself and if you do bad deeds, they too will be for yourself. After that, when the time of the second promise arrives, We let loose on you Our mighty people so that they may ruin your faces and barge into the mosque the way they had done the first time and ravage whatever they can lay hands on. It may well be that your Lord shows mercy to you and if you do the same, We too shall do the same and We have made Hell a shed for the disbelievers. (4-8)

Explanation

وَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ إِلَّا تَشْجُدُوا مِنْ دُونِي وَكَيْلًا³

The word الْكِتَابُ refers to the Torah and وَيْلٌ refers to a guardian and helper and someone who can be consigned all of one's affairs by completely trusting him.

This verse is a prelude to a mention of the wrong beliefs that had crept up in the Jews. The purpose is to refer to the fact that they did not duly value this elaborate arrangement of guidance made by God. They completely ignored His scripture of guidance and in spite of the explicit directive of abstaining from polytheism ended up in incriminating themselves with that filth.

The allusion to monotheism after a mention of the Book refers to its foundational status in all the teachings of religion. The entire *sharī'ah* is based on it. A group which adheres to monotheism adheres to religion. As soon as this attachment slackens, the whole religion is lost.

It is not even needed to state that the whole Torah is replete with the teaching of monotheism. Citing references may prolong the discussion. For this reason, I will confine myself to just one quote:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. (Exodus,

3. And We had given Moses the Book and had made it a memorandum of guidance: "Do not make anyone your guardian except Myself."

How similar are the Qur'ānic words “Do not make anyone your guardian except Myself” with the Biblical ones “You shall not bow down to them or worship them.” Yet, inspite of this explicit directive, the Jews were incriminated with polytheism on numerous occasions. Their prophets expressed great sorrow in this attitude of theirs and even rebuked them. Jesus (sws) went as far as to say: “O Israelites! You have committed adultery the first night.”⁴

ذُرِّيَّةَ مَنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا ﴿٥﴾

The particle of invocation (O!) is suppressed here. In other words, together with the teaching of monotheism they were reminded to keep in mind that they were the noble remnants of Noah's progeny that was saved in the Ark by God. Since Noah (sws) was a grateful person, they too should show gratitude and adhere to monotheism. They must remember that the people of Noah (sws) were exterminated by God from the face of this earth because of polytheism. They too will be exterminated by Him if they follow their ways.

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّةً ثَيْنٍ وَلَتُعْلَنَ عَلُواكِبْرًا ﴿٦﴾

The preposition *إِلَى* after *قَضَيْنَا* (We decided) shows that a verb which collocates with this preposition be understood to exist. The verb should be *أَبْلَغْنَا* (We informed) or some other to its effect. The translation would thus be: We informed the Israelites after taking this decision.

The word *الْكِتَابِ* (The Book) here encompasses all the scriptures of the Jews. In the Qur'ān, this word has been used for the Torah as well as for the scriptures of other prophets of the Israelites. The prophets David (sws), Isaiah (sws), Jeremiah (sws) and

4. I am unable to find a reference to this quote. (Translator)

5. “O progeny of those whom We had boarded with Noah!” Undoubtedly, he was a grateful servant.

6. And We had informed the Israelites about this decision of Ours in the Book: “Twice shall you surely create disorder in the land and show great rebelliousness.”

Ezkiel (sws) warned the Jews of the first of their two disorders and its fate referred to in the verse, while Jesus (sws) warned them of the second of these disorders and its fate. Disorder means rebellion against monotheism and the *sharī'ah* of God. The history of the Jews is replete with such disorders. Thus one of them is mentioned in Sūrah al-Baqarah when the ark of the covenant was snatched from them. However, the disorders referred in this verse were such that the whole nation of the Jews was humiliated and routed. This is how David (sws) had predicted the first disorder and its fate in Psalm 106:

- ³⁴ They did not destroy the peoples
as the LORD had commanded them,
³⁵ but they mingled with the nations
and adopted their customs.
³⁶ They worshiped their idols,
which became a snare to them.
³⁷ They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to false gods.
³⁸ They shed innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and daughters,
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,
and the land was desecrated by their blood.
³⁹ They defiled themselves by what they did;
by their deeds they prostituted themselves.
⁴⁰ Therefore the LORD was angry with his people
and abhorred his inheritance.
⁴¹ He gave them into the hands of the nations,
and their foes ruled over them.

