PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN PROPHETS
AND
THE FINAL PROPHET MUHAMMAD
(Peace be upon him)
THE MECCA PERIOD (610-622)

VOLUME 3

FAROOQ MIRZA

The first-ever rendition of the Quran

According to specific topics and the subject matter

A new paradigm in Understanding the Quran

From

The Quran Foundation

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DEDICATION

The seven-volume book series about the Quran is dedicated to the memory of Muhammad Asad, whose work, *"The Message of the Qur'an,"* was the first-ever attempt at an idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Quranic message in English. In my opinion, it is the best translation and commentary on the Holy Quran.

Muhammad Asad was born Leopold Weiss in July 1900 in Lviv, now Ukraine. He was the descendant of a long line of rabbis, a line broken by his father, who became a barrister. Asad himself received a thorough religious education that would qualify him to keep alive the family's religious tradition. He left Europe for the Middle East in 1922 for what was supposed to be a short visit to an uncle in Jerusalem. There, he came to know the Arabs and was struck by how Islam infused their everyday lives with existential meaning, spiritual strength, and inner peace. Weiss then became, at the remarkably young age of twenty-two, a correspondent for *The Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers in Germany and across Europe. As a journalist, he traveled extensively, mingled with ordinary people, held discussions with Muslim intellectuals, and met heads of state in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Back in Berlin from the Middle East, a few years later, Weiss underwent an electrifying spiritual epiphany—reminiscent of the experiences of some of the earliest Muslims—that changed his mind and his life. "Out of the Quran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad," Weiss said. Thus, it was that Weiss became a Muslim. He converted in Berlin before the head of a small Muslim community in the city. Weiss took the name Muhammad to honor the Prophet, and Asad—meaning "lion"—a reminder of his given name, Leopold, which is derived from the Latin word for lion. Asad spent some six years in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where he studied Arabic, the Quran, and the "Hadith"—the traditions of

the Prophet and Islamic history. He mastered the Arabic language not only through academic study, but also by living with a tribe that spoke the Arabic dialect of the Holy Quran. At the age of eighty, after seventeen years of effort, he completed his life's dream, for which he felt all his life had been an apprenticeship: a translation and exegesis, or "tafsir," of the Quran in English: *The Message of the Qur'an*.

THE MAIN THEME OF THIS VOLUME

The Quran teaches us that Allah will judge man's conscious actions and behavior in the afterlife. In this earthly life, Allah, out of grace and mercy, grants respite to all sinners so they can reflect and reform their ways. Allah may, however, punish a community engulfed in sin in this life.

Say: "Consider whatever there is in the heavens and on earth!" But to what avail could all the messages and warnings be to people who will not believe? Can such then expect anything else [to befall them] the like of the days of [calamity which befell] those [deniers of the truth] who passed away? Say: "Wait then [for what will happen], I shall wait with you!" [Thus, it always happens, We seal the doom of all who deny the truth and give the lie to Our messages] and save Our apostles and those attained faith. Thus, We have willed it upon Ourselves; We protect all who have faith [in Us]. (10:101-103)

The experiences of the earlier prophets with recalcitrant communities, the doom of those who contradicted their messages, and the divine deliverance of the Prophet concerned and those who followed him. "Thus, have We willed it upon Ourselves: We will save all who believe [in Us]." I.e., the unavoidable fulfillment of Allah's "willing it upon Himself," and not a duty on His part, for neither is anything incumbent upon Him who has the power to will anything nor has man any right concerning his Creator.

The common theme of many stories narrated in this volume is a depiction of Allah's judgment in this life on various evil communities. In the story of Hud and the tribe of Ad, Salih and Thamud, Shuayb and Madyan, the people of Sheba and Tubba were all punished in this life.

The purpose of relating such stories from the past was to warn the pagans of Arabia to change their decadent ways to avoid an inevitable evil fate. However, Allah never chastised any community for the wrong they may have done before he had sent an apostle to them. Prophet Muhammad was sent to the Arabs to reform their evil ways. For twelve years, the Prophet and a small band of his followers were persecuted by the establishment. When the persecution became unbearable, the Muslims and the Prophet migrated to Medina, 200 miles north of Mecca.

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PART 1

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN PROPHETS

PREFACE
PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

Our knowledge of Arabia's ancient history comes chiefly from the Quran. Arab historians of the eighth and following centuries collected old folklore and traditions meticulously.

GEOGRAPHY

Arabia is a peninsula twice as large as France. It is bounded north by the Syrian desert, east by the Persian Gulf, south by the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. It is bounded west by the Red Sea. Arabia was divided into three zones.

The northern part was dominated by two Arab tribes, the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. They were near two extremely powerful empires, Christian Byzantium and Zoroastrians Persia. The Byzantines supported the Arab Ghassanid tribe, who dominated the region east of Jordan and Damascus. Similarly, the Persians backed the Lakhmids, who controlled the Euphrates area.

In the center was the Hijaz proper, the seminal area for Islam. This area contains the famous cities of Medina and Mecca, and the Jeddah port. The rugged rocky landscape breaks Hijaz, especially around Mecca, fifty miles from the Red Sea’s shores. This barren valley has scant rainfall and no navigable river. The peninsula's natural isolation, combined with its size, protects against foreign invasions. No predator could consider barren Hijaz attractive to exploit.

Eastward of the gaunt and arid Hijaz lies the oasis of Taif, covered with vegetation and shady trees, where all kinds of fruits grow. Nejd lies eastward of Hijaz, a vast plateau with deserts and mountain gorges interspersed with green plantations extending to the Persian Gulf.

In the south, Yemen was generally arid except for its highlands. These consist of many fertile valleys where coffee, the Indigo plant, the date palm, vegetables, and fruit trees are grown. Hadramawt lies east of Yemen toward the Gulf of Oman. With Byzantium's approval, Ethiopians crossed into Yemen early in the sixth century and occupied this fertile territory. Before their ruin at the hands of a ruthless conqueror, the Yemenites opened central Arabia's desert to trade.

THE ORIGIN OF ARABS

There is hardly any mention of Arab genealogies of Arabian prophets in the Quran. As the Quran emphasizes ethics, ancestry and family history have little bearing on the concept of ethics. The Arabs are proud of their origin and never forgot Ishmael as their progenitor. Arabs memorize their family tree and their ancestors' achievements. Since there is a scant description of Arab genealogies in the Quran, we must rely on the Old Testament genealogies to fill in the blanks.

Old Testament genealogies rank Hebrews, Aramaeans, and Arabs among the descendants of Shem, the eldest son of Noah, from whose name we take the term Semitic. The Arabs descended from two bloodlines, one originating in the south (Sabaeans), while the second or northern group descended from Ishmael, Abraham's older son. Because Arabs recognize a relative according to descent in the male line only and ignore the mother’s ethnic origin, race is obsolete in Arab definition. Therefore, white Syrians and black Sudanese are among the heterogeneous Arabs. Arabia's tribes and nationalities are far from homogeneous. This diversity was mainly due to different races and religions.

THE SABAEANS

The original Arabs or true Semites were descendants of Eber, a great-grandson of Noah’s son Shem. Their primary cradle was

Babylon or Iraq, on the banks of the Euphrates River. As they progressed south, they destroyed aboriginal settlers and then concentrated in Yemen. One of the later descendants of Eber was the famous Abdus Shams ("servant of the sun"), surnamed Saba, meaning Capturer, because of his battle victories. His son Himyar succeeded Saba, and the Saba dynasty was called the Himyarites. To this dynasty belonged the famous Queen of Sheba.

THE BEDOUINS

Dwellers of the desert, Bedouins live in tents, and their families and flocks roam the desert for pasture. Bedouin societies were centered on extended families, where related families comprised a clan. A cluster of several lines constitutes a tribe. Tribes were led by a chief (Sheikh) selected by consensus of his peers, the heads of leading clans, or families. These tribal elders formed an advisory council where the leader exercised his authority, resembling a primitive parliamentary system. Bedouins looked down on settled societies. They considered farmers, merchants, and kings slaves to backbreaking toil, monotonous or devious trade, or a rigid legal code. The wild Bedouin welcomes the stranger to his tent, as one has a right to everything. He will slay his foal to treat him, serve him with sacred hospitality for three days, and send him on his way. And then, by another law, kill him if he can.

The manly business of the Arab was to raid the flocks of his enemy tribes. Intertribal warfare was a long-held tradition, and the goal was to weaken and eventually absorb other tribes by reducing them to dependency. Arabs emphasized tribal ties and group loyalty as the source of power for a clan or tribe. The rugged individualism of the tribe was counterbalanced by subordination to tribal authority and customs.

GIFT OF LANGUAGE

In words, as in action, they are reserved but eloquent, gifted at speaking. Their wealth was freedom, honor, noble ancestry, and incomparable poetry, the only art they knew. They had poetic contests before Muhammad. There were yearly fairs in Arabia, and poets sang for prizes when the merchandising was done. For the Bedouin, words were as powerful as the sword. When a hostile tribe met for combat, each side usually put up its finest poet to praise the courage and nobleness of its own people. This was done to heap contempt on the enemy. There were occasions when a poet was so eloquent and his words so compelling that the opposing tribe would withdraw, defeated before a blow was struck.

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN PROPHETS

Ad and Thamud are two of several communities described in the Quran as recipients of Allah's chosen prophets and destroyed for rejecting them. But unlike most others, these two stand out for not having any clear counterparts in the Bible. Hud, Saleh, and Shoaib are the only three pre-Islamic prophets mentioned in the Quran with exclusive Arab provenance.

CHAPTER 1
HUD AND THE TRIBE OF AD

WADI RAMM (WORLD HERITAGE SITE)

Wadi Ramm, located in present-day Jordan, has inhabited many human cultures, including the Nabataeans, since prehistoric times. They left their mark in the form of petroglyphs (rock carvings, especially prehistoric ones), inscriptions, and temples. The combination of 25,000 petroglyphs with 20,000 rock inscriptions and their continuity over at least 12,000 years sets Wadi Ramm apart from other rock art and inscription sites. North-Arabian inscriptions have allowed scholars to identify Wadi Ramm with Iram, where the tribe of Ad lived.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TRIBE OF AD

Remember how He made you heirs to Noah's people and endowed you abundantly with power; remember Allah's blessings so that you might attain a happy state!" (7:69)

The Quran mentions Ad as the successor to Noah's people. It is believed to have gotten its name from Iram, the name of their legendary capital, now buried in the moving dunes.

IRAM, THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE TRIBE

Are you unaware of how your Sustainer has dealt with [the tribe of] Ad? The people of] Iram the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land. (89:6-8)

In classical Arabic, the ancient Bedouin term "the many-pillared" is used as a metonym for "mighty dominion" or "firmness of power." The size determines the number of poles supporting a Bedouin tent. A mighty chieftain has many pillars or tentpoles.

The story of the tribe of Ad exemplifies divine punishment for corrupt people. Allah left Iram buried under the sands of the desert, making Iram and Ad legends to be spoken of and a moral lesson of warning. The tribe of Ad disappeared from history many centuries before Islam, but its memory remains alive in the Arabian tradition. Hud was the first Prophet sent to the tribe of Ad.

THE TRIBE OF AD

We established them securely in a way that We never settled you, [O people of later times]. We endowed them with hearing, sight, and [knowledgeable] hearts. But their hearing, sight, or hearts were of little avail to them, seeing that they rejected Allah's messages, and [in the end] they were overwhelmed. (46:26)

Ad tribes were unchallenged lords in their region. Living conditions were simple and free of uncertainties and dangers that beset higher civilizations. Besides security, strength, power, and influence, "We endowed them with hearing, sight, and heart," or in other words, intellect, and feelings. Therefore, they could be considered more "securely established" on earth than the people of later times, such as the pagan contemporaries of the Prophet and later generations.

DO NOT WORSHIP IDOLS

And to [the tribe of] Ad, We sent their brother Hud. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah alone: you have no deity other than Him. Will you not then be conscious of Him? (7:65) [As a matter of fact], you are the inventors of falsehood. O, my people! No reward do I ask of you for this [message]. My reward rests with none but Him who brought me into being. Will you not then use your reason? Hence, ask your Sustainer to forgive your sins and turn towards Him in repentance. He will shower upon you heavenly abundant blessings and add strength to your strength; do not turn away [from me] as people lost in sin!" (11:50-52)

You are the inventors of falsehood since your alleged deities have no reality. The scarcity of rain is a characteristic of the desert country, and there were periods of severe drought, so the abundant blessings here denote rain.

BUILDING ALTARS AND CASTLES

I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust. Be conscious of Allah, and pay heed to me! (26:125-126) "Will you, in your wanton folly, build [idolatrous] altars on every height and make for yourselves mighty castles, [hoping] to become immortal?" (26:128-129)

The above verse refers to the ancient Semitic custom of worshipping tribal gods on hilltops, crowned by sacrificial altars or monuments, each devoted to a particular deity. Building a mighty castle is to hope you live in it forever or gain immortal fame for making it.

REFRAIN FROM VIOLENCE AND CRUELTY

And will you [always] lay a hand [on others] cruelly, without restraint? "Be, then, conscious of Allah and pay heed to me. And [thus] be conscious of Him who has [so] abundantly provided you with all [the good] that you might think of, provided you with flocks, children, gardens, and springs, for I fear lest suffering befalls you on an awesome day!" (26:130-135)

The term Jabbar (lay a hand on them cruelly), when applied to man, denotes one who is arrogant, overbearing, and cruel and does not submit to moral restraints in his dealings with those weaker than himself. It expresses a Quranic prohibition, valid always, of unnecessary cruelty in warfare. It is coupled with the positive, clearly implied injunction to subordinate every act of war to moral considerations and restraints. The emphasis is placed on the brutal

behavior of the tribe of Ad and their fierce conflicts with other people.

THE FOREFATHERS' RELIGION

[But] they [the tribe of Ad] answered: "It is all one to us whether you preach [something new] or you are not of those who [like to] preach. [The religion of ours] is none other than that which our forebears followed. We will not be chastised [for adhering to it]! (26:136-138) Have you come to seduce us away from our gods? Bring that [doom] with which you threaten us if you are a man of truth!" Said he [Hud], "The knowledge [of when it will befall you] rests with Allah alone. I convey unto you the message I have been entrusted with. I see you people are ignorant [of what is right and wrong]!" (46:22-23)

STRICKEN WITH MADNESS

They said [the tribe of Ad]: "O Hud! You have brought us no clear evidence [that you are a prophet]. We will not forsake our gods on your mere word, especially since we do not believe in you. We can say no more that one of our gods may have smitten you with something evil!" Answered: [Hud] "I call Allah to witness, and you to be [my] witnesses that it is not in me to ascribe divinity, as you do, to anything besides Him! Contrive then [anything you may wish] against me, all of you, and give me no respite! I have placed my trust in Allah, [who is] my Sustainer and your Sustainer, for there is no living creature He does not hold by its forelocks. Straight is my Sustainer's way! But if you choose to turn away, then know [that] I have delivered to you the message with which I was sent to you. In addition, my Sustainer may cause other people to take your place, whereas you in no wise can harm Him. My Sustainer watches over all things!" (11:53-57)

I am not guilty of your ascribing a share in Allah's divinity. I reject the sarcastic suggestion that one of their imaginary deities might

have possessed me. When describing a person's humility and subjection to another person, the ancient Arabs used to say, "The forelock of so-and-so is in the hand of so-and-so." "Straight is my sustainer way" refers to Allah's governance of all that exists according to a system of truth and justice in an ultimate, absolute sense. Never allowing the conscious evildoer to escape the consequence of his deeds, and never letting righteousness be unrewarded, either in this world or in the hereafter (since human life combines these two phases.)

WEAK-MINDED AND A LIAR

Said the great ones among his people, who refused to acknowledge the truth: "We see you are weak-minded, and we think you are a liar!" Said [Hud]: "O my people! I am not weak-minded, but I am an apostle from the Sustainer of all worlds. I deliver my Sustainer's messages and advise you honestly. Why do you deem it strange that a tiding from your Sustainer should have come to you through a man from among yourselves so that he might warn you? (7:66-69)

DEMAND FOR CHASTISEMENT

They answered: "Have you come to us [with the demand] that we worship Allah alone and give up all that our forefathers worshipped? Bring about that [punishment] you have threatened us with if you are a man of truth!" (7:70) Said [Hud], "You are already beset by loathsome evils and your Sustainer's condemnation! Do you argue with me about the [fictitious] names you invented – you and your forefathers – for which Allah has given no warrant from on high? Wait, then, [for what will happen], I shall wait with you!" (7:71)

They considered him weak-minded. After all, he expected them to give up their traditional beliefs and deities. He was a liar because he

claimed to be Allah's prophet. The false deities you invented have no existence.

WARNINGS TO THE TRIBE OF AD

Remember, brother of [the tribe of] Ad, seeing [other] warnings had already come and gone within his knowledge and in times beyond his ken. He warned his people [who lived] among those sand dunes, "Worship none but Allah! I fear lest suffering befall you on an awesome day!" (46:21)

The above refers to the many warning messages in Hud's time and forgotten past. These messages ought to have made the tribe of Ad conscious of how far astray they had gone. We have a subtle reminder that apart from the revelations He bestows upon His prophets, Allah offers His guidance to man through the many signs and warnings apparent in all nature and the changing conditions of human society.

FALSE PRIDE IN POWER

Now, as for [the tribe of] Ad, they walked haughtily on earth, [offending] against all right, and saying, "Who could have a power greater than ours?" Why were they unaware that Allah, who created them, had a higher power than theirs? (41:15)

APPROACHING A DENSE CLOUD

And so, when they beheld it in the shape of a dense cloud approaching their valleys, they exclaimed, "This is but a heavy cloud which will bring us [welcome] rain!" [But Hud said], "No, it is the very thing which you [so contemptuously] sought to hasten, a wind bearing grievous suffering, bound to destroy everything at its Sustainer's behest!" (46:24-25)

RAGING SANDSTORM FOR SEVEN NIGHTS AND EIGHT DAYS

To the truth gave the lie [the tribe of] Ad and how severely they suffered when they disregarded My warnings! Behold, We let loose a raging storm of wind on a day of bitter misfortune. It swept the people away as though palm trees were uprooted. For how severe is the suffering I inflicted when they disregard My warnings? (54:18-21)

The Ad, on the other hand, were destroyed by a furiously raging storm wind, which He willed against them for seven nights and eight days without ceasing. So that in the end, thou could see those people laid low [in death], as though they were so many [uprooted] trunks of hollow palm trees: and dost thou now see any remnant of them? (69:6-8)

SAVING OF HUD

And when Our judgment came to pass by Our grace, We saved Hud and those who shared his faith. We saved them [too] from severe suffering [in the life to come]. And that was [the end of the tribe of] Ad, [who] rejected their Sustainer's messages, rebelled against His apostle. They followed the bidding of every arrogant enemy of truth. And they were pursued in this world by [Allah's] rejection, and [shall finally be overtaken by it] on the Day of Resurrection. Oh [the tribe of] Ad denied their Sustainer! Oh, away with the Ad, the people of Hud! (11:58-60)

Every arrogant enemy refers to "the most powerful ones" or the elite among them "who refuse to acknowledge the truth."

MORAL LESSONS

In this [story], there is a message [to men], even though most will not believe [in it]. But your Sustainer – He alone – is almighty, a dispenser of grace! (26:139-140)

The message referred to here is the three cardinal sins resulting from man's inordinate striving for power: worship of anything apart from Allah, self-glory or arrogance, and cruelty towards one's fellow men.

CHAPTER 2
SALIH AND THE TRIBE OF THAMUD

THE ORIGIN OF THE TRIBE OF THAMUD

The Nabataean tribe of Thamud descended from the tribe of Ad and is therefore often referred to in pre-Islamic poetry as the “Second Ad.” Madain Saleh is a pre-Islamic archaeological site located in AlUla in the northwest of Saudi Arabia, some 400 km north of Medina. Mount Athlab is located northeast of Madain Saleh. It was an ancient center of the Thamud people who settled there.

Apart from the Arabian authorities, a series of older non-Arabic references confirm the historical existence of Thamud's name and people. Long before Alexander’s conquests, there was an Assyrian empire. Its king, Sargon II (d. 705 BC), boasted of his Thamud conquest. The ancient township, long since non-existent, is also mentioned by Ptolemy as "Hegra” and by Pliny as “Egra.” Many centuries elapsed before references to Thamud emerged concerning the Nabataean empire – a large Arab kingdom spreading from Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and parts of Sinai.

From all the historical references to the Thamud, it is apparent that they were one of the most powerful Arab tribes of their time. As in the case of the Adite Prophet, Hud, Salih is called a “brother” of the tribe because he belonged to it. After Hud, Salih was the second Prophet sent to the Arabs.

AL-HIJR

The people of Al-Hijr gave the lie to [Our] message-bearers for We vouchsafed them with Our messages, but they stubbornly turned their backs upon them. Notwithstanding, they wanted [to enjoy Our blessings and] to hew out dwellings in the mountains, [wherein they could live] in security. So, the blast [of Our

punishment] overtook them in the early morning. To no avail was all [power] they had acquired. (15:80-84)

When the Quran speaks, the Thamud were settled in Al-Hijr, the northernmost Hijaz, south of the oasis of Taymah near Syria. There have been many legends attached to Al-Hijr since time immemorial. The Wadi l-Qura is situated north of Medina on the ancient caravan route from South Arabia to Syria.

HEGRA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE (AL-HIJR/MADAIN SALIH)

The Hegra Archaeological Site (al-Hijr/Madain Salih) is the first World Heritage property in Saudi Arabia. Formerly known as Hegra, it is the largest conserved site of the Nabataean civilization south of Petra in Jordan. It features well-preserved monumental tombs with decorated facades. Today, we can see evidence of elaborate rock dwellings or tombs. They were carved out of the cliffs west of Al-Hijr and embellished with animal sculptures. The site also features some 50 inscriptions from the pre-Nabataean period and some cave drawings. Many inscriptions attest to a relatively high degree of their civilization and power. In popular Arabian parlance, these rock-dwellings are called Mada in Salih (The Towns of Salih).

WORSHIP ALLAH ALONE

[We sent] their brother Salih to [the tribe of] Thamud. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah alone, and you have no deity other than Him. And remember how He made you heirs to [the tribe of] Ad and settled you firmly on earth. This is so that you [can] build castles on its plains and carve mountains [to serve you] as dwellings. Remember Allah's blessings, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption." (7:73-74)

[Salih continued]: "He brought you into being out of the earth and made you thrive thereon. Ask Him, therefore, to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance, for my Sustainer is ever near, responding [to the call of whoever calls unto Him]!" (11:61)

The Quran references man as "created out of the earth" because organic substances capable of development, proliferation, and evolution are derived from the earth.

Salih said: "Will you not be conscious of Allah? I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore], worthy of your trust. Be conscious of Allah and pay heed to me! And no reward I ask of you for it. My reward rests with the Sustainer of all worlds. Do you think you will remain secure [forever] in what you have here and now? Amidst [these] gardens, springs and fields, there are palm trees with slender spathes? And that you will [always be able to] sculpt dwellings out of the mountains with [the same] degree of skill? Be conscious of Allah, pay heed unto me, and pay no heed to the counsel of those who are given to excess, those who spread corruption on earth instead of setting things to rights!" (26:141-152)

DIALOGUE BETWEEN SALIH AND THAMUD TRIBE

They [leaders of the tribe] answered: "O Salih! The high hopes we had placed before this! Wouldst thou forbid us to worship what our forefathers worshipped? Because [of this], we are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about [the meaning of] your call to us!"

He [Salih] retorted: "O my people! What do you think? If [it be true], I am taking my stand on clear evidence from my Sustainer, who has vouchsafed grace from Himself. [If this is true], who would shield me from Allah if I rebelled against Him? Hence, what you offer me is perdition!" (11:62-63)

"The high hope we placed in you" refers to Salih's outstanding intellect and character, which made him the future leader of his tribe. But he disappointed them with his passionate demand that they abandon their traditional beliefs and devote themselves to worship of the One Allah alone.

The pre-Islamic Arabs regarded their gods and the angels (whom they believed were “Allah’s daughters”) as legitimate mediators between man and Allah based on a desire to “bring Allah closer to man.” Their Prophet's demand greatly disturbed them that they should abandon worshipping those allegedly divine or semi-divine beings. The above answer of the Thamud suggests they might consider Salih’s claim as a prophet more favorably if he would refrain from insisting that “you have no deity other than Him.”

Although this dialogue is between Salih and the leaders of the Thamud, its implications have universal, timeless import. The emphasis is on the impossibility of reconciling belief in the One Allah, whose omniscience and omnipotence embrace all that exists. This includes attributing divine or semi-divine qualities and functions to anyone.

JUDGE THE MESSAGE ON ITS MERITS

The great ones who gloried in their arrogance towards all deemed weak said unto the believers: “Do you [really] know that his Sustainer has sent Salih?” They answered: “We believe in the message he bears.” [But] the arrogant ones said: “What you have come to believe in we refuse to regard as true!” (7:75-76)

Salih's followers were deemed weak because of their small numbers and low socio-economic status. The arrogant leaders of their tribe questioned them for believing in Salih’s message. The content of Salih's message was enough to accept on its merits without esoteric proof, such as miracles. It is an invitation to the skeptic, who cannot believe in the divine origin of a religious message, to judge it on its

merits. This is rather than make his acceptance dependent on extraneous proofs.

SPLIT AMONG THE THAMUD TRIBE

They were [split into] two factions. Said [Salih to the erring ones]: "Why do you seek to hasten the coming of evil instead of hoping for the good? Why do you not ask Allah to forgive your sins so that you might be graced with His mercy?" They answered: "We augur evil from you and those that follow you!" Said he, "Your destiny, good or evil, rests with Allah, yeah you are people undergoing a test!" (27:45-47)

REJECTION OF SALIH'S MESSAGE

[The tribe of] Thamud gave the lie to all [Our] warnings, and they said: "Are we to follow one mortal, one from among ourselves? In that case, we would certainly sink into error and folly! Why should this [divine] reminder be bestowed on him alone among us? He is a boastful liar!" [And Allah said]: "Tomorrow, they will know who the haughty liar is!" (54:23-26) Said they [to Salih]: "You are but one of the bewitched! You are nothing but a mortal like us! Come, then, forward with a token [of thy mission] if you are a man of truth!" (26:153-154)

"Token" refers to an indication and proof that you have been sent to us by Allah.

SHE-CAMEL A TEST

"Behold, [O Salih] We are letting loose this she-camel as a test for them, and thou but watch them and contain thyself in patience. And let them know that the water [of their wells] will be divided between them, with each share equitably apportioned." (54:27-28) We provided for [the tribe of] Thamud the she-camel as a light-

giving portent and never sent those signs for any other purpose than to convey warning. (17:59)

Salih said: "O my people! Worship Allah alone. You have no deity except Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come to you from your Sustainer. "This she-camel belonging to Allah shall be a token for you so, leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and do her no harm, lest grievous chastisement befall you. (7:73) The she-camel shall have a share of water, and you shall have a share of water, on the days appointed [therefore] and do her no harm, lest suffering befall you on an awesome day!" (26:155-156)

She-camel was ownerless and protected by the whole tribe. According to ancient Arabian tribal customs, on the days appointed for camel watering, the ownerless she-camel should receive her share of water side-by-side with the tribe's herds and flocks. Tokens of change were to be displayed through the humane treatment of the defenseless animal. Salih's emphasis on the excellent treatment of this ownerless animal was due to the cruel high-handedness displayed by the tribe. As Allah loosens her, she becomes the test between the herds and the ownerless she-camel. Thus, the she-camel became a "light-giving portent," a sign or warning to the tribe of Thamud that something momentous or calamitous was likely to happen if they abused the she-camel.

KILLING OF SHE-CAMEL

To [this] truth they gave the lie, in their overweening arrogance, [the tribe of] Thamud, when that most hapless wretch from among them rushed forward [to commit his evil deed], although Allah's apostle had told them, "It is she-camel belonging to Allah, so let her drink [and do her no harm]!" But they gave him the lie and cruelly slaughtered her. (91:11-14) They summoned their [boldest] companion, and he ventured [upon the evil deed], and cruelly slaughtered [the animal] (54:29)

They hamstrung the animal before slaughtering it to prevent fleeing. To hamstring an animal means to sever the large tendon at the back of the knee on the hind legs. Hamstringing became synonymous with cruel slaughter. Their lack of compassion for Allah's creatures showed that they did not fear His retribution and did not believe in Him.

DEMAND FOR PUNISHMENT

They turned away from their Sustainer's commandment and said: "O Salih! Bring about that [punishment] with which you have threatened us if you are truly one of Allah's message-bearers!" (7:77) For none [of them] had any fear of what might befall them. (91:15)

PLOT TO KILL SALIH AND HIS FAMILY

Now there were in the city nine men [or nine clans] who wanted to commit depravity all over the land and would not reform. [And] after binding one another by an oath in Allah's name, they said. "Indeed, we shall suddenly fall upon him and his household at night [and slay them all]. Then we shall boldly say to his next of kin, we did not witness the destruction of his household, and we are certainly men of truth!" And so, they devised an evil scheme, but We devised a subtle plan [of Our own], and they perceived it not. Then, what all their scheming came to, in the end, We utterly destroyed them and their people, all of them. (27:48-51)

The plot to kill Salih is an example of the hostility that a call to righteousness evokes in powerful but vain people addicted to senseless passions. However, the Thamud had a vague notion of Allah, as nine men took the oath in "Allah's name" to kill Salih. Their excessive arrogance overlaid their erstwhile faith and deprived them of all spiritual value.

JUDGMENT IN THREE DAYS

They cruelly slaughtered her, and then they regretted it for the suffering [predicted by Salih] befell them. (26:157-158) And [Salih] said: "[Only] for three days [more] shall you enjoy life in your homes. This is a judgment that will not be belied!" (11:65)

SINGLE BLAST OF PUNISHMENT WITH EARTHQUAKE

In [the story of the tribe of] Thamud, when told, "You shall enjoy your life for a while." After they turned with disdain from their Sustainer's commandment, the thunderbolt of punishment overtook them while they [helplessly] looked on. The thunderbolt of punishment engulfed them while they were [helplessly] looking on and could not even rise and defend themselves. (51:43-45) An earthquake overtook them, and then they lay lifeless, in their homes, on the ground. (7:78) And how severe was the suffering I inflicted when My warnings were disregarded! Behold, We let loose upon them one blast [of Our punishment], and they became like a sheepfold's dried-up, crumbling twig. (54:30-31) And the blast [of Allah's punishment] overtook those bent on evildoing, and then they lay lifeless, in their homes, on the ground, as though they had never lived there. Oh, verily, [the tribe of] Thamud denied their Sustainer! Oh, do away with the Thamud! (11:67-68) We utterly destroyed them and their people, all of them, and [now] those dwellings are empty, [ruined] as a result of their evil deeds. In this, behold, there is a message indeed for people of [innate] knowledge - (27:51-53) As for the Thamud – a violent upheaval [of the earth] destroyed them. (69:5)

The "thunderbolt of punishment" describes the subterranean rumbling, which often precedes and accompanies an earthquake or the thunder-like noise of a volcanic eruption. The volcanic eruption accompanied the earthquake, which ravaged the Thamud tribe's

historical dwelling places. The vast black lava fields of northern Hijaz, particularly near Mada in Salih, bear witness to this day.

[The tribes of] Thamud [We destroyed], as should have become evident to you from [whatever remains of] their dwellings. [They perished] because Satan made their [sinful] doings seem goodly to them and thus had barred them from the path [of Allah] despite their ability in recognizing the truth. (29:38)

Thus, the Quran implies that man's ability to perceive the truth makes him morally responsible for his doings and, hence, for his failure to resist his evil impulses. This is the meaning of "Satan" in this context.

SAVING OF SALIH AND HIS FOLLOWERS

[Salih] turned away from them and said: "O my people! Indeed, I delivered my Sustainer's message and gave you good advice, but you did not love those who gave [you] good advice." (7:79) So, when Our judgment came to pass, by Our grace, We saved Salih and those who shared his faith and [We saved them, too] from the ignominy of [Our rejection on] that Day [of Resurrection]. Your Sustainer alone is powerful, Almighty! (11:66)

MORAL LESSONS

In this [story], there is a message [to men], even though most will not believe. But your Sustainer, He alone is almighty, a dispenser of grace! And as for [the tribe of] Thamud, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness over advice. The thunderbolt of shameful suffering fell upon them as an outcome of all [the evil] they had wrought. We saved [only] those who attained faith and were conscious of Us. (41:17-18)

[Remember how We punished the tribes of] Ad and Thamud and the people of Ar-Rass, and many generations [of sinners] in-between? Each of them We did proffer lessons [which they failed

to heed] and each of them We destroyed with utter destruction. (25:38-39) Has it ever come within your ken, the story of the [sinful] hosts of Pharaoh and of [the tribe of] Thamud? And yet, those bent on denying the truth persist in giving it the lie. But all the while, Allah encompasses them [with His knowledge and might] without their awareness. (85:17-20)

Ar-Rass, a town, exists in the Central-Arabian province of Al-Qasim. It seems to have been inhabited by Nabataean descendants. The message behind this story is that Allah's judgment awaits everyone, and compassion for living beings is the basis of true morality.

CHAPTER 3
JETHRO (SHUAYB IN ARABIC)

Shuayb is said to be identical to Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, also called in the Bible Reu-el (Exodus ii, 18), meaning "Faithful to Allah." The region of Madyan—the Midian of the Bible—extended from the present-day Gulf of Aqabah westwards deep into the Sinai Peninsula and to the mountains of Moab east of the Dead Sea. Its inhabitants were Arabs of the Amorite tribes. Madyan's people were commercially inclined and were engaged in fraudulent activities. The purport of this story transcends far beyond the historical interpretation. As always in the Quran, to a principle of ethics: the impossibility of being righteous unless one is principled in human relationships.

TWIN POSTULATES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

WORSHIP ALLAH ALONE

Unto [the people of] Madyan, We sent their brother Shuayb. He said: "O my people! Worship Allah alone. You have no deity except Him. Clear evidence of the truth has now come to you from your Sustainer. And do not lie in ambush by every road [metaphorically speaking] ***[that leads to the truth], threatening and trying to turn away from Allah's path all who believe in Him, and trying to make it appear crooked. And remember [the time] when you were few, and He made you many, and what happened at the end to the spreaders of corruption! (7:85-86)***

The use of the pronoun "We" connotes divine majesty, an ancient Arabian rhetorical device. *Nahnu* (Arabic for "we") Allah Most High uses to refer to Himself or to Himself along with His angels. *Nahnu* is the royal "we," and connotes majesty.

JUSTICE IN DEALINGS WITH FELLOWMEN

O, my people, worship Allah alone; you have no deity except Him. Do not give short measure and weight. Hence, O my people, always give full measure and weight, with equity, do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption. That which rests with Allah is best for you if you believe [in Him]! However, I am not your keeper." (11:84-86) Give, therefore, full measure and weight [in all your dealings], and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs. Do not spread corruption on earth after it has been so well ordered. [All] this is for your good if you believe. (7:85)

[Always] give full measure and be not among those who [unjustly] cause loss [to others]. Also [in all your dealings] weigh with a true balance, and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs, and do not act wickedly on earth by spreading corruption but be conscious of Him who has created you just as [He created] those countless generations of old!" (26:181-184)

The phrase "created you and countless generations of old" points to the temporary character of man's life on earth and, by implication, Allah's judgment. "That which rests with Allah" refers to the lasting merit achieved by righteous deeds and fair dealings with one's fellow men. Belief in One Allah and justice in all transactions between man and man are placed together as the twin postulates of righteousness.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN SHUAYB AND HIS PEOPLE

The dwellers of the wooded dales [of Madyan] gave the lie to [one of Allah's] message-bearers when their brother Shuayb said to them: "Will you not be conscious of Allah? I am an apostle [sent by Him] to you, [and therefore] worthy of your trust and pay heed unto me! And I ask you of no reward. My reward rests with the Sustainer of all worlds." (26:176-180)

REVERT TO OUR WAYS

Said the great ones among his people, who gloried in their arrogance: "Most certainly, O Shuayb, we shall expel you and your fellow believers from our land unless you indeed return to our ways!"

Said [Shuayb], "Why, even though we abhor [them]? We should be guilty of blaspheming against Allah if we return to your ways after Allah has saved us from them! It is not conceivable that we should return to them – unless Allah, our Sustainer, so wills. [An expression of humility, and not of the idea that Allah might "will" them to blaspheme] ***All things our Sustainer embraces within His knowledge, in Allah do we place our trust. O our Sustainer! Let Thou open the truth between our people and us. For Thou art the best of all to lay open the truth!" But the great ones among his people, who were bent on denying the truth, said [to his followers]: "Indeed, if you follow Shuayb, you will be the losers!" (7:88-90)***

ARE YOU THE ONLY RIGHT-MINDED MAN?

Said they: "O Shuayb! Does thy [habit of] praying compel thee to demand of us that we give up all that our forefathers worshiped or refrain from doing whatever we please with our possessions? Behold, [thou wouldst have us believe] thou art the only clement, the only right-minded man!" (11:87)

"Whatever we please with our possessions" without regard to others' rights and needs: their sarcastic reference in the following sentence to Shuayb's clemency and right-mindedness.

He answered: "O my people! What do you think? If [it be true that] I am taking my stand on clear evidence from my Sustainer, who has vouchsafed me goodly sustenance [as a gift] from Himself – [how could I speak to you otherwise than I do]? And yet, I have no desire to act out of opposition to you. What I am asking you not to do? I desire no more than to set things to rights

in so far as it lies within my power. However, the achievement of my aim depends on Allah alone. I have placed my trust in Him and always turn to Him! (11:88) "And O my people, let not [your] dissent from me drive you into sin, lest there befall you the like of what befell the people of Noah, the people of Hud, the people of Salih, and [remember] the people of Lot who lived not far from you!" (11:89) Hence, ask your Sustainer to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance for, verily, my Sustainer is a dispenser of grace, a fount of love!" (11:90)

Shuayb's stress that Allah has graced him amply with worldly goods (goodly sustenance) is meant to remind his fellow citizens that it is not self-interest that causes him to ask them to be fair in their dealings with their fellow men. He has no desire to deprive them of what is rightfully theirs.

YOU HAVE NO POWER OVER US

[But his people] said: "O Shuayb! We cannot grasp the significance of much of what thou sayest. On the other hand, behold, we see clearly how weak thou art in our midst. Were it not for thy family, we would have certainly stoned thee to death, considering that thou hast no power over us!" (11:91) Said he: "O my people! Do you hold my family in greater esteem than Allah? For Him you regard as something that may be cast behind you and forgotten! Verily, my Sustainer encompasses [with His might] all that you do! Hence, O my people, do [to me] anything that may be within your power, [while] I, behold, shall labor [in Allah's way]. In time, you will know which [of us] shall be visited by suffering that will cover him with ignominy, and which [of us] is a liar. Watch, then, [for what is coming] behold, I shall watch with you!" (11:92-93) And if some believe in the message I bear, while others do not, then have patience in adversity till Allah judges between us [and them]; He is the best of all judges. (7:87)

DEMAND FOR JUDGMENT

Said they: "You are but one of the bewitched, for you are nothing but a mortal like us! And we think you are a consummate liar! Cause fragments of the sky to fall upon us if you are a man of truth!" Answered [Shuayb], "My Sustainer knows full well what you are doing." But they gave him the lie. And thereupon, suffering overtook them on a day dark with shadows. It was the suffering of awesome day! (26:185-189)

A "day dark with shadows" may refer either to the physical darkness that often accompanies volcanic eruptions and earthquakes or to the spiritual darkness and gloom which come in the wake of belated regrets.

SAVING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

When Our judgment came to pass, we saved Shuayb and those who shared his faith by our grace. Whereas the blast [of Our punishment] overtook those bent on evil. Oh, do away with [the people of] Madyan, just as the Thamud was done away with! (11:94-95)

ALLAH'S JUDGMENT

Suddenly, an earthquake overtook them: and then they lay lifeless, in their homes, on the ground. They who had given the lie to Shuayb – as though they had never lived there; they were the losers! And he turned away from them and said: "O my people! Indeed, I delivered my Sustainer's message and gave you good advice. How, then, could I mourn for the people who denied the truth?" (7:91-93) The dwellers of the wooded dales [of Madyan] were inveterate evildoers, so We inflicted Our retribution on them. And both these [sinful communities] lived by a highway, [to this day] plain to see. (15:78-79)

The region of Madyan (the Biblical Midian) shows ample evidence of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. The people of Lot and Shuayb inhabited adjacent areas, and their fate should be plain to see as a highway passes through the regions once occupied by them.

CHAPTER 4
JOB (AYYUB IN ARABIC)

The story of Job, describing his erstwhile happiness and prosperity, his subsequent trials and tribulations is given in full in the Old Testament (The Book of Job). This Biblical, highly philosophical epic is probably a Hebrew translation or paraphrase, still evident in the language employed in an ancient Nabataean (i.e., North-Arabian) poem.

PATIENCE IN ADVERSITY

And call to mind Our servant Job, [how it was] when he cried out to his Sustainer. "Behold, Satan has afflicted me with [utter] weariness and suffering!" (38:41) And [remember] Job, when he cried out to his Sustainer, "Affliction has befallen me, but Thou art the most merciful of the merciful!" Whereupon We responded unto him and removed all the affliction from which he suffered. (21:83-84)

The book of Job in the Old Testament began with a dialogue between Allah and Satan. When Allah pointed out "my servant Job" as the most upright and devout, Satan suggested Job only worshipped Allah because he had power and riches. On a bet that Job would stay faithful, Allah let Satan take Job's possessions, kill his children, and afflict him with boils. Job's sufferings were a test of his faith. The first point Job's story made was that not all sufferings are evidence of sin. Job ranks in the Quran among the prophets, personifying the great virtue of patience in adversity.

APPEARANCE OF A HEALING SPRING

[And thereupon was told]: "Strike [the ground] with thy foot: here is cool water to wash with and to drink!" We bestowed upon him

new offspring, doubling their number as an act of grace from Us and a reminder to those endowed with insight. (38:42-43)

PUNISHMENT FOR BLASPHEMY

[And finally, We told him]: "Now take in thy hand a small bunch of grass, and strike therewith, and thou wilt not break thine oath!" For, verily, We found him full of patience in adversity. How excellent a servant [of Ours], who would always turn unto Us! (38:44)

As soon as he realizes that Allah has been testing him, Job perceives that his utter hopelessness and weariness of life, eloquently described in the Old Testament (The Book of Job iii), was due to "Satan's whisperings." This is the moral drawn from the above evocation of Job's story. The miraculous appearance of a healing spring heralded the end of Job's suffering, both physical and mental.

In the words of the Bible (The Book of Job ii, 9), at the time of his seemingly hopeless suffering, Job's wife blamed her husband for persevering in his faith: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse Allah and die." Job swore that if Allah restored him to health, he would punish her for blasphemy with a hundred stripes. But when he recovered, he bitterly regretted his hasty oath. His wife's blasphemy resulted from her love and pity for him. He was told in a revelation that he could symbolically fulfill his vow by striking her once with a bunch of grass containing a hundred blades or more. (See 5:89: ***"Allah will not take you to task for oaths you may have uttered without thought."***

For "Job, the author of the finest piece of poetry the ancient Semitic world produced was an Arab, not a Jew. This is evident in the form of his name (Ayyub) and the scene in his book, North Arabia, indicates" (Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, London 1937, pp. 42-43).

In his essay “The hero as prophet,” Thomas Carlyle describes the Book of Job in the following words: “Biblical critics seem to agree that our own Book of Job was written in that region of the world. I call that, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen. A noble book; all men’s book! It is our first, oldest statement of the never-ending problem - man’s destiny and Allah’s ways with him here in this earth. And all in such free-flowing outlines: grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity, in its epic melody, and repose of reconcilement. Sublime sorrow, sublime reconciliation: oldest choral melody as of the heart of mankind; - so soft and great; as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars! There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit.”

CHAPTER 5
THE PEOPLE OF SHEBA AND TUBBA

The kingdom of Sheba (Saba in Arabic) was situated in southwestern Arabia and, at the time of its greatest prosperity (i.e., in the first millennium B.C.), comprised not only Yemen but also a large part of Hadramawt and the Mahrah country and probably much of present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Indeed, in [the luxuriant beauty of] their homeland, the people of Sheba had evidence [of Allah's grace]. The two [vast expanses of] gardens, to the right and the left, [calling out to them]: "Eat of what your Sustainer has provided for you and render thanks unto Him, a land most goodly, and a Sustainer much-forgiving!" But they turned away [from Us]. So, We unleashed upon them a flood that overwhelmed the dam. This changed their two [expanses of luxuriant] gardens into a couple of gardens yielding bitter fruit, tamarisks, and some few [wild] lote-trees. Thus, We requitted them for having denied the truth. But We do ever requite [thus] any but the utterly ingrate?

Now [before their downfall], We placed between them and the cities We had blessed [many] towns within sight of one another. And thus, We made traveling easy [for them, as if to say]: "Travel safely in this [land], by night or by day!" But now they would say, "Our Sustainer has made the distance long in all the stages of our journey!" For they sinned against themselves. And in the end, We caused them to become [one of those] tales [of things long past]. They were scattered in countless fragments. Herein, there are messages for all who are wholly patient in adversity and deeply grateful [to Allah]. (34:15-19)

Marib, the Sabaean capital, was in the drainage basin of Wadi Adhana. Here, the river breaks through a rocky barrier before disappearing in the Rub al-Khali desert. With the construction of an

immense dam, it turned the drainage basin into an area of farms and forests. Over the centuries, an extensive system of dams, dykes, and sluices was built, becoming famous in history, with astonishing remnants present today. To this mighty dam, the country of Sheba owed its great prosperity, which became proverbial throughout Arabia. The country's flourishing state was reflected in its people's intense trading activities and their control of the spice road. This led from Marib northwards to Mecca, Yathrib, and Syria. They traveled eastward to the Arabian Sea shores - connecting with maritime routes from India and China.

In about A.D. 600, the Marib dam burst, agriculture vanished, and fertile land was abandoned. A few decades before the advent of Islam, the grand dam collapsed entirely and finally. The kingdom of Sheba was devastated, leading to the migration of southern tribes towards the north of the Peninsula.

The people of Saba (the Biblical Sheba) are cited as an example of the impermanence of human power, wealth, and glory. Sheba's prosperity and catastrophic downfall became a byword in Arabia. Its mention in the Quran has a purely moral purport. This legend is symbolic of the transient nature of all humans' might and achievement. As mentioned above, the story of Sheba's downfall is closely linked to men's recurrent ingratitude towards Allah.

