



إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ



Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right (or stable),

Quran English Translation & Commentary

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بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ

Introduction and Summary

In the gradation of spiritual teaching (see Introduction to Surah 8), we saw that the first seven Surahs sketched the early spiritual history of man, and led up to the formation of the new Ummah of Islam. Surah 8 to 16 formed another series dealing with the formation of the new Ummah and its consolidation, and Allah's dealing with man taken as an Ummah and considered, in his social relation in original communities (see Introduction to Surahs 8, 10, and 16). We now come to a fresh series, (Surahs 17-29), which may be considered in three parts.

- Surahs 17-21 begin with an allusion to the Mi'raj (of which more later), and proceed to spiritual history as touching individuals rather than nations. The old prophets and stories of the past are now referred to from this point of view.
- Surahs 22-25 refer to Hajj (pilgrimage), worship and prayer, chastity, privacy, etc, as related to a man's individual spiritual growth.
- Surahs 26-29 go back to the old prophets and stories of the past, as illustrating the growth of the individual soul in its reactions against the lives of the communities and the reactions of the communities to the lives of its great individual souls.

Let us now consider Surah 17, by itself. It opens with the mystic Vision of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet; he was transported from the Sacred Mosque (of Makkah) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) in a night and shown some of the Signs of Allah. The majorities of Commentators takes this Night Journey literally, but allow that there were other occasions on which a spiritual Journey or Vision occurred. Even on the supposition of a miraculous bodily Journey, it is conceded that the body was almost transformed into spiritual fineness. The Hadith literature gives details of this Journey and its study helps to elucidate its meaning.

The Holy Prophet was first transported to the seat of the earlier revelations in Jerusalem, and then taken through the seven heavens even to the Sublime Throne, and initiated into the spiritual mysteries of the human soul struggling in Space and Time. The Spaniard, Miguél Asín, Arabic Professor in the University of Madrid, has shown that this Mi'raj literature has a great influence on the Mediaeval literature of Europe, and especially on the great Italian poem, the Divine Comedy (or Drama) of Danie, which towers a landmark in mediaeval European literature.

The reference to this great mystic story of the Mi'raj is a fitting prelude to the journey of the human soul in its spiritual growth in life. The first steps in such growth must be through moral conduct-the reciprocal rights of parents and children, kindness

to our fellow-men, courage and firmness in the hour of danger, and sense of personal responsibility, and a sense of Allah's Presence through prayer and praise.

The Mi'raj is usually dated to 27th night of the month of Rajab (though other dates, e.g. 17th Rabi 1, are also given) in the year before the Hijrah. This fixes the date of the opening verse of the Surah, through portions of the Surah may have been a little earlier.

Summery- The spiritual experiences of the Prophets of Allah are given in order that Allah's Signs may be made clear to men: man is misled into evil, and must be guided to a sense of personal responsibility (17:1-22, and C. 128). (R).

Our service to Allah is shown also in our human relations, goodness to parents and kinsmen and strangers in want, as well as kindness to children, purity in sex relations, justice and respect for human life, protection of orphans, probity in all dealings, and avoidance of arrogance (17:23-40, and C. 129).

Allah's glory is above all comparison, and the reception of His revelation marks off the man of faith from those who do not believe. But the Believers should speak fair and avoid dissensions, for Allah doth encompass all men (17:41-60, and C. 130).

Pride caused the fall of Iblis, but the children of Adam have been raised in excellence above other Creation. They will be judged by their deeds. Prayer is good at stated times and at night, and the Quran is offered as healing and mercy (17:61-84, and C. 131).

Inspiration (the Quran) is a Sign of Allah's grace, and men should accept it without making carping excuses. Be humble in prayer and praise (17:85-111, and C. 132).

C.128 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(17:1-22)

*It is privilege of the men of God
To see the sublimest mysteries
Of the spiritual world and instruct men
In Righteousness; they warn and shield men
Against Evil. But nothing can lessen
Each soul's personal responsibility
For its own deeds. It carries its fate
Round its own neck. Allah's gifts
Are for all, but not all receive
The same gifts, nor are all gifts
Of equal dignity or excellence.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا ...

1. Glory to (Allah) Who did take His Servant for Journey by night

C2166. The reference is to the Isra' for which see the [Introduction to this Surah](#).

... مِنْ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ ...

from the Sacred Mosque

C2167. Masjid is a place of prayer: here it refers to the Ka'bah at Makkah. It had not yet been cleared of its idols and rededicated exclusively to the One True God. It was symbolical of the new Message which was being given to mankind.

... إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى ...

to the Farthest Mosque,

C2168. The Farthest Mosque must refer to the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem on the hill of Moriah, at or near which stands the Dome of the Rock, called also the Mosque of Hadhrat 'Umar. This and the Mosque known as the Farthest Mosque (Masjid-ul-Aqsa) were completed by the Amir 'Abd Allah Malik in A.H. 68.

Farthest, because it was the place of worship farthest west which was known to the Arabs in the time of the holy Prophet: it was a sacred place to both Jews and Christians, but the Christians then had the upper hand, as it was included in the Byzantine (Roman) Empire, which maintained a Patriarch at Jerusalem.

The chief dates in connection with the Temple are:

- it was finished by Solomon about B.C. 1004;
- destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar about 586 B.C.;
- rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah about 515 B.C.;
- turned into a heathen idol-temple by one of Alexander's successors, Antiochus Epiphanes, 167 B.C.;
- restored by Herod, B.C. 17 to A.D. 29;
- and completely razed to the ground by the Emperor Titus in A.D. 70.

These ups and downs are among the greater Signs in religious history.

...الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا...

whose precincts We did Bless -- in order that We might show him some of Our Signs:

...إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ (١)

for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).

C2169. Allah's knowledge comprehends all things, without any curtain of Time or any separation of Space. He can therefore see and hear all things, and the Mi'raj was a reflection of this knowledge.

In this and the subsequent verses, the reference to Allah is generally in the first person and plural.

But in the first and the last clause of this verse it is in the third person singular: "Glory to Allah, Who did take His Servant ; "He is the One"

In each of these two instances, the clause expresses the point of view of Allah's creatures, who glorify Him, and whose hearing and seeing are ordinarily so limited that they can do nothing but glorify Him when one of His creatures is raised up to hear and see the Signs. It is they who glorify Him. (R).

وَأَتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ...

2. We gave Moses the Book,

C2170. The Book: the revelation that was given to Moses.

It was there clearly laid down that those who followed Moses must consider Allah as the Only God.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me; thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ;" etc. (Exod. 20:3-5).

These are the words of the English Bible.

As a matter of fact the spirit of the Mosaic teaching went further. It referred all things to the Providence of Allah: Allah is the Disposer of all affairs, and we are to look to none but Him. This is Islam, and the Mi'raj showed that it was the teaching of Allah from the most ancient times, and yet it was violated by the very people who claimed to be its custodians.

...وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِلَّا تَتَّخِذُوا مِن دُونِي وَكِيلاً (٢)

and made it a Guide to the Children of Israel, (commanding):

"Take not other than Me as Disposer of (your) affairs."

C2171. Note the transition from "We" in the first clause to "**Me**" in the second clause.

- The first clause refers to the majesty of Allah as the Heavenly King;
- the second clause refers to His personal interest in all our affairs.

دُرِّيَّةٌ مِّنْ حَمَلِنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ ...

3. O ye that are sprung from those whom We carried (in the Ark) with Noah!

C2172. After the Deluge of the time of Noah the only descendants of Noah were those who were saved in the Ark with him. They had special reason to celebrate the praises of Allah. But they relapsed into idolatry, sin, and abominations.

They are reminded of the true and sincere devotion of Noah himself, as contrasted with the unworthiness of Noah's descendants, especially the Children of Israel.

... إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا (٣)

Verily he was a devotee most grateful.

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ ...

4. And We gave (clear) warning to the Children of Israel in the Book,

C2173. The Book is the revelation given to the Children of Israel.

Here it seems to refer to the burning words of Prophets like Isaiah. For example,

see Isaiah, chap, 24.

or Isaiah 5:20-30,

or Isaiah 3:16-26.

... لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ...

that twice would they do mischief on the earth

C2174. What are the two occasions referred to?

It may be that "twice" is a figure of speech for "more than once", "often".

Or it may be that the two occasions refer to;

- the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C., when the Jews were carried off into captivity,
- and the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70, after which the Temple was never re-built.

See [n. 2168 above](#).

On both occasions it was a judgment of Allah for the sins of the Jews, their backslidings, and their arrogance.

...وَلْتَعْلَنَّ عَلُوًّا كَبِيرًا (٤)

and be elated with mighty arrogance (and twice would they be punished)!

فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعَدُ أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ...

5. When the first of the warnings came to pass, We sent against you Our servants given to terrible warfare:

C2175. A good description of the war-like Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonians.

They were servants of Allah in the sense that they were instruments through which the wrath of Allah was poured out on the Jews, for they penetrated through their lands, their Temple, and their homes, and carried away the Jews, men and women, into captivity.

As regards "the daughters of Zion" see the scathing condemnation in Isaiah, 3:16-26.

...فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ...

They entered the very inmost parts of your homes;

...وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا (٥)

and it was a warning (completely) fulfilled.

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَا لَكُمُ الْكَرَّةَ عَلَيْهِمْ ...

6. Then did We grant you the Return as against them:

C2176. The return of the Jews from the Captivity was about 520 B.C.

They started life afresh. They rebuilt their Temple. They carried out various reforms and built up a new Judaism in connection with Ezra. See appendix II following Surah 5.

For a time they prospered. Meanwhile their old oppressors the Babylonians had been absorbed by Persia. Subsequently Persia was absorbed in Alexander's Empire. The whole of western Asia was Hellenized, and the new school of Jews was Hellenized also, and had a strong centre in Alexandria.

But their footing in Palestine continued, and under the Asmonaeon Dynasty (B.C. 167-63), they had a national revival, and the names of the Makkah bees are remembered as those of heroes.

Another dynasty, that of the Idummaeans, (B.C. 63 to B.C. 4), to which Herod belonged, also enjoyed some semi-independent power. The scepter of Syria (including Palestine) passed to the Romans in B.C. 65, and Jewish feudatory Kings held power under them. But the Jews again showed a stiff-necked resistance to Allah's Messenger in the time of Jesus, and the inevitable doom followed in the complete and final destruction of the Temple under Titus in 70 A.C.

... وَأَمْدَدْنَاكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَنِينَ...

We gave you increase in resources and sons,

... وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ أَكْثَرَ نَفِيرًا (٦)

and made you the more numerous in manpower.

إِنْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ أَحْسَنْتُمْ لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ وَإِنْ أَسَأْتُمْ فَلَهَا...

7. If ye did well, ye did well for yourselves;

if ye did evil, (ye did it) against yourselves;

C2177. This is a parenthetical sentence. If anyone follows Allah's Law, the benefit goes to himself: he does not bestow a favour on anyone else.

Similarly evil brings its own recompense on the doer of evil.

...فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعَدُ الْآخِرَةِ لِيَسُوءُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ ...

so when the second of the warnings came to pass, (We permitted your enemies) to disfigure your faces,

C2178. The second doom was due to the rejection of the Message of Jesus.