Following are the words of Jesus (sws) regarding the prophecy of the second disorder:

Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another;
every one will be thrown down. (Matthew, 24:2)

In Luke, he says:

Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for
yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when

you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" (23:28-30)

At the end of the verse, words to the affect *فنعذبكم مرتين* (thus We shall twice punish you) are suppressed. In other words, the complete sense would be: We had informed the Israelites in the Book about this decision of Ours that twice you shall create disorder in the land and be very rebellious and on both occasions We will severely punish you." Since these implications were evident and since all its details are coming up in the succeeding verses, it was suppressed here by the Qur'ān.

فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ وَ
كَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا⁷

The particle *إِذَا* is not merely used for the future; it is also used to express an established practice and convention, and at times to portray a situation. Here it is used for the latter and the translation keeps this into account.

The preposition *عَلَى* after *بَعَثَ* evidences that besides "stirring up" this verb encompasses the meaning of "letting loose someone on someone."

The words *فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ* are a depiction of extreme humiliation and disgrace of the Jews because if the enemy is so powerful that it barges into houses, this means that it has totally violated all respect and honour. Here only this much is mentioned since it was sufficient to portray their humiliation. However, later it will be mentioned that the enemy did not stop at barging into their houses; it totally violated the sanctity of the Aqṣā Mosque.

This is a reference to the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon and Ninveh who in 586 BC had decimated Jerusalem.

Jeremiah (sws) prophesied this event in these words:

Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have

7. Thus, when the time for that first promise arrives, We let loose on you extremely powerful people of Ours. So, they barged into the houses and that certain promise was fulfilled.

not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah, 25:8-9)

Here are his further words of warning:

I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jeremiah, 25:10-11)

This is how Jeremiah (sws) lamented:

How the Lord has covered Daughter Zion with the cloud of his anger! He has hurled down the splendour of Israel from heaven to earth; he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger. Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of Daughter Judah. He has brought her kingdom and its princes down to the ground in dishonour. In fierce anger he has cut off every horn of Israel. (Lamentations, 2:1-3)

The words *عِبَادًا لَّنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ* (extremely powerful people of Ours) are used for the army of Nebuchadnezzar. These words are not used because of their piety and religiosity but because they served as tools and weapons to implement the will of God. Though they were filthy people yet they were instrumental in implementing God's will by cleaning a huge pile of filth. For this reason, they were actually ascribed to God. The Israelites arrogantly claimed *نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ* (We are God's near and favoured ones). God made it clear to them that the shoes by which they have been beaten carried some weight with God but they had none whatsoever.

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكِرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَمْدَدْنَكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ وَجَعَلْنَكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا ۖ

After years of slavery and utter helplessness, when the

8. Then We rotated your turn to them and helped you with wealth and children and made you a large group.

Israelites turned back to reform themselves, they were once again helped by Him. They were blessed with wealth and riches. His help manifested for them in the form of Cyrus the king of Persia defeating the Chaldeans and occupying their country in 539 BC. After that, they were allowed by him to go back and inhabit their country. As a result, they received great impetus.

إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا ۚ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسُوءَ
وُجُوهَكُمْ وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ ۚ وَلِيُتَبَرَّوْا مَا عَمَلُوا تَتَّبِعُونَ ﴿٩﴾

In other words, when the Israelites were emancipated after a long period of slavery, it carried the lesson alluded to in the verse. Even their prophets fully informed them of this. However, what transpired was exactly in accordance with what was prophesied.

The words *بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَّنَا أُولَى بَاسٍ* (We let loose on them extremely powerful people of Ours) are suppressed before because of concomitant indications. The ل in *لِيَسُوءَ* distinctly points to them.

It is evident from Biblical history that this is a mention of the destruction of the Jews at the hands of the Roman Emperor Titus in 70 AD as alluded to by Jesus (sws).

عَسَى رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يَبْرُحَكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ عُذْتُمْ عَدْنًا ۚ وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا ﴿١٠﴾

The word *حَصِيرًا* refers to a shed in which animals are kept.