"Blessed towns" refer to Mecca and Jerusalem, both along the caravan route that was frequented by the people of Sheba. The departure of large population groups and the resultant abandonment of many towns and villages on caravan routes "made the distance between our journey" long and arduous. "Scattered in countless fragments" refers to the mass migration of South-Arabian tribes in all directions, particularly towards central and northern Arabia after the destruction of the Marib Dam.

THE PEOPLE OF TUBBA

Tubba was the title borne by a succession of powerful Himyar kings who ruled for centuries over South Arabia. They were finally defeated by the Abyssinians in the fourth century of the Christian era. **Himyar,** also called **Himyarite,** an important tribe in the ancient Sabaean Kingdom of southwestern Arabia concentrated on Yemen's coast. They are mentioned elsewhere in the Quran (50:14) as denying the truth of the resurrection and Allah's judgment.

DENIAL OF AFTERLIFE

[Long] before those [who now deny resurrection] did Noah's people give the lie to this truth, [so did] the folk of Ar-Rass the tribes of] Thamud, Ad, Pharaoh, Lot's brethren, the dwellers of the wooded dales [of Madyan], and the people of Tubba. They all gave the lie to the apostles and that I had warned [them] came true. (50:12-14) The people of Tubba and those before them, whom We destroyed because they were truly lost in [the same] sin? For [thus it is], We have not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in mere idle play. None of this We have created without [an inner] truth, but most of them do not understand it. (44:37-39)

If there were no hereafter, man's life on earth would be meaningless. In contradiction to the following statement, "none of all this We have created without [an inner] truth."

KING TUBBA AND THE TWO RABBIS

The tafsir of Ibn Kathir (born 1302 CE) is one of the most widely used Quranic explanations. While explaining Ayah 44:37 in the Quran, Ibn Kathir relates the following events: King Tubba left Yemen and embarked on a conquest journey until he reached Samarkand, expanding his kingdom and domain. **(Samarkand** is a city in southeastern Uzbekistan and among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Central Asia.) When he passed through Al-

Madinah he fought with its inhabitants. They resisted him during the day and supplied him with food at night. King Tubba felt so ashamed and refrained from harming them. When he passed by Mecca, he wanted to destroy the Kabah. The King was accompanied by two Jewish rabbis who advised against it. They told him about the significance of this House, which had been built by Ibrahim Al-Khalil, and that it would become of great importance through a Prophet who would be sent towards the end of time. The King respected their opinion, performed Tawaf around it, and covered it with a fine cloth before he returned to Yemen.

CHAPTER 6
LUQMAN THE SAGE

Luqman is a legendary figure but not a Prophet. He is firmly established in the ancient Arabian tradition as a prototype of the sage who disdains worldly honors or benefits and strives for inner perfection. His legend was celebrated in a poem by Ziyad ibn Muawiyah, who lived in the sixth century of the Christian era. Long before Islam, Luqman became a focal point of innumerable legends, stories, and parables expressive of wisdom and spiritual maturity. For this reason, the Quran uses this mythical figure – as it uses the equally legendary figure of Al-Khidr in surah 18 – as a vehicle for some of its warnings regarding how man ought to behave.

BE GRATEFUL UNTO ALLAH

And, indeed, We granted this wisdom unto Luqman: "Be grateful unto Allah – for he who is grateful [unto Him] is grateful for his own good. While he who chooses to be ungrateful [ought to know that], verily, Allah is self-sufficient, ever to be praised!" And, lo, Luqman spoke thus unto his son, admonishing him: "O my dear son! Do not ascribe divine powers to aught beside Allah. Behold, such [a false] ascribing of divinity is indeed a terrible wrong! (31:12-13)

GOODNESS TOWARD PARENTS

"And [Allah says]: 'We have enjoined man goodness towards his parents. His mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years. [Hence, O man], be grateful towards thy parents and Me, [and remember that] with Me is all journeys' end. (31:14)

A child's weaning occurs within two years when he is completely dependent on his mother. Thus, gratitude towards parents, who were

instrumental in one's coming to life, is here stipulated as concomitant to man's gratitude towards Allah, who is the ultimate cause and source of his existence.

WHEN TO DISOBEY YOUR PARENTS

[Revere thy parents] yet should they endeavor to make thee ascribe divinity, side by side with Me, to something which thy mind cannot accept [as divine], obey them not. But [even then] bear them company in this world's life with kindness, and follow the path of those who turn towards Me. In the end, unto Me you all must return; and thereupon, I shall make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life].' "O my dear son," [continued Luqman], "verily, though there be aught of the weight of a mustard-seed, and though it is [hidden] in a rock or the skies, or the earth, Allah will bring it to light for, behold, Allah is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware. (31:15-16)

DO GOOD AND FORBID EVIL

"O, my dear son! Be constant in prayer and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and bear in patience whatever [ill] may befall thee: this, behold, is something to set one's heart upon! (31:17)

HUMBLENESS

"And turn not thy cheek away from people in [false] pride, and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, Allah does not love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts boastfully. "Hence, be modest in thy bearing, and lower thy voice: behold, the ugliest of all voices is donkeys' [loud] voice. (31:18-19)

Part 2

The Quraysh and the History of Mecca

CHAPTER 7
ABRAHAM'S MIGRATION TO PALESTINE AND ISHMAEL'S BIRTH

ABRAHAM, ISHMAEL, AND HAGAR LINK TO MECCA

Mecca's history is a convoluted tale of patriarch Abraham and his family. Abraham was forced to leave Iraq because he worshipped one Allah and opposed idol worship in his homeland. He and his wife Sarah migrated to Canaan or Palestine. They acquired a slave girl Hagar, during their visit to Egypt, who accompanied them back to Canaan. Sarah had no children and offered Hagar to Abraham as his second wife. Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, who was born and raised in Canaan. When Ishmael was a teenager, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Ishmael and Hagar were evicted, and they migrated from Canaan and settled in Mecca. Ishmael became the progenitor of the "northern" group of Arab tribes and, thus, of the Prophet Muhammad. He descended from Ishmael through the Quraysh tribe in the direct line.

There is no Quranic description of these events, so we must rely on the Old Testament version of this aspect of Abraham's story. Ishmael and Isaac's childhood stories are intertwined, and the Biblical and Arabian versions are presented in the next few chapters.

THE ORIGINAL COVENANT

Abraham and Sarah were childless before leaving for Palestine. Allah granted Abraham the covenant central to the biblical story. The covenant consisted of three parts.

1 The promised land**:** ***The Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country to the land (Canaan) I will show you." (Gen 12:1)***

2 The promise of the descendants: ***"I will make you a great nation and bless you." (Gen 12:2).***

3 ***"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Gen 12:3) Abraham was seventy-five when he left Harran for Canaan. At that time, the Canaanites were present in the land. (Genesis 12:4)***

The third and last part of the Abrahamic covenant was the promise of blessing and redemption. Allah promised to bless all nations through Abraham, the progenitor of monotheism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Allah called Abraham to leave Iraq and go to Canaan and promised to give this land to Abraham's descendants.

DECEPTION IN EGYPT

When Abraham arrived in Palestine, famine was widespread, and Abraham moved to Egypt to live there for a while.

As Abraham was about to enter Egypt, he told his wife, Sarah, "I know what a beautiful woman you are." When the Egyptians see you are a beautiful woman, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me, but let you live." Abraham pretended Sarah was his sister and hence unmarried. (Gen 12:10-13)

Sarah was Abraham's half-sister. She must have been attractive at 65.

RETURN OF ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND HAGAR TO CANAAN

The Pharaoh married Sarah, and the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues. When Pharaoh discovered Sarah was married, he returned Sarah to Abraham and gave him many gifts. Abraham became rich in cattle, silver, and gold. The

Pharaoh gave Abraham a slave girl, Hagar, and he returned to Palestine. (Gen 12:14-17)

Although Sarah and Abraham were guilty of deception, Allah punished Pharaoh instead and rewarded Abraham.

PROMISE OF ISHMAEL

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth so that if anyone could count the dust, your offspring could be numbered. (Gen 13:16) After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abraham, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." But Abraham said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless?" Then the Lord replied, "A son who is your flesh and blood will be your heir. Look up at the sky and count the stars—if you can count them." Then he said, "So shall your offspring." (Gen 15:2, 4-5) Sarah, Abraham's wife, had not borne him a child. After Abraham lived ten years in Canaan, Sarah took Hagar and gave it to her husband Abraham as his second wife. As soon as Hagar conceived, Sarah felt insignificant and jealous and treated her harshly, causing Hagar to flee. (Gen 16:1-6)

The second part of the covenant is known as the descendants' promise. This is where Allah promised Abraham that I would greatly increase your numbers and make you into nations. This was when Allah changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning 'father of many nations.' The mention of Abraham's descendants was general. The earth's dust represents Abraham's uncountable offspring. Similar phrases like "as numerous as the stars in the sky" and "as the sand on the seashore" cannot refer to Jews only (Genesis 15:5, 22:17, 28:14).

According to the latest demographic data, the Jewish population is only 14 million worldwide - too small to justify the above description of innumerable dust particles or stars in the night sky.

There are approximately 450 million Arabs. Added all Muslims, Arabs, and non-Arabs is about 1.8 billion. There are two billion Christians around the globe. When Abraham's offspring from his three wives are added, one can almost compare the night sky to countless dust particles.

A WILD DONKEY OF A MAN

The angel intercepted Hagar and told her to "return to your mistress and submit to her authority." The angel also told her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants, too many to count." Behold, you are pregnant and will give birth to a son, and you shall name him Ishmael because the Lord has heard your affliction. But he will be a wild donkey of a man. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him, and he will live in defiance of all his brothers." (Gen 16:7-12) So, Hagar bore a son to Abraham, who named him Ishmael. Abraham was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him. (Gen 16:15-16)

Out of the twelve Biblical personalities, Ishmael was honored, for Allah chose his name. Ishmael means "Allah listens," in this case, to Hagar's plea for help.

MOTHER OF MAYHEM

The angel announced the good news: "I will multiply your descendants until there are too many to count." Remember, Ishmael is still a fetus at this stage. Then comes a highly pessimistic prediction that your son would act like an animal and be violent towards his brothers, causing no end to the chaos. Biblical apologists downplay this by saying Ishmael would become independent like a wild donkey. The fact is that this is the first step in an attempt at denigration of Ishmael's character but also an implicit accusation against his descendants (Arabs), portrayed as a violent and brutal race. Such statements are the basis of widespread

prejudice and hatred towards Arabs and Muslims in Judeo-Christian societies. There is a dichotomy in this passage-a positive message in the first part contrasts with negativity in the second.

Imagine the psychological trauma Hagar suffered. She is lonely, homeless, and on the run. Now, she is told she will be the mother of mayhem, and a monster is growing inside her. What was the purpose of such a crude and cruel prediction? At this early stage, the Bible author laid the foundation for the future justification of Isaac's preferential treatment by smearing Ishmael's character. Did this prediction prove true? The Bible provides no evidence for Ishmael's violent behavior. On the contrary, the Old Testament mentions numerous examples of genocides when Jewish zealots slaughtered men, women, children, infants, and even animals. Let us examine the same verse (16:12) in the Samaritan Torah; the difference is startling.

SAMARITANS' TORAH

The Samaritan Pentateuch, also known as the Samaritan Torah, is the text of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible written in Samaritan script. Samaritans use it as sacred scripture.

"He [Ishmael] will be fertile. His hand will be with everyone, and everyone's hand will be with him, and he will live among all his brothers."

The second part of the verse in the Samaritan Torah is precisely the opposite of the Hebrew version. Ishmael is described in Genesis 16 in the Samaritan Torah as a 'fertile man' instead of a 'wild ass.' 'His hands will be with everyone instead of 'his hands will be against everyone,' and 'he will live among all his descendants' the opposite of 'he will live in defiance of all his brothers.' The entire tenor of this verse is positive.

WHO WERE THE SAMARITANS?

There was a schism in the tenth century B.C., and the Israelites' kingdom split into northern and southern kingdoms. Both kingdoms devolved into corruption and sin despite repeated warnings from Allah's prophets. Therefore, Allah warned them that conquerors would overtake them. In 721 BC, Israel's northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians, and many Jews were forced to migrate to the Assyrian lands. But some remained in the land and intermarried with foreigners or "lowly" gentiles planted there by the Assyrians. These half-Jewish, half-Gentile impure races became known as the Samaritans, hated by Jews more than gentiles.

CIRCUMCISION: THE COVENANT SEAL

In biblical times, the covenants were often sealed by severing an animal, implying that the party who breaks the covenant will suffer a similar fate. In Hebrew, the verb seals a covenant translates literally as "to cut." Jewish scholars presume that circumcision symbolizes such a sealing of the covenant. Allah told Abraham to cut off his foreskin and that of all the boys in his household, including Ishmael.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, which signifies the covenant between you and Me. For generations to come, males eight days old must be circumcised. My covenant in the flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male will be removed from his people; he has broken my covenant." (Gen 17:9-14) On that very day, Abraham took his son Ishmael, and those born in his household or bought with his money were circumcised. Abraham was ninety-nine when circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen. Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on the same day. (Gen 17:22-27)

After Isaac's birth, Ishmael was cut off from the above covenant. (See the next volume for more details).

CHAPTER 8
THE EVICTION OF ISHMAEL AND HAGAR

PLOT TO KILL ISHMAEL AND HAGAR

Sarah noticed the son Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing with her son Isaac. She demanded Abraham: "Drive out that slave and her son! No son of that slave will share inheritance with my son Isaac!" (Gen 21:9-10).

Early the next morning, Abraham got some bread and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. Then, placing the child on her back, he sent her away. As she roamed aimlessly in the Beer-Sheba wilderness, she used up all her water skin. She put the child down under one of the bushes and sat opposite him, about a bowshot away. She said, "I cannot watch the child die." As she sat opposite him, she wept aloud. Allah heard the boy's voice, and Allah's angel called Hagar from heaven: "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not fear; Allah has heard the boy's voice in his plight. Get up, lift the boy, and hold him by the hand, for I will make him a great nation." Then Allah opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. She filled the water skin and let the boy drink. Allah was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert bowman. (Gen 21:14-20)

It is clear from the above verse that the motive for evicting Hagar and Ishmael was hubris, greed, and jealousy. "No son of that slave," a statement of arrogance and contempt, "will share the inheritance with my son Isaac." In Sarah's mindset, Isaac, "the only seed of Abraham," deserved all of Abraham's wealth. People suffering from a superiority complex may be condescending, smug, or mean to those they consider inferior. Ishmael and his mother were expelled with scanty food and water and abandoned in a desert that

may have led to certain death. Ishmael came close to dying, probably from dehydration, and was saved only by a water spring miracle.

WATERSHED MOMENT

The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael was a watershed moment. It laid the foundation of discord between Jews and Arabs. To this day, Sarah's progeny, following in the footsteps of their matriarch, are trying to evict all Ishmaelites from Palestine. The racist concept of the “chosen people" is the root cause of all conflict between Jews and Arabs. Sarah made it very clear that she wanted all of Abraham's wealth and the land of Canaan given to her son. Some biblical apologists have the audacity to blame the victim Ishmael for adversely influencing his brother Isaac. Ishmael was a teenager at his eviction, and Isaac was a toddler. It is unlikely that a teenager would be an undesirable influence on a young child.

Arabian legend says Ishmael was an infant when Hagar was expelled. Now Ishmael was a teenager, and one wonders how Hagar carried the skin of water, bread, and a grown adolescent on her back. The above passage will make more sense if we consider that Ishmael was an infant.

THE ARABIAN VERSION OF THE ABANDONMENT OF ISHMAEL AND HAGAR

Even in pre-Islamic times, Mecca and the Kabah were associated with Abraham’s memory. His personality was always at the heart of Arabian thought. There is no mention of this awful story in the Quran of Ishmael and Hagar’s maltreatment. The Arabian account of Ishmael’s expulsion was based on hadith and popular Arabian legend. It was narrated by Ibn Abbas, the Prophet’s uncle.

The Arabian accounts differ in two respects. Hagar and Ishmael were cruelly evicted in the Biblical narrative and left to their own

devices to perish in the desert. The Arabian version seems more compassionate. Under divine inspiration, Abraham accompanied Hagar and Ishmael on their journey to Mecca's site. It explains the Biblical statement that Hagar carried bread, water, and Ishmael on her back. Ishmael was still breastfeeding in the Arabian account, while in the Biblical story, he was a teenager when they were expelled.

According to Ibn Abbas, When Abraham had differences with his wife (because of her jealousy of Hagar), he took Ishmael and his mother and moved away. Abraham brought Hagar and his son Ishmael to a barren valley while she still suckled him. This is not improbable for a camel-riding Bedouin (and Abraham was certainly one), a twenty or even thirty-day journey. At first glance, the Biblical statement that Hagar roamed in the wilderness of Beersheba (i.e., the southernmost tip of Palestine) conflicts with the Arabian account. This seeming contradiction disappears as soon as we remember that to the ancient, town-dwelling Hebrews, the term "wilderness of Beersheba" encompassed all the desert regions south of Palestine, including the Hijaz.

Abraham made them sit under the bush, placed a leather bag containing some dates and a small water-skin near them, and set out homeward. Hagar followed him, saying: "O Abraham! Why are you leaving us in this valley where there is no one we can enjoy the company of, nor is there anything else?" She repeated that to him many times, but he did not look back at her. Then she asked him: "Has Allah ordered you to do so?" He said: "Yes." She said, "Then He will not neglect us."

MAKE THIS LAND SECURE

From here, the Quran picks up Abraham's saga and his abandonment of his second family, Hagar, and Ishmael. After Abraham abandoned Hagar and Ishmael and on his return journey, when he was far enough away that Hagar could not see him, he

raised both hands and invoked Allah, saying the following prayers according to the Quran:

And [remember the time] when Abraham spoke [thus]: "O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and preserve my children and me from ever-worshipping idols. For, verily, O my Sustainer, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray! "Hence, [only] he who follows me [in this my faith] is true of me; and as for him who disobeys me - Thou art, verily, much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (14:35-36) And, lo, Abraham prayed: "O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance - such as those who believe in Allah and the Last Day." [Allah] answered: "And whoever denies the truth, he will enjoy for a short while. But in the end, I shall drive him to suffer through fire: and how vile a journey's end!" (2:126)

Abraham's prayer: "O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance" is the answer to one of the largest oil reserves in Saudi Arabia.

THE SPRING OF ZAMZAM

Ishmael's mother continued to drink water. She and her child became thirsty when the water ran out. She stared at Ishmael, tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at the dying child. The As-Safa hillock was the nearest to her. She climbed to the top and looked around but saw nobody. Then she descended from As Safa. When she reached the valley, she tucked up her robe and ran like a distressed person. She reached the top of Al Marwa. She stood there but could not see anybody. She repeated running seven times between Safa and Marwa. Pilgrims are expected to walk fast during the Hajj ceremony, just like Hagar did to find help.

When she reached Al Marwa (for the last time), she heard a voice and asked herself to be quiet and listen. She heard the voice again

and said: “O, whomever you may be! You have made me listen to your voice. Can you help me?” And behold! She saw an angel at Zamzam, digging the earth with his heel [or his wing] till water flowed from that place. Using her hands, she formed a basin around it, filling the water skin. According to the Bible, Abraham never contacted Ishmael or Hagar after abandoning them. However, Abraham often visited his second family in Mecca in the Arabian account.

CHAPTER 9
THE HUMAN SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM'S SON

THE BIBLICAL VERSION

"And Allah said, take now thy son, your only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains I will tell thee of." (Genesis 22:2).

The mention of Isaac as your "only son" is not a typographical error but a final attempt to cut off all ties with Ishmael. The Bible denied Ishmael's paternity, adding the final insult to the injuries. Before this, his humanity was questioned by labeling him "a wild ass." If the words "your only son Isaac" were not interpolated, the above verse would agree with the Quran, where neither Ishmael nor Isaac was mentioned in the sacrifice story.

THE QURANIC VERSION

[Abraham prayed: "O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me the gift of [a son, who shall be] one of the righteous!" Whereupon We gave him the glad tiding of a boy-child gentle [like himself]? And [one day], when [the child] became old enough to share in his [father's] endeavors, the latter said: "O my dear son! I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: consider, then, what would be your view?" [Abraham's son] answered: "O my father! Do as you are bidden; if Allah so wills, you will find me among those who are patient in adversity!" But as soon as the two had surrendered themselves to [what they thought to be] the will of Allah, and [Abraham] had laid him down on his face, We called out to him: "O Abraham; you have already fulfilled [the purpose of] that dream-vision!" Thus, We reward the doers of good, for all this was a clear trial. And We ransomed him with tremendous sacrifice

and left him, therefore, to be remembered among later generations: "Peace be upon Abraham!" Consequently, We reward the doers of good - for he was truly one of our believing servants. (37:100-111)

ISHMAEL VERSUS ISAAC

The Quran does not mention Ishmael or Isaac being offered for sacrifice. However, circumstantial evidence points to Ishmael.

- The "tremendous sacrifice" spoken of here is celebrated by sacrificing an animal in connection with the pilgrimage to Mecca (al-hajj) and throughout the Islamic world every year by countless believers.
- It commemorates Abraham and his son's willingness to obey divine commands and constitutes one of Islam's five pillars.
- There is no such celebration among Bible believers. Arguably, it points to Ishmael, not Isaac, and these events happened in Mecca rather than Palestine. It is immaterial which son was offered as a sacrifice. Muslims would still celebrate this event with the same enthusiasm as if Isaac was sacrificed. This is because both were Allah's prophets, according to the Quran.

ABRAHAM'S DREAM

When Abraham's son reached an age where he could understand and share in his father's faith and aims, Abraham confided in him about his dream of sacrificing his son. However, in the Quran, Abraham only had a dream vision and not a direct command from Allah as in the Bible. Allah rescued Ishmael from Abraham's misapprehension by sending a sacrificial ram at the last moment. The moral significance of Abraham's dream vision was its test of his readiness to sacrifice what was dearest to him in life, his son, at Allah's behest.

ABRAHAM OF THE QURAN AND THE BIBLE

Abraham in the Quran represents the exemplary human being. He is described in glowing terms:

Indeed, you had an excellent example in Abraham and those who followed him. (60:4) Abraham was most tender-hearted and merciful. (9:114) Abraham was a man who combined all virtues within himself, devoutly obeying Allah's will, turning away from all that is false, and not being of those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah. [He was always] grateful for the blessing granted by Him, who elected him and guided him to a straightway. And so, We granted him good in this world, and in the life to come, he will also find himself among the righteous. (16:120-122) "We raise by degrees whom We will." (6:83)

Raising by degrees signifies the tremendous spiritual dignity to which this forerunner of a long line of prophets was ultimately raised. Abraham's biblical portrayal is not flattering. During his visit to Egypt, he and Sarah tried to deceive Pharaoh about their relationship. By being henpecked by Sarah, he jeopardized his son's, and second wife's lives and safety. He abandoned his son during his teen years when male adolescents needed a father figure. In today's parlance, we call such fathers deadbeats. He willingly gave all his wealth to Isaac and denied inheritance to his other children. Isaac also inherited the land of Canaan, and the Jews of today still deny any other than Jews living in this land.

CONCLUSION

- Before Abraham left Ur, Allah established His covenant with him and his descendants. Ishmael was the only descendant for thirteen years. When Isaac came along, Ishmael was cut off from the covenant.

- The Bible, from the beginning, portrays Ishmael negatively. One can hardly find a positive statement concerning Ishmael and Hagar.

Even at his fetal stage, the Bible predicts that Ishmael will grow up to be a violent, vicious donkey of a man.

- Isaac was declared Abraham's only seed. The purpose was twofold: to establish the racial superiority of Isaac over Ishmael. In addition, to deny Ishmael any rights of ownership in Canaan, where he was born and any share of Abraham’s estate.

CAN ALLAH BE THE AUTHOR OF THIS STORY?

Is the Almighty, the transcendent and loving Allah, the author of this tale of injustice and abuse, or is it the product of a biased and narrow human mind? The Quran declares Isaac and Ishmael as Allah’s prophets. No verse in the Quran states Ishmael’s superiority over Isaac or vice versa. Since Jews were the first monotheists, the Quran recognizes Jews as “chosen people” spiritually. The Quran makes it clear that the Jews have the right to live in the land of Palestine side by side with others. The Quran's even-handed approach is in sharp contrast to the biased description of the Bible, whose author cannot be God.

CHAPTER 10
MECCA AND THE BUILDING OF THE KABAH

THE ORIGIN OF THE CITY OF MECCA

Hagar settled near the spring, called the Zamzam Well, which still flows to this day. It may have been that spring that induced a wandering group of Bedouin families belonging to the South Arabian (Qahtani) tribe of Jurhum to settle there. Ishmael married a girl of this tribe and became the progenitor of the Arabianized tribes. (In the Biblical account, Ishmael married a girl from Egypt since Hagar was also from there.) Thus, their descent was from a Hebrew father and a Qahtani mother. The Jurhum tribe ruled Mecca for many generations. The drying up of the Zamzam spring led to the takeover by Khuzaahs.

The narration of Ibn Abbas continued: "When Abraham thought of visiting his family, he had left at Mecca, and he told his wife (Sarah) of his decision.

He found Ishmael behind the Zamzam well, mending his arrows. He said: ‘O Ishmael, your Lord has ordered me to build a house for Him.’ Ishmael said: ‘Obey the order of your Lord.’ Abraham replied:

‘Allah has also ordered me that you should help me therein.’ Ishmael said: ‘Then I will do so.’” When the building became too high for Abraham to lift more stones, he stood upon the stone of Al Maqam (station of Abraham) and kept handing Ishmael the rocks. The Temple (al-Bayt)—“House of Worship”—is the Kabah in Mecca. In other places, the Quran speaks of it as “the Ancient Temple” (al-Bayt al-Atiq) and “the Inviolable House of Worship” (al-masjid al-haram).

THE KABAH, THE FIRST SYMBOL OF ALLAH'S ONENESS

The first Temple ever set up for humanity was at Bakkah, rich in blessings and [source of] guidance for all the worlds, full of clear messages. [It is] where Abraham once stood, and whoever enters it finds inner peace. Hence, a pilgrimage to the Temple is a duty owed to Allah by those who are able to undertake it. As for those who deny the truth, Allah does not need anything in all worlds. (3:96-97) O our Sustainer! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley with no arable land, close to Thy sanctified Temple. So that, O our Sustainer, they might devote themselves to prayer: cause Thou, therefore, people's hearts to incline towards them, and grant them fruitful sustenance, so that they might have cause to be grateful. (14:37)

'Bakkah,' a word derived from a Sabaean term meaning sanctuary. It is an older name for Mecca (which, if correctly transliterated, is spelled Makkah). In ancient Arabic dialects, the labial consonants b and m, being phonetically close, are occasionally interchangeable.

"Full of clear messages" in the above verse relates to Allah's oneness and uniqueness (symbolized by the Kabah). Abraham and Ishmael built the Kabah as the first temple dedicated to the One Allah. Abraham paid many visits to Mecca to see his second family. His prayer, "People's hearts to incline towards them," is answered when millions of Muslims attend the Hajj yearly, injecting financial resources into the local economy.

THE OLD TESTAMENT: BACA'S VALLEY

There is mention of the Valley of Baca in the Psalm that opens: ***"How amiable are Thy tabernacle, O Lord of hosts. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee in whose heart are the ways of them who were passing through the valley of Baca make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools." (Psalm 84:5-6).***

The Hebrew word Baca is related to bakah, which means "to weep." Baca refers to a type of "weeping" tree, that is, one that drips resin or gum-like tears, such as a balsam tree. "The valley of weeping" describes a barren valley in the desert where Ishmael and his mother were abandoned.

ABRAHAM AND ISHMAEL'S PRAYER

While Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the Temple, [they prayed]: "O, our Sustainer, Thou accept this from us, for Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing! O, our Sustainer! Make us surrender ourselves to Thee and make out of our offspring a community that surrenders itself to Thee, shows us our ways of worship, and accepts our repentance. Thou alone art the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace!" "O, our Sustainer! Raise from the midst of our offspring an apostle from among themselves, who shall convey Thy messages, impart revelation and wisdom, and cause them to grow in purity, for Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!" (2:127-129) And who, unless he is weak of mind, would want to abandon Abraham's creed, knowing that We have raised him high in this world and that in the life to come, he shall be among the righteous? When his Sustainer said to him, "Surrender yourself unto Me!" He answered, "I have surrendered myself to [Thee], the Sustainer of all worlds." (2:130-131)

The Kabah is much older than the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and denotes any cubical building deliberately chosen in an unpretentious three-dimensional form. It represents man's humility and awe before Allah, whose glory is beyond anything man could conceive through architectural beauty. The Kabah has been instituted as the prayer direction (Qiblah) for all Muslims. Its establishment as the Qiblah does not break the Abrahamic tradition. On the contrary, it reestablishes direct contact with that patriarch

and the brotherhood of all believers. These believers, wherever they may be, turn their faces in prayer towards this one focal point.

PRAYER AND CHARITY

Call to mind, through this divine writ, Ishmael. He was always true to his promise and was an apostle [of Allah], a prophet, who enjoined upon his people prayer and charity and found favor in his Sustainer's sight. (19:54-55) [***Remember] Ishmael and Idris and everyone who [like them] pledged himself [unto Allah]. They all were among those who were patient in adversity, and so We admitted them to Our grace; they were among the righteous! (21:85-86) Call to mind Ishmael and Elisha, and everyone who [like them] pledged himself [unto Us]: for each of them was truly pious! (38:48)***

These were some of the prophets upon whom Allah bestowed His blessings, [prophets] of the seed of Adam; whom We caused to be borne [in the Ark] with Noah, of the seed of Abraham and Israel. [All of them were] among those We guided and elected. Whenever the messages of the Most Gracious were conveyed to them, they would fall [before Him], prostrating themselves and weeping. Yet they were succeeded by generations [of people] who lost all [thought of] prayer and followed [but] their lusts, and these will, in time, meet with utter disillusionment. (19:58-59)

Ishmael was the first prophet to establish prayer and charity as obligatory forms of worship. The Hebrew prophets, whose line ended with Jesus, descended from Abraham through Isaac and Israel (Jacob).

The Prophet traced his descent from the same patriarch through his firstborn son, Ishmael. All the prophets were conscious of being mortal, humble servants of Allah. And yet, some people who were completely lost in sin succeeded these great prophets of Allah. They

will realize in the hereafter the full extent of their self-deception, which has led to their spiritual ruin.

CHAPTER 11
THE TRIBE OF QURAYSH

MECCA, THE CENTER OF RELIGIOUS AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Mecca stood at the crossroads of routes from Yemen to Syria and Abyssinia to Iraq. Mecca's growth as a trading center was due to the Kabah, to which men could come without fear of molestation. Mecca's leaders conducted complex financial transactions in Prophet Muhammad’s times. These financiers were skillful in manipulating credit, wise in their speculations, and interested in any lucrative investment from Aden to Gaza or Damascus.

Therefore, nomads came to Mecca for goods brought from the four points of the compass by caravan. The caravans to Yemen, Syria, and elsewhere required many nomads as guides, escorts, camel men, etc. They would pay a chief for safe conduct on his territory, water, and other supplies.

During Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, the Quraysh were foremost among the tribes of west and west-central Arabia—that is, among all those with whom they came into close contact. The military strength they could bring to bear on any opponent was not their own but that of a whole confederacy. They built this confederacy based on their mercantile enterprises. Thus, the nomadic tribes shared in Mecca's trade, and the Meccan prosperity meant their prosperity; the Meccan loss was their loss.

GENEALOGY

QUSAYY IBN KILAB

Qusayy was the 5th-century ruler of Mecca, the descendant of Prophet Ishmael and the fifth grandfather of Prophet Muhammad.

Some two hundred years before Prophet Muhammad's birth, Qusayy ibn Kilab ascended within the ranks of Mecca's political scene. Qusayy married the daughter of the Khuzaite chieftain, and upon his death, Qusayy became the custodian of Kabah. The tribe of Khuzaah tried to take away Qusayy's guardianship of Kabah. However, with the help of the Quraysh and several surrounding tribes, he was confirmed in his guardianship. Qusayy established the Quraysh as the dominant power in Mecca and laid the foundation for its prosperity as the leading commercial republic of Arabia in the sixth century.

Qusayy had many sons and grandsons. (Not all of them are listed below). His sons were **Abdul Dar** and **Abd Manaf**.

Abd Manaf had four sons: **Naufal, Muttalib, Hashim**, and **Abd Shams**. The **Banu Umayyah** clan was named after Umayyah ibn Abd Shams.

Abdul Muttalib, whose sons were **Abu Talib, Hamza, Abbas, Zubair, and Abdullah**, the father of **Prophet Muhammad**.

THE CLANS OF THE QURAYSH

The Quraysh tribe was subdivided into many clans. The more prominent clans were **Hashim**, the clan of the Prophet himself and Ali ibn Talib; **Zuhrah,** that of his mother; and **Taim,** the first caliph, Abu Bakr; and **Adi**, the clan of the second caliph, Umar; and **Umayya**h, the clan of the third caliph Uthman, and his relatives, the Umayyad caliph dynasty.

Nobility and prestige among the desert Arabs were matters of military power. Preeminence among the tribes belonged to those who could protect their clients and avenge all insults, injuries, and deaths.

Within the commercial city of Mecca, there was a continuous power struggle. The political groupings were involved in relations with the

surrounding Arab tribes with whom the Meccan caravans came into contact. They were also involved in relations with the great powers whose markets they served. The only government organ in Mecca was an assembly of chiefs and consisted of leading men from the various clans. The council was deliberative. Each clan was theoretically independent and could go its own way. Therefore, the only effective decisions were unanimous ones.

Individual influence in Mecca's affairs depended on two things: his clan and his qualifications. Clan power was proportional to its wealth. Inherited wealth and business connections could help a man. Still, his influence depended chiefly on his personal qualities—his commercial and financial shrewdness, diplomacy in dealing with other tribes and representatives of the world's powers, and his ability to get his equals in the clan and in wider circles to follow his lead. The dominance of Meccan policy by Abu Sufyan during The Prophet's prime was not due to any office carrying authority. Instead, it was due to the importance and wealth of his clan, 'Abd Shams or Umayyah, and his possession of such qualities. There were three major clans in Mecca during Prophet Muhammad's ministry:

Banu Hashim

Banu Umayyah

Banu Makhzum

THE CLANS OF BANU HASHIM AND AL-MUTTALIB

The Islamic Prophet belonged to the Banu Hashim, the clan named after Prophet Muhammad's great-grandfather Hashim ibn Abd Manaf. Mecca prospered under Hashim's wise leadership and became Arabia's capital.

He oversaw feeding the pilgrims and called every Quraysh member to contribute to food provision. He argued that pilgrims are guests

and, therefore, worthy of hospitality in Allah's house. During the drought year, he provided food for the whole population.

After Hashim's death, his brother al-Muttalib succeeded him. Water must be imported into Mecca due to Zamzam's disappearance a few centuries ago. Al-Muttalib was credited with finding Zamzam's site. Abd al Muttalib had several sons, and those listed below played a significant positive role in Islam's history:

Abu Talib ibn Abd al-Muttalib (535–619) was the leader of the Banu Hashim, a powerful clan of the Quraysh tribe, and the paternal uncle of the Prophet. His significant role was as a protector of his nephew Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Besides protection, Abu Talib was Muhammad's father figure. He was also the father of Ali ibn Talib, the fourth caliph and one of the greatest warriors in Islam's history. Abu Talib was well-respected in Mecca despite declining financial fortunes.

Abbas ibn Abd al-Muttalib was the Prophet's paternal uncle, just three years older than his nephew. After his father's death, he took over the Zamzam Well and distributed water to the pilgrims. He protected the Prophet in Mecca from his enemies. He became a spice merchant, a trade that made him wealthy. He fought on the side of the polytheists, and Abbas was captured during the Battle of Badr and later became a convert. Abbas immediately joined The Prophet's army, participating in the Conquest of Mecca, the Battle of Hunayn, and the Siege of Taif. He defended the Prophet at Hunayn when other warriors deserted him. After these military exploits, Abbas brought his family to Medina. He was also the progenitor of the Abbasid caliphs. Through his son Abdullah ibn Abbas, the later Abbasid dynasty claimed the caliph title.

Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib was an uncle and companion of Prophet Muhammad. He was skilled at wrestling, archery, and warfare. Hamza and Ali were the two champions of the first battle

of Badr, and their contribution to Islam's survival was invaluable. Hamza was martyred in the second battle of Uhud.

Abdullah ibn Abdul-Muttalib, the Prophet Muhammad's father, was Abd al Muttalib's youngest son and a great-grandson of Qusayy, the city's founder. He was married to Aminah bint Wahb, descended from Qusayy's brother, Zuhrah. Muhammad was their only child. Returning with a caravan from Syria and Palestine, Abdullah stopped to visit relatives in Yathrib (later known as Medina). He fell ill there and died before his son Muhammad's birth. Some fifty-odd years later, Muhammad, now the Prophet of Allah, emigrated to Medina and established the first Islamic state.

Thomas Carlyle, in his essay "The Hero as Prophet," described the prevailing conditions of Mecca before Islam: "It had been from the sacredness attached to this Kabah Stone and Hagar's Well, from the pilgrimings of all tribes of Arabs thither, that Mecca took its rise as a Town. A great town once, though much decayed now. It has no natural advantage for a town; it stands in a sandy hollow amid bare, barren hills, at a distance from the sea; its provisions, its very bread, have to be imported. But so many pilgrims needed lodgings, and then all places of pilgrimage, from the first, became places of trade. The first day pilgrims meet, merchants have also met: where men see themselves assembled for one object, they find that they can accomplish other objects which depend on meeting together. Mecca became the fair of all Arabia. The government was a kind of irregular aristocratic republic, not without a touch of theocracy. Ten Men of a chief tribe, chosen in some rough ways, were governors of Mecca and Keepers of Kabah. The rest of the Nation fractioned and cut asunder by deserts, lived under similar rude patriarchal governments by one or several: herders, carriers, traders, generally robbers too; being often at war with one another, or with all: held together by no open bond, if it were not this meeting at the Kabah, where all forms of Arab idolatry assembled in common adoration; held mainly by the inward indissoluble bond of common blood and

language. In this way, the Arabs lived for long ages, unnoticed by the world: a people of great qualities, unconsciously waiting for the day when they should become notable to the entire world."

CHAPTER 12
EVENTS SURROUNDING MUHAMMAD'S BIRTH

PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN RELIGIONS

Polytheism: The worship of or belief in multiple deities in a pantheon of gods and goddesses. **Idolatry**: The worship of an idol or a physical object, such as a cult image. **Animism**: Belief in non-human entities (animals, plants, and inanimate objects or phenomena) possessing a spiritual essence.

Paganism: A religion that believes in many different deities often related to nature or agriculture.

Monotheism: The belief in the existence of a single Allah.

Islamic tradition says pre-Islamic Arab monotheists, called Hanifs, were descendants of the Prophet

Abraham and his son Ishmael. With the passage of many millennia, the Arabs, like others, followed the downward slope that led from monotheism to idolatry. Most pre-Islamic Arabs practiced a hybrid religion of polytheism mixed with belief in one supreme Allah, a form of primitive monotheism. Judaism and Christianity were known as monotheistic faiths in Arabia.

The Arabs had not lost all awareness of Allah and thought of Him as a supreme deity too remote and impersonal to concern them in their daily lives. Practical help was to be expected from lesser gods and idols. Arabia's religion reflected its tribal nature and social structure. Gods and goddesses served as protectors of individual tribes, and their spirits were associated with sacred objects – trees, stones, springs, and wells. Each tribe had its own idols and temples. The priests and hierophants attached to these temples received rich offerings from the devotees. And often, there arose sanguinary

conflicts between the followers of rival temples. Besides special idols located in the temples, each family had household pennates that required rigorous attention from them. They often carried their idols when they traveled, believing that the idol allowed its worshipper to travel. Arabs also worshipped animals and plants, the gazelle, the horse, the camel, the palm tree, and inorganic matter like rocks, stones, etc. Belief in Jins, ghouls, and oracles was derived from their idols, which they consulted with pointless arrows.

KABAH BASTION OF PAGANISM

To the Arabs, one of the most ancient universal objects of worship was that black stone, a celestial object, kept in the Kabah at Mecca. There were 360 idols, one for each day, arranged around the great god.

Hubal. They included two gazelles of gold and silver and the image of Abraham and his son Ishmael. The tribes came from all over Arabia, year after year, to kiss the black stone and circumambulate around the Kabah seven times. Human sacrifices, especially of baby girls, were not uncommon. The custody of this temple was an object of great jealousy among the tribes, as it conferred on the custodians the most honorable functions and privileges in the sight of the Arabs. At Muhammad's birth, his family possessed this honor, and his grandfather was the venerable chief of the theocratic Commonwealth constituted around the Kabah.

The absolute monotheistic message of the Quran was a revolutionary idea within the context of apparent idol worship; with the notion of the one supreme Allah in the background in Pre-Islamic Arabia. There is an ever-recurring Quranic stress on Allah's oneness and uniqueness and the categorical denial of the notion that anyone or anything could have the most negligible share of Allah's qualities or the slightest influence on the way He governs the universe. The absolute oneness of Allah aims at freeing man from

self-imposed servitude to an imaginary hierarchy of mediating powers and making him realize that “wherever you turn, there is Allah’s countenance” (2:115) and that Allah is “always near, responding to the call of whoever calls unto Him” (2:186).

THE STRUGGLES BETWEEN THE BYZANTINE AND PERSIAN EMPIRES

During Prophet Muhammad’s times, Mecca's external politics were dominated by the titanic struggle between the two superpowers, the Byzantine (Roman Empire) and Persian empires. Meccan trade dictated neutrality, connecting Persian-held Yemen in the south with Byzantine Syria in the north. They carried Indian spices, silk, frankincense (incense), myrrh (an embalming oil), and other luxury goods to the Roman Empire. It was about forty days march North from Mecca to the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire markets.

Neither the Persians nor the Byzantines tried to control the Arabian nomads directly. It was a task beyond the strength even of a great empire. To prevent nomads from raiding the settled people, the Byzantines supported the Arab tribe of Ghassanid, who dominated the region east of Jordan and Damascus. Similarly, the Persians supported the Lakhmids, who dominated the area near the Euphrates.

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

After the destruction of the Temple of Solomon in 70 A.D., Judaism penetrated Arabia. Persecuted and evicted from their homeland, many Jews settled in pre-Islamic Arabia. In the north, Jews settled in

Khaybar and Yathrib. In the south, Judaism was professed in Yemen by some Himyar descendants. The Jews were naturally more disposed toward the Persians since Christianity was

associated with Byzantium and Ethiopia's two traditional enemies. After five centuries of evangelism, Christianity gained a foothold in outlying areas such as Hadramawt and Najran. The struggle between Christianity and Judaism came to a head in the 6th century. This was when the Judaizing king of Himyar tried to spread Judaism in the south, resulting in the famous massacre of Najran Christians. In the last quarter of the 6th century, the Persians occupied the south. This enabled Judaism and Nestorian Christianity to regain strength and admit an Indo-European religious experience, Iranian Zoroastrianism. (Nestorianism considered the two natures, human and divine of Jesus Christ, distinct and functioning in parallel.) In B.C.E. 520, an expedition of Ethiopian Christians destroyed the last king of Yemen with Byzantine Christians' blessing.

THE RISE OF ABRAHA

An Ethiopian soldier of fortune named Abraha successfully revolted and became Yemen's viceroy. He erected a magnificent cathedral in Sana, now Yemen's capital. He hoped to divert the annual Arabian pilgrimage from the Kabah to the newly built church. In the middle of the desert, Mecca evolved into a prominent commercial center. Besides, the Kabah was already the heart of the annual pilgrimage, attracting pilgrims from all over Arabia. Such a city was naturally vulnerable and a tempting target.

Abraha's hope of attracting pilgrims remained unfulfilled, so he determined to destroy the Kabah. He set out against Mecca at the head of a large army, including many war elephants, something hitherto unknown and astounding to the Arabs. Hence the designation of that year by contemporaries and later historians, as "the Year of the Elephant."

Abraha was at striking distance from Mecca, and Quraysh already evacuated the city when suddenly the elephants halted and refused to go any further; the army stopped in its tracks. Abraha's army was miraculously destroyed, and he died on his return to Sana. Thus, the

Kabah remained inviolate as it had been for eons. This event is recorded in the Quran in the hundred-fifth and hundred-sixth surahs.

SURAH 105 AL-FIL (THE ELEPHANT)

AND

SURAH 106 (QURAYSH)

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the dispenser of grace: Are you not aware of how your Sustainer dealt with the army of the elephants? Did He not utterly confound their artful planning? Thus, He let loose upon them great swarms of flying creatures, who smote them with stone-hard blows of chastisement preordained and caused them to become like a field of grain eaten down to stubble. (105:1-5)

So that the Quraysh might remain secure in their winter and summer journey, let them worship the Sustainer of this Temple, [Kabah], who has given them food against hunger and made them safe from danger. (106:1-4)

The first verse of the hundred-fifth surah alludes to the Abyssinian campaign against Mecca in 570 of the Christian era. It was the same year Prophet Muhammad was born in Mecca.

THE EPIDEMIC OF SEVERE VIRULENCE

The phrase “Stone-hard blows of chastisement preordained” refers to a sudden epidemic of extreme virulence. It was the first-time typhus and smallpox appeared in the Arab land. Typhus is a bacterial disease spread by lice or fleas. Fleas are wingless, agile insects with tube-like mouthparts adapted to feeding on their hosts' blood. Their legs are long; the hind pair is well adapted to jumping. Smallpox is a viral infection spread quickly from saliva droplets. (Smallpox has been eradicated worldwide due to modern immunization techniques.)

FLYING CREATURES

Neither the Quran nor any authentic tradition provides evidence of the nature of the flying creatures mentioned in the above verse. If the hypothesis of an epidemic is correct, "flying creatures" such as jumping fleas may well have been the carriers of the infection.

One thing, however, is clear: whatever the nature of the doom that overtook the invading force, it was undoubtedly miraculous in the true sense of this word - namely, in the sudden, totally unexpected rescue that it brought to the distressed people of Mecca. The army of Abraha was destroyed to safeguard the Quraysh, as the custodians of the Kabah, amid the last Prophet, Muhammad, appeared. The security of the Quraysh is a metonym for the safety of the Kabah, fulfilling Abraham's prayer: "O my Sustainer! Make this land secure and grant its people fruitful sustenance" (2:126).

"Winter and summer journey:" It was Qusayy, the great grandfather of the Prophet, who standardized the two annual trade caravans to Yemen in winter and Syria in summer, on which Mecca's prosperity depended.

BIRTH OF MUHAMMAD

Muhammad is the most common Muslim masculine name. It means "Highly praised." In 570 CE, an orphan named Muhammad was born in the prosperous metropolis of Mecca. The family name bestowed on him was **Abu l-Qasim Muhammad ibn Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim** (Abu or father of, ibn or son of).

