



اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى



Allah! there is no god but He! To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

Ta Ha



Introduction and Summary

The chronology of the Surah has some significance: it has some relation to the spiritual lessons which it teaches.

It was used with great effect in that remarkable scene which resulted in Umar's conversion, and which took place about the seventh year before the Hijrah. The scene is described with dramatic details by Ibn Hisham.

Umar had previously been one of the greatest enemies and persecutors of Islam. Like his blood-thirsty kinsmen the

Quraysh be meditated slaying the Prophet, when it was suggested to him that there were near relations of his that had embraced Islam. His sister Fatima and her husband Sa'id were Muslims, but in those days of persecution they had kept their faith secret. When Umar went to their house, he heard them reciting this Surah from a written copy they had. For awhile they concealed the copy. Umar attacked his sister and her husband, but they bore the attack with exemplary patience, and declared their faith. Umar was so struck with their sincerity and fortitude that he asked to see the leaf from which they had been reading. It was given to him: his soul was touched, and he not only came into the Faith but became one of its strongest supporters and champions.

The leaf contained some portion of the Surah, perhaps the introductory portion.

The mystic letters Ta Ha are prefixed to this Surah.

What do they mean?

The earliest tradition is that they denote a dialectical interjection meaning "O man!" If so, the title particularly appropriate in two ways.

1. It was a direct and personal address to a man in a high state of excitement, tempted by his temper to do grievous wrong, but called by Allah's Grace, as by a personal appeal, to face the realities, for Allah knew his inmost secret thoughts (20:7): the revelation was sent by Allah, Most Gracious, out of His Grace and Mercy (20:5).
2. It takes up the story from the last Surah, of man as a spiritual being and illustrates it in further details.

It tells the story of Moses in the crisis of his life when he received Allah's Commission and in his personal relation with his mother, and how he came to be brought up in the Pharaoh's house, to learn all the wisdom of the Egyptians, for use in Allah's service, and in his personal relations with Pharaoh, whom we take to be his adoptive father (28:9).

It further tells the story of a fallen soul who misled the Israelites into idolatry, and recalls how man's Arch-enemy Satan caused his fall. Prayer and praise are necessary to man to cure his spiritual blindness and enable him to appreciate Allah's revelation. (R).

Summery- The revelation of Allah (the Quran) is not an occasion of distress, but is a gift of mercy from Allah Most Gracious (20:1-8, and C. 142).

How Moses was first chosen, and led to his mission to Pharaoh with his brother Aaron (20:9-36, and C. 143).

How mother of Moses was directed to cast the infant Moses into the river, to be brought up in Pharaoh's house under Allah's own supervision, in order to preach to Pharaoh and declare Allah's glory (20:37-76, and C. 144).

How Moses was directed to lead his people and quell their rebellious spirit, and how that spirit was stirred up by Samiri (20:77-104, and C. 145).

On the Day of Judgement personal responsibility will be enforced, and Allah's Truth acknowledged: man should guard against Adam's enemy, Satan, and should renounce vanities, purify himself with prayer and praise, and await the call to Allah (20:105-135, and C. 146).

C.142 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(20:1-8)

*Allah's revelation is not an occasion
For man's distress: it is a Message
To show that Allah the All-Knowing sits
On the throne of Mercy and guides all affairs.
There is no god but He: to Him
Belong all the Most Beautiful Names.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

طه (۱)

1. Ta Ha.

C2534. For an explanation see the [Introduction to this Surah](#).

If the meaning is "O man!" that is itself a mystic meaning, as explained, but the letters form a word and would not be classified strictly as abbreviated Letters: see n. 25 to 2:1.

This, however, is a question of classification and does not affect the meaning. This is conjectural, and no one can be dogmatic about it.

مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى (۲)

2. We have not sent down the Qur'an to thee to be (an occasion) for thy distress,

C2535. Allah's revelation may cause some human trouble for two reasons:

- it checks man's selfishness and narrowness of view, and
- it annoys the wicked and causes them to jeer and persecute.

These are mere incidental things, due to man's own shortcomings. As far as the trouble is concerned, the revelation is meant to give a warning, so that persecutors may be reclaimed, (and of course for men of faith it is comfort and consolation, though that point does not arise in this context).

إِلَّا تَذَكَّرَ لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (۳)

3. But only as an admonition to those who fear (Allah) --

تَنْزِيلًا مِّمَّنْ خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ وَالسَّمَاوَاتِ الْعُلَى (۴)

4. A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the heavens on high.

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى (٥)

5. (Allah) Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne (of authority).

C2536. Cf. 10:3. n. 1386.

If things seem to be wrong in our imperfect vision on this earth, we must remember Allah, Who encompasses all Creation and sits on the throne of Grace and Mercy, is in command, and our Faith tells us that all must be right.

Allah's authority is not like an authority on earth, which may be questioned, or which may not last. His authority is "firmly established".

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَى (٦)

6. To Him belongs what is in the heavens and on earth, and all between them, and all beneath the soil.

C2537. An exhaustive definition of everything we can conceive of;

- what is in the heavens,
- on the earth,
- or between,
- or within the bowels of the earth.

وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى (٧)

7. If thou pronounce the word aloud, (it is no matter): for verily He knoweth what is secret and what is yet more hidden.

C2538. There are two or three implications.

- Whatever you profess, or say aloud, gives no information to Allah: He knows not only what is secret and perhaps unknown to others, but what people take special care to conceal.
- It does you no good to make insincere professions: your hidden motives are known to Him, Who alone matters.
- If you read the Word of Allah, or if you pray to Allah, it is not necessary to raise your voice: in either case,

Allah will judge you by your inner thoughts which are like an open book to Him.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ...

8. Allah! there is no god but He!

...لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَى (٨)

To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.

C2539. Cf. 17:110 and n. 2322.

Allah is The One and the most beautiful things we can think of are referable to Him. His names refer to His attributes which are like titles of Honour and Glory. (R).

C.143 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(20:9-36)

*The story of how Moses was chosen and told
Of his mission, has a high mystic meaning.
He was true to his family and solicitous
For their welfare. Encamped in the desert,
He saw a fire far off. Approaching,
He found it was holy ground. Allah
Did reveal Himself to him, so
That he saw life in things lifeless,
And light in his glorified Hand, that shone
White with light divine. Armed
With these Signs he was told to go forth
On his mission. But he thought of his brother
Aaron, and prayed that Allah might join him
In his mission, and his prayer was granted.*

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى (٩)

9. Has the story of Moses reached thee?

C2540. The story of Moses in its different incidents is told in many places in the Quran, and in each case the phase most appropriate in the context is referred to or emphasised.

- In 2:49-61, it was a phase from the religious history of mankind;
- in 7:103-162, it was a phase from the story of the Ummah (or nation) of Israel, and the story was continued to the times after Moses,
- in 17:101-103, we have a picture of the decline of a soul in the arrogance of Pharaoh;
- here, in 20:9-24, we have a picture of the rise of a soul in the commission given to Moses from Allah;
- in 20:25-36, we have his spiritual relationship with his brother Aaron;
- in 20:37-40, we have his spiritual relation with his mother and sister, and his upbringing;
- in 20:41-76, we have his spiritual combat with Pharaoh; and
- in 20:77-98, we have his spiritual combat with his own people, the Israelites. For other incidents, consult the Index.

إِذْ رَأَى نَارًا ...

10. Behold, he saw a fire:

C2541. A fire: It appeared like an ordinary fire, which always betokens the presence of men in a desert or a lonely place.

Moses made for it alone, to fetch the wherewithal for making a fire for his family, and perhaps to find some direction as to the way, from the people he should meet there.

But it was not an ordinary fire. It was a Burning Bush: a Sign of the Glory of Allah.

... فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا ...

so he said to his family, "Tarry ye; I perceive a fire;

... لَعَلِّي آتِيكُمْ مِنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجْدُ عَلَى النَّارِ هُدًى (١٠)

perhaps I can bring you some burning brand therefrom or find some guidance at the fire."

C2542. The spiritual history of Moses begins here.

It was the beginning of his mission. His physical life, infancy, and upbringing are referred to later on, to illustrate another point.

Moses, when he grew up, left the palace of Pharaoh and went to the Midianite people, in the Sinai peninsula. He married among them, and was now traveling with his family, when he was called to his mission by Allah.

He went to look for a fire for comfort and guidance. He found a higher and holier comfort and guidance. The whole passage is full of portent meaning, which is reflected in the short rhymed verses in the original. (R).

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ يَا مُوسَى (١١)

11. But when he came to the fire, a voice was heard:

"O Moses!

إِنِّي أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَاخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ ...

12. "Verily I am thy Lord!

Therefore (in My presence) put off thy shoes:

C2543. The shoes are to be put off as a mark of respect.

Moses was now to put away his mere worldly interests, he having been chosen by Allah, the Most High. (R).

... إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى (١٢)

thou art in the sacred valley Tuwa.

C2544. This was the valley just below Mount Sinai, where subsequently he was to receive the Torah.

وَأَنَا اخْتَرْتُكَ فَاسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَى (١٣)

13. "I have chosen thee:

listen, then, to the inspiration (sent to thee).

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ...

14. "Verily, I am Allah:

...لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا...

there is no god but I:

...فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي (١٤)

so serve thou Me (only), and establish regular prayer for celebrating My praise.

إِنَّ السَّاعَةَ آتِيَةٌ...

15. "Verily the Hour is coming --

C2545. The first need is to mend our lives and worship and serve Allah, as in the last verse.

The next is to realise the meaning of the Hereafter, when every soul will get the meed of its conduct in this life.

...أَكَادُ أَخْفِيهَا لِتُجْزَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا تَسْعَى (١٥)

My design is to keep it hidden -- for every soul to receive its reward by the measure of its endeavour.