This verse addresses the Jews who were present when this verse was revealed and were fully backing the disbelievers of the Quraysh in opposing the Qur'ān. They are being told that whatever has happened belongs to the past and has been narrated to them. Now if they want to be secure from God's wrath, they should adhere to the message of this unlettered prophet that has been sent to them. If they reform themselves, God too will show

9. If you do good deeds, it will be for yourself and if you do bad deeds, they too will be for yourself. After that, when the time of the second promise arrives, We let loose on you Our mighty people so that they may ruin your faces and barge into the mosque the way they had done the first time and ravage whatever they can lay hands on.

10. It may well be that your Lord shows mercy to you and if you do the same, We too shall do the same and We have made Hell a shed for the disbelievers.

His mercy to them and if they revert to their evil ways of the past, God will take them to task they way He did earlier. They must also remember that besides the humiliation they will suffer in this world, they will be consigned to the shed of Hell in the hereafter.

The tone of this verse is noteworthy. Initially, the style was indirect (عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يَرْحَمَكُم). Then it became direct by the words إِنَّ عُدَّتُمْ عُدَّتْنَا. The first part has a ring of disregard. In other words, if they adopt the right attitude, it will benefit only themselves and if not they will invite their own doom and not harm God in any way. The second part carries a very stern warning. For this reason, first, the address has become direct which is more appropriate for warning and then it also has vagueness and conciseness in it. It is said “We will do the same.” However, it is not described how this would be done. It is left to the understanding of those who can understand. The great severity found in this sentence is concealed in this vagueness.

Section III (Verses 9-21)

In this section of verses, both the Jews and the Idolaters of the Quraysh are invited to profess faith in the Qur'ān. It is calling them to the same straight path of human nature that other prophets called people to. The fates of those who accept this call and those who reject it are depicted and those who have shut their eyes to the signs spread all around them and to the clear revelations of the Qur'ān are rebuked. They instead are demanding the signs of punishment. In this regard, the established practice of God regarding punishing nations is rather concisely alluded to.

Readers may now proceed to study these verses.

Text and Translation

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَثِيرًا ﴿٩﴾ وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾ وَيَذَرُ الْإِنْسَانَ بِالْشَّمْرِ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ ۖ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا ﴿١١﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتَيْنِ فَمَحْوَنَ آيَةٍ

الَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِّتَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السَّيِّئِينَ وَ
 الْحِسَابِ ۖ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَضَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾ وَكُلَّ إِنسَانٍ أَلَزَّمْنَاهُ فِئِئْنَةً ۖ وَنُخْرِجْ لَهُ
 يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مِنْشُورًا ﴿١٣﴾ أَقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ ۖ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا ﴿١٤﴾
 مَن اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّا يَهْدِيهِ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ وَمَن ضَلَّ فَإِنَّا يَفْضِلْهُ عَلَيَّهَا ۖ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۖ
 وَمَا كُنَّا مَعَدِّينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾ وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَن نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا
 فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا ﴿١٦﴾ وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِن بَعْدِ نُوحٍ ۖ وَ
 كَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبٍ عِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾ مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ
 لِمَن نُّرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ﴿١٨﴾ وَمَن أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا
 سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَّشْكُورًا ﴿١٩﴾ كُلًّا نُّبْدِ هَؤُلَاءِ وَهَؤُلَاءِ مِن عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ ۖ
 وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا ﴿٢٠﴾ انظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُم عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۖ وَلَآ خَيْرَ لِّأَكْبَرُ
 دَرَجَاتٍ ۖ وَالْأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا ﴿٢١﴾

Indeed, this Qur'ān shows the way which is absolutely straight and gives glad tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that for them is a great reward and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, for them We have prepared a painful torment. (9-10)

And a human being desires vice in the same way as he should desire virtue and a human being is very impatient. And We made the night and the day as two signs. So, We faded the sign of the night and made the sign of the day radiant so that you may seek the bounty of your Lord and so that you can calculate the years and know their count. And We have detailed out everything completely. (11-12)