PART 3

THE LAST PROPHET MUHAMMAD (BIRTH TO PROPHETHOOD)

CHAPTER 13
THE TRAGIC CHILDHOOD

CARE OF HALIMAH IN THE DESERT

Muhammad's childhood was cradled in tragedy; he lost his father, Abdullah, almost at birth, who died at twenty-five. A few days after his death, Amina gave birth to Muhammad. Following the tradition of many Meccan families, Amina sent Muhammad away to a challenging but healthy life in the desert. A wet nurse from the Bedouin tribe looked after him. Epidemics were frequent, and infant mortality was high among the settled population. The Quraysh recently adopted a sedentary lifestyle. It was a custom of Arab towns to send their newborns to spend early childhood in the fresh air of the desert.

Halimah bint Abi Dhuayb (bint or daughter, Abi or father) and her husband were from the tribe of Sad b. Bakr is a subdivision of Hawazin, a large North Arabian tribe. Muhammad was eight days old when Halimah cared for him. The following is the best-known Ibn Ishaq story: The original text of Sirat Rasul Allah (Biography of Muhammad) by Ibn Ishaq did not survive. Yet it was one of Muhammad's earliest substantial biographies. However, much of the original text was copied into a work of his own by Ibn Hisham. How accurate these events are historically is unknown.

HALIMAH'S JOURNEY TO MECCA

The wet nurse of the Messenger of Allah used to tell how, with her husband and a small son she was suckling, she set out from her country along with some women of the clan of Sad b. Bakr seeking children to suckle. It was a drought year, she said, which left nothing. I set out on a she-ass I had, and with us was an old she-camel. By Allah, it gave us not a drop of milk. None of us slept at night because the little boy was crying from hunger; there was not

enough milk in my breasts, and the she-camel had nothing to satisfy him. We kept hoping for rain to end the misery. So, I set out on that ass; it was weak and emaciated and moved so slowly that it made things difficult for the others. At this point, we reached Mecca, looking for children to breastfeed.

CHOOSING INFANT MUHAMMAD IN THE LAST RESORT

Not a woman of ours but had the Messenger of Allah offered to her, but when she heard he was an orphan, she refused him. We thought of the present we would get from the child's father. We kept saying, an orphan. I wonder what his mother and grandfather are likely to do! So, we did not want him. Every woman in our party found a baby except me. When we agreed to leave for home, I said to my man, By Allah, I will go to that orphan and take him. By Allah, I don't want to go back with the other women without a child. He said it would not harm you; perhaps Allah will bless us through him. So, I took him, and my only reason was that I had not found another baby.

AMPLE MILK SUPPLY

After taking him, I returned to where my stuff was; then, I placed him in my bosom and gave him my breasts with whatever milk he wanted. He drank till he had enough, and his brother (her baby) drank too; they had enough, and they both slept. In the Arabian tradition, Halimah became his "milk-mother by nursing him." Her husband became Muhammad's "milk-father," and Muhammad was raised alongside their biological children as a "milk brother."

My husband got up and went to that old she-camel of ours, and to his surprise, she had plenty of milk. He milked her, and he and I drank our fill and then had a fantastic night. In the morning, my husband would say, By Allah, Halimah, you know you have taken a blessed creature; and I replied, By Allah, I hope so. Then we set

out, and I rode my she-ass carrying the baby, and she-ass moved so quickly that none of their asses could keep up with me, so my companions would say to me, confound you, Bint Abi Dhuayb, wait for us. Is this not the ass you rode on the outward journey? Yes, by Allah, the very same, I would reply. By Allah, something has happened to her, they would say. She continued: Then we came to our encampments in the country of the clan of Sad, and of all Allah's earth, I know no tract more barren.

After I brought him back there, the beasts (the she-camel) used to come back to me in the evening satisfied and full of milk. Yet nobody else found a single drop of milk in the udders of their beasts. So those of our tribe who were settled there used to say to their herders, confound you, go to the pasture where Bint Abi Dhuayb's herd spends time; but their beasts came back hungry and gave not a drop of milk, and mine were satisfied and full of milk. So, we continued to experience Allah's bounty and favor until the baby's two years were up, and I weaned him. He was more lustrous than any other boy, quite sturdy by two. We took him to his mother, but we were keen to have him stay among us for the blessing we saw in him. We spoke to his mother, and I said to her, perhaps you would leave my son with me until he grows up. I am afraid he may get the Meccan plague. We kept on insisting until she sent him back with us.

VISITATION OF TWO ANGELS

We returned with him, and some months after our coming, by Allah, he was among our lambs with his brother behind our tents. His brother came to us hurrying and said to his father and me. That brother of mine from Quraysh—two men in white clothes laid him down and split his body open, and they stirred him up inside. So, his father and I rushed out to him and found him standing, looking pale. I clasped him, and so did his father, and we asked him, what is wrong with you, my son? Two men in white clothes came to me,

he said. They split open my body and looked for something in it. I do not know what. We took him back to our tent, and his father said to me, Halimah, I am afraid something has happened to this boy; take him to his family before anything is noticed.

RETURNED TO MOTHER

So, we carried him and brought him to his mother. What made you come, nurse? She said, seeing you were so eager to have him with you. It was Allah who had made my son grow up, I replied. I have finished my job, and I am afraid he might have an accident, so I have taken him to you as you requested. She said that is not what worries you; tell me the truth about it, and she did not leave me alone until I told her the story. Then it is the devil you are afraid of, she asked. Yes, I said. No, by Allah, she replied, the devil has no hold on him; my son will be something; shall I tell you about him? Yes, I said. When I carried him, a light glowed out of me that lit up the palaces of Busra in Syria. When he was born, he placed his hands on the ground and lifted his head at his birth. Leave him now and have a safe journey home!

THE DEATH OF THE MOTHER AND THE GRANDFATHER

When Muhammad was six years old, his mother, a woman noted for her beauty, took him to Yathrib. It is the same city where Muhammad’s father died, and on their return journey, she also fell ill and died. He fell under the charge of his grandfather Abd al Muttalib, a hundred-year-old Hashemite clan chief. Muhammad’s father, Abdullah, was his youngest favorite son. He loved the little orphan boy greatly and used to say, "they must take care of that beautiful little boy; nothing in their family was more precious than him. Muhammad's grandfather saw with his life-worn eyes the return of lost Abdullah.

When Muhammad was eight or nine years old, his grandfather died. He left his young grandson under the charge of the eldest uncle, Abu Talib, He was a man of scarce means but many mouths to feed.

THE SHEPARD BOY

As a young lad, Muhammad felt obliged to do what he could to earn his livelihood. He spent his early years as a shepherd boy, pasturing sheep and goats alone in the mountainous uplands near Mecca. He became accustomed to the rigors of a nomadic existence. His bereavement made him sensitive to human suffering, and he was always ready to help others, especially the poor and the weak. The Prophet's difficult childhood as an orphan deeply affected him; later, even the Quran consoled the Prophet.

SURAH 93

AD-DUHA (THE BRIGHT MORNING HOURS)

ALLAH'S MERCY IS BOUND TO LIGHTEN SUFFERING

Consider the bright morning hours and the night when it grows still and dark. Your Sustainer has not forsaken you, nor scorns you. Indeed, the life to come will be better for you than this earlier part [of your life]! And, in due time thy Sustainer will grant you [what your heart desires], and you shall be well pleased. Has He not found you an orphan and sheltered you? And found you lost on your way and guided you? And found you in need, and provided you sufficiency? Therefore, you shall never wrong the orphan, and him that seeks [your] help you shall never rebuke. And of your Sustainer's blessings, you shall always speak. [**"**rather than thy suffering"] ***(93:1-11)***

The expression "bright morning hours" symbolizes the few and widely spaced periods of happiness in human life. The much longer

length of “the night when it grows still and dark” represents the extended period of sorrow or suffering that, as a rule, overshadows man’s existence in this world. As morning follows night, Allah’s mercy will lighten every sorrow. Allah has “willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy” (6:12 and 54). The tragic childhood brought a lot of sorrow to the Prophet, and even Allah had to console him with the promise of a better life. His marriage to Khadijah brought immense stability and satisfaction to domestic affairs, resulting in a brief period of happiness. However, with the beginning of Prophethood, his life was a constant hardship filled with struggle for survival till his death.

Though addressed to the Prophet, this surah has a broader application. It is meant to console every faithful man and woman suffering from the sorrows and bitter hardships that often afflict the good and the innocent. These hardships sometimes cause even the righteous to question Allah’s transcendental justice. In a sense, every human being is an orphan, as everyone is “created in a lonely state” (6:94) and “will appear before his Maker on Resurrection Day in a lonesome state” (19:95).

CHAPTER 14
JOURNEYS TO FOREIGN LANDS

LEARNING FROM THE CARAVAN TRADE

Muhammad traveled twice to Syria with his uncle Abu Talib as a boy. Ibn Ishaq described Muhammad's journey to Syria: "Later Abu Talib set out with a party to trade in Syria. When the preparations were complete and the party assembled, the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) showed his affection for him, so they say. Abu Talib was moved to pity and said: By Allah, I shall take him with me, and we shall never leave one another—or something like that. So, he took him with him. (At last) the party camped at Busra in Syria. There was a monk there in his cell called Bahira, who was versed in Christians' lore. From time immemorial, there was a monk well versed in their lore from a book that was there. As the story goes, as one grew old, he handed it on to another.

So, they camped near Bahira that year. Many times, previously, they had passed, and he had not spoken to them nor even showed himself to them. But this year, when they camped near his cell, he got abundant food for them because of something he had seen in his cell, they say; for, so the story goes. While in his cell, he had seen the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) among the party as they drew near and a white cloud shading him alone among the people. They descended in the shade of a tree near him, and he observed the cloud overshadowing the tree and its branches bending together over the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) so that he found shelter under them. When Bahira saw that, he went down from his cell, having already given orders for that food. When it was ready, he said, I have prepared food for you, O tribe of Quraysh, and I would like all of you to come, small and great, slave and free. One of them said to him, By Allah, O Bahira, what is the matter with you today? You never have at any time treated us thus,

although we have passed by you many times. True, it is as you say; but you are guests, and it has pleased me to honor you and prepare food for you that you may all eat of it. So, they went together to him; because of his youthful years, the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) was not with the party but stayed behind among their stuff beneath the tree. When Bahira looked among the party, he did not see the mark he was as familiar with and had found in his (book), so he said, O tribe of Quraysh, none of you is to stay away from my food. They told him, O Bahira, none of us has stayed away from you whom it befits to come to you, except a lad, the youngest of the party in years. He has stayed behind among the stuff. He said that is not right; call him and let him join in this feast with you. Then a man of Quraysh in the party said, by al-Lat and al-Uzza, it is shameful that the son of Abdallah b. Abd al-Muttalib should not be with us but should stay away from the feast. So, he went to him and embraced him and set him among the party. When Bahira saw him, he began to eye him keenly and observe the features of his body. Then, when the party had finished eating and had broken up, Bahira went up to him and said, Young man, I adjure you by al-Lat and al- Uzza to answer my questions. Bahira said that to him only because he had heard his people swearing by these two. They say that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) said to him, do not ask me by al-Lat and al-Uzza, for by Allah there is absolutely nothing I detest so much as these two. So, Bahira said to him, answer what I ask you in Allah's name. Ask what seems good to you, he said. So, Bahira began to ask him about certain particulars of his sleep condition, outward appearance, and affairs. Then the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless and preserve him) answered him, and what he said agreed with his description of him in Bahira’s (book). Bahira looked at his back and saw the seal of prophethood between his shoulders as described in his (book). Ibn Hisham said: It was like the imprint of a cupping glass. Ibn Ishaq continued: When finished, Bahira went up to Abu Talib and said, how is this youth related to you? He said, "he is my son." Bahira

told him, He is not your son; this young man's father cannot be alive. He said; indeed, he is my brother's son. What did his father do? He died, he said, while his mother was pregnant with him. True, he said; return to your own country with your nephew and take care of him against the Jews, for by Allah, if they see him and know what I know about him, they will desire evil, for great importance is in store for this your nephew. So, hurry to your country with him. So, his uncle Abu Talib set out with him quickly and soon reached Mecca on the completion of their trade with Syria. Muhammad keenly observed how his uncle traded, bartered, bought and sold the business. This experience would help him to land a job with his future wife, Khadijah. On his return to Mecca, Muhammad continued his solitary life as before.

EDUCATION

Muhammad never had a formal education; he either did not know how to read or write or had minimal writing skills. Arabia was just introduced to writing. Life in the desert as a shepherd boy, with all its experiences or foreign travels, were all his education. He is alone deep down in the bosom of the wilderness, and he must grow up alone with nature and his thoughts.

PERSONALITY

One hears of Muhammad's beauty: his pleasing, honest face, florid brown complexion, and beaming brown eyes. He had this black swelling vein in his brow, a feature of the Hashim family. From an early age, he was remarked as a thoughtful man, and they noted that he always meant something. He was serious, truthful, yet amiable, cordial, and companionable. Silent when there was nothing to be said but pertinent, wise, and sincere when he spoke, always throwing light on the matter.

WEAPONS TRAINING

Abu Talib ensured that Muhammad, Abbas, and Hamzah had weapons training. Muhammad, being average built, showed a marked aptitude for archery and had the potential of being an excellent bowman like his ancestors, Ishmael, and Abraham.

THE SACRILEGIOUS WAR

In those years, Quraysh was not involved in fighting except in a spasmodic conflict known as a sacrilegious war. This is because it started during Dhul-Qadah, one of the sacred months when war and bloodshed were forbidden.

A grand annual fair was held in Ukaz, close to Mecca. The fair presented a scene of decadent pleasure with its dancing girls, gaming tables, drunken orgies, poetic contests, and masochism shows, frequently ending in brawls and bloodshed. At one of the fairs, fighting broke out among the various local tribes. A drunken man from the tribe of Kinanah treacherously murdered a man from Amir, one of the Hawazin tribes of Najd. He took refuge in Khaybar's impregnable fortress. Tribal honor demanded revenge, so a fight broke out between Kinanah and Amir men. The Quraysh were involved because they were allies of Kinanah. This war continued for several years, and actual fighting occurred for only a few days. Muhammad accompanied his uncles to one of the first battles, and since he was too young to fight, he was allowed to help by gathering arrows and handing them to his uncles to shoot back at the enemy. The Quraysh and their allies had the worst day in the subsequent battle. Muhammad, now a teenager, was allowed to show his skills as a bowman and was much praised for his valor. The Quraysh were ultimately victorious after sporadic fighting for many years.

THE LAW OF RETALIATION

The unholy war exposed the inadequacy of the desert law for the settled communities. As a result of the sovereign independence of the tribes, there was no supreme law in the desert. It was impossible to maintain law and order over the vast Arabian steppe. Tribal affiliation was the basis of identity and protection. The threat of family or group vendetta, the law of retaliation, was vital in a society lacking central political authority. The desert libertarian code was life for life, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

The leaders of Mecca had traveled to Syria and saw the relative justice in the Roman Empire. There was no such law system in Arabia where a crime victim could seek redress. There was growing discontent among the Meccans about law and order, and Quraysh was ready to act. Soon, Quraysh's sense of justice was tested by a scandalous incident in Mecca.

HILF-UL-FUDHUL

One of the prominent Meccan merchants refused to pay the debt to a Yemeni trader who was visiting Mecca. It was perhaps an attempt to stop Yemenite traders from coming to Mecca, adding to local competition. There was a vigorous reaction from a particular section of Mecca's society to the apparent injustice. The Yemenite trader had no recourse due to Pre-Islamic Arabia's lack of justice system. Thus, at the suggestion of Zubayr, an uncle of the Prophet, a League was formed to prevent disturbances of the peace. It was formed to help oppressed victims, uphold commercial integrity, and protect travelers. Muhammad took a very active interest in the functioning of this chivalry pact, which came into being from a settlement known as Hilf-ul-Fudhul. The Meccan merchant was compelled to pay his debt to the Yemenite trader. The League continued to function for half a century following Islam's inception.

CHAPTER 15
MARRIAGE TO KHADIJAH

Learning about the caravan trade: Muhammad was now more than twenty years old, and as time passed, he received invitations to join one of his relatives on their travel abroad. At last, he received an offer to take responsibility for the goods of a merchant who was unable to travel. His success in this capacity opened more opportunities for business trips. Muhammad's companions named him **Al Amin**, the faithful, based on those who entrusted their merchandise to him. Muhammad was known as a man of truth and fidelity, true in what he did, spoke, and thought.

Khadijah: A wealthy widow named Khadijah also heard many favorable things about her distant cousin, a young man named Muhammad. She was the daughter of Khuwaylid ibn Asad, one of the leaders of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca. Khadijah was a successful businesswoman in her own right, a rare exception in a society where females were considered private property**.** She was an activist who fed and clothed the poor. She was an entrepreneur whose help laid the foundations of a religion.

Muhammad's trip to Syria: She offered Muhammad double the customary fee and the service of a young man named Maysarah to accompany him on the journey. He was twenty-five years old when he entered Khadijah's service and headed north to Syria in Maysarah's company. When they reached Bostra in southern Syria, Muhammad took shelter under the same tree as when he first visited Syria with Abu Talib 15 years ago. The tree stood near the cell of a monk named Nestor. Perhaps Bahira died and was replaced by Nestor. Maysarah reported that the monk came out of his cell and asked: “Who is the man beneath that tree?” “He is a man of Quraysh,” answered Maysarah. Nestor replied: "No one but a prophet is sitting under the tree.” On his way home towards noon,

Maysarah had a clear vision of two angels shading Muhammad from the sun. It did not come as a surprise to Maysarah because he realized he was in the company of a man unlike any other he had seen before. Muhammad managed this business trip with fidelity and adroitness, and Khadijah's gratitude and regard for him grew. This encouraged Khadijah to employ Muhammad again, sending him to Yemen, a land rich in coffee beans.

Khadijah's marriage proposal: The story of their marriage is altogether a graceful, intelligible one, as told by Arab authors. Khadijah was twice widowed and turned down several Quraysh noblemen who asked for her hand, believing they were after her wealth. She had no intention of marrying a third time after her first two husbands were killed in battle. As a woman, she hated the thought of widowhood again. But the accounts relayed to her by her trusted servant Maysarah regarding her new employee Muhammad made her reconsider her insistence on never marrying again. Khadijah confided her feelings to her friend Nufaysa, daughter of Umayyah, that she had fallen in love with Muhammad.

Nufaysa asked Muhammad why he had not yet married. "I have no means to marry," he answered. "But if means were given to you," she replied, "and if you were bidden to an alliance where there is beauty, wealth, nobility, and abundance, would you not consent?" "Who is she?" he excitedly inquired. "Khadijah," said Nufaysa. "And how could such a marriage be mine?" he asked. "Leave that to me!" said Nufaysa. "For my part, I am willing," said Muhammad. Khadijah was fifteen years older than him. She was 40 (in another tradition, her age is 27 years), and Muhammad was only 25 years old.

Marriage made in heaven: It was truly a marriage made in heaven. It was not until he, as a handsome and dreamy youth, stirred the heart of his elderly but well-to-do employer—the widow Khadijah—that he had the opportunity to devote himself to his dreams. His marriage to Khadijah brought him freedom from

economic care and leisure for spiritual contemplation. He seems to have lived in the most affectionate, peaceable, wholesome way with this wedded benefactress, loving her truly and her alone. They were the ideal couple, and their marriage is considered a paragon of family relationships, practices, and attitudes.

It gave the Prophet the firm faith and energetic devotion of an able and enthusiastic woman. She became his first convert and his most loyal supporter in the face of determined and distressing opposition. During the long periods ahead in which the world turned desolate before Muhammad's eyes, and no one believed in him, Khadijah remained steadfast at his side. She kept alive the thin flame of hope. Allah's tradition was to say, "Comforting him through her, for she made his burden light."

She won, in return, a place in his affections that no other woman could usurp. The most incredible aspect of Muhammad's marriage is not his ten years of polygamy in Yathrib but his twenty-five years of monogamy in Mecca, something practically unheard of. Muhammad never forgot this benevolent Khadijah. Long afterward, Aishah, his favorite young wife, a woman who indeed distinguished herself by all manner of qualities, this brilliant young Aishah was questioning him: "Now, am I not better than Khadijah? She was a widow, old, and had lost her looks. You love me better than you did her?" "No, by Allah!" answered the Prophet: "No, by Allah! She believed in me when no one else would. I had but one friend in the whole world, and she was that!" Her death was one of the severest blows to the rejected Prophet of Mecca.

Muslims often refer to Khadijah as "Mother of the Believers." She is one of the most influential female figures in Islam. Her financial contribution and psychological support to the Prophet helped sustain the propagation of the new faith. The Prophet said: "A thankful heart, a mindful tongue, and a virtuous wife who helps man in worldly and otherworldly affairs are better than whatever people treasure."

ADDITION OF ZAYD

The bridegroom left his uncle’s house and lived in his bride's house. On the day of his marriage, Khadijah made him a gift of one of her slaves, a fifteen-year-old named Zayd. He was seized by a raiding party and sold into slavery. Zayd belonged to the southern tribe of Kalb, and his mother belonged to Tayy. Zayd was proud of his ancestry. When his father Harithah and his brother came to Mecca to ransom Zayd, Muhammad told them: “Let him choose, and if he prefers you, he is yours without a ransom." Then he called Zayd and asked him to decide between his family and Muhammad. Zayd said: “I would not choose any man over thee. Thou art unto me as my father and mother.” Later, Muhammad set him free and treated him like his own son.

BIOLOGICAL CHILDREN

While Muhammad and Khadijah's marriage proved happy and blessed in every sense, the deaths of those around him still haunted him. They had two sons, and both died in infancy. The eldest son's name was Qasim, and Muhammad was known as Abu l-Qasim (the father of Qasim). Khadijah gave birth to four daughters: Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Um Kulthum, and Fatima.

It is more likely that Khadijah was much younger than reported if she gave birth to six children after marrying the Prophet. Having many children after forty is unusual, if not impossible. By 45, it becomes increasingly difficult to get pregnant naturally.

Shiah sources argue that Zaynab, Ruqayyah, and Umm Kulthum were either from Khadijah's previous marriages or daughters of Hala, Khadijah's sister. After Hala's death, Muhammad adopted her daughters. According to Abbas and Shia sources, Fatimah was Muhammad's only biological daughter. Fatimah was later married

to Ali ibn al Talib, Muhammad's first cousin. Ali was the first of the Twelve Shiah Imams and, in the Twelver's view, the rightful successor to Muhammad. He was followed by male descendants through his daughter Fatimah and cousin Ali. Shiah theology says the Prophet's successor had to be from his bloodline—an anti-democratic concept against the Quran's teachings. No mention is made in the Quran of bloodline or hereditary as the only criteria for Muslim Ummah's leadership. Consultation with the community is necessary for all matters of common concern. *(42:38)*

ADDITION OF ALI

Abu Talib had more children than he could support. Muhammad asked his uncle Abbas for help. He was a successful merchant and close to Muhammad as they grew up together. With the consent of Abu Talib, Abbas took charge of Jafar, who was fifteen, while Muhammad took Ali, the youngest son of Abu Talib. The immediate family of Muhammad and Khadijah included four daughters, Zayd and Ali, who were about the same age as Ruqayyah.

Until middle age, Muhammad led a private, peaceful, and prosperous life. However, he did not wholly withdraw from the public life of Mecca. He revived the league formed many years ago to protect widows, orphans, and helpless strangers. Yet despite his concern for others, he remained removed from them in outlook and ways, isolated amid an effete and chaotic society.

REBUILDING OF KABAH

During the rebuilding of the Kabah (destroyed during a flood), a dispute broke out among various clans about who would have the honor of placing the Black Stone, a celestial object, in its place. Each clan wanted the privilege of lifting the Black Stone into its place. The deadlock lasted for four or five days, and preparation was made for the battle when the oldest man among them proposed a

solution. He said: “Take as an arbiter between you, about that wherein ye differ, the first man who shall enter through the gate of the Mosque." The precinct around the Kabah is called a mosque, in *Arabic, masjid,* a place of prostration. The first person to enter the Mosque was Muhammad, and his arrival was greeted with a sigh of relief and satisfaction. When they explained the matter to him, he said: “Bring me a cloak.” And when they brought it, he placed the Black Stone in the middle of the cloak. “Let each clan take hold of the garment border and lift it altogether.” When they raised the Black Stone to the correct height, Muhammad lifted the Stone with his own hands and placed it into the niche. Above it, the building was completed. Muhammad mediated the dispute successfully and averted bloodshed. News of Muhammad’s conflict resolution skills spread far and wide. Later, he was invited to emigrate to Medina to serve as a chief arbitrator or judge in a bitter feud between its Arab tribes.

CHAPTER 16
THE ORIGIN OF ISLAM

THE MOUNT HIRA CAVE

In a town teeming with commercial speculators and in a masculine world where almost every Arab participated in armed combat, Muhammad's early career appears comparatively uneventful. In a climate where men grow old prematurely, he quickly passed the age of adventure and ambition. There were fifteen years of preparation and spiritual communion after his marriage before his ministry began.

By now, Muhammad had established himself as a man of substance, respected in the community, and admired for his integrity, generosity, and good sense. His future seemed assured, yet his spirit was uneasy and became increasingly so as he approached middle age. While peering into the mysteries of good and evil, he could not accept the crudeness, superstition, and fratricide accepted as usual. Seething, simmering like a furnace of thoughts, this deep, fiery heart reached out to Allah. He began to experience powerful psychic signs in the form of premonitions and visions. Not much is known about these experiences. Nature was preparing him for some momentous event. The immediate result of these visions was that solitude became dear to him. There was a huge barren rock on Mecca's outskirts known as Mount Hira. In this rock was a cave, which Muhammad frequented. He withdrew into the seclusion of Mount Hira's cave, and there committed himself to ardent devotions consisting of long vigils and prayers. His vigils often lasted the entire night and sometimes many days.

Soon, from this mountain cave came the most remarkable phrase of the Arabic language: the deep, electrifying cry, which rallied people to the limits of the known world: “La ilaha illa Allah!” There is no

Allah but Allah! Since “Allah” in Arabic means “the Allah,” this could also be translated as “There is no Allah but Allah!”

READ

When Muhammad was forty years old, he had an overwhelming, mystical experience. One night at Mount Hira, the Angel of Revelation, Archangel Gabriel, suddenly appeared to him. When the angel of revelation said, "Read," Muhammad initially thought he had to read the actual script, which he could not do due to his illiteracy. He answered, “I cannot read.” In his own words, the angel “seized me and pressed me to himself so hard until all strength was taken out of me.” The same sequence of events was repeated twice. The third time, the angel seized Muhammad and said:

Read in the name of your Sustainer, who has created - created man out of a germ-cell! Read - for your Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught [man] the use of the pen - taught man what he did not know! (96:1-5)

KNOWLEDGE: THE FOUNDATION OF FAITH

In a sudden illumination, Muhammad understood that he was called upon to ‘read’—that is, to receive and understand Allah’s message to man. The term *“Iqra”* or read is a poignant reminder that the very foundation of the Islamic faith is rooted in knowledge and scholarship. “The pen” is a symbol for all knowledge recorded by writing, which explains the symbolic summons, “Read.” Man’s unique ability to transmit, by written records, his thoughts, experiences, and insights endow all human knowledge with a cumulative character. Man is “taught by Allah,” Who creates him as a biological entity and implants in him the will and the ability to acquire knowledge. Allah’s teaching of man also signifies His revealing, through the prophets, spiritual truths and moral standards. These truths cannot be unequivocally established through human experience and reasoning alone. The first revelation

alludes to man's miraculous evolution from a germ cell or a fertilized female ovum. This contrasts his primitive and simple biological origins with his exemplary intellectual and spiritual potential.

CONFUSION AND DISBELIEF

There is controversy about the Prophet's reaction after he received his first revelation. The common version is as follows:

Arousing from his trance, the Prophet felt that the words he had heard were inscribed on his soul. He rushed from the cave, and halfway down the mountain slope, he heard a voice above him: “O Muhammad, thou art the messenger of Allah, and I am Gabriel.” He looked up and saw the angel filling the whole horizon. He hastened home to his wife and said, “O Khadijah! He would not have believed it has become either a soothsayer or possessed-mad." The Prophet told her what he had seen. She said, “Rejoice, O dear husband, and be of good cheer. In whose hands is Khadijah’s life? He is my witness that you will be the Prophet of these people.”

CONSULTATION WITH WARAQAH IBN NAWFAL

Khadijah consulted her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian who was translating Evangel into Arabic. When she told him what Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah broke into these words:

“Holy, Holy! By Him who dominates Waraqah’s soul, this must be the Great Spirit that spoke to Moses. Muhammad must be the Prophet of this nation. Tell him that he must be firm.” Later, while visiting the Kabah, the Prophet saw Waraqah also present there. He greeted the old blind man, and Waraqah said to him: “Tell me, O son of my brother, what thou hast seen and heard.” The Prophet told him, and Waraqah added: “Thou wilt be called a liar and ill-treated, and they will cast thee out and make war upon thee. "If I live to see

that day, Allah knoweth I will help His cause." Then he leaned toward the Prophet and kissed his forehead.

THE NIGHT OF DESTINY

Behold, we have bestowed a [divine writ] upon the Night of Destiny from on high. And what could make you realize what the Night of Destiny is? It is better than a thousand months. The hosts of angels descend, bearing divine inspiration from their Sustainer. From all [evil] that may happen, it secures until the rise of dawn. (97:1-5) Consider daybreak and ten nights! (89:1-2) Consider the night as it runs its course! Considering all this, could there be, to anyone endowed with reason, a [more] solemn evidence of the truth? (of Allah's oneness) ***(89:4-5)***

The Quran was first revealed during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic Lunar Calendar. Muslims know this blessed month as the month of fasting. The first revelation came on a blessed night known as *Laylat al-Qadr*, the 'Night of Power' or the 'Night of Destiny.' The exact night on which *Laylat al-Qadr* takes place is unknown, but what is known is that it falls on one of the odd nights in the last ten days of Ramadan. It is speculated that it was the twenty-seventh day of Ramadan. The ten nights allude to the last third of Ramadan, during which Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation. Above is the earliest use of the term "**divine inspiration**" in a conscious realization of the sanctity of the night of destiny. This secures the believer from all spiritual evil and acts as a shield against unworthy thoughts. **Daybreak** symbolizes man's inner awakening. Therefore, the night of spiritual darkness is bound to run its course and disappear as soon as men become truly conscious of Allah.

THE ALTERNATE NARRATIVE

Some Islamic theologians believe that the above description of confusion and disbelief on the part of the Prophet is fiction.

Waraqah's consultation is also part of this legend. They base their argument on the description in surah 53, An Najam:

THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE ANGEL OF REVELATION

Consider this unfolding [of Allah's message] as it comes down from high! This fellowman of yours has not gone astray, nor is he deluded. He does not speak out of his desire. He conveys to you an inspiration he received from a mighty one. [Angel Gabriel] ***[An angel] endowed with surpassing power, who manifested himself in his true shape and nature, appearing in the horizon's lofty part, drew near, and came close, until he was but two bow-lengths away, or even closer. And thus [Allah] revealed to His servant whatever He deemed proper to reveal. The servant's heart did not deceive him about what he saw. Will you, then, contend with him about what he saw? (53:1-12) [And withal], the eye did not waver, nor did it stray, truly he saw some of the most profound of his Sustainer's symbols. (53:17-18) For this fellowman of yours is not a madman, and he indeed beheld [the angel] on the clear horizon. He is not one to begrudge others with the knowledge [of whatever was revealed to him] of that which is beyond human perception. (81:22-24) Has it, then, never occurred to them that there is no madness whatsoever in [this] fellowman? He is only a plain warner. (7:184)***

Muhammad a Plain Warner: "He is a madman," was the taunt with which most of Muhammad's contemporaries greeted the beginning of his preaching and with which they continued to deride him for many years. Because he enunciated a message that differed radically from anything to which the Meccans had been accustomed, the Prophet was considered mad by many of his unbelieving contemporaries. The stress on him being "their fellow man" is meant to emphasize the fact that he is human and thus to

counteract any possible tendency of his followers to invest him with superhuman qualities.

The graphic **description of the angel's** approach, based on an ancient Arabian figure of speech, conveys that the Angel of Revelation became a perceptible, almost tangible presence. "Allah only revealed what He deemed right to reveal" implies that even to His chosen prophets, Allah does not entirely unveil the ultimate mysteries of existence, life, and death. This is because of the purpose for which He created the universe or the nature of the universe itself.

The Prophet was fully aware of the spiritual character of his experience. There was no conflict between his conscious mind and his intuitive perception. It was a truly spiritual experience, which could only be conveyed to others by symbols and allegories that skeptics readily dismiss as fancies, "**contending with him as to what he saw."** In this Quranic allusion, the Prophet is said to have been "made to see" (i.e., given to understand) some, but not all, of the ultimate truths. It is to emphasize Muhammad's absolute humanity that he is characterized as this fellow human being of yours. To prevent any deification. These early visions sustained the Prophet in the face of mockery, calumny, and persecution.

SURAH 68

AL-QALAM (THE PEN)

The Prophet also received reassurance from Heaven in the form of a second or third revelation in chronological order:

Consider the pen and all that they write [therewith]! Thou art not, by thy Sustainer's grace, a madman! And, indeed, thine shall be a reward never-ending for, behold, thou keepest indeed to a sublime way of life. And [one day] thou shalt see, and they [who now deride thee] shall see, which of you was bereft of reason. Verily, thy Sustainer alone is fully aware of who has strayed from

His path, Just as He alone is fully aware of those who have found the right way. (68:1-7)

The mention of “the pen” recalls the first revelation ("The Germ Cell") to emphasize its symbolic significance. In its broader sense, the above passage relates not to the Prophet but to all who followed or will follow him. They base their moral valuations on their belief in Allah and life after death, which many skeptics consider delusional.

THE PURPOSE OF THE DEVINE WRIT

Consider this divine writ, clear in itself and showing the truth! From on high, We have bestowed it on a blessed night, for We have always warned [man]. During that night, We drew a distinction between all things [good and evil] at the behest of Ourselves, in wisdom. For, We have always sent [Our messages of guidance] in pursuance of thy Sustainer’s grace [unto man]. He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing, the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them if you could grasp it with inner certainty! There is no deity save Him, and He grants life and deals with death. He is your Sustainer and the Sustainer of your forebears. (44:2-8)

The Quran's message is the continuation and the culmination of all divine revelations carried on since the dawn of human consciousness. Its purpose has always been Allah's warning not to abandon himself to mere material ambitions and pursuits. This will cause him to lose sight of spiritual values. The revelation of the Quran, symbolized by that “blessed night,” provides man with a standard to discern between good and evil. It leads to spiritual growth through an ever-deepening realization of Allah’s existence on the one hand and spiritual blindness and self-destruction on the other. One can achieve inner certainty that Allah exists if he truly desires and prays for it.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), in his essay, “The Hero as Prophet,” said of Muhammad’s revelation:

One day, Muhammad told his wife Kadijah that by the unspeakable special favor of Heaven, he had now found it all out; he was in doubt and darkness no longer but saw it all. That all these Idols and Formulas were nothing but miserable bits of wood; that there was One Allah in and over all; and we must leave all Idols and look to Him. That Allah is great, and that there is nothing else great! He is the Reality. Wooden Idols are not real; He is real. He made us at first and sustains us yet; we and all things are but the shadow of Him; a transitory garment veiling the Eternal Splendor. “Allah Akbar, Allah is great;”—and then also “Islam,” That we must submit to Allah. “If this be Islam,” says Goethe, “do we not all live in Islam?” Yes, all of us that have any moral life; we all live so.

Islam means in its way, Denial of Self, Annihilation of Self. This is yet the highest Wisdom that Heaven has revealed to our Earth. Such light had come, as it could, to illuminate the darkness of this Arab soul. A confused dazzling splendor as of life and Heaven, in the great darkness which threatened to be death: he called it a revelation and the angel Gabriel—who of us yet can know what to call it? It is the "inspiration of the Almighty" that giveth us understanding. To know, to get into the truth of anything, is ever a mystic act—of which the best Logics can but babble on the surface. "Is not Belief the true Allah-announcing Miracle?" says Novalis—That Muhammad's whole soul, set in flame with this grand Truth vouchsafed him, should feel as if it were important and the only important thing, was very natural. That Providence had unspeakably honored him by revealing it, saving him from death and darkness; that he, therefore, was bound to make known the same to all creatures: this is what was meant by "Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah;" this too is not without its true meaning.

CHAPTER 17
EXCERPTS FROM THE EARLY MECCAN SURAHS

The Predominant themes of the early Meccan Surahs are:

- Monotheism, Allah's goodness, and His power.
- Social Concerns: suffering due to poverty.
- Self-sufficiency.
- Eschatology: the part of theology concerned with death, judgment, and the soul's final destiny.

HIATUS IN REVELATION

After the Prophet's early revelations, a period elapsed during which he received no revelation at all. The length of this break cannot be determined reliably. One can imagine the spiritual anguish, mental doubts, and waves of misgivings that followed this experience. Was the voice Allah's? Would it come again? Above all, what would it require?

It was due to the moral support of his wife, Khadijah and her unwavering faith in his prophetic mission that he did not entirely lose his courage and hope. Like Isaiah (6:1-13) and other great prophets of the Hebrew scripture before him, Muhammad was overwhelmed by his experience of the Holy. He struggled to understand that experience without the benefit of the religious context of the Biblical Prophets. To the Prophet's credit, he scrutinized his initial encounter with an angel.

Walking alone in the hills, hoping for some relief, he came to a steep precipice. His foot dislodged a stone, which tumbled into the abyss. He was seized by an impulse to follow it when the voice of an angel intervened, saying: "Muhammad, you are the true Prophet of

Allah!" At the end of the hiatus period, the Prophet had a vision of angelic force during the revelation of Surah 74.

SURAH 74

AL MUDDATHTHIR (THE ENFOLDED ONE)

When the Prophet saw an angel "sitting between heaven and earth," the seventy-fourth surah (The Enfolded One) was revealed. From then on, in Prophet Muhammad's own words, "revelation became intense and continuous." Despite its early origin and brevity, the surah outlines practically all the fundamental concepts to which the Quran is devoted:

ARISE AND WARN

One night, when the Prophet was lying wrapped in his cloak, he received a Divine Command stern and urgent, bidding him to warn men of the Day of Judgment:

O THOU [in thy solitude] enfolded! Arise and warn! And glorify thy Sustainer's greatness! And purify thine inner self! And shun all defilement! And do not seek thyself to gain through giving but turn in patience to thy Sustainer. And [warn all men] when the trumpet-call [of resurrection] is sounded that very Day shall be a day of anguish, not of ease, for all who [now] deny the truth! (74:1-10)

There is a literal and abstract meaning to the expression "**enfolded**." In its literal sense, it refers to the Prophet's habit of covering himself with a cloak or blanket when he felt a revelation was about to begin. Metaphorically, it alludes to Muhammad's intense desire for solitude before his prophetic mission. It explains the subsequent call, "**Arise and warn**," or give up your privacy and stand up before the entire world as a preacher and warner and purify your heart or inner self of all that is blameworthy. It is the earliest Quranic occurrence of the expression **"kafir"** (for all those who knowingly

deny the truth). The trumpet call of resurrection will end the world as we know it, and all [creatures] in the heavens and on earth will fall senseless.

THE SIN OF ARROGANCE AND FALSE PRIDE

What, then, is amiss with them [with so many people who refuse to listen to the truth] ***that they turn away from all warnings, as though they were terrified asses fleeing from a lion? Yea, everyone claims he [himself] ought to be given revelations unfolded! They do not [believe in and, hence, do not] fear life to come. This is an admonition, and whoever wills may take it to heart. But they [who do not believe in the life to come] will not take it to heart unless Allah so wills, [for] He is the Fount of all Allah-consciousness and forgiveness. (74:49-56)***

Every one of them wants to have wide-open scriptures amenable to understanding without the intervention of a prophet. The above is the earliest illustration of the arrogance of false pride to which the Quran often refers. The sin of vanity is an original sin committed by Satan for which he was banished from the presence of Allah. However, only Allah can bestow His grace on them by making their minds and hearts receptive to the truth to make the right choice.

SURAH 73

AL-MUZZAMMIL (THE ENWRAPPED ONE)

This Surah is almost certainly the fourth in revelation order. Another night, the Prophet was awakened by the command, telling him the intensity of worship expected of him. This confirmed the great burden of responsibility about to be laid upon him. The entire Surah is reproduced below.

RECITE THE QURAN AND CONCENTRATE ON ITS MEANING

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace: ***O, thou enwrapped one! Keep awake [in prayer] at night, all but a small part of one-half thereof or make it a bit less than that or add to it [at will]; and [during that time] recite the Quran calmly and distinctly, with thy mind attuned to its meaning. Behold, We shall bestow a weighty message [and], verily, the hours of night, the mind most strongly and speak with the clearest voice, whereas by day a long chain of doings is thy portion. But [whether by night or by day], remember thy Sustainer's name, and devote thyself unto Him with utter devotion. The Sustainer of the east and the west [is He]: there is no deity save Him: hence, ascribe to Him alone the power to determine thy fate, and endure with patience whatever people may say [against thee], and avoid them with graceful avoidance. (73:1-10)***

HELL, AS A FINAL ABODE

Leave Me alone [to deal] with those who give the lie to the truth and enjoy the blessings of life [without any thought of Allah]. Bear thou with them for a while for, behold, heavy fetters [await them] with Us, a blazing fire, food that chokes, and grievous suffering. On that Day, the earth and the mountains will be convulsed and [crumble to] become like a sand-dune on the move! (73:11-14)

Heavy fetters, blazing fire, food that chokes, and grievous suffering are the four symbols of hell.

THE DAY OF RESURRECTION

Behold, [O men], We sent you an apostle who shall bear witness to the truth before you. Even as We sent an apostle unto Pharaoh who rebelled against the apostle. We took him to task with a crushing grip. How, then, if you refuse to acknowledge the truth,

will you protect yourselves on that Day which shall turn the hair of children grey, [the Day] on which the skies shall be rent asunder, [and] His promise [of resurrection] fulfilled? This, verily, is a reminder, let him who wills, then set out on the way to his Sustainer! (73:15-19)

MODERATION IN WORSHIP

Behold, [O Prophet], thy Sustainer knows that thou keepest awake [in prayer] nearly two-thirds of the night, half of it, or a third of it, with some of those who follow you. And Allah determines the measure of night and day, is aware that you would never grudge it, and He turns towards you in His grace. Recite as much of the Quran as you are able with ease. He knows that in time there will be among you sick people, others who will go about the land in search of Allah's bounty, and others who will fight for Allah's cause. Recite, then, [only] as much of it as you may do with ease, be constant in prayer, spend in charity, and [thus] lend unto Allah a goodly loan. For whatever good deed you may offer up on your behalf, you shall find it with Allah - yea, better, and richer in reward. And [always] seek Allah's forgiveness, behold, Allah is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace! (73:20)

The sentence, "others who will fight in Allah's cause is expressed in the future tense: "in time there will be" - and must be understood as a prediction of future circumstances. The above passage stresses the necessity of avoiding exaggeration, even in devotions.

RECEIVING AND UNDERSTANDING THE DIVINE WRIT

Move not your tongue in haste, [repeating the revelation's words]: it is for Us to gather it [in your heart], and to cause it to be read [as it ought to be read]. Thus, when We recite it, you will follow its wording [with all your mind], and then We will clarify its meaning. (75:16-19).

The Prophet feared he might forget some revealed words unless he repeated them immediately after revelation. Allah assured him that He would aid him in remembering it and read its message with mind and heart. Since Allah reveals the Quran and bestows upon man the ability to understand it, He attributes its recitation to Himself.

Although addressed to the Prophet, this passage has a wider significance. It applies to every believer who reads, listens to, or studies the Quran. These verses emphasize the importance of imbibing the divine word slowly, patiently, giving full thought to the meaning of every word and phrase. One should not remain satisfied with the mere beautiful sound of the Quran without understanding or paying adequate attention to its message.

MONOTHEISM (ALLAH'S UNITY)

Early passages deal mainly with fundamental ideas such as the reorientation of pure monotheism evident in many early Meccan surahs, especially Surah 1, Al-Fatihah (The Opening). There are several verses expounding this theme of Allah's unity, goodness, and power; this, by far, is the most prominent aspect of the message of the early passages.

There is only one Allah, Allah. He is All-powerful, the Creator of all, the Everlasting. Allah Muhammad preached was not new to the Meccans. Indeed, He was the principal deity of a group enshrined in their al-Kabah's leading sanctuary of Hijaz. The objection was not to Him but to this exclusiveness required in worshipping Him. Pre-Islamic Arabs believed in a supreme Allah besides many other deities. The following are some examples of early Meccan surahs:

SURAH 1

AL-FATIHAH (THE OPENING)

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: ALL PRAISE is due to Allah alone, the Sustainer of all

the worlds, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace, Lord of the Day of Judgment! Thee alone do we worship, and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. Guide us the straight way, the way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings. Not of those who have been condemned [by Thee], nor of those who go astray! (1:1-7)

This Surah is called "The Opening of the Divine Writ," "The Essence of the Divine Writ," "The Surah of Praise," "The Foundation of the Quran," and is known by several other names as well. In a condensed form, it contains all the fundamental principles of the Quran. It is repeated several times in each of the five daily prayers.

SURAH 112

AL-IKHLAS: (THE DECLARATION OF [ALLAH'S] PERFECTION)

The Prophet described this Surah as "equivalent to one-third of the whole Quran." It was revealed in the early Mecca period.

In The Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: SAY: "He is the One Allah: Allah the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of all Beings. "He begets not, and neither is He begotten, and nothing could be compared with Him." (112:1-4)

SURAH 95

THE FIG (AL TIN)

ETHICAL UNITY

Consider the fig, olive, Mount Sinai, and this land secure! (95:1-3)

The keyword is derived from the mention of the fig (i.e., fig tree) in the first verse. The ninety-fifth surah (The fig) also belongs to the

early Mecca period. It formulates a fundamental moral truth that is common to all true religious teachings.

The fig and the olive symbolize the lands in which these trees predominate: i.e., the countries bordering the eastern part of the Mediterranean, especially Palestine and Syria. Most of the Abrahamic prophets mentioned in the Quran lived and preached in these lands. These two species of trees may be taken as metonyms for the religious teachings voiced by along line of Allah-inspired men, culminating in the person of the last Judaic Prophet, Jesus. On the other hand, Mount Sinai specifically stresses Moses' apostleship as the religious law valid before and until Prophet Muhammad. In its essentials, binding on Jesus was revealed to Moses on a mountain in the Sinai Desert. "**This land secure**" signifies Mecca, where Muhammad, the Last Prophet, was born and received his divine call. Thus, these verses draw our attention to the fundamental ethical unity underlying the genuine teachings of the three historical phases of monotheistic religion. These teachings are personified by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad.