"To disfigure your faces" means to destroy any credit or power you may have got:

the face shows the personality of the man.

...وَلِيَدْخُلُوا الْمَسْجِدَ ...

and to enter your Temple

C2179. Titus's destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was complete. He was a son of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, and at the date of the destruction of Jerusalem, had the title of Caesar as heir to throne.

He ruled as Roman Emperor from 79 to 81 A.D.

...كَمَا دَخَلُوهُ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَلِيُتَبَّرُوا مِثْلَ مَا عَلُوا بُيُوتَهُمْ (٧)

as they had entered it before,

and to visit with destruction all that fell into their power.

C2180. Merivale in his Romans Under the Empire gives a graphic account of the siege and final destruction (ed. 1890, 7:221-255).

The population of Jerusalem was then 200,000. According to the Latin historian Tacitus it was as much as 600,000.

There was a famine and there were massacres. There was much fanaticism. The judgment of Merivale is:

"They" (the Jews) "were judicially abandoned to their own passions and the punishment which naturally awaited them". (7:221).

عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يَرْحَمَكُمْ...

8. It may be that your Lord may (yet) show Mercy unto you;

C2181. Now we come to the time of our holy Prophet.

In spite of all the past, the Jews could still have obtained Allah's forgiveness if they had not obstinately rejected the greatest of the Prophets also.

If they were to continue in their sins, Allah's punishment would also continue to visit them.

...وَإِن عُدْتُمْ عُدْنَا...

but if ye revert (to your sins), We shall revert (to Our punishments):

...وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَصِيرًا (٨)

and We have made Hell a prison for those who reject (all Faith).

C2182. There is such a thing as disgrace in this life, but the final disgrace is in the Hereafter, and that will be irretrievable.

Notice that the allegorical reference to Jewish history, when brought into relation with the true meaning of Mi'raj, refers to the constant struggle of the individual soul against evil. It has its setbacks and its punishments. But if it is true to itself and is true to the Faith in Allah, Allah will give it strength and make it successful in its fight against evil. For Allah's Mercy is unbounded and comes to suffering humanity again and again. (R).

إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ...

9. Verily this Qur'an doth guide to that which is most right (or stable),

C2183. The instability and crookedness of the Jewish soul having been mentioned, the healing balm which should have cured it is now pointed out.

The Message of the Quran is for all.

- Those who have Faith and show that Faith in their conduct must reap their spiritual reward.
- But those who reject Faith cannot escape punishment.

Apart from what is past, apart from questions of national or racial history, there is a Hope, -and a Danger- for every soul.

...وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا (٩)

and giveth the glad tidings to the Believers who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a magnificent reward;

وَأَنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٠)

10. And to those who believe not in the Hereafter, (it announceth) that We have prepared for them a Penalty grievous (indeed).

Section 2

وَيَدْعُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِالشَّرِّ دُعَاءَهُ بِالْخَيْرِ...

11. The prayer that man should make for good, he maketh for evil:

C2184. Man in his ignorance or haste mistakes evil for good, and desires what he should not have.

The wise and instructed soul has patience and does not put its own desires above the wisdom of Allah. He receives with contentment the favours of Allah, and prays to be rightly guided in his desires and petitions.

...وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ عَجُولًا (١١)

for man is given to hasty (deeds).

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَاتٍ...

12. We have made the Night and the Day as two (of Our) Signs:

C2185. If we were to cry when it is night, we shall look foolish when it is day; for the night is but a preparation

for the day: perhaps, as the last verse says, we pray for the day when we want rest for the night.

Both are Signs from Allah.

Darkness and light stand for

- ignorance and
- knowledge.

"Where ignorance is bliss, its folly to be wise."

Darkness and light may also stand for

- shadow and sunshine,
- sorrow and joy:

both may be for our development.

...فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً...

the Sign of the Night have We obscured, while the Sign of the day We have made to enlighten you;

...إِنبَتُّعُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِّينَ وَالْحِسَابَ...

that ye may seek Bounty from your Lord, and that ye may know the number and count of the years:

C2186. By the physical light we see physical facts. And this physical gift of Allah is good for us in two ways:

1. we can arrange for our livelihood, or we can attain the knowledge of the physical sciences and gain some control over the physical forces of nature; and
2. the daily rising and setting of the sun gives us the computation of days and years, for the physical natural year is the solar year. But there is spiritual light even more precious; by it we can similarly attain two objects, viz,
 - our spiritual livelihood and knowledge, and
 - our computation of the stages we reach in our spiritual years.

Let us be patient and seek everything as from Allah - in joy and in sorrow, in knowledge and in want of knowledge of those things which are above us.

Let us rejoice in what Allah has given us, and not be impatient about those things which He in His wisdom has thought fit to withhold from us. But all things should be sought and striven for under the guidance of the All-Knowing Allah.

...وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا (١٢)

all things have We explained in detail.

وَكُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَائِرَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ...

13. Every man's fate We have fastened on his own neck:

C2187. Fate: Tair, literally a bird, hence an omen, an evil omen, fate.

Cf. 36:19.

The Arabs, like the ancient Romans, sought to read the mysteries of human fate from the flight of birds. And many of us in our own day seek to read our future fortunes by similar superstitions.

We read in the previous verse that there are Signs of Allah, but they are not meant to subserve the vulgar purpose of disclosing our future destiny in a worldly sense. They are meant for quite other purposes, as we have explained.

Our real fate does not depend upon birds or omens or stars. It depends on our deeds; good or evil, and they hang round our necks. (R).

...وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنْشُورًا (١٣)

on the Day of Judgment We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open.

C2188. These deeds, good or evil, will be embodied in a scroll which will be quite open to us in the light of the Day of Judgment, however much we may affect to be ignorant of it now or waste our energies in prying into mysteries that do not concern us.

اقْرَأْ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا (١٤)

14. (It will be said to him:) "Read thine (own) record: sufficient is thy soul this day to make out an account against thee."

C2189. Our true accusers are our own deeds.

Why not look to them instead of vainly prying into something superstitious which we call a book of fortune or a book of omens?

مَنْ اهْتَدَىٰ فَإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ...

15. Who receiveth guidance, receiveth it for his own benefit:

...وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا...

who goeth astray doth so to his own loss:

C2190. The doctrine of personal responsibility is insisted on, and the basis of ethics is shown to be our own good or evil as furthering or obstructing our highest development.

...وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ...

no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another:

C2191. The doctrine of vicarious atonement is condemned. Salvation for the wicked cannot be attained by the punishment of the innocent.

One man cannot bear the burden of another: that would be unjust. Every man must bear his own personal responsibility. Cf. 6:164.

But Allah never visits His wrath on anyone until due warning is conveyed to him through an accredited messenger.

...وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّىٰ نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا (١٥)

nor would We visit with Our Wrath until We had sent a Messenger (to give warning).

وإِذَا أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نُهْلِكَ قَرْيَةً أَمَرْنَا مُتْرَفِيهَا فَفَسَقُوا فِيهَا...

16. When We decide to destroy a population, We (first) send a definite order to those among them who are given the good things of this life and yet transgress;

C2192. Allah's Mercy gives every chance to the wicked to repent. When wickedness gets so rampant that punishment becomes inevitable, even then Allah's Mercy and Justice act together.

Those who are highly gifted from Allah -it may be with wealth or position, or it may be with talents and opportunities- are expected to understand and obey. They are given a definite order and warning. If they still transgress there is no further room for argument. They cannot plead that they were ignorant. The command of the Lord is proved against them, and its application is called for beyond doubt. Then it is that their punishment is completed.

...فَحَقَّ عَلَيْهَا الْقَوْلُ فَدَمَّرْنَاَهَا تَدْمِيرًا (١٦)

so that the word is proved true against them: then (it is) We destroy them utterly.

C2193. Qaul here has the sense of word, order, law, charge framed against one under a definite law.

وَكَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنَ الْقُرُونِ مِنْ بَعْدِ نُوحٍ...

17. How many generations have We destroyed after Noah?

C2194. Noah's Flood is taken as a new starting point in history. But even after that hundreds of empires, towns, and generations have perished for their wickedness.

...وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ بِذُنُوبِ عِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا (١٧)

And enough is thy Lord to note and see the sins of His servants.

C2195. Let not the wicked think, because they are given a lease of life and luxury for a time, that their wickedness has escaped notice.

Allah notes and sees all things, both open and secret. He knows the hidden motives and thoughts of men, and He has no need of any other evidence. His knowledge and sight are all-sufficient.

مَنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا مَا نَشَاءُ لِمَنْ نُرِيدُ...

18. If any do wish for the transitory things (of this life), We readily grant them -- such things as We will, to such persons as We will:

C2196. An explanation is now given of how it is that prosperity sometimes seems to attend the wicked.

The explanation is threefold:

1. the transitory things of this life are worth little in the eternal scheme of things;
2. even they are provided, not just because their recipients wish for them, but according to a definite Plan of Allah; and
3. in the end there is for the wicked the eternal Misery and deprivation of grace,-the Hell which is worse than destruction in the terms of this world.

...ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ يَصْلَاهَا مَذْمُومًا مَذْحُورًا (١٨)

in the end have We provided Hell for them:

they will burn therein, disgraced and rejected.

C2197. All the pride and insolence will then be brought low. The disgrace and the exclusion from the "sight of the Face of Allah" will by themselves be punishments of which the magnitude cannot be measured in the terms of our present material life.

...وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ...

19. Those who do wish for the (things of) the Hereafter,

C2198. This is in contrast to the last verse.

Those who wish for mere earthly good sometimes get it and misuse it. Those whose eyes are fixed on the Hereafter, they too share in their Lord's bounty provided they fulfil the conditions explained in the next note; but their wishes and endeavours are more acceptable in the sight of Allah.

... وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ...

and strive therefor with all due striving, and have Faith --

C2199. A mere wish for moral and spiritual good is not enough. It must be backed up by hard endeavour and supported by a lively Faith. On those conditions the wishes are accepted by Allah.

...فَأُولَئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا (١٩)

they are the ones whose striving is acceptable (to Allah).

كُلًّا نُمِدُّ هَؤُلَاءِ وَهَؤُلَاءِ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ...

20. Of the bounties of thy Lord We bestow freely on all -- these as well as those:

...وَمَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ مَحْظُورًا (٢٠)

the bounties of thy Lord are not closed (to anyone).

C2200. Allah's favours are showered on all,

- the just and the unjust,
- the deserving and the undeserving.

But there is a difference as explained in the last two verses.

انظُرْ كَيْفَ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ...

21. See how We have bestowed more on some than on others;

...وَلِلْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ دَرَجَاتٍ وَأَكْبَرُ تَفْضِيلًا (٢١)

but verily the Hereafter is more in rank and gradation and more in excellence.

C2201. Nor should man suppose that all gifts are of equal value. The spiritual ones rank far higher in dignity and real worth than the transitory ones. Therefore it is altogether wrong to compare the worldly prosperity of a wicked man with the apparent want of it to a man of spiritual worth.

There is no comparison between them when measured by right standards.

لَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ ...

22. Take not with Allah another object of worship;

C2202. The seeming inequality of gifts to men might make short-sighted men impugn the impartiality of Allah. But the fault lies with such men's own want of knowledge and want of Faith. There is no excuse for them to seek other objects of worship than Allah. For there is none worthy of worship except Allah.