And We have tied the fate of each person with his neck, and on the Day of Judgement We shall bring forth a register for him which he will find totally open. Here, read your account of deeds. Today you yourself are sufficient to take your own account. He who treads the path of guidance, he treads it for himself and he who goes astray, he alone bears its evil consequence. And no bearer of burden shall bear someone else's burden. And We were never to punish unless We send a messenger. (13-15)

And when We intend to destroy a settlement, We direct its affluent. So, they create great disorder in it. Thus, the word is

fulfilled for them. Then at once We totally wipe it out. And how many a nation after Noah We destroyed and sufficient is your Lord to be aware of and see the sins of His people. (16-17)

He who wants the world, We give it for whomsoever We want and in whatever quantity We want. After that, We have Hell for him which he shall enter humiliated and accursed. And he who seeks the Hereafter, and also strives for it the way it is befitting and is also a believer, then it is such people whose effort will be accepted. We help everyone with the bounty of your Lord; to these also and to those as well. And the bounty of your Lord is not withheld from anyone. Observe, how We have granted one superiority over the other, and the ranks and blessings of the Hereafter, however, are much more. (18-21)

Text and Translation

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا ۝ وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ۝¹¹

The word أَقْوَمُ means “straight.” It refers to the path which is in exact harmony with human nature and intellect, and leads a person to God.

This is an invitation to the Israelites and the Idolaters of the Quraysh to profess faith in the Qur’ān. If they want to reach God, they should leave aside wandering here and there and adhere to the path the Qur’ān is calling them to. The verse gives glad tidings to those who after professing faith in the Qur’ān adopt a life of righteousness. As for those who do not believe in the hereafter and are denying the Qur’ān as a result, they will face a painful torment in the hereafter.

وَيَدْعُمُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّمْرِ دُعَاءَ لَا بِالْخَيْرِ ۖ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا ۝¹²

This is a depiction of the rivals of the Qur’ān who instead of professing faith in it demanded a sign of punishment. Since this

¹¹. Indeed, this Qur’ān shows the way which is absolutely straight and gives glad tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that for them is a great reward and those who do not believe in the Hereafter, for them We have prepared a painful torment.

¹². And a human being desires vice in the same way as he should desire virtue and a human being is very impatient.

demand was an absolutely foolish one and was devastating for them, what is stated here is said while turning away from them in general words to express sorrow.

In other words, instead of benefitting from the respite and reforming themselves, they are making this naïve demand.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَتَيْنِ فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْهِمَةً لِّتُبْتَغُوا فُضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابِ ۚ وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فِى فَضْلِنَا تَفْصِيلًا ۝¹³

In the first part of this verse, after *فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ* words to the effect *مُظْلِمَةً لِّتَسْتَرْيَحُوا* are suppressed as evidenced by the later words: *مُبْهِمَةً لِّتُبْتَغُوا فُضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ*. The meaning would be: We made the night dark so that you receive comfort from it and made the day radiant so that you obtain the bounty of God.

The verse directs the attention of those who demanded punishment as a sign to the signs found around them.

It is stated that from the succession of the night and day with such precision people are able to find the count of years and calculate other things as well. If there was no such difference between the night and day how would they have distinguished things from one another? Besides in the signs in the vast world, a further favour done to them by God is that every necessary detail has been provided to them in this Book of theirs so that even the Book is sufficient for those who deliberate.

Just as attention has been directed here through the succession of day and night to what is mentioned earlier, at other instances, the Qur'ān has adduced some other facts from this phenomenon. Thus, for example, it has adduced monotheism from the harmony between day and night in spite of their contradictory natures. Similarly, the hereafter too has been adduced from their succession. These details are presented earlier in this exegesis and they are coming up ahead as well.

وَكُلِّ انْسَانٍ اَلْزَمْنَهُ طَرِيقَةً فِى عُنُقِهِ ۚ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنشُورًا ۝^{١٤} اِقْرَأْ

13. And We made the night and the day as two signs. So, We faded the sign of the night and made the sign of the day radiant so that you may seek the bounty of your Lord and so that you can calculate the years and know their count. And We have detailed out everything completely.

كُتِبَ عَلَيْكَ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا ۝¹⁴

The real meaning of the word طَيْر is “a bird.” However, since the Arabs used it as an omen and portent and would try to find the future from birds, this word began to be used in the meaning of “fate” and “future.”