MANIFESTATION OF ALLAH'S POWER AND GOODNESS

Allah's goodness and power are seen in many natural phenomena. The following are some early Meccan surahs describing Allah's goodness and power:

MIRACULOUS CREATION FROM AN EMBRYO

The first revelation speaks of man's miraculous creation from an embryo. (96:1-5)

NAY, VERILY, these [messages] are but a reminder and whoever is willing may remember Him in [the light of His] revelations blest with dignity, lofty and pure, [borne] by the hands of messengers noble and most virtuous. (80:11-16) [But only too often] a man destroys himself how stubbornly he denies the truth! [Does the

man ever consider] out of what substance [Allah] creates him? He creates him out of a drop of sperm and determines his nature, making it easy for him to go through life. In the end, He causes him to die and brings him to the grave. If it be His will, He shall raise him again to life, nay, but [man] has never yet fulfilled what He has enjoined upon him! (80:17-23)

From Adam to this day, every human being has shortcomings. This is in tune with the Quranic doctrine that perfection is an attribute of Allah alone.

ALLAH-GIVEN BOUNTY

Let man, then, consider [the sources of] his food, [how We pour down water, pouring it down abundantly. Then We cleave the earth [with new growth], cleaving it asunder, and thereupon We

cause grain to grow out of it, and vines and edible plants, and olive trees and date palms, and gardens dense with foliage, and fruits and herbs, for you and your animals to enjoy. (80:24-32)

How Allah sends rain to produce grain, pasture, grapes, olives, palms, etc. Above all, His goodness is seen in nature and in the sustenance He provides to His creation. The implication is that man ought to be grateful for all this Allah-given bounty, but he is not. In this Meccan surah, the description of lush vegetation represents a tropical climate and not Mecca's desert conditions. Islam's critics distorted the meaning of the above verses. They claimed that Muhammad was never in Mecca, and his movement took place in the far north of Arabia. This is where lush green vegetation is common. The implication is that Muhammad described his environment, and the Quran is not Allah's inspired word. The Arabs of the seventh century traveled far and wide into Syria and Yemen, where tropical vegetation and plants were common. Taif, a mountain resort near Mecca, is known for its lush green gardens and fruit trees.

PIERCING RESURRECTION CALL

AND SO, when the piercing call [of resurrection] is heard on a Day, everyone will [want to] flee from his brother, mother, father, spouse, and children. On that Day, to everyone, his state will be of sufficient concern. Some faces will be bright with happiness, laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings. And some faces will be covered with dust, with darkness overspread. These will be the ones who denied the truth and were immersed in iniquity! (80:33-42)

Those who deliberately distort Allah's word and deny the truth will be covered with dust and darkness.

QUEST FOR THE TRUTH

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) describes Muhammad's dilemmas and quest for the ultimate truth:

"Ah no: this deep-hearted Son of the Wilderness, with his beaming black eyes and open social deep soul, had other thoughts in him than ambition. A silent great soul, he was one of those who cannot but be in earnest, whom Nature herself has appointed to be sincere. While others walk in formulas and hearsays, contented enough to dwell there, this man could not screen himself in formulas; he was alone with his own soul and the reality of things. The great Mystery of Existence, as I said, glared in upon him, with its terrors, with its splendors; no hearsays could hide that unspeakable fact, "Here am I!" Such sincerity, as we named it, has, in very truth, something of divine. The word of such a man is a Voice direct from Nature's own Heart. Men do and must listen to that as to nothing else; —all else is wind in comparison. From of old, a thousand thoughts, in his pilgrimings and wanderings, had been in this man: What am I? What is this unfathomable Thing I live in, which men name Universe? What is Life; what is Death? What am I to believe? What am I to do? The grim rocks of Mount Hira, of Mount Sinai, and the stern sandy solitudes answered not. The great Heaven rolling

silently overhead, with its blue-glancing stars, answered not. There was no answer. The man's own soul, and what of Allah's inspiration dwelt there, had to answer! It is the thing that all men have to ask themselves, which we, too, have to ask, and answer. This wild man felt it to be of infinite moment; all other things of no moment whatever in comparison. The jargon of argumentative Greek Sects, vague traditions of Jews, the stupid routine of Arab Idolatry: there was no answer in these. A Hero, as I repeat, has this first distinction, which indeed we may call first and last, the Alpha and Omega of his whole Heroism, that he looks through the shows of things into things. Use and won't, respectable hearsay, respectable formula: all these are good or are not good. There is something behind and beyond all these, which all these must correspond with, be the image of, or they are —Idolatries, "bits of black wood pretending to be Allah," to the earnest soul, a mockery and abomination. Idolatries never so gilded waited on by heads of the Quraysh, will do nothing for this man."

Part 4

The Infidels (Kafirs) of Mecca

CHAPTER 18
THE MECCAN LEADERSHIP AND RELATED QURANIC PASSAGES

KAFIR - DELIBERATELY DENY THE TRUTH

These are messages of revelation, and what thy Sustainer has bestowed upon you from on high is the truth, yet most people will not believe [in it]. (13:1) And [warn men that] when the trumpet-call [of resurrection] is sounded, that very Day shall be a day of anguish, not of ease, for all who [now] deny the truth! (74:8-10)

This is the earliest Quranic occurrence of the expression kafir (those who deny the truth). The root verb of the noun kafir is kafara, "he who covers or conceals a thing." Thus, in 57:20, the tiller of the soil (farmer) is called kafir, "one who hides " the sown seed with earth. Just as night is spoken of as having "covered" (kafara) the earth with darkness. In other words, "concealing" or "denying" something that exists.

The term Kafir has a wider, more general meaning. In the Quran - except in 57:20 - a kafir denies the truth in the broadest, spiritual sense. Irrespective of whether it relates to the cognition of Allah, a doctrine or ordinance enunciated in the divine writ, or to a self-evident moral proposition. Many non-Arab Muslim theologians erroneously equate this term with "unbeliever" or "infidel" in the specific, restricted sense of one who rejects the system of doctrine and law promulgated in the Quran and amplified by the Prophet's teachings.

As described before**,** there were three major clans in Mecca during Prophet Muhammad's ministry. The Banu Hashim to which the Prophet belonged (see the previous description). The Banu Umayyah and the Banu Makhzum were the two powerful clans opposing Prophet Muhammad.

THE BANU UMAYYAH

Banu (sons of) Umayyah descended from Umayyah ibn Abd Shams, the father of Harb ibn Umayyah. During the pre-Islamic period, the “Banu Umayyah” was a leading Quraysh clan. By the end of the 6th century, the Umayyads dominated the Quraysh’s increasingly prosperous trade networks with Syria and developed economic and military alliances with the nomadic Arab tribes that controlled the northern and central Arabian desert expanses affording the clan a degree of political power in the region. The Umayyad clan also cared for the Kabah and the Zamzam.

ABU SUFYAN

Abu Sufyan was born in 560 C.E., son of Harb ibn Umayyah. His great-grandfather was Abd Shams ibn Abd Manaf, brother to Muhammad’s great-grandfather Hashim. The Umayyads, headed by Abu Sufyan, were a merchant family of the Quraysh tribe and the archenemy of Prophet Muhammad. He commanded the Meccan army against the Prophet at the battles of Uhud and the Trench in 625 and 627 CE. He converted to Islam immediately before Mecca surrendered to the advancing army of the Prophet. Abu Sufyan was controversial, especially between Sunni and Shia Muslims. The lateness of his conversion always attracted the charge that he only did so when he had no choice. His son, Muawiyah, established the first dynastic caliphate against the Quran's teachings from 661 until the Abbasid coup of 750 CE. However, an Umayyad branch established a sultanate in Spain in 756.

THE BANU MAKHZUM

The Banu Makhzum was a prominent clan of the larger Quraysh tribal grouping that dominated Mecca in pre-Islamic times. The Banu Makhzum were among Prophet Muhammad's fiercest opponents. One of their chieftains, Amr ibn Hisham (Abu Jahl), led a boycott of the Banu Hashim in c. 616–618. He was commander

of the Meccan army at the first battle of Badr. The Muslims gained the advantage at the Battle of Badr, inflicting heavy losses on the Makhzum, with many nobles, including Abu Jahl, slain. The Makhzum suffered significant losses, and they were replaced in prominence by the Banu Abd Shams under Abu Sufyan. At least three Makhzum members fought alongside the Prophet at Badr, and several others defected, including one of their eminent military commanders, Khalid ibn al-Walid.

WALID IBN AL-MUGHIRAH

Walid ibn al-Mughirah was the chief of the powerful Makhzum clan of the Quraysh tribe. He was one of the wealthiest men in Mecca and the owner of the large caravan trade. He had many sons, including Khalid bin Walid, one of the greatest generals of all time. He was responsible for the Muslims' debacle at Uhud. Later, he conquered rebellious Arabian tribes, the Christian, Byzantine, and Persian Empires.

CONSULTATION WITH WALID

The pilgrimage time was near, and Arabs came to Mecca from all over Arabia. All Meccan chiefs decided what to tell visiting Arab representatives if they asked about Muhammad’s teachings. The Quraysh had a high reputation for hospitality, and they welcomed every pilgrim, both him and his gods. But this year, they would hear their gods insulted by Muhammad and his followers. No doubt, many of them might not return to Mecca again. It would be negative for business but also diminish the honor and prestige of the Guardians of the Sanctuary. Therefore, visiting Arabs must be told that Muhammad did not represent Quraysh. They consulted Walid ibn al-Mughirah, probably the most influential man among them. Al-Mughirah turned down all the accusations the Quraysh chiefs proposed against the Prophet. Al-Mughirah struggled against his conscience to come up with a charge to discredit the Prophet. After

many deliberations, he suggested labeling Muhammad a sorcerer. So, the following verses concerning al-Walid were revealed:

GREED FOR MORE AND MORE

Leave Me alone [to deal] with him whom I have created alone, and to whom I have granted vast resources, and children as [love's] witnesses, and to whose life I gave so broad a scope: and yet, he greedily desires I give yet more! Nay, indeed, it is against Our messages that he knowingly, stubbornly sets himself up [and so] I shall constrain him to endure a painful uphill climb! Behold, [when Our messages are conveyed to one who is bent on denying the truth], he reflects and meditates [as to how to disprove them], and thus he destroys himself, the way he meditates: yea, he destroys himself, the way he meditates and then he looks [around for new arguments], and then he frowns and glares, and in the end, he turns his back [on Our message], and glories in his arrogance, and says, "All this is mere spellbinding eloquence handed down [from olden times]! This is nothing but mortal man's word!" (74:11-25)

"Leave me alone" to decide how to treat truth deniers - thus forbidding human punishment. He forgets that I am his Creator and Sustainer. "Whose life I gave so wide a scope," and endowed with potentialities far beyond those open to other living beings. He stubbornly opposes or rejects something, knowing it to be true. The element of human contrariness and stubbornness is also implied here as a permanently recurring phenomenon. The term "ascent" or "climb" means something extremely difficult, painful, or distressing. An allusion to man's willful neglect of moral and spiritual truths (Allah's messages). Hence, individual and social suffering unavoidably follows in this world and hampers his spiritual development in the afterlife. By inventing fallacious arguments against Allah's messages, he destroys himself spiritually. He becomes emotional, frowns and glares because he suspects his

arguments are weak. In his arrogance, he declares divine revelation as mere spell-binding eloquence or “sorcery” or “magic.”

SURAH 109

AL-KAFIRUN (THOSE WHO DENY THE TRUTH)

THE OFFER OF A HYBRID RELIGION

One day, Walid and other pagan leaders approached the Prophet in the Kabah to offer him a proposition. They said: “Muhammad, let us worship what you worship, and you worship what we worship. If what you worship is better than what we worship, we will take a share of it, and if what we worship is better than what you worship, you can take a share of that.” The response to this proposition was the following surah 109:

In The Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: SAY: “O you who deny the truth! “I do not worship that which you worship, and neither do you worship that which I worship! “And I will not worship that which you have [ever] worshipped, and neither will you [ever] worship that which I worship. Unto you, your moral law, and unto me, mine!” (109:1-6)

WHY WAS THE QURAN BESTOWED UPON MUHAMMAD?

Al-Mughirah also questioned that if the Quran was a divine revelation, it would have been bestowed on a person of " prestigious standing,” such as himself or the chief of Taif. It cannot be Muhammad, who had neither wealth nor prestige in his native city. In response, the following verses were revealed:

And they say, too, “Why was not this Quran bestowed from on high on some great man of the two

cities?" [Mecca and Taif] ***But is it they who distribute thy Sustainer's grace? [Nay, as] it is We who distribute their means of livelihood among them in this world and raise some of them by degrees above others. To the end that they might avail themselves of one another's help [so, too, it is We who bestow gifts of the spirit upon whomever We will] and this thy Sustainer's grace is better than all [the worldly wealth] that they may amass. (43:31-32)***

SURAH 80

ABASA (HE FROWNED)

ADMONISHMENT TO THE PROPHET

He frowned and turned away because the blind man approached him! Yet for all you knew, [O Muhammad], he might have grown in purity, or been reminded [of the truth], and helped by this reminder. Now, as for him, who believes himself self-sufficient, you gave your full attention. Although you are not accountable for his failure to attain purity, but as for him who came to you full of eagerness and in awe [of Allah], him you did disregard! (80:1-10)

Revealed at a very early stage of the Prophet's mission, the eightieth surah (He frowned) has always been designated by the predicate with which its first sentence opens. The immediate cause of the revelation of the first ten verses was an incident witnessed by several of the Prophet's contemporaries. One day, the Prophet was conversing with the most influential chieftain of pagan Mecca, Walid ibn al-Mughirah. The Prophet hoped to convince him and, through him, the Meccan community at large of his message's truth. At that point, he was approached by one of his followers, the blind Abd Allah ibn Shurayh. He requested to elucidate certain earlier Quran passages. Annoyed by this interruption of what he momentarily considered a more important endeavor, Muhammad "frowned and turned away" from the blind man. He was

immediately reproved by the revelation of the first ten verses of this surah. In later years, he often greeted Abd Allah with these words of humility: “Welcome unto him on whose account my Sustainer has rebuked me!”

Above is an indirect rebuke stressing using the third person (he) in verses 1-2. It illustrates the objective nature of the Quranic revelation because if Muhammad had composed the Quran, he would not have admonished himself. Typically, it would have been a minor act of discourtesy on the part of an ordinary human being. However, it would have been a sin deserving divine rebuke when committed by a prophet. Those who believe to be self-sufficient and do not feel the need for divine guidance refer to the arrogant pagan chieftain with whom the Prophet was conversing.

AMR IBN HISHAM (ABU JAHL)

His real name was Amr ibn Hisham. He belonged to the Makhzum clan. He was one of the Quraysh’s leaders, the archenemy of Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslims. Because of his cruelty, the Prophet gave him the titles of “The Pharaoh of this Ummah” and “Abu Jahl” (father of ignorance). Contrary to the general misconception, ibn Hisham was not the Prophet's uncle but his father’s cousin. He was the nephew of the now elderly Walid, who was chief of the Makhzum clan. Abu Jahl was confident of succeeding his uncle. He established himself in the Meccan elite through his wealth and feared reputation for brutality. It was his intention to retaliate against anyone who opposed him.

Abu Jahl justified his opposition to Muhammad: “We (i.e., Banu Abd Shams) and Banu Hashim competed over honor: they fed the poor, and we did too; they supplied the pilgrims with water, and we did too, and they gave protection to refugees, and we did too (and so on) until we became almost equal just like two racehorses. Then they said: “A Prophet has appeared among us. How can we achieve something like this?"

COERCION IN RELIGION

Have you ever considered him who tries to prevent a Allah's servant from praying? Have you considered whether he is on the right path or concerned about Allah-consciousness? Have you considered whether he may be giving a lie to the truth and turning his back [upon it]? Does he, then, not know that Allah sees [all]? If he doesn't desist, we will drag him down upon his forehead - the lying, rebellious forehead! Let him summon [to his aid] the counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom, [all the while] We shall summon the forces of heavenly chastisement! You pay no heed to him but prostrate yourself [before Allah] and draw close [unto Him]! (96:9-19)

The above passage alludes to Abu Jahl, the Prophet's bitterest opponent in Mecca. Abu Jahl persistently tried to prevent Prophet Muhammad and his followers from praying before the Kabah, not concerned about his fellowmen's Allah-consciousness. The phrase "Drag him by his forelock" is an ancient Arabian expression denoting subjection and humiliation. Apart from its historical significance, it applies to all attempts to deny freedom of religion and its legitimate function in shaping social life. "Counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom" may be a reference to the arrogance that so often deludes man into believing that he is self-sufficient.

OVERWHELMING WITH A CROWD

And [know] that all worship is due to Allah [alone]. Therefore, do not invoke anyone alongside Allah! Yet [thus it is] that whenever a servant of Allah stands up in prayer to Him, they [who are bent on denying the truth] would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds. Say: "I invoke my Sustainer alone, for I do not ascribe divinity to anyone besides Him. Say: "It is not in my power to cause you harm or to endow you with the consciousness of what is right." Say: "No one could ever protect me from Allah, nor could I ever find a place to hide from Him if I failed to convey [to

the world whatever illumination comes to me] from Allah and His messages. Now, if he rebels against Allah and His Apostle, the fire of hell awaits him to abide beyond the count of time. [Let them, then, wait] until the time when that [doom] of which they were forewarned [The Day of Judgment] for then they will understand what type of man is more helpless and counts for less! Say: "I do not know whether that [doom] of which you were forewarned is near or whether my Sustainer has set it aside for a distant term. He [alone] knows what is beyond a created being's perception. To none does He disclose any of the mysteries of His unfathomable wisdom except to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect [therefor]. And then He sends forth [the forces of heaven] to watch over him in whatever lies open before him and in what is beyond his ken. To manifest that it is indeed [but] their Sustainer's messages these [apostles] deliver. For it is He who encompasses [with His knowledge] all they have [to say], just as He takes count, one by one, of everything [that exists]" (72:18-28).

The phrase "would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds" to extinguish Allah's (guiding) light refers to the Prophet Muhammad and the hostility shown to him by his pagan contemporaries, who surrounded him while he prayed in the Kabah to intimidate him. In the days that followed, the Prophet made numerous attempts to preach to the Meccans. Abu Lahab and his confederate, Abu Jahl, did what they could to stop him. They frequently succeeded in dispersing the crowds that gathered to hear the Apostle's homily. It is Allah's will to give insight into what is beyond human perception to His apostles. Every apostle thus graced by divine revelation is spiritually protected in every aspect of his life.

On one occasion, the Prophet came to the Kabah to read the Quran when suddenly he was mobbed by idolaters. Harith ibn Abi Hala, Khadijah's nephew and adopted son, arrived just in time. He entered the melee to defend the Prophet, and, in the fray, one of the idolaters drew his dagger and stabbed Harith repeatedly. He fell into a pool

of blood and died. He was only seventeen, the youngest victim of the spiraling and escalating violence of the infidels.

HELLFIRE

[Hence], I shall make him endure hellfire [in the life to come]! And what could make thee conceive what hellfire is? It does not allow to live, nor leaves [to die], making [all truth] visible to mortal man. Over it are nineteen [powers]. We have caused none but angelic powers to lord over the fire [of hell]. We have not caused their number to be aught but a trial for those bent on denying the truth. (74:26-31)

The term “hellfire” is one of the seven names given in the Quran to the concept of suffering in the hereafter. Man brings suffering upon himself by sinning and deliberately remaining blind and deaf to spiritual truths. “Making [all truth] visible to mortals" refers to the sinner’s belated cognition of the truth. Realization of his nature, past failings, and deliberate wrongdoings. He realizes his responsibility for the suffering that lies in store for him: a state neither of life nor death. When Abu Jahl heard about nineteen angels, he said mockingly: Brothers, are you so powerless that even ten of you at a time will not be able to overpower a single policeman of Hell? At this, a wrestler present said: Well, I will deal with and overcome at least 17 of them by myself; as for the remaining two, you all together can tackle them. The following phrase refers to "a trial for those” who intently deny the truth and are unwilling to grasp angelic powers. You cannot imagine what tremendous powers Allah has granted to the angels He created.

ABD AL-UZZA (ABU LAHAB)

Abu Lahab's real name was **Abd al-Uzza ibn Abd al-Muttalib.** He was one of the polytheist pagan Quraysh leaders and the Prophet's paternal uncle. He is called a persecutor of Muslims and a great enemy of his nephew Muhammad. He was popularly nicknamed

Abu Lahab (He of the Flame) because of his handsome looks, expressed in his glowing countenance. The hundred-eleventh surah, a very early surah - the sixth in revelation order - derives its name from its last word. It relates to the bitter hostility shown to the Prophet's message by his uncle Abu Lahab. His hostility was rooted in his inborn arrogance, pride in his substantial wealth, and a dislike of the idea, propounded by Muhammad, that all human beings are equal before Allah and will be judged by Him on their merits alone.

As reported by several unimpeachable authorities, the Prophet ascended the hillock of As-Safa in Mecca and called together all who could hear him from among his clan. When they assembled, he asked: "O sons of Abd al-Muttalib! O sons of Fihr! If I told you that enemy warriors are about to fall upon you from behind that hill, would you believe me?" They answered: "Yes, we would. He said: "Then, I am here to warn you of the Last Hour!" At that, Abu Lahab exclaimed: "Was it for this purpose that you summoned us? May you be doomed!" And shortly afterward, this surah was revealed.

SURAH 111

THE FLAME (AL LAHAB)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace. Doomed are his hands of the glowing countenance, and doomed, is he! What will his wealth avail him of, and all that he has gained? [In the life to come] he shall have to endure a fire fiercely glowing, together with his wife, that carrier of evil tales, [who bears] around her neck a rope of twisted strands! (111:1-5)

According to classical Arabic usage, the expression "hands" in the above clause is a metonym for power, alluding to Abu Lahab's great influence. The phrase "fire fiercely glowing" is a subtle play on Abu Lahab's nickname. The "carrier of firewood" is an idiomatic expression denoting one who secretly carries evil tales and slander from one person to another to kindle hatred flames between them. The carrier of evil tales was Arwa umm Jamil bint Harb ibn

Umayyah. She was Abu Sufyan's sister, married to Abu Lahab. Her hatred of the Prophet and his followers was so intense that she scattered thorns before the Prophet's house to hurt him under darkness. Using her eloquence, she persistently slanders him and his message. "Around her neck, a rope of twisted strands" alludes to the spiritual truth that "every human being's destiny is tied to his neck." (17:13)

UTBAH AND SHAYBAH IBN RABIAH

Utbah ibn Rabiah (563-624) belonged to the clan of Banu Abd Shams (parent clan of Banu Umayyah) from the tribe of Quraysh. He was one of the prominent pagan leaders and Abu Sufyan's father-in-law. Hind bint Utbah the daughter of Utbah ibn Rabiah, was married to Abu Sufyan. **Shaybah ibn Rabiah** was Utbah's brother and a Meccan army champion. Shaybah, along with his brother Utbah and his son Walid ibn Utbah, were killed in the Battle of Badr.

Hudhayfah bin Utbah was the son of Utbah ibn Rabiah. He embraced Islam, participated in the battle of Badr to defend Islam, and witnessed his family members' deaths.

THE OFFER OF TEMPTATION BY UTBAH IBN RABIAH

Quraysh noted Hamza's conversion as a cause for concern. The Quraysh were uncertain what to do next. Undaunted by persecution, Muslims kept growing. Now, they have proclaimed their faith loudly and prayed publicly. Some pagans believed that Muhammad was prompted by his ambitions to denounce their ancestral mode of worship and their idols. They all put their heads together and tried to think of some unconventional solution to the problem. After a lengthy discussion, they decided to send Utbah to meet Muhammad and make an offer he couldn't refuse. Utbah was noted for his persuasive ability.

One day, while Muhammad was sitting in the Kabah, he was approached by Utbah ibn Rabiah, Abu Sufyan's father-in-law. Utbah made several proposals to the Prophet and said, “You enjoy among us great eminence and noble lineage, and you have brought about serious issues and divided our people, O Muhammad! Do not plant seeds of dissension and discord among the Arabs. Do not curse the gods and goddesses our ancestors worshipped for centuries, and we honor them today. I am about to make many proposals to you, and certainly one of them will prove satisfactory. By bringing up this conflict, you seek to increase your wealth. We are prepared to give you our wealth until you become the wealthiest man. If you desire power and honor, we will make you our chief and endow you with such powers that nothing could be done without your consent. And if you want marriage to some noble family, you name it, and we shall arrange it for you. Finally, if you cannot cure yourself of the visions, you have been seeing, we shall be happy to seek for you at our expense all the medical services possible. This will be done until your health is restored. When he finished, the Prophet recited the thirty-second surah of the Quran.

THE THIRTY-SECOND SURAH

AS-SAJDAH (PROSTRATION)

DIVINE GUIDANCE

THE BESTOWAL from on high of this divine writ issues, beyond any doubt, from the Sustainer of all the worlds. Yet, they [who are bent on denying the truth] assert, “[Muhammad] has invented it!” Nay, but it is the truth from thy Sustainer, enabling thee to warn [this] people whom no warner has come before thee so that they might follow the right path.

CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six eons and established the throne of His almightiness. You have none to protect you from Allah and none to intercede for you [on Judgment Day]. Will you not, then, bethink yourselves? He governs all that exists, from celestial space to earth.

JUDGMENT DAY

In the end, all shall ascend unto Him [for judgment] on a Day the length of which will be [like] a thousand years of your reckoning. Such is He who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and that can be perceived by a creature's senses or mind, the Almighty, Dispenser of Grace, who makes most excellent everything He creates.

CREATION OF MAN

Thus, He begins the creation of man out of clay. Then, he causes him to be begotten out of the essence of a humble fluid. He forms him in accordance with what he is meant to be and breathes into him His spirit. And [thus, O men], He endows you with hearing, sight, feelings, and minds. [Yet] how seldom are you grateful!

DENIAL OF RESURRECTION

For, [many are] they [who] say, "What? After we have been [dead and] lost in the earth, shall we indeed be [restored to life] in a new act of creation?" Nay, but [by saying this], they deny the truth that they are destined to meet their Sustainer! Say: "[One day], the angel of death who has been given charge of you will gather you, and then unto your Sustainer, you will be brought back." If thou couldst but see [how it will be on Judgment Day], when those who are lost in sin will hang their heads before their Sustainer, [saying]: "O our Sustainer! [Now] we have seen, and we have

heard! Return us, then, [to our earthly life] that we may do good deeds, for [now], behold, we are certain [of the truth]!"

FREEWILL AND HELL

Yet had We so willed, We could indeed have imposed Our guidance upon every human being, but [We have not willed it thus – and so] that word of Mine has come true. Most certainly, will I fill hell with invisible beings and with humans, all together! [And He will say unto the sinners]: "Taste, then, [the recompense] for your having been oblivious of the coming of this your Day [of Judgment]. For, verily, We are [now] unmindful of you. Taste, then, [this] abiding suffering for all [the evil] that you were wont to do!"

THE TRUE BELIEVERS

Only they [truly] believe in Our messages whenever they are conveyed to them, fall prostrating themselves in adoration, and extol their Sustainer's limitless glory and praise. And who are never filled with false pride [and] are impelled to rise from their beds [at night] to call out to their Sustainer in fear and hope, and who spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. (32:2-16)

At this point, the Prophet prostrated himself as commanded in the above verse. Raising his head, he said, "Thou hast heard what thou hast heard. O Utbah and all is now between thee and that." When Utbah returned to his companions, they were so struck by the change of expression on his face that they exclaimed: "What hath befallen thee?" Utbah answered them, saying, "I have witnessed an utterance like of which I never heard. It is not poetry, by Allah, neither is sorcery nor soothsaying. Men of Quraysh, pay attention to me and do as I say. Don't try to interfere with this man and what he is about but let him be. By Allah, the words I have heard from him will be received as a great blessing. If the Arabs strike him

down, ye will be rid of him at the hands of others, and if he overcomes the Arabs, then his sovereignty will be your sovereignty, and his might will be your might, and ye will be among the most fortunate of men." The Quraysh, however, rejected his advice, and they mocked him, saying: "He hath bewitched you with his tongue." Utbah opposed them no further, and the Quranic verses only made a fleeting impression on him."

After Abu Talib's death, the Prophet traveled to Taif. Their chiefs rejected the Prophet's message and pelted stones at him. He unknowingly took refuge in an open orchard, and the owner was Utbah's family.

It was not of the earth he wanted to hear; it was of Heaven above. What could all Arabia do for this man? With the crown of Greek Heraclius, Persian Chosroes, and all crowns on earth, what could they all do for him? All crowns and sovereignties, where would they be in a few short years? To be a sheikh of Mecca or Arabia and have a bit of gilt wood put into your hand, will that be one's salvation?

CHAPTER 19
ALLAH'S BLESSINGS UPON THE DENIERS OF THE TRUTH

DIVINE GUIDANCE FOR TRUTH DENIERS

It is not [conceivable] that those bent on denying the truth - [be they] from among the followers of earlier revelation or those who ascribe divinity to others besides Allah – should ever be abandoned [by Him] before there comes to them the [full] evidence of the truth. An apostle from Allah, imparting [to them] revelations blessed with purity. Wherein there are ordinances of ever-true soundness and clarity. (98:1-3) We would never chastise [any community for the wrong they may do] ere. We have sent an apostle [to them]. (17:15) T***hy Sustainer would never destroy a community for its wrongdoing so long its people are still unaware [of the meaning of right and wrong]. All shall be judged according to their [conscious] deeds, and thy Sustainer is not unaware of what they do. (6:131-32)***

If idol worshippers or animists never had any revealed scripture to fall back upon, they won't be abandoned or arbitrarily condemned until Allah sends a prophet to show them the right way, which they consciously refused to follow. This is in accord with repeated statements in the Quran that Allah does not take anyone to task for erroneous beliefs and wrong actions. This is unless the true meaning of right and wrong has previously been explained to him.

Indeed, Allah bestowed favor upon the believers when he raised in their midst an apostle to convey His message to them. This was to cause them to grow in purity, and to impart the divine writ and wisdom. Before that, they were indeed, most obviously, lost in error. (3:164)

The Prophet's mission was divine blessing for those lost in error. For, he conveyed Allah's message to the deniers of the truth who became believers and grew in purity.

You have heard it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike (Matthew 5:43-45).

Jesus of Nazareth uttered revolutionary words that we should love our enemies to the point of blessing them. The Prophet often prayed to Allah to pardon his enemies. He was worried about the fate of his enemies in the afterlife.

ALLAH'S POWER TO BESTOW SPIRITUAL LIFE

And though some are too proud [to listen to this call], they who [in their hearts] are with thy Sustainer extol His limitless glory by night and by day, and never grow weary [thereof]. Among His signs is this: you see the earth lying desolate and lo! When We send down water upon it, it stirs and swells [with life]! He who brings it to life can surely give life to the dead [of heart], for He can will anything. (41:38-39)

The above verses illustrate Allah's power to bestow spiritual life upon hearts that have remained closed to His existence and omnipotence. Hence, it implies a call to the believer never to abandon the hope that "those who deny the truth" may one day grasp the truth of the Quranic message.

SURAH 86

AL TARIQ (THE NIGHT STAR)

MORNING STAR PIERCES DARKNESS

Consider the heavens and that comes in the night! And what could make you conceive what comes in the night? It is the star that pierces through [life's] darkness [for] no human being has ever been left unguarded. (86:1-4) Behold, this [divine writ] is a word that cuts between truth and falsehood and is no idle tale. Behold, they [who refuse to accept it] devise many a false argument [to disprove its validity], but I shall bring all their scheming to naught. Let the deniers of the truth have their will. Let them have their will for a little while! (86:13-17)

HOPE FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE

Yet, in the end, the hearts of those who do not believe in life to come might incline towards Him. In Him, they might find contentment, and they might earn whatever they can earn [of merit]. [Say you], "Am I, then, to look to anyone but Allah for judgment [as to what is right and wrong], when it is He who has bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, clearly spelling out the truth?" (6:113-114)

Allah has bestowed upon you this divine writ that distinguishes between truth and falsehood. The plural "you" indicates that the divine writ is addressed to all who know it. Man is, as a rule, absorbed in the pursuit of material goods and comforts, identifying with "happiness." Hence, he pays scant attention to spiritual aims and values if he is called upon to abandon his selfish pursuits in favor of something hypothetical: life in the hereafter.

ROLE OF PROPHETS TO REFORM COMMUNITIES

Thus, We have raised you [O Muhammad] as Our Apostle amidst a community [of unbelievers]. Before whose time [similar] communities have come and gone so that you might propound to them what We have revealed unto you: for [in their ignorance] they deny the Most Gracious! Say: "He is my Sustainer, there is

no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, and unto Him is my recourse!" (13:30)

These are messages of the revelation of a discourse clear in itself and clearly showing the truth. And it will come to pass that those who are [now] bent on denying this truth will wish they had surrendered themselves to Allah [in their lifetime]. Leave them alone; let them eat and enjoy themselves while the hope [of vain delights] amuses them: for they will soon come to know [the truth]. (15:1-3)

"Before whose time [similar] communities have come and gone" is an indirect reference to the continuity of prophetic revelation before and up to the time of the Last Prophet Muhammad. "The evidence of truth" relates to the Quran, Prophet Muhammad, and all the earlier prophets and revelations. They deny Allah by refusing to acknowledge His existence, rejecting His guidance, or ascribing divine qualities to other beings or forces with Him. The term Quran whenever it appears without a definite article (al), denotes a solemn recital or "discourse." Those who deliberately reject the messages of revelation now will have no excuse on Resurrection Day when they come to know the truth.

THE PROPHET HERALD OF GLAD TIDINGS

And yet, some people worship, instead of Allah, things that can neither benefit nor harm them. Thus, he who denies the truth indeed turns his back on his Sustainer! Yet [withal, O Prophet] We have sent you only as a herald of glad tidings and a warner. Say: "For this, no reward do I ask of you [no reward] other than that he who so wills may unto his Sustainer find a way!" Hence, place your trust in the Living One who dies not, and extol His limitless glory and praise: for none is as aware of His creatures' sins as He. (25:55-58)

CONVEY THE MESSAGE OF ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM

Say [to the deniers of the truth]: "I am forbidden to worship those [beings] you invoke instead of Allah. Say: "I do not follow your errant views, or else I should have gone astray and should not be among those who have found the right path. (6:56)

CHAPTER 20
THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE INFIDELS (KAFIRS)

MORAL BANKRUPTCY

A theological treatment of idolatry must consider idol worship's close association with sexual immorality and greed in all forms. The moral teachings of this new religion demanded an end to the licentiousness which citizens were disinclined to give up.

In his book *The Religions of Man*, Huston Smith writes, "Before Muhammad, there was virtually no restraint of inter-tribal violence. Glaring inequities in wealth and possessions were accepted without conscience. Women were regarded more as possessions than as human beings. Rather than say that a man could marry an unlimited number of wives, it would be more accurate to say that his relations with women were so casual that they scarcely approximated marriage at all beyond the first wife or two. Child infanticide was common, especially among girls. The world into which Muhammad was born is described by subsequent Muslims in a single word: barbaric. Life under the conditions of the desert had never been serene. The Bedouin felt almost no obligation to anyone outside his tribe. Scarcity of material goods and a fighting mood chronically inflamed by the blazing sun made brigandage a regional institution and the proof of virility. In the sixth-century A.D., political deadlock, and the collapse of the magistrate in the leading city of Mecca made this generally chaotic situation even worse. Drunken orgies often ended in brawls, and bloodshed were commonplace. The gaming impulse, always strong among nomads, was uncontrolled, with Meccan gambling tables busy the night through. Dancing girls moved from tent to tent, inflaming the passions of the impetuous sons of the desert. Meanwhile, the prevailing religion was providing no check whatever. Best described as animistic

polytheism, it peopled the desert with beastly sprites called Jinn. Fantastic personifications of the terrors of the desert, but there is no evidence that they inspired anything, in the way of genuine religious enthusiasm, much less moral conduct. Generally, conditions could hardly have been better calculated to produce smoldering undercurrent, which erupted in sudden affrays and blood feuds, some of which stretched on for decades."

As Muhammad grew from childhood to youth and youth to manhood, the lawless strife of his contemporaries, the repeated outbursts of pointless quarrels among the tribes frequenting the Meccan fairs, and the general immorality produced in the prophet-to-be a sustained reaction of horror and disgust.

SEALING OF HEARTS AND ALLAH'S WAY

Behold, as for those bent on denying the truth, it is all one to them. Whether you warn them or not, they will not believe. Allah has sealed their hearts and hearing, and over their eyes is a veil, and awesome suffering awaits them. (2:6-7)

The term al-kafirun is simply rendered as "those who deny the truth." The past tense in alladhina kafaru indicates **conscious intent** and is rendered as "those **bent** on denying the truth." "Allah has **sealed their hearts** refers to the natural law instituted by Allah. When a person persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth, he gradually loses the ability to perceive truth. So finally, as if a "seal is set upon his heart." It is Allah who has instituted all laws of nature, which, in their aggregate, are called Sunnat Allah ("the way of Allah"), and this "sealing" is attributed to Him. Similarly, suffering in the afterlife is for those who willfully remain deaf and blind to the truth in this life. It is a natural consequence of their free choice and not an arbitrary determination from Devine. Just as happiness in the life to come is the consequence of man's endeavor to attain righteousness and inner

illumination during this life. In this sense, Allah's "reward" and "punishment" must be understood in the Quran.

INVISIBLE BARRIER

But [thus it is]: whenever you recite the Quran, We place an invisible barrier between you and those who will not believe in the life to come. Over their hearts We have laid veils, which prevent them from grasping its purport, and into their ears, deafness. And so, whenever you mention, while reciting the Quran, your Sustainer as the one and only Divine Being, they turn their backs [upon you] in aversion. (17:45-46) For after the truth [has been forsaken], what is [left] but error? How, then, can you lose sight of the truth? Thus, is thy Sustainer's word proved true regarding such as are bent on sinful doings: they will not believe? (10:32-33)

BREAKING THE PRIMORDIAL BOND WITH ALLAH

In this way, He causes many to go astray, just as He guides others. But none He causes to go astray save the iniquitous, who break their bond with Allah after it has been established [in their nature] and cut asunder what Allah has bidden to be joined and spread corruption on earth: these shall be the losers. (2:26-27)

The "**bond with Allah**" refers to man's moral obligation to use his inborn gifts, intellectual and physical, in the way intended for them by Allah. The "establishment" of this bond arises from the faculty of reason that must lead men to realize their weakness and dependence on a causative power. This must lead to a gradual cognition of Allah's will.

All Quranic references to Allah **letting man go astray** must be interpreted against the background of "none does He cause to go astray save the **iniquitous**." One who "wills to go astray" will choose to reject the truth (cause) and persevere in this denial, and

never attain faith. Man's drift from the right path is because of his attitudes and preferences, not because of arbitrary predestination. He has deliberately made improper use of the free will that Allah has endowed to man.

SHACKLES AROUND THE SINNERS' NECKS

Indeed, the word [of Allah's condemnation] is bound to come true against most of them: for they will not believe. Around their necks, We have put shackles, reaching up to their chins, so that their heads are forced up. We have set a barrier before and behind them, and We have enshrouded them in veils so they cannot see. Thus, it is irrelevant to them whether you warn them or not, they will not believe. You can [truly] warn him who is willing to take the reminder to heart and stands in awe of the Most Gracious. Therefore, give glad tidings of [Allah's] forgiveness and an excellent reward! (36:7-11)

Allah's placing shackles around the necks of sinners is a metaphor for His sealing their hearts and hearing. "Their heads are forced up" symbolizes their arrogance, and they cannot see the right way. "We have set a barrier before and behind them," so they can neither advance nor go back: a metaphor for utter spiritual stagnation. These are all allegories of their deliberate denial of truth.

THEIR HEARTS AND MINDS ARE CLOSED

[Whenever this divine writ is offered to men] most of them turn away, so they cannot hear [its message], and they say, "Our hearts are veiled from whatever you call us to, [O Muhammad] and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a barrier. Do, then, [whatever you will, we shall do [as we have always done]!" (41:4-5) Have you given thought [to how you will fare] if this is truly [a revelation] from Allah, while you deny its truth? Who could be more astray than one who places himself [so] deeply in the wrong? (41:52)

It refers to the attitude of people who turn away from the Quran's message, saying, as it were: “Our hearts are veiled from whatever you call us to, [O Muhammad] and in our ears is deafness, and between us and you is a barrier.”

DEAF AND BLIND OF HEARTS

And there are among them such as [pretend to] listen to you but can you cause the deaf to hearken when they do not use their reason? And there are among them such as [pretend to] look towards you but can you show the right way to the blind even though they cannot see? Allah does not do the slightest wrong to men, but it is men who wrong themselves. (10:42-44)

TRUTH: THEY DETEST

Is it perchance that they have not recognized their Apostle, and so they disavow him? Or do they say: “There is madness in him”? No, he brought them the truth most detest! But if the truth were in accord with their likes and dislikes, the heavens and the earth would indeed have fallen into ruin. All that lives in them [would long ago have perished]! (23:69-71)

As the sequence illustrates, the Quran's worldview is not in accord with their likes and dislikes or preconceived notions regarding the reality of all creations. If the universe - and, especially, human life - had been as devoid of meaning and purpose as they imagine, nothing could have endured, and everything would have long since perished in chaos.

AVERSION TO ALLAH’S MESSAGE

Well, We do know that what such people say grieves you indeed. Yet it is not you to whom they lie, but Allah’s messages these evildoers deny. (6:33) It is My reminder that they distrust! They have not yet tasted the suffering I impose! Or do they [think that

they] own the treasures of thy Sustainer's grace - [the grace] of the Almighty, the Giver of Gifts? Or [that] dominion over the heavens and the earth and all between them is theirs? Then, let them try to ascend [to Allah like power] by all [conceivable] means! (38:8-10)

It is not the Prophet's personality that fills them with distrust but, instead, the substance of the message proclaimed by him - and his insistence on Allah's absolute oneness and uniqueness, which runs counter to their habits of thought and social traditions. Do they think it is up to them to decide who should and who should not be graced with divine revelation? Do they believe that human beings are so highly endowed that they are bound someday to attain mastery over the universe and all nature, thus to Allah-like power?

MAKING ONE'S DESIRES HIS DEITY

Have you ever considered [the kind of man] who makes his desires his deity, and whom Allah has [thereupon] let go astray, knowing [that his mind is closed to all guidance], and whose hearing and heart He has sealed, and upon whose sight He has placed a veil? (45:23)

WHO IS THE MOST GRACIOUS?"

Yet when they [bent on denying the truth] they are told, "Prostrate yourselves before the Most Gracious." They used to ask, "[Who and] what is the Most Gracious? Are we to prostrate ourselves before whatever you bid us [to worship]?" And so [your call] increases their aversion. (25:60)

ARGUE ABOUT ALLAH WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

Among men, there is many a one that argues about Allah without having any knowledge [of Him]; without any guidance, and any light-giving revelation - scornfully turning aside [from the truth],

and leading [others] astray from Allah's path. Disgrace [of the spirit] is in store for him in this world and on the Day of Resurrection. (22:8-9)

Since many unrighteous people prosper in this world, clearly, the disgrace of which the above verse speaks is moral - namely, a gradual coarsening of all ethical perceptions and, thus, a degradation of the spirit.

PLAY WITH WORDS

But among men, there is many a one that prefers a mere play with words [to divine guidance], to lead [those]without knowledge astray from Allah's path and turn it to ridicule: for such there is shameful suffering in store. (31:6) Time and again, were My messages conveyed unto you, but [every time] you would turn about on your heels [and] be impelled by your arrogance; you would talk senselessly far into the night. Have they, then, not tried to understand this word [of Allah]? Or has [now] come to them something that never came to their forebears? (23:66-67)

The above statement describes a type of mentality and has general import. Among the people, there is he who takes playful or idle talk in exchange for divine guidance. This is an allusion to a pseudo-philosophical play with words and metaphysical speculations without any real meaning behind them. The expression "talk senselessly" refers to endless, fruitless discussions divorced from reality or a mere play with words. “Something that never came to their forefathers," implies that the Quran's message is but a continuation of the entire divine messages ever revealed to man.

MORAL RELATIVISM

What is amiss with you? [O sinners]. On what do you base your judgment [of right and wrong]? Or have you, perchance, a [special] divine writ which you study, and in which you find all

you wish to find? Or have you received a solemn promise, binding on Us until Resurrection Day, that yours will assuredly be whatever you judge [to be your rightful due]? Ask them which of them can vouch for this! Or have they, perchance, any sages to support their views? Well, then, if they are sincere in their claim, let them produce those supporters of theirs (68:36-41)

"You may wish to find" any moral justification for the claim that whatever is considered expedient is eo ipso right. Are there any wise people who share their views and way of life?

SPIRITUAL CONFUSION

What, then, is amiss with such as are bent on denying the truth that they run about confusedly to and fro before you, [coming upon you] from the right and the left, in crowds? Does every one of them hope to enter [by this means] a garden of bliss? Never! We have created them out of something that they know [only too well]! (70:36-38) Hence, leave them to indulge in idle talk and play [with words] – until they face that [Judgment] Day they have been promised. (70:42)

People who do not want to see the truth of Allah's existence and have no solid basis to build their worldview cannot conceive any definite standards of personal and social ethics. Hence, whenever they are confronted with anyone's positive assertion of faith, they run about to and fro in spiritual confusion, trying to justify themselves intellectually, to demolish the premises of that faith by arguments - an endeavor depicted in the metaphor, "coming upon you from the right and the left." Do they hope to achieve inner peace and fulfillment (garden of bliss) by disproving another person's faith?

THEY ARE LIKE CATTLE

We have destined for hell many invisible beings and men who have hearts that fail to grasp the truth. They have eyes they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle, no; they are even less conscious of the right way: it is they, they who are the [truly] heedless! (7:179)

They are like cattle or animals that follow only their instincts and natural needs. They are not conscious of the possibility or necessity of moral choices.

PARABLES TO MAKE THEM THINK

And, indeed, We have propounded unto men all kinds of parables in this Quran. But if you approach them with any [such] message, those bent on denying the truth are sure to say, "You are just making false claims!" In this way, Allah seals the hearts of those who do not [want to] know [the truth]. (30:58-59)

THE PEOPLE WHO KINDLE A FIRE

Their parable is that of people who kindle a fire: but as soon as it illuminates all around them, Allah takes away their light and leaves them in utter darkness, wherein they cannot see deaf, dumb, blind - and they cannot turn back. (2:17-18)

The parable of the "people who kindle a fire" alludes to some people's exclusive reliance on worldly approaches to illuminate and explain life and faith's imponderables. The resulting arrogant refusal to admit that anything could be beyond man's intellect. This overweening arrogance unavoidably exposes its devotees - and the society dominated by them - to the lightning of disillusionment, which almost takes away their sight, which in turn weakens their moral perception and deepens their terror of death.