... فَتَقْعُدَ مَذْمُومًا مَّخْذُومًا (٢٢)

or thou (O man!) wilt sit in disgrace and destitution.

C2203. If foolish men turn to false objects of worship, they will not only be disappointed, but they will lose the respect of their own fellow-men, and spiritually they will be reduced to destitution. All their talents and their works will be of no avail.

C.129 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(17:23-40)

*To be worthy of the service of the One True God.
We must love and serve His Creatures
The parents who cherished us in childhood
Deserve our humble reverence and service; next
Come the rights of kinsmen, those in want,
And wayfaring strangers; to each
According to his need, not in spendthrift show
And gentleness is needed to those whom we
Cannot help. Allah will provide. He has made
Life sacred and pure. Fulfil your trusts
For orphans and deal with all in strictest
Probity. Pry not into evil from curiosity,
And shun insolence: for Allah hates evil-
The One, the Good, the Universal Lord!*

Section 3

وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا...

23. Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents.

...إِمًّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا...

Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life,

C2204. The spiritual and moral duties are now brought into juxtaposition.

We are to worship none but Allah, because none but Allah is worthy of worship, not because "the Lord thy God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me" (Exod. 20:5).

Note that the act of worship may be collective as well as individual; hence the plural **ta'buda**.

The kindness to parents is an individual act of piety; hence the singular **taqul, qul**, etc.

... فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا...

say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them,

... وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا (٢٣)

but address them in terms of honor.

وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ...

24. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say:

C2205. Cf. 15:88 and n. 2011.

The metaphor is that of a high-flying bird which lowers her wing out of tenderness to her offspring. There is a double aptness.

1. When the parent was strong and the child was helpless, parental affection was showered on the child:

when the child grows up and is strong, and the parent is helpless, can he do less than bestow similar tender care on the parent?

2. But more: he must approach the matter with gentle humility: for does not parental love, remind him of the great love with which Allah cherishes His creatures?

There is something here more than simple human gratitude; it goes up into the highest spiritual region.

رَبِّ ارْحَمَهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا (٢٤)

"My Lord! bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood."

C2206. Note that we are asked to honour our father and mother, not "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exod. 20:12), but upon much higher and more universal grounds, such as befit a perfected revelation.

- In the first place, not merely respect, but cherishing kindness, and humility to parents, are commanded.
- In the second place, this command is bracketed with the command to worship the One True God.

Parental love should be to us a type of divine love: nothing that we can do can ever really compensate for that which we have received.

In the third place (see next verse) our spiritual advancement is tested by this: we cannot expect Allah's forgiveness if we are rude or unkind to those who unselfishly brought us up.

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي نُفُوسِكُمْ...

25. Your Lord knoweth best what is in your hearts:

...إِنْ تَكُونُوا صَالِحِينَ فَإِنَّهُ كَانَ لِلأَوَّابِينَ غَفُورًا (٢٥)

if ye do deeds of righteousness, verily He is Most Forgiving to those who turn to Him again and again (in true penitence).

C2207. It is the heart, and its hidden and secret motives, by which we are judged: for Allah knows them all.

وَأْتِ ذَا الْقُرْبَىٰ حَقَّهُ وَالْمِسْكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ...

26. And render to the kindred their due rights, as (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer:

C2208. In the Jewish Decalogue, which was given to a primitive and hard-hearted people, this refinement of Kindness, -to those in want and to wayfarers (i.e., total strangers whom you come across) finds no place.

Nor was there much danger of their wasting their substance out of exuberance. Even the command "to honour thy father and mother" comes after the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath.

With us, the worship of Allah is linked up with kindness;

- to parents, kindred,
- those in want,
- those who are far from their homes though they may be total strangers to us.

It is not mere verbal kindness. They have certain rights which must be fulfilled.

وَلَا تُبَدِّرْهُ تَبْدِيرًا (٢٦)

but squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift.

C2209. All charity, kindness, and help are conditioned by our own resources. There is no merit if we merely spend out of bravado or for idle show.

How many families are ruined by extravagant expenses at weddings, funerals, etc., or (as they may call it) to "oblige friends or relatives", or to give to able-bodied beggars?

To no one was this command more necessary than it is to Muslims of the present day.

إِنَّ الْمُبَدِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ...

27. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Evil Ones;

...وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا (٢٧)

and the Evil One is to his Lord (Himself) ungrateful.

C2210. Spendthrifts are not merely fools. They are of the same family as the Satan.

And the Satan himself-fell by his ingratitude to Allah. So those who misuse or squander Allah's gifts are also ungrateful to Allah.

وَأِمَّا تُعْرِضَنَّ عَنْهُمْ ابْتِغَاءَ رَحْمَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكَ تَرْجُوهَا...

28. And even if thou hast to turn away from them in pursuit of the Mercy from thy Lord which thou dost expect,

...فَقُلْ لَهُمْ قَوْلًا مَّيْسُورًا (٢٨)

yet speak to them a word of easy kindness.

C2211. You may have to "turn away" from people for two reasons.

- You may not have the wherewithal with which to entertain them and give them their rights; or
- you may have to give them a wide berth because their thoughts are not as your thoughts.

In either case there is no need to speak harshly to them. Your words should be those of "easy kindness", i.e., the sort of kindness (not merely frigid politeness) which flows from pity and understanding and smoothes over unnecessary difficulties in human intercourse.

وَلَا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إِلَىٰ عُنُقِكَ...

29. Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck,

C2212. Cf. the phrase for niggardliness in 5:64.

We are not to be so lavish as to make ourselves destitute and incur the just censure of wise men, nor is it

becoming to keep back our resources from the just needs of those who have a right to our help. Even strangers have such a right, as we saw in [17:26 above](#). But we must keep a just measure between our capacity and other people's needs.

...وَلَا تُبْسِطْهَا كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُومًا مَّحْسُورًا (٢٩)

nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ...

30. Verily thy Lord doth provide sustenance in abundance for whom He pleaseth, and He provideth in a just measure:

C2213. If a foolish spendthrift pretends that his generosity, even if it ruins himself, is good for other people, he is reminded that Allah will take care of all. He knows every one's true needs and cares for them.

He gives in abundance to some, but in all cases He gives in just measure. Who are we to pretend to greater generosity! (R).

إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا (٣٠)

for He doth know and regard all His servants.

Section 4

...وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ...

31. Kill not your children for fear of want:

C2214. The Arabs were addicted to female infanticide. In a society perpetually at war a son was a source of strength whereas a daughter was a source of weakness. Even now infanticide is not unknown in other countries for economic reasons.

This crime against children's lives is here characterized as one of the greatest of sins.

...نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ...

We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you:

...إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْءًا كَبِيرًا (٣١)

verily the killing of them is a great sin.

وَلَا تَقْرُبُوا الزَّوْجَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا (٣٢)

32. Nor come nigh to adultery:

for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).

C2215. Adultery is not only shameful in itself and inconsistent with any self-respect or respect for others, but it opens the road to many evils.

- It destroys the basis of the family:
- it works against the interests of children born or to be born;
- it may cause murders and feuds and loss of reputation and property, and also loosen permanently the bonds of society.

Not only should it be avoided as a sin, but any approach or temptation to it should be avoided.

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ...

33. Nor take life -- which Allah has made sacred -- except for just cause.

...وَمَنْ قُتِلَ مَظْلُومًا فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيِّهِ سُلْطَانًا...

And if anyone is slain wrongfully, We have given his heir authority (to demand Qisas or to forgive):

C2216. On the subject of Qisas see 2:178 and the notes thereto.

Under the strict limitations there laid down, a life may be taken for a life. The heir is given the right to demand the life; but he must not exceed due bounds, because he is helped by the Law.

Some Commentators understand "he" in "**he is helped (by the Law)**" to refer to the heir of the person against whom Qisas is sought. He too will be helped by the Law, if the heir of the first slain exceeds the 'bounds of Law.

... فَلَا يُسْرِفَ فِي الْقَتْلِ ...

but let him not exceed bounds in the matter of taking life:

... إِنَّهُ كَانَ مَنصُورًا (٣٣)

for he is helped (by the Law).

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا مَالَ الْيَتِيمِ إِلَّا بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ...

34. Come not nigh to the orphan's property except to improve it,

C2217. Cf. 6:152, and other passages relating to orphans, e.g., 2:220.

If an orphan's property is touched at all, it should be to improve it, or to give him something better than he had before,

- never to take a personal advantage for the benefit of the guardian.

A bargain that may be quite fair as between two independent persons would be, under this verse, unfair as between a guardian and his orphan ward until the latter attains the full age of understanding.

... حَتَّىٰ يَبْلُغَ أَشُدَّهُ ...

until he attains the age of full strength;

C2218. Ashuddahu means the age when the orphan reaches his full maturity of strength and understanding, say between the ages of 18 and 30.

The age of legal maturity may be 18 (as for certain purposes in India) or 21 (as in England). For certain purposes in Muslim law it may be less than 18.

In the orphan's interest a much stricter standard is required in his case.

... وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ ...

and fulfil (every) engagement, for (every)

C2219. The definite article al has here a generic meaning, and is best translated by "every".

... إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا (٣٤)

engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).

C2220. From the context the engagements referred to would relate to beneficial contracts connected with the orphan's property or promises or undertakings given by the guardian or implied in the terms of his appointment. But the words are general and may be interpreted in the general sense.

Note that this sentence does not occur in the similar passage in 6:152, where there was a discussion of social laws: it is appropriate here, where the discussion is about the guardian's personal and individual responsibility in a spiritual sense.

وَأَوْفُوا الْكَيْلَ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ وَزَنُوا بِالْقِسْطِ الْمُسْتَقِيمِ...

35. Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight:

...ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا (٣٥)

that is the most fitting and the most advantageous in the final determination.

C2221. Giving just measure and weight is not only right in itself but is ultimately to the best advantage of the person who gives it.

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ...

36. And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge;

C2222. Idle curiosity may lead us to nose into evil, through our ignorance that it is evil. We must guard against every such danger.

We must only hear the things that are known to us to be of good report, and see things that are good and instructive and entertain in our hearts feelings or in our minds ideas that we have reason to expect will be spiritually profitable to us. We shall be called to account for the exercise of every faculty that has been given to us.

This goes a little farther than a famous sculpture on a Japanese temple in which three monkeys are shown as putting their hands to their ears, eyes, and mouths, respectively, to show that they were not prepared to hear any evil, or see any evil, or speak any evil.

Here idle curiosity is condemned. Futility is to be avoided even if it does not reach the degree of positive evil.

...إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا (٣٦)

for every act of hearing, or of seeing, or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).

وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا...

37. Nor walk on the earth with insolence:

C2223. Insolence, or arrogance, or undue elation at our powers or capacities, is the first step to many evils. Besides, it is unjustified. All our gifts are from Allah.

...إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَخْرِقَ الْأَرْضَ وَلَنْ تَبْلُغَ الْجِبَالَ طُولًا (٣٧)

for thou canst not rend the earth asunder, nor reach the mountains in height.

