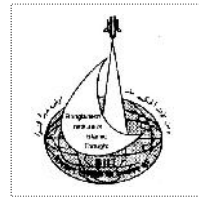


Selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an



Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought

Selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an

By an Editorial Board

ISBN
984-70103-0016-0

©Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT)

First Published
July 2009
Razab 1430
Ashar 1416

Publisher
Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT)
House # 04, Road # 02, Sector # 09, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka – 1230
Phone/Fax : 8950227, 8924256, 06662684755, 01554357066
E-mail: biit_org@yahoo.com Web: www.iiitbd.org

Price
Tk. 175 US\$: 15

Printed by
Al-Falah Printing Press
423 Bara Maghbazar, Dhaka – 1217
Phone: 9345741, 9358432

'Selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an' published by Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT). House # 04, Road # 02, Sector # 09, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka-1230, Phone/Fax: 8950227, 8924256, 06662684755, 01554357066, E-mail: biit_org@yahoo.com, Web: www.iiitbd.org, Price: Tk. 175 US\$: 15

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PUBLISHERS NOTE

This great and noble project started after an article on Life and Tafsir of Maulana Akram Khan written by Shah Abdul Hannan was posted on the Internet. He was then the President of the Bangladesh Institute of Islamic Thought (BIIT). Ahmad Totonji, an international figure and Vice President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), USA, became interested in this article and asked Shah Abdul Hannan whether Maulana Akram Khan's tafsir can be fully translated into English. At that point Shah Abdul Hannan advised him that full translation was not needed, and what was needed was to publish a work in English where the speciality of Moulana Akram Khan's tafsir would be presented, particularly the points where he differed from the majority and agreed with the minority or where he gave his unique ideas.

Ahmad Totonji agreed with this and asked to proceed. Accordingly a team was formed headed by Shah Abdul Hannan, on which initially there were Md. Iftekhar Iqbal of Dhaka University and Md. Abdul Aziz, Deputy Executive Director of BIIT. It was so devised that first of all, out of the five volumes of the Tafsir in Bangla, the portions to be included in the new work would be selected by the team.

After the selection from five volumes, the translation was started by Md. Khairul Alam and Rowshan Zannat, Research Fellow of BIIT. It was indeed a difficult task to transfer the technical meanings from Bangla to English and they did this in the best possible manner. We are thankful for this to them.

After completion of their work it was sent to Md. Mahmudul Hasan, for English editing of the book for it to become of international standard and attractive for sophisticated readers. While editing, he thought that language required improvement and as such he re-translated the whole work. We expressed our gratitude to him for his painstaking work.

We acknowledge the co-operation of Jubaer Mohammad Ehsanul Haque, Assistant Professor, Department of Arabic, Dhaka University who helped the Editor regarding few expressions of Arabic texts. We also acknowledge the role of Raudah Mohd Yunus who helped the project in various ways especially preparing the glossary.

We are also thankful to Iftekhar Iqbal of Dhaka University, Mir Kamal Chowdhury, faculty of International Islamic University Chittagong (IIUC), and Shakil Abdullah, faculty of Manarat International University, for their work in this noble project at the initial stage. We also thank Mohammad Abdul Alim who kindly composed all the Arabic texts in the book.

We are grateful to Md. Abdul Aziz, the Deputy Executive Director of BIIT, for his immense patience and organizing capability that he showed while managing this work.

We believe that this work has become representative of the great work of Maulana Akram Khan. We hope that this book will be very useful to researchers, thinkers, scholars and ulama of home and abroad.

M. Azizul Huq
President, BIIT

TRANSLATION AND EDITORIAL NOTES

Originally my job with regard to this noble project was to have a quick look at an already translated draft for possible language correction and improvement. However, eventually I had to re-translate the entire work.

While translating selections from Akram Khan's Tafsirul Qur'an, I have had to take the role of an editor as well. There were some errors, and incomplete and faulty references in the source text, which I have tried to address according to my ability and the resources available to me. In some cases, I have added my ideas in square brackets mainly for clarification purposes and for adding relevant information. I have also provided complete quotes from the Bible in relevant places. I have retained key Arabic terms as they were in the source text and explained them. Needless to say, my translation of the Qur'anic verses is in compliance with the way Akram Khan translated them into Bangla.

I want to apologize and seek readers' forgiveness for my inability to decipher the significance of few expressions even after consulting books and approaching scholars. Those terms are: dorjon, patara. However, I have provided their meanings in brackets with question marks which suggest my misgiving as well as inability.

For readers not familiar with key Islamic, technical terms and some names, with the help of my wife Raudah Mohd Yunus, I have appended a glossary.

I also want to admit my inabilities and limitations. Despite several readings, there may still be typos and other mistakes in the work, for which I seek forgiveness from Allah and readers' cooperation to correct them in subsequent editions.

May Allah increase our understanding of the Qur'an and forgive us all!

Md. Mahmudul Hasan

FOREWORD

This book presents some salient features of Maulana Akram Khan's *Tafsirul Qur'an*, which he wrote spanning most of his active life as an intellectual and writer. A legendary figure in Muslim Bengal, Akram Khan wrote this tafsir in Bangla when there was no such work in the language. It is true that there were few translations and short commentaries before that; but this is the first full-length tafsir of the Qur'an produced in the Bangla language in a true sense. In this work we have tried to present some selective sections of his tafsir, particularly those parts which reflect his in-depth research on the Qur'an and where he has given different views from those of early mufassirun (exegetes) and upheld minority views (even rare views). Our intention is to give the readers who do not know Bangla an access to this superb, scholarly work.

Moulana Muhammad Akram Khan was among the topmost scholars of former Bengal of the last few hundred years. He was the President of the Bengal Muslim League before the partition of the sub-continent, a remarkable Islamic scholar and an eminent journalist. Above all, he was the writer of a path-breaking biography of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and of the commentary of the Qur'an, as he was a scholar of Muslim history and literature. His *Mostafa Charit*, a biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), clearly demonstrates the profundity of his ability as a researcher. There he analyzed the life of the Prophet in the light of reliable historical materials and accepted only those facts that have been verified. Conversely, he excluded those materials which appeared contrary to reason. He rebutted Orientalist critiques of the Prophet's life and, in this context, he examined some traditions attributed to the Prophet and analyzed their texts. Based on the principles of examining texts (matn) of hadith, laid down by the usuliyyun (scholars of Islamic jurisprudence), he regarded some of them as unacceptable. All may not agree with his ideas, but his work significantly facilitates more critical analysis and helps us rethink about many widely-held views. Moreover, his book on the social history of Muslim Bengal is an unparalleled contribution.

It is difficult to say which is his greatest work — his biography of the Prophet or his commentary of the Quran – in terms of scholarship and their usefulness as intellectual products for the Ummah. Both works are indeed great.

His tafsir is an extra-ordinary work. In what follows, I mention a few points on the specialty of his work. Although some readers may find the language he used a bit old-fashioned, his Bangla is by and large lucid, which is a sheer pleasure to read. I find the language of his tafsir the best among all Bangla translations and commentaries of the Quran. He adopts a very cautious approach and shows his great acumen in choosing his words very carefully and astutely. Some examples are as follows:

- (1) He has translated the word 'taqwa' (2:21) in several ways, one of them is "restraint" (shangjom in Bangla).
- (2) He has translated the word 'fasiq' (2:22) as evil doer (duskarmaparan in Bangla). I find it an apt translation of the word.
- (3) He has translated the word asma as knowledge of essence of all things or matter (bostutattwaguli in Bangla), which is very exceptional.

In his insightful treatment of issues related to women, he does not hesitate to clearly indicate where Allah gives honour to women. For example, he translates a section of verse 36 of Sura Ale Imran – *laisadh dhakaru kal unsa* – as "whereas men are not equal (shamotulla in Bangla) to women." I would advise those who enthusiastically and constantly refer to verse 34 of Sura Nisa to take this verse into account.