C2546. Ukhfi may mean either "keep it hidden", or "make it manifest",

and the Commentators have taken, some one meaning and some the other.

- If the first is taken, it means that the exact hour or day when the Judgment comes is hidden from man;
- if the second, it means that the fact of the Judgment to come is made known, that man may remember and take warning.

I think that both meanings are implied. (R).

فَلَا يَصُدُّكَ عَنْهَا مَنْ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِهَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ...

16. "Therefore let not such as believe not therein but follow their own lusts,

...فَقَرَّدَى (١٦)

divert thee therefrom, lest thou perish!"

C2547. Moses had yet to meet the formidable opposition of the arrogant, Pharaoh and his proud Egyptians, and latter, the rebellion of his own people. In receiving his commission, he is warned of both dangers. This relates to man's own soul:

when once the light reaches him, let him hold fast to it lest he perish.

He will be beset with dangers of all kinds around him, the worst will be the danger of unbelieving people who seem to thrive on their selfishness and in following their own vain desires! (R).

وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَى (١٧)

17. "And what is that in thy right hand, O Moses?"

قَالَ هِيَ عَصَايَ...

18. He said, "It is my rod: on it I lean;

C2548. Now comes the miracle of the rod.

First of all, the attention of Moses himself is drawn to it, and he thinks of the ordinary uses to which he puts it in his daily life. (R).

...أَتَوَكَّأُ عَلَيْهَا وَأَهُشُّ بِهَا عَلَى غَنَمِي...

with it I beat down fodder for my flocks;

...وَلِيَّ فِيهَا مَآرِبٌ أُخْرَى (١٨)

and in it I find other uses."

قَالَ أَلْقِهَا يَا مُوسَى (١٩)

19. (Allah) said, "Throw it, O Moses!"

فَأَلْقَاهَا ...

20. He threw it,

...فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَى (٢٠)

and behold! it was a snake, active in motion.

C2549. Cf. 7:107, where a different word (thu'ban) is used for "snake" and the qualifying adjective is "plain (for all to see)".

The scene there is before Pharaoh and his magicians and people: the object is to show the hollowness of their magic by a miracle: the rod appears before them as a long and creeping writhing serpent.

Here there is a symbol to present Allah's power to Moses' mind and understanding: the rod becomes a **Hayy** (a live snake), and its "live motion is what is most to be impressed on the mind of Moses, for there were no other spectators. So the highest spiritual mysteries can be grasped, with Allah's gift of insight, from the most ordinary things of daily use. Once they are grasped, there is no question of fear. They really are the virtues of this life lifted up to the glorious spiritual plane.

قَالَ خُذْهَا وَلَا تَخَفْ...

We shall return it at once to its former condition"...

...سَنُعِيدُهَا سِيرَتَهَا الْأُولَى (٢١)

We shall return it at once to its former condition"...

وَأَضْمُ يَدَكَ إِلَى جَنَاحِكَ تَخْرُجَ بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ...

22. "Now draw thy hand close to thy side:

it shall come forth white (and shining), without harm (or stain) --

C2550. The second of the greater Miracles shown to Moses was the "White (shining) Hand".

Ordinarily, when the skin becomes white, it is a sign of disease, leprosy or something loathsome. Here there was no question of disease: on the contrary, the hand was glorified, and it shone as with a divine light.

Such a miracle was beyond Egyptian or human magic. (R).

...آيَةٌ أُخْرَى (٢٢)

as another Sign --

لِنُرِيكَ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا الْكُبْرَى (٢٣)

23. "In order that We may show thee (two) of Our Greater Signs.

أَذْهَبْ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى (٢٤)

24. "Go thou to Pharaoh, for he had indeed transgressed all bounds."

C2551. Moses, having been spiritually prepared now gets his definite commission to go to Pharaoh and point out the error of his ways.

So inordinate was Pharaoh's vanity that he had it in his mind to say: "I am your Lord Most High!" (79:24).

Section 2

قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي (٢٥)

25. (Moses) said:

"O my Lord! expand me my breast;"

C2552. The **breast** is reputed to be the seat of knowledge and affections.

The gift of the highest spiritual insight is what he prays for first. Cf. 94:1.

This was the most urgent in point of time. There are three other things he also asks for: viz.

1. Allah's help in his task, which at first appears difficult to him,
2. the gift of eloquence, and the removal of the impediment from his speech; and
3. the counsel and constant attendance with him of his brother Aaron, whom he loved and trusted, for he would otherwise be alone among the Egyptians.

وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي (٢٦)

26. "Ease my task for me;

وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّن لِّسَانِي (٢٧)

27. "And remove the impediment from my speech.

C2553. Literally, "Loosen a knot from my tongue".

يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي (٢٨)

28. "So they may understand what I say:

وَأَجْعَلْ لِّي وَزِيرًا مِّنْ أَهْلِي (٢٩)

29. "And give me a Minister from my family,

هَارُونَ أَخِي (٣٠)

30. "Aaron, my brother;

اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي (٣١)

31. "Add to my strength through him,

C2554. Literally, "Strengthen my back with him".

A man's strength lies in his back and backbone so that he can stand erect and boldly face his tasks.

وَأَشْرِكْهُ فِي أَمْرِي (٣٢)

32. "And make him share my task:

كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا (٣٣)

33. "That we may celebrate Thy praise without stint,

C2555. The requests that Moses makes are inspired, not by earthly but by spiritual motives.

The motive, expressed in the most general terms, is to glorify Allah, not in an occasional way, but systematically and continuously, "without stint".

The clauses in this verse and the next, taken together, govern all the requests he makes, from verse 25 to verse 32.

وَتَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا (٣٤)

34. "And remember Thee without stint:

إِنَّكَ كُنْتَ بِنَا بَصِيرًا (٣٥)

35. "For Thou art He that (ever) regardeth us."

C2556. The celebration of Allah's praise and remembrance is one form of showing gratitude on the part of Moses for the Grace which Allah has bestowed upon him.

قَالَ قَدْ أُوتِيتَ سُؤْلَكَ يَا مُوسَى (٣٦)

36. (Allah) said:

"Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!"

C.144 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(20: 37-76)

*From his birth was Moses prepared for his task.
His mother received guidance, so that
Allah's purpose might be fulfilled. Moses
Was brought up in Pharaoh's palace and trained
In all the learning of Egypt. Yet he drank
The Love of his people in his mother's milk
Adventures and trials he had, including
His stay with the Midianites-until
He was called to his double mission: to preach
To Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and to free
His own people. So he and Aaron went
To Pharaoh, who rejected Allah and His Signs,
But appointed a trial of strength between
His magicians and Moses. Moses won;
And the Truth of Allah was accepted
By some Egyptians, but not by Pharaoh.*

وَلَقَدْ مَنَّا عَلَيْكَ مَرَّةً أُخْرَى (٣٧)

37. "And indeed We conferred a favor on thee another time (before).

إِذْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ مَا يُوحَىٰ (٣٨)

38. "Behold! We sent to thy mother, by inspiration, the message:

C2557. The story is not told, but only those salient points recapitulated which bear on the upbringing and work of Moses.

Long after the age of Joseph, who had been a Wazir to one of the Pharaohs, there came on the throne of Egypt a Pharaoh who hated the Israelites and wanted them annihilated. He ordered Israelite male children to be killed when they were born.

Moses' mother hid him for a time, but when further concealment was impossible, a thought came into her mind that she should put her child into a chest and send the chest floating down the Nile. This was not merely a foolish fancy of hers. It was Allah's Plan to bring up Moses in all the learning of the Egyptians, in order that that learning itself should be used to expose what was wrong in it and to advance the glory of Allah.

The chest was floated into the river Nile. It flowed on into a stream that passed through Pharaoh's Garden. It was picked up by Pharaoh's people and the child was adopted by Pharaoh's wife.

See 28:4-13.

أَنْ أَقْذِفِيهِ فِي التَّابُوتِ فَاقْذِفِيهِ فِي الْيَمِّ فَلْيُلْقِهِ الْيَمُّ...

39. "Throw (the child) into the chest, and throw (the chest) into the river:

...بِالسَّاحِلِ يَأْخُذْهُ عَدُوٌّ لِّي وَعَدُوٌّ لَهُ...

the river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him':

C2558. Pharaoh was an enemy to Allah, because he was puffed up and he blasphemed, claiming to be God himself.

He was an enemy to the child Moses, because he hated the Israelites and wanted to have their male children killed; also because Moses stood for Allah's revelation to come.

...وَأَلْقَيْتُ عَلَيْكَ مَحَبَّةً مَّيِّ ...

but I cast (the garment of) love over thee from Me:

C2559. Allah made the child comely and lovable, and he attracted the love of the very people who, on general grounds, would have killed him.

... وَلِئَصْنَعَ عَلَيَّ عَيْنِي (٣٩)

and (this) in order that thou mayest be reared under Mine eye.

C2560. See [n. 2558](#) above.

By making the child Moses so attractive as to be adopted into Pharaoh's household, not only was Moses brought up in the best way possible from an earthly point of view, but Allah's special Providence looked after him in bringing his mother to him, as stated in the next verse, and thus nourishing him on his mother's milk and keeping him in touch, in his inner growth, with the feelings and sentiments of his people Israel.

إِذْ تَمْشِي أُخْتُكَ فَتَقُولُ ...

40. "Behold! thy sister goeth forth and saith,

... هَلْ أَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ مَن يَكْفُلُهُ ...

'Shall I show you one who will nurse and rear the (child)?'

C2561. We may suppose that the anxious mother, after the child was floated on the water, sent the child's sister to follow the chest from the bank and see where and by whom it was picked up. When it was picked up by Pharaoh's own family and they seemed to love the child, she appeared like a stranger before them, and said, "Shall I search out a good wet-nurse for the child, that she may rear the child you are going to adopt?"