كُلُّ ذَلِكَ كَانَ سَيِّئُهُ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ مَكْرُوهًا (٣٨)

38. Of all such things the evil is hateful in the sight of thy Lord.

ذَلِكَ مِمَّا أَوْحَى إِلَيْكَ رَبُّكَ مِنَ الْحِكْمَةِ...

39. These are among the (precepts of) wisdom, which thy Lord Has revealed to thee.

C2224. The moral law, as expounded in [17:23-39](#) is far in advance of the bare Decalogue in that it searches out motives, and draws pointed attention to the weak and helpless if we are to reach any real understanding of Allah.

It begins with a mention of the worship of Allah, the One True God and ends with a similar mention to close the argument, thus emphasizing the fact that the love of Allah embraces the love of man and practical help of our fellow-creatures. (R).

...وَلَا تَجْعَلْ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَتُنْفَلَىٰ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَلُومًا مَّدْحُورًا (٣٩)

Take not, with Allah, another object of worship, lest thou shouldst be thrown into Hell, blameworthy and rejected.

C2225. "Blameworthy" carries us back by reminiscence to 17:29, between which and this verse there is mention of crimes committed out of covetousness and a selfish disregard of other people's rights.

"Rejected" carries back our reminiscence to 17:18, from which to here we have a reference to crimes that lead to deprivation of Allah's grace.

The latter is of course wider than the former. Note how subtly the two streams of thought are here conjoined.

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا...

40. Has then your Lord, (O Pagans!) preferred for you sons, and taken for Himself daughters among the angels?

C2226. Cf. 16:57-59.

Insistence on true worship means also exclusion of false worship or worship derogatory to Allah.

In circles where daughters were despised and even their lives had to be protected by special legislation, what could have been dreadful than ascribing daughters to Allah?

...إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا (٤٠)

Truly ye utter a most dreadful saying!

C.130 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(17:41-60)

*There is none like unto Allah, Exalted
Beyond measure is He. All Creation
Declares His glory. His revelation*

*Is Truth, but is beyond comprehension
 To those who believe not in the Hereafter.
 Those who serve Him should beware
 Lest words unseemly should escape them,
 Whether to friend or foe. Avoid
 Dissensions, and know that Allah's Wrath
 When kindled is a terrible thing
 But we rejoice that He forbears and forgives.*

Section 5

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِيَذَكَّرُوا...

41. We have explained (things) in various (ways) in this Qur'an, in order that they may receive admonition,

C2227. Things are explained in the Quran from all points of view, individual and national, by means of stories, parables, and figures of speech, and by way of categorical commands.

But those who are evil, instead of profiting by such instruction, often go farther and farther away from the Truth.

...وَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا نُفُورًا (٤١)

but it only increases their flight (from the Truth)!

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ مَعَهُ آلِهَةٌ كَمَا يَقُولُونَ إِذًا لَأَبْتَعُوا إِلَىٰ ذِي الْعَرْشِ سَبِيلًا (٤٢)

42. Say:

if there had been (other) gods with Him -- as they say -- behold, they would certainly have sought out a way to the Lord of the Throne!

C2228. There is only One True God. But if, as polytheists say, there had been subsidiary gods, they would yet have had to submit to the Throne of the Supreme God, for they could have done nothing without Him. Thus the Islamic idea of the unity of the Godhead is quite different from the polytheistic ideas of a supreme

god, as in the Greek Pantheon, where Jupiter was often defied by the minor deities! But such ideas are absurd, as stated in the next verse.

سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَىٰ عَمَّا يُفُولُونَ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا (٤٣)

43. Glory to Him!

He is high above all that they say! -- Exalted and Great (beyond measure)!

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ...

44. The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein, declare His glory:

...وَأِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ...

there not a thing but celebrates His praise; and yet ye understand not how they declare His glory!

C2229. All Creation, animate and inanimate, sings Allah's praises and celebrates His glory,

- animate, with consciousness, and
- inanimate, in the evidence which it furnishes of the unity and glory of Allah.

All Nature bears witness to His power, wisdom, and goodness. It is only **"ye"**, i.e., those who reject the whole trend of your nature and deny Faith simply because ye have been given a limited amount of choice and free-will,

- it is only such as **"ye"** that understand not what every other creature understands and proclaims with joy and pride.

What must be your degradation! And yet Allah bears with you and forgives you! Such is His goodness! (R).

...إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا (٤٤)

Verily He is Oft-Forbearing, Most Forgiving!

وَإِذَا قُرَأَتِ الْقُرْآنُ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ

حِجَابًا مَّسْتُورًا (٤٥)

45. When thou dost recite the Qur'an, We put, between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter, a veil invisible:

C2230. Veil invisible: Some Commentators understand **mastur** here as equivalent to **satir**: a veil that makes invisible, a thick or dark veil.

But I think that the meaning of **mastur** (in the passive voice) as "hidden or invisible" is more consonant with the whole passage.

If all nature, external and within ourselves, declares Allah's glory, those unfortunate who cut themselves off from their better nature are isolated from the true servants of Allah and the revelation of Allah, because;

- they are unfit for being in their company, and
- because the servants of Allah and the revelation of Allah must be protected from the pain which blasphemy or rebellion must cause to their unsullied nature.

The veil is none the less real even though it is invisible. (R).

وَجَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا...

46. And We put coverings over their hearts (and minds) lest they should understand the Qur'an, and deafness into their ears:

C2231. The invisible veil being put against the ungodly on account of their deliberate rejection of Truth, the result is that their minds are fogged so that they cannot understand and their ears are clogged so that they cannot hear.

In other words the effects of Evil become cumulative in shutting out Allah's grace.

...وَإِذَا ذَكَرْتَ رَبَّكَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَحْدَهُ وَلَوَّا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهِمْ نُفُورًا (٤٦)

when thou dost commemorate thy Lord -- and Him alone -- in the Qur'án, they turn on their backs, fleeing (from the Truth).

نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَسْتَمِعُونَ بِهِ إِذْ يَسْتَمِعُونَ إِلَيْكَ ...

47. We know best why it is they listen, when they listen to thee;

C2232. See [last note](#).

That being so, the only motive for the ungodly to listen to Allah's Truth is to scoff at it instead of to be instructed by it. They may make a show of listening, but when they meet together in private, they show themselves in their true colours. Cf. 2:14.

They cannot help seeing that there is singular charm and attractiveness in Allah's Word, and that it consoles, helps, and elevates many people who receive it in the right spirit. So they pretend that they are superior to such people and laugh at them for listening to some one who is only under the influence of something which they call magic!

... وَإِذْ هُمْ نَجْوَىٰ إِذْ يَقُولُ الظَّالِمُونَ إِن تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَّسْحُورًا (٤٧)

and when they meet in private conference, Behold, the wicked say, "Ye follow none other than a man bewitched!"

انظُرْ كَيْفَ ضَرَبُوا لَكَ الْأَمْثَالَ ...

48. See what similes thy strike for thee;

...فَضَلُّوا فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَبِيلًا (٤٨)

but they have gone astray, and never can they find a way.

C2233. Note that the word used is "**Sabilan**" "a way", not "the way".

In going astray they have lost the way; but never can they find any means of getting back to that way, or of justifying themselves or making good their wicked similes.

وَقَالُوا أَيُّدًا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرُفَاتًا أَلَيْسَ لِمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا (٤٩)

49. They say:

"What! when we are reduced to bones and dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new creation?"

C2234. They do not realise that Allah Who created them once out of nothing can create them again, with memories of their past, in order to render to Him an account of how they used or misused the talents and opportunities which they were given.

If it is to be a new Creation, what then?

Bones and dust or ashes may yet retain something of the personality which was enshrined in them. But even if they were reduced to stones or iron or anything which their minds can conceive of as being most unlike them, yet there is nothing impossible to Allah!

He has clearly sent a Message that we shall have to render an account of ourselves, and His Message is necessarily true. (R).

قُلْ كُونُوا حِجَارَةً أَوْ حَدِيدًا (٥٠)

50. Say: "(Nay!) be ye stones or iron,

أَوْ خَلْقًا مِّمَّا يَكْبُرُ فِي صُدُورِكُمْ...

51. "Or created matter which, in your minds, is hardest (to be raised up) -- (yet shall ye be raised up)!"

...فَسَيَقُولُونَ مَنْ يُعِيدُنَا...

Then will they say: "Who will cause us to return?"

...قُلْ الَّذِي فَطَرَكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ...

Say: "He Who created you first!"

...فَسَيُبْغِضُونَ إِلَيْكَ رُؤُوسَهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هُوَ...

Then will they wag their heads towards thee, and say, "When will that be?"

C2235. The skeptic shifts his ground when he is cornered in argument. It is no longer tenable for him to say that it cannot happen or that there is no one who can bring him back to life and memory. He now gets shaky, and says, "Well, when is that going to happen?"

The actual time no man can tell. Indeed that event will be on a plane in which there will be no Time. Our relative ideas of time and place will have been completely overthrown, and it will appear to us then, not that it has been postponed too long, but that it has come too soon!

See the next verse and note.

...قُلْ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونَ قَرِيبًا (٥١)

Say, "Maybe it will be quite soon!"

يَوْمَ يَدْعُوكُمْ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمْدِهِ...

52. "It will be on a Day when He will call you, and ye will answer (His call) with (words of) His praise,

...وَتَتَّبِعُونَ...

and ye will think

C2236. It may be that this verse should not be in the inverted commas governed by the verb "say", in the last clause of the last verse. In that case, the answer to the skeptic would be finished in the last verse, and this verse would be a general statement applying also to the righteous, who will rise up celebrating the praises of Allah.

But on the whole, I think it is better to take this verse as part of the answer to the skeptic referred to in the last verse.

...إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٥٢)

that ye tarried but a little while!"

C2237. Whatever may have been your spiritual blindness in this life, the "new creation" will have opened your eyes to the Truth. No one will any longer be in any delusion as regards the Reality of Allah, and will be

forced, by their new circumstances, to recognise the Truth and sing Allah's praises. And all will be surprised at the seemingly short flight of time since they had their little ephemeral life on this earth. They will now appraise its true worth.

Section 6

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...

53. Say to My servants that they should (only) say those things that are best:

C2238. This command refers to two situations.

- Even to your enemies and the enemies of Allah you should speak fair:

who are you to judge others?

Judgment belongs to Allah alone, for He knows you (i.e., all mankind) best, and your personal knowledge is at best imperfect. And Satan is always trying to divide mankind.

- Amongst yourselves, also you should not entertain suspicions, but speak politely according to the best standards of human speech. A false or unkind word may destroy all your efforts at building up unity, because the forces of disruption are more numerous than the forces of unity.

...إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ يَنْزَعُ بَيْنَهُمْ...

for Satan doth sow dissensions among them:

...إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا (٥٣)

for Satan is to man an avowed enemy.

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ...

54. It is your Lord that knoweth you best:

...إِنْ يَشَاءُ يَرْحَمَكُمُ أَوْ إِنْ يَشَاءُ يُعَذِّبِكُمْ...

if He please, He granteth you mercy, or if He please, punishment:

C2239. Man should never for a single moment entertain a thought that would imply that he was wiser than Allah. Allah's knowledge is all-embracing. If He grants mercy to some that you consider wicked or punishment to some that you consider righteous, it is your knowledge or your deductions that are at fault, not Allah's righteous Plan.