In his tafsir, he offers very logical explanations of various events. He had faith in the miraculous abilities of the prophets; however, he did not accept fabricated and irrational stories. He looked at the account of the Prophet Musa fleeing from Egypt with Bani Israel logically and realistically. His main argument is that Musa along with his followers crossed the Nile rather than the Red Sea. Earlier tafsirs were mainly based on Exodus of the Bible and on other legends. His arguments about this issue are as follows:

"In the first part of the verse under discussion (Sura Bakara, verse 50), the word 'Al Bahr' has been used. In the dictionary, the word Bahr has been defined as:

- (1) Accumulated water in plenty, or only saline water. (*Qamus*)
- (2) As opposed to land, it signifies the depth and vastness of waters and the streams of sea. (Jawhari)
- (3) As opposed to land, it signifies saline water, every large stream, or any wide thing. (*Al-Mawrid*)

Akram Khan states:

They were going to the land of their ancestors, or the holy land, to their kith and kin. Their destination was the land of the Jews, Israel, Palestine, and Jerusalem. After crossing the border of Egypt they reached the Sinai Peninsula and Teeh Plateau. Evidence of the same is also available in the Qur'an (Sura Taha: 80 and other verses). Therefore, it is proved beyond doubt that Musa along with the people of Bani Israel started his journey from Goshen; the Sinai Peninsula or the Teeh Plateau and its prairie was their first place of movement.¹

Then Akram Khan argues that it was rather illogical to reach Arabia by crossing 500 miles of sea route and travel from there to Palestine. The irrationality lies in the fact that they were many in number and did not have any means of transportation. So it was very difficult for them to cover such large distances on foot. Instead the easier way for them to reach Sinai was to cross a lake or coastland from Egypt. He further argues that to describe the place where Pharaoh died, the words *bahr* and *yamm* were used. Both of these words can be interpreted as a stream or any form of water body. It is merely a description narrated in Exodus of Old Testament that Pharaoh died drowning in the Red Sea. But there is no evidence for this in the Qur'an or authentic hadith.

Akram Khan states in conclusion:

Musa along with his people started the journey from the Goshen area of Egypt, and after traveling a dry route along the bank of Lake Timsah arrived in Sinai. Before the Suez Canal was dug, the vast land spreading over nearly 100 miles from the Mediterranean Sea to the city of Suez was full of lakes, marshy lands, etc. which still exist in many places. During ebb, water level of this area are

¹ All quotations from Akram Khan's tafsir are taken from this book.

very low, strips of sandy lands rise up and the surrounding marshy lands become dry. On the other hand, these lands become inundated again during tide. In such a condition, if there is excessive spate in sea, water rises very high and sometimes the waves look like pillars and inundate the neighboring area. It is called tide bore. This is the universal and sovereign law of Allah. It should be remembered that as these marshy lands are situated between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, it is very likely that ebb and tide would alternate within a very short time. Musa, according to Allah's order, started his journey from Egypt on the appropriate lunar day and also had the right direction from Allah about his route. Thus, the people of Bani Israel were saved and Pharaoh along with his legion was drowned. To me, this is the most remarkable miracle of the prophetic life of Musa.

In his exegetical work, he supported the view that there is no abrogated (mansukh) verse in the Quran. In the commentary verses 184 and 185 of Sura Baqarah, he writes:

The word yutiqu is not generally used for a person who can accomplish a task at ease, as this term is used only for such a person who can do something with difficulty.

Imam Raghīb has also provided this meaning in his dictionary. But, unfortunately, many interpreters of the Qur'an have interpreted it thus: "Those who do not fast despite their capability of doing so will give fidya (food for a miskeen)." Using this inconsistent translation, some of the progressive scholars have come up with an interpretation that fast can be broken by giving fidya even without a genuine reason. On the other hand, in order to get rid of this intricacy, the commentators of the Qur'an as said above have come up with an argument that verse 2:184 has been abrogated by verse 2:185. But we must remember that it is the word of Allah and He cannot do anything out of whim which needs to be repelled in no time after its revelation. In fact, in my opinion there is not a single verse in the Qur'an that can be called mansukh (abrogated).

He offers a very rational interpretation of verse 228 of Surah Baqarah. He writes, "It has been further said that the husband has the same

right over his wife as the wife has over her husband. If both fulfill their duties, family life will be full of happiness. Man has a degree over woman means that a man's responsibilities are a degree greater. In verse 34 of Surah Nisa, man has been said to be kawwam or maintainer" (See Akram Khan's note 181 in Surah Baqarah).

He expresses the view that it is not lawful to have sexual relations with female slaves except through marriage. He writes:

Some ulama think that this verse [4:3] does not carry the order of marrying the slave women. According to their view, since the slave women can be enjoyed freely by dint of ownership, marriage is not required. I strongly maintain that this view is absolutely contradictory to the general principle of Islam and against the ethical standard promulgated by the Qur'an. In this verse it is clearly stated that: You will marry free women in twos, in threes, in fours or only one, and slave women.

Maulana Muhammad Akram Khan's tafsir is an excellent work in every respect. It bears similarities with Muhammad Asad's tafsir titled *The Message of the Qur'an*. Maulana Akram Khan can be said to be the Asad of South Asia in the field of tafsir though we cannot assert that they met or knew each other. Some might not approve of his rationalist style of exegesis. However, the reader of his commentary must acknowledge that every opinion in his tafsir is buttressed by strong textual and circumstantial evidences. He has used in his tafsir both hadith material and rational arguments extensively, as the reader will find in this book.

We hope this summarized version of his tafsir will help people understand the ideas of this great writer and thinker of Islam with regard to the Qur'an.

Shah Abdul Hannan
Former Secretary to the Govt. of Bangladesh &
Chairman, BIIT Trust

Dhaka, Bangladesh
June 2009

INTRODUCTION

When Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) died, Kazi Abdul Wadud said at a memorial conference organized at Albert Hall in Calcutta: "If such intelligence, culture, and independence could have been reared in a person who grew up and lived in the dark confines of the home with its many restrictions and suppressions, what have Bengali Muslims to be fearful about?"² At the dawn of the twenty-first century when Muslims in this part of the world are still lagging behind other communities³ and are suffering from the loathsome syndrome of self-defeatism, a look back at the life and work of Mohammad Akram Khan (1868-1969)⁴ – popularly known as Maulana Akram Khan – may give rays of hope and bonfires of inspiration to the people at large, especially the Muslims, of this region. As is the case with Rokeya and with many other Muslim luminaries of former Bengal, a research on Akram Khan gives us surprises and disbelief that this land can be the fertile ground of such great scholars and that their successors can be oblivious of their rich cultural and intellectual tradition to such an awful extent! When we find ourselves mesmerized by the seemingly superior achievements of other societies and communities both local and foreign – some of

² Cited by Susie Tharu, "Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain." In S. Tharu, & K. Lalita (Ed.), *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*, vol I (pp. 340-343). London: Pandora, 1991, p. 342.

³ Remarkably, Akram Khan discusses this issue of the deplorable, underprivileged condition of the Muslim community in this region, and it is acknowledged by scholars across religious denominations that Muslims in the South Asian subcontinent have suffered discrimination, prejudice, and differential treatment since the colonial period. As Amalendu De states in the Indian context: "It is quite well-known that due to the uneven growth of the two major segments of population, [...] the Muslims lagged behind the Hindus." ("The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period," *Social Scientist*, 23[4-6], 1995, p. 16)

⁴ Some scholars mention his lifespan as 1868-1968.

whom perhaps for reasons known to them cannot accept Muslims as equals – and engage ourselves in the vicious cycle of self-hatred, the legacy of Akram Khan and the like stares us in the face with a strong feeling of pity and commiseration. While our predecessors in the region left an indelible mark of devotion, selflessness, altruism, profound intellectualism and great scholarship, and above all, self-respect and confidence, we have indulged in flippancy, selfishness, insularity and narrowness, greed and avarice, conceit and narcissism, intellectual pretension, and the worst of all, a fatalistic tendency of self-defeat and self-hate. Studying great figures like Akram Khan may help us wake up from this confused slumber and intellectual disorientation, as it may augur the revival of the lost era of glory and confidence especially in the Muslim community.