That was exactly what they wanted. She ran home and told her mother. The mother was delighted to come and

fold the infant in her arms again and feed it at her own breast, and all openly and without any concealment.

...فَرَجَعْنَاكَ إِلَىٰ أُمِّكَ كَيْ تَقَرَّ عَيْنُهَا وَلَا تَحْزَنَ...

So We brought thee back to thy mother, that her eye might be cooled and she should not grieve.

C2562. The mother's eyes had, we may imagine, been sore with scalding tears at the separation from her baby.

Now they were cooled: a phrase meaning that her heart was comforted.

...وَقَاتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْعَمِّ وَقَاتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْعَمِّ وَقَاتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْعَمِّ وَقَاتَلْتَ نَفْسًا فَنَجَّيْنَاكَ مِنَ الْعَمِّ...

Then thou didst slay a man, but We saved thee from trouble, and We tried thee in various ways.

C2563. Years passed. The child grew up. In outward learning he was of the house of Pharaoh.

In his inner soul and sympathy he was of Israel. One day, he went to the Israelite colony and saw all the Egyptian oppression under which Israel labored. He saw an Egyptian smiling an Israelite, apparently with impunity.

Moses felt brotherly sympathy and smote the Egyptian. He did not intend to, kill him, but in fact the Egyptian died of the blow. When this became known, his position in Pharaoh's household became impossible. So he fled out of Egypt, and was only saved by Allah's grace.

He fled to the Sinai Peninsula, to the land of the Midianites, and had various adventures. He married one of the daughters of the Midianite chief, and lived with the Midianites for many years, as an Egyptian stranger. He had many trials and temptations, but he retained his integrity of character.

...قَلْبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ...

Then didst thou tarry a number of years with the people of Midian.

C2564. See [last note](#).

After many years spent in a quiet life, grazing his father-in-law's flocks, he came one day to the valley of Tuwa underneath the great mountain mass of Sinai, called Tur (in Arabic). The peak on the Arabian side (where Moses was) was called Horeb by the Hebrews.

Then was fulfilled Allah's Plan: he saw the fire in the distance, and when he went up, he was addressed by Allah and chosen to be Allah's Messenger for that age.

...ثُمَّ جِئْتَ عَلَىٰ قَدَرٍ يَا مُوسَىٰ (٤٠)

Then didst thou come hither as ordained, O Moses!

وَأَصْطَنَعْتُكَ لِنَفْسِي (٤١)

41. "And I have prepared thee for Myself (for service)"...

اذهب أنت وأخوك بآياتي ولا تنيا في ذكري (٤٢)

42. "Go, thou and thy brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in keeping Me in remembrance.

C2565. We may suppose that Moses had fled alone to the land of Midian, and that he had now come alone (with his family but not with his brother) to Tuwa, as described in [n. 2542 above](#).

When he was honoured with his mission, and was granted his request that his brother Aaron should accompany him, we may suppose that he took steps to get Aaron to come to him, and their meeting was in Tuwa. Some time may be supposed to have elapsed before they were in Egypt, and then they prayed, and received these directions in their Egyptian home.

Aaron was either an elder or a younger brother, we are not told which. In either case he was born when the ban on Israelite new-born babes was not in operation. Moses had been out of touch with him, and it speaks greatly for his family affection that he remembered him and prayed for his comradeship in the most serious spiritual work of his life.

اذْهَبَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ ...

43. "Go, both of you, to Pharaoh,

C2566. Their mission was in the first instance to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians, and then to lead Israel out of Egypt.

... إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ (٤٣)

for he has indeed transgressed all bounds;

C2567. Compare the same phrase in 20:24.

Having glanced at the early life of Moses we come back now to the time when Moses' actual ministry begins. The earlier personal story of Moses is rounded off.

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهُ يَتَذَكَّرُ أَوْ يَخْشَىٰ (٤٤)

44. "But speak to him mildly; perchance he may take warning or fear (Allah)."

C2568. So far Pharaoh in his inordinate vanity had forgotten himself and forgotten how small a creature he was before Allah. This was to be brought to his recollection, so that he might perhaps repent and believe, or at least be deterred by fear from "transgressing all bounds".

Some men eschew wrong from sincere love of Allah and understanding of their fellow-men, and some (of coarser minds) from the fear of consequences. Even the latter conduct may be a step to the former.

قَالَا رَبَّنَا إِنَّنَا نَخَافُ أَنْ يُفْرِطَ عَلَيْنَا أَوْ أَنْ يَطَّعَىٰ (٤٥)

45. They (Moses and Aaron) said:

"Our Lord! we fear lest he hasten with **insolence** against us, or lest he transgress all bounds."

C2569. They were now in Egypt (see n. 2565 above) and therefore in the power of the Pharaoh. The local atmosphere called for the greatest courage and firmness on their part to carry out the dangerous mission which had been entrusted to them.

قَالَ لَا تَخَافَا...

46. He said:

"Fear not: for I am with you:

...إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ أَسْمَعُ وَأَرَى (٤٦)

I hear and see (everything).

فَأْتِيَاهُ فُفُولًا إِنَّا رَسُولَا رَبِّكَ...

47. "So go ye both to him, and say,

'Verily we are Messengers sent by thy Lord:

...فَأَرْسِلْ مَعَنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَا تُعَذِّبْهُمْ...

send forth, therefore, the Children of Israel with us, and afflict them not:

C2570. The Children of Israel were subjected to all sorts of oppression and indignities. They were given hard tasks; their leaders were unjustly beaten; they were forced to make bricks without straw; and they "groaned in bondage" (Exod. 5:6-19. 6:5).

...فَقَدْ جِئْنَاكَ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكَ...

with a Sign, indeed, have we come from thy Lord!

...وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَىٰ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَىٰ (٤٧)

And peace to all who follow guidance!

C2571. Allah, in His infinite Mercy, always offers Peace to the most hardened sinners, even those who are warring against Him.

But, as stated in the next verse, their defiance cannot go on with impunity indefinitely. The punishment must inevitably come for sin, whether the sinner is great or small.

إِنَّا قَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْنَا أَنَّ الْعَذَابَ عَلَىٰ مَن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ (٤٨)

48. "'Verily it has been revealed to us that the Penalty (awaits) those who reject and turn away.'"

قَالَ فَمَنْ رَبُّكُمَا يَا مُوسَى (٤٩)

49. (When this message was delivered), (Pharaoh) said: "Who, then, O Moses, is the Lord of you two?"

C2572. Notice how subtly Pharaoh rejects the implication in Moses' speech, in which Moses had referred to "thy Lord" (verse 47).

Pharaoh implicitly repudiates the suggestion that the God who had sent Moses and Aaron could possibly be Pharaoh's Lord. He asks insolently, "Who is this Lord of yours, of Whom ye speak as having sent you?"

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى (٥٠)

50. He said: "Our Lord is He Who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature, and further, gave (it) guidance."

C2573. The answer of Moses is straightforward, dignified, and illuminating. He will not dispute about "my Lord" or "your Lord," the God of Israel, or the God of Egypt. He and his brother were proud to serve "our Lord," but He was the universal Lord and Cherisher, the One and Only God, Who had created all beings and all things.

It was from Him that each created thing derived its form and nature, including such free-will and power as man had got.

He, Pharaoh, was subject to the same condition. In order that the free-will should be rightly exercised, Allah had given guidance through His Messengers, and His Signs. Moses and Aaron stood as such Messengers, with such Signs. Will Pharaoh now understand and do right?

قَالَ فَمَا بَالُ الْفُرُونَ الْأُولَى (٥١)

51. (Pharaoh) said: "What then is the condition of previous generations?"

C2574. But Pharaoh was not the man to accept teaching from the despised Israelite- one, too, who in his eyes was a renegade from the higher Egyptian civilisation.

"If," he says in effect, "there is only one God, to Whom all things are referred, this is a new religion.

What of the religion of our ancestors?

Were they wrong in worshipping the Egyptian gods?

And if they were wrong, are they in misery now?

He wanted to trap Moses into a scathing denunciation of his ancestors, which would at once have deprived him of the sympathy or the hearing of the Egyptian crowd.

قَالَ عَلَّمَهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي فِي كِتَابٍ...

52. He replied:

"The knowledge of that is with my Lord, duly recorded:

C2575. Moses did not fall into the trap. He remembered the injunction given to him to speak mildly (20:44). He speaks mildly, but does not in any way whittle down the truth.

He said in effect: 'Allah's knowledge is perfect, as if, with men, it were a record. For men may make mistakes or may not remember, but Allah never mistakes and never forgets.

But Allah is not only All-Knowing: He is also All-Good. Look around you: the whole earth is spread out like a carpet. Men go to and fro in it freely. He sends abundance of water from the skies, which comes down in Nile floods and fertilizes the whole soil of Egypt, and feeds men and animals.'

...لَا يَضِلُّ رَبِّي وَلَا يَنْسَى (٥٢)

my Lord never errs, nor forgets --

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَسَلَكَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا...

53. "He Who has made for you the earth like a carpet spread out; has enabled you to go about therein by roads (and channels);

C2576. Sabil means not only a road, but would include water-roads or channels, and in modern conditions, airways- in fact all means of communication.

وَأَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً ...

and has sent down water from the sky."

C2577. This seems to be outside the speech of Moses, and connects itself with the following verses 54-56, as part of the Word of Allah, expanding the speech of Moses and explaining the working of Allah's Providence in nature.

... فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِّن نَّبَاتٍ شَتَّى (٥٣)

With it have We produced diverse pairs of plants each separate from the others.

C2578. Azwaj. - we might translate here (as in 15:88) by "classes" instead of "pairs"; but as sex in plants seems to be referred to elsewhere (see 13:3, and n. 1804), I translate "pairs".

كُلُوا وَارْعَوْا أَنْعَامَكُمْ...