THE PARABLE OF A RAGING CLOUDBURST

Or [the parable] of a violent cloudburst in the sky, with utter darkness, thunder, and lightning. They put their fingers into their ears to keep out the peals of thunder, in terror of death, but Allah encompasses [with His might] all who deny the truth. Lightning almost takes away their sight; whenever it gives them light, they advance and standstill whenever darkness falls around them. And if Allah so willed, he could indeed take away their hearing and sight: Allah has the power to do anything. (2:19-20)

The implication is that He does not will this - that is, He does not preclude the possibility that those who have taken error in exchange for guidance may one day perceive the truth and mend their ways. The expression “their hearing and their sight” is a metonym for man’s intuitive ability to discern between good and evil and, hence, his moral responsibility.

CHAPTER 21
SELF-SUFFICIENCY, INGRATITUDE, AND HUBRIS OF KAFIRS

THE CONCEPT OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

There were two common ways: the pre-Islamic Arabs denied Allah, a cardinal sin in any religion where Allah is the central figure. By replacing Allah with idols or ignoring Allah in belief of man's self-sufficiency. Mecca was the scene of a radical socioeconomic change involving the transition from a wandering Bedouin to a settled urban society. Only two generations earlier, Meccans lived harsh nomadic lives on the Arabian steppes. Each day required a grim struggle for survival. In harsh desert conditions, men had to join one another to survive. Poor and weak members were cared for in the tribal system. By 610, trade through Mecca had become very lucrative, and its people gained their livelihood almost exclusively through the mercantile economy. They were rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Forgetting man's creatureliness: Trust in wealth brings an excess of self-confidence that leads man to forget, and even deny, his dependence on Allah. The Meccans have too high an opinion of human powers and forget man's creatureliness.

Insensitivity to others' needs: An exaggerated sense of self-importance led them to expect special favors without assuming mutual responsibilities for helping the weak and the poor among them. **T**he sense of entitlement combined with insensitivity to others' needs brought more exploitation of the weak. **Ingratitude:** Material prosperity led to excessive self-importance, arrogance, vanity, and entitlement. If one is entitled to everything, one is thankful for nothing. A central issue was their slavish adherence to self-sufficiency and, thus, the denial of gratitude for favors received

through Allah's grace. A person of this type finds expressions of gratitude to be highly unpleasant. Expressions of gratitude is an acknowledgment that one is dependent on Allah's grace and not self-sufficient.

Above the need for Divine guidance: A sense of self-sufficiency made them believe that they were above the need for divine guidance and were not answerable to a higher power. Without responsibility, the concept of morality and discrimination between good and evil or right and wrong loses its meaning. And since self-sufficiency is entirely illusory, those who build their worldview on it will never satisfy their overweening conceit.

MAN'S SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Say, man becomes grossly overweening whenever he believes himself to be sufficient, for unto thy Sustainer all must return. (96:6-8) But nay, those bent on denying the truth are lost in [false] pride and [hence] deeply in the wrong. (38:2) As for those who call Allah's messages in question without any evidence, therefore - in their hearts is nothing but an overweening self-conceit they will never be able to satisfy. (40:56)

They refuse to acknowledge the fact of divine revelation because such an acknowledgment would imply an admission of man's responsibility to Allah - and this their false pride, manifested in their arrogant belief in man's "self-sufficiency", does not allow them to do.

SURAH 102

AT-TAKATHUR (GREED FOR MORE AND MORE)

You are obsessed with greed for more and more until you go to your grave. Nay, in time, you will understand! And once again, nay, you will understand in time! Nay, if you could but understand [it] with an understanding [born] of certainty, you would indeed,

most surely, behold the blazing fire [of hell]! In the end, you will indeed, most surely, behold it with the eye of certainty, and on that Day, you will most surely be called to account for [what you did with] the boon of life! (102:1-8)

THIS early Meccan surah is one of the most powerful, prophetic passages of the Quran. It illuminates man's unbounded greed in general and the tendencies to dominate all human societies in our technological age.

SURAH 107

AL-MAUN (ASSISTANCE)

Hast thou ever considered [the kind of man] who gives the lie to all moral laws? Behold, this [kind of man] thrusts the orphan away and feels no urge to feed the hungry. Woe, then, unto those praying ones whose hearts are remote from their prayers. Those who want only to be seen and praised, and, withal, deny all assistance [to their fellowmen]! (107:1-7)

INGRATITUDE FOR ALLAH'S BLESSINGS

Are they not aware that it is for them that We created, among all the things Our hands have wrought, the domestic animals of which they are [now] masters? We have subjected them to man's will so they may use them for riding and of some, they may eat and may have [yet other] benefits from them, and [milk] to drink? Will they not, then, be grateful? But [no], they worship deities other than Allah, [hoping] to be succored [by them, and not knowing that] they cannot succor their devotees. (36:71-75)

The above metaphorical expression, "Our hands have wrought," is based on the concept of handiwork in its broadest sense, abstract and concrete. "We have subjected them to man's will" also implies that man is morally responsible for the way he uses or misuses them. He may be more inclined to worship all manner of imaginary forces

and false values seemingly helpful to human aggrandizements - like wealth and power. He denies validity to any truth; however, obvious, which runs counter to his sense of self-importance.

INGRATITUDE AS A CAUSE OF IDOL WORSHIP

For whatever good thing comes to you is from Allah. Whenever harm befalls you, it is unto Him that you cry for help. Once He has removed the harm from you, lo! Some of you [begin to] ascribe to other powers a share in their Sustainer's divinity. Only to prove their ingratitude for all that We have granted them! Enjoy your [brief] life, but in time you will know [the truth]! (16:53-55) If you are an ingrate, Allah does not need you. Nonetheless, He does not approve of ingratitude in His servants, but if you show gratitude, He approves of it in you. (39:7)

Idolatry is the ultimate expression of unfaithfulness and ingratitude to Allah. By attributing the change in their luck to what they regard as extraneous factors and influences, they invest the latter, as it were, in divine qualities and powers.

PARABLE OF INTENTIONAL INGRATITUDE

Allah propounds [to you] a parable: [imagine] a town that was [once] secure and at ease, with sustenance coming abundantly from all quarters, but they blasphemously refused to show gratitude for Allah's blessings. Therefore, Allah caused it to taste the all-embracing misery of hunger and fear the result of [the evil] that its people had so persistently wrought. And indeed, there came unto them an apostle from among themselves, but they gave him the lie and suffering overwhelmed them while they were doing wrong [to themselves]. (16:112-113)

This parable shows intentional ingratitude for Allah's manifold blessings. A deliberate refusal to submit to His guidance will have disastrous consequences here and the hereafter. No society may

expect to live in security and ease unless it conforms to the ethical and social standards inherent in the concept of man's bond with Allah.

ACHIEVING MASTERY OVER NATURE

The parable of the life of this world is that of rain which We send down from the sky and is absorbed by the plants of the earth from which men and animals draw nourishment. Until the earth has assumed its artful adornment and been embellished and they who dwell on it believe they have gained mastery over it. (10:24)

Vanity and false pride often make man think he is the center of the universe. This urges him to remain satisfied with his own empirically acquired knowledge. They believe they have gained mastery of nature, with no reasonable limits to what they may yet achieve.

OVERWEENING ARROGANCE

And even if We showed them mercy and removed whatever distress might befall them [in this life], they would persist in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro. And, indeed, We tested them through suffering, but they did not humble themselves before their Sustainer. They will never humble themselves until We open before them a gate of [truly] severe suffering [in the life to come]: and then, lo! They will be broken in spirit. (23:75-77)

HOPELESS DURING AFFLICTION AND ARROGANCE IN GOOD TIMES

And so it is: if We let man taste some of Our grace, and then take it away from him - he abandons all hope, forgetting all gratitude [for Our past favors]. And so it is: if We let him taste ease and plenty after hardship has visited him, he is sure to say, "Gone is all affliction from me!" For he is given to vain exultation and

glory only in himself. (11:9-10) When We bestow Our blessings upon man, he turns away arrogantly and keeps aloof [from any thought of Us]. When evil fortune touches him, he abandons all hope. Say: "Everyone acts in a manner peculiar to himself and your Sustainer is fully aware who has chosen the best path" (17:82-84). If We send a wind [that scorches their land], and they see it turn yellow. They begin, after that [erstwhile joy of abundant rain], to deny the truth [of Our almightiness and grace]! (30:51) When We bestow Our blessings upon man, he tends to turn aside and keep aloof [from remembering Us]; but as soon as evil fortune touches him, he is full of wordy prayers! (41:51)

The generic term "man" applies to those "bent upon denying the truth" and those, while believing in Allah, who are weak in faith and easily swayed by external circumstances. Out of self-conceit or excessive love of this world, people reject any suggestion of divine guidance and absolute moral values. He becomes utterly hopeless as he attributes his past happiness to a merely accidental chain of causes and effects, commonly regarded as luck – and not to Allah's grace. He is triumphant beyond all measure, excessively self-glorifying, and usually attributes the turn of fortune to his excellent qualities and supposed good luck.

PARABLE OF A SEAFARER

He enables you to travel on land and sea. And [what happens] when you go to sea in ships, they sail on a favorable wind and rejoice thereat? Until there comes a storm and waves surge towards them from all sides. They believe themselves to be encompassed [by death; and then] they call unto Allah, [at that moment] sincere in their faith in Him alone, "If you will but save us from this, we shall most certainly be among the grateful!" Yet as soon as He has saved them from this [danger], lo! They behave outrageously on earth, offending against all rights! O men! All your outrageous deeds are bound to fall back on you! [You care

only for] the enjoyment of life in this world. [But remember that] in the end unto Us, you must return, after that We shall make you truly understand all you did [in life]. (10:22-23) Thus, they show utter ingratitude for all that We have vouchsafed them and go on [thoughtlessly] enjoy their worldly life. (29:66)

The above discourse on the psychology of agnosticism and half-belief is continued in the parable of the seafarers. The discourse changes abruptly from the direct address “you” to the third person plural “they,” a construction meant to bring out the symbolic character of the subsequent narrative and turn it into a lesson of general validity. “Your deeds are bound to fall back upon yourself,” the often-recurring Quranic expression, “they have sinned against themselves,” or "they have wronged themselves,” indicates the certainty with which every evil deed damages its perpetrator spiritually.

THE QURANIC SOLUTION TO POVERTY

Thus, as for him who gives [to others] and is conscious of Allah and believes in the truth of the ultimate good - for him shall we make easy the path towards [ultimate] ease. But as for him who is miserly, thinks he is self-sufficient, and calls the ultimate good a lie for him, shall we make easy the path towards hardship, and what will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his grave]? Behold, it is indeed for Us to grace [you] with guidance. Ours is [the dominion over] the life to come and [over] this early part [of your life]. So, I warn you of the raging fire that none shall endure but that most hapless wretch who gives the lie to the truth and turns away [from it]. For, distant from it shall remain those truly conscious of Allah. He that spends his possessions [on others] so that he might grow in purity not as payment for favors received, but only out of a longing for the countenance of his Sustainer, the all-highest, such, indeed, shall be well-pleased. (92:5-21)

The once-poor orphan introduced economic doctrines claiming beggars and the needy's rights to share in wealth. The Prophet called upon the rich to share their wealth with the needy and the underprivileged. Many of the rich Meccans were moneylenders, and they became wealthy by lending money to the lower classes at exorbitant interest rates. The poor could never repay their debts and were held in perpetual servitude. Sharing their ill-gotten wealth with the same people they exploited was anathema.

ALL MEN ARE EQUAL

O mankind, we have created you from one male and one female and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another (49:13)

All belong to one human family, without any inherent superiority of one over another. The social content of the new message was dynamite to an effete and unjust economic order. In a society driven by racism and class distinction, the new prophet preached a message intensely democratic, insisting on equality between the master and the slave, the rich and the poor, the Arab and the non-Arab, repudiating claims of superiority based upon race and the bloodline. And by teaching that in Allah's sight, all men are equal, except for righteousness.

INDIVIDUALISM AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE TRIBAL ETHICS

In Mecca, tribal solidarity was replaced by individualism. Financial and material interests were the basis of partnerships besides blood-relationship. Meccans were obsessed with amassing enormous fortunes. The gap between the rich and the poor widened in the last half-century. The successful merchants thought only of increasing their power and influence, which led to the oppression of the poor members of the tribe, such as widows and orphans.

MORAL CAUSES OF SOCIAL ILLS

Despite their economic, social, and moral undercurrents, the Quran thus envisages the troubles of the time as due primarily to moral causes. They are remedied only by religious means. The Quran does not attempt to restore the old tribal order. Instead, man's consciousness as an individual stayed - on the Day of Resurrection, it is essentially a judgment on individuals.

DUTY OF GENEROSITY

Allah's blessing for man: The Quran raises awareness of how many good and wholesome things men enjoy are owed to Allah. It speaks of Allah's power to create man and give him all the conditions that make a happy life possible. Humans depend on their lives and support from a higher power.

Wealth as a trust from Allah: Man is given wealth not simply for his own enjoyment but also in trust for the community. The rich are stewards of their wealth rather than absolute owners. The early passages of the Quran insist on the duties of generosity upon the rich to alleviate poverty.

Reward for generosity in the afterlife: It reminds man that in the end, 'to Him is the return.' There is death and eschatological judgment. Reward and punishment in the afterlife provide an additional sanction. Miserliness will be punished, and generosity rewarded. Since the pagans of Mecca did not believe in an afterlife, this sanction was not operative until men believed in the Last Day.

Tribal solidarity was slowly replaced by shared ideology—an incredible innovation in any society. Something has been produced capable of filling the gap caused by the breakdown of the old tribal order and functioning in an individualistic society.

CHAPTER 22
THE SPIRIT, THE MEN OF THE CAVE AND DHU L-QARNAYN

THE MECCANS' CONSULTATION WITH THE RABBIS OF YATHRIB

The Quraysh decided to send two of their envoys to the Jewish rabbis in Yathrib to inquire about Muhammad's prophethood and his call for monotheism. They were the people of the first scripture, and they were more knowledgeable about the Prophets in general than the polytheists of Mecca. The rabbis said, "Ask him about three things, and if he answers them, he is a Prophet who has been sent (by Allah). They came to the Prophet and asked those three questions. The Prophet said, "I will tell you tomorrow about what you have asked me." So, they went away, and the Prophet waited for fifteen days without any revelation. The people of Mecca taunted him and said, `Muhammad promised to tell us the next day, and now fifteen days have gone by, and he has not told us anything in response to the questions we asked. Then Gabriel brought him a revelation:

IF ALLAH SO WILLS?

And never say about anything, "I shall do this tomorrow without [adding], "if Allah so wills." And if you should forget [yourself at the time and become aware of it later], call thy Sustainer to mind and say: "I pray my Sustainer to guide me, even closer than this, to a consciousness of what is right!" (18:23-24)

The revelation was temporarily withheld from the Prophet as a token of Allah's disapproval, for he did not say 'If Allah wills.' This exhortation also expresses a general principle addressed to all believers. The delay of this revelation confirmed to some skeptics that the revelations came to the Prophet from Heaven and that he

had no part in it and no control over it. The answers drew strength, as always, for the believers and helped to convert others.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

1) WHAT IS THE SPIRIT?

And they will ask thee about [the nature of] divine inspiration. Say: "This inspiration [comes] at my Sustainer's behest; and [you cannot understand its nature, O men, since] you have been granted very little of [real] knowledge." **(17:85)**

The revelation affirmed the spiritual transcendence over man's mind, which is incapable of grasping its reality.

2) THE MEN OF THE CAVE AND THEIR DOG

The second question relates to some young men who withdrew from their hostile world to protect their faith. Most commentators believe the story relates to a phase in early Christian history, the persecution of Christians by Emperor Decius in the third century. Legend has it that some young Christians of Ephesus, accompanied by their dog, withdrew into a secluded cave to live by their faith. They remained there, miraculously sleeping for a long time (according to some accounts, three centuries).

However, it is mere speculation from a Quranic perspective as it does not explicitly mention Ephesus' Christian youth. It is used in the Quran in a purely parabolic sense as an illustration of Allah's power to bring about death (or "sleep") and resurrection (or "awakening"). Secondly, an allegory of righteousness induces men to abandon a wicked or frivolous world to keep their faith unsullied. Allah recognizes that faith by bestowing a spiritual awakening that transcends time and death.

TEST OF MATERIAL ATTACHMENT AND BEST OF CONDUCT

Behold, We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put men to the test, [showing] which of them are best in conduct. And [in time] We shall reduce all that is on it to barren dust! [And since the life of this world is but a test,] Do you [really] believe [the parable of] the Men of the Cave and [their devotion to] the scriptures could be considered more wondrous than any [other] of Our messages? (18:7-9)

Putting men to the test means that Allah lets them reveal their true attitudes toward the attachment to material goods (beauty on earth) and the benefits that the world offers them. The parable based on this story is entirely in tune with the Quran's ethical doctrine and, therefore, not more wondrous than any other of its statements. This passage implies that the real motive underlying man's refusal to believe in Allah's spiritual message is almost always their excessive, blind attachment to the pleasures of this world. This is combined with false pride in their achievements.

STANDING UP TO MISGUIDED FELLOWMEN AND RULERS

[And now] We shall truly relate to you, their story. They were young men who had faith in their Sustainer, and [so] We deepened their consciousness of the right way and endowed their hearts with strength. They stood up and said [to one another]: "Our Sustainer is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we invoke any deity other than Him. [If we did], we would have uttered an enormity! These people of ours have worshiped [other] deities instead of Him, without adducing any reasonable evidence in support of their beliefs. And who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about Allah? (18:13-15)

We truly relate to this story without the many legendary embellishments that obscure the meaning of this parable. Those

who invent imaginary deities lie to the truth of Allah's oneness and uniqueness or even deny His existence altogether. These young men stood up to their misguided fellowmen or rulers. They persecuted the believers regarding their worship of deities other than Allah without any clear evidence accessible to reason or authority in their support.

When those youths took refuge in the cave, they prayed: "O our Sustainer! Bestow on us grace from Thyself and endow us, whatever our [outward] condition, with the consciousness of what is right!" And thereupon, We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year. (18:10-11)

Allah caused them to remain cut off—physically or metaphorically—from the sounds and bustle of the outside.

SPECULATION ABOUT THEIR NUMBERS IS FRUITLESS

[And in times to come] some will say, "[They were] three, the fourth of them being their dog, while others will say, "Five, with their dog as the sixth of them"—idly guessing at something of which they cannot know—and [so on, until] some will say, "[They were] seven, the eighth of them being their dog." Say: "My Sustainer knows best how many they were. None but a few have any [real] knowledge of them. Hence, do not argue about them without an obvious argument, and do not ask those [storytellers] to enlighten you about them." (18:22)

The future tense (in time to come) refers to the legendary character of the story. It implies that all speculations about its details are irrelevant to its parabolic, ethical purpose. Do not ask storytellers for the self-evident moral lesson to be derived from their story.

WITHDRAWAL INTO UTTER SECLUSION

Hence, now that you have withdrawn from them and from all they worship instead of Allah, take refuge in that cave. Allah will spread His grace over you and endow you—whatever your [outward] condition—with all that your soul may need!" And [for years], you might have watched the sun rise, incline away from their cave on the right. Turn aside from them on the left on its setting while they lived in that spacious chamber. [Bearing witness to] this of Allah's messages: He whom Allah guides, he alone has found the right way; whereas for him whom He lets go astray, you can never find any protector who would point out the right way. (18:16-17)

And you would have thought they were awake, whereas they lay asleep. We caused them to turn over repeatedly, now to the right, now to the left, and their dog [lay] on the threshold, its forepaws outstretched. If you had come upon them [unprepared], you would surely have turned away in flight and filled with awe. (18:18)

The cave opened to the north so that the sun's heat never disturbed them. This was an echo of the Quranic allusions to the happiness of the righteous in paradise, symbolized by its everlasting shade. An accidental onlooker would immediately sense the mystic, awe-inspiring aura surrounding the Men of the Cave.

RELATIVITY OF TIME

And [over time] We awakened them, and they asked one another [as to what had happened to them]. One of them asked: "How long have you remained thus?" [The others] answered: "We have remained thus a day or part of a day." They [endowed with deeper insight], said: "Your Sustainer knows best how long you have remained thus."(18:19) [And We did all this] to mark out [to the world] which of the two points of view showed a better understanding of the period they remained in this state. (18:12)

Later, “We awakened them,” indicating a return to active life. How long have you remained in the cave? We did this to determine which of the two viewpoints computed the time span. The above verse alludes to the deceptive, earthbound concept of time. It points to an idea underlying this allegory, namely Allah’s power to bring forth the living out of that which is dead and the dead out of that which is alive (3:27, 6:95, 10:31, 30:19).

IDLE GUESSES ABOUT LENGTH OF TIME

And [some people assert], “They remained in their cave for three hundred years,” and some have added nine [to that number]. Say: “Allah knows best how long they remained [there]. His [alone] is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: how well does He see and hear! They have no guardians apart from Him since He allots to no one a share in His rule!” (18:25-26)

HOW DOES THE STORY OF THE MEN OF THE CAVE COME TO LIGHT?

Let one of you go with these silver coins to the town and have him find out what food is purest there and bring you thereof [some] provisions. But let him behave with great care and by no means make anyone aware of you. For if they know of you, they might stone you to death or force you back to their faith—in which case you would never attain any good!” (18:19-20)

During their sleep, time stood still for the Men of the Cave, so they assumed the outside world had remained unchanged and was, as before, hostile to them. They sent one of them to town to purchase food. In the meantime, the situation changed drastically. Christianity was no longer persecuted and became the Roman Empire's official religion. The ancient coin from Decius' reign, with which the young man wanted to pay for his purchases, immediately aroused curiosity. People began to question the stranger, and the

story of the Men of the Cave and their miraculous sleep came to light.

At this point, the story ends abruptly. The Quran is never concerned with narratives for their own sake. It is revealed in the sequence as an allegory of death and resurrection and the relativity of time as manifested in man's consciousness.

ALLAH'S PROMISE OF RESURRECTION IS TRUE

And in this way have We drawn [people's] attention to their story. This is so that they might know—whenever they debate among themselves as to what happened to those [Men of the Cave]-that Allah's promise [of resurrection] is true, and there can be no doubt as to [the coming of] the Last Hour. (18:21)

We have drawn attention to this story through the legend that has grown around the Men of the Cave. Their story occupied men's minds for a long time, leading to many discussions and conflicting interpretations. The next sentence explains why Allah has drawn people's attention to this story because Allah's resurrection promise is true. In the Quran, this legend is used in a purely parabolic sense, namely, as an illustration of Allah's power to bring about death (or "sleep") and resurrection (or "awakening.")

ERECT A HOUSE OF WORSHIP IN THEIR MEMORY

And so, some [people] said: "Erect a building in their memory; Allah knows best what happened to them." Said they whose opinion prevailed in the end: "Indeed, we must surely raise a house of worship in their memory!" (18:21)

The leaders of the Quraysh had not bound themselves to take the advice of the rabbis, nor did the rabbis themselves recognize the Prophet, despite answering their questions beyond their expectations.

3) DHU L-QARNAYN THE TWO-HORNED ONE AND GOG AND MAGOG

The third question relates to the great traveler named Dhu l-Qarnayn.

THE TWO-HORNED ONE

The noun qarn means 1) “Horn,” 2) “generation” or "epoch" and 3) “age” or “century.” The term "qarn" occurs in the Quran—apart from the story of Dhul-Qarnayn - and each time it has the meaning of “generation” in the sense of people belonging to one epoch or civilization. The classical commentators tend to favor the first of these meanings (“the Two-Horned”). They were influenced by ancient Middle Eastern imagery of “horns” as symbols of power and greatness. The epithet Dhul-Qarnayn signifies “the Two-Horned One” or “He of the Two Epochs,”

ALEXANDER THE GREAT?

In the Quranic allegory, the “two horns” denote the two sources of power with which Dhul-Qarnayn is said to have been endowed. Namely, the worldly might and prestige of kingship and the spiritual strength resulting from his faith in Allah. It is precisely the Quranic stress on his faith in Allah that makes it impossible to identify Dhul-Qarnayn with Alexander the Great (who is represented on some of his coins with two horns on his head). Alexander the Great was a pagan and worshipped a plurality of deities. Dhul-Qarnayn is depicted as a firm believer in the One Allah. It is this aspect of his personality that provides the reason for the Quranic allegory. We must, therefore, conclude that the latter has nothing to do with history or even legend. Instead, its sole purpose is a parabolic discourse on faith and ethics, with specific reference to worldly power. It is an allusion to the parabolic character of this story, and it is confined to a few fundamental, spiritual truths.

Qualities of a powerful and just ruler: The allegory of Dhu l-Qarnayn is meant to illustrate the qualities of a powerful and just ruler. It is possible to assume that this designation is an echo of the above-mentioned ancient symbolism, which - being familiar to the Arabs from very early times – acquired idiomatic currency in their language long before Islam. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn aims at illustrating certain ethical principles in a parabolic manner.

WHEN THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS

And they will ask thee about the Two-Horned One. Say: "I will convey unto you something by which he ought to be remembered." We established him securely on earth and endowed him with [the knowledge of] the right means to achieve anything [that he might set out to achieve], and so he chose the virtuous means [in whatever he did]. (18:83-85)

If the goals are worthwhile and noble, and the means we use to accomplish them are also worthy and noble, then the ends justify the means. Most people, however, use this concept to justify morally wrong actions. The Two-Horned One never employed immoral methods to achieve a righteous goal.

PUNISHMENT OR COMPASSION FOR A SINFUL COMMUNITY

[And he marched westwards] till, when he came to the sun's setting, it appeared to him that it was setting on a dark, turbid sea. Nearby he found people [given to every kind of wrongdoing]. We said: "O you two-horned one! You may either cause [them] to suffer or treat them with kindness!" He answered: "As for him who does wrong [unto others]— him shall we, in time, cause to suffer and he shall be referred to his Sustainer, and He will cause him to suffer from unnamable suffering (in the hereafter)." (18:86-87)

Principle of social or moral preference: The sun was setting in the sea, the common optical illusion of the sun's "disappearing into the sea." The divine permission to choose between two possible courses of action—punishment or kindness toward the sinful community—a metonymic statement of Allah's freedom of will. It also establishes the important legal principle of social or moral preference open to a ruler or government. This principle is conducive to the community's greatest good. This is the second lesson of the Two-Horned One parable. “Unnamable suffering” in the hereafter implies the life to come could never be imagined or defined regarding human experience.

Obligations towards Allah and the rights of man: The Two-Horned One is reiterating the Quranic principle that Allah’s chastisement does not afflict any people merely on account of their holding beliefs amounting to shirk and kufr but afflicts them only if they persistently commit evil in their mutual dealings, and deliberately hurt [other human beings] and act tyrannically [towards them].

RIGHTEOUSNESS MUST NOT BE TOO DEMANDING

[Two-Horned One continued]: But as for him who believes and does righteous deeds, he will have the ultimate good [of life to come] as his reward. And [as for us], we shall make binding only that which is easy to fulfill. And once again, he chose the right means [to achieve a right end]. (18:88-89)

Since righteous behavior is the norm expected of a man, the laws relating to it must not be too demanding. This is another lesson to be drawn from this parable.

PROHIBITION TO CORRUPT ALLAH’S CREATIONS

[And then he marched eastwards] till, when he came to the rising of the sun, he found that it was rising on people for whom We had

provided no coverings against it. Thus [We had made them, and therefore he left them]; and We encompassed all that he had in mind. And once again, he chose the right means [to achieve a right end]. (18:90-92)

The Two-Horned One marched to the easternmost point of his expedition and found the natural state of those people who needed no clothes. This state of innocence was similar to Adam and Eve before the Fall in the garden of Eden. The Two-Horned One left them as he had found them, being mindful not to upset their mode of life and cause them misery. His resolve was not to "corrupt or change Allah's creation," which is a further ethical lesson to be derived from this parable.

ERECT A RAMPART: GOG AND MAGOG SPOILING THE LAND

He [The Two-Horned One] marched on till, when he reached [a place] between the two mountain barriers. He found beneath them people who could scarcely understand a word [of his language]. They said: "O you Two-Horned One! Gog and Magog are spoiling this land. May we, then, pay unto you a tribute on the understanding that you will erect a barrier between them and us?" (18:93-94)

He answered: "My Sustainer has so securely established me is better than anything you could give me] hence, do help me with [your labor's] strength, [and] I shall erect a rampart between you and them! Bring me ingots of iron!" Then, after he had [piled up the iron and] filled the gap between the two mountainsides, he said: "[Light a fire and] ply your bellows!" At length, when he had made it [glow like] fire, he commanded: "Bring me molten copper which I may pour upon it." And thus [the rampart was built, and] their enemies were unable to scale it, and neither were they able to pierce it. Said [the King]: "This is a mercy from my Sustainer! (18:95-98)

DESTRUCTION OF THE RAMPART

Yet when the time appointed by my Sustainer comes, He will make this [rampart] level with the ground: and my Sustainer's promise always comes true!" And on that Day [I.e., on the Day of Judgment] ***We shall [call forth all mankind and] leave them to surge like waves [that dash] against one another; and the trumpet [of judgment] will be blown, and We shall gather them all together. (18:98-99)***

GOG AND MAGOG

Some classical commentators (e.g., Tabari) regard this as a prediction of a definite, historic event, namely, the future breakthrough of the savage tribes of "Gog and Magog," who are identical with the Mongols and Tatars. This "identification" is mainly based on a well-authenticated Tradition, which tells us that the Apostle of Allah had a prophetic dream to which he referred, on awakening, with an exclamation of distress: "There is no deity save Allah! Woe unto the Arabs from a misfortune that is approaching: a little gap has been opened today in the rampart of Gog and Magog!" Ever since the Late Middle Ages, Muslims have been inclined to discern in this dream a prediction of the great Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, which destroyed the Abbasid Empire and, thus, the political power of the Arabs.

The alternate explanation relates to the mention of the Day of Judgment in connection with "Gog and Magog" in verse 18:99. "The time appointed by my Sustainer" relates to the Last Hour, when all man's works will be destroyed. Both interpretations are equally valid. The break-through of the godless forces of "Gog and Magog" is one of the signs of its approach.

DESTRUCTION OF IRREMEDIABLE COMMUNITY

Hence, it has been unfailingly true of any community whom We have ever destroyed that they [were people who] would never turn

back [from their sinful ways] until such a time as Gog and Magog are let loose [upon the world] and swarm down from every corner [of the earth]. (21:95-96)

Whenever Allah consigns a community to destruction, He does it only because of their irremediable, conscious unwillingness to forsake their sinful ways. The terms Yajuj and Majuj are used allegorically, referring not to any specific tribes but to a series of social and cultural catastrophes "from all directions" or "from every corner of the earth," which will overwhelm mankind before the Last Hour.

Part 5

Proselytization and Persecution

CHAPTER 23
PROSELYTIZATION

EARLIEST CONVERTS

For the first two to three years of the Prophet's ministry, no summons to Islam had yet been made public. For a time, a movement developed slowly with a trickle of converts. After the first revelation, the Prophet confided in close friends and family, who knew him intimately and were convinced of his mission's truth. His wife , **Khadijah** was the first convert. The next disciple was young **Ali**, still ten years old. He would be the fourth caliph and one of Islam's greatest warriors. Soon after, Zayd, Muhammad's manumitted slave, converted to the new faith. He was martyred during the battle of Mutah.

CONVERSION OF ABU BAKR AND OTHER NOTABLES

- **Abu Bakr** was a leading Quraysh member who later became famous as the first caliph. He was a wealthy merchant, prudent, honest, and amiable; he enjoyed great respect among his compatriots. He was two years younger than the Prophet, and his unhesitating adoption of the new faith had a great moral effect. Abu Bakr was a close friend of the Prophet. From outside his family, Abu Bakr was the first person to whom Muhammad confided in the vision he had seen and the revelation he had received. Many years later, the Prophet said of him: "I have never called anyone to Islam who was not filled with doubts, questions, and contradictions, except Abu Bakr." As far as Abu Bakr was concerned, Muhammad's truthfulness was beyond doubt. He declared his new faith openly and brought new converts to the faith, including:

- **Uthman ibn Affan**, who later was Muhammad’s son-in-law and became the third caliph. As soon as Abd al-Rahman ibn Awf accepted Islam, the Prophet called him Abd al-Rahman - the servant of the Beneficent Allah. He participated in all of Prophet Muhammad's battles. At Uhud, he remained firm throughout and suffered more than twenty wounds, some of them deep and severe. His parents were from the Zuhra clan of the Quraysh tribe. He was one of Muhammad's wealthiest companions, and his generosity was legendary. He was one of the ten promised paradise because of his service to Islam.

- **Sad ibn Abi Waqqas** was the maternal uncle of the Prophet. He belonged to Bani Zuhrah, the clan of Aminah bint Wahb, the Prophet's mother. Sad embraced Islam at age seventeen under Abu Bakr's influence. Sad is renowned as the commander-in-chief of the strong Muslim army Umar dispatched to confront the Persians at Qadisiyyah near Najaf. Umar sent dispatches to Muslim governors throughout the state to mobilize all able-bodied persons. The Muslim army camped at Qadisiyyah. The Persians mobilized an overwhelming force of men under their most brilliant commander, Rustum. The Persians were heavily defeated. The Battle of Qadisiyyah is one of the major decisive battles in world history. It sealed the Sasanian Empire's destiny just as the Battle of Yarmuk sealed the Byzantine Empire's fate in the east.

- **Zubayr ibn al Awwam** was Khadijah's nephew. Zubayr embraced Islam at 16. He was one of the first to accept Islam under Abu Bakr's influence. The Prophet made Zubayr commander at the Battle of Badr. He participated in Muhammad's early battles and expeditions. He played a leading role in the Ridda Wars against rebel Arabian tribes. He participated in the conquest of Iraq, Byzantine Syria, Egypt, and Persia.

- **Talhah, ibn Ubayd Allah,** distinguished himself at the Battle of Uhud by keeping close to the Prophet while most of the Muslim army fled. He protected the Prophet's face from an arrow by holding it in his hand, and two of his fingers were cut. He suffered multiple wounds in the battle and survived.

- **Abu Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrah** participated in the first major battle between Muslims and the Quraysh at Badr. His father, Abdullah ibn al-Jarrah, was fighting alongside the Quraysh and cornered Ubaydah, leaving him no choice but to kill his father. In the Battle of Uhud, when the bulk of the Muslim soldiers fled, Abu Ubaydah remained steadfast and protected the Prophet. He participated in the Battle of the Trench, Hunayn, and Ridda wars. He was appointed supreme commander in Syria and had numerous other assignments in his illustrious career.

- **Hudhayfah bin Utbah** was from the tribe of Abu Shams, the son of Utbah ibn Rabiah. He was one of Quraysh's most influential leaders. Hudhayfah's sister was Hind bint Utbah, Abu Sufyan's wife. Abu Hudhayfah participated in the Battle of Badr alongside the Muslim army. His father, brother, and uncle were killed fighting alongside the Meccans. Abu Hudhayfah was martyred in the Battle of Al-Yamamah in the Ridda or apostasy wars. He relinquished power, wealth, and social status to Islam.

These men were members of the various Quraysh clans. Fearful of arousing the Quraysh's hostility, the newly converted Muslims used to hide their conversion and go to the outskirts of Mecca to pray. Under the Prophet's tutelage, these ordinary men made history and became great future leaders.

GOING PUBLIC AND THE BEGINNING OF OPPOSITION

After the first revelation, the Prophet restricted proselytization to close friends and family. The situation changed when the command

was given to preach openly approximately three years into his ministry.

WARN THE FOREMOST OF ALL CITIES AND HUMANITY

And warn [whomever you can reach, beginning with] your kinsfolk, and spread the wings of your tenderness over all believers who follow you. But if they disobey you, say, "I am free of responsibility for what you may do!" And place your trust in the Almighty, the Dispenser of Grace, who sees you when you stand [alone], and [sees] your behavior, among those who prostrate themselves [before Him] for He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! (26:214-220)

"Spread the wings of your tenderness" is a metonymical expression evocative of a bird that lovingly spreads its wings over its offspring in the nest. The phrase "all believers who follow you" shows that the above passage addresses the Prophet and everyone who chooses to be guided by the Quran. Who is called upon to extend his loving kindness and care to all believers who follow him?

Hence, proclaim openly all you have been instructed [to say], and leave alone all those who ascribe divinity to others besides Allah. We shall suffice you against all who [now] deride [this message] who assert that there are, side by side with Allah, other divine powers as well: for in time, they will know [the truth]. And We do know that your bosom is constricted by the [blasphemous] things they say. But you should extol thy Sustainer's limitless glory and praise Him and be of those who prostrate themselves [before Him] in adoration and worship thy Sustainer until death comes to you. (15:94-99)

GATHERING FOR A BANQUET

The Prophet invited his clan of Abd al-Muttalib to a grand dinner and preached the message to them. The occasion ended in disaster. One of his uncles, Abu Lahab, was openly abusive and soon became the most implacable enemy of the new religion.

In Carlyle's words, "After some three years of small success, he invited forty of his chief kindred to entertainment; and there he stood up and told them what his pretension was: that he had this thing to promulgate abroad to all men; that it was the highest thing, the one thing: which of them would second him in that? Amid the doubt and silence of all, young Ali, yet a lad, impatient with the silence, stood up, and exclaimed in passionate and fierce language, That he would! The assembly, including Abu Talib, Ali's father, could not be unfriendly to Muhammad. However, the sight there, of one unlettered elderly man, with a young lad, deciding on such an enterprise against all mankind, appeared ridiculous to them; the assembly broke up in laughter. Nevertheless, it was not a laughable thing; it was a very serious thing!"

POLEMICS AGAINST THE PROPHET

The Quraysh were disposed to tolerate the new religion, even after the Prophet openly proclaimed it. The opposition, at first, did not take Muhammad's preaching seriously. They ignored this strange group as a sad case of self-deception. The Meccan elite became alarmed by Muhammad's increasing, albeit small, success in attracting converts. They also became alarmed by the message directed at their gods, principles, and their ingrained practices.

Open confrontation, on the other hand, would have been against their interests. Their power depended on city unity. The example of Yathrib being torn apart by factional conflict was a grim warning to them. Whatever they might think privately of its rogue members,

the Hashim clan was bound by custom to defend the Prophet if attacked.

The Quraysh began by ridiculing him and misrepresenting his prophethood by instigating their poet friends to attack Muhammad in their poetry. They used mockery, sarcasm, and polemic. He was possessed by a jinn, said some; no, he was a falsifying magician, claimed others, a soothsayer asserted still others.

CONFRONT THE ANTI-SOCIAL CHARACTERS

Hence, defer not to [the likes and dislikes of] those who give the lie to the truth. They would like thee to be soft [toward them], so they might be soft [with thee]. Furthermore, defer not to the contemptible swearer of oaths, [or to] the slanderer with defaming tales. [Or] the withholder of the good, sinful aggressor, cruel, greed possessed, and utterly useless [to his fellowmen]. Is it because he is possessed of worldly goods and children that, whenever Our messages are conveyed to him, he says, "Fables of ancient times?" [For this] We shall brand him with indelible disgrace! (68:8-16)

"They would like thee to be soft," or conciliatory in the matter of ethical principles and moral valuations. Then they would reciprocate and desist from actively opposing thee. The term "children" or "sons" is often used in the Quran metonymically, denoting "popular support" or "many adherents." In conjunction with the term "worldly goods," it illustrates a pseudo-religious mentality where power, wealth, and influence are the only goals in life. These visible signs of worldly success are considered evidence of the "righteousness" of the person concerned and without further guidance. These verses were revealed concerning some polytheists - such as al-Waleed ibn al-Mughirah or someone else. They also have a general meaning and apply to anyone who meets this description. This is because the Qur’an was revealed to guide humanity.

DENUNCIATION OF INFLUENTIAL MERCHANTS

Tension in the city increased gradually, month by month, as Muhammad's spiritual influence spread. It became more dangerous when successive revelations were broadened to include the denunciation of influential merchants' whole way of life and their false attitude towards wealth. This was done by calling them cruel, miserly, and arrogant. The Prophet denounced false contracts, usury, neglect and the exploitation of orphans and widows. He defended the rights of the indigent and oppressed, asserting that the rich had an obligation to the poor and dispossessed.

THE PARABLE OF SINNERS' SUFFERING

[As for such sinners] behold, We [but] try them as We tried the owners of a certain garden who vowed that they would surely harvest its fruit tomorrow and made no allowance [for Allah's will]. Whereupon a visitation for thy Sustainer came upon that [garden] while they were asleep so that it became barren and bleak by tomorrow. When they rose in early morning, they called unto one another, "Go early to your tilth if you want to harvest the fruit!" Thus, they launched forth, whispering unto one another, "Indeed, no needy person shall enter it today [and come] upon you [unaware]." Early they went, strongly bent upon their purpose. But as soon as they beheld [the garden and could not recognize] it, they exclaimed, "Surely we have lost our way!" "Nay, but we have been rendered destitute!" Said the most right-minded among them." Did I not tell you, 'Will you not extol Allah's limitless glory?'" They answered: "Limitless in His glory is our Sustainer! Verily, we were doing wrong!" They then turned upon one another with mutual reproaches. [In the end] they said: "Oh, woe unto us! We behaved outrageously! "[But] it may be that our Sustainer will grant us something better instead of that, for, verily, unto our Sustainer do we turn with hope!" SUCH is the suffering [with which We try some people in this world], but

greater by far will be the suffering [which sinners shall have to bear] in the life to come if they but knew it! (68:17-33)

Ever since Biblical times, the poor have had a right to a share in the harvest of the fields and gardens owned by their more fortunate fellowmen (Cf. 6:141 - "give [to the needy] their due on harvest-day"). The determination of the "owners of the garden" to deprive the poor of this right is a social sin the parable points to.

GARDEN OF BLISS

For, behold, it is the Allah-conscious [alone] whom gardens of bliss await with their Sustainer. Should we, perchance, treat those who surrender themselves to Us as [We would treat] those who remain lost in sin? What is amiss with you? On what do you base your judgment [of right and wrong]? Or have you, perchance, a [special] divine writ you study, and in which you find all that you may wish to find? Or have you received a solemn promise, binding on Us till Resurrection Day, that yours will assuredly be whatever you judge [to be your rightful due]? Ask them which of them can vouch for this! Or have they, perchance, any sages to support their views? If they are sincere in their claim, let them produce those supporters of theirs. (68:34-41)

Earliest occurrence of the term Muslim*:* “Those who surrender themselves unto Us” is the earliest occurrence of the term Muslimun (sing. Muslim) in the history of Quranic revelation. The meaning of the terms Muslim and Islam in their original connotations is "one who surrenders himself to Allah" and "man's self-surrender to Allah." Their exclusive application to followers of the Prophet Muhammad represents a post-Quranic development and must be avoided in a translation of the Quran.

FATE ON THE DAY OF RESURRECTION

On the Day when man's very being shall be bared to the bone and when they [who now deny the truth] shall be called upon to prostrate themselves [before Allah], and shall be unable to do so. Downcast will be their eyes, with ignominy overwhelming them - seeing that they were called upon [in vain] to prostrate themselves [before Him] while they are yet sound [and alive]. (68:42-43)

“Man's very being shall be bared to the bone,” or his innermost thoughts, feelings, and motivations will be exposed. The implication is that their real motives shall be revealed in all their nakedness - namely, as something indefensible and spiritually destructive. They will be unable to prostrate before Allah, seeing that they were called upon to willingly humble themselves before Him while alive.

Hence, leave Me alone with such as give the lie to this tiding. We shall bring them low, step by step, without their perceiving how it has come about. For, behold, though I may give them rein for a while, My subtle plan is exceedingly firm! Or is it [they fear lest] thou ask them for a reward, [O Prophet], so that they would be burdened with debt [if they listened to thee]? Or [do they think] that the hidden reality [of all that exists] is within their grasp, so that [in time] they can write it down? (68:44-47)

"Leave me alone," whether or not they should be chastised. The implication is that Allah alone decides their fate. Indirectly, the above passage alludes to the question of why Allah allows so many evil persons to enjoy their lives to the fullest. In contrast, many of the righteous are allowed to suffer. The answer is that during his life in this world, man cannot understand where apparent happiness and unhappiness ultimately lead to. He cannot understand what role they play in Allah's "subtle plan" for creation. The term "subtle plan" describes Allah's unfathomable master plan for creation. Man can

glimpse only isolated fragments and never the totality: a plan in which everything has a definite function, and nothing is accidental.

The present passage points to the fallacy of the arrogant belief that the solution to all the mysteries of the universe is "just around the corner." Man-centered science epitomizes its being "written down" - and can and will teach its adepts how to "conquer nature" and attain what they regard as the best life.

THE EXAMPLE OF JONAH

Bear with patience thy Sustainer's will and be not like the great fish, who cried out [in distress] after giving into anger. [And remember]: had not grace from his Sustainer reached him, he would indeed have been cast forth upon that barren shore in a state of disgrace. But [as it was] , his Sustainer elected him and placed him among the righteous. Hence, [be patient] even though they who are bent on denying the truth would all but kill thee with their eyes whenever they hear this reminder, and [though] they say, "[As for Muhammad], behold, most surely, he is a madman!" [Be patient]: for this is naught else but a reminder [from Allah] to all humanity. (68:48-52)

This refers to Jonah. As mentioned in 37:140, "He fled like a runaway slave" from the task entrusted by Allah because his people did not accept his preaching as valid. So, Muhammad is exhorted not to give in to despair or anger at the opposition shown to him by most of his contemporaries in Mecca. Instead, he is encouraged to persevere in his prophetic mission.

CHAPTER 24
CONDEMNATION OF IDOL WORSHIP AND THE SATANIC VERSES

The utter condemnation of idolatry in verses from surah 53, Al Najam, set the stage for a protracted struggle between Islam's monotheism and idol worship. The rejection of polytheism was vigorously expressed and closed the door to future compromise. Arabia's polytheism was in a head-on collision with the pure monotheism of the Quran, and an epic struggle soon followed.

THE SATANIC VERSES

The story of Satanic verses, supposedly related to Surah Al Najam, is beyond this book. This is because it is not mentioned in the Quran or in early oral or written sources. It is not included in ibn Ishaq's Sira, the earliest biography of the Prophet. Islamic historians believe that "satanic verses" were a fabrication and a fake story based upon hearsay, documented more than a hundred years after the Prophet's death. For argument's sake, even if the story of the satanic verses is true, the Quran's infallibility is confirmed at the end of the day. The Prophet was a human being, not Allah or the son of Allah. Despite his exalted status, he is still a human being. In the Quran, Allah admonishes the Prophet whenever he commits a mistake. The difference between a prophet and an ordinary human being is that Allah does not leave a prophet in error.