Even Prophets of Allah are not sent to arrange or dispose of men's affairs, but only to teach Allah's Message. How much less can ordinary men presume to judge other men?

The **Mashiyat** -Will and Plan of Allah- is above all human wisdom. (R).

...وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلاً (٥٤)

We have not sent thee to be a disposer of their affairs for them.

...وَرَبُّكَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

55. And it is your Lord that knoweth best all beings that are in the heavens and on earth:

C2240. Not only are we not to judge other ordinary men and carp at them. We are not to set up false standards for judging the Prophets of Allah.

If one was born of the unlearned Arab race, he yet was a mercy to all the worlds.

If one spoke to Allah as Kalim Allah or another's life Ruh Allah began with a miracle; it does not imply superiority. It only means that Allah's wisdom is more profound than we can fathom. (R).

...وَلَقَدْ فَضَّلْنَا بَعْضَ النَّبِيِّينَ عَلَى بَعْضٍ...

We did bestow on some Prophets more (and other) gifts than on others:

...وَأَتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ زَبُوراً (٥٥)

and We gave to David (the gift of) the Psalms.

C2241. The spiritual gifts with which the prophets came may themselves take different forms, according to the needs of the world and the times in which they lived, as judged by the wisdom of Allah.

A striking example here given is the gift of David over others.

David was given the Zabur, the Psalter or Psalms, intended to be for the worship of Allah and the celebration of Allah's praise.

For the Book of Psalms, see the last part of n. 669 to 4:163, where exactly the same words are used about David.

قُلْ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهِ...

56. Say: "Call on those -- besides Him -- whom ye fancy:

...فَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ كَشْفَ الضَّرِّ عَنْكُمْ وَلَا تَحْوِيلًا (٥٦)

they have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them."

C2242. Men's suspicions of each or of the prophets have been condemned in the previous verses.

We now have the strongest condemnation of all, that of imagining any other being as being equal or in the same category with One true God. Allah has all power: they have no power. They cannot remove men's troubles. They cannot even mitigate or change them so as to afford the least relief. Why indulge in false worship?

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ يَبْتَغُونَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمُ الْوَسِيلَةَ...

57. Those whom they call upon do desire (for themselves) means of access to their Lord --

...أَيْهِمْ أَقْرَبُ وَيَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَهُ وَيَخَافُونَ عَذَابَهُ...

even those who are nearest: they hope for His Mercy and fear His Wrath:

C2243. Where men or heroes, or prophets or angels are worshipped, the worship is futile; because;

- even if they are good and holy, and ever so near to Allah, yet the nearest of them have need to seek means of access to Allah, and they do seek such means, viz,: the hope of Allah's Grace;
- though by their very nature it is impossible for us to suppose that they will incur the Wrath of Allah, yet they are but creatures and are subject to the law of personal responsibility.

...إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ كَانَ مَحْذُورًا (٥٧)

for the Wrath of thy Lord is something to take heed of.

وَأَنَّ مَنْ قَرِيئَةٌ إِلَّا نَحْنُ مُهْلِكُوهَا قَبْلَ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُوهَا عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا...

58. There is not a population but We shall destroy it before the Day of Judgment or punish it with a dreadful Penalty:

C2244. These verses are a commentary on the last clause of the last verse. "The Wrath of thy Lord is something to take heed of."

The godless thoughtlessly challenge Allah's Wrath, but do they realise its nature?

Even the best of us must be moved with terror when we think of its consequences, were it not for His unbounded Mercy.

Those who deny the Hereafter fail to realise its terrible Portents. They ask for Portents and Miracles now, but do they realise that their coming means destruction and misery to those who reject faith? They will come soon enough. The whole world will be convulsed before the Day of Judgment. The part of the wise is to prepare for it.

...كَانَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْكِتَابِ مَسْطُورًا (٥٨)

that is written in the (eternal) Record.

وَمَا مَنَعَنَا أَنْ نُرْسِلَ بِالْآيَاتِ إِلَّا أَنْ كَذَّبَ بِهَا الْأَوَّلُونَ...

59. And We refrain from sending the Signs, only because the men of former generations treated them as false:

C2245. Past generations treated Signs and Portents with contempt or rebellion, and brought about their own undoing. It is only Allah's Mercy that gives them Grace for a time and prevents the coming of those Portents and Punishments which would overwhelm them if they were put to their trial at once.

...وَأَتَيْنَا تَّمُودَ النَّاقَةَ مُبْصِرَةً فَظَلَمُوا بِهَا...

We sent the She-camel: to the Thamud to open their eyes, but they treated her wrongfully:

C2246. An example is cited from the story of Thamud.

A wonderful She-camel was sent among them as a Portent and a Symbol. In their wickedness they hamstrung her.

So instead of her reclaiming them she was a cause of their destruction, as their sin and rebellion were laid bare. For the story of the She-camel and the references to the passages in which she is mentioned, see n. 104 4 to 7:73.

...وَمَا نُرْسِلُ بِالآيَاتِ إِلَّا تَخْوِيفًا (٥٩)

We only send the Signs by way of terror (and warning from evil).

C2247. Signs, Miracles, and Portents are sent by Allah as a warning, to strike terror into the hearts of evil-doers and reclaim them to the right path.

I have discussed Fear as a motive for reclaiming certain kinds of hard hearts, in my note 82 to 2:74. But some hearts are so hard that even this motive does not work. As they have a limited free-will given by Allah, they are to that extent free to choose. But when they actually choose evil, Allah in His infinite Mercy delays their punishment and removes the occasion for their immediate self-destruction by withholding the Signs which might make them transgress all the more and compass their total destruction.

وإذ قلنا لك إن ربك أحاط بالناس...

60. Behold! We told thee that thy Lord doth encompass mankind round about:

C2248. The reference may be to 72:28, probably an earlier Makkan revelation. But the argument is independent of time.

This verse falls naturally into three divisions. Warnings and Portents and Signs are sent or not sent according to Allah's All-Wise Plan of Mercy and Justice, this is in no wise inconsistent with the apparent freedom given to the wicked: because:

- in any case Allah is all round all His creatures, and His delay as a Sign of Mercy in no way diminishes His power;
- the Visions of Truth vouchsafed to Prophets of Allah are themselves Signs by which they can warn the ungodly; and
- sometimes it is more merciful to give them time by not immediately bringing the matter to judgment. (R).

...وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ...

We granted the Vision which We showed thee, but as a trial for men --

C2249. Some Commentators take this as referring to the Mi'raj (17:1) and others to other visions. Such visions are miracles, and become a stumbling block to unbelievers.

They are an encouragement to men of faith. Thus they are "a trial for men".

...وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ...

as also the Cursed Tree (mentioned) in the Qur'an:

C2250. The tree Zaqquq, a bitter and pungent tree described as growing at the bottom of Hell, a type of all that is disagreeable.

See 37:62-65; 44:43-46; and 56:52.

All these are Surahs chronologically earlier than this Surah.

The application of the name to a tree of the myrobalan kind in the region of Jericho is, I think, of post-Quranic date.

It is a trial for wrong- doers. See 37:63 and n. 4073.

...وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا (٦٠)

We put terror (and warning) into them, but it only increases their inordinate transgression!

C.131 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(17:61-84)

*Arrogance, jealousy, spite and hatred
Were the cause of the fall of Iblis. Man
Was given pre-eminence above
Much of Allah's Creation, and owes
Higher responsibilities. He should give thanks
For Allah's mercies, and remember
To Day of Account. Not all the scheming
Of Evil will deflect Allah's righteous Plan
To protect His chosen ones. They should pray
Without ceasing, and seek His true Guidance;
For Truth will last, but Falsehood will perish.*

Section 7

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ ...

61. Behold! We said to the angels: "Bow down unto Adam":

C2251. Cf. 7:11-18, which deals, as is the case here, with the temptation of the individual human soul, while 2:30-38 deals with the collective race of man through Adam. Arrogance, jealousy, spite, and hatred are the ingredients in the story of Iblis.

... فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ...

they bowed down except Iblis:

... قَالَ أَسْجُدْ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا (٦١)

he said, "Shall I bow down to one whom Thou didst create from clay?"

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ...

62. He said,

"Seest Thou? This is the one whom thou hast honored above me!

... لئن أخرجتني إلى يوم القيامة لأحتنكن ذريته إلا قليلاً (٦٢)

If Thou wilt but respite me to the Day of Judgment, I will surely bring his descendants under my sway -- all but a few!"

C2252. The power of Evil (Satan) over man is due to man's limited free-will.

In other words man hands himself to Evil. As to those who loyally worship and serve Allah, Evil has no power over them.

This is expressly mentioned in [verse 65 below](#), and in other places.

قَالَ اذْهَبْ ...

63. Allah said: "Go thy way;

C2253. The power of Evil is summarily dismissed, but not without a clear warning.

"Do thy worst; if any of them misuse their limited free-will and deliberately follow thee, they must take the consequences with thee; all of you must answer according to your personal responsibility."

... فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاءُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا (٦٣)

if any of them follow thee, verily Hell will be the recompense of you (all) -- an ample recompense.

وَأَسْتَفْزِرُ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ ...

64. "Lead to destruction those whom thou canst among them,

C2254. "Do thy worst; but ye are both warned that that path leads to destruction."

... بِصَوْتِكَ ...

with thy (seductive) voice;

C2255. Evil has many snares for mankind. The one that is put in the foreground is the voice,

- the seductive personal appeal, that "makes the worse appear the better part".

... وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِم بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ ...

make assaults on them with thy cavalry and thy infantry;

C2256. The forcible assault of Evil is next mentioned under the metaphor of **cavalry and infantry**.

It is when cajolery and tempting fair-seeming seem to fail that an attack is made in force with weapons of violence, of all kinds, like the different arms in an organized army.

... وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ وَعَدْتَهُمْ ...

mutually share with them wealth and children; and make promises to them.

C2257. If the first assaults are resisted. Evil has other weapons in its armoury.

- Tangible fruits are dangled before the eyes, ill-gotten gains and children of sin, that follow from certain very alluring methods of indulgence in passions.
- Or it may be children dedicated to sin or worldly gains, etc. And then there are all kinds of promises for the future.

... وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا (٦٤)

But Satan promises them nothing but deceit.

C2258. This is a parenthetical clause inserted to show up what the promises of the Satan are worth.

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ...

65. "As for My servants, no authority shalt thou have over them."

C2259. This verse should be read along with the two preceding ones to complete their meaning. Evil has no power except over those who yield to its solicitations.

...وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكَيْلًا (٦٥)

Enough is thy Lord for a Disposer of affairs.

C2260. As Evil has no authority over the sincere servants of Allah, they should put their trust completely in Him. For He is All-Sufficient to carry out their affairs, and by His grace, to save them from all harm and danger.

رَبُّكُمُ الَّذِي يُزْجِي لَكُمُ الْفُلْكَ فِي الْبَحْرِ لِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ...

66. Your Lord is He that maketh the Ship go smoothly for you through the sea, in order that ye may seek of His Bounty:

C2261. This illustration of the sea, and the skill with which, by Allah's grace, men pass through it with ease in order to earn material gains by commerce, social gains by human intercourse, and spiritual gains by knowledge, is frequently used to enforce Allah's goodness to man.