54. Eat (for yourselves) and pasture your cattle:

...إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى (٥٤)

verily, in this are Signs for men endued with understanding.

Section 3

مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ...

55. From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you,

...وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى (٥٥)

and from it shall We bring you out once again.

C2579. The verse ought really to go into the last Section.

وَلَقَدْ أَرَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَأَبَى (٥٦)

56. And We showed Pharaoh all Our Signs, but he did reject and refuse.

C2580. This is a sort of general introduction to the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh.

The Signs are not only the countering of the fraudulent magic of Egypt with real miracles, but the subsequent Plagues (not mentioned here) and the Crossing of the Red Sea by Israel. (R).

قَالَ أَجِئْتَنَا لِنُخْرِجَنَّكَ مِنْ أَرْضِنَا بِسِحْرِكَ يَا مُوسَى (٥٧)

57. He said: "Hast thou come to drive us out of our land with thy magic, O Moses?"

C2581. The Egyptians accused Moses of a design to deprive them of their land, and of exercising black magic.

Both charges were palpably false.

What Moses wanted to do was to free his people from bondage. The Egyptians had all the power in their possession.

As to magic, the Egyptians judged Moses by themselves. They accused the Prophet of Allah of doing the same, though both his outlook and the source of his strength were altogether different.

فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّكَ بِسِحْرٍ مِّثْلِهِ فَاجْعَلْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكَ مَوْعِدًا...

58. "But we can surely produce magic to match thine!

So make a tryst between us and thee,

...لَا نُخْلِفُهُ نَحْنُ وَلَا أَنْتَ مَكَانًا سُوًى (٥٨)

which we shall not fail to keep -- neither we nor thou -- in a place where both shall have even chances."

C2582. Suwan: literally, 'equal, even'.

It has been construed to mean:

- a place equally distant for both sides, a central place, or
- equally convenient to both sides, or

- an open level plain, where the people can collect with ease.

All these are possible meanings, but the one I have adopted is more comprehensive, and includes the others, viz.:

a place where both sides shall have even chances. "a fair place," as Palmer Laconically translates it.

قَالَ مَوْعِدُكُمْ يَوْمَ الزَّيْنَةِ وَأَنْ يُحَشِّرَ النَّاسُ ضَحَىٰ (٥٩)

59. Moses said: "Your tryst is the Day of the Festival, and let the people be assembled when the sun is well up."

C2583. A great day of a Temple Festival, when the temples and streets were decorated, and people were on holiday, free from work.

Moses makes this appointment in order to collect as large a number as possible, for his first duty is to preach the Truth. And he apparently did it with some effect with some Egyptians (20:70, 72-76), though the Pharaoh and his high and mighty officers rejected the Truth and afterwards paid the Penalty.

فَقَتَّلَ فِرْعَوْنُ فَجَمَعَ كَيْدَهُ ثُمَّ أَتَىٰ (٦٠)

60. So Pharaoh withdrew: he concerted his plan, and then came (back).

C2584. Pharaoh was apparently taken aback at Moses appointing a solemn day of public Festival, when there would be a large concourse and there would be sure to be some people not in the Court clique, who might be critical of Pharaoh's own sorcerers.

But probably there was something more in their dark counsels, something unfair and wicked, to which Moses refers in his speech in the next verse.

قَالَ لَهُم مُّوسَىٰ...

61. Moses said to him:

...وَيَلُكُم لَأ تَفْتَرُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا فَيُسْحِتَكُمْ بِعَذَابٍ...

"Woe to you! forge not ye a lie against Allah, lest He destroy you (at once) utterly by chastisement:

...وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ افْتَرَى (٦١)

the forger must suffer frustration!"

C2585. Moses had some idea of their trickery and deceit. They would palm off their fraudulent magic as coming from Allah or from their gods!

He warns them that their tricks will stand exposed, and their hopes will be defeated.

فَتَنَازَعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ وَأَسْرُوا النَّجْوَى (٦٢)

62. So they disputed, one with another, over their affair, but they kept their talk secret.

C2586. They knew that they had here to deal with no ordinary man, but a man with powers above what they could conceive of.

But evil always thinks evil. Judging Moses and Aaron by their own standards, they thought that these two were also tricksters, with some tricks superior to their own. All they had to do was to stand together, and they must win.

I construe [20:63-64](#) to be private talk among themselves, followed by their open challenge to Moses in [20:65](#).

قَالُوا إِنَّ هَذَانِ لَسَاحِرٌ...

63. They said:

"These two are certainly (expert) magicians:

...ان يُرِيدَانِ أَنْ يُخْرِجَاكُم مِّنْ أَرْضِكُمْ بِسِحْرِهِمَا...

their object is to drive you out from your land with their magic,

...وَيَدَّهَبَا بِطَرِيقَتِكُمُ الْمُثَلَى (٦٣)

and to do away with your most cherished institutions.

C2587. Cf. [20:104](#).

'Your most cherished institutions,' i.e., 'your ancestral and time- honoured religion and magic'.

Muthla, feminine of Amthal, most distinguished, honoured, cherished.

Tariqat: way of life, institutions, conduct.

فَأَجْمِعُوا كَيْدَكُمْ ثُمَّ اتُّوَا صَفًّا...

64. "Therefore concert your plan. And then assemble in (serried) ranks:

...وَقَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْيَوْمَ مَنْ اسْتَعْلَى (٦٤)

he wins (all along) today who gains the upper hand."

C2588. Presumably Pharaoh was in this secret conference, and he promises the most lavish rewards to the magicians if they overcome Moses. See 7:114. That-but I think more than that-is implied.

That day was to be the crisis: if they won then, they would win all along, and Moses and his people would be crushed.

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى إِمَّا أَنْ نُلْقِيَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ نَكُونَ أَوْلَ مَنْ أَلْقَى (٦٥)

65. They said:

"O Moses! whether wilt thou that thou throw (first) or that we be the first to throw?"

قَالَ بَلْ أَلْقُوا...

66. He said, "Nay, throw ye first!"

...فَإِذَا حِبَالُهُمْ وَعَصِيُّهُمْ يُخَيَّلُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ سِحْرِهِمْ أَنَّهَا تَسْعَى (٦٦)

Then behold their ropes and their rods -- so it seemed to him on account of their magic -- began to be in lively motion!

C2589. Their bag of tricks was so clever that it imposed upon all beholders.

Their ropes and their rods were thrown, and seemed to move about like snakes. So realistic was the effect that

even Moses felt the least bit of doubt in his own mind. He of course had no tricks, and he relied entirely on Allah.

فَأَوْجَسَ فِي نَفْسِهِ خِيفَةً مُوسَى (٦٧)

67. So Moses conceived in his mind a (sort of) fear.

C2590. The concerted attack of evil is sometimes so well contrived from all points that falsehood appears and is acclaimed as the truth. The believer of truth is isolated, and a sort of moral dizziness creeps over his mind.

But by Allah's grace Faith asserts itself, gives him confidence, and points out the specific truths which will dissipate and destroy the teeming brood of falsehood.

فَلَمَّا لَا تَخَفَ بِكَ أَنْتَ الْأَعْلَى (٦٨)

68. We said: "Fear not! for thou hast indeed the upper hand:

وَأَلْقِ مَا فِي يَمِينِكَ تَلْقَفْ مَا صَنَعُوا ...

69. "Throw that which is in thy right hand: quickly will it swallow up that which they have faked.

...إِنَّمَا صَنَعُوا كَيْدُ سَاحِرٍ...

What they have faked is but a magician's trick:

...وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاحِرُ حَيْثُ أَتَى (٦٩)

and the magician thrives not (no matter) where he goes."

C2591. The meaning may be either

- that falsehood and trickery may have their day, but they cannot win everywhere, especially in the presence of Truth, or
- that trickery and magic must come to an evil end.

فَأَلْقَى السَّحْرَةَ سُجَّدًا قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ هَارُونَ وَمُوسَى (٧٠)

70. So the magicians were thrown down to prostration: they said,

"We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses."

C2592. Cf. this passage with 7:120-126 and n. 1082, and n. 1083.

قَالَ آمَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ آذَنَ لَكُمْ...

71. (Pharaoh) said:

"Believe ye in Him before I give you permission?

...إِنَّهُ لَكَبِيرُكُمْ الَّذِي عَلَّمَكُمُ السِّحْرَ...

Surely this must be your leader, who has taught you magic!

C2593. Pharaoh accuses his sorcerers who have been converted, of having been in league with Moses all the time, and in fact of having been led and taught by him!

So arrogance and evil cannot conceive of Allah's worlds and worlds of beauty and truth beyond its own narrow vision! It is truly blind and its very cleverness deludes it to wander far from the truth.

...فَلَأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ وَلَأَصْلَبَنَكُمْ فِي جُذُوعِ النَّخْلِ...

Be sure I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm-trees:

...وَلَتَعْلَمُنَّ أَيُّنَا أَشَدُّ عَذَابًا وَأَبْقَى (٧١)

So shall ye know for certain, which of us can give the more severe and the more lasting Punishment!"

قَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْتِرَكَ عَلَى مَا جَاءَنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالَّذِي فَطَرَنَا...

72. They said:

"Never shall we regard thee as more than the Clear Signs that have come to us, or than Him Who created us!

C2594. Clear Signs:

- the miracles,
- the personality of the Messengers of Allah,
- the logic of events as they unfolded themselves, and
- the light of inner conviction in their own conscience.

There are in addition the Signs and Proofs of Allah in nature, which are referred to in many places, e.g., [20:53-54](#).

...فَأَقْضِ مَا أَنْتَ قَاضٍ...

So decree whatever thou desirest to decree:

...إِنَّمَا تَقْضِي هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٧٢)

for thou canst only decree (touching) the life of this world.