DAUGHTERS OF ALLAH: THE TRIAD OF AL-LAT, MANAT, AL-UZZA

Have you, then, ever considered [what you worship in] Al-Lat, Al-Uzza, and [in] Manat, the third and last [of this triad]? Why [would you choose only] male offspring for yourselves, whereas to Him [you assign] female - an unfair division? These [allegedly

divine beings] are empty names you invented - you and your forefathers. For which Allah has bestowed no warrant from on high. They [who worship them] follow nothing but speculation and wishful thinking - although their Sustainer has given them proper guidance. Does man imagine it is his due to have all he wishes for, even though [both] the life to come and this present [one] belong to Allah [alone]? (53:19-25)

The Quran draws our attention to false symbols men often use to invest in divine qualities or powers. The sacrilegious imagery of Arabian pagans was epitomized in the triad of Al-Lat, Manat, and Al-Uzza.

CONTEMPT FOR THE DAUGHTERS

The daughters were considered mere liabilities, and their birth was a disgrace. From their standpoint, daughters have no function except to embellish a man's life. The contempt that the pagan Arabs felt for their female offspring and their attribution of daughters to Allah was particularly absurd and self-contradictory. They blaspheme by ascribing progeny to Allah, but they intensify their blasphemy by ascribing to Him something they despise, i.e., female offspring.

QUALIFIED INTERCESSION BY THE ANGELS

For, however many angels there may be in the heavens, their intercession can be of least avail [to anyone] except after Allah has given leave [to intercede] for whomever He wills and with whom He is well-pleased. Behold, it is [only] those who do not [really] believe in the life to come that regard angels as female beings. They have no knowledge whatsoever about it, they follow nothing but guesswork; yet behold, never can guess take the place of truth. (53:26-28)

They also believed that angels were Allah's daughters and female sub-deities. Angels are spiritual beings and sexless. Angels are creatures of the Most Gracious, created and not divine. Only the deniers of the hereafter think of them as female genders and "Allah's daughters." Whatever Allah decides regarding His grant or refusal of mediation depends on His redemptive acceptance or rejection of the human being concerned.

INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN MAN AND ALLAH

The pagans believed that goddesses and angels would act as mediators between worshippers and Allah. Similar thinking is not uncommon in other religions in the guise of veneration of saints and deified persons. Allah is omnipotent and omniscient and does not require any mediator between Himself and His creatures. What can anyone tell Allah, who knows everything? Allah will allow symbolic intercession for those already qualified for His forgiveness.

AVOID GRAVE SINS AND SHAMEFUL DEEDS

Therefore, avoid those who turn away from all remembrance of Us and care only for this world. To them is the only thing worth knowing. Behold, thy Sustainer is fully aware of who strayed from His path and **fully aware of who followed His guidance.** ***Indeed, unto Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He will reward those who do evil according to what they did and reward those who do good with ultimate good. As for those who avoid the [truly] grave sins and shameful deeds even though they may sometimes stumble - behold, thy Sustainer is bounding in forgiveness. He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of the dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers' wombs: do not, then, consider yourselves pure - [for] He knows best as to who is conscious of Him. (53:29-32)***

HOSTILE REACTION BY THE MECCAN ELITE

The Quraysh - particularly its Umayyad clan – the custodians of Kabah and the Zamzam, controllers of the caravan trade and oligarchic masters of the city, had special reasons for resistance. The great merchants of Mecca found nothing in what Muhammad offered they wanted to buy. The Meccan leaders were determined to have none of it because this teaching suited neither their taste nor their privilege. Muhammad's preaching was challenging and marked with resistance from the Meccans. Still, he kept proclaiming the message of Allah’s oneness with an unswerving purpose in the face of relentless persecution, insults, and outrage. The reaction to his message was violently hostile for the following reasons:

THREAT TO MECCA’S RELIGIOUS EMINENCE

Islam's uncompromising monotheism threatened Mecca's considerable revenue from pilgrimages to the Kabah with its three hundred sixty shrines (one for every day of the lunar year). Acceptance of the new doctrine would eliminate all other deities. The city's "idols" brought pilgrims, trade, and money. If this man succeeded in converting the Meccans and turning them against their old worship, what would happen to the Meccan trade? What would remain of Mecca’s religious eminence? Those were frightening thoughts that called for more severe measures to be taken.

POLITICAL REASONS

It will ruin the reputation of the Kabah guardians. At the very least, the Arabs might band together to drive the Quraysh out of Mecca and establish another tribal group in their place. This is as they have previously done with Khuzaahs and Khuzaahs had done to Jurhum.

There was a threat to wealthy merchants' political power and influence. Muhammad claimed to have received revelations from Allah that he would become "a potential new ruler if he achieved

religious success." The best man to rule a tribe had outstanding judgment, prudence, and wisdom.

DIVISION WITHIN INFLUENTIAL FAMILIES

The Prophet's preaching undermined influential families' unity. The conversion of the younger sons to Islam while the older generation wielded power and were bitter opponents. What was the Quran's message that attracted the younger sons of Mecca's elite families? These young men were summoned for religious grounds. Conscious thoughts about economics or politics played little part in this group's conversion.

CONVERSION OF POOR SLAVES AND FOREIGNERS

Some of the early Islam converts were slaves, foreigners, and the poor. They did not belong to any clan and were without protection. This group was almost certainly influenced more by their insecurity, both physical and psychological, than by any prospect of economic or political advantage. Islam appealed to the poor and depressed classes in Mecca. When members of these classes became Muslims, they also became aware that as pagans, they were despised and rejected by the highly class-conscious and racist aristocracy, but Islam gave them a new self-esteem. As Muslims, they were all equal, and they found pride in themselves.

It was seen as a subversive activity. The affluent Quraysh members used to scoff at them for being the "chosen ones" of the Quraysh in Allah's sight! They poked fun at their humble social standing and attacked them for any weakness of character they had before accepting Islam.

Hence, repulse not [any of] those who invoke at morning and evening their Sustainer, seeking His countenance. You are in no wise accountable for them - just as they are not responsible for

you - and you have, therefore, no right to repulse them: for then you would be among the evildoers. (6:52)

This verse relates not only to "lowly" Islam followers but to people who, for whatever reason, their beliefs or actions do not coincide with the Quran's teachings. They believe in Allah and always seek His grace and acceptance in the morning and evening. Muslims are urged not to repulse anyone who believes in Allah. Even though his beliefs may not fully answer the Quran's demands, try to help him with a patient explanation.

CHAPTER 25
THE PERSECUTION OF MUSLIMS

Abu Jahl's persecution methods were based on the social status of newly converted Muslims. He would resort to verbal attacks on influential persons, economic pressure on lesser men, and physical violence and torture toward those without influential backing.

Verbal abuse: When he heard of the conversion of a man from some influential family with powerful friends, he criticized him vigorously and put him to shame. ‘You have left your father’s religion,’ he said, ‘although he is a better man than you, we shall make your prudence appear folly and your judgment unsound, and we shall bring your honor low.’ He would refrain from violence, as most of the clans of Quraysh were sufficiently strong to cause serious inconvenience, if not worse, to anyone who maltreated a clansman or confederate.

Business boycott: If he was a merchant, he used to say, ‘By Allah, we shall see that your goods are not sold, and your capital is lost.’

Violence towards marginalized Muslims: The wicked Abu Jahl used to incite Quraysh men against the poor Muslims. He beat him and incited people against him—those exposed to physical violence included slaves and persons without clan connections. They pelted Muslims with stones, hit them with sticks, and threw them in prison. Horrendous torture was inflicted upon poor Muslims, and some died. However, no massacres were committed, and only a few lives were lost. The law of retaliation prevented whole-scale killings.

EACH TRIBE TORTURED ITS NEW CONVERTS

The Quraysh chose an organized persecution system. Each household tortured its members or clients and slaves who converted to Islam. Many were thrown into prison, starved, and beaten. To not

violate their vendetta laws, each family took upon itself the task of strangling the new religion within its circle.

CONTEMPT FOR THE POOR MUSLIM CONVERTS

They who are bent on denying the truth speak thus of those who have attained faith: "If this [message] were any good, these [people] would not have preceded us in accepting it!" And since they refuse to be guided by it, they will always say, "This is [but] an ancient falsehood!" (46:11)

Early followers of Muhammad were treated with contempt by the pagan Quraysh. Most of them came from the poorest, lowest strata of Meccan society. The above verses have timeless import as the poor and lowly have always been among the first to follow a prophet. It may also bear on our times when the materially powerful nations, whose technological progress has been blinded to many spiritual verities, are increasingly contemptuous of those weaker civilizations in which religion still plays a formalistic role.

Some pagan chieftains at Mecca expressed their willingness to consider accepting Islam if the Prophet dissociated himself from former slaves and other oppressed persons among his followers. This was a demand that the Prophet, of course, rejected.

MARTYRDOM OF THE FIRST CONVERT FAMILY

The Meccans did not harm Muhammad for fear of reprisals from his clan. They still hurt the rank-and-file Muslims, who were less socially connected. For a long time, it was the latter who bore the brunt of the Quraysh's wrath. There are some well-documented persecution incidents, and the family of Yasir and Sumayya is one of them. They were the first family, all accepting Islam. They had no tribal affiliation, and there was no one to protect them. Abu Jahl tortured all three. Sumayya died during torture. She thus became the first martyr. Her husband, Yasir, was also tortured to death later.

Ammar bin Yasir survived torture by recanting his faith under duress.

RECANTING FAITH UNDER DURESS

As for anyone who denies Allah after attaining faith - and this, to be sure, does not apply to one who does it under duress, his heart remains true to his faith. But [only] him who willingly opens his heart to a denial of the truth. Upon all such [falls], Allah's condemnation and tremendous suffering await them. (16:106)

It relates to believers who, under torture or death threat, "recant" to save themselves. Although the Quran makes it clear in several places that martyrdom in the cause of faith is highly commendable, "Allah does not burden any human being with more than he is well able to bear." (2:233)

The verse was revealed in the case of Ammar bin Yasir, whose parents were mercilessly murdered before his eyes. He was put to such unbearable torture that, to save his life, he had to utter the words of unbelief demanded of him. Afterward, when he came to the Prophet feeling guilty and sorrowful, he said: "O Messenger of Allah, they did not let me go until I spoke evil of you and praised their deities." The Prophet asked him: How do you feel about this in your heart? He replied humbly: My heart is fully convinced of faith. At this, the Prophet replied: If they put you to the same torture again, you may utter the same words.

TORTURE OF ENSLAVED MUSLIM MEN

A favorite form of torture was to expose them to the desert heat. When reduced by thirst, the torturer offered the new converts the choice of worshipping idols or death. The hill of Ramdha and a place called Batha became the scene of cruel torture. Bilal, the first muezzin to call the faithful to prayer, his torture is well documented.

Bilal ibn Rabah was the Ethiopian slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf. He inflicted torture by being exposed to the sun's heat when it was at its peak. He was made to lie on his back with a large stone block placed on his chest. He was given a choice between death or abjuring Islam. The slave refused to surrender. As he lay dying of thirst, his only word, which he repeated over and over, was "ahadun, ahadun" "One [Allah], one" until his master, seeing that he would never recant, sold him to Abu Bakr. His heroism was typical. At Badr, Bilal killed Umayyah bin Khalaf his former master.

Bilal ibn Rabah is one of the most illustrious names in Islamic history. The Prophet selected Bilal to be one of his distinguished companions. Bilal's rise to prominence is evidence of Islam's importance of pluralism and racial equality.

Shuayb bin Sinan was captured and sold as a slave by the Greeks. When he became a Muslim, the Quraysh beat him savagely. The Prophet said: "The first Muslims are four people: I am the first Muslim among Arabs. Suhayb bin Sinan is the first Muslim among the Byzantines. Salman al-Farisi is the first Muslim among the Persians, and Bilal is the first Muslim among the Abyssinians."

Abu Fukaiha was Safwan bin Umayyah's slave. His master dragged him on hot sand with a rope tied to his feet. The aged Abu Fukayha became a Muslim. He suffered under 614-616 persecution when he was tortured until he did not know what he was saying.

Khabab ibn el-Arat was made to stand in the desert sun and flogged. He was forced to lie on the fire embers. He survived and remained firm in his faith. Food and water were denied to them in the vain hope that hunger and thirst would compel them to abandon Islam.

TORTURE OF FEMALE SLAVES

Lubina was a Mumil bin Habib slave. Umar bin al-Khattab (the future caliph of the Muslims) tortured her, and whenever he paused,

he said: “I have not stopped beating you out of pity. I have stopped because I am exhausted.” **Zunayra** was another female slave. When she declared her faith in Islam, Umar ibn al-Khattab and Abu Jahl tortured her until she became blind. Many years later, she recovered her sight, and the Quraysh attribute this recovery to Muhammad's "sorcery".

Nahdiyya and **Umm Unays** were two other female slaves who became Muslims. Their masters tortured them for accepting Islam. Abu Bakr bought all the male and female slaves mentioned above and gave them freedom.

ABDULLAH IBN MASOOD

There were other Muslims who were not slaves but "poor and weak.” They, too, endured torture. Abdullah ibn Masood, a young Muslim, was such an example. He was distinguished among the Prophet’s companions by his knowledge and learning. He was one of the earliest *huffaz* (who memorized the entire Quran by heart) in Islam. As each new verse was revealed, he heard it from the Prophet and memorized it. He was the first man to recite the Quran loudly in the Kabah.

ABU BAKR

Persecution was not limited to slaves and the poor; even notables suffered torture. Aishah, the Prophet’s wife, reports that when Muslims number 38, Abu Bakr, suggested to the Prophet they should go public. The Prophet said to him: “We are still a few in number.” He repeated his advice several times until the Prophet acted on it. The Prophet declared himself to his companions as they sat around the Kabah. Abu Bakr then stood up after the Prophet was seated. He called on people to believe in Allah and His Messenger. This was a challenge for the unbelievers, and they physically assaulted the Muslims in the gathering. Abu Bakr came out worst. Utbah ibn Rabiah, a leading personality who usually took a

moderate attitude, was most brutal. He used a thick pair of shoes to beat up Abu Bakr and cut his face with his shoes' edges. He jumped over Abu Bakr, smashing his nose. Abu Bakr's tribesmen from Taym rushed to his aid, rescuing him from his persecutors and carrying him home. Abu Bakr was unconscious for many hours.

UTHMAN IBN AFFAN

When Uthman ibn Affan accepted Islam, his uncle Abu Al-Aas ibn Umayyah tied him up and swore not to free him until he left Islam. When Uthman declared that he would not leave Islam, his uncle saw how determined Uthman was to remain a Muslim, and he let him go.

THE HOUSE OF AL-ARQAM

Al-Arqam ibn Abi al-Arqam was a young man, seventh on the list of people, who became a Muslim at Abu Bakr's invitation. He belonged to the Makhzum clan, the family of some of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Mecca. He owned a large house located centrally on the east of As-Safa Hill opposite the Kabah. In the fifth year of his mission, the Prophet made Al-Arqam the center of his preaching activities. He did not live in this house but spent most of the day there. His followers came to him to be instructed in the Quran and perform ritual prayers. The house was strategically located so that it served as a secret hide-out to protect Muslims from Quraysh harassment. It was the same house where Umar Ibn Al Khattab saw the Prophet and announced his conversion to Islam.

CHAPTER 26
MUSLIMS EXILE TO ETHIOPIA (615)

CONVERSION OF UMAR IBN AL KHATTAB AND HAMZA

The Prophet spoke to those who would listen to him publishing his doctrine among the pilgrims as they came to Mecca, gaining adherents at this place and that. Continual contradictions, hatred, and open or secret danger threatened him. His strong relationships protected him.

Profoundly afflicted by his disciples' suffering, the Prophet advised many of his adherents to quit Mecca. The Prophet sent some of his followers to seek refuge in the neighboring Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. This is because he learned that the Christian King was a wise and just man and would not tolerate injustice. Fewer than a hundred Muslims secretly left for Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia). When they arrived in Abyssinia, the Muslims presented the King with an official letter from the Prophet. The letter read: "I have sent my cousin Jafar to you, accompanied by a small number of Muslims; if he comes to you, receive them in hospitality."

The Quraysh sent two ambassadors to King Negus to extradite these fugitives to Mecca. The charge was the abjuration of their old religion and the adoption of another one. King Negus sent for the exiles and inquired whether what their enemies had stated was true. The Prophet, in advance, chose Jaffar, son of Abu Talib, and his cousin because he was an eloquent speaker.

Acting as a spokesman for the group, Jaffar said:" O, King! We were in a state of immortality, worshipping idols, eating carrion, and committing iniquity. We honored no relative and assisted no neighbor. The strong among us exploit the weak. Then Allah sent us a prophet, one of our own, whose lineage, truthfulness, loyalty, and purity were well known. He called us to worship Allah alone

and repudiate all the stones and idols to whom our ancestors prayed. He commanded us always to tell the truth, remain faithful to trust and promise, assist the family, be good neighbors, abstain from things forbidden, and avoid fornication, perjury, and false witness. He commanded us not to rob the orphan's fortune or falsely accuse the married woman. He ordered us to hold prayers, fast, and give charity." (The five pillars of Islam were here enumerated and explained.) "We believed in him and what he brought to us from Allah and followed him in what he enjoined and forbade. Our people, however, tried to sway us away from our religion and persecuted us. They inflicted great suffering so that we might re-enter old immoral practices. As they vanquished and berated us unjustly and made life intolerable in Mecca, we chose you and your country and came hither to live under your protection in justice and peace." Thereupon, the Negus asked, "Will you show me some of the revelations your Prophet claims to have come to him from Allah?" Jaffar answered, "Yes!" and recited the surah of Mary (The Nineteenth Surah Maryam or Mary) revealed before their departure to Abyssinia.)

And call to mind, through this divine writ, Mary. Lo! She withdrew from her family to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them. We sent her Our angel of revelation, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made human being. She exclaimed: "Verily, 'I seek refuge from thee with the Most Gracious! [Approach me not] if thou art conscious of Him!" [The Angel] answered: "I am but a messenger of thy Sustainer, [who says], 'I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son endowed with purity.'" Said she: "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? For, never have I been a loose woman!" [The Angel] answered: "Thus it is [but] thy Sustainer says, 'This is easy for Me; and [thou shalt have a son], so that We might make him a symbol unto mankind and an act of grace from Us.'" (19:16-21)

When the Negus, the patriarchs, and the bishops heard this statement, they all wept in public. The King's beard became wet, and the bishops cried until their scrolls were wet. The King said, “These words must have sprung from the same fountainhead from which our master Jesus Christ's words have sprung." Negus asked them to tell him more about Jesus. Jaffar ibn Abu Talib answered, “Our judgment of Jesus is what was revealed to our Prophet; namely, that Jesus is the servant of Allah, His Prophet, His spirit, His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin.” The Negus drew a line on the floor with his cane and said, “Between your religion and ours, there is no more difference than this line.” At this, the king denied the extradition of Muslims to Mecca.

CONVERSION OF HAMZA

Abu Jahl indirectly did a great service to the new religion. He once passed by the apostle at al-Safa in the Kabah, insulted him, and behaved most offensively, speaking spitefully of Islam. The Prophet ignored Abu Jahl and kept quiet. Now, a woman close by listened to what transpired on. Hamza B. Abdul Muttalib arrived after returning from a hunting trip. Hamza was the Prophet's uncle and the strongest Quraysh man. He passed by this woman, who asked him if he had heard of what Abu Jahl had done recently to his nephew, Muhammad. She also told him how he had insulted and cursed him. Hamza was outraged and rushed back to find Abu Jahl and struck him with his bow. Hamza then declared his Islam conversion. Hamza and Ali were the two greatest warriors in Islam's early battles. Hamza was martyred in Uhud.

CONVERSION OF UMAR IBN AL KHATTAB

At the time of his conversion, Umar was a mature man of thirty to thirty-five years who was devoted to old paganism. He was passionately opposed to Muhammad’s message and determined to wipe it out. Upon learning that his sister Fatima and her husband

had converted to Islam, he rushed straight to their house. Upon entering the house without knocking, he found them listening to a third person reciting the Quran.

They, too, heard him approach, hid their visitor and put away the Quran manuscript from which they were reading. Umar asked, “What is this cantillation I heard as I walked in?” The pair denied hearing anything. Flying into a rage, Umar told them he knew they had forsworn their faith and entered Islam. He chastised them and hit his brother-in-law. Fatima rose to protect her husband. As she came between the two men, Umar hit her on the head and made her bleed. At that point, the pair lost their fear entirely and said together, “Yes, indeed! We have become Muslims. Do what you will!” At this surge of courage and upon seeing his sister's blood flow, Umar was moved. After calming down a bit, he asked his sister to let him see the manuscript, which she and her husband had been reading together. She surrendered the manuscript (the twentieth chapter of the Quran) to him. He read it, and his face changed to an expression of regret for what he had done. He was deeply shaken by the beauty, majesty, nobility, and magnanimity of its message.

O man! We did not bestow the Quran from on high to make you unhappy. But as an exhortation to all who stand in awe [of Allah]. A revelation from Him who created the earth and the high heavens. The Most Gracious, established on the throne of His almightiness. Unto Him belongs all there is in the heavens and on earth, and all that is between them and beneath the sod. And if you say it aloud, [He hears it] since He knows [even] the secret [thoughts of man], and all that is yet more hidden [within him]. Allah - there is no deity save Him; His [alone] are the attributes of perfection! (20:1-8)

The ethical discipline imposed upon man by the Quran's teachings is not meant to narrow down his experience of life. On the contrary, it enhances it by deepening his consciousness of right and wrong. He knows man’s unspoken, conscious thoughts and all that

transpires within his subconscious self. The Quran's Arabic was an innovative literary form and a masterpiece of Arab prose. The sheer beauty of the Quran, which resonated with their deepest aspirations, cut through their intellectual preconceptions. It inspired them on a level more profound than the cerebral, inspiring many of the first believers. One of the most dramatic conversions was that of Umar ibn al Khattab, as described above. He was also an expert in Arabian poetry and the first time he heard the Quran's extraordinary eloquence. As he said, the language broke through all his reservations about its message: “When I heard the Quran, my heart softened, and I wept, and Islam entered in me."

Umar left his sister's house and , headed straight for Muhammad, and declared his conversion to Islam. Thus, the new faith gained a valuable adherent, who would later be the second caliph and perhaps one of the greatest administrators in Islam's history. The Quraysh then recognized that the Prophet had found a protector in Hamza and Umar, and so they abandoned some of their harassment methods.

CHAPTER 27
THE PERSECUTION OF THE PROPHET

For the time being, the Prophet was exempt from immediate violence owing to the protection of Abu Talib and his kinsmen. Among Muhammad's opposition were Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, Abu Jahl, and Abu Sufyan, the chief of the Umayyad clan. One man's claim to be Allah's prophet had turned into a serious revolutionary movement that threatened their status.

The persecution only motivated him to preach fervently. He adjured his listeners to turn from their false gods, abandon their evil ways and prepare for the day of reckoning when the earth would be folded up, and none would be near but Allah.

URGING ABU TALIB TO RELINQUISH MUHAMMAD'S PROTECTION

The aristocracy of the Banu-Umayyah tribe: Walid ibn al-Mughirah, Utbah ibn Rabiah, Shayba ibn Rabiah, Abu Sufyan ibn Ḥarb, Amr ibn Hisham (Abu Jahl), and many other Meccan leaders met Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and urged him to stop his nephew from attacking their religion, blaspheming their gods, and condemning their forefathers for unbelief.

They urged Abu Talib to stop Muhammad from preaching or relinquishing his protection. Abu Talib refused to forego his protection of Muhammad and communicated his resolution to his clan Banu Hashim and Banu al Muttalib. All of them pledged to protect Muhammad except Abu Lahab. The tribal bond they shared with Muhammad and their traditional rivalry with Banu Umayyah influenced their decision to stand by the Prophet.

The second time the delegation came to see Abu Talib, its members took a handsome young man, Ammarra ibn Walid, and offered Abu

Talib a “son” if he surrendered Muhammad to them. The idea was absurd, but Abu Talib handled the situation with finesse and sent them away. They met Abu Talib the third time and finally gave the ultimatum to stop your nephew, or we will fight both of you.

Abu Talib called Muhammad and appraised him of the purpose of the Quraysh representation and then added: “O life of your uncle! Do not place a burden upon me that is beyond my strength." Muhammad answered: "O my uncle! If the Quraysh places the Sun on my right hand and the Moon on my left, I shall not refrain from proclaiming Allah's Oneness. In the execution of this duty, either I shall succeed, and Islam shall spread, or, if I fail, I shall perish in the attempt.” Abu Talib said: “Go my son and do whatever you like. No one will dare harm you."

In Carlyle’s words, “There was something in this Truth he had got, which was from Nature herself; equal in rank to the Sun, or Moon, or whatsoever thing Nature had made. It would speak itself there, so long as the Almighty allowed it, despite Sun and Moon, and all Quraysh and all men and things. It must do that and could do no other; that the task he had got was not soft but a stern and great one.”

OPEN PERSECUTION

When everything else failed, they turned to open persecution. Even the prophet Muhammad did not escape, despite his clan's protection. The Prophet was assaulted many times by the pagans; he escaped without severe bodily harm each time. They covered Muhammad and his followers with dirt and filth while they worshipped. While praying in the Kabah, **Abu Lahab** threw on him the entrails of a goat sacrificed to one of the gods.

Uqbah bin Muayt was one of the vilest antagonists of the Prophet and Muslims. Despite being a neighbor to the Prophet, his acts of hatred include insults, mockery, and stepping on the Prophet’s neck

while he was in prostration. He also spit in the Prophet's face, attempted his murder by strangulation, and more. On one occasion, when he was praying in the courtyard of the Kabah, Uqbah brought the waste of a slaughtered camel (intestines, blood, dung, etc.) upon the suggestion of other Quraysh leaders who were gathered there and placed it upon Muhammad's back while he was prostrating. He remained in that position due to the weight, unable to get up from prostration until his daughter came and removed it. They laughed so much that they fell on each other.

Uqbah was killed during the Battle of Badr and was among Quraysh leaders buried in a pit. However, according to Ibn Hisham's biography, Uqbah was executed on Muhammad's order after the Battle of Badr.

COERCION IN RELIGION

Have you ever considered him who prevents a servant [of Allah] from praying? Have you pondered whether he is on the right way or concerned with Allah-consciousness? Have you considered whether he may be giving the lie to the truth and turning his back [upon it]? Does he not know Allah sees [all]? If he desists not, We shall most surely drag him down upon his forehead - the lying, rebellious forehead! Let him summon [to his aid] the counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom, [all the while] We shall summon the forces of heavenly chastisement! You pay no heed to him but prostrate yourself [before Allah] and draw close [unto Him]! (96:9-19)

The above passage alludes to Abu Jahl, the Prophet's bitterest opponent in Mecca. Abu Jahl persistently tried to prevent Muhammad and his followers from praying before the Kabah, not concerned about his fellowmen's Allah-consciousness. The phrase "Drag him by his forelock" is an ancient Arabian expression denoting a person's utter subjection and humiliation. "Counsels of his own [spurious] wisdom" is an allusion to the arrogance that so

often deludes man into regarding himself as "self-sufficient." Apart from its historical significance, it applies to all attempts to deny freedom of religion its legitimate function in shaping social life.

OVERWHELMING WITH A CROWD

And [know] that all worship is due to Allah alone: therefore, do not invoke anyone side-by-side with Allah! Yet [thus it is] that whenever a servant of Allah stands up in prayer to Him, they [who are bent on denying the truth] would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds. Say: "I invoke my Sustainer alone, for I do not ascribe divinity to anyone besides Him. Say: "It is not in my power to cause you harm or to endow you with consciousness of what is right. Say: "No one could ever protect me from Allah, nor could I ever find a place to hide from Him if I failed to convey [to the world whatever illumination comes to me] from Allah and His messages." (72:18-23)

PUNISHMENT FOR REBELLION AGAINST ALLAH

Now, whoever rebels against Allah and His Apostle, the fire of hell awaits him to abide beyond the count of time. [Let them wait] until that [doom] of which they were forewarned: [The Day of Judgment]. For then, they will understand what [type of man] is more helpless and counts for less! Say: "I do not know whether that [doom] of which you were forewarned is near or whether my Sustainer has set it a long time away. He [alone] knows what is beyond a created being's perception. To none does He disclose any of the mysteries of His unfathomable knowledge unless it be to an apostle whom He has been pleased to elect [therefor]. And then He sends forth [the forces of heaven] to watch over him in whatever lies open before him and in what is beyond his ken – to make manifest that it is indeed [but] their Sustainer's messages these [apostles] deliver. For it is He who encompasses [with His

knowledge] all they have [to say], just as He counts, one by one, of everything [that exists]" (72:23-28).

In this instance, the people alluded to are those who "would gladly overwhelm Allah's servant with their crowds." Only Allah has exclusive knowledge of "what is beyond the perception of any created being" (al-ghayb), and only Allah's elects are privy to this knowledge. The very fact of being graced by divine revelation protects every Apostle spiritually in all concerns of his life. This is regardless of whether these concerns are obvious to him or beyond his ken.

ABU LAHAB AND ABU JAHL

Prophet Muhammad made numerous attempts to preach to the Meccans in the days that followed. Abu Lahab and his confederate, Abu Jahl, did what they could to stop him. They largely succeeded in dispersing the crowds gathered to hear the Apostle's homilies. The phrase "Would gladly overwhelm him with their crowds" to extinguish Allah's (guiding) light refers to Prophet Muhammad and the hostility shown to him by his pagan contemporaries, who surrounded him while he prayed in the Kabah to intimidate and overwhelm him. On one occasion, Prophet Muhammad came to the Kabah to read the Quran when suddenly he was surrounded by idolaters. They mobbed him but for the intervention of Harith ibn Abi Hala, the nephew and adopted son of Khadijah. He arrived on the scene just in time and entered the melee to defend the Prophet. In the struggle, one of the idolaters drew his dagger and stabbed Harith, repeatedly killing him. He was only seventeen, the youngest victim of spiraling and escalating violence.

PROPHETS OF THE OLD ALSO FACED OPPOSITION

And indeed, [O Prophet] even before your time, we sent [Our apostles] to old communities. Never did an apostle come to them without derision. We [now] cause [scorn of Our message] to

permeate the hearts lost in sin, who do not believe in it. Although the way those [evildoers] of olden times had to go has long been within their ken. (15:10-13)

The term Shiah (communities) denotes a distinct group of people having in common similar persuasions or adhering to the same principles of behavior. Sometimes (though not here) used in the sense of "sect." Although the way of life (Sunnah) of olden times has already passed, the way Allah has dealt with them has long since become a matter of common knowledge.

DO NOT GRIEVE OVER THOSE WHO REFUSE TO HEED YOU

Turn not your eyes [longingly] towards worldly benefits We have granted to those [that deny the truth]. Do not grieve over those [who refuse to heed you]. But spread the wings of tenderness over the believers and say: "I am indeed the plain warner [promised by Allah]!" (15:88-89)

NO COMPROMISE WITH IDOLATRY

They [who have gone astray] intend to tempt you away from all [the truth] with which We have inspired you, [O Prophet], to make you invent something else in Our name. In that case, they would surely call you their friend! And if We had not made you firm [in faith], you might have inclined to them a bit, in which case, We would indeed have had you taste double [chastisement] in life and twofold [chastisement] after death, and you would have found none to succor you against Us! (17:73-75)

The disbelievers of Mecca were exerting their best efforts to turn the Prophet away from his message of Allah's Oneness. They were also forcing him to make a compromise with idolatry. To achieve this end, they tempted him with greed, held out threats, and raised false propaganda. They persecuted him, and applied economic

pressure and social boycott against him. In short, they did all that they could to defeat his resolve.

CHAPTER 28
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BOYCOTT (616-619 CE)

After Umar's conversion, Mecca's Muslims gained a strong ally. Umar did not hide his conversion and disapproved of Muslims holding prayers in secret. The Quraysh then sought another strategy. Towards the end of 616 CE, they bound themselves by a solemn document not to enter any marriage contract or commercial relations with the Hashemites and Muttalibities. The pagans had already spent three years campaigning against Islam, but they had very little to show for their efforts. They commissioned poets who directed their most caustic stings at Muhammad's preaching. They injured and harmed his person and his followers. They offered him bribes of money, royalty, and power, all which satisfied the most fastidious among men. In short, they tried temptation, persuasion, insults, jibes, mockery, the threat of force, and the actual use of force, but to no avail.

Finally, the Meccan oligarchy decided to take steps against Abu Talib in desperation. In their opinion, he was the real protector of blasphemy. The various clans of Quraysh met in a solemn conclave in Mecca's town hall. By consensus, they drafted and signed a document that stipulated that unless Banu Hashim surrendered Muhammad to them, it would be subjected to an economic and social boycott. They pledged not to buy or sell anything to Banu Hashim members. The ban was carefully written down and sealed with three seals and sent to the other tribes for ratification. No fewer than forty Quraysh leaders signed this agreement. After ratification, it was solemnly suspended from the Kabah wall. The pact into which the Quraysh clans entered for boycotting Muhammad and blockading Muslims continued for three consecutive years.

Abu Talib found himself in great peril and realized that living in a city where the enemy could strike would not be prudent. He decided to leave Mecca and seek safety in that quarter of the hollow of Mecca: a ravine with natural defenses and where most of the clan lived. The entry to this ravine was through a low gateway, through which a camel passed with difficultly. It was detached from the town by cliffs and buildings on all sides.

The Hashemites soon found themselves cut off from food supplies and other necessities, and a severe scarcity ensued. The cries of hungry children were heard outside. Some resorted to eating tree bark and old leather. They would probably have perished, but they received help from their compassionate compatriots surreptitiously. Among the relatives of the isolated band, some ventured to help despite Quraysh threats.

Hakim ibn Hizam was a nephew of Khadijah who brought supplies for his aunt Khadijah. Ali was 16 years old, and he was charged with the dangerous and challenging duty of bringing water and grain whenever he could find any. For one goatskin of water, he had to pay for one piece of gold. His efforts, however, brought only partial relief to the beleaguered tribe. Ali, despite his daring and resourcefulness, could not find provision. Being hungry and thirsty was the norm in the ravine. When water was available, mothers boiled dead leaves to comfort their crying children. The most precious gift for the besieged clans during these three years was water.

One of Banu Hashim's friends was Hisham ibn **Amr al-Aamiri** brought food and water for them as often as he could. The time he delivered the provisions was a few hours before daybreak. However, eventually, the Quraysh caught him, and they threatened to kill him if he helped Banu Hashim.

Similarly, **Abu l-Bakhtari** brought essential supplies to Banu Hashim. They all risked death time and again to get food and water.

They were also happy to pay the bill for relief operations for three years. All they sought in return was the safety of the besieged clans.

After three years, four or five *non-Muslims*, more humane than the rest and belonging to different clans, publicly denounced the unjust boycott. Banu Hashim's siege was lifted in A.D. 619, and the clan returned to the city. The Quraysh embargo failed to produce the intended result. They survived physically, but they did not abandon Muhammad to Quraysh. At the sacrifice of all their worldly interests and hopes and at repeated risks of death, followers adhered to the new Prophet with loyalty and devotion seldom paralleled in history. Sir William Muir Said, whose words carry added weight because he was, overall, a severe critic of Islam:

"Never since the days when primitive Christianity startled the world from its sleep and waged a mortal conflict with heathenism, had men seen the like arousing of spiritual life - the like faith that suffered sacrifice and took the spoiling of goods joyfully for conscience's sake."

THE YEAR OF MOURNING (619 CE)

After repudiation of the boycott pact, Muhammad and his companions emerged from their quarters. Muhammad resumed his call to the Quraysh and tribes who came to Mecca during the holy months. A few months later, Abu Talib, now over eighty years old, died. Henceforth, Muhammad could no longer rely on the protection of his clan. Khadijah prophet's wife also died the same year. In Abu Talib, Muhammad lost his guardian, who stood between him and his enemies. Khadijah's death was a severe psychological blow. When none believed in Muhammad and his own heart was full of doubt, Khadijah's love and faith stood by for him. Food shortages during the siege contributed to Khadijah's death.

FAILURE TO CONVERT ABU TALIB

You cannot guide everyone you love: but Allah guides him who wills. He is fully aware of all who let themselves be guided. Now some say, "If we followed the guidance you invite us, we would be torn away from our very soil!" Why have We not established for them a sanctuary secure, as a provision from Us, wherein shall be gathered the fruits of all [good] things? But most of them are unaware [of this truth]. (28:56-57)

Abu Talib's faith has been controversial between Shia and some Sunni scholars. Shia scholars say historical and hadith evidence shows Abu Talib was a Muslim. Abu Talib's poems show his belief in Islam and the Prophet's prophethood.

Abu Talib may not have openly professed Islam, but his heart and sympathies were always with his nephew. Besides his wife, Khadijah, Abu Talib stood by his nephew in all tragic events during the Mecca period. He suffered tremendous hardships in Islam's cause. No one can judge a man's faith except Allah. Only Allah knows what is in men's hearts. As human beings, we can only see men's deeds. The services Abu Talib provided to Islam were invaluable. Abu Talib was a gifted poet, with great integrity

and a high moral character.

Sunni version says one of the great disappointments of Muhammad's life was his failure to convert Abu Talib to Islam. Once, the Prophet approached Abu Talib and said, "Allah has sent me to his servants to direct them towards the truth, and O my uncle, you are the most worthy of all. Thus, I should call upon you to accept the truth and help spread it." Replied Abu Talib, "I cannot abjure the religion of my fathers, but by the Supreme Allah, while I am alive, none shall dare to injure you." However, this event occurred early in the Prophet's ministry.

According to several Traditions, the above verse relates to the Prophet's inability to induce his dying Uncle Abu Talib to renounce the pagan beliefs of his ancestors. Influenced by Abu Jahl and other Meccan chieftains, Abu Talib died proclaiming, in his own words, "the creed of Abd al-Muttalib" or, according to another version, "the creed of my ancestors." However, the Quranic statement, "you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love," does not specify any personality. It stresses the inadequacy of all human endeavors to convert others unless that person wills to be guided. Thus, Allah's guidance is but the final act of His grace with which He rewards all who desire guidance.

"If we follow your guidance, we would be torn away from our soil:" it echoes an objection voiced by many pagans of Mecca to Muhammad's preaching. "If we were to accept your call, most of the other tribes would regard this as a betrayal of our common ancestral beliefs and would drive us away from our land and cause a total breach between us and our community and, thus, cut the ground from under our feet." The Prophet's Meccan contemporaries were reminded that they need not fear to be dispossessed of this holy land, so long as they remain righteous and trust in Allah. The "sanctuary secure" is Allah's promise that all who have faith in Him and are conscious of their responsibility to Him shall be graced with a sense of inner peace in this world and with enduring bliss in the life to come.

AGONY OVER NONBELIEVERS' SPIRITUAL FATE

But would you perhaps torment yourself to death with grief over them, if they are not willing to believe in this message? (18:6)

This rhetorical question was addressed to the Prophet. He was deeply distressed by the hostility his message aroused among the pagan Meccans and suffered agonies of apprehension regarding their spiritual fate. Beyond that, however, it applies to everyone who, having become convinced of the truth of an ethical

proposition, is dismayed at the indifference with which his social environment reacts to it.

PERSECUTION IN TAIF

After Abu Talib's death, Abu Lahab, Muhammad's uncle, and his most formidable adversary, succeeded Abu Talib as chief of the clan. Fearing the lack of support from his clan, Muhammad approached various nomadic tribes and then visited the town of Taif in the hope of finding a base there. Accompanied by Zayd, his freed slave, he arrived among the Thaqifs. He called them to worship one Allah, and his words caused a storm of indignation. After pelting him with stones until evening, they drove him from the city. Wounded and bleeding, foot sore and weary, he and Zayd took refuge in an open orchard. He devoted himself to prayer under the shade of a tree, complaining to Allah but not cursing his tormentors. Raising his hands towards heaven, he cried:

"O Lord! I make my complaint unto Thee out of my feebleness and the vanity of my wishes. I am insignificant in men's eyes. O Thou art most merciful! Lord of the weak! Thou art my Lord! Please do not forsake me. Leave me not as a prey to strangers, nor to my enemies. If Thou art not offended, I am safe. I seek refuge in the light of Thy countenance, by which all darkness is dispersed, and peace comes here and hereafter. Let not thy anger descend on me; solve my difficulties as it pleases Thee. There is no power, no help, but in Thee."

ANGEL GABRIEL

At that moment, Angel Gabriel came to Prophet Muhammad and told him that if he wished, Allah could order an angel to collapse the two mountains surrounding the people of Taif and crush them. He said to Angel Gabriel, "I rather hope that Allah will raise from among the people those who will worship one Allah and not ascribe partners to Him."

The two owners of the orchard watched the prophet and had an excellent opportunity to kill him, but instead, they felt sympathy and compassion for him. This orchard was the summer retreat of Utbah ibn Rabiah, the archenemy of the Prophet, and the two owners were his sons. They sent their slave Addas with some grapes to give to the Prophet. The slave heard the Prophet say, “Bismillah Ir Rahma Nir Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace) before he ate. Addas was surprised and curious because he had never heard anyone say such words before. The Prophet asked Addas where he was from and Addas answered that he was from Nineveh (Iraq). The Prophet said, “The land of Jonah the Just, son of Matta.” The young man was bewildered that this man, Muhammad, knew of Prophet Jonah. After informing the Prophet that he was a Christian, Addas asked the Prophet who he was and how he had such knowledge. The Prophet said, “Jonah is my brother. He was a Prophet, and I am a Prophet.” Addas kissed the Prophet's head and hands, and he immediately accepted Islam.

Today, Taif has a population of 1.2 million people. It is known for its grapes, pomegranates, figs, roses, and honey. It is the summer capital of Saudi Arabia, known for its cool weather and beautiful mountain scenery.

On his return, the Prophet could not enter Mecca as he no longer enjoyed Abu Talib's protection. He sent a message to several leading idolaters, asking for their protection. Two refused, but Mutim ibn Adi, chief of the Nofal clan of Quraysh, agreed to protect him.

The Prophet continued preaching to strangers who congregated in Mecca during the annual pilgrimage season. He hoped to find among them some who would believe in him and carry the truth to their people. He traveled and visited the tribes of Kindah, Kalb, Banu Hanifah, and Banu Amir in their provinces. None of them responded favorably to his call. Every tribe had its own reasons,

whether economic or attachment to the religion of its ancestors and worship of old idols.

CHAPTER 29
THE PROPHET'S NIGHT JOURNEY

After the loss of his uncle and wife, the two pillars upon which the Prophet's personal and emotional security rested, if ever there was a time for a heavenly gift, this was it. Close to the end of the mourning year, the miracle came from a mystical experience.

A GLIMPSE OF HELL AND HEAVEN

While the Allah-conscious will see Paradise on Judgment Day, the Prophet had a glimpse of heaven and hell on the "Night Journey" (*Isra*) from Mecca to Jerusalem and his subsequent "Ascension" (*Miraj*) to heaven. They are two stages of one mystical experience, dating almost exactly one year before the departure to Medina.

PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Since the Prophet himself did not leave any clear-cut explanation for this experience, Muslim thinkers have always widely differed as to its true nature. Many of the Prophet's companions believed that the Night Journey and the Ascension were physical occurrences. The Prophet's widow and most intimate companion of his later years, Aishah, emphatically declared that "he was transported only in his spirit, while his body did not leave its place." No one knows the exact mode of transport and the "how" of this incident. The Prophet probably time-traveled into the future after judgment Day to see people in the fire or in the gardens of paradise.

THE NIGHT JOURNEY (ISRA) FROM MECCA TO JERUSALEM

Limitless in His glory is He who transported His servant by night from the Inviolable House of Worship [at Mecca] to the Remote House of Worship [at Jerusalem]—the environs of which We

blessed—so that We might show him some of Our symbols: for, verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-seeing. (17:1)

In this otherworldly experience, the Apostle of Allah, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, was Transported by night to the site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. He led a congregational prayer for many earlier, long-since deceased prophets; some of whom he encountered again in heaven afterwards. The expression "some of Our symbols" refers to insight, through symbols, into some of the ultimate truths.

The Inviolable House of Worship (*al-masjid al-haram*) is one of the designations given in the Quran to the Temple of the Kabah, the prototype of which owed its origin to Abraham and was "the first Temple set up for mankind" for the worship of the one Allah.

"The Remote House of Worship" denotes the ancient Temple of Solomon—or, rather, its site—which symbolizes here the long line of Hebrew prophets who preceded the advent of the Prophet Muhammad. These prophets are alluded to by the phrase "the environs of which We blessed."

ISLAM IS NOT THE NEWEST DOCTRINE

The juxtaposition of these two sacred temples is meant to show that the Quran does not inaugurate a "new" religion. Instead, it represents the continuation and ultimate development of the same divine message preached by the prophets of old who had Jerusalem as their spiritual home. It expresses the principle that Islam, as preached by the Prophet Muhammad, is the fulfillment and perfection of humanity's spiritual development. His leading a congregational prayer to earlier prophets symbolizes that Muhammad was the last and greatest message-bearer.

THE ASCENSION

The Prophet's Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem, immediately preceding his Ascension, is the second phase of the journey. Gabriel led the Prophet toward the very throne of Allah. Legendary descriptions of the Prophet's excursions follow him through the various levels of heaven, where he meets all the prominent prophetic forebears. However, the Prophet did not see Allah.

Besides heaven's splendor, Gabriel also showed him hell and the horrors of the damned. The tree of Zaqqum is not earthly, found only in the depth of hell with its bitter smell and flowers like the heads of demons, the food of inmates of hell. Ascension is important from Muslim theology's viewpoint. During this experience, the five daily prayers were instituted as an integral part of the Islamic faith by Allah's ordinance.

THE LOTE-TREE SYMBOL OF PARADISE

And indeed, he saw him [Angel] a second time by the lote tree of the farthest limit, near the garden of promise. The lote tree veiled in a veil of nameless splendor. [And withal] the eye did not waver, nor yet did it stray truly did he see some of the most profound of his Sustainer's symbols. (53:13-18)

THE VISION OF ANGEL GABRIEL IN HIS TRUE FORM

The above verses allude to the Prophet's mystic ascension to heaven. He saw the angel Gabriel manifested in his true shape and nature the second time. The Prophet had twice in his lifetime a vision of this angelic force "manifested in its true shape and nature": once after the hiatus of revelation (see Surah 74) and during his mystic vision known as the Ascension.