Cf. 2:164.

...إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا (٦٦)

for He is unto you Most Merciful.

وَإِذَا مَسَّكُمُ الضُّرُّ فِي الْبَحْرِ ضَلَّ مَنْ تَدْعُونَ إِلَّا إِلَاهُ...

67. When distress seizes you at sea, those that ye call upon -- besides Himself -- leave you in the lurch!

...فَلَمَّا نَجَّأكُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ أَعْرَضْتُمْ...

But when He brings you back safe to land, ye turn away (from Him).

...وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ كَفُورًا (٦٧)

Most ungrateful is man!

C2262. Against Allah's gracious gifts and mercies is contrasted man's ingratitude.

In danger he remembers Allah, the One True God, but relapses into his own fancies when the danger is past.

Cf. also 10:22-23. (R).

أَفَأَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يَخْصِفَ بِكُمْ جَانِبَ الْبَرِّ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ حَاصِبًا...

68. Do ye then feel secure that He will not cause you to be swallowed up beneath the earth when ye are on land, or that He will not send against you a violent tornado (with showers of stones)

C2263. Man is safe neither on land nor at sea except by the grace and mercy of Allah.

How forcibly this is brought home to us by the Quetta earthquake of 31st May 1935, when tens of thousands of men, women, and children, perished in a few moments, by night, buried in debris!

The stories of violent destructive tornadoes in such areas as the southern United States are equally impressive.

The destruction is so sudden that the victims have no time to arrange anything. They are simply wiped out.

...ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ وَكَيلًا (٦٨)

so that ye shall find no one to carry out your affairs for you?

أَمْ أَمِنْتُمْ أَنْ يُعِيدَكُمْ فِيهِ تَارَةً أُخْرَى...

69. Or do ye feel secure that He will not send you back a second time to sea

...فَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ قَاصِفًا مِّنَ الرِّيحِ فَيُغَرِّقُكُم بِمَا كَفَرْتُمْ...

and send against you a heavy gale to drown you because of your ingratitude,

C2264. If a man flees from the Wrath of Allah, there is no place secure for him.

He may flee from sea to land, and back again from land to sea. But his life depends on the Disposer of all affairs.

He may go again and again to sea, and perhaps finally end by being drowned.

...ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُوا لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا بِهِ تَبِيعًا (٦٩)

so that ye find no helper therein against Us?

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ...

70. We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea;

... وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ...

given them for sustenance things good and pure;

...وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا (٧٠)

and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our Creation.

C2265. The distinction and honour conferred by Allah on man are recounted in order to enforce the corresponding duties and responsibilities of man.

- He is raised to a position of honour above the brute creation:
- he has been granted talents by which he can transport himself from place to place by land, sea, and now by air:
- all the means for the sustenance and growth of every part of his nature are provided by Allah;
- and his spiritual faculties (the greatest gift of Allah) raise him above the greater part of Allah's Creation.

Should he not then realise his noble destiny and prepare for his real life in the Hereafter?

Section 8

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ...

71. One day We shall call together all human beings with their (respective) Imams:

C2266. I have discussed the various meanings of **Imam** in 2:124, n. 124.

What is the meaning here?

The Commentators are divided.

- Some understand the meaning to be that each People or Group will appear with its Leader, who will bear witness to its virtues or sins: Cf. 16:84.
- Another view is that the **Imam** is their revelation, their Book.
- A third is that the Imam is the record of deeds spoken of in the next clause.

I prefer the first.

...فَمَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ يَقْرَءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ...

those who are given their record in their right hand will read it (with pleasure),

...وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا (٧١)

and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least.

C2267. Literally, by the value of a **fatil**, a small skin in the cleft of a date-stone: this has no value.

...وَمَنْ كَانَ فِي هَذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ...

72. But those who were blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter,

C2268. On the Judgment Day the children of light will receive and peruse their record, and will render joyful thanks to Allah for His Mercies.

What of the children of darkness?

They had already been blind in this world's life, and they will not receive the light of Allah's Countenance then. On the contrary they will find that the longer the time they have travelled, the farther away they have gone from the Path.

Notice the association of ideas-blindness, not seeing the light, going farther and farther away from the true Path.

...وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا (٧٢)

and most astray from the Path.

وَأِنْ كَادُوا لَيَفْتِنُونَكَ عَنِ الَّذِي أُوحِيَإِنَّا إِلَيْكَ لِنَتَقَرِّيَ عَلَيْنَا غَيْرَهُ...

73. And their purpose was to tempt thee away from that which We had revealed unto thee, to substitute in Our name something quite different: (in that case),

C2269. It happens with men of Allah, and it happened with the holy Prophet, that they are tempted by the world with many things which appeal to the world generally, if they would make some small concession in their favour. The "small concession" may hold the key of the position, and neutralize the whole teaching sent by Allah.

If the Prophet had accepted wealth and position among the Quraish and "only respected" their idols! The Quraish would have taken him into their inner circle!

A dishonest liar like Musaylama would have jumped at the opportunity and been hailed as a friend and associate and made much Of. But Prophets of Allah are made of sterner stuff. They are given special strength to resist all plausible deception. (R).

...وَإِذَا لَاتَّخَذُوكَ خَلِيلًا (٧٣)

behold! they would certainly have made thee (their) friend!

وَلَوْ لَا أَنْ تَبْتَئِنَّاكَ لَقَدْ كِدْتَ تَرْكُنُ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئًا قَلِيلًا (٧٤)

74. And had We not given thee strength, thou wouldst nearly have inclined to them a little.

C2270. From a purely human point of view it may seem policy to make a small "concession" to men's weakness in order to fulfil a divine mission. But the divine Messenger is given special strength to resist such temptations.

إِذَا لَأَذْفَنَّاكَ ضِعْفَ الْحَيَاةِ وَضِعْفَ الْمَمَاتِ...

75. In that case We should have made thee taste an equal portion (of punishment) in this life, and an equal portion in death:

C2271. If such a thing was possible for a true Messenger of Allah, viz.:

a compromise with evil and a dereliction of his mission, he would be no exception to the law of personal responsibility.

Indeed, as the power and the responsibility were greater, the punishment would have been greater too. It would have been double,

- an exposure in this life and the usual punishment in or after death for a desertion of Truth.

...ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ عَلَيْنَا نَصِيرًا (٧٥)

and moreover thou wouldst have found none to help thee against Us!

C2272. The motive held out by the world for a compromise with Truth is itself fallacious. The motive is that the compromise may bring influence, position, and opportunity, if not wealth and the other good things of life. But these themselves (if attained) would be of no use or help if pitted against the command of Allah.

وَأِنْ كَادُوا لَيَسْتَفِزُّوكَ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ لِيُخْرِجُوكَ مِنْهَا...

76. Their purpose was to scare thee off the land, in order to expel thee;

C2273. As happened in the case of the holy Prophet, the enemies try to frighten the Prophet of Allah away from their midst, so that, once away, they could expel him and keep him out. But they are counting without the Plan of Allah. If they persecute the righteous, they dig their own graves! (R).

...وَأِذَا لَا يَلْبَثُونَ خِلَافَكَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٧٦)

but in that case they would not have stayed (therein) after thee, except for a little while.

سُنَّةَ مَنْ قَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ مِنْ رُسُلِنَا...

77. (This was Our) way with the Messengers We sent before thee:

...وَلَا تَجِدُ لِسُنَّتِنَا تَحْوِيلًا (٧٧)

thou wilt find no change in Our ways.

C2274. This was no new thing in history. Allah protects His own, and the ungodly cannot long enjoy the fruits of their unrighteousness even if their punishment be delayed a little while.

Section 9

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِدُلُوكِ الشَّمْسِ إِلَى غَسَقِ اللَّيْلِ وَقُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ...

78. Establish regular prayers -- at the sun's decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading:

C2275. The Commentators understand here the command for the five daily canonical prayers, viz,:

the four from the declination of the sun from the zenith to the fullest darkness of the night, and the early morning prayer, Fajr, which is usually accompanied by a reading of the holy Quran.

The four afternoon prayers are:

- Zuhr, immediately after the sun begins to decline in the afternoon;
- 'Asr, in the late afternoon;
- Magrib, immediately after sunset; and
- Isha, after the glow of sunset has disappeared and the full darkness of the night has set in.

There is difference of opinion as to the meaning of particular words and phrases, but none as to the general effect of the passage.

...إِنَّ قُرْآنَ الْفَجْرِ كَانَ مَشْهُودًا (٧٨)

for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony.

C2276. The morning prayer is specially singled out for separate mention, because the morning is a "peaceful hour" and special influences act on the soul awaking

from the night's rest. Special testimony is borne to the prayers of this hour by the angelic host.

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَتَهَجَّدْ بِهِ نَافِلَةً لَّكَ ...

79. And pray in the small watches of the morning: (it would be) an additional prayer (or spiritual profit) for thee:

C2277. This is held to be addressed specially to the holy Prophet who usually prayed more than the five canonical prayers.

The Tahajjud was a prayer after midnight, in the small watches of the morning.

... عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَكَ رَبُّكَ مَقَامًا مَّحْمُودًا (٧٩)

soon will thy Lord raise thee to a station of Praise and Glory!

C2278. To the Prophet was to be assigned in the Hereafter the highest Post of Honour and Glory - the **Maqam Mahmud**, implying his excellence above all other Prophets.

The immediate reference may be to the hope that the Makkan persecution will soon be over and the glorious work in Madinah will begin. (R).

وَقُلْ رَبِّ اُدْخِلْنِيْ مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَّاُخْرِجْنِيْ مُخْرَجَ صِدْقٍ...

80. Say: "O my Lord! let my entry be by the Gate of Truth and Honor, and likewise my exit by the Gate of Truth and Honor;

C2279. The entry and exit here referred to may be interpreted in four senses:

1. entry into death and exit at the resurrection:

for the righteous, who have purified their souls by prayer (last verse) and spiritual teaching from the Quran (next verse), there is on each occasion a fuller and fuller realisation and enjoyment of truth and honour: for those who are estranged from Allah, the effect is the opposite: the truth becomes bitter and there is ignominy and exposure instead of honour:

2. entry for the holy Prophet into the new life at Madinah, which was still in the womb of futurity, and

exit from the life of persecution and the milieu of falsehood, which surrounded him in his native city of Makkah still given up to idolatry:

3. referring to the impending Hijrah again, the prayer may mean,

"Let it be from pure motives of truth and spiritual honour, and not from motives of anger against the city of Makkah or its persecutors, or of ambition or worldly power from the city of Madinah, which was ready to lay everything at the Prophet's feet":

4. generally, entry and exit at every stage of life.

...وَأَجْعَلْ لِّي مِنْ أَدْنِكَ سُلْطَانًا تَصِيرًا (٨٠)

and grant me from Thy Presence an authority to aid (me)."

C2280. All prayer must be for Allah's aid and authority. However much we may plan, our success must depend on His aid. However nobler our motives, we have no right to imperil any lives unless there is authority in the Word of Allah. The Prophet only acts on Allah's commission and inspiration,

وَقُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ...

81. And say: "Truth has (now) arrived, and Falsehood perished:

...إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا (٨١)

for Falsehood is (by its nature) bound to perish."