C2595. Thus was the first part of the mission of Moses- that to the Egyptians- fulfilled.

See n. 1083 to 7:126; also [Appendix V](#).

إِنَّا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّنَا لِيَغْفِرَ لَنَا خَطَايَانَا...

73. "For us, we have believed in our Lord: may He forgive us our faults,

...وَمَا أَكْرَهْتَنَا عَلَيْهِ مِنَ السِّحْرِ...

and the magic to which thou didst compel us:

C2596. The magic mummerly, and deceptions which pertained to Egyptian Pagan religion became a creed, a State article of faith, to which all citizens were compelled to bow, and which its priests were compelled actively to practice. And Pharaoh was at the head of the whole system-the high priest or the supreme god. With justice, therefore, do the converted magicians lay the blame on Pharaoh, effectively negating Pharaoh's disingenuous charge that they had been in league with Moses.

These falsehoods and deceptions-combined in many cases with horrid cruelties, open and secret,-were common to many Pagan systems. Some of them have been investigated in detail in Sir John G. Frazer' Golden Bough.

...وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (٧٣)

for Allah is Best and Most Abiding."

إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَأْتِ رَبَّهُ مُجْرِمًا فَإِنَّ لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ...

74. Verily he who comes to his Lord as a sinner (at judgment) -- for him is Hell:

C2597. The verses 20:74-76 are best construed as comments on the story of the converted Egyptians who had "purified themselves (from evil)".

But some construe them as a continuation of their speech.

...لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى (٧٤)

therein shall he neither die nor live.

وَمَنْ يَأْتِهِ مُؤْمِنًا قَدْ عَمِلَ الصَّالِحَاتِ فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمُ الدَّرَجَاتُ الْعُلَى (٧٥)

75. But such as comes to Him as Believers who have worked righteous deeds -- for them are ranks exalted --

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا...

76. Gardens of Eternity, beneath which flow rivers:

they will dwell therein for aye:

...وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ مَنْ تَزَكَّى (٧٦)

such is the reward of those who purify themselves (from evil).

C2598. As the Egyptian magicians had done when they confessed the One True God.

C.145 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(20: 77-104)

*The people of Israel were rescued from bondage
And led on their way to the Promised Land.
Allah's Grace gave them light and guidance, but they
Rebelled under the leadership of one
Called the Samiri; he melted the gold
Of their jewels and made an idol-a calf
For their worship-a thing without life or power.
Moses destroyed the idol, and cursed
The man who led the people astray.*

Section 4

وَلَقَدْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي...

77. We sent an inspiration to Moses:

"Travel by night with my servants,

C2599. Time passes, and at last Moses is commanded to leave Egypt with his people by night. They were to cross the Red Sea into the Sinai Peninsula. They were told to have no fear of Pharaoh or of the sea or of the unknown desert country of Sinai into which they were going.

They crossed dry-shod, while Pharaoh who came in pursuit with his troops was overwhelmed by the sea. He and his men all perished.

There is no emphasis on this episode here. But the emphasis is laid on the hard task which Moses had with his own people after he had delivered them from the Egyptian bondage.

...فَأَضْرِبْ لَهُمْ طَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْرِ يَبَسًا...

and strike a dry path for them through the sea,

...لَا تَخَافُ دَرْكًا وَلَا تَخْشَىٰ (٧٧)

without fear of being overtaken (by Pharaoh), and without (any other) fear."

فَاتَّبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ بِجُنُودِهِ فَغَشِيَهُمْ مِّنَ الْيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمْ (٧٨)

78. Then Pharaoh pursued them with his forces, but the waters completely overwhelmed them and covered them up.

وَأَضَلَّ فِرْعَوْنُ قَوْمَهُ وَمَا هَدَىٰ (٧٩)

79. Pharaoh led his people astray instead of leading them aright.

C2600. It is the duty of kings and leaders to give the right lead of their people. Instead of that, the evil ones among them lead them astray and are the cause of the whole of the people perishing.

يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ قَدْ أَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ عَدُوِّكُمْ...

80. O ye Children of Israel!

We delivered you from your enemy,

...وَوَاعَدْنَاكُمْ جَانِبَ الطُّورِ الْأَيْمَنِ...

and We made a Covenant with you on the right side of Mount (Sinai),

C2601. Right side: Cf. 19:52, and n. 2504, towards the end.

The Arabian side of Sinai (Jabal Musa) was the place where Moses first received his commission before going to Egypt, and also where he received the Torah after the Exodus from Egypt.

...وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلْوَى (٨٠)

and We sent down to you Manna and quails:

كُلُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ...

81. (Saying):

"Eat of the good things We have provided for your sustenance,

C2602. Cf. 2:57 and n. 71; and 7:160.

1 should like to construe this not only literally but also metaphorically.

'Allah has looked after you and saved you. He has given you ethical and spiritual guidance. Enjoy the fruits of all this, but do not become puffed up and rebellious (another meaning in the root Taga); otherwise the Wrath of Allah is sure to descend on you.'

...وَلَا تَطْغَوْا فِيهِ فَيَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبِي...

but commit no excess therein, lest My Wrath should justly descend on you:

...وَمَنْ يَحِلِّ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدْ هَوَى (٨١)

and those on whom descends My Wrath do perish indeed!

C2603. This gives the key-note to Moses' constant tussle with his own people, and introduces immediately afterwards the incident of the golden calf.

وَإِنِّي لَعَفَّارٌ لِّمَن تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا ثُمَّ اهْتَدَى (٨٢)

82. "But, without doubt, I am (also) He that forgives again and again, to those who repent, believe, and do right -- who, in fine are ready to receive true guidance."

وَمَا أَعَجَلَكَ عَنِ قَوْمِكَ يَا مُوسَى (٨٣)

83. (When Moses was up on the mount, Allah said:)

"What made thee hasten in advance of thy people, O Moses?"

C2604. This was when Moses was up on the Mount for forty days and forty nights: 2:51, and n. 66.

Moses had left the elders of Israel with Aaron behind him: Exod. 24:14.

While he was in a state of ecstatic honour on the Mount, his people were enacting strange scenes down below. They were tested and tried, and they failed in the trial. They made a golden calf for worship, as described below.

See also 7:148-150 and notes 1112-1114 and 1115-1118.

قَالَ هُمْ أُولَاءِ عَلَىٰ أَنرِي وَعَجِلْتُ إِلَيْكَ رَبِّ لِتَرْضَىٰ (٨٤)

84. He replied:

"Behold, they are close on my footsteps:

I hastened to Thee, O my Lord, to please Thee."

قَالَ فَإِنَّا قَدْ فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ مِن بَعْدِكَ وَأَضَلَّهُمُ السَّامِرِيُّ (٨٥)

85. (Allah) said: "We have tested thy people in thy absence: the Samiri has led them astray."

C2605. Who was this Samiri?

If it was his personal name, it was sufficiently near the meaning of the original root-word to have the definite article attached to it:

Cf. the name of the Khalifa Mu'tasim (Al-Mu'tasim).

What was the root for "Samiri"?

If we look to old Egyptian, we have Shemer: A stranger, foreigner (Sir E.A. Wallis Budge's Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary, 1920,p. 815 b).

As the Israelites had just left Egypt, they might quite well have among them an Egyptianised Hebrew bearing that nickname. That the name Shemer was subsequently not unknown among the Hebrews is clear from the Old Testament.

In 3 Kings, 16:24 we read that Omri, king of Israel, the northern portion of the divided kingdom, who reigned about 903-896 B.C., built a new city, Samaria, on a hill which he bought from Shemer, the owner of the hill, for two talents of silver.

See also Renan: History of Israel, 2:210.

For a further discussion of the word, see [n. 2608 below](#).

فَرَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا...

86. So Moses returned to his people in state of indignation and sorrow.

...قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَمْ يَعِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ وَعَدًّا حَسَنًا...

He said: "O my people! did not your Lord make a handsome promise to you?"

C2606. There are two promises referred to in this verse, the promise of Allah and the promise of the people of Israel.

They form one Covenant, which was entered into through their leader Moses. See 20:80, and 2:63, n. 78.

Allah's promise was to protect them and lead them to the Promised Land, and their promise was to obey Allah's Law and His commandments.

...أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْعَهْدُ...

Did then the promise seem to you long (in coming)?

...أَمْ أَرَدْتُمْ أَنْ يَجَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُمْ مَوْعِدِي (٨٦)

Or did ye desire that Wrath should descend from your Lord on you, and so ye broke your promise to me?"

قَالُوا مَا أَخْلَفْنَا مَوْعِدَكَ بِمَلَكِنَا...

87. They said:

"We broke not the promise to thee, as far as lay in our power:

...وَلَكِنَّا حُمَلْنَا أَوْزَارًا مِّن زِينَةِ الْقَوْمِ فَقَذَفْنَاهَا...

but we were made to carry the weight of the ornaments of the (whole) people, and we threw them (into the fire),

C2607. Cf. Exod. 12:35-36: the Israelites, before they left Egypt, borrowed from the Egyptians 'jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment'; and 'they spoiled the Egyptians'" i.e., stripped them of all their valuable jewelry.

Note that the answer of the backsliders is disingenuous in various ways.

1. The Samiri was no doubt responsible for suggesting the making of the golden calf, but they could not on that account disclaim responsibility for themselves: the burden of the sin is on him who commits it, and he cannot pretend that he was powerless to avoid it.
2. At most the weight of the gold they carried could not have been heavy even if one or two men carried it, but would have been negligible if distributed.
3. Gold is valuable, and it is not likely that if they wanted to disburden themselves of it, they had any need to light a furnace, melt it, and cast it into the shape of a calf.

...فَكَذَّبَكَ أَخْفَى السَّامِرِيُّ (٨٧)

and that was what the Samiri suggested.

C2608. See [n. 2605](#) about the Samiri.