The implication of these verses is that on the Day of Judgement no one soul will bear the burden of another. Every person will observe his deeds and carry his burden alone.

مَنْ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ ۚ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا ۖ وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ۚ وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا ۝¹⁵

This verse is a further explanation of the previous one.

The last part explains the established practice of God regarding punishing nations. Before they are punished, He sends them a messenger to conclusively deliver the truth to them. In other words, they are being reprimanded of their haste in demanding the punishment and told that its first step has been fulfilled. A messenger has come to them to conclusively deliver the truth. The only time that remains is when the truth is actually delivered to them in this manner. If they do not benefit from this respite, they will be doomed.

وَإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاهَا تَدْمِيرًا ۝¹⁶

The word أَمَرَ does not merely mean “to give a command,” it

14. And We have tied the fate of each person with his neck, and on the Day of Judgement We shall bring forth a register for him which he will find totally open. Here, read your account of deeds. Today you yourself are sufficient to take your own account.

15. He who treads the path of guidance, he treads it for himself and he who goes astray, he alone bears its evil consequence. And no bearer of burden shall bear someone else's burden. And We were never to punish unless We send a messenger.

16. And when We intend to destroy a settlement, We direct its affluent. So, they create great disorder in it. Thus, the word is fulfilled for them. Then at once We totally wipe it out.

also at times means “to give respite.” When a person gets tired and frustrated in trying to reconcile or resolve a matter with another person or a group, he says: *إفعلوا ما بدا لكم* (do whatever you want to). An imperative style is apparently adopted here, but it actually implies giving respite. In a similar way, the Almighty gives respite to people once the truth is conclusively communicated to them so that no excuse remains.

The word *مُتْرَيْنَ* refers to the elite and affluent class of a society. This respite is given to the affluent because they have the reins of the society. Thus messengers of God address them the foremost. Then it is their attitude of stubbornness which creates hoplessness in their messenger and their going after killing their respective messenger that the latter migrates from them and the nation is punished.

The verse is a further explanation of the established practice of God regarding punishing nations to whom messengers are sent.

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِنْ بَعْدِ نُوحٍ ۖ وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا ﴿١٧﴾

This is a further corroboration to the just referred to established practice of God through historical evidence. The Prophet (sws) is sounded assurance in the last part of the verse: when God is aware of the crimes of the rebellious people of his nation, He will not give them any respite when the time comes to punish them.

مَنْ كَانَ يَرْيِدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِبَنٍ تُرِيدُ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مِنْ مുമًا مَدَّ حُورًا ﴿١٨﴾

The word *عَاجِلَةَ* is used in contrast to the hereafter and hence refers to this world and to its immediate gains.

This verse states the established practice of God regarding giving respite to a nation.

The words *مَنْ كَانَ يَرْيِدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ* need to be specially kept in mind. The

17. And how many a nation after Noah We destroyed and sufficient is your Lord to be aware of and see the sins of His people.

18. He who wants the world, We give it for whomsoever We want and in whatever quantity We want. After that, We have Hell for him which he shall enter humiliated and accursed.

implication is that those who have worldly desires do not even have the authority to earn whatever they want to. This matter, in fact, rests with God. It is He Who gives to whomsoever He wants in which quantity He desires.

19 ﴿وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا﴾

This is a mention of those who seek the hereafter and will be successful. The implication is that it is these people who earn in this world whatever is ordained for them and the hereafter is already an abode of success for them.

Here too the words *وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ* must be kept in consideration. The implication is that the pleasures of the hereafter will not merely be obtained by desiring them; they also require a befitting effort and a faith too that is devoid of any stain of polytheism. Unless both these pre-requisites are present with this desire, it will not be fulfilled.