C2281. From its nature falsehood must perish, for it is the opposite of Truth, and Truth must ever prevail.

وَنُنزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ...

82. We send down (stage by stage) in the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe:

...وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا (٨٢)

to the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss.

C2282. In Allah's revelation there is healing for our broken spirits, hope for our spiritual future, and joy in

the forgiveness of our sins. All who work in faith will share in these privileges.

It is only the rebels against Allah's Law who will suffer loss. The more they will oppose Truth, the deeper down will they go into the mire—the state of sin and Wrath, which is worse than destruction.

وَإِذَا أَنْعَمْنَا عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ أَعْرَضَ وَنَأَى بِجَانِبِهِ...

83. Yet when We bestow Our favors on man, he turns away and becomes remote on his side (instead of coming to Us),

...وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ كَانَ يُؤُوسًا (٨٣)

and when Evil seizes him he gives himself up to despair!

C2283. Truth saves us from two extremes:

- when we are happy, we are saved from being puffed up, for we realise that everything comes from Allah;
- and when we suffer misfortunes, we are not in despair, for we know that Allah is our sure refuge and help.

فَلْ كُلُّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَىٰ شَاكِلَتِهِ...

84. Say: "Everyone acts according to his own disposition:

...فَرُبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ سَبِيلًا (٨٤)

but your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the Way."

C2284. If the wicked go their own ways, there is nothing to discourage us. It is their nature. We must seek and hold fast to true guidance.

C.132 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(17:85-111)

*Who can define the Spirit of Inspiration?
Its gift is the highest of Allah's Mercies
To man. The Quran is divine, and no carping*

*Can affect its greatness or the greatness
Of the Messenger who brought it to men,
Those who reject it will be called
To account on the Day of Judgement. Let not
Pride and Ignorance rush, like Pharaoh,
To the Punishment of the Hereafter.
The Quran as revealed by stages teaches
The Truth; learn it and chant it, and praise
The Beautiful Names of Allah forever!*

Section 10

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ...

85. They ask thee concerning the Spirit (of inspiration).

C2285. What is the nature of inspiration?

Who brings it?

Can it ask its Bringer questions?

Can we ask anything which we wish?

These are the sort of questions always asked when inspiration is called in question. The answer is given here,.

Inspiration is one of those high experiences which cannot be explained in the terms of our everyday human experience. It is spiritual.

The Spirit (Gabriel) does not come of his own will. He comes by the command of Allah, and reveals what Allah commands him to reveal.

Of the sum-total of true divine knowledge what a small part it is that ordinary mortals can understand! They can be only given that which they can understand, however dimly. We are not in a position to ask anything that we wish. If we did so, it would only make us look foolish, for the guidance comes from Allah's Wisdom, not from our worldly knowledge.

...قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٨٥)

Say:

"The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord:

of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!)

وَلَيْنَ شَيْئًا لَنُدْهَبَنَّ بِالَّذِي أُوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ...

86. If it were Our Will, We could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration:

C2286. Even the spiritual knowledge that comes to us comes because of the favour and mercy of Allah. If He were to withhold it, who can call Him in question?

...ثُمَّ لَا تَجِدُ لَكَ بِهِ عَلَيْنَا وَكِيلًا (٨٦)

then would thou find none to plead thy affair in that matter as against Us --

إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِّن رَّبِّكَ...

87. Except for Mercy from thy Lord:

C2287. In that case the only one who can plead for us is the Mercy of Allah.

We can interpret the phrase in its widest abstract sense, as well as in the concrete sense of the title which is applied to the holy Prophet Muhammad, the Mercy of Allah. Thus we come from the abstract question to the concrete question of the Quran, which is referred to by name in the verses that follow.

...إِنَّ فَضْلَهُ كَانَ عَلَيْكَ كَبِيرًا (٨٧)

for His Bounty is to thee (indeed) great.

قُلْ لَّيْنِ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ...

88. Say:

"If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an,

C2288. For the meaning of "Jinns", see n. 929 to 6:100.

... لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا (٨٨)

they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.

C2289. The proof of the Quran is in its own beauty and nature, and the circumstances in which it was promulgated. The world is challenged to produce a Book like it and has not produced one.

It is the only revealed Book whose text stands pure and uncorrupted today.

Cf., for a similar challenge, 2:23, 10:38, and 11:13.

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا لِلنَّاسِ فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ مِنْ كُلِّ مَثَلٍ...

89. And We have explained to man, in this Qur'án, every kind of similitude:

C2290. In the Quran everything is explained in detail from various points of view, by commands, similitudes, examples, stories, parables, etc.

It does not merely narrate stories or lay down vague abstract propositions. It gives every detailed help in outward and inner life.

... فَأَبَى أَكْثَرُ النَّاسِ إِلَّا كُفُورًا (٨٩)

yet the greater part of men refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude!

C2291. One form in which it can be received with ingratitude is to pay verbal tributes to it but not study it as it ought to be studied (2:121 , haqqa tilawatihi), or to disobey its precepts or standards.

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا (٩٠)

90. They say:

"We shall not believe in thee, until thou cause spring to gush forth for us from the earth,

C2292. Cf. 2:60.

أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجَّرَ الْأَنْهَارَ خِلَالَهَا تَفْجِيرًا (٩١)

91. "Or (until) thou have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water;

C2293. This ill-assorted and crude jumble of the sort of miracles which the Unbelievers wanted is in very appropriate contrast to the sober and reasoned argument which has begun in the last sentence of verse 93 and continued in sections 11 and 12, which close this Surah.

It is throughout reminiscent of the materialistic imagination of Jewish skeptics, which was mainly responsible for the fall of the Jewish nation (see verse 104 below). For a thirsty people sojourning in a dry land, the finding of a spring of water as in the story of Moses or of the well of Zamzam is an appropriate miracle. But miracles are not for faithless crowds to gape at.

A beautiful well-watered Garden is a symbol of Felicity: but a skeptic cannot order Allah to produce it for his pleasure. The same may be said about a house adorned with gold, except that its symbolism is even more materialistic.

The fall of the sky or producing Allah face to face or climbing to the skies by a ladder, or bringing down a book of parchment which men could handle, are all irreverent suggestions that make no distinction between spiritual and material things.

أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمَتَ عَلَيْنَا كَيْفًا...

92. "Or thou cause the sky to fall in pieces, as thou sayest (will happen), against us;

C2294. Contrast the sublime passages like the beginning with 82:1. or that in 25:25, where the final breaking up of the firmaments as we know them is referred to in the world's catastrophe, with the ridiculous demand that it should be done for the sport of the skeptics!

...أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قِيَابًا (٩٢)

or thou bring Allah and the angels before (us) face to face;

C2295. Cf. 2:55 and 4:153 about the desire of the Israelites to see Allah face to face;

and 6:8-9, about angels coming down to convince men.

أَوْ يَكُونُ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِّنْ زُخْرَفٍ أَوْ تَرْقَى فِي السَّمَاءِ...

93. "Or thou have a house adorned with gold, or thou mount a ladder right into the skies.

C2296. Cf. 6:35 about a ladder to the skies.

...وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّىٰ نُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا نَقْرُوهُ...

No, we shall not even believe in thy mounting until thou send down to us a book that we could read."

C2297. Cf. 6:7 for the foolish idea of materialistic skeptics that a spiritual revelation could come down from the heavens on a piece of parchment that they can touch.

...قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا (٩٣)

Say: "Glory to my Lord! am I aught but a man -- a Messenger?"

C2298. A prophet or messenger of Allah is a man at the command of Allah, and not to satisfy the disingenuous whims and fancies of Unbelievers.

Miracles greater than any that their foolish fancies could devise were before them. The Quran was such a miracle, and it is a standing miracle that lasts through the ages.

Why did they not believe?

The real reason was spite and jealousy like that of Iblis. See next verse.

Section 11

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ...

94. What kept men back from Belief when Guidance came to them, was nothing but this:

...إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا (٩٤)

they said, "Has Allah sent a man like (us) to be (His) Messenger?"

C2299. When a man is raised to honour and dignity, his sincere brothers rejoice, for it is an honour that reflects its glory on them. But those with evil in their hearts are jealous like their prototype Iblis, ([17:61](#), [n. 2251](#)).

To such men the mere fact that their own brother receives the grace of Allah is enough to turn them against that brother.

Any other reasons they may devise are mere make-believe.

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَفِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمْشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ...

95. Say,

"If there were settled, on earth, angels walking about in peace and quiet,

C2300. The argument is that if angels inhabited this earth, an angel from heaven could be sent down as a messenger to them, as they could mutually understand each other, and the Message of Allah could be explained without difficulty.

But the earth is inhabited by men, and the men themselves are divided into races, or groups, or nations. To each Group is sent a prophet from among their brethren: to 'Ad, their brother Hud (11:50); to Thamud, their brother Salih (11:61): and so on.

As a matter of fact, with wicked men, constituted as they are, the appearance of an angel causes disturbance and an unseemly riot, as in the case of the angels that came to Lut (11:77-80).

In any case they cannot carry out an effective mission among men (6:8-9).

...لَنزَلْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا (٩٥)

We should certainly have sent them down from the heavens an angel for a messenger."

قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ...

96. Say: "Enough is Allah for a witness between me and you:

C2301. 'If you want a real witness, it is not these sorts of fancy miracles, but the witness of the true ever-living God. Purify your hearts, and ask Him in true contrition and repentance, and He will guide you and show you the Way'. (R).

...إِنَّهُ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ خَبِيرًا بَصِيرًا (٩٦)

for He is well-acquainted with His servants, and He sees (all things)."

وَمَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ...

97. It is he whom Allah guides, that is on true guidance;

...وَمَنْ يُضَلِّلْ فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِهِ...

but he whom He leaves astray -- for such wilt thou find no protector besides Him.

C2302. 'All your insincere subtleties are of no use. The only real guidance is the guidance of Allah. If you do not seek His grace, you will be lost. Besides Him, there is no true friend or protector'.

...وَنَحْشُرُهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمْ عُمِيًَّا وَبُكْمًا وَصُمًّا...

On the Day of Judgment We shall gather them together, prone on their faces, blind, dumb, and deaf:

...مَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ كُلَّمَا خَبَتْ زِدْنَاهُمْ سَعِيرًا (٩٧)

their abode will be Hell:

every time it shows abatement, We shall increase for them the fierceness of the Fire.

C2303. 'If you still persist in your evil ways, what is to be your evil end?

You will become more and more identified with the Company of Evil. You will come to shame and ignominy, like men thrown down prone on their faces. You will lose the use of all the faculties of judgment with which Allah has endowed you.

Instead of seeing, you will be blind to Allah's Signs. Instead of having the power of seeking Him in prayer and rejoicing in His grace, you will be dumb. Instead of hearing the harmony and music of the spheres, as typified in the pure and harmonious lives of men, you will hear nothing or only hear dull or confused sounds like deaf men.

The scorching fire of your punishment will not grow less, but grow more fierce as you go deeper into Hell'.

ذَلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا...

98. That is their recompense, because they rejected Our Signs,

...وَقَالُوا أَيُّدَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرَفَاتًا إِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا (٩٨)

and said, "When we are reduced to bones and broken dust, should we really be raised up (to be) a new Creation?"