If the Egyptian origin of the root is not accepted we have a Hebrew origin in "Shomer" a guard, watchman, sentinel. The Samiri may have been a watchman, in fact or by nickname.

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عَجَلًا جَسَدًا ...

88. "Then he brought out (of the fire) before the (people) the image of a calf:

C2609. See. n. 1113 to 7:148, where the same words are used and explained.

... لَهُ خُورًا ...

it seemed to low:

C2610. See n. 1114 to 7:148.

... فَقَالُوا هَذَا إِلَهُكُمْ وَإِلَهُ مُوسَىٰ فَنَسِيَ (٨٨)

so they said: 'This is your god, and the god of Moses, but (Moses) has forgotten!'"

C2611. Moses has forgotten: i.e., 'forgotten both us and his god. He has been gone for so many days. He is searching for a god on the Mount when his god is really here!'

This is spoken by the Samiri and his partisans, but the people as a whole accepted it, and it therefore, becomes their speech.

أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَنَّهُمْ يُرْجَعُ إِلَيْهِمْ فَوَلَّوْا وَلَا يُمَلِّكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا (٨٩)

89. Could they not see that it could not return them a word (for answer), and that it had no power either to harm them or to do them good?

C2612. This is a parenthetical comment.

How blind the people were!

They had seen Signs of the true living God, and yet they were willing to worship this dead image!

The true living God had spoken in definite words of command, while this calf could only emit some sounds of lowing, which were themselves contrived by the fraud of the priests. This image could do neither good nor harm, while Allah was the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Universe, Whose Mercy was unbounded and Whose Wrath was terrible.

Section 5

وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَهُمْ هَارُونُ مِنْ قَبْلُ يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّمَا فُتِنْتُمْ بِهِ...

90. Aaron had already, before this, said to them:

"O my people! ye are being tested in this:

C2613. "Resist this temptation: you are being tested in this. Do not follow after the semi-Egyptian Samiri, but obey me."

...وَإِنَّ رَبَّكُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ فَاتَّبِعُونِي وَأَطِيعُوا أَمْرِي (٩٠)

for verily your Lord is (Allah) Most Gracious:

so follow me and obey my command."

C2614. The Bible story makes Aaron the culprit, which is inconsistent with his office as the high priest of Allah and the right hand of Moses. See n. 1116 to 7:150.

Our version is more consistent, and explains, through the example of the Samiri, the lingering influences of the Egyptian cult of Osiris the bull-god.

قَالُوا ...

91. They had said:

C2615. Obviously Aaron's speech in the last verse, and the rebels' defiance in this verse, were spoken before the return of Moses from the Mount.

... لَنْ نُبْرَحَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفِينَ حَتَّىٰ يَرْجِعَ إِلَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ (٩١)

"We will not abandon this cult, but we will devote ourselves to it until Moses returns to us."

C2616. The rebels had so little faith that they had given Moses up for lost, and never expected to see him again.

قَالَ يَا هَارُونُ مَا مَنَعَكَ إِذْ رَأَيْتَهُمْ ضَلُّوا (٩٢)

92. (Moses) said: "O Aaron! what kept thee back, when thou sawest them going wrong

أَلَا تَتَّبِعَنَ أَفْعَصَيْتَ أَمْرِي (٩٣)

93. "From following me?

Didst thou then disobey my order?"

C2617. Moses, when he came back, was full of anger and grief. His speech to Aaron is one of rebuke, and he was also inclined to handle him roughly:

see next verse.

The order he refers to is that stated in 7:142, "Act for me amongst my people: do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief."

قَالَ يَبْنَؤُمَّ لَا تَأْخُذْ بِلِحْيَتِي وَلَا بِرَأْسِي...

94. (Aaron) replied:

"O son of my mother! seize (me not) by my beard nor by (the hair of) my head!

C2618. Cf. 7:150.

...إِنِّي خَشِيتُ أَنْ تَقُولَ فَرَّقْتَ بَيْنَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَمْ تَرْفُئْ قَوْلِي (٩٤)

Truly I feared lest thou shouldst say,

"Thou hast caused a division among the Children of Israel, and thou didst not respect my word!"

C2619. This reply of Aaron's is in no way inconsistent with the reply as noted in 7:150.

On the contrary there is a dramatic aptness in the different points emphasised on each occasion. In Surah 7, we were discussing the Ummah of Israel, and Aaron rightly says, "The people did indeed reckon me as naught, and went near to slay me!" In addition, "Let not the enemies rejoice over my misfortune" he is referring by implication to his brother's wish to maintain unity among the people.

Here the unity is the chief point to emphasize: we are dealing with the Samiri as mischief-monger, and he could best be dealt with by Moses, who proceeds to do so.

قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكَ يَا سَامِرِيُّ (٩٥)

95. (Moses) said: "What then is thy case, O Samiri?"

C2620. Moses now turns to the Samiri, and the Samiri's reply in the next verse sums up his character in a few wonderful strokes of character-painting.

The lesson of the whole of this episode is the fall of a human soul that nominally comes to Allah's Truth in a humble position but makes mischief when and as it finds occasion. It is no less dangerous and culpable than the arrogant soul, typified by Pharaoh, which gets into high places and makes its leadership the cause of ruin of a whole nation.

قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ...

96. He replied:

"I saw what they saw not:

فَقَبَضْتُ قُبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ...

so I took a handful (of dust) from the footprint of the Messenger,

...فَقَبَضْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلَتْ لِي نَفْسِي (٩٦)

and threw it (into the calf): thus did my soul suggest to me."

C2621. This answer of the Samiri is a fine example of unblushing effrontery, careful evasion of issues, and invented falsehoods.

He takes upon himself to pretend that he had far more insight than anybody else: he saw what the crowd did not see. He saw something supernatural.

"The Messenger" is construed by many Commentators to mean the angel Gabriel. Rasul (plural, rusul) is used in several places for "angels" e.g., in 11:69, 77; 19:19; and 35:1.

But if we take it to mean the Messenger Moses, it means that the Samiri saw something sacred or supernatural in his footprints: perhaps he thinks a little flattery would make Moses forgive him. The dust became sacred, and

his throwing it into the calf made the calf utter a lowing sound! As if that was the point at issue!

He does not answer the charge of making an image for worship. But finally, with arrogant effrontery, he says, "Well, that is what my soul suggested to me, and that should be enough!"

قَالَ فَادْهَبْ فَإِنَّ لَكَ فِي الْحَيَاةِ أَنْ تَقُولَ لَا مِسَاسَ...

97. (Moses) said: "Get thee gone! but thy (punishment) in this life will be that thou wilt say, 'Touch me not';

C2622. He and his kind were to become social lepers, untouchables; perhaps also sufficiently arrogant to hold others at arm's length, and say "Noli me tangere" (touch me not) .

...وَأِنَّ لَكَ مَوْعِدًا لَنْ نُخْلِقَهُ...

and moreover (for a future penalty) thou hast a promise that will not fail:

C2623. Namely, the promised Wrath of Allah:

see [20:81](#), [89:25](#).

...وَأَنْظِرْ إِلَى إِلَهِكَ الَّذِي ظَلَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا...

now look at thy god, of whom thou hast become a devoted worshipper:

...لَنُحَرِّقَنَّهُ ثُمَّ لَنَنْسِفَنَّهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا (٩٧)

we will certainly (melt) it in a blazing fire and scatter it broadcast in the sea!"

C2624. The cast effigy was destroyed. Thus ends the Samiri's story, of which the lessons are indicated in [n. 2620](#) above.

It may be interesting to pursue the transformations of the word Samiri in later times. For its origin see notes [2605](#) and [2608](#) above.

Whether the root of Samiri was originally Egyptian or Hebrew does not affect the later history. Four facts may be noted.

1. There was a man bearing a name of that kind at the time of Moses, and he led a revolt against Moses and was cursed by Moses.
2. In the time of King Omri (903-896 B.C.) of the northern kingdom of Israel, there was a man called Shemer, from whom, according to the Bible, was bought a hill on which was built the new capital of the kingdom, the town of Samaria.
3. The name of the hill was Shomer (watchman, vigilant guardian), and that form of the name also appears as the name of a man (see 3 Kings [16:24](#));
 some authorities think the town was called after the hill and not after the man (Hastings's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics), but this is for our present purposes immaterial.
4. There was and is a dissenting community of Israelites called Samaritans, who have their own separate Pentateuch and Targum, who claim to be the true Children of Israel, and who hold the Orthodox Jews in contempt as the latter hold them in contempt; they claim to be the true guardians (Shomerim) of the Law, and that is probably the true origin of the name Samaritan, which may go further back in time than the foundation of the town of Samaria. I think it probable that the schism originated from the time of Moses, and that the curse of Moses on the Samiri explains the position.

إِنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ...

98. But the God of you all is the One Allah:

there is no god but He:

...وَسِعَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا (٩٨)

all things He comprehends in His knowledge.

كَذَلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ مَا قَدْ سَبَقَ...

for We have sent thee a Message from Our own Presence.

...وَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ذِكْرًا (٩٩)

for We have sent thee a Message from Our own Presence.

C2625. Thus superseding previous revelations; for this (the Quran) is direct from Allah, and is not a second-hand exposition on other men's authority.

مَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وِزْرًا (١٠٠)

100. If any do turn away therefrom, verily they will bear a burden on the Day of Judgement;

خَالِدِينَ فِيهِ...

101. They will abide in this (state):

...وَسَاءَ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حِمْلًا (١٠١)

and grievous will the burden be to them on that Day --

C2626. Cf. [6:31](#).

If people are so immersed in the evanescent falsehoods of this life as to turn away from the True and the Eternal, they will have a rude awakening when the Judgment comes. These very things that they thought so enjoyable here;-

- taking advantage of others,
- material self-indulgence,
- nursing grievances instead of doing good, etc., -

will be a grievous burden to them that day, which they will not be able to escape or lighten.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ...