The above remark I have made is instigated by my humble observation of the current Muslim intellectual culture particularly in Bangladesh and by my research on Akram Khan's and Rokeya's life and work.⁵ It is also inspired by a great sense of pride I have gathered while working on this tafsir project. It is gratifying to observe that our land is not at least bereft of greats and giants especially when it comes to scholarship. Here is a great man who stands out both in 'secular' and Islamic learning – though there may not be much difference between the two branches of knowledge as long as both are well-intentioned and directed to the wellbeing and service of humanity – and houses in himself a unique combination of journalism and scholarship. Akram Khan was an eclectic scholar being at the height of expertise in journalism, shining in political and social activism, and excelling in Islamic learning in this region at his time. The depth of his Islamic knowledge as manifested in *Tafsirul Qur'an* and in other works especially *Mostafa Charit*⁶ puts him on a par with classical Islamic scholars in terms of both profundity and originality. His tafsir bears testimony to the fact that Islamic scholarship is not confined to the Arab world and that Muslim Bengal is not a barren

⁵ There is a lack of adequate research on Muslim scholars of the region, Akram Khan included. For example, I have recently read an encyclopedia entry on Akram Khan, where the writer seems to be unaware of his great work *Tafsirul Qur'an*.

⁶ Two other important works by Akram Khan are: *Samasya O Samadhan* (Problems and Solutions) and *Moslem Banglar Samajik Itihas* (The Social History of Muslim Bengal).

land with regard to producing towering scholars. This luminary Muslim figure will remain as a source of pride and inspiration for the people in general, especially the Muslims of this region.

His life

This great man was born in a village called Hakimpur in the district of Chabbis Pargana in what is now the state of West Bengal, India at a time of social, political and economic decadence of the Muslims of the subcontinent. Being an orphan at early age, he suffered negligence and adversities, and did not have much institutional education though he managed to appear in the Madrasah Final Examination of Calcutta Alia Madrasah in 1901; and soon after he had to enter the world of work to earn a living. He was well-versed in Arabic literature right from the beginning, and had a deep passion for Persian literature and wrote poetry in the language. Through personal studies, he earned expert knowledge of Bangla, English, Arabic and Persian languages and had profound knowledge of Islam and contemporary society and culture. After the creation of Pakistan and India in the wake of independence from British colonialism in 1947, Akram Khan moved to Dhaka and made it the center of his journalistic, intellectual, and political work. In this region, he is most celebrated as the father of Muslim journalism and as a beacon for subsequent journalists. An institution by himself, Akram Khan contributed to the betterment of the Muslims of former Bengal and Assam during a long period, spanning the British and Pakistan regimes, mainly through his intellectual and political activism.

He began his journalistic career in the early twentieth century and edited major periodicals like *Mohammadi* and *Al-Eslam*. He turned the *Mohammadi* from a monthly into a fortnightly and then into a weekly. What is more, before he took the responsibility of editing *Mohammadi*, it had been a sectarian newspaper of the Ahl Hadith group; but Akram Khan gradually distanced it from the monopoly of one segment of Muslim society. Previously it was a spokespaper of one community, and now under his editorship it turned into a national paper.⁷ Through his continuous endeavors he established Anjuman Ulama Bangla and brought out *Al-Eslam* as its official paper. Both the

⁷ Mohammad Monsuruddin, "Akram Khan'r Sahitya Sadhona" (Literary Practice of Akram Khan). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 138-145), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 140.

*All quotations from Bangla source texts are translated into English by me.

Anjuman and *Al-Eslam* created an enormous awakening and awareness among the Muslims of Bengal. Later on he brought out dailies like the *Zamana* and *Sebak* from Calcutta, which was followed by the *Daily Azad* that played a paramount role in creating a vibrant political culture among the Muslims. The pioneer daily of Muslim Bengal and Assam, the *Daily Azad* played an important part also in realizing the Pakistan dream which eventually facilitated the creation of two homelands – Pakistan and Bangladesh – for the Muslims of the South Asian subcontinent. In 1946, Indian politics took a different turn, and Akram Khan felt the need to bring out an English newspaper. Mujibur Rahman's *The Mussulmans* had been closed down long ago. Akram Khan bought the ownership of Maulana Mohammad Ali's *Comrade* and revived the English newspaper.

It is true that there were few newspapers run by Muslims before the emergence of Akram Khan; but those few were mainly concerned with petty, divisive theological issues such as whether Muslims should shake one hand or both when they meet one another and whether they should brush the teeth from the right or left.⁸ But Akram Khan was above these trivial issues and addressed real problems Muslims were facing. His efforts were directed to create not division but bridges by way of spreading proper knowledge and expanding networks. He diagnosed the condition of the Muslim community and accordingly addressed their moral and intellectual diseases to elevate their standing both nationally and internationally. Mohammad Nasiruddin, a contemporary of Akram Khan and the editor of *Saugat*, pays homage to him thus:

I respected him as a good writer, a thinker, accomplished journalist, powerful orator and a person of generous heart. The difference in our work strategy and methodology could not hinder our shared ideological struggle. My belief was that differences of opinion could not stop those who wanted to work sincerely for the development of society, literature and culture. Both of us succeeded in building up the nation while remaining unswerving in our own opinions.⁹

⁸ Muhiuddin Khan, "Monishar Alokey Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan" (Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan in the Criterion of a Genius). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 191-197), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 193.

⁹ Cited by Abu Jafar, "Bhumika" (Introduction). In *Maulana Akram Khan*, Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, December 1986, p. x.

In his capacity as an editor, Akram Khan promoted contemporary Muslim writers and intellectuals and their ideas. For example, many of Rokeya's works especially her *Aborodhbasini* (Secluded Ones) were published in Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* and this makes the reformist ideas of Rokeya more relevant when discussing the life and work of Akram Khan. Importantly, many people who entered journalism especially through his *Mohammadi* and *Azad* succeeded and thrived in this profession.

Before Akram Khan appeared in the political scene, the Muslims had launched several anti-colonial, independence movements such as, Faqir Andolon, Mujahid Andolon, Sipahi Biplob and Forayaji Andolon to liberate the people from the clutch of colonialism. Hence, they were already known as the marked enemies of the British. Moreover, in the aftermath of the Great Rebellion in 1857, the marginalization of Muslims and their exclusion from spheres of public influence were quite obvious.¹⁰ Hence, the British became involved in a conspiracy to cripple the Muslims socially, politically and economically with the collaboration of the Hindus.¹¹ In such a political climate Muslims were at the receiving end of colonial oppression and communal prejudice. While the people of British India were oppressed by the foreign rulers, the local Hindus coined derogatory terms to refer to the Muslims, such as: Mlechchha and Jobon.¹² In such a sorry state of the Muslims, Akram Khan along with others devoted himself to rescue the community from the joint conspiracy of the British and the local Hindus. He used *Mohammadi*, *Al-Eslam*, *Daily Jamana*, *Daily Sebak*, and *Daily Azad* to give hope to the Muslims and thus prompted them to compete with other communities in the world of work. He tried not only to secure an honorable place for them in the subcontinent but also in the wider Muslim world at large.

Along with his deep, continuous engagement in the profession of journalism, he was hugely active in national and Muslim politics that he mainly used to protect the rights of Muslims who were as a matter of course discriminated against by the colonizers and by their Hindu neighbors. He was also deeply involved in the anti-colonial and

¹⁰ Muhiuddin Khan, p. 193.

¹¹ Abu Jafar, p. xiv.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Khilafat movements and thus fought against colonial rule and struggled to defend the Khilafat in Turkey. The Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) was a pan-Islamic as well as all-India movement dedicated to defend the Khilafat.¹³ Despite being a liberal Muslim thinker who wanted to work with the Hindus in national politics, Akram Khan was disillusioned by the lukewarm response of the Hindu politicians to the cause of Muslim interests, especially to the issue of Khilafat. This disappointment led him to fully devote himself in Muslim politics, and finally he engaged himself in the service of the Muslim League.¹⁴ However, Akram Khan was first and foremost a journalist and a thoughtful writer who took the career of politics later on as a necessary means of the overall welfare and development of the people.