20 ﴿لَّا نُبَدُّ هَؤُلَاءِ وَهَؤُلَاءِ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ ۖ وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا﴾

When the word *كُلٌّ* is mentioned after various groups the way it is here, then on such occasions it becomes a defined noun. In other words, it refers to the groups that have just been mentioned. The implication is that the Almighty's bounties are available to everyone. Those who are all the time engrossed in acquiring the pleasures of this world while completely disregarding the next world are given whatever bounties God has ordained for them. They are not deprived by God because of forgetting Him and the hereafter. Similarly, those who strive for the life of the next world, are given the share God has ordained for them in this world and in the next too they will fully earn the reward of their deeds. The implication is that when this is the actual reality, why should a person deprive himself of the abiding blessings of the hereafter while becoming a slave to the

19. And he who seeks the Hereafter, and also strives for it the way it is befitting and is also a believer, then it is such people whose effort will be accepted.

20. We help everyone with the bounty of your Lord; to these also and to those as well. And the bounty of your Lord is not withheld from anyone.

pleasures of this trivial and temporary world. Why should he not tread the path which makes him worthy of the eternal favours of the hereafter and also receives whatever is ordained for him in this world.

21 ﴿أَنْظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ ۖ وَلَآ خِرَآءَ الْكَبِيرِ ۚ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا﴾

People should observe that God gives abundantly to whomsoever He wants and sparingly to whomsoever He wants. A person does not have the authority to acquire blessings to whatever extent he wants. Similarly, in the hereafter too, all authority will rest in the hands of God. He will grant respect to whomsoever He wants and humiliate whomsoever He intends. None will have the power to influence God's decisions there. Since the ranks of the hereafter are much higher than those of this world, those who have to strive should strive for the ranks of the hereafter. Why should he destroy the gains of the next world by becoming a slave to the desires of this world?



21. Observe, how We have granted one superiority over the other, and the ranks and blessings of the Hereafter, however, are much more.

The word “Muslim” in the Bible: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry into Isaiah 42:19

Mushafiq Sultan

One of the Qur’ān’s central theological assertions is that all prophets across human history were sent with the same essential religion—*islām*—which denotes submission to the will of God. The Qur’ān explicitly names this religion as the only one acceptable to God:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ. (١٩:٣)

Islam is the only religion in God’s sight. (3:19)

وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ. (٨٥:٣)

And He who would like to choose a religion other than Islam, it shall never be accepted from him whatsoever and in the world to come he will be from among the losers. (3:85)

This idea is further reinforced in Qur’ān 42:13, where the religion of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) is identified as a unified, continuous path of divine guidance.¹

According to this framework, all those who surrendered themselves to God’s will in earlier dispensations—be they Israelites under Moses or disciples of Jesus—may properly be termed *Muslims* in the Qur’ānic sense. This is consistent with the Qur’ān’s broader conception of religion as primordial and universal:

أَفَعَيِّرْ دِينَ اللَّهِ يَتَّبِعُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ

1. “He has prescribed the same religion for you to which He guided Noah and whose revelation [O Prophet] We have sent to you and whose directive We gave to Abraham, Moses, Jesus: “Adhere to this religion [in your lives] and do not create difference in it.””

يُرْجَعُونَ. (٨٣:٣)

So, do these people now seek a religion other than God's even though all things in the heavens and the earth are obedient to Him, willingly or unwillingly and to Him shall they be returned. (3:83)

It is thus difficult to negate the existence of Islam (in the sense of submission) in earlier times. The Bible, which is the most substantial and authentic pre-Qur'ānic religious source, also emphasizes submission as the essence of true religion.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus (pbuh) says:

For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me. (John 6:38)

David (pbuh) similarly affirms in the Psalms,

I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path. (Psalms 143:10)

These and many other examples highlight that submission to God's will is the essential trait of the truly faithful, mirroring the Qur'ānic notion of *islām*. Yet, one might inquire whether words like "Islam" or "Muslim" explicitly appear in sources predating the Qur'ān.

Qur'ānic Reference to the Antiquity of the Term *Muslim*

The Qur'ān also supports the antiquity of the designation *Muslim*. Qur'ān 22:78 recalls the "way (*millat*) of Abraham (pbuh)" and adds:

هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا ...

It was he who had earlier named you Muslim and in this [Qur'ān] also [your name is Muslim] ...

Classical exegetes differ as to whether the pronominal subject

is God or Abraham (pbuh), yet in either case the verse unambiguously suggests that the identity of being a *Muslim* predates the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The question then arises: do pre-Qur'ānic sources outside the Qur'ān bear witness to this term's existence?