102. The Day when the Trumpet will be sounded:

...وَنَحْشُرُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ زُرْقًا (١٠٢)

that Day, We shall gather the sinful, blear-eyed (with terror),

C2627. Zurqa:

- having eyes different from the normal colour, which in the East is black and white;
- having blue eyes,
- or eyes afflicted with dimness or blindness, or squint; hence metaphorically, blear-eyed (with terror).

يَخَافُونَ بَيْنَهُمْ إِنْ أَلَيْتُمْ إِلَّا عَشْرًا (١٠٣)

103. In whispers will they consult each other:

"Ye tarried not longer than ten (Days);"

C2628. Faced with eternity they will realise that their life on this earth, or the interval between their sin and their punishment, had a duration which practically amounted to nothing.

They express this by the phrase "ten days", but their wiser heads think that even this is an over-estimate. It was but a brief day!

نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ...

104. We know best what they will say,

إِذْ يَقُولُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ طَرِيقَةً إِنْ أَلَيْتُمْ إِلَّا يَوْمًا (١٠٤)

when their leader most eminent in Conduct will say: "Ye tarried not longer than a day!"

C2629. Cf. [20:63](#) and [n. 2587](#).

Note that it is the shrewdest and most versed in Life who will say this, because they will be the first to see the true situation.

C.146 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(20: 105-135)

*Such is the lure of Evil; but high
And low will be leveled on the Day*

*Of Judgement, before the Eternal, the Gracious,
 The King, the Truth, who sends the Quran
 To teach and to warn. Will man remember
 How Adam's arch-enemy, Satan, caused
 His fall, and will he yet he blind
 To the Signs of Allah? Nay-but let
 Not Evil make you impatient: the Prize
 Of the Hereafter is better than aught
 Of the glitter of this life: wait in Faith
 And the End will show the triumph
 Of Truth, Goodness, and Righteousness.*

Section 6

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ...

105. They ask thee concerning the mountains:

C2630. In the last verse, it was the deceptiveness and relativity of Time that was dealt with. Here we come to the question of space, solidity, bulk.

The question was actually put to the holy Prophet: what will become of the solid Mountains, or in the English phrase, "the eternal hills"?

They are no more substantial than anything else in this temporal world. When the "new world", ([13:5](#)) of which Unbelievers doubted, is actually in being, the mountains will cease to exist.

We can imagine the scene of judgment as a level plain, in which there are no ups and downs and no places of concealment. All is straight and level, without comers, mysteries, or lurking doubts.

...بِقُلُوبٍ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا (١٠٥)

say,

"My Lord will uproot them and scatter them as dust;"

C2631. The one word **nasafa** carries the ideas of:

- tearing up by the roots,
- scattering like chaff or dust,
- and winnowing.

Its twofold repetition here intensifies its meaning.

فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا (١٠٦)

106. "He will leave them as plains smooth and level;"

لَا تَرَى فِيهَا عِوَجًا وَلَا أَمْتًا (١٠٧)

107. Nothing crooked or curved wilt thou see in their place."

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَّبِعُونَ الدَّاعِيَ ...

108. On that Day will they follow the Caller (straight):

C2632. The Caller: the angel whose voice will call and direct all souls. (R).

... لا عِوَجَ لَهُ ...

no crookedness (can they show) him:

... وَخَشَعَتِ الأصْوَاتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ ...

all sounds shall humble themselves in the presence of (Allah) Most Gracious:

C2633. A beautiful personification of hushed Sound. First there is the loud blast of the Trumpet. Then there is the stillness and hush of awe and reverence: only the tramp of the ranks marching along will be heard. (R).

... فَلَا تَسْمَعُ إِلَّا هَمْسًا (١٠٨)

nothing shalt thou hear but the tramp of their feet (as they march).

يَوْمَئِذٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا (١٠٩)

109. On that Day shall no intercession avail except for those for whom permission has been granted by (Allah) Most Gracious and whose word is acceptable to Him.

C2634. Cf. 2:255 in the Verse of the Throne.

Here man is in the accusative case governed by **tanfa'u**, and it is better to construe as I have done. That is, intercession will benefit no one except those for whom Allah has granted permission, and whose word (of repentance) is true and sincere, and therefore acceptable to Allah.

Others construe: no intercession will avail, except by those to whom Allah has granted permission, and whose word (of intercession) is acceptable to Allah.

In that case the two distinct clauses have no distinct meanings.

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ...

110. He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them:

C2635. Cf. 2:255 and n. 297.

The slight difference in phraseology (which I have tried to preserve in the Translation) will be understood as a beauty when we reflect that here our attention is directed to the Day of Judgment, and in 2:255 the wording is general, and applies to our present state also.

...وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِهِ عِلْمًا (١١٠)

but they shall not compass it with their knowledge.

وَعَنَتِ الْوُجُوهُ لِلْحَيِّ الْقَيُّومِ...

111. (All) faces shall be humbled before (Him) -- the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal:

...وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ حَمَلَ ظُلْمًا (١١١)

hopeless indeed will be the man that carries iniquity (on his back).

C2636. The metaphor of the burden of sin which the unjust carry on their backs is referred to in 20:100-101 (see n. 2626), in 6:31, and in other passages.

Note that all faces, those of the just as well as of the unjust, will be humble before Allah: the best of us can

claim no merit equal to Allah's Grace. But the just will have Hope: while the unjust, now that the curtain of Reality has risen, will be in absolute Despair!

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ...

112. But he who works deeds of righteousness, and has faith,

...فَلَا يَخَافُ ظُلْمًا وَلَا هَضْمًا (١١٢)

will have no fear of harm nor of any curtailment (of what is his due).

C2637. See [the last note](#).

Unlike the unjust, the righteous, who have come with Faith, will now find their Faith justified: not only will they be free from any fear of harm, but they will be rewarded to the full, or, as has been said in other passages, where His bounty rather than His justice is emphasised, they will get more than their due reward (3:27; 39:10).

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا وَصَرَّفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ...

113. Thus have we sent this down -- an Arabic Qur'an -- and explained therein in detail some of the warnings,

...لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا (١١٣)

in order that they may fear Allah, or that it may cause their remembrance (of Him).

C2638. The Quran is in clear Arabic, so that even an unlearned people like the Arabs might understand and profit by its warnings, and the rest of the world may learn through them, as they did in the first few centuries of Islam and may do again when we Muslims show ourselves worthy to explain and exemplify its meaning.

The evil are warned that they may repent; the good are confirmed in their Faith and strengthened by their remembrance of Him.

فَنَعَالَى اللَّهُ الْمَلِكُ الْحَقُّ...

114. High above all is Allah, the King, the Truth!

...وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ...

Be not in haste with the Qur'an before its revelation to thee is completed,

C2639. Allah is above every human event or desire. His purpose is universal. But He is the Truth, the absolute Truth; and His kingdom is the true kingdom, that can carry out its will.

That Truth unfolds itself gradually, as it did in the gradual revelation of the Quran to the holy Prophet. But even after it was completed in a volume, its true meaning and purpose only gradually unfold themselves to any given individual or nation. No one should be impatient about it.

On the contrary, we should always pray for increase in our own knowledge, which can never at any given moment be complete.

...وَقُلْ رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا (١١٤)

but say, "O my Lord! advance me in knowledge."

Section 7

وَلَقَدْ عَاهَدْنَا إِلَىٰ آدَمَ مِنْ قَبْلُ...

115. We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam,

C2640. The spiritual fall of two individual souls, Pharaoh and the Samiri, having been referred to, the one through overweening arrogance, and the other through a spirit of mischief and false harking back to the past,

our attention is now called to the prototype of Evil (Satan) who tempted Adam, the original Man, and to the fact that though man was clearly warned that Satan is his enemy and will only effect his ruin, he showed so little firmness that he succumbed to it at once at the first opportunity.

...فَنَسِيَ وَلَمْ نَجِدْ لَهُ عَزْمًا (١١٥)

but he forgot: and We found on his part no firm resolve.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى (١١٦)

116. When We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam," they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis: he refused.

فَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ إِنَّ هَذَا عَدُوٌّ لَكَ وَلِزَوْجِكَ...

117. Then We said:

"O Adam! verily, this is an enemy to thee and thy wife:

...فَلَا يُخْرِجَنَّكَمَا مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ فَتَشْقَى (١١٧)

so let him not get you both out of the Garden so that thou art landed in misery.

C2641. See [last note](#).

The story is referred to in order to draw attention to man's folly in rushing into the arms of Satan though he had been clearly forewarned.

إِنَّ لَكَ أَلًا تَجُوعَ فِيهَا وَلَا تَعْرَى (١١٨)

118. "There is therein (enough provision) for thee not to go hungry nor to go naked,

C2642. Not only had the warning been given that Satan is an enemy to man and will effect his destruction, but it was clearly pointed out that all his needs were being met in the Garden of Happiness. Food and clothing, drink and shelter, were amply provided for.

وَأَنَّكَ لَا تَظْمَأُ فِيهَا وَلَا تَصْحَى (١١٩)

119. "Nor to suffer from thirst, nor from the sun's heat."

فَوَسْوَسَ إِلَيْهِ الشَّيْطَانُ...

120. But Satan whispered evil to him:

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ هَلْ أَدُلُّكَ عَلَى شَجَرَةِ الْخُلْدِ وَمَلِكٍ لَّا يَبْلَى (١٢٠)

he said, "O Adam! shall I lead thee to the Tree of **Eternity** and to a kingdom that never decays?"

C2643. The suggestion of Satan is clever, as it always is: it is false, and at the same time plausible.

It is false, because;

- that felicity was not temporary, like the life of this world, and
- they were supreme in the Garden, and a "kingdom" such as was dangled before them would only add to their sorrows.