The pan-Islamic ideas of Jamal-al-Din Afghani (1838-1897) created a widespread political consciousness among the Muslims of the subcontinent whose political sentiments were spurred by a number of events – both national and global – detrimental to the interests of Muslims, such as, the revocation of the Partition of Bengal in 1911, the Italian (1911) and Balkan (1911-1912) attacks on Turkey, and later Great Britain's participation in the First World War (1914-18) against Turkey.¹⁵ The Turkish Khilafat was the last Muslim nation which could possibly challenge and check the imperial rise of Europe. The belligerent attitude of the British government toward it greatly worried the Muslim leaders of this region like Akram Khan, as it also created a comprador class and some local lickspittles who worked as collaborators or intermediaries in the service of the British Raj. Conversely, Akram Khan not only gave intellectual support to the movement to protect the Khilafat, but also toured the rural areas of Bengal and organized meetings especially in Dhaka and Chittagong to rally public support. In 1920 when the Bengal Provincial Khilafat Committee was organized, he became its General Secretary. His

¹³ The Turkish sultanate that was the last Muslim rule assuming the title of Khalifah of Islam came to an end in November 1922, and Turkey was transformed into a republic in October 1923, the Khilafat was finally abolished in March 1924.

¹⁴ Rana Razzaq, "Mohammad Akram Khan." In *Banglapedia*, retrieved on June 17, 2009 from http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/K_0164.htm

¹⁵ Sufia Ahmed, "Khilafat Movement." In *Banglapedia*, retrieved on May 10, 2009 from http://banglapedia.net/HT/K_0236.HTM.

Mohammadi also played a prominent role in triggering political consciousness and an anti-colonial feeling among the Muslims throughout the region under his and other great figures like Maulana Azad's and Maniruzzaman Islambadi's leadership.

The colonial administration was markedly perturbed by the widespread response and public support that the Khilafat movement received from people of all walks of life. Hence, it cracked down on the Khilafat leaders and establishments, and many leaders including Akram Khan were arrested in 1921. Akram Khan started working on his tafsir and completed translating Ampara (the 30th juz of the Qur'an) while he was in prison, and he kept translating and interpreting the entire Qur'an throughout the rest of his life and fortunately was able to publish it during his lifetime. However, he wrote *Mostafa Charit*, his most outstanding work besides the tafsir, before the imprisonment.

During the height of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements when big newspaper headlines were stirring up political agitation and influencing public opinion, the colonial government obviously followed a carrot-and-stick strategy. A section of society that was benefitted by colonial rule supported the British policy against the Sultan in Turkey. An executive council comprising mainly nawabs and local zamindars used to rule this country at the behest of the colonial government. One nawab of that executive council once called for Akram Khan who he thought belonged to the sect of Ahl Hadith and the sultans of Turkey were followers of Ahl Sunnat wal-Jama'at. The nawab requested him to write for the British policy and against the 'sunni' Khalifah. Akram Khan refused to comply. Then that Muslim member of the executive council tried to entice him through various ways. After presenting his arguments in favor of British policy, he offered all possible monetary assistance to turn Akram Khan's *Mohammadi* into a daily. Akram Khan was in dire financial difficulties at that time and, in such a condition, his moral strength and commitment to his community was put on trial. Readers can guess what would be the response of many of our editors and journalists of the present time who have obviously polluted the noble profession of journalism and seem to be at the forefront of serving foreign interests, especially by pursuing falsehood and creating mistrust and division among the people, and thus aggravating their

misery. Akram Khan could grab the covetous proposal of government patronization to publish a daily and to become its editor. But he rejected the offer outright and said to the nawab:

Listen, Sir! Let my brain be impaired before I even think of harming the Khalifah Sultan! Let my hand be paralyzed before I start writing against him! Let my corporeal body be put to an end before I try to damage him! — this is my supplication to Allah.[...] Look, Sir! I have gone out hunting many times in life and shot many birds dead. I know very well that if a gun-bullet is shot at me, I may die. But you should know for sure that if I am killed by the bullet of a gun, every drop of blood from my body will recreate one Akram Khan each.¹⁶

This was the response of Akram Khan in the face of enticement and threats – carrot and stick – of the colonial government, and this was his moral strength; and Allah blessed him with a long life of 99 years. Indeed, our editors and journalists have much to learn from Akram Khan to whom they owe an enormous debt.

One important aim of Akram Khan's intellectual activism was to address the deplorable condition of the Muslims and to put them in an equal standing with other communities. Another important objective of his work was to remove superstitions and wrong notions mixed with the teachings of Islam. Through his writings he tried to spread the true message of Islam, wrote and spoke against religious wrong notions, and worked hard throughout his life to inspire the Muslims to follow the true teachings of Islam, to reject all forms of shirk, to unlearn misconceptions about Islam, and to become responsible citizens. In his book *Moslem Bonger Samajik Itihas*, Akram Khan says :

It is a historical truth that many Sufis came to our land and this caused the conversion of many non-Muslims into Islam. But who embraced Islam at that time? No satisfactory answer to this question is being found. So far we have discovered, it suggests that the Buddhists and the Jains who were oppressed by the caste system and persecuted by the Brahmins accepted Islam. But this is very much true that they brought their age-old

¹⁶ Mohammad Wajed Ali, *Dilruba*, 1960, pp. 589-90. Cited by Mohammad Monsuruddin, pp.143-44.

superstitions and cultural practices with them. But we have no reliable historical evidence to suggest that our revered Sufis tried to free those Muslims from the wrong notions they carried. Hence, the Muslims in general were gradually contaminated by those erroneous and blind beliefs. Perhaps, this is why un-Islamic practices made inroads into Muslim society, and as a byproduct, like their religious life, their political and economic life also turned into irreligiosity.¹⁷

Since Muslims came under the multifarious influences of Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians and other faith communities, they internalized many ideas of these religious groups and incorporated them in their own religion. In such a cultural backdrop, Akram Khan had to take the role of a Mujaddid (reformer) and point his finger at the Muslim community in order to rescue them from many semi-religious, un-Islamic practices. However, the orthodox religious establishment of his time did not like his ideas and work; but that did not swerve him from his resolve to remove foreign and flawed elements that entered into Islam. He was determined in his work, as he was steadfast and optimistic. He tolerated antagonism from both Muslims and Hindus in silence. Hindus' antagonism to his work was mainly communal, but the opposition he faced from the Muslims was more complex and wrapped in ignorance and misunderstandings.

In his noble task of fighting against cultural mythologies mixed with Islam and of spreading the teachings of Islam, Akram Khan employed two weapons: knowledge and rationality. And on both these fronts Muslims were in a shameful condition, and they wanted to cling to their age-old beliefs and superstitions. Syed Sajjad Husain recounts Muslims' opposition to Akram Khan's reformist ideas in the following way: "I remember during my childhood, the religious tutor of our home forbade us to read [Akram Khan's] *Mostafa Charit*. Upon query, it was said that *Mostafa Charit* makes people's belief in Islam weak because Akram Khan [in this book] did not support many of conventional beliefs."¹⁸ This was mainly because the traditionalists did not like his rationalist analysis of the life of the Prophet,

¹⁷ Cited by Abu Jafar, p. xxi.

¹⁸ "Maulana Akram Khan Sworoney" (In Memory of Maulana Akram Khan). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 129-132), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 130.

especially with regard to chest dissection and other miracles.¹⁹ Some other reasons why people, especially the shirk-ridden Muslims, did not like him was his opposition to worshipping saints, visiting shrines, and similar other customs and practices. After all, Akram Khan was brought up in a climate of tariqa Muhammadi,²⁰ which was against all forms of shirk and social mythologies. More importantly, he held many unconventional views. For example, he was opposed to the summary ruling that Islam prohibits music.²¹

Akram Khan struggled tenaciously to end colonial oppression and to rescue the Muslims from communal slurs and from their underprivileged condition. He worked on multiple fronts – journalism, politics, and scholarship – to realize his goals. And he faced antagonism from three groups of people: the British, Hindus and Muslims. As mentioned above, the last group's opposition to his work was caused mainly by his attack on many of their long-held beliefs and practices that are extraneous to Islam. His unconventional ideas are passed on to us chiefly through his *Mostafa Charit* and *Tafsirul Qur'an*. As was the case during his lifetime, his ideas are still controversial to many people, while they help many others to look at the teachings of Islam rationally and with evidence fully in compliance with the spirit and teachings of Islam. For both the groups, his work opens new avenues of thought and revolutionary ways of interpreting Prophet's life and the Qur'an.