THE LOTE TREE

The Arabian lote tree, owing to the abundance of leafy shade, symbolizes paradise's spiritual peace and fulfillment. “The lote tree veiled in a veil of nameless splendor” is a phrase deliberately vague. It is indicative of the inconceivable majesty and splendor attached to this symbol of Paradise that no description can picture and no definition can embrace.

The qualifying term “of the **utmost or farthest limit**” indicates that Allah has set a definite limit to all knowledge accessible to created beings. During his mystic experience, the Prophet saw and understood some, but not all, of the ultimate truths. Human wisdom cannot, even in paradise understand the ultimate reality, which the Creator reserved for Himself.

CHAPTER 30
THE PROPHET AND ABU BAKR'S EMIGRATION TO YATHRIB (MEDINA)

The city of Yathrib, later known as Medina, is located 210 miles north of Mecca. It is an oasis town, famous for its dates even today, but unfortunate in every other way. Its population consisted of two powerful Arab tribes and various Jewish clans, all at war with each other. While Mecca prospered due to its relative unity, Yathrib suffered from persistent communal strife. What was needed was a strong, nonpartisan leader to forge unity among Yathrib's motley tribes. No candidate for leadership from any faction was acceptable. There was much to be said for seeking an outsider to fill this role.

THE FIRST PLEDGE OF AL-AQABAH

One day, during the pilgrimage in 620, the Prophet met six men from Yathrib. These men were so impressed by The Prophet's personality and force of his character that at the pilgrimage of 621, five of them came back to Mecca with seven others to have further discussions with The Prophet. The twelve represented the most influential clans of Yathrib, and they proclaimed their readiness to accept Islam. It is known as the **First Pledge of al-Aqabah**, from the hill's name in the valley of Mina on the outskirts of Mecca. They met with the Prophet secretly and took the pledge as follows: "We will not associate anything with Allah; we will not steal, nor commit adultery, nor fornication; we will not kill our children; we will abstain from calumny and slander; we will obey the Prophet in all things just." When they returned to Yathrib, they took one of the Prophet's companions, Musab ibn Umayr, to teach the new converts the elements of the faith. Musab was known for his diplomatic and negotiation skills with clan chieftains.

THE SECOND PLEDGE OF AL-AQABAH

On the pilgrimage of June 622, seventy-five persons came to Mecca from Yathrib and slipped quietly into Mina valley. At midnight, a small group of white-cloaked figures came to them out of the darkness. The Prophet and some of his companions, together with his uncle al-Abbas, arrived at the meeting.

The delegation from Yathrib repeated the former pledge and offered an invitation and guarantee of security and protection for the guest and his followers. Every person pledged one by one, undertaking to defend the Prophet as they would their wives and children. It was the **second pledge of al-Aqabah**. A turning point came for The Prophet, Muslims, and the world. Muslims demonstrated incredible forbearance for thirteen years by turning the other cheek. The Prophet's destiny was to show that another alternative is open to the oppressed and persecuted, called Jihad or just war. Peace has its season, and so does war. Human beings are born to wage war on one level or another: if not physical, then spiritual.

ESCAPE FROM MECCA

And [remember, O Prophet] how those bent on denying the truth were scheming against you, restraining you [from preaching], slaying you, or driving you away. They have always conspired, but Allah brought their scheming to failure—for Allah is above all schemers. (8:30)

Those who deny the truth of divine revelation are always intent on rendering its preachers powerless or destroying them, either physically or figuratively, through ridicule. The beginning of revelation to The Prophet and proselytizing absolute monotheism marked the Mecca period. The Prophet encouraged his followers to immigrate in small numbers unnoticed by Quraysh leaders. Most of his disciples left, and The Prophet, Ali, and Abu Bakr remained behind.

PLOT TO KILL THE PROPHET

Fearing The Prophet's escape, an assembly of Quraysh chiefs met to decide on further action. The Prophet's assassination was proposed, but killing by one man would have exposed him to blood vengeance by the Hashim clan. Abu Jahl suggested that several men, chosen from different families, attack The Prophet simultaneously to solve the difficulty. Responsibility for the deed would rest on all, and The Prophet's relatives would not avenge it. The assassins posted around The Prophet's house. They watched all night through a hole in the door, waiting to murder him when he left his house at the early dawn. The Prophet confided in his plan in Ali ibn Abu Talib. He asked him to cover himself with the Prophet's green mantle and sleep in his bed. The killers outside felt reassured whenever they looked through the door hole and saw somebody in the bed.

Just before dawn, the Prophet slipped away without being noticed. He picked up Abu Bakr at his house and traveled southward towards Thawr Cave, where they hid. They were expected to go northward towards Yathrib, and the southerly direction of their flight was inconceivable to everyone.

The Prophet faced the severest career crisis and had to hide in caverns, escape in disguise, and fly hither and thither, homeless in the continual peril of his life. More than once, it seemed all over. More than once, it turned on a straw. Whether The Prophet and his doctrine had not ended and not heard at all, it was not to end. The verses below allude to the Prophet's flight with Abu Bakr from Mecca to Medina.

FLIGHT TO MEDINA

If you do not succor the Apostle, [Muhammad] then [know Allah will do so Just as] Allah succored him at the time when those bent on denying the truth drove him away, [and he was but] one of the

two. When these two were [hiding] in the cave, [and], the Apostle said to his companion, "Grieve not Allah is with us." And thereupon Allah bestowed upon him from on high His [gift of] inner peace and aided him with forces which you could not see and brought utterly low the cause of those bent on denying the truth, whereas Allah's cause remained supreme for Allah is almighty, wise. (9:40) How many a community of greater power than this your community, which has driven you out, [O Muhammad], We have destroyed, with none to succor them! Can he who takes his stand on clear evidence from his Sustainer be likened to one whom the evil of his doings [always] seems goodly, and unto such as would follow but their lusts? (47:13-14)

MASSIVE MANHUNT

When the Meccan leaders got wind of the exodus, they started a massive manhunt. When the horsemen scouring the countryside came so close to discovering them, Abu Bakr was moved to despair and said, "We are but two." The Prophet answered, "No, we are three, for Allah is with us." After three days, when the search slowed, they managed to procure two camels. Their servant brought the third camel for himself. And the three men made their hazardous journey on unfrequented paths to their destination. Their servant and guide, Abdullah ibn Urayqit, headed south of Mecca and then to the mountain range of Tihamat, close to the shore of the Red Sea. He took an unknown path northward parallel to the coast but far removed from it. His purpose was to remain off the beaten track. For seven days, they traveled, lying low during the day's heat and moving with haste under cover of the night till they reached their destination.

PART 6

ARABIAN POLYTHEISM VERSUS ISLAMIC PRISTINE MONOTHEISM

CHAPTER 31
DEFENCE OF IDOL WORSHIP AND THE QURANIC REBUTTAL

WORSHIP OF IDOLS, ANGELS, JINN, SAINTS AND ALLAH'S OFFSPRING

Whenever the term shuraka (pl. of sharik) is used in the Quran concerning beliefs, it denotes:

Real or imaginary beings or forces to whom one ascribes a share in Allah's divinity.

Saints are attributed with semi-divine qualities and powers. Even today, Muslims visit revered saints' tombs to act as mediators on their behalf. Others besides Him refers to the worship of saints, angels, and deified persons, their symbolic representations (statues, pictures, relics, etc.), and their reputed tombs in the case of defunct human personalities.

Abstract notions like wealth, social status, personal power, nationalism, materialism, deceptive ideas, and glittering half-truths are meant to delude the mind.

Due to false objects of worship, men can lose sight of spiritual values and squander their selves. They often imply an objective influence on human destinies.

THE TRIAD OF AL-LAT, MANAT AND AL-UZZA

Have you, then, ever considered [what you worship in] Al-Lat and Al-Uzza, as well as [in] Manat, the third and last [of this triad]? (53:19-20) These [allegedly divine beings] are nothing but empty names which you have invented - you and your forefathers - [and] for which Allah has bestowed no warrant from on high. They [who worship them] follow nothing but guesswork and wishful

thinking - although right guidance has now come to them from their Sustainer. Does man imagine that it is his due to have all that he might wish for, even though [both] the life to come and this present [one] belong to Allah [alone]? (53:23-25)

The Quran draws our attention to the "false symbols" that men often choose to associate with divine qualities or powers. In this instance, they are epitomized in the triad of Al-Lat, Manat, and Al-Uzza. These three goddesses - regarded by the pagan Arabs as "Allah's daughters" side by side with the angels (who, too, were conceived of as females) - were worshipped in most of pre-Islamic Arabia. There were several shrines in the Hijaz and Najd. Al-Lat worship was particularly ancient. She may have been the prototype of the Greek semi-goddess Leto, one of Zeus' wives and mother of Apollo and Artemis. An allusion to the pagan idea that those goddesses, as well as the angels, would act as "mediators" between their worshippers and Allah. This is a wishful idea that lingers even among adherents of major religions in the guise of veneration of saints and deified persons. Allah is omnipotent and omniscient and does not, therefore, require any "mediator" between Himself and His creatures.

WORSHIP OF ANGELS

They claim the Most Gracious created the angels who are females: [but] did they witness their creation? (43:19) Has your Sustainer distinguished you by bestowing sons and daughters upon Him in the guise of angels? You are saying a dreadful thing! (17:40) Now ask them to enlighten thee. Has thy Sustainer daughters, whereas they have [only] sons? Or is it that We have created the angels as females, and they [who believe them to be divine] have witnessed [that act of creation]? (37:149-150) It is [only] those who do not believe in the life to come that regard the angels as female beings, and [since] they do not know thereof; they follow nothing but speculation that can never replace truth. (53:27-28)

CONTEMPT FOR DAUGHTERS?

And yet, they attribute to Him offspring from among His created beings! Verily, the man most obviously, bereft of all gratitude! Or [do you think] perchance that out of all His creations He has chosen for Himself daughters and favored you with sons? For [thus it is] if any of them is given the glad tidings of [the birth of] what he so readily attributes to the Most Gracious, his face darkens, and he is filled with suppressed anger: "What! [am I to have a daughter] one who is to be reared [only] for the sake of ornament?" And thereupon, he finds himself torn by a vague inner conflict. (43:15-18)

In view of the contempt the pagan Arabs felt for their female offspring, their attribution of "daughters" to Allah was particularly absurd and self- contradictory. Apart from the blasphemous belief in Allah's having "offspring" of any kind, their ascribing to Him what they themselves despised gave the lie to their alleged "reverence for Him," whom they, too, regarded as the Supreme Being.

ATTRIBUTING SON TO ALLAH

Oh, it is out of their own [inclination to] falsehood that some people assert, "Allah has begotten [a son]." They are lying [too when they say]: "He has chosen daughters in preference to sons!" What is amiss with you and your judgment? Will you not bethink yourselves? Or have you, perchance, clear evidence [for your assertions]? Produce that divine writ of yours if you speak the truth! (37:151-157)

Some people forget Allah's uniqueness. A male or female offspring implies a natural likeness to its progenitor, negating Allah's uniqueness. Allah, there is "nothing like Him." (42:11)

WORSHIP OF JINN

Some people have invented a kinship between Him and all manners of concealed forces - although [even] these invisible forces know well that they [who thus blaspheme against Allah] shall indeed be arraigned [before Him on Judgment Day]. (37:158) They have come to attribute to all manners of invisible beings a place side-by-side with Allah - although it is He who has created them [all]. (6:100)

The term jinn (popularly, but incorrectly, taken to denote "genii" or "demons") is primarily concealed from man's senses and is thus applicable to all kinds of invisible beings or forces. People who refuse to believe in Allah often regard those elemental forces as mysteriously endowed with purposeful creative power. The Quran relates how their votaries invent a kinship between themselves and Allah, i.e., they attribute similar qualities and powers to Allah.

ASCRIBING DIVINE QUALITIES TO RATIONAL BEINGS

To Allah belongs whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on earth: hence, what is it that they follow – those who invoke, besides Allah, beings to which they ascribe a share in His divinity? They follow, but conjectures [of others], and do nothing but guess (10:66)

The substantive pronoun man (whoever), occurring twice in the first part of the verse, contains an allusion to rational beings (distinct from inanimate objects) whom those who ascribe divinity to others besides Allah consider endowed with qualities or powers that belong to Him alone. The Quran argues against this idolatrous concept by pointing out that all those beings, whether men or angels, belong to Allah (i.e., are – like everything else in the universe – wholly dependent on Him for their existence), possessing no divine qualities and, therefore, no reality as objects of worship.

SAINTS AND ANGELS ARE POWERLESS

Say: [To those who believe in the existence of any divine power apart from Allah] "Call upon those [beings] whom you imagine [to be endowed with supernatural powers] beside Him." [You will find] they have it not in their power to remove any affliction from you or to shift it [elsewhere]. Those [saintly beings] whom they invoke are striving to obtain their Sustainer's favor. [Even] those closest [to Him] [Prophets and angels] ***are hoping for His grace and dreading His chastisement: for thy Sustainer's chastisement is something to beware of! (17:56-57) Say: "If there were - as some people assert - [other] deities side by side with Him, surely [even] they would have to strive to find a way unto Him who is enthroned on His almightiness?" (17:42)***

"To shift it **elsewhere** or to transfer it onto themselves" is an allusion to the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement. The term "seat of power" denotes Allah's absolute sway over all that exists; the expression may be suitably rendered as "He who is enthroned in His **almightiness**."

IDOLS BRING US NEARER TO ALLAH

Is it to Allah alone that all sincere faith is due? And yet, they who take for their protectors' others besides Him [say], "We worship them for no other reason than that they bring us nearer to Allah." (39:3) But [thus it is]: whenever they who are bent on denying the truth consider you, they make you but a target of their mockery, [saying to one another], "Is this the one who speaks [so contemptuously] of your gods?" And yet, it is they who, at [every] mention of the Most Gracious, want to deny the truth! (21:36)

"Others besides Him" relates to the worship of saints, angels, and deified persons, their symbolic representations (statues, pictures, relics, etc.), and their reputed tombs in the case of defunct human personalities. Such practices are based on the worshiper's hope of

mediation between himself and Allah. They conflict with the concept of His omniscience and justice and are utterly rejected by the Quran.

Although they resent any aspersion cast on whatever things or forces they unthinkingly worship, they refuse to acknowledge Allah's planning will manifest in every aspect of His creation.

FOLLOWING ANCESTRAL BELIEFS BLINDLY

Many of them refuse to use their reason when being told, "Come to that which Allah has bestowed on you from on high and to the Apostle" - they invariably reply, "Enough for us is what our forefathers believed in and were doing." Why even though their forefathers knew nothing and had no guidance? (5:103-104) And when such [people] are told to follow what Allah has bestowed from on high, they answer, "Nay, we shall follow that which we found our forefathers believing in and doing!" Why - [would you emulate your forefathers] even if Satan had invited them unto the suffering of the blazing flame? (31:21)

Nay, but they say, "Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe - and, verily, it is in their footsteps that we find our guidance!" And thus, whenever We sent a warner to any community, those of its people who had lost themselves entirely in pursuit of pleasures would always say, "Behold, we found our forefathers agreed on what to believe - and, verily, it is in their footsteps that we follow!" [Whereupon each prophet] would say, "Why, even though I bring you a guidance better than that which you found your forefathers believed in?" [To which] the others would reply, "Behold, we deny there is any truth in [what you claim to be] your messages!" And so, We inflicted Our retribution on them. Behold what happened in the end to those who gave the lie to the truth! (43:22-25)

Muhammad wants to turn you away from your forefather's religion: For [thus it is] whenever Our messages are conveyed to them in all their clarity. They [who are bent on denying the truth] say [to one another], "This [Muhammad] is nothing but a man who wants to turn you away from what your forefathers were wont to worship!" (34:43)

The above verses condemn blindly following our forefathers' religion. It refers to the pagan Arabs who rejected Allah's message on the premise that it conflicted with their ancestor's religion. It applies to all people accustomed to worshipping false values handed down by their ancestors and who, consequently, observe wrong moral standards. Such an attitude results in future suffering, whether in this world or the hereafter, or both. In these verses, we see the fallacy of blind, unquestioning acceptance of someone else's religious views. Allah has made it evident that they have not arrived at the truth by reason nor based on the clear authority of a revealed text. Instead, they have adopted their forebears' opinions.

MONOTHEISM IS NOT OUR ANCESTRAL TRADITION

Indeed, they [who deny the truth] have always said, "If only we had a tradition [to this effect] from our forebears, we would certainly be true servants of Allah." And yet, [now that this divine writ has been placed before them], they refuse to acknowledge it as true! In time, however, they will know [what they rejected]. For, long ago, Our word has gone forth to Our servants, the message-bearers, that they - they indeed - would be succored, and Our hosts - they certainly - would [in the end] be victorious! Hence, you turn aside those [who deny the truth] and recognize them [for what they really are: people bent on deceiving themselves]. They [too] will come to see [what they do not see now]. (37:167-175)

Only if we had an ancestral tradition bearing the message of Allah's oneness and uniqueness as promulgated by the Quran. Those who

reject it will realize the truth and suffer the consequences: a reference to the Day of Judgment.

IDOL WORSHIP AND PREDESTINATION

Now those who ascribe divinity to aught beside Allah say, "Had Allah so willed, we would not have worshipped aught but Him - neither we nor our forefathers; nor would we have declared aught forbidden without a commandment from Him." (16:35) Yet they say, "Had [not] the Most Gracious so willed, we would never have worshipped them!" (The Quranic rebuttal): ***[But] they cannot have any knowledge of [His having willed] such things. They do nothing but guess, or have We, perchance, vouchsafed them, before this one, a revelation [to the contrary] to which they are still holding fast? (43:20-21)***

The derision of Allah's messages by truth deniers is implied in their questioning of His grant of free will to man. In addition, they question his ability to choose between right and wrong, which is the basis of morality. They cannot have any "knowledge" of something devoid of all reality. Far from approving their sin, Allah left it to their free will to make a moral choice between right and wrong. Can they produce revelation that allows a man to worship other beings besides Allah or attribute "offspring" to Him? This is a rhetorical question that implies its negation.

FAITH IS THE GIFT OF ALLAH'S GRACE

Say: "Was I to go astray, I would but go astray [due to me, and] to the hurt of myself, but if I am on the right path, it is by virtue of what my Sustainer reveals unto me, for He is all-hearing, ever near!" (34:50)

The interpolated words "due to me" convey that everything that goes against one's spiritual interests is caused by oneself.

CHAPTER 32
THE MECCAN IDOLATERS' OBJECTIONS TO THE QURAN

The Prophet's opponents in both his past and future allege that what he described as divine revelation was the outcome of his poetic invention. The Prophet had never composed a single line of poetry, nor was he distinguished by his eloquence. In contrast, the Arabs had a widespread tendency to write poetry.

QURAN IS FALSEHOOD

And they say, "This [Quran] is nothing but a falsehood invented [by man]!" And yet, [O Muhammad] never have We vouchsafed them with any revelations they could quote, and neither have We sent them any warners before you. Thus, too, gave the lie to the truth [many of] those who lived before them. Those [earlier people] had not attained a tenth of [the evidence of the truth]; We have vouchsafed unto these [late successors of theirs]. Yet when they gave the lie to My apostles, how awesome was My rejection! (34:43-45)

They could not quote any revelation supporting their ancestors' blasphemous beliefs and practices. How much more humiliated will truth deniers feel when the Quran is so explicitly and comprehensively conveyed?

THE QURAN MAD POET'S POETRY

Whenever they were told, "There is no deity save Allah," they would glory in their arrogance and say, "Shall we give up our deities at the bidding of a mad poet?" But he [whom you call a mad poet] has brought the truth, and he confirms the truth of [what the earlier of Allah's] message-bearers [have taught].

(37:35-37) Has it never occurred to them that [this] their fellowman is not mad? He is only a plain warner. (7:184)

They [who deny the truth] say: "O you unto whom this reminder has [allegedly] been bestowed from on high: you are mad!" (15:6) We are fully aware of what they are hearing when listening to you for when they are secluded among themselves, lo! These wrongdoers say [to one another], "If you followed the Prophet, you would follow only a man bewitched!" See what they liken you to, [O Prophet, simply] because they have gone astray and are now unable to find a way [to the truth]! (17:47-48)

GIFT OF POETRY

We have not imparted to this [Prophet the gift] of poetry, nor would it suit this [message]. It is a reminder and a [divine] discourse, clear in itself and clearly showing the truth. To the end that it may warn everyone alive [of heart], and that the word [of Allah] may bear witness [or prove true on the Day of Judgment] ***against all who deny the truth. (36:69-70)***

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN POETRY AND THE QURAN

As for the poets - [they too are prone to deceiving themselves: and only] those lost in grievous error would follow them. Are you not aware that they wander confusedly through all the valleys [of words and thoughts] and that they [so often] say what they do not do [or feel]? (26:224-226)

Until forty, The Prophet never displayed poetic or philosophical gifts and, on top of that, he was not literate. How could he have composed a work exemplary in its language, as penetrating in its psychological insight and compelling in its inner logic as the Quran?

The Quran exemplifies a fundamental difference between poetry (especially Arabic poetry) and divine revelation. In the former,

meaning is often subordinated to language rhythm and melody. In the Quran, the opposite is true. Language choice, position, rhythm, and melody are always subordinate to the intended meaning. "Wandering through valleys of words" describes a confused or aimless and sometimes self-contradictory play with words and thoughts. This context illustrates the difference between the Quran's precision, free from inner contradictions, and poetry's vagueness.

CAN A PROPHET BE A MORTAL LIKE US?

Consider this the sublime Quran! But no, they deem it strange that a warner should have come to them from their midst. (50:1-2)

It is the earliest Quranic mention of people deeming it strange that someone delivered a divine message from their midst, a mortal like them. Most of The Prophet's Meccan contemporaries refused to believe in his prophethood because Allah could not have entrusted a man from among them with His message.

It refers to the Meccans' negative attitude toward The Prophet's call. This shows the tendency to distrust any religious statement without exoticism if it has been made by someone sharing the social and cultural background of the people he addresses. The message relies exclusively - as the Quran does - on an appeal to man's reason and moral sense. Hence, the Quran explicitly mentions people's objections to a prophet who eats food like ordinary mortals and goes about in the marketplace.

DIVINE WRIT IN CLEAR ARABIC

Now, behold, this [divine writ] has been bestowed from on high by the Sustainer of all the worlds. Trustworthy divine inspiration has descended with it from on high upon thy heart, [O Muhammad] so that thou mayest be among those who preach in the clear Arabic tongue. (26:192-195) But [even] We bestowed it from on

high upon non-Arabs, and had he recited it unto them [in his tongue]; they would not have believed in it. Thus, We caused this [message] to pass [unheeded] through the hearts of those lost in sin. (26:198-200) Now, if We had willed this [divine writ] to be a discourse in a non-Arabic tongue, they [who now reject it] would indeed have said, "Why is it that its messages have not been spelled out clearly? Why [a message in] a non-Arabic tongue and [its bearer] an Arab?" Say: "To all who have attained faith, this [divine writ] is a guidance and source of health." But as for those who will not believe - in their ears is deafness, and so it remains obscure to them: they are [like people who are] being called from too far away. (41:44)

The Quran was expressed in clear Arabic, which they understood. If the Prophet had been a foreigner and his message was expressed in a non-Arabic tongue, they would have been even less prepared to accept it. Then they would have had the legitimate excuse that they could not understand it.

"Never have We sent forth any apostle except with a message in his own people's tongue." (14:4) The Quran's message is universal. The other prophets mentioned in the Quran who "preached in the Arabic tongue" were Ishmael, Hud, Salih, and Shuayb. Furthermore, Hebrew and Aramaic are ancient Arabic dialects. All Hebrew prophets may be included among "those who preached in Arabic."

CHALLENGE TO REPLICATE THE QURAN

FABLES OF ANCIENT TIMES

Whenever Our messages were conveyed to them, they would say, "We have heard [all this] before. If we wanted, we could certainly compose sayings like these [ourselves]. They are nothing but fables of ancient times!" (8:31)

Or do they say, "[He is but] a poet - let us wait what time will do unto him?" Say you: "Wait, [then] I, too, shall hopefully wait with you!"31 Is it their minds that bid them [to take] this [attitude], or are they [simply] people filled with overweening arrogance? (52:30-32)

The expression "we could certainly ourselves compose" alludes to the often-repeated but never fulfilled boast of the pagan Quraysh. They could produce a poetic message like the Quran, an attitude of many unbelievers even today towards revealed scriptures. The above passage has twofold significance: firstly, the wisdom in the Quran precludes any possibility of its being composed by a human being. Secondly, the Quranic message is meant to confirm and give a final formulation to the eternal truths conveyed to man through a long succession of prophets. Later, the truths are obscured by wrong interpretations, deliberate omissions, interpolations, or a partial or total loss of the original texts.

THE QURAN INVENTED BY MUHAMMAD

Now, this Quran could not have been devised by anyone save Allah. Indeed, it confirms the truth of whatever remains [of earlier revelations] and clearly, spells out the revelation [which comes] - let there be no doubt about it - from the Sustainer of all the worlds. And yet, they [who are bent on denying the truth] assert, "[Muhammad] has invented it!" (10:37-38)

PRODUCE SURAH OF SIMILAR MERIT

Say [unto them]: "Produce, then, a surah of similar merit; and [to this end] call to your aid whomever you can, other than Allah, if what you say is true!" No, but they are bent on giving the lie to everything, the wisdom of it they do not comprehend, and before its inner meaning has become clear to them. Those who lived before their time give the lie to the truth and what happened in the end to those evildoers! (10:38-39)

If you doubt any part of what We have bestowed from on high, step by step, upon our servant [Muhammad], then produce a surah of similar merit, and call upon any other than Allah to bear witness for you - if what you say is true! (2:23)

The challenge is to produce a chapter with the message that Allah's oneness and uniqueness are the focal points. The gradualness of revelation is relevant in this context. The Prophet's opponents argued that the Quran could not be of divine origin because it was revealed gradually and not in one piece. Then, come forward with a surah like it and call upon witnesses other than Allah. Namely, to attest that your hypothetical literary effort could be considered equal to any part of the Quran.

PRODUCE TEN SURAHS

Is it inconceivable [O Prophet] that you could omit any part of what is being revealed to you [because the deniers of the truth dislike it]. So they assert, "[Muhammad himself] has invented this [Quran]!" Say [to them]: "Produce, then, ten surahs of equal merit, invented [by yourselves], and [to this end] call to your aid whomever you can, other than Allah, if what you say is true! And if they [whom you have called to your aid] [your poets and wise men] are not able to help you, know that [this Quran] has been bestowed from on high out of Allah's wisdom alone, [Only by Allah's knowledge] and that there is no deity save Him. Will you, then, surrender yourselves unto Him?" (11:12-14)

The Quran's style is Allah's style. It is different, incomparable, and inimitable, which constitutes the miraculous character (ijaz) of the Quran. Of all miracles, it is the greatest. The Prophet was authorized to challenge his critics to produce something comparable. Unbelievers are called upon to create ten chapters of equal merit. More than one stylist took up the challenge in Arabic literature - to a predictable conclusion. The relevance of The Prophet's illiteracy to this argument becomes obvious.

Humanity and invisible beings cannot produce.

Say: "If all humanity and all the invisible beings would come together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce it like even though they were to exert all their strength in aiding one another!" Indeed, we have given many facets in this Quran to every kind of lesson [designed] for [the benefit of] mankind! (17:88-89) Or do they say, "He has composed this [message]?" No, but they are not willing to believe it! But then, [if they deem it the work of a mere mortal], let them produce another discourse like it - if what they say is true! (52:30-34)

Whereas you are waiting for my message to be proved wrong, I await its fulfillment! The phrase, "let us wait for the evil happenings brought about by time," denotes the expectation of the Prophet's detractors that time would prove his teachings false or, at best, a delusion. Do they have any reasoned objection to the contents of this message - or do they reject the truth because their false pride in the man's supposed self-sufficiency prevents them from accepting responsibility before a Supreme Being?

QURAN IS IMPARTED BY UNKNOWN FOREIGNERS

For the past one thousand five hundred years and even today, Quran critics have been looking for some unknown foreigners whom The Prophet allegedly consulted to compose the Quran. So far, their efforts have proven fruitless. In their arrogance and misplaced sense of superiority, the Jews and Christians believe that divine revelations are exclusive to their tribe. Jewish dogma says Allah only graces His chosen people with prophets and Torah revelations. If Muhammad's prophethood claim is true, the Jews are no longer the chosen people. The Christians believe that Allah Himself came to earth in the flesh of Jesus, and they have the keys to the true revelation. The implication in both cases is that we are blessed ones and thus superior to the rest of humanity.

Those bent on denying the truth say, "This [Quran] is nothing but a lie, which he [himself] has devised with the help of other people, who have perverted the truth and brought a falsehood into being." And they say, "Fables of ancient times he has caused to be written down so that they could be read out to him in morning and evening!" Say [O Muhammad]: "He who knows all the mysteries of the heavens, and the earth has bestowed from on high this [Quran upon me]! He is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!" (25:4-6)

QURAN PLAGIARIZED VERSION OF THE BIBLE

None could knowingly reject Our messages unless it is such as would deny [obvious] truth. For, [O Muhammad], you have never been able to recite any divine writ before this one [was revealed], nor did you ever transcribe one with your hand. Or else, those who try to disprove the truth [of your revelation] might have had cause to doubt [it]. (29:47-48)

[As for thee, O Prophet] nothing is said to thee but what was said to all [of Allah's] apostles before thy time. Thy Sustainer is indeed full of forgiveness, but He also has the power to requite most grievously! (41:43) Thus, too, We have vouchsafed revelation unto Moses aforetime, and disputes arose about it. And [then, as now] had it not been for a decree already gone forth from thy Sustainer, all would indeed have been decided between them [from the outset]. They [who will not believe in this divine writ] are in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it portends. (41:45)

Historically, The Prophet, the unlettered prophet, could neither read nor write. Therefore, he could not have derived his extensive knowledge of the contents of earlier revelations from the Bible or other scriptures. As the Quran points out, this would convince any unprejudiced person that this knowledge must have come to him through divine revelation.

Although The Prophet lived in an environment saturated with Christian and Jewish religious ideas, the Quran is an original religious inspiration with a different view from the previous scriptures. The attempt to trace the Quran's ideas back to a source from earlier revelation misses the essential aspect of the Prophet's religious experience. Biblical figures and stories have a place on its pages. Still, their purpose is to buttress a new and different vision of Allah, human beings, and the world with unquestionable integrity. The suggestion that the Prophet was merely an imitator of those who had gone before is historically inaccurate.

Indeed, We do know that they say, "It is but a human being who imparts [all] this to him!" [Notwithstanding that] the tongue of him to whom they so maliciously point is wholly outlandish, whereas this is Arabic speech, clear [in itself] and clearly showing the truth [of its source]. (16:103)

The Prophet was accused of obtaining his revelation:

· From some unnamed foreigners or by various Arab converts to Judaism or Christianity.

· From a learned Jew or a Christian - who lived in Mecca at that time

· Conjectures have been advanced regarding the identity of the person or persons whom the suspicious Meccans might have had in mind. These conjectures are purely speculative and, therefore, have no historical value.

· The pagan Quraysh regarded the ideas expressed in the Quran as invented by The Prophet. He had deceived himself into believing that the Quran was a divine revelation or deliberately attributed it to Allah. Even today, most western experts of the Quran do not believe in its divine origin. But then they have no explanation for how an illiterate man isolated in the desert, far away from civilization centers came up with such a sophisticated and complex book.

· The last sentence constitutes a Quranic rebuttal of the malicious allegation expressed in the preceding clause. The Quran's content shows no close resemblance to anything in the Bible. The fact is that no human being could ever have produced the flawless, exalted Arabic diction in which the Quran is expressed.

QURAN PRODUCT OF EVIL SPIRITS

[This divine writ is such a reminder]: no evil spirits have brought it down: for, neither does it suit their ends, nor is it in their power [to impart it to man]. Verily, [even] from hearing it are they utterly debarred! Hence, [O man], do not invoke any other deity side by side with Allah, lest you find yourself among those who are made to suffer [on Judgment Day]. (26:210-213) [And] shall I tell you upon whom those evil spirits descend? They descend upon all sinful self-deceivers who readily lend an ear [to every falsehood], most of whom lie to others. (26:221-223)

During the early years of his prophetic mission, some of The Prophet's Meccan opponents tried to explain the rhetorical beauty and persuasiveness of the Quran by insinuating that he was a soothsayer in communion with all manners of dark forces and evil spirits. The expression "a great or habitual liar" means one who lies to himself, which emphasizes the psychological fact that most self-deceivers readily lie to others.

SORCERER WITH SPELLBINDING ELOQUENCE

Exhort, then, [O Prophet, all men]: for you are neither a soothsayer nor a madman by your Sustainer's grace. (52:29) Whenever Our messages are conveyed to them in all their clarity, they who are bent on denying the truth speak thus of the truth as soon as it is brought to them: "This is nothing but spellbinding eloquence!" (46:7) Closer draws unto men their reckoning, yet they remain stubbornly heedless [of its approach]. Whenever there comes to them any new reminder from their Sustainer, they

but listen to it with playful amusement, their hearts set on passing delights. Yet they who are [thus] bent on wrongdoing conceal their innermost thoughts [when they say to one another], "Is this [Muhammad] anything but a mortal like yourselves? Will you yield to [his] spellbinding eloquence with your eyes open?" Say: "My Sustainer knows whatever is spoken in heaven and on earth; and He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing." (21:1-4)

Spellbinding eloquence is a term frequently used in the sense of sorcery or magic. By rejecting the message of the Quran on the specious plea that The Prophet is but a human being endowed with spellbinding eloquence, the opponents of the Quranic doctrine conceal their innermost thoughts, for their rejection is due not so much to any pertinent criticism of this doctrine as, rather, to their instinctive, deep-set unwillingness to submit to the moral and spiritual discipline which an acceptance of the Prophet's call would entail.

For [thus it is] whenever Our messages are conveyed unto them in all clarity, they [who are bent on denying the truth] say, "This [Muhammad] is nothing but a man who wants to turn you away from what your forefathers were wont to worship!" And they say, "This [Quran] is nothing but a falsehood invented [by man]!"And [finally], they who are bent on denying the truth speak thus of the truth when it comes to them: "This is nothing but spellbinding eloquence!" (34:43)

So, [O Muhammad, say to them]: "Flee unto Allah [from all that is false and evil]! I am a plain warner to you from Him!" [But] thus it is, never yet came an apostle to those who lived before their time, but they said, "A spellbinder [or sorcerer is he], or a madman!" Have they, perchance, handed down this [way of thinking] as a legacy to one another? They are people filled with overweening arrogance! Turn away from them, and you shall incur no blame; yet go on reminding [all who would listen]: for such a reminder will profit believers. (51:50-55)

Yet whenever a surah [of divine writ] is bestowed from on high, some deniers of the truth are prone to ask, "Which of you this [message] has strengthened his faith?" For those whose hearts are diseased, each new message adds another [element of] disbelief to the disbelief they already harbor, and they die while [still] refusing to acknowledge the truth. Are they unaware that they are being tested year-in, year-out? And yet, they do not repent and do not bethink themselves [of Allah]. Whenever a surah is bestowed from on high, they look at each other [and say, as it were], "Is there anyone who can see what is in your heart?" [Implying that Allah does not exist], ***they turn away. Allah has turned their hearts away from the truth, for they are people who will not grasp it. (9:124-127)***

The phrase, "Which of you has this [message] strengthened in his faith?" is a sarcastic reference to 8:2, which speaks of believers "whose faith is strengthened whenever His messages are conveyed unto them?" "Each new Allah's message adds another loathsome evil to their loathsome evil". It makes them more stubborn in denying the truth of Allah's messages because they refuse to admit the existence of anything beyond human perception (al-ghayb). The test consists of human beings endowed with reason and, therefore, the ability to choose between right and wrong.

CHAPTER 33
MALIGNING THE PROPHET AND QUESTIONING HIS VERACITY

THE TRUSTWORTHY

How can you reconcile your past conviction that The Prophet was incapable of uttering a lie with your present contention that he composed the Quran? Do you also claim that he falsely attributes it to divine revelation? The Quran answers this allegation by mentioning the impeccable character of the Prophet, who dwelt among his community for a lifetime. Since his early youth, The Prophet had been renowned for his truthfulness and integrity, so much so that his Meccan compatriots gave him the epithet Al-Amin (The Trustworthy).

FALSELY ATTRIBUTED THE QURAN TO ALLAH

Say: "Had Allah willed it [otherwise], I would not have conveyed this [divine writ] unto you, nor would He have brought it to your knowledge. Indeed, I lived among you for a lifetime before receiving this revelation. Will you not, then, use your reason?" And who could be more wicked than those who attribute their lying inventions to Allah or give the lie to His messages? (10:16-17)

ONLY A WARNER

Say: "I counsel you one thing only: Be [ever conscious of] standing before Allah, whether you are in company or alone. And then bethink yourselves [that] there is no madness in [this prophet] your fellowman. He is only a warner to you of the suffering severe to come. (34:46)

The above phrase, “Be [ever conscious of] standing before Allah,” refers to man’s actions concerning others in all situations requiring a moral choice.

SUFFERING FROM HALLUCINATIONS

Those [enemies of the truth] malign the Prophet by saying, “He is all ears." Say: “[Yes], he is all ears, [listening] to what is good for you! [I.e., to divine revelation] ***He believes in Allah, and trusts the believers, and is [a manifestation of Allah’s] grace towards such of you as have [truly] attained faith. And for those who malign Allah’s Apostle, grievous suffering awaits them [in the life to come]!” (9:61) Say: “Go on, mocking! Allah will bring to light [namely, self-knowledge] the very thing you are dreading!” (9:64)***

All ears because The Prophet believes everything he hears. He interprets these sounds as revelations, considered mere hallucinations by hypocrites and unbelievers. It explains the statement that “they malign the Prophet” - namely, by attributing to him self-deception - and that this saying of theirs amounts to a denial of the truth.

TARGET OF MOCKERY

But [thus it is]: whenever they who are bent on denying the truth consider you, they make you a target of their mockery, [saying to one another], “Is this the one who speaks [so contemptuously] of your Allahs?” And yet, it is they who, at [every] mention of the Most Gracious, want to deny the truth! (21:36)

TALKING FRIVOLOUSLY

Now those who are bent on denying the truth say [to one another]: “Do not listen to this Quran, but rather talk frivolously about it so that you might gain the upper hand!” (41:26)

Talking frivolously about the Quran is an effort to discredit divine revelation. The Prophet invented it for personal and political purposes, as a series of misunderstood quotations from earlier scriptures. The opponents of the Quranic message instinctively feel its force, realizing that it endangers their complacent, materialistic outlook on life, which should be combated.

ALTER THIS DISCOURSE TO OUR LIKING

Whenever Our messages are conveyed to them in clarity, those who do not believe they are destined to meet Us say, "Bring us a discourse other than this or alter this one." Say [O Prophet]: "It is not conceivable that I should alter it of my own volition; I only follow what is revealed to me. I would dread, were I [thus] to rebel against my Sustainer, the suffering [that would befall me] on that awesome Day [of Judgment]!" (10:15) Is it conceivable [O Prophet] that you could omit any part of what is being revealed unto you [because the deniers of the truth dislike it, and] your heart is distressed at their saying? (11:12)

Alter this message to suit our views on what is right and wrong. In their view, the Quran was composed by The Prophet and expressed only his convictions.

IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT A PROPHET SHOULD DECEIVE?

It is not conceivable that a prophet should deceive since he who deceives shall be faced with his deceit on the Day of Resurrection. Every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has done, and none shall be wronged. Is he [Muhammad] who strives after Allah's goodly acceptance, like him who has earned the burden of Allah's condemnation and whose goal is hell? And how vile a journey's end! They are on [entirely] different levels in Allah's sight, for Allah sees all they do. (3:161-163)

The Quran often accuses followers of earlier revelations of falsely attributing their views to Allah. It also distorts His messages by arbitrary interpolations and deliberate changes in revelation wording.

FABLES OF ANCIENT TIMES

There are among them those who listen to you [O Prophet], but over their hearts, We have laid veils, which prevent them from grasping the truth and in their ears, deafness. And even if they saw every sign of the truth, they would still not believe it. So much so that when they come to you to contend with you, those bent on denying the truth say, "This is nothing but fables of ancient times!" They bar others from that place and go far away from it. They destroy themselves and perceive it not. (6:25-26)

PUNISHMENT FOR ATTRIBUTING LIES TO ALLAH

Who could be more wicked than those who attribute their lying inventions to Allah? [On the Day of Judgment], these shall be arraigned before their Sustainer. Those who are called upon to bear witness [against them] shall declare, "It is they who uttered lies about their Sustainer!" (11:18) Or do they declare, "He invented all this"? Say [O Muhammad]: "Had I invented it, you would not be of the least help to me against Allah. He is fully aware of the [slander] into which you so recklessly plunge. Enough is He as a witness between you and me! And [withal], He alone is truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace. Say: "I am not the first of [Allah's] apostles and [like all of them] I do not know what will be done with you and me, for I am nothing but a plain warner" (46:8-9).

CONSEQUENCES OF FALSE ATTRIBUTION

It is inconceivable that the Prophet of Allah deceives by attributing his own opinions to Allah and then appealing to believers to place

their trust in Him alone. It is a common view among non-believers that the Prophet himself composed the Quran and falsely claimed it to be divine revelation. Anyone who falsely attributes his views to Allah or distorts His messages by arbitrary interpolations and deliberate changes in the wording of a revelation will earn Allah's condemnation. On the Day of Judgment, the prophets will testify for or against the people they were sent to. Allah will punish me if "I have invented all this," and in that case, you will be of no help to me. Then why should "I have invented all this" for your sake? I am a human being like all of Allah's message-bearers who preceded me. I am not preaching anything not already preached by all of Allah's apostles before me.

ENTRAP YOU IN CONTRADICTIONS

Is it that [they who reject your message, O Muhammad, fear lest] you ask of them a reward? So, they would be burdened with debt [if they listened to you]? Or [do they think] that the hidden reality [of all that exists] is almost within their grasp, so they can write it down in time? Or do they want to entrap [you in contradictions]? But those who are bent on denying the truth - it is they who are truly entrapped! Have they, then, any deity other than Allah? In His limitless glory, Allah is utterly remote from anything to which men may ascribe a share in His divinity! And yet, if they [who refuse to see the truth] were to see part of the sky falling, they would [only] say, "[It is but] a mass of clouds!" (52:40-44)

CHAPTER 34
SIN OF IDOL WORSHIP

UNFORGIVABLE SIN

Say: "Come, let me convey unto you what Allah has [really] forbidden to you: "Do not ascribe divinity, in any way, to anything beside Him." (6:151) Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to anything beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills: those who ascribe divinity to others besides Allah have gone far astray. (4:116)

TAKING SATAN FOR THEIR MASTER

In His stead, they invoke only lifeless symbols - thus invoking none but a rebellious Satan, whom Allah has rejected for having said, "Of Thy servants, I shall most certainly take my due share, and shall lead them astray, and fill them with vain desires; and I shall command them, and they will cut off the ears of cattle [in idolatrous sacrifice], and I shall command them, and they will corrupt Allah's creation!" But all who take Satan rather than Allah for their master do indeed, most clearly, lose all: he holds out promises to them and fills them with vain desires: yet whatever Satan promises them is meant to delude the mind. (4:117-120)

The pre-Islamic Arabs dedicated some of their cattle to their idols by cutting off or slitting the ears of the animal, which was considered sacred. The allusion to Satan's inducing man to "corrupt Allah's creation" has a meaning to which sufficient attention is seldom paid. Since this creation, and the way it manifests itself, is an expression of Allah's planned will, any attempt to change its intrinsic nature amounts to corruption.

ALL WORKS IN VAIN

It has already been revealed to you [O man] and to those who lived before you, that if you ever ascribe divine powers to anything but Allah, all your works shall most certainly have been in vain: for [in the life to come] you shall be among the lost. (39:65)

It has been conveyed to you through divine messages revealed through the prophets. The above reminder is addressed to man in general, irrespective of time and circumstance, concerning the deadly sin of ascribing divine powers to anything besides Allah.

PRAYERS FOR FORGIVENESS ARE NOT ACCEPTED

It is not befitting to the Prophet and those who have attained faith to pray that those who ascribed divinity to others besides Allah be forgiven [by Him] - even though they were [their] nearest of kin - after it has been made clear unto them that those [dead sinners] are destined for the blazing fire. (9:113)

This prohibition relates to the dead among such sinners - i.e., those who have died without repentance - and not to those still living: a prayer for forgiveness in respect of a living sinner amounts to asking Allah to grace him with His guidance, and this is permissible. The people referred to are the believers who, before the revelation of verse 113, used to pray to Allah that He grants His forgiveness to their relatives and friends who had died in the state of shirk (ascribing divinity to others besides Allah).

DO NOT GIVE ALLAH ANY COMPEERS

Allah is the Creator of all things, and He alone determines their fate. His are the keys [to the mysteries] of the heavens and the earth. Those who are bent on denying the truth of Allah's messages - it is they, they, who are the losers! Say: "Is it, then, something other than Allah that you bid me worship, O you who are unaware [of right and wrong]?" (39:62-64) No, but you shall

worship Allah [alone], and be among those grateful [to Him]! (39:66)

PARABLE OF MULTIPLE MASTERS

A man who has several partners for his masters, [all of them] at variance, and a man entirely dependent on one person: can these two be deemed equal regarding their condition? All praise is due to Allah [alone]: but most of them do not understand this. (39:29)

Several masters are used as a metaphor for belief in a plurality of divine powers. The above verse describes contrasting attitudes: a belief in Allah's transcendental oneness and uniqueness, on the one hand, and a readiness to ascribe divine powers and qualities to various created beings or supposed incarnations of Allah, on the other.

ALL DEITIES ARE BUT ONE ALLAH

Now these [people] find it strange that warner should have come to them from their midst. And [so] the deniers of the truth say: "A mere spellbinder is he, a liar! Does he claim that all the deities are [but] one Allah? A most strange thing is this!" And their leaders proclaim: "Go ahead and hold steadfastly onto your deities: this is the only thing to do! We never heard of [a claim like] this in any faith of the latter days! It is nothing but [a mortal man's] invention! What! "Upon him alone from among us, should [divine] reminder have been bestowed from on high?" (38:4-8)

Does he claim that all creative powers and qualities are inherent exclusively in what he conceives as one Allah? This illustrates the tendency of many people to attribute a decisive influence on human life and, hence, a quasi-divine status to various fortuitous phenomena or circumstances (like wealth, luck, social position, etc.), rather than acknowledging the overwhelming evidence, in all observable nature, of Allah's unique existence. There has never

been a claim like this in any religion prevalent today. This is an oblique reference to Christianity and its dogma of the Trinity, which contrasts with the Quranic concept of Allah's oneness and uniqueness, as well as any other faith based on the belief in a multiplicity or multiform incarnation of divine powers (e.g., Hinduism with its triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva).