Isaiah 42:19 and the Hebrew *Mešullām*

One of the more striking textual resonances with this Qur'ānic idea of *Muslim* is found in Isaiah 42:19. The verse reads in Hebrew:

מי עור כי אם-עבדי וחרש כמלאכי אשלח מי עור כמשלם ועור כעבד יהוה:
mî 'iwwēr kî 'im-'abdî
we-ḥērēš k-mal'ākî 'eshlāḥ
mî 'iwwēr k-mešullām
we-'iwwēr k-'ēbed YHWH

This is variously translated in English versions:

KJV: “*Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the LORD’S servant?*”

NRSV: “*Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the LORD?*”

NIV: “*Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the LORD?*”

Isaiah describes the collective Israel metaphorically as a blind and deaf servant entrusted with divine guidance yet failing to uphold its covenant responsibilities. Among the descriptive terms is the Hebrew משלם (*mešullām*), closely resembling the Arabic مسلم (*muslim*). The Hebrew term משולם (*mešullām*) is traditionally understood to mean “dedicated,” “perfected,” or “one at peace,” derived from the root ש-ל-ם (*š-l-m*), which bears meanings related to completeness, reconciliation, and peace. The same root is shared by the Hebrew word *šālōm* and the Arabic

Scriptures

words *salām* (peace) and *muslim* (one who submits), reflecting a broader Semitic semantic field. The phonetic shift between Hebrew *š* and Arabic *s* is regular in comparative Semitic linguistics, as seen in other examples such as Hebrew *šēm* / Arabic *ism* (name).

This linguistic correspondence has not gone unnoticed by biblical commentators:

Mešullām and Exegetical Works

Several Bible commentaries discuss “*mešullām*” in Isaiah 42:19:

Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers notes:

As he that is perfect. — Strictly speaking, *the devoted, or surrendered one*. The Hebrew *meshullam* is interesting, as connected with the modern *Moslem* and *Islam*, the man *resigned* to the will of God. The frequent use of this, or a cognate form, as a proper name after the exile (1 Chron. ix. 21; Ezra viii. 6, x. 15; Neh. iii. 4) may (on either assumption as to the date of 2 Isaiah) be connected with it by some link of causation. Other meanings given to it have been “perfect” as in the Authorised Version, “confident,” “recompensed,” “meritorious.”²

The Pulpit Commentary observes:

As he that is perfect; rather, *as he that receives reward from me* (see Prov. xi. 31; xiii. 13). The word used is connected etymologically with the Arabic *muslim* (our “Moslem”); but it does not appear to have had the sense of “surrender” or “submission” in Hebrew.³

George A. F. Knight offers a particularly illuminating discussion that explores multiple interpretive possibilities:

2. Charles J. Ellicott, ed., *An Old Testament Commentary for English Readers*, Exposition (on ‘Isaiah’) by Rev. E. H. Plumptre, vol. 4 (London: Cassell & Company, 1884), 529.

3. George Rawlinson, *Isaiah*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, vol. 2 of *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Company), 120.

The shocking reality, however, is that “he with whom the all-embracing covenant has been made” cannot grasp the majesty of his calling. These ten words seek to translate just the one word *dedicated* in Hebrew. My translation is but one of several possible ways of rendering it. If the root is *m-sh-l*, then the word has to do with “reporting in story form.” If it is *sh-l-m*, then it might be vowelled to mean “he who has been granted *shalom*, peace.” But in DI’s⁴ day, the root *sh-l-m* conveyed the idea of wholeness, completeness, fullness, comprehensiveness, and the like. Yet “peace” implies all these things. Solomon (from this root) was meant to be the man with the whole heart (1 Kings 11:4). A generation before DI’s day, Ezekiel had declared that God said to Israel “I will make with them a complete, total, comprehensive covenant” (34:25; 37:26). Today we have to learn to distinguish between what our newspaper means by peace and what DI meant by the word. On the other hand, others have translated this four-consonant word by “devoted” or “dedicated” in that it may be vowelled in a manner similar to the Arabic word *muslim*, “he who is devoted to God.” Others suggest that the word might be rendered by “rewarded”, or “paid”, and so “hired”, all of these being adjectives added to the noun *servant*. Whatever way we decide to translate it, we should note that it has become an epithet for Israel, in the same way as has Jeshurun at 44:2.⁵

In his commentary on Isaiah, Cheyne renders *mešullām* as “the surrendered one.” Further explaining this word, he writes:

[the surrendered one] One might almost say, “as the Moslem,” for the prophet’s word (*mēshullām*) is closely akin to the Arabic *muslim* (Moslem), i.e., “he that devoteth or submitteth himself (to God).” Comp. Emerson: “A more *surrendered* soul, more informed and led by God.”