Tafsirul Qur'an

Tafsir – translated as 'exegesis' in theological terminology – is actually interpretation, elucidation and commentary of the Qur'an. A Muslim's success is hugely dependent upon the proper understanding of Allah's words and acting upon them. Although the need to explicate the Qur'anic message was always there, for various reasons,

¹⁹ Anisuzzaman, "Sahityik O Sangbadik" (Litterateur and Journalist). In Abu Jafar (Ed.), *Maulana Akram Khan* (pp. 173-180), Dhaka: The Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, 1986, p. 176.

²⁰ Muhiuddin Khan, p. 192.

²¹ About music, Akram Khan made the following comment: "After discussing the three verses the other party quotes to prohibit music, I have shown that these verses have little relation with allowing or prohibiting music." (*Mohammadi*, Aswin, 1335 [Bangla Year]. Cited by Anisuzzaman, p. 176)

Muslims dared not translate and comment on it for long after its revelation. Mustansir Mir mentions two reasons that discouraged attempts at elucidating the word of Allah:

First, coming as it did from God, the Qur'an must be assumed to be clear in its import, thus obviating the need for exposition. Second, how could finite human intelligence claim to be able to discover the true meanings of the texts of a book that emanated from the possessor of infinite wisdom?²²

But the reservations with regard to interpreting the Qur'an had to be compromised in the long run, and this because of the arising of new issues and problems whose answers had to be found primarily in the Qur'an. Few generations after the Prophet, Muslims began addressing new, emerging issues by way of expounding verses of the Qur'an. But this early phase of tafsir literature was conspicuously dependent on reports attributed to the Prophet and his companions. About the development of tafsir literature, Mustansir Mir states:

Until then, tafsir on the whole had been transmitted orally and had not been compiled and written down. Furthermore, the discipline of tafsir was not yet clearly distinguishable from that of hadith (prophetic tradition) but was rather a special domain within hadith. In fact, it was the muhaddithun (scholars of hadith) whose collections of ahadith, which included tafsir reports, paved the way for the development of an independent discipline of tafsir. This development led to the emergence of major mufasssirin and their works.²³

Known as 'tafsir bi-al-mathur' or received tafsir, this early tradition of interpreting the Qur'an drew heavily on the transmitted views of the Prophet and of his companions that came through various channels. However, despite the fact that the Qur'an repeatedly advises the Muslims and others to use their intellect and to reflect upon the words of Allah, majority of the early mufasssirin like Ibn Taymiyah repudiated 'tafsir bi-al-ra'y' or the rationalist tradition of tafsir which is based on "personal reflection or independent rational

²² Mustansir Mir, "Tafsir." In John L. Esposito (Ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, vol. 4, 1995, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*

thinking."²⁴ But, unfortunately, the overly dependence of the early exegetes on transmitted reports later on facilitated the inclusion of Jewish apocryphal reports or Israelites, which in turn led to the adulteration of this discipline by elements foreign to Islam and thus brought about a harm which the early mufasssirin devoutly tried to check.

In *Tafsirul Qur'an*, Akram Khan goes against this tradition of transmitted tafsir and counteracted many 'tafsir reports,' which he shows are contradictory and inconsistent with the normative teachings of Islam. In this respect, he espouses to isolate and reject the Judeo-Christian views which are unacceptable but have been blended with tafsir literature in the name of transmitted reports. For example, the Jews believe that "Moses led the Israelites out of captivity from Egypt, parted the Red Sea through God's miraculous assistance so that his people could escape, and received the divine law in the form of Ten Commandments."²⁵ On the other hand, many Christians hold the belief that "Jesus would return to earth, end human misery, and inaugurate 1,000 years of peace and prosperity."²⁶ Regrettably, both these notions have captivated the Muslims and have received an Islamic coloring and gained an apparently solid foundation in the Muslim mind. Akram Khan tried to eliminate such wrong notions from Muslim society. In doing so, he makes linguistic and semantic analysis of relevant Qur'anic verses and follows chiefly the tradition of 'tafsir of the Qur'an by the Qur'an.' This is not to say that his tafsir ignores prophetic narratives or represents a completely novel approach which does not have any precedents. In fact, he substantiates his arguments by referring to many classical exegetes whose views on some particular issues, though well-founded, have not been popular in Muslim societies, especially in the subcontinent. Readers may not like or agree with some of his views; but unquestionably they must recognize the depth of Akram Khan's research and the strength of his arguments, and I am sure they will appreciate his sincerity and scholarship.

Translation and interpretation of the Qur'an in languages other than Arabic started even much later. Diffidence and a sense of impropriety

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Outline of American Literature* (revised edition), United States Department of State, (n. d.), p. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

stopped the believers to translate the divine word into other languages for many centuries. However, when some western and western-educated Muslim scholars started translating the Qur'an into English, they were heavily influenced by and reliant on the Shakespearean and Biblical style of writing and used archaic expressions, and thus making it not more intelligible for the reader to understand the message of the holy book. What is more undesirable, in their intention to remain closer to the words of the Qur'an while translating, many of the translators and interpreters went for literal rendering largely to maintain the texture of the Arabic language, which did not make the message anymore clearer.

Unfortunately, translation of the Qur'an into Bangla has not been any better in terms of the lucidity of language and the correct rendering of the source text. Comparing Akram Khan's *Tafsirul Qur'an* with other Bangla tafsirs, Syed Sajjad Husain states:

But it can be said without doubt that there is no other tafsir in Bangla which is as understandable and lucid and at the same time able to satisfy the need of the reader as his [Akram Khan's] tafsir is. Other Bangla tafsirs and translations are mostly written in awkward language, hence difficult to comprehend.²⁷

He was free from the wrong notion of following the Arabic texture in translating the Qur'an. He believes that in order to convey the message of the Qur'an, its teachings have to be transferred in lucid terms.²⁸

Most of the Bangla translations of the Qur'an – including the ones published afterward – are amateurish, many of which are done by devout Muslims who undertook such an important task out of necessity and for their love of Islam, but with inadequate training. Some Bangla translations are unnecessarily difficult, as the translators followed a meandering writing style; some others are either faulty or deficient. Akram Khan's tafsir is free from many such deficiencies. In terms of the purity of language and the correctness of sense and translation, his translation of the Qur'an stands out not only as a religious book, but also as a valuable treasure in Bangla literature.

²⁷ Syed Sajjad Husain, p. 130.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

Being his mature work, *Tafsirul Qur'an* bears a potent imprint of Akram Khan's literary flair and artistic mastery. Moreover, in this tafsir a rationalist philosophy is obvious, which is by no means based on his personal whims or capricious notions. His interpretation of the Qur'an is very much intra- and inter-textual. He draws heavily upon verses of the Qur'an and upon the interpretation of early exegetes, and this makes his arguments strong and well-founded. His geographical description in providing the interpretations of the Qur'an tells us about his wide knowledge about the spatial locations mentioned in the Book, as it points to a similarity between his and Maulana Maududi's tafsir *Tafheemul Qur'an*. Needless to say, Akram Khan's tafsir is original both in terms of language and ideas; and, what is more, it is the first full-length tafsir in the Bangla language and is published in five volumes.

Unfortunately, *Tafsirul Qur'an* has not seen its further edition since it was first published many decades ago from Dhaka in 1958-59; hence, it has still remained obscure to a vast majority of the readers. It is imperative that research institutions like the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh bring out its second edition immediately for the benefit of the truth-seeking people. In this *Selections*, we have presented in English only few excerpts of his monumental work on the Qur'an, hoping that it will prompt the readers to do more research on his work and on the issues discussed. One last word: His ideas about few issues, though somewhat controversial, are quite ground-breaking and suggest his intellectual strength and courage to speak up. All the readers may not agree with all of his ideas; but disregarding his hard work, sound scholarship, and in-depth research will smack of complacency and arrogance.

This extraordinary tafsir tells us about our responsibility to look into many widely-held, apparently-accepted views and about the need to conduct such extensive research to review those issues. It also points to a grim aspect of Muslims' intellectual culture and to our conformist approach to israeliates, which we have to address seriously in order to disabuse the wider readership of misinterpretations of various verses as well as prophetic traditions.

Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Kuala Lumpur
15 June 2009

SELECTIONS FROM TAFSIRUL QUR'AN

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (2:35)

“We further said: O Adam! You and your pair (wife) dwell in this garden and both of you keep eating in plenty from wherever of this place you wish. But, beware! Do not go even near this tree! Or, you will become included in the community of disbelievers” (2:35).

Adam and paradise

Little can be ascertained about the origin and meaning of the word Adam. A general view of the grammarians, litterateurs and exegetes of the Qur'an is that it is not an Arabic word at all. Nor do we necessarily need to give much attention to the philological and morphological aspect of the word. However, according to some scholars, this is a Syriac word. Differences of opinion on this issue have been there for long, and that on the question whether Adam denotes Adam the prophet (peace be upon him) or Bani Adam, that is, the human race. It is generally known that Adam means Adam the progenitor of the human race, and it is he who has been referred to as a vicegerent in verse 2:30. Others hold the view that the term Adam denotes the human race that has been bestowed with the honor and responsibility of the position of khalifah (vicegerent of Allah on earth). In my view, the latter interpretation is more logical and appropriate for the following reasons:

(1) Part of verse 2:38 reads: “Get you down all from here.” If the word Adam in verses 2:31 and 2:33 denoted Adam the individual, then plural number – instead of dual number – would not be used. Contrary to this view, some commentators have argued that the Serpent and Satan were also living with Adam and Hawa (Eve) in paradise and that they were also included in the punishment of expulsion [hence, plural number has been used]. But the Qur'an and

hadith literatures do not corroborate this hypothesis. It is, in fact, a sheer myth propagated by the Jews. Notably, in Surah A'araf it has been categorically stated that Satan was driven out from paradise soon after he had arrogantly refused to prostrate before Adam (verses 7:12-13), and Adam and Eve were told to continue to dwell in heaven (verse 7:19).

(2) After giving them the order to leave Jannah (paradise) in verses 38-39 of this surah (Baqarah), it is clearly stated that there shall come a Guidance from Allah (SWT) and that those who follow it will have no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who are bent on denying the truth and give a lie to the message of Allah are destined for Hellfire. In these two verses, eight verbs and pronouns have been used and all of them are plural. If Adam meant a person and not the human race, then this sort of plural usage would have no significance or relevance. Moreover, we cannot entertain an idea that guidance from Allah will come to a prophet and that he will disobey [and be destined for Hellfire].

(3) The Qur'an says nowhere, explicitly or implicitly, that there was no existence of human beings on earth when the angels were told to prostrate before Adam. The story of Adam has been described in various places of ten other surahs in the Qur'an. But in the second ruku of Surah A'araf an unequivocal statement reads: Allah created human and gave him proper shape and thereafter told the angels to prostrate before Adam [read human].

(4) Many of the commentators have given the opinion that Adam was a messenger of Allah and was free from grave sins. But, having taken Adam as a person, they have virtually conceded that Adam violated the prohibition of Allah and thus proved to be fallible and misguided. What is more, this group of commentators have reduced Adam's status to a mushrik or polytheist (see Surah A'araf: 189-191; Surah Taha: 121).²⁹

²⁹ He it is Who created you from a single being, and of the same (kind) He created his mate, that he might incline to her; so when he covers her she bears a light burden, then moves about with it; but when it grows heavy, they both call upon Allah, their Lord: If You give us a good one (child), we shall

Adam's Jannah

The literal meaning of the Arabic word jannah is 'to cover' or 'to be covered.' It has been derived from the root word jinin (embryo). A garden is called jannah because it covers its surrounding areas with the shade of its trees. This meaning of garden is widely accepted. The jannah in life hereafter has also been termed as a garden of various types of fruits. More so, the real nature of that jannah is [now] remaining invisible or covered from human sight. For this reason also paradise is called jannah.

In verse 35, Adam and his wife have been told to reside in jannah. Now a question arises whether this jannah is the one in life hereafter, or it is a mundane place beautifully adorned with trees and flowers and watered by rivers. Many commentators hold the first view that it is jannah in life hereafter. Their argument is that the word jannah, as used here, has taken the definite article 'the.' So, this jannah denotes

the one in hereafter prepared for the virtuous people, and there is no other jannah except the one in life hereafter (Baizawi, Kabir, etc.). As evidence, they cite the hadith of shafa'at (intercession) which speaks about [massacre] a condition that will happen in the future. In this regard, I will only say that Imam Ahmad and some other scholars of hadith literature have considered this kind of hadith as *صل لها* or baseless. Moreover, such hadith narration tends to suggest that the prophets are not free from sins [and disobedience of Allah].

In this regard, my carefully considered opinion is that, the abovementioned argument of the general [traditional] exegetes does not have at base any justification [and I beg to differ with their view in this regard for the following reasons]:

certainly be of the grateful ones. But when He gives them a good one, they set up with Him associates in respect of what He has given them; but Allah is exalted high above what they associate (with Him). (7:189-190)

وَعَصَىٰ آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَىٰ “And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so he went astray.” (20:121)

(1) It is not true that we the humankind are not aware of any other jannah except the one in life hereafter. In many places in the Qur'an, the gardens or the forests of the earth have also been referred to as

jannat or gardens (Surah Bani Israel: 91, Surah Saba: 15-16, Surah Furqan: 8, and a number of verses in ruku 5 of Surah Kahf).

2. They have defined jannah as or a place to enjoy the rewards for good deeds done during one's lifetime on earth. And there is no doubt that this is the main characteristic of the archetypal Jannah in the hereafter. However, this raises a question: Given that the mundane world is the place of deeds, how can one enjoy the rewards of one's good deeds before these are done? So, reasonably, they have to admit that whatever happened with Adam happened in this world.

3. Having been arrogant and full of vanity, Satan refused to prostrate before Adam (verse 2:34). A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) reads: “A person with even an atom of vanity in the heart can never enter heaven” (Bukhari & Ibn Kathir). According to this group of commentators, Iblis (Satan) instigated and provoked Adam in the jannah. But such a theory – that Satan was in paradise [despite his vanity] – is inconceivable. Hence, it is clear that the jannah mentioned in the verse is not the one in life hereafter [rather, it is a garden in this world].

4. In the Qur'an the jannah of the life hereafter has been termed as 'Darul Qarar,' 'Darul Maqam,' and 'Darul Khuld'— all meaning 'permanent abode.' In many places of the Qur'an it has been stated that the virtuous will live in Jannah for ever and that they will never come out of that place or will not be able to come out [in other words, they will never be expelled from there]. But we see in the verse in question that Adam had to come out from this jannah. So this establishes that this jannah cannot be the Jannah of life hereafter.

5. Allah created Adam out of mundane clay of this world and wanted to make him a khalifa for the people of this world, and the angels expressed their views about Adam in line with the nature and characteristics and nature of humankind in this world. So, it was a responsibility of the other group [the traditional exegetes] to

ascertain, with proper evidence, when actually Adam went up to the heaven and when he descended from heaven! But unfortunately, they have not explained this. Detailed discussions on other related issues regarding Adam are provided in the tafsir of the following surahs: A'araf, Taha, and Bani Israel.

The Talmud of the Jews states that there was a huge statue of Adam. His head used to touch the sky when he stood. Many other strange stories like this are found in Talmud. On the basis of these stories, Palmer states that the traditions and proverbs regarding the creation of Adam as described here [as found in the exegeses of the Qur'an] are very much similar to those in the legends of Talmud. Most probably, these were prevailing among the contemporary Arab Jews [and then made inroads into the Muslim consciousness].

We do not have to explain the intention of Palmer's comment. Unfortunately, a group of our exegetes of the Qur'an have provided the Christian translators with enough materials to make such comments. Their compiled narrations are neither acceptable, nor of any good taste. These have no relation and relevance with the Qur'an and hadith, and are nothing but baseless, fictitious stories. I advise the inquisitive readers to see pages 52-58 of the first volume of *Tafsir al-Jalalain* of Imam Suyuti.

Shajara: the forbidden tree

The word shajara means tree. We learn from this verse simply that Allah forbade Adam and Eve even to go near a particular tree. The name of this tree is not mentioned anywhere in the Qur'an or hadith. But our narrators whimsically have named it a dorjon (sulphur?) tree.