It was plausible, because;

- nothing had been said to them about Eternity, as the opposite of Eternity was not yet known, and
- the sweets of Power arise from the savour of Self, and Self is an alluring (if false) attraction that misleads the Will.

فَأَكَلَا مِنْهَا فَبَدَّتْ لُهُمَا سَوْآتُهُمَا...

121. In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them:

C2644. Hitherto they knew no evil. Now, when disobedience to Allah had sullied their soul and torn off the garment, their sullied Self appeared to themselves in all its nakedness and ugliness, and they had to resort to external things (leaves of the Garden) to cover the shame of their self-consciousness..

...وَوَطَّفَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ...

they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden:

...وَعَصَى آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَى (١٢١)

thus did Adam disobey His Lord, and allow himself to be seduced.

C2645. Adam had been given the will to choose, and he chose wrong, and was about to be lost when Allah's Grace came to his aid. His repentance was accepted, and Allah chose him for His Mercy, as stated in the next verse.

ثُمَّ اجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ وَهَدَىٰ (١٢٢)

122. But his Lord chose him (for His Grace):

He turned to him, and gave him guidance.

قَالَ اهْبِطَا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ...

123. He said: "Get ye down, both of you -- all together, from the Garden, with enmity one to another;

C2646. The little variations between this passage and 2:38 are instructive, as showing how clearly the particular argument is followed in each case.

Here **ihbita** ('get ye down') is in the dual number, and refers to the two individual souls, our common ancestors.

in 2:38 **ihbita** is in the plural number, to include all mankind and Satan, for the argument is about the collective life of man.

On the other hand, "all together" includes Satan, the spirit of evil, and the enmity "one to another" refers to the eternal feud between Man and Satan, between our better and Evil.

...فَأَمَّا يَا أَيُّكُمْ مَنِّي هُدًى فَمَن اتَّبَعَ هَذَايَ فَلَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَشْقَىٰ (١٢٣)

but if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery.

C2647. For the same reason as in the last note, we have here the consequences of Guidance to the individual, viz.: being saved from going astray or from falling into misery and despair.

In 2:38, the consequences expressed, though they apply to the individual, are also appropriate taken collectively: "on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا...

124. "But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down,

...وَتَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى (١٢٤)

and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."

C2648. Again, as in the last two verses, there is a variation from the previous passage (2:39).

The consequences of the rejection of Allah's guidance are here expressed more individually: a life narrowed down, and a blindness that will persist beyond this life.

"A life narrowed down" has many implications:

- it is a life from which all the beneficent influences of Allah's wide world are excluded;
- in looking exclusively to the "good things" of this life, it misses the true Reality.

قَالَ رَبِّ لِمَ حَشَرْتَنِي أَعْمَى وَقَدْ كُنْتُ بَصِيرًا (١٢٥)

125. He will say: "O my Lord! why hast thou raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?"

C2649. Because Allah gave him physical sight in this life for trial, he thinks he should be favoured in the real world, the world that matters! He misused his physical sight and made himself blind for the other world.

قَالَ كَذَلِكَ أَتَتْكَ آيَاتُنَا فَنَسِيْتَهَا...

126. (Allah) will say:

"Thus didst thou, when Our Signs came unto thee, disregard them:

...وَكَذَلِكَ الْيَوْمَ تُنْسَى (١٢٦)

so wilt thou, this day, be disregarded."

C2650. 'You were deliberately blind to Allah's Signs: now you will not see Allah's favours, and will be excluded from His Grace.

وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ أَسْرَفَ وَلَمْ يُؤْمِنْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ...

127. And thus do We recompense him who transgresses beyond bounds and believes not in the Signs of his Lord:

...وَلْعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَشَدُّ وَأَبْقَى (١٢٧)

and the Penalty of the Hereafter is far more grievous and more enduring.

C2651. Blindness in the world of enduring Reality is far worse than physical blindness in the world of probation.

أَفَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِنَ الْفُرُونِ...

128. It is not a warning to such men (to call to mind) how many generations before them We destroyed,

...يَمْتَسُونَ فِي مَسَاكِنِهِمْ...

in whose haunts they (now) move?

...إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي النُّهَى (١٢٨)

Verily, in this are Signs for men endued with understanding.

C2652. Cf. [20:54](#).

This phrase concluded the argument of Moses with Pharaoh about Pharaoh's blindness to Allah and the Signs of Allah.

Now it concludes the more general argument about men, concerning whom the saying arose: 'none are so blind as those who will not see.'

Section 8

وَلَوْ لَا كَلِمَةٌ سَبَقَتْ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَكَانَ لِزَامًا ...

129. Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from thy Lord, (their punishment) must necessarily have come;

C2653. Cf. [10:19](#) and n. 1407; also [11:110](#).

In Allah's holy plan and Purpose, there is a wise adjustment of all interests, and a merciful chance and respite given to all, the unjust as well as the just, and His decree or word abides.

The most wicked have a term appointed for them for respite. Had it not been so, the punishment must

necessarily have descended on them immediately for their evil deeds.

... وَأَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى (١٢٩)

but there is a term appointed (for respite).

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ...

130. Therefore be patient with what they say,

C2654. All good men must be patient with what seems to them evil around them. That does not mean that they should sit still and do nothing to destroy evil; for the fight against evil is one of the cardinal points in Islam.

What they are told is that they must not be impatient: they must pray to Allah and commune with Him, so that their patience and faith may be strengthened, and they may be able the better to grapple with evil. For they thus not only get strength but inward spiritual joy..

...وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا...

and celebrate (constantly) the praises of thy Lord before the rising of the sun, and before its setting;

...وَمِنْ أُنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ...

yea, celebrate them for part of the hours of the night, and at the sides of the day:

C2655. Taraf, plural *atraf*, may mean sides, ends, extremities.

If the day be compared to a tubular figure standing erect, the top and bottom are clearly marked, but the sides are not so clearly marked: they would be *atraf* (plural), not *tarafain* (dual).

Now,

- the prayer before sunrise is clearly Fajr;
- that before sunset is Asr:

"part of the hours of the night"

- would indicate Maghrib (early night, just after sunset),
- and Isha, before going to bed.

There is left Zuhr, which is in the indefinite side or middle of the day:

it may be soon after the sun's decline from noon, but there is considerable latitude about the precise hour.

The majority of Commentators interpret in favour of the five Canonical prayers, and some include optional prayers. But I think the words are even more comprehensive.

A good man's life is all one sweet Song of Praise to Allah.

... لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَى (١٣٠)

that thou mayest have (spiritual) joy.

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ...

131. Nor strain thine eyes in longing for the things We have given for enjoyment to parties of them,

... زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ...

the splendor of the life of this world, through which We test them:

... وَرَزَقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (١٣١)

but the provision of thy Lord is better and more enduring.

C2656. The good things of this life make a brave show, but they are as nothing compared with the good of the Hereafter.

Both are provided by Allah. But the former are given to the just and the unjust as a test and trial, and in any case will pass away; while the latter come specially from Allah for His devoted servants, and are incomparably of more value and will last through eternity.

وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا...

132. Enjoin prayer on thy people, and be constant therein.

... لَّا نَسْأَلُكَ رِزْقًا نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكَ...

We ask thee not to provide sustenance:

We provide it for thee.

C2657. **Sustenance**, in the sense of ordinary needs of life, the man of Allah does not worry about. That is provided by Allah for all, the just and the unjust.

But the special provision, the real **Sustenance**, the spiritual fruit, is for a righteous life in the service of Allah.

...وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلتَّقْوَى (١٣٢)

But the (fruit of) the Hereafter is for Righteousness.

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا يَأْتِينَا بِآيَةٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ...

133. They say: "Why does he not bring us a Sign from His Lord?"

C2658. The question or plea of the Unbelievers is disingenuous. Many Signs have come with this Revelation. But the one that should have appealed to those who believed in former revelations and should have convinced them was what was in their own books.

...أَوَلَمْ تَأْتِهِم بَيِّنَةٌ مَا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٣٣)

Has not a clear Sign come to them of all that was in the former Books of revelation?

وَلَوْ أَنَّا أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ مِّن قَبْلِهِ لَقَالُوا...

134. And if We had inflicted on them a Penalty before this, they would have said:

C2659. If the Sign mentioned in the last note did not convince them, it would mean that they were not true to their own faith. They were not straight with themselves. In justice they should have been punished for their falsehood. But they were given further respite.

Or they would again have argued in a circle, and said: "If only Allah had sent us a living messenger we should have believed!"

The living messenger they flout because they want a Sign. The Sign they wish to ignore, because they want a living messenger!

...رَبَّنَا لَوْلَا أَرْسَلْتَ إِلَيْنَا رَسُولًا فَنَتَّبِعَ آيَاتِكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَذَلَّ

وَنَحْزَى (۱۳۴)

"Our Lord! if only Thou hadst sent us a Messenger, we should certainly have followed Thy Signs before we were humbled and put to shame."

فَلْ كُلُّ مُرْتَبِّصٍ فَتْرَبَّصُوا...

135. Say:

"Each one (of us), is waiting: wait ye, therefore,

C2660. If people will not be true to their own lights, what further argument is left?

The Prophet of Allah can only say: "Let us wait the issue: my faith tells me that Allah's Truth must prevail."

Cf. 9:52. (R).

...فَسَتَّعْلَمُونَ مَنْ أَصْحَابِ الصِّرَاطِ السَّوِيِّ وَمَنِ اهْتَدَى (۱۳۵)

and soon shall ye know who it is that is on the straight and even way, and who it is that has received guidance."

C2661. Cf. 19:43.

The straight and even Way must endure, and show that the man who follows it has received true guidance. All falsehood and crookedness must ultimately disappear.



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Zahid Javed Rana, Abid Javed Rana

Lahore, Pakistan

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