4. DI: Deutero-Isaiah (Sultan)

5. George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40–55*, International Theological Commentary (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 53–54 (emphasis added).

Apparently this word became a favourite among the pious Jews in later times. It appears as a proper name in Ezra viii. 16, x. 15, 29, and the fem. Meshullemeth (before the Exile), 2 Kings xxi. 19. Comp. also the frequent expression *lēbh shalēm*, “a perfect (= devoted) heart.”⁶

Cheyne further points out that *Měshullām* and *Meshullemeth* were often adopted as a personal names among Jewish men and women, akin to “Muslim” and “Muslimah” in Arabic-speaking contexts.

These scholarly resources confirm that *mešullām* connotes “devoted” or “one in covenantal loyalty,” and is likely used in Isaiah 42:19 in a deeply ironic way: the “devoted one” has become spiritually blind.

Historical Reception in South Asian Bible Translations

The first complete Urdu (Hindustani) translation of the Bible was published in Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1843. The second volume, covering Job through Malachi, contains the following translation of Isaiah 42:19 directly from the Hebrew text:

اندھا کون ہے مگر میرا بندہ۔ اور کون ایسا بہر اسے جیسا میرا رسول جسے میں نے بھیجا، کون
مسلم کا سا اندھا اور عبد اللہ کا سا اندھا ہے۔

Who is blind but My servant? And who is as deaf as My messenger whom I have sent? Who is as blind as “Muslim,” and as blind as “Abdullah”?

This rendering demonstrates the interpretive transparency with which South Asian translators of the nineteenth century viewed the semantic link between *mešullām* and *muslim*. Whether deliberate or incidental, the translation reflects a theological insight that aligns with Qur’ānic affirmation of the term’s antiquity.

6. T. K. Cheyne, *The Prophecies of Isaiah: A New Translation with Commentary and Appendices*, 5th ed., rev., vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1889), 271.

7. *The Holy Bible in the Hindustani Language*, vol. 2 (Calcutta: Printed at the Asiatic Press for the Auxiliary Bible Society, 1843), 351.

Conclusion

Isaiah 42:19 offers compelling linguistic and theological evidence for the pre-Qur'ānic usage of a term closely resembling *muslim*—*mešullām*—to describe one wholly devoted or surrendered to God. *Mešullām* in Isaiah 42:19 is a rare but profoundly theological epithet, commonly rendered as “the wholly-devoted one.” Its lexical and phonetic features, when viewed through the lens of historical Semitic linguistics, reveal a striking resemblance to the Arabic word *muslim*—“one who submits”—once the standard phonological shifts between cognate Semitic languages are taken into account. This observation, though philologically subtle, has not gone unnoticed: Biblical commentators have drawn attention to this parallel, in some cases explicitly identifying the Hebrew *mešullām* with the Arabic *muslim*. Within the context of Isaiah 42:19, this association gains theological weight, as the verse appears to confront Israel with the very title that encapsulates its divinely ordained vocation—complete submission to God. The rhetorical force of the verse thus lies in its implicit critique: Israel, as the supposed *mešullām*, is indicted not for ignorance but for failing to embody the ideal of submission inherent in its own calling.

When viewed in light of Qur'ānic affirmations that *islām*—understood as total surrender to the divine will—has been the consistent and perennial message of all true prophets, the resonance between *mešullām* and *muslim* acquires intertextual significance. Isaiah 42:19, in this view, becomes a potent scriptural witness to the continuity of God's call to submission from the Abrahamic legacy, through the biblical prophetic tradition, and culminating in the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Far from being a linguistic coincidence, the convergence of these terms across Hebrew and Arabic may reflect a deeper theological unity that transcends the historical divisions between the scriptural communities.





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