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وَإِذْ نَجَّيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَسُومُونَكُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ يُدَبِّحُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ عَظِيمٍ (2:49) وَإِذْ فَرَقْنَا بِكُمْ الْبَحْرَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ (2:50)

“And remember (that time when) We delivered you from (slavery) by the kinspeople of Phiraon who were afflicting you with stern

punishments. They used to slaughter your sons and let your women-folk live; therein was a tremendous trial from your Lord” (2:49). “And remember (that time when) we divided a particular water-reservoir for you and accordingly saved you and drowned Phiraon's kinspeople within your very sight” (2:50).

Release of the Jews

After referring to many troubles of the Jews in verse 2:49, accounts of their release have been given in brief in this verse. The release of the Egyptian Jews and some other related, previous occurrences have been focused in short or at length in various surahs like Nisa, Maeda, An'am, A'araf, Yunus, Taha, Shuara and others. Among these, A'araf, Yunus, Taha, Shuara and Qasas were revealed in Makkah. Therefore, in order to maintain the continuity of the narration, discussions of surahs revealed in Makkah should be followed by the contextual interpretation of the ones revealed in Madinah. However, in the present organization and order of the surahs in the Qur'an, that is not possible.³⁰

In this verse the Bani Israel (the children of Israel) have been directly addressed, and they have been reminded of the bounties they had received from Allah. They were an oppressed, despicable and undignified slave community. Allah freed them from that predicament of the curse of a slavish life. The most remarkable occurrences in the history of their emancipation are their migration from Egypt and the extermination of their oppressors soon after they had reached their destination after crossing insuperable barriers and difficulties. That heralded the beginning of a bright future for them.

I have tried to unearth the significance of the key words used in this verse and also in some other places of the Qur'an about crossing the sea as described in authentic hadiths, but with little success. Conversely, some commentators of the Qur'an came up with strange discussions on this subject, which are simply reproductions of the Exodus of the Jewish Bible or of their hearsays. For the benefit of

³⁰ This is because, the sequence of the revelation of the Qur'anic verses was not maintained in the compilation done by the rightly guided caliphs, and that for very good reasons.

discussion, the gist of some relevant sections of those stories is mentioned below:

“Musa (Moses) according to Allah's order set out from Egypt at night. He had six hundred and forty thousand people of Bani Israel with him. People of the age of 20 or less and of 60 or above are not counted in this figure. So, Musa with more or less twelve hundred thousand men and women (including the children and the old) left for his destination. In addition, they had a large number of camels, sheep, goats, etc. with them. Food arrangement was definitely there.

“With this huge number of people and animals Musa reached the shore of the Red Sea. By no means could they cross the ocean that was in front of them, and Pharaoh and his mighty army behind. Musa then prayed to Allah. An order came from heaven: ‘Beat the sea.’ [Musa did] but the sea did not respond. It replied, ‘I haven't received any message from heaven.’ In such a critical moment, Musa turned to Allah again, and then there came a heavenly command: ‘Musa! Call the sea by its nick name.’ Musa accordingly addressed the sea by saying ‘Ya Abu Khalid!’ [O Abu Khalid!] and hit the sea for the second time. Then and there huge water of the Red Sea rose high and twelve walls were erected making twelve separate paths in the sea. The seabed at once became dried up by the wind. Twelve groups of the people of Bani Israel crossed the sea through the twelve thoroughfares. Not only that, windows were also set on the walls so that they could see, and do not have to become worried about, their co-travelers.

“Pharaoh, after arriving at the sea shore, witnessed all these unusual happenings and became bewildered. He did not dare to chase Musa. But Allah's plan was different. He wanted to punish Pharaoh and his people by drowning them. So, He sent Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) who appeared before the Egyptian army on his mare and straightaway drove her to the roads created on the seabed. Seeing the mare of Jibreel, the male horses of the soldiers of Pharaoh became sexually excited and started running after her. The water walls in the sea were vanished at once and the sea took its former shape. Pharaoh along with his army was drowned.”

As already mentioned, there is no authentic hadith to substantiate all these stories. Nor can the accounts of the Jews satisfy us by providing us with any historical evidence. In fact, the Jews do not have any structured history in the true sense. What they have are the compilations of some scattered legends and hearsays inscribed and engraved in rocks, pillars, coins, etc. Ancient history is generally restored by the discovery of statues, coins, writing on stones, and other similar materials. But in the case of the Jews, their history is not very rich even by that standard. So far no historical evidence of this kind has been discovered from any of their places. If we compare the anthropological heritage of Egypt, Yemen, Babylon and Assyria with that of the Jews, the latter's inadequacy becomes clear.³¹

The legends and fictitious stories of the Jews provided in their religious books are not acceptable from historical and philosophical points of view. Regarding the subject under discussion, their only source is the or the book of Exodus in the Bible of the Jews. About this book *Encyclopedia Britannica* states:

The Book of Exodus, like the other books of Hexateuch, is a composite work which was passed, so to speak, through many editions; hence the order of events which it sets forth cannot lay claim to any higher authority than that of the latest editor. Moreover, the documents from which the book has been compiled belong to different periods in the history of Israel, and each of them, reflects the stand of the age in which it was written. (*Ency. Britannica*, vol. 8, Exodus)

Given the circumstances, we have to depend entirely on the Qur'an and Arabic dictionaries. The information we get from hadith literature suggests that the people of Bani Israel were saved from the clutch of their enemies on 10 Muharram, that is, on the day of Ashura (Bukhari & Muslim). So, keeping this view in mind, we have to proceed to a further discussion on this verse.

The words bahr and faraqna are used in the first part of this verse. The meanings of these two words need to be ascertained. Farqun means to separate one part of a thing from another, , (in Urdu) to separate. As regards the

³¹ Please see: *Historians' History of the World*, Volume ii, pp. 1-238.

meaning of bahr, the lexicographers provide the following definitions:

1. Accumulated water in plenty, or only saline water. (*Qamus*)
2. As opposed to land, it signifies the depth and vastness of waters and the streams of sea. (Jawhari)
3. As opposed to land, it signifies saline water, every large stream, or any wide thing. (*Al-Mawrid*)
4. Any spacious place containing huge water is bahr. This is its primary meaning which is applicable for every wide thing. Even horse is called bahr for the width of its back, and a person possessing vast knowledge is also called bahr. For example, we say bahrul ulum (ocean of knowledge). We also find in reliable dictionaries that bahr signifies a wide reservoir that includes sea and river. So, in the Arabic language, the word bahr is not exclusive for sea only; and it is not proper to argue that bahr does not signify river or any other water reservoir.

In the light of such evidence, we have translated the verse as: And when we cleft a particular water reservoir before you. In order to ascertain which reservoir is meant by 'a particular reservoir,' we need to resolve the following questions first of all:

1. In which place of Egypt were the people of Bani Israel living before their migration and what was the shelter and destination to which these thousands of people – males and females – were heading? Is answer to this question available in the Qur'an and hadith or in any dependable account of history? Similarly, in which place or locality did they arrive after crossing the sea?
2. What route was safe and easy for them to reach their destination? Are there any direct or indirect evidences or hints in the Qur'an [that may help us solve this question]?
3. As discussed above, there are a number of meanings of the word bahr — river, brook, vast area containing water, sea, etc. And this is its unanimous definition as found in Arabic dictionaries. But, considering the context of the verse, how to resolve which specific meaning is most relevant?

Answer to the first question

As regards the exact location in which the people of Bani Israel were living before their migration, no specific mention is made in the Qur'an. What is clear from the Qur'an is that Musa's mother, by Allah's order, floated him in a river soon after his birth. Wife of Pharaoh (or his daughter) came to take bath in a ghat of the river and happened to see the floating box in which Musa was kept. She picked up the patara (box?) and brought it home. At the same time Musa's sister was walking along the bank of the river to follow it. She finally called her mother and managed to get her employed as the nurse of the baby.³²

Description in *Encyclopedia Britannica* about the Prophet Yaqub reads: "Finally he came to an understanding with Emaur and was settled in Kenan. But during the famine, he left for Egypt and lived with his family till death at Goshen, the north-east border of Egypt." (*Britannica*, 'Jacob')

It is learnt from the above description that the palace of Pharaoh was not far from the place where Musa's family was living and that the river was the river Nile because no other rivers exist in the region (Egypt). So, it is evident that the people of Bani Israel were living somewhere on the bank of the river Nile near the palace of Pharaoh.

Modern archeologists also hold the view that, from the arrival of Yaqub in Egypt till the migration of Musa, the people of Bani Israel were living in a place named Goshen.³³ The author of *Biblica* narrates, "The freshwater of Timsah Lake with its large marshes, full of reeds, exactly at the entrance of Goshen, would fulfill all conditions for the Exodus and for the Hebrew name."³⁴

The second part of the question is very easy. They were going to the land of their ancestors, or the holy land, to their kith and kin. Their destination was the land of the Jews, Israel, Palestine, and Jerusalem. After crossing the border of Egypt they reached the Sinai

³² See verse 7 of Surah Qasas.

³³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol.10, "Goshen."

³⁴ Art. Red Sea.

Peninsula and Teeh Plateau. Evidence of the same is also available in the Qur'an (Surah Taha: 80 and other verses). Therefore, it is proved beyond doubt that Musa along with the people of Bani Israel started his journey from Goshen; the Sinai Peninsula or the Teeh Plateau and its prairie was their first place of movement.

Answer to the second question

Musa, his brother Haroon and his Jewish companions knew very well that their enemy Pharaoh and his army would chase and kill all of them if they could catch them. Musa was also given the message by Allah that Pharaoh was taking all preparations to chase him and his followers (Sura Shuara: 56). Therefore, undoubtedly Musa would take all precautions and try to cross the border of Egypt as soon as possible.

I would like to draw the attention of the reader to the map of the places under discussion. We see here two routes to follow. One route goes from Goshen straight to the Sinai Peninsula and Teeh plateau, and the other through the Red Sea leaving the Suez Canal at the left. The second route covers a distance of more or less five hundred miles, and they would need to cross at least another five hundred miles through the western border of the Arab world to reach the Sinai Peninsula. So, to cover this thousand miles distance in the desert, a long time was needed. At the same time, the risk of being caught by Pharaoh and his army was very high. On the other hand, to reach the Sinai Peninsula from Goshen through the first route, they would have to cross a way of only 50-60 miles and the fear of enemy attack was also bare minimum. Another consideration is that, in the first route only a lake or a coast land was there before them to cross, while the second route involved crossing the vast sea. So, the route from Goshen to Sinai Peninsula was easy, simple and relatively safer as well as less time consuming.

For answer to the last section of the question, the reader may consult verse 77 of Surah Taha where Musa is advised to follow a dry route.³⁵

³⁵ "And certainly we revealed to Musa, saying: Travel by night with My servants, then make for them a dry path in the bahr, not fearing to be overtaken, nor being afraid." (20:77)

Answer to the third question

This question is to be resolved first by the facts and evidences from the Qur'an. Common sense and judgment has also to be applied in this connection. We see in the Qur'an that the place where Pharaoh and his people were drowned has been termed as يَمِّ amm, and not as bahr. According to the exegesis writers in general, yamm is taken for a sea, that is, the Red Sea where Pharaoh was drowned. However, I do not agree with this view for the following reasons:

a. That Pharaoh was drowned in the Red Sea is a narration of the Book of Exodus in the Jewish Bible. It has no support in the Qur'an and in hadith literature. So it is not proper to accept that as a recognized fact.

b. When Musa was a baby, Allah sent a message to his mother that she should put him into a box and float it in water. This has been narrated in verses like Surah A'araf: 136, Surah Qasas: 7, and Surah Taha: 39. In the subsequent two verses the word yamm (not bahr) has been used. And all the commentators think that this refers to the river Nile, and not to the Red Sea. As it was discussed before, bahr can also mean a big water reservoir and sea is not its only meaning. The last two verses make this undoubtedly evident. Again, in verses Surah Qasas: 39, Dhariyat: 40, and Taha: 78, we get the information that Pharaoh and his people were drowned in the 'yamm.' So, in the context of these verses we can say that the meaning of 'yamm' is river, lake or any other water reservoir; and there is no justification to take it for the Red Sea.

It is common knowledge that revelation came to Musa in the Ibrani language. According to the experts of that language, the word sea was used for lakes in most oriental languages, especially in Hebrew.³⁶ In the Arabic translation of the Hebrew version of that Bible (Numbers) as referred to by the writer, the sea has been translated as bahrul kinnarat. After making the abovementioned comment, the writer gave his opinion against the fiction of the Red Sea.³⁷

³⁶ *Ency. Biblica*, Art, "Red Sea".

³⁷ Therefore, it can be inferred that there is no evidence of Musa's crossing the Red Sea. [Editor]

asa is association, solidarity, or jama'ah. A stick is called asa, because it is held by all the fingers collectively together. Nevertheless, that asa means organization or a group of people is supported by all Arabic dictionaries (Raghib, Jawhari, *Misbah al-Munir*, etc.). Jawhari provides an example: *ذا كانت الهيجا وانشقت العصا فحسبك والضحاك سيف مهند*

There are also many examples in hadith of its usages:

- a) -
 بياك و قتل العسا أي إياك أن تكون قاتلا أو مقتولا في شق عصا المسلمين-
 إن الخوارج شقوا عصا المسلمين أي فرقوا جماعتهم- ()
 a) To desert a group.
 b) Protect yourself from being the killer or killed with regard to breaking the unity of the Muslims.
 c) They broke the unity of the Muslims.

In this verse the word asa takes the prefix 'ba' whose meaning here is 'with'. As we see in Surah Shuara (set out with my servants at night). On the basis of this, we have translated the verse as: You go round the mountains with your people.

iii) Now let us discuss the significance of the word *عين* and *hajar* ain. There is no disagreement about the meaning of ain. Fountain, spring, brook or any other running stream of water is called ain. One meaning of hajar is stone. But in the Arabic language it has some other meanings too, such as, mountain or a rocky area. In a hadith about Dajjal the Prophet (SAWS) said, *تبعه أهل الحجر والمدر*, "The people of Hajar and Madar will follow him." Here 'people of Hajar' means the people who used to live in the rocky area or in the mountains (*Majma- ul-Bihar*). The inhabitant of Madar means the people who used to remain at home in the villages or towns (*Qamus*). So, it is clear in the usage of this hadith that rock or a rocky place is also called hajar.

Regarding the meaning of hajar it is said in *Qamus*

محجر العين - الحديفة و من العين ما دارها -
 الحاجر الأرض المرتفعة وسطها و ما يمسك الماء من شفة الوادس -)

(

The author of *Qamus* – the renowned hadith scholar Firozabadi – has provided various meanings of the word hajar. In short, it means 'a high land whose middle part is low and it preserves water from wadi (valley).' Wadi [in Urdu] means *كشاده میان کو ہستان و تلها و* a wide flat land over which water coming from mountainous area and from high land flows.

According to this meaning, the significance of the verse will be: Commandment of Allah came to Musa, "Proceed with the people of Bani Israel to the mountains where there is fountain, spring and reservoir. And let them try and find twelve sources of water for each of their twelve groups."

Pharaoh along with his people was drowned and the people of Bani Israel, by the grace of Allah, crossed safely and eventually became free from four hundred years of slavery and were going to rule their own holy land very soon. But, being ungrateful, they forgot all bounties of Allah and started quarreling with the Prophet Musa over trifle things like garlic, onion, etc. Then they were given manna and salwa so that they remained happy and grateful to Allah for these blissful meals which they obtained without effort. But this could not satisfy them. Conversely, they started thinking: "Since we are rescued, now it is the necessity of Musa and his Allah! If they want to protect their religion, they will have to entertain all our demands!"

According to the universal law of Allah, the time for such capricious demands was over. Now, in response to each of their unreasonable demands, Allah created for them all ingredients on earth, which is consistent with natural law, and said: "If you want food, look around in the villages and cities and use the raw materials provided by Us. If you want water, you have to work hard and search for it in the right place." The last section of the verse under discussion and the following verse shed clear light on this ruling.

وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ وَرَفَعْنَا فَوْقَكُمُ الطُّورَ