ALLAH HAS NEVER CONDONED IDOL-WORSHIP

And yet they [who claim to believe in Him often] worship [other beings or forces] beside Allah - something for which He has never bestowed any warrant from on high, and [of the reality] of which they cannot have any knowledge. Such evildoers shall have none to succor them [on Judgment Day]. As it is, whenever Our messages are conveyed unto them in all their clarity, you can perceive utter repugnance on the faces of those bent on denying the truth. They would almost assault those who conveyed Our messages! Say: "Shall I, then, tell you of something worse than what you feel at present? It is the fire [of the hereafter] that Allah has promised to those bent on denying the truth: and how vile a journey's end!" (22:71-72)

And yet, despite their awareness that Allah alone knows all and is, therefore, unique in His all-embracing Presence, they worship other beings besides Allah. They cannot have knowledge through independent reasoning or observation of true reality. In the hereafter, it will be more painful than the repugnance you feel today towards Allah's messages.

CHAPTER 35
WORSHIP ALLAH ALONE

MESSAGE TO MANKIND

Say [O Prophet]: "O mankind! If you are in doubt as to what my faith is, then [know that] I do not worship those beings you worship beside Allah. Instead, I worship Allah alone, who shall cause you [all] to die. I have been bidden to be among those who believe [in Him alone]." Hence, [O man], set your face steadfastly towards the [true] faith, turning away from all that is false, and be not among those who ascribe divinity to anything besides Allah. Thus, do not invoke, side by side with Allah, anything that can neither benefit you nor harm you: for if you do it, you will surely be among the evildoers! (10:104-106)

The use of the pronoun in the phrase "those whom you worship" shows that it relates here to rational beings - like saints, not inanimate representations. The specific reference to Allah as the One who causes all living beings to die is meant to impress those who deny the truth that after their death, they will be placed before Him for judgment.

O mankind! Worship your Sustainer, who created you and those who lived before you, so you might remain conscious of Him. He has made the earth a resting-place for you and the sky a canopy and sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not, then, claim there is any power that rivals Allah when you know [He is the only one]. (2:21-22)

The term "compeers" implies any object of adoration to which some or all of Allah's qualities are ascribed. This is whether it is conceived as a deity "in its own right" or a saint supposedly possessing certain divine or semi-divine powers.

ALLAH ALONE CAN CAUSE HARM OR BENEFIT

And yet, they would frighten you with those [imaginary divine powers they worship] beside Him! (39:36) Say: "Have you ever considered what you invoke instead of Allah? If Allah wills harm to me, could those [illusory powers] remove His harm? Or, if He wills grace should alight on me, could they withhold His grace [from me]?" (39:38)

Some people always stress the need to pay attention to all these imaginary forces and values. They frighten themselves and their fellow men with the thought that neglecting to do so might have evil consequences in their practical lives.

WHO CAN PROTECT YOU FROM DIVINE PUNISHMENT?

Say: "Who could protect you from the Most Gracious by night or day?" And yet, from remembrance of their Sustainer, they stubbornly turn away! Do they [think they] have deities that could shield them from Us? Those [alleged deities] are not [even] able to succor themselves. Hence, neither can they [who worship them hoped to] be aided [by them] against Us. (21:42-43)

The reference to Allah, in this context, as "the Most Gracious" (ar-rahman), is meant to emphasize that He - and He alone – is the protector of all creations.

PARABLE OF THE FRAILTY OF SPIDER'S WEB

The parable of those who take [beings or forces] other than Allah as their protectors is the spider, which builds itself a house. The frailest of all houses is the spider's house. Could they understand this? (29:41-42)

IS NOT ALLAH ENOUGH FOR HIS SERVANT?

Did they, perchance, [think they could] choose protectors other than Him? But Allah alone is the Protector [of all that exists], since He alone brings the dead back to life, and He alone has the power to will anything. (42:9) Now, for those who take others beside Him as their protectors, Allah watches them, and you are not responsible for their conduct. (42:6)

FREE ADVICE

Say: "No reward I have ever asked of you [out of anything] is yours. My reward rests with none but Allah, and He is witness unto everything!" (34:47) Nay, [in this divine writ] We convey to them all they ought to bear in mind, and they [heedlessly] turn away from this reminder! Or do you [O Muhammad] ask of them any worldly recompense? But [they ought to know that] recompense from thy Sustainer is best since He is the best of providers! And verily, thou callest them onto a straightway. Those who will not believe in the life to come are bound to deviate from that way. (23:71-72)

LIGHT OF TRUTH WILL WITHER FALSEHOOD

Say: "My Sustainer hurls truth against all that is false. He fully knows everything beyond a created being's perception! Say: "The truth has now come [to light, and falsehood is bound to wither away]: for falsehood cannot bring forth anything new, nor can it bring back [what has passed away]. (34:48-49)

In contrast to the creativeness inherent in every true idea, falsehood - being an illusion - cannot create anything or revive any values that may have been alive in the past.

ALLAH IS THE ALONE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE

Say: "Have you ever [really] considered those beings and forces to whom you ascribe a share in Allah's divinity, [and] whom you invoke beside Allah? Show me what they have created on earth - or do [you claim] they have a share in [governing] the heavens?" (35:40) [If so], bring me any divine writ preceding this one, or any [other] vestige of knowledge - if what you claim is true!" (46:4) Now those beings (dead saints) ***that some people invoke besides Allah cannot create anything: they are but created and are dead, not living, and they do not [even] know when they will be raised from the dead! (16:20-21)***

THE BIRTH OF A HEALTHY CHILD AND ALLAH'S GRACE

When he embraces her, she conceives [what at first is] a light burden and continues to bear it. Then, when she grows heavy [with a child], they both call unto Allah, their Sustainer, "If Thou indeed grant us a sound [child], we shall most certainly be among the grateful!" And yet, as soon as He grants them sound [offspring], they begin to ascribe to other powers beside Him a share in bringing about what He has granted them! Sublimely exalted, however, is Allah above anything to which men may ascribe share in His divinity! (7:189-190)

Many of them look upon the contributing factors of sound childbirth as something independent of Allah, forgetting that all these favorable factors are - like the birth of the child itself - but an outcome of Allah's will and grace: a manifestation of what the Quran calls the way of Allah (Sunnat Allah).

CHAPTER 36
DEMAND TO PERFORM MIRACLES

Mecca's pagans demanded The Prophet perform miracles to prove his prophethood, a scornful attitude that confronted all the earlier prophets at one time or another. They challenged him to do as much as Moses and Jesus did. They asked, "Why not turn Mount Safa and Mount Marwah into gold?" Wouldn't it be great if you could have the book you speak of falling from heaven already written? Why don't you make Gabriel appear to us all and speak to us as he spoke to you? Why don't you cause a water fountain to spring with sweeter water than Zamzam, knowing how badly your town needs an additional water supply?" The Meccans did not stop at these demands, and they asked, "Why does not your Allah inform you of the market prices of the future to help you and us in the trade of tomorrow?"

WHY CAN'T THE PROPHET PERFORM MIRACLES?

Now they [who deny the truth] ask, "Why has no miraculous sign ever been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer?" Say, "Allah's alone is knowledge beyond human perception. Wait, then, [until His will becomes manifest], I shall wait with you!" (10:20)

The last and greatest of Allah's apostles, the Prophet, was not empowered to perform miracles. His only miracle was and is the Quran itself. The Prophet was uneducated and could not have produced a book embodying all wisdom and theology essential to human life. The message is unsurpassed in its clarity and ethical completeness, destined forever for all stages of human development. It is also grammatically accurate and is incomparable to any poetry. It is addressed not merely to men's feelings but also

to their minds, open to everyone, whatever their race or social environment and bound to remain unchanged forever.

The Prophet said, “Ask you for a miracle than this, O unbelieving people! To have your vulgar tongue chosen as the language of that incomparable book, one piece of which puts to shame all your golden poesy and suspended songs.”

So high was the Prophet’s regard for it that he considered it the only miracle Allah worked through him—his “standing miracle,” as he called it. Unfortunately, quite a few erroneous Ahadith quote many miracles performed by the Prophet.

QURAN MUHAMMAD’S STANDING MIRACLE

And nothing has prevented Us from sending [this message, like the earlier ones] with miraculous signs [in its wake], save [Our knowledge] that the people of olden times [only too often] gave them the lie. (17:59) And yet, when you [O Prophet] do not produce any miracles for them, some [people] say, “Why do you not seek it [from Allah]?” Say: “I only follow whatever is revealed to me by my Sustainer. This [revelation] is a means of insight from your Sustainer, and a guidance and grace to people who will believe.” (7:203)

The teachings of the earlier prophets were suited to cultural needs and intellectual maturity. Some of these prophets needed symbolic portents or miracles to make people realize the inner truth of their mission. Sometimes, miracles fail to convince nonbelievers. A case in point is that Jesus performed many miracles yet had a handful of followers. Due to earlier Judeo-Christian religious development, a degree of maturity was achieved that enabled understanding of the Quran's message without the aid of portents and miracles.

DEMAND FOR DIRECT REVELATION

And whenever a [divine] message comes to them, they say, "We shall not believe unless we are given the like of what Allah's apostles were given!" [But] Allah knows best upon whom to bestow His message. Abasement in the sight of Allah will befall those who have become guilty of evildoing and severe suffering for all the schemes they were wont to weave. (6:124)

MUHAMMAD IS A WARNER AND NOT A MIRACLE WORKER

However, they bent on denying the truth [refuse to believe and] say, "Why has no miraculous sign ever been bestowed on him from on high by his Sustainer?" [But] thou art only a warner; and [in Allah] all people have a guide. (13:7) "Why has not a treasure been bestowed upon him from on high?" Or "[Why has not] an angel come [visibly] with him?" [They fail to understand that] thou art only a warner, whereas Allah has everything in His care. (11:12)

Their utter immersion in the passing pleasures of this world's life makes it impossible for "those bent on denying the truth" to sense the breath of the divine in The Prophet's message. So, they refuse to accept it as true unless an outward miracle supports it. You are only a warner bound to do nothing more than deliver the message entrusted to you. However, it is Allah alone who can truly guide men's hearts towards faith.

I AM A MORTAL MAN, AND AN APOSTLE

Most men are unwilling to accept anything but blasphemy. So, they say: "[O Muhammad], we shall not believe thee till thou cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, or thou have a garden of date palms and vines and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst in a sudden rush. (17:89-91) Or thou have a house [made] of gold, or thou ascend to heaven - but nay, we would not

[even] believe in thy ascension unless thou bring down to us [from heaven] writing which we [ourselves] could read!" Say thou, [O Prophet]: "Limitless in His glory is my Sustainer!" Am I, then, aught but a mortal man, an apostle?" (17:93-94)

Most men are unwilling to accept any idea that contradicts their sinful nature. We shall not believe in Muhammad's prophethood until he causes a lush garden with running water. This is a derisory allusion to the paradise allegory so often mentioned in the Quran.

MAN BEWITCHED

Yet they say: "What sort of apostle is this [man] who eats food [like all other mortals] and goes about in the marketplaces? Why has not an angel [visibly] been sent down unto him to be a warner with him?" Or: "[Why has not] a treasure been granted to him [by Allah]?" Or: "He should [at least] have a [bountiful] garden, so that he could eat thereof [without effort]!" And so, these evildoers say [to one another], "If you followed [Muhammad, you would follow] but a man bewitched!" See what they liken you, [O Prophet, simply] because they have gone astray and are now unable to find a way to the truth]! Hallowed is He who, if it be His will, shall give you something better than that [of which they speak] - gardens through which running waters flow - and shall assign to you mansions [of bliss in the life to come]. (25:7-10)

MIRACLES ARE EXERCISE IN FUTILITY

Even if We sent you [O Prophet] writing on a paper and they touched it with their own hands. Those bent on denying the truth would indeed have said, "This is nothing but a deception!" (6:7) Now, they swear by Allah with their most solemn oaths that if a miracle were shown to them, they would indeed believe in this [divine writ]. Say: "Miracles are in the power of Allah alone." And for all you know, even if one should be shown to them, they would not believe so long as We keep their hearts and their eyes

turned [away from the truth], even as they did not believe in it in the first instance: and [so] We shall leave them in their overweening arrogance, blindly stumbling to and fro. Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and if the dead were to speak unto them, [to prove life after death] and [even if] We were to assemble before them, face to face, all the things [that can prove the truth], they would still not believe unless Allah so willed. But most of them are unaware. (6:109-111) Yet even if [they should listen to] the [divine] discourse by which mountains could be moved, or the earth cleft asunder, or the dead made to speak - [they who are bent on denying the truth would still refuse to believe in it]. (13:31) Allah alone has the power to decide what shall be. Yet even if We had opened to them a gateway to heaven, and they had ascended, on and on, up to it, they would surely have said, "It is only our eyes that are spellbound! No, we have been bewitched!" (15:14-15)

The Quran states the futility of demanding tangible, extraneous means to prove prophetic messages divine origin. No miraculous sign can convince those whose hearts Allah has sealed because of their breaking their bond with Him. Not even a direct insight into the wonders of heaven could convince those bent on denying the truth. Prophets who performed miracles (such as Jesus) were still rejected by those who rejected the truth.

PROPHETS OF THE OLD WERE NOT SUPERHUMAN

"Nay," they say, "[Muhammad propounds] the most involved and confusing of dreams! Nay, but he invented [all] this! Nay, but he is [only] a poet! Let him, then, come unto us with a miracle, just as those [prophets] of old were sent [with miracles]!" (21:5) For [even] before thy time, [O Muhammad] We never sent [as Our apostles] any but [mortal] men, whom We inspired. Hence, [tell the deniers of the truth], "If you do not know this, ask the followers of earlier revelations," and neither did We endow them

with bodies that could dispense with food, nor were they immortal. (21:7-8) And, truly, We sent forth apostles before thee, and We appointed wives and offspring. It was not given to any apostle to produce a miracle save at Allah's behest. (13:38) Ask the followers of [earlier] revelation, [and they will tell you that their prophets were but mortal men whom We had endowed] with all evidence of the truth and with books of divine wisdom. And upon you [too] We have bestowed from on high this reminder, so you might make clear unto mankind all that has ever been bestowed upon them, and they might take thought. (16:43-44) We never sent as Our message-bearers any but [mortal men] who ate food [like other human beings] and went about in the marketplaces: for [it is] We cause you [human beings] to be a means of testing one another. Are you able to endure [this test] with patience? For [remember, O man], thy Sustainer is truly all seeing! (25:20)

Above is a rejoinder to those who refuse to accept a divine message as valid, conveyed to humanity by an ordinary mortal. The prophets of old were mortals like all men and not endowed with supernatural qualities. In addition, We did not endow the apostles with bodies that ate no food, implying a denial of any magical quality in the prophets entrusted with Allah's message. **"**Ask the followers of [earlier] revelation**,"** that is, the Jews and the Christians, for enlightenment in this respect. Allah's apostles have appeared, at one time or another, within every civilization, and consequently, no substantial human group has ever been left without divine guidance. It also answers the objection frequently raised by unbelievers that The Prophet could not be Allah's message-bearer since he was a mere mortal man. The Quran clarifies that no created being, not even a prophet, has ever been endowed with "supernatural" powers. Therefore, moral values are independent of all time-bound changes and must be regarded as permanent. The appearance of each new prophet had, as a rule, to be a means of testing men's moral perceptions and dispositions as manifested in their reactions to the prophet's message. Their willingness or unwillingness to accept it

based on its intrinsic merit, without demanding or even expecting any supernatural proof of its divine origin.

MIRACLES ARE IN ALLAH'S POWER

And, indeed, [O Muhammad], We sent forth apostles before your time; some of them, We have mentioned to you, [In the Quran] and some of them, We have not mentioned to you. And it was not given to any apostleto bring forth a miracle except by Allah's leave. Yet when Allah's will becomes manifest, judgment will [already] have been passed in all justice, and lost will be, then and there, all who tried to reduce to nothing [whatever they could not understand]. (40:78)

The Quran prohibits telling the future through astrology (67:5-6) or divination, a common practice among idol-worshippers in pre-Islamic Arabia. Since only Allah knows "that which is beyond a created being's perception," any such attempt is blasphemy. The Prophets did not have the power to predict the future except under divine inspiration. The unbelievers derisively ridiculed Muhammad as an apostle "who eats food like all other mortals and goes about in the marketplaces" (See 25:7). The many references to their incredulous wondering that Allah should have chosen as His prophet a man from among themselves.

DENIAL OF ANY SUPERNATURAL POWERS

Say [O Prophet]: "I do not say unto you, 'Allah's treasures are with me.' Nor [do I say], 'I know the things beyond human perception,' nor do I say unto you, 'behold, I am an angel.' I but follow what is revealed to me. (6:50) "It is not within my power to bring benefits to, or avert harm from, myself, except as Allah may please. And if I knew that which is beyond human perception, abundant good fortune would surely have fallen to my lot, and no evil would ever have touched me. I am nothing but a warner and a herald of glad tidings unto those who will believe." (7:188)

The above is a categorical denial by the Prophet of any claim to supernatural powers. Beyond this specific reference, however, this passage is meant to prevent the deification of the Prophet. It is meant to make it clear that he - like all other prophets before him - was but a mortal human being, a servant whom Allah had chosen to convey His message to humanity. The repeated insistence in the Quran on the humanness of the Prophet is in tune with the doctrine that no created being has or could have any share, however small, in any of the Creator's qualities or powers.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND MIRACLES

If it distresses you that those who deny the truth turn their backs on you - why, then, if you can go deep into the earth or ascend a ladder to heaven to bring them a [yet more convincing] message, [do so] but [remember that] had Allah so willed, He would indeed have gathered them all unto [His] guidance? Do not, therefore, allow yourself to ignore [Allah's ways]. Only they who listen [with their hearts] can respond to a call; and as for the dead [of heart], Allah [alone] can raise them from the dead, whereupon unto Him, they shall return. (6:35-36)

Even after continuous preaching, Mecca rejected The Prophet's message. Sometimes, he cherished the wish that Allah sent a clear sign that the Meccans had no alternative but to accept his message. If this mission could have been performed by miracles, Allah would have done so. However, a conviction based solely on miraculous proof would compromise man's free will and, therefore was of no spiritual value.

Since Allah granted The Prophet the Quran itself, he is bidden to declare that these demands are irrelevant and frivolous. Miracles are in Allah's power (6:109). If you are looking for miracles, open your eyes, and miracles are all around us. In an age charged with supernaturalism, when miracles were accepted as the most ordinary saint's stock-in-trade, The Prophet refused to traffic with human

weakness and credulity. To the miracle-hungry idolaters seeking signs and portents, he made it clear that Allah has not sent me to work wonders; He has sent me to preach to you. From first to last, he resisted every impulse to glamourize his person. I never said Allah's treasures are in my hand, I knew the hidden things, or I was an angel. I am only a preacher of Allah's words, the bringer of Allah's message to humanity.

CHAPTER 37
DEMAND FOR CHASTISEMENT AND TO SEE ALLAH AND ANGELS

DEMAND TO SEE ANGEL

But those who do not believe they are destined to meet Us tend to say, "Why have not angels been sent down to us?" Or "Why do we not see our Sustainer?" Indeed, they are far too proud of themselves, having rebelled [against Allah's truth] with utter disdain! (25:21) Thou cause the skies to fall upon us in smithereens, as you have threatened, or [till] you bring Allah and the angels face to face before us. (17:92)

THE APPEARANCE OF ANGEL WILL CAUSE CONFUSION

Say: "If angels were walking about on earth as their natural abode, We would indeed have sent them an angel out of heaven as Our apostle." (17:95) And [even] if We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him [appear as] a man - and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves. (6:9)

Since it is impossible for man to perceive angels as they would have assumed the shape of a human being, their demand for direct verification of the message would have remained unfulfilled, and their self-caused confusion unresolved.

ANGELS ONLY APPEAR ON JUDGMENT DAY

Had We sent down an angel, all would have been decided, and they would have received no further respite [for repentance]. (6:8) We never send down angels otherwise than according to the [demands of] truth; and [were the angels to appear now], lo! They

[who reject this divine writ] would have no further respite! (15:8) [Yet] on that Day - the Day on which they shall see the angels - there will be no glad tidings for those lost in sin; and they will exclaim, "By a forbidding ban [are we from Allah's grace debarred]!" (25:22)

Only on Judgment Day will the angels manifest themselves to men in their true form and become comprehensible to them. The appearance of angels to ordinary men marks the end of the world. No further respite for repentance is granted. Thus, the doom of the truth deniers. We never send angels to satisfy a frivolous demand of people who refuse to consider a prophetic message on its merits.

DEMAND FOR CHASTISEMENT

[So, O Muhammad], they challenge you to hasten the coming of [Allah's] chastisement. However, Allah never fails to fulfill His promise – and in thy Sustainer's sight, a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning. (22:47)

The Prophet's contemporaries who refused to regard the Quran as a divine revelation made a sarcastic demand to be punished immediately, "if this is indeed the truth from Allah." However, what men conceive of as "time" has no meaning regarding Allah because He is timeless, without beginning or end, so that one day and a thousand years are alike. Since Allah is timeless, hastening or delaying any event will be meaningless.

ONLY ALLAH HAS THE POWER TO PUNISH

Say: "I take my stand on clear evidence from my Sustainer - and [so] it is to Him that you are giving the lie! It is not in my power that [in your ignorance] you so hastily demand. Judgment rests with Allah. He shall declare the truth since He is the best judge between truth and falsehood. Say: "If what you so hastily demand

was in my power, everything would have been decided between me and you. But Allah knows best who is wrong" (6:57-58).

They mock him to receive Allah's exemplary punishment. It is not in the Prophet's power to harm anyone. Judgment rests with Allah alone.

Man is a creature of haste [but in time] I shall make clear to you [the truth of] My message. Do not, then, ask Me to hasten [it]! (21:37) If We so willed, We could cause the earth to swallow them or sky fragments to fall upon them. In all this, behold, there is a message for every servant [of Allah] who wont to turn unto Him [in repentance]. (34:9)

Man is, by nature, impatient about things to come. Allah's judgment is bound to come, and do not call for its speedy advent!

IGNORE THOSE WHO DEMAND CHASTISEMENT

Do they [really] wish that Our chastisement be hastened? Hence, you turn aside for a while from them and see[them for what they are]. In time, they [too] will come to see [what they do not see now]. (37:176-179)

WHY HASTEN COMING OF EVIL?

[Since, O Prophet, they are bent on denying the truth], they challenge you to hasten the coming upon them of evil instead of [hoping for] good. Although [they ought to know] the exemplary punishments [which they now deride] have come to pass before their time. Your Sustainer is full of forgiveness unto men despite all their evildoing, but He is [also] truly severe in retribution! (13:6) They who are bent on doing evil shall have their share [of evil] like their fellows [of old]. So let them not ask Me to hasten [their doom]! For, woe unto those bent on denying the truth - [woe] on the Day they are promised! (51:59-60)

Every act of evildoing bears the seed of retribution either in this world or in the hereafter.

NO CHASTISEMENTS WHILE THE PROPHET IS IN THE MIDST

And, lo, they would say, "O Allah! If this is indeed the truth from Thee, then rain down upon us stones from the skies, or inflict [some other] grievous suffering on us!" But Allah did not choose to chastise them while you [O Prophet] are still among them [in Mecca], nor would Allah chastise them when they [might yet] ask for forgiveness. (8:32-33)

Abu Jahl, the Prophet's chief opponent at Mecca, uttered these words and was killed in the battle of Badr.

DO THEY WISH OUR CHASTISEMENT BE HASTENED?

They will not believe in it [the divine writ] till they behold the grievous suffering that will come upon them [on resurrection], suddenly, without their awareness [of its approach], and then they will exclaim, "Could we have a respite?" [For a second chance in life] ***Do they [really] wish that Our chastisement be hastened? But have you ever considered [this] if We allow them to enjoy [this life] for some years? Thereupon that [chastisement] which they were promised befalls them - of what avail to them will be all their past enjoyments? And withal, We have never destroyed any community unless it was warned and reminded, for We never do wrong to [anyone]. (26:201-209)***

DEMAND FOR JUDGMENT

They [who deny the truth] ask, "When will that promise [of resurrection and judgment] be fulfilled?" [Answer this, O you who believe], if you are men of truth!" Say [O Prophet]: "It is not within my power to avert harm from, or bring benefit to, myself,

except as Allah may please. A term has been established for all people. When the end of their term approaches, they can neither delay it by a single moment nor hasten it." Say: "Have you ever considered [how you would feel] if His chastisement befalls you by night or day? What could be in that prospect that people lost in sin should wish to hasten? Will you, then, believe in it [only] after it has come to pass – [on the Day when you will be asked, do you believe in it] now, [when it is too late] after having [contemptuously] called for its speedy advent? After that, those [in their lifetime] who were bent on doing evil will be told to taste suffering abiding! Is this retribution anything but the just due for what you did?" (10:48-52)

The "end of the term" refers to the Last Hour and the Day of Judgment. It is the incredulous inquiry of the deniers of the truth about the timing of the Last Hour. Additionally, they sarcastically demand that Allah chastise them immediately as proof of Muhammad's prophetic mission. All of Allah's chastisement is awful and bitter and should inspire one to flee from it. Nothing in it ought to make one wish to hasten it. The expression "by night or day" denotes the suddenness and unexpectedness with which doom encompasses evildoers on the Day of Judgment.

CHAPTER 38
DEALING WITH BLASPHEMERS

IGNORE THE BLASPHEMERS AND ADMONISH THE SINNERS

Now, whenever you meet such as, indulge in [blasphemous] talk about Our messages, turn your back upon them until they begin talking about other things. If Satan should ever cause you to forget [yourself], remain not, after recollection, in the company of such evildoing folk, for whom those conscious of Allah are in no wise accountable. Theirs, however, is the duty to admonish [the sinners] so they can become conscious of Allah. And leave to themselves those beguiled by the life of this world, who have made a play and passing delights their religion. (6:68-70)

They have made play and fun or passing delight their religion as the primary goal of their lives. They devote themselves to pursuing pleasure, which money and power can provide. Their pursuit of Pleasure is akin to religious fervor, an attitude of mind that causes them to lose sight of all spiritual and moral values. You shall not sit with them until they talk about anything other than making a mockery of Allah's message.

AVOID THE COMPANY OF MOCKERS

And, indeed, He has enjoined upon you in this divine writ that whenever you hear people deny the truth of Allah's messages and mock them, you shall avoid their company until they begin to talk of other things - or else, you will become like them. Together with those who deny the truth, Allah will gather in hell. (4:140) You avoid those who turn away from all remembrance of Us and care for no more than the life of this world, the only thing they think worth knowing. [That is their sum-total or goal of knowledge] Thy

Sustainer is fully aware of who has strayed from His path and who follows His guidance. (53:29)

LACK OF REASONED APPROACH

Hence, whenever they consider you, [O Muhammad], they but make you a target of their mockery, [saying]: "Is this the one whom Allah has sent as an apostle?" Indeed, he would almost have led us astray from our deities had we not been [so] steadfastly attached to them!" But in time, when they see the suffering [that awaits them], they will know who it was that strayed farthest from the path [of truth]! Can you, O Prophet, be held responsible for him? Do you think most people listen to your message and use reasoning to decide what to do? No, they are, but like cattle - no, they are even less conscious of the right way! (25:41-44)

DISDAIN FOR ALLAH'S MESSAGE

Woe unto every sinful self-deceiver who hears Allah's messages when they are conveyed to him, and yet, as though he did not listen to them, persists in his haughty disdain! Hence, announce grievous suffering, for when he becomes aware of our messages, he makes them a target of his mockery! There is shameful suffering in store for all such people. Hell is ahead of them, and all they may have gained [in this world] shall be of no avail whatsoever to them or any of those things which, instead of Allah, they have come to regard as their protectors: for awesome suffering awaits them. (45:7-10)

The term liar is applied, particularly to one who lies to himself because he is perverted in his intellect and judgment. "Those things" refer to anything they may attribute to a quasi-divine influence on their lives, whether false deities or pseudo values, e.g., wealth, power, social status, etc.

Indeed, [O Muhammad], before you, we sent forth apostles, each one to his people. They brought them all evidence of the truth and then, [by causing the believers to triumph], We inflicted Our retribution upon those who [deliberately] did evil for We had willed it upon Ourselves to succor the believers. (30:47)

ALLAH'S SUBTLE WAYS

Hence, leave Me alone with such as give the lie to this tiding. We shall draw them little by little (to their undoing) in a way that they will not know, for though I may give them rein for a while, My subtle plan is exceedingly firm! (68:44-45)

"This tiding" refers to divine revelation in general and the tiding of resurrection and judgment in particular. The implication is that Allah alone has the right to decide whether or how to chastise them. Giving "rein for a while" alludes to why Allah allows many evil persons to enjoy their lives while many righteous persons are allowed to suffer. The answer is that during his life in this world, man cannot understand where apparent happiness and unhappiness ultimately lead to and what role they play in Allah's "subtle plan" of creation. The term" subtle plan" describes Allah's unfathomable plan of creation. Man can glimpse only isolated fragments and never the totality of a plan in which every happening has a definite function, and nothing is accidental.

CHAPTER 39
ALLAH'S JUDGMENT FOR IDOL WORSHIPPERS

RESPITE FOR SINNERS BEFORE PUNISHMENT

We have allowed these [sinners] - as [We allowed] their forebears - to enjoy the good things of life for a long time. But then - have they never yet seen how We visit the earth [with Our punishment], gradually depriving it of all that is best thereon? Can they [hope to] be the winners? Say [unto all men]: "I warn you on the strength of divine revelation!" But the deaf [of heart] will not hearken to this call; however, often, they are warned. And yet, if but a breath of thy Sustainer's chastisement touches them, they are sure to cry, "Oh, woe unto us! We were evildoers!" (21:44-46) You will indeed taste grievous suffering [in the life to come], although you shall not be requited for aught but for what you were wont to do. (37:38-39)

The principle is that "an evil deed will be punished with no more than the like thereof," and he who "shall come [before Allah] with a good deed will receive ten times the like thereof" (see 6:160).

FULL RECOMPENSE FOR THEIR DEEDS

AND SO, [O Prophet] be not in doubt about anything that those [misguided people] worship. They worship but [unthinkingly] as their forefathers worshipped aforetime; and behold, We shall most certainly give them their full due [for whatever good or evil they have earned], without diminishing the aught thereof. (11:109) And, verily, unto each and all will thy Sustainer give their full due. For whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all they do! (11:111)

SEVERE SUFFERING IN AFTERLIFE

But as for him who is bent on denying the truth - let not his denial grieve thee. Unto Us, they must return, and then We shall make them [truly] understand all that they were doing [in life]: for, verily, Allah has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men]. We will let them enjoy themselves for a short while, but in the end, We shall drive them into severe suffering. (31:23-24)

ALLAH'S JUDGMENT

We send [Our] message-bearers only as heralds of glad tidings and warners: hence, all who believe and live righteously do not need to fear, and neither shall they grieve. Whereas those who give the lie to Our messages - suffering will afflict them due to all their sinful doings. (6:48-49)

Splendid rewards await those who obey His commands. Terrible punishment awaits those who disregard them. There is a paradise, and there is a hell.

PRODUCE AN EVIDENCE FOR SHARE IN ALLAH'S DIVINITY

On that Day, He will call unto those [arraigned before His judgment seat], and will ask: "Where, now, are those [beings or powers] whom you imagined having a share in My divinity?" And [they will remain silent: for by then] We will have called forth witnesses from within every community and will have said [unto the sinners]: "Produce evidence for what you have been claiming!" And so, they will understand that all truth is Allah's [alone]; and all their false imagery will have forsaken them. (28:74-75)

Allah's "question" is meant to stress the inability of the sinners concerned to justify their erstwhile attitude rationally. The prophets who appeared at various stages of man's history and who will now bear witness that they had duly conveyed Allah's message to the

people. Produce evidence for the possibility of anyone sharing Allah's divinity. He is the Ultimate Reality, and whatever is or could be is an outcome of His will alone. A specific instance of such "false imagery" is the futility of man's dependence on his wealth and worldly power.

INTERCESSION BY THE MEDIATOR

Omniscience is the state of knowing everything—intercession conflicts with the concept of His omniscience and thus denial of Allah Himself.

DENIAL OF ALLAH'S OMNISCIENCE

He who has every living being in His almighty care, [dealing with each] according to what it deserves – [is He like anything else that exists]? And yet, they ascribe to other beings a share in Allah's divinity! Say: "Give them any name [you please] but do you [really think you could] inform Him of anything on earth He does not know - or [do you] but play with words?" (13:33)

An intercessor is a person who intervenes on behalf of another, especially by prayer. The phrase "Give them any name" is an expression of utter contempt for those allegedly divine beings: i.e., they are so unreal and meaningless as not to deserve even a name. Those false objects of worship and imaginary intercessors are but empty words that you have invented.

ANGELS AS MEDIATORS

For, however, many angels, there be in the heavens; their mediation can be of slightest avail [to anyone] - except after Allah has given leave [to intercede] for whomever He wills and with whom He is well-pleased. (53:26)

The belief that His judgment can be influenced by "mediation" is due to an anthropomorphic concept of Allah far removed from the

truth. A mediator is a go-between who attempts to resolve a conflict between parties. Worshiping multiple deities is based on the worshiper's hope of mediation between himself and Allah. The argument runs thus: If those alleged divine or semi-divine "mediators" really existed, then it is evident that being no more than mediators, even they would have to recognize Allah as the Supreme Being. It amounts to admitting that they have no power of their own but are entirely dependent on and subject to Him. This unavoidable conclusion implies a negation of any divinity in those imaginary mediators. Is it not far more reasonable to turn directly to Allah, who is almighty, all-hearing, and does not need any mediator?

WORSHIP OF INTERCESSORS

When the last Hour dawns, those lost in sin will be broken-in spirit, for they will have no intercessors in the beings to whom they ascribe a share in Allah's divinity, seeing that [by then], they will have ceased to believe in their erstwhile blasphemous fancies. (30:12-13) They choose [to worship], side by side with Allah, [imaginary] intercessors. Say: "Why - even though they have no power over anything and no understanding?" Say: "Allah's alone is [the power to bestow the right of] intercession: His [alone] is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and, in the end, unto Him, you will all be brought back." And yet, whenever Allah alone is mentioned, the hearts of those who will not believe in the life to come contract with bitter aversion - whereas, when those [imaginary powers] are mentioned side by side with Him, lo, they rejoice! (39:43-45)

This refers to the adoration of dead saints or their tombs or relics and inanimate representations of saints. Many people choose to worship intercessors despite the evidence of Allah's almightiness. Intercessors could not act independently without Allah's permission. Cognition of Allah has a sense of moral responsibility;

the Allah less shrink from it and joyfully turn to the worship of real or imaginary powers, making no such virtuous demand.

INTERCESSION ONLY BY ALLAH'S LEAVE

Say: "Call upon those [beings] whom you imagine [to be endowed with divine powers] besides Allah. They have not an atom's weight of power either in the heavens or on earth, nor have they any share in [governing]. He [choose] not to have any helper from among them." And, before Him, mediation can be of no avail [to any] save one in whose case, He may have granted leave [therefore]. (34:22-23)

The above passage relates to the attribution of divine or semi-divine qualities to saints and angels and the problem of their "intercession" with Allah. Whatever Allah decides regarding His grant or refusal of mediation depends on His redemptive acceptance or rejection of the human being concerned.

TESTIMONIES OF ANGELS

[As for those who now deny the truth], one Day, He will gather them all together and ask the angels, "Was it you that they worshiped?" They will answer: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! Thou [alone] art close unto us, not they! No, [when they thought they were worshiping us], they were but [blindly] worshiping forces concealed from their senses; most believed in them" (34:40-41).

The above is a metaphorical question because Allah is omniscient and has no need to "ask." Many who deny the truth of Allah's messages delude themselves into believing they worship spiritual forces or angels. The answer of the angels implies that the sinners' alleged worship of them had never been more than a subconscious fear of the invisible forces of nature and, ultimately, of the yet more profound fear of the unknown. The fear that sooner or later engulfs

all who refuse to believe in the existence of Allah and, hence, cannot see any meaning or purpose in human life.

INVOKE YOUR DEFIED SAINTLY BEINGS

Hence, [bear in mind] the Day on which He will say, "Call [now] unto those beings who you imagined having a share in My divinity!" They will invoke them, but those [beings] will not respond, for We shall have placed an unbridgeable gulf between them. And those lost in sin will behold the fire and know that they are bound to fall into it and find no way to escape there. (18:52-53)

A barrier of perdition is an allusion to the vast gulf that separates those sinners from the blasphemous figments of their imagination or, more probably, the gulf that separates them from the saintly persons they used to worship. However, the latter had never claimed divine status.

IT WAS NOT US YOU USED TO WORSHIP

For, one Day We shall gather them all together, and then, We shall say unto those who [in their lifetime] ascribed divinity to others but Allah, "Stand where you are, you and those [beings and powers] to whom you ascribed a share in Allah's divinity!" We shall have [visibly] separated them by then. And the beings to whom they had ascribed a share in Allah's divinity will say [to those who had worshiped them], "It was not us that you used to worship, and none can bear witness between you and us as Allah. We were, for certain, unaware of your worshiping [us]." There and then will every human being apprehend what he has done in the past, and all will be brought back unto Allah, their true Lord Supreme, and all their false imagery will have forsaken them. (10:28-30)

The worship of saints, prophets, angels, etc., is nothing but a projection of the worshiper's subconscious desires. Those who ascribed divinity to beings other than Allah will be separated from the objects of their one-time adoration. They will realize that there has never been any existential link between them, and those false objects of worship and all their false imagery have forsaken them. It was only your fancies and desires that you worshiped, covering them in the garb of extraneous beings.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN ALLAH AND DEIFIED PROPHETS AND SAINTS

But [as for people unaware of thy Sustainer's oneness] one Day, He will gather them together with all they [now] worship instead of Allah. He will ask [those whom divinity was falsely ascribed]: "Was it you who led My creatures astray, or did they by themselves stray from the right path?" They will answer: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! It was inconceivable for us to take for our masters anyone but Thyself! But Thou allowed them and their forefathers to enjoy [the pleasures of] life to such an extent, they forgot all remembrance [of Thee], for they were people devoid of all good. [Thereupon Allah will say]: "And now, they [whom you regarded as divine] have given the lie to all your [past] assertions, and you can neither ward off [your punishment] nor obtain any succor! For, whoever of you has committed [such] evil, him We shall cause to taste great suffering!" (25:17-19)

"Was it you who led My creatures astray?" The rhetorical question is addressed to wrongfully deified rational beings, i.e., prophets or saints - and not to lifeless idols. They will answer that it would have been morally impossible for them to ask others to worship them. The above question-and-answer, repeated in many variations throughout the Quran, is to stress, in a dramatic manner, the moral odiousness and intellectual futility of attributing divine qualities to any being other than Allah.

DEIFIED BEINGS WILL DISOWN IDOL WORSHIPERS

Allah, your Sustainer, unto Him belongs all dominion. Whereas those you invoke instead of Him do not own so much as the husk of a date-stone! If you invoke them, they do not hear your call, and even if they could listen, they would not [be able to] respond to you. And [withal], they will utterly disown you for associating them with Allah on the Day of Resurrection. And none can make you understand [the truth] like the all-aware One. (35:13-14)

On the Resurrection Day, all false objects of worship, whether saints, angels, relics, fetishes, or deified forces of nature, will "bear witness" against their one-time worshipers and will "disown" them.

ENMITY FROM DEIFIED BEINGS

And who could be more astray than one who invokes, instead of Allah, such as will not respond to him either now or on the Day of Resurrection. Are they not even conscious of being invoked? Such as, when all mankind is gathered [for judgment], will be enemies to those [who worshiped them], and will utterly reject their worship? (46:5-6)

DIALOGUE BETWEEN DEIFIED BEINGS AND IDOLATERS

And when they who ascribed divinity to beings other than Allah, [on Judgment Day], they will exclaim: "O our Sustainer! These are the beings to whom we ascribed a share in Thy divinity and whom we invoke instead of Thee!" After which [those beings] will fling at them the retort: "You have indeed been lying [to yourselves]!" And on that Day, they will [who had thus been sinning, belatedly] proffer their surrender to Allah; all their false imagery will have forsaken them. Upon those bent on denying the truth and turning others away from the path of Allah, We will heap suffering upon suffering in return for all the corruption they wrought. For one Day, We shall raise a witness against them

within every community from among themselves. And you [too, O Prophet], We have brought forth to bear witness regarding those [whom your message may have reached]. As We have bestowed from on high upon you, step by step, this divine writ, to make everything clear, and to provide guidance and grace and a glad tiding unto all who have surrendered themselves to Allah. (16:86-89)

Every sinner who dies without repentance on Judgment Day is endowed with a clear, objectified vision of his sins, which will have assumed the status of an independent reality bearing witness against the sinner and forcing him to acknowledge his now irremediable guilt.

WE DID NOT MEAN TO ASCRIBE DIVINITY

For one Day, We shall gather them all together, and then, We shall say unto those who ascribed divinity to others besides Allah: "Where, now, are those beings which you imagined having a share in Allah's divinity?" Whereupon, in their utter confusion, they will only [be able to] say: "By Allah, our Sustainer, we did not [mean to] ascribe divinity to anything beside Him!" They have lied to themselves - and [how] their false imagery has forsaken them! (6:22-24)

"We did not [mean to] ascribe divinity" refers to shirk. The person concerned does not subjectively visualize as denying Allah's oneness, how they lied to themselves in their lifetime that their beliefs did not offend against the principle of Allah's oneness.

LONGING FOR SECOND CHANCE

If you could but see [them] when they are made to stand before the fire and will say, "Oh, would we be brought back [to life] then we would not give the lie to our Sustainer's messages but would be among the believers!" But [they will say this only because] the

truth they used to conceal [from themselves] in the past will have become evident to them. If brought back [to life], they would return to the very thing, which was forbidden to them, for they are indeed liars! (6:27-28)

Faith is useless unless it is desired for its own sake. Their longing for a second chance is not due to a love of truth. Instead, they dread the evil consequences of their doings.

FORSAKEN BY ALLEGED DIVINE PARTNERS

In Him alone is vested the knowledge of when the Last Hour comes. On that Day, when He shall call out to them, "Where, now, are those [alleged] partners of Mine?" They will [surely] answer, "We confess unto Thee that none of us can bear witness and all they invoked aforetime will have forsaken them. They shall know for sure that there is no escape for them. (41:47-48) And [this retribution will befall all evildoers because] they devise that false imagery - and all their false imagery is within Allah's knowledge. [And never can the blasphemers prevail against the truth - not] even if their false imagery were so [well devised and powerful] that could move the mountains thereby. Hence, do not think Allah will fail to fulfill the promise He gave His apostles. Allah is almighty, an avenger of evil! (14:46-47)

UNABLE TO HUMBLE THEMSELVES BEFORE ALLAH

On the Day when man's very being shall be bared to the bone, they [who now deny the truth] shall be called upon to prostrate themselves [before Allah] and shall not be able to do so. Downcast will be their eyes, with ignominy overwhelming them, seeing that they were called upon [in vain] to prostrate themselves [before Him] while they were yet sound [and alive]. (68:42-43)

On the Day of Judgment, man's innermost thoughts, feelings, and motivations will be laid bare. Their erstwhile motivation shall be

revealed in all its nakedness as something indefensible and spiritually destructive. On that Day, the deniers of the truth would be willing to humble themselves before Allah but unable to do so because they refused to accept Allah when they were alive.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION HERE AND CONSEQUENCES IN HEREAFTER

Say [O Muhammad]: "I am bidden to worship Allah, sincere in my faith in Him alone; and be foremost among those who surrender themselves unto Allah." Say: "I would dread were I to rebel against my Sustainer, the suffering [which would befall me] on that awesome Day [of Judgment]. Say: "I worship Allah alone and [it is up to you, O sinners, to] worship whatever you please instead of Him!" Clouds of fire will be above them, and [similar] clouds beneath them. In this way, Allah imbues His servants with fear. (39:11-16)

RETRIBUTION FOR THE DENIERS OF THE TRUTH

Hence, you remain patient in adversity, for Allah's promise always comes true. And whether We show thee [in this world] something of what We hold in store for those [deniers of the truth], or whether We cause you to die [before that retribution takes place - know that, in the end], it is unto Us that they will be brought back. (40:77)

BLAZING FIRE

Whereas the blazing fire will be laid open before those lost in grievous error, and they will be asked: "Where now is all that you were wont to worship instead of Allah? Can these [things and beings] be of any help to you?" (26:90–93) On the Day, those bent on denying the truth will be brought within sight of the fire [and asked], "Is not this the truth?" They will answer, "Yeah, by Our Sustainer!" [And] He will say: "Taste, then, this suffering as an

outcome of your denial of the truth!" (46:34) Verily, Allah has rejected the deniers of the truth and readied for them a blazing fire, therein to abide beyond the count of time. No protectors will they find, and none to bring them succor. On the Day when their faces shall be tossed about in the fire, they will exclaim, "Oh, would we have paid heed unto Allah, and the Apostle!" (33:64–66) But they who shall come with evil deeds—their faces will be thrust into the fire, [and they will be asked]: "Is this aught but a just requital for what you were doing [in life]?" (27:90)

HELLFIRE FOR THE PERSECUTORS OF BELIEVERS

They destroy [but] themselves, they who would ready a pit of fire fiercely burning [for all who have attained faith]! Lo! [With glee do] they contemplate that [fire], fully conscious of what they are doing to the believers, whom they hate for no other reason than they believe in Allah, the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due, [and] to whom the dominion of the heavens, and the earth belongs. But Allah is witness unto everything! As for those who persecute believing men and women and do not repent, hell's suffering awaits them: yeah, suffering through fire awaits them! (85:4-10)

The anonymity of the evildoers shows this is a parable and not an allusion to historical or even legendary events. The persecutors are those who have no faith and hate to see faith in others. The "pit of fire" is a metaphor for the latter's persecution by the former: a phenomenon not restricted to any time or particular people but recurring in many forms and varying degrees of intensity throughout recorded history.

FULL RECOMPENSE FOR THEIR DEEDS

AND SO, [O Prophet], be not in doubt about anything that those [misguided people] worship: they worship but [unthinkingly] as their forefathers worshipped aforetime; and behold, We shall

most certainly give them their full due [for whatever good or evil they have earned], without diminishing the aught thereof. (11:109) And, verily, unto each and all will thy Sustainer give their full due for whatever [good or evil] they may have done: behold, He is aware of all they do! (11:111)

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