C2304. This phrase is repeated from [17:49](#).

The reminiscence rounds off the argument. After certain moral precepts to which Faith was linked, we have had a discussion of Unfaith. Its various motives have been analyzed, and its penalties have been allegorically shadowed forth.

After this, the example of Pharaoh is held as a type of Unfaith in the next section, and the Surah closed with an exhortation to faith and a declaration of the glory of Allah.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ قَادِرٌ عَلَى أَنْ
يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ...

99. See they not that Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, has power to create the like of them (anew)?

C2305. Allah, Who created all that is in the heavens and on earth, has surely the power to revive the life of individual souls after their bodies have perished, -and revive them with memories of their past life and for a continuation of their spiritual history. Only He has fixed a term for each stage of our existence, which we can neither prolong nor shorten.

...وَجَعَلَ لَهُمْ أَجَلًا لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ...

Only He has decreed a term appointed, of which there is no doubt.

...فَأَبَى الظَّالِمُونَ إِلَّا كُفُورًا (٩٩)

But the unjust refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude.

C2306. This phrase carries us back to 17:89, after we began the argument about the real motives for the rejection of the Quran by skeptics.

The argument is now closed in a sort of minor circle within the major circle sketched in n. 2304 above.

فَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ تَمَلَّكُونَ خَزَائِنَ رَحْمَةِ رَبِّي...

100. Say: "If ye had control of the Treasures of the Mercy of my Lord,

...إِذَا لَأُمْسِكْتُمْ خَشْيَةَ الْإِنْفَاقِ...

behold, ye would keep them back, for fear of spending them:

...وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ قَنُورًا (١٠٠)

for man is (ever) niggardly!"

C2307. A fresh argument is now addressed to those who would confine Allah's revelations to a limited circle of men, such as they themselves belonged to.

The immediate reference was to the Jews, who could not understand how any Gentiles could receive revelations and guidance even superior to what they considered their own birth-right. But the tendency is widespread in the human race.

A particular race, or caste, or a particular kind of culture, claims to be the custodian of Allah's Message, whereas it is universal. Allah's Mercy is universal, and He scatters the priceless Treasures of His Mercy broadcast among His creatures. They are not exhausted by spending. It is only the misers who hoard their wealth for fear it should be used up by spending.

'Are you spiritual misers going to keep back Allah's holy Message from the multitude?

Is that the reason why you deny the advent of the new Teacher, who comes as a Mercy to all men-to all Creation?'

Section 12

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى تِسْعَ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ...

101. To Moses We did give nine Clear Signs:

C2308. Nine Clear Signs: see 7:133, n. 1091.

The story of Pharaoh (or a phase of it) is here told with a view to exhibiting the decline of a soul on account of pride in outward power and dignity.

...فَاسْأَلُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ فَقَالَ لَهُ فِرْعَوْنُ...

ask the Children of Israel: when he came to them, Pharaoh said to him:

C2309. To them: i.e., to Pharaoh, as sitting in his Council, with the Chiefs of his people. Cf. 7:103.

The whole scene is described in some detail from the point of view of nations or Ummahs in 7:103-133.

...إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا مُوسَى مَسْحُورًا (١٠١)

"O Moses! I consider thee, indeed, to have been worked upon by sorcery!"

C2310. At a different and later stage in the scene, Pharaoh's Chiefs call Moses a "sorcerer well-versed" (7:109).

Here Moses, who had come with the Nine Signs but had not yet shown them, is reproached with being the object of sorcery: he is practically told that he is mad!

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتَ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

بَصَائِرَ...

102. Moses said, "Thou knowest well that these things have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth as eye-opening evidence:

C2311. We can well suppose Moses to ask Pharaoh to recall all the past history of Moses, for Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh's palace in all the learning of the Egyptians. He could not therefore be mad, or a simpleton worked on by Egyptian magic.

What he was going to show was something far greater; it was not the deceptive magic of Pharaoh's sorcerers, but true Signs that came from Allah, the Lord of all power. They were to open the eyes of his people, and if Pharaoh resisted faith. Moses warns him that Pharaoh in that case was doomed to destruction.

This is the course of the soul that sinks down by Pride!
(R).

...وَأِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا فِرْعَوْنَ مَثْبُورًا (١٠٢)

and I consider thee, indeed, O Pharaoh, to be one doomed to destruction!"

فَأَرَادَ أَنْ يَسْتَفِزَّهُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ...

103. So he resolved to remove them from the face of the earth:

C2312. Pharaoh on this tries various subterfuges and plans for removing not only Moses but all his people by doing away with them.

The detailed story is not told here but may be read in Surah 7.

But Allah's Wrath descended on Pharaoh and those who were with him in body and mind. The Egyptians who repented were subject to Pharaoh's wrath but were saved from the Wrath of Allah (7:121-126).

...فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ جَمِيعًا (١٠٣)

but We did drown him and all who were with him.

وَقُلْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اسْكُنُوا الْأَرْضَ...

104. And We said thereafter to the Children of Israel, "Dwell securely in the land (of promise)":

C2313. The Israelites were taken to the Promised Land in Palestine, and they established their own kingdom there, but they forfeited Allah's favour by their sins and backslidings and will have to answer like all souls by the law of personal responsibility at the Day of Judgment.

...فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعَدُ الْآخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا (١٠٤)

but when the second of the warnings came to pass, We gathered you together in a mingled crowd.

C2314. The second of the warnings:

- the first was probably that mentioned above, in 17:5 and
- the second that mentioned in 17:7 (middle).

When this second warning due to the rejection of Jesus came to pass, the Jews were gathered together in a mingled crowd.

Some Commentators understand the second warning to be the Day of Judgment, the Promise of the Hereafter. (R).

وَبِالْحَقِّ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ وَبِالْحَقِّ نَزَلَ...

105. We sent down the (Qur'án) in Truth, and in Truth has it descended:

C2315. The Quran was sent down by Allah in Truth: it was not forged by any mortal.

It has descended in Truth: it was not and has not been falsified or corrupted in the process of being communicated to mankind.

...وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا (١٠٥)

and We sent thee but to give Glad Tidings and to warn (sinners).

C2316. The part of the Prophet was that of a Messenger: he was not responsible if the ungodly rejected it. He fulfilled his mission in promulgating and explaining it and leaving it as a legacy to the world.

وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مُكْتَبٍ...

106. (It is) a Qur'an which We have divided (into parts from time to time), in order that thou mightest recite it to men at intervals:

...وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا (١٠٦)

We have revealed it by stages.

C2317. The marvel is that these parts, revealed at different times and in different circumstances, should fit together so closely and consistently as they do. All revelation is progressive.

The previous revelations were also progressive. Each of them marked a stage in the world's spiritual history.

Man's mind does not take in more than his spiritual state will have prepared him, for Allah's revelation comes as a light to illuminate our difficulties and show us the way in actual situations that arise.

قُلْ آمِنُوا بِهِ أَوْ لَا تُؤْمِنُوا...

107. Say: "Whether ye believe in it or not,

...إِنَّ الدِّينَ أَوْثَرُ الْعِلْمِ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ إِذَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ يَخِرُّونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ

سُجَّدًا (١٠٧)

it is true that those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them, fall down on their faces in humble prostration,"

C2318. No one's belief or unbelief affects the beauty or grandeur of Allah's revelation. But those endowed with spiritual knowledge or insight know at once when they hear Allah's holy Word, and fall down and adore Allah.

Those endowed with knowledge include those who had received previous revelations and had kept themselves free from corrupt ideas.

وَيَقُولُونَ سُبْحَانَ رَبَّنَا إِن كَان وَعَدُ رَبَّنَا لِمَفْعُولًا (١٠٨)

108. And say: "Glory to our Lord! truly has the promise of our Lord been fulfilled!"

C2319. Those who had received previous revelations find in the Quran and in the Messenger who brought it, the promise of Allah fulfilled. Those who were spiritually prepared for it found in the same way the satisfaction of their spiritual yearnings: to them, also, Allah's promise was sent to be fulfilled.

وَيَخْرُونَ لِلْأَذْقَانِ يَبْكُونَ وَيَزِيدُهُمْ خُشُوعًا (١٠٩)

109. They fall down on their faces in tears, and it increases their (earnest) humility.

C2320. A feeling of earnest humility comes to the man who realises how, in spite of his own unworthiness, he is brought, by Allah's Mercy, into touch with the most sublime Truths.

Such a man is touched with the deepest emotion, which finds its outlet in tears.

قُلْ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ...

110. Say: "Call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman:

C2321. Cf. 7:180.

Rahman describes one of the attributes of Allah, -His grace and Mercy which come to the sinner even before he feels conscious of the need of it,- the preventive Grace which saves Allah's servants from sin. See n. 19 to 1:1.

Allah can be invoked, either by His simple name, which includes all attributes, or by one of the names implying the attributes by which we try to explain His nature to our limited understanding. The attribute of Mercy in Rahman was particularly repugnant to the Pagan Arabs (see 25:60, and 21:36): that is why special stress is laid on it in the Quran. (R).

...أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى...

by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.

C2322. These Beautiful Names of Allah are many. The Hadith related by Tirmizi, accepted by some as authentic, mentions 99 names of Allah.

Qadhi Muhammad Sulaiman has published an Urdu monograph on the subject, published by the Daftar Rahmatun-lil-'Alamin Patiala, 1930. Those who wish to see a poetic Commentary on the names in the form of stories in English may consult Sir Edwin Arnold's Pearls of the Faith.

Sir Edwin's stories are of unequal merit, but a fine example is furnished by No. 4, al-Malik. "The King". (R).

...وَلَا تَجْهَرُ بِصَلَاتِكَ وَلَا تُخَافِتُ بِهَا وَابْتَغِ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ سَبِيلًا (١١٠)

Neither speak thy Prayer aloud, nor speak it in a low tone, but seek a middle course between."

C2323. Cf. 7:205.

All prayer should be pronounced with earnestness and humility, whether it is congregational prayer or the private outpouring of one's own soul.

Such an attitude is not consistent with an over-loud pronunciation of the words, though in public prayers the standard of permissible loudness is naturally higher than in the case of private prayer.

In public prayers, of course, the Azan or call to prayer will be in a loud voice to be heard near and far, but the chants from the Sacred Book should be neither so loud as to attract the hostile notice of those who do not believe nor so low in tone as not to be heard by the whole congregation.

وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا...

111. Say:

"Praise be to Allah Who begets no son,

...وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلِيٌّ مِّنَ الدُّلَى...

and has no partner in (His) dominion: nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation:

C2324. A first step towards the understanding of Allah's attributes is to clear our mind from superstitions, such as that Allah begot a son, or that He has partners, or that He is dependent upon other beings to protect Him from harm and humiliation.

We must realise that He is the One and Peerless. His greatness and glory are above anything we can conceive: but using our highest spiritual ideas, we must declare forth His greatness and glory.

The Surah began with singing the glory and praises of Allah: it ends on the same note, concluding the argument.

The next Surah takes up the same theme from another point of view, and opens with the same note, "Praise be to Allah". (R).

وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًا (۱۱۱)

Yea, magnify Him for His greatness and glory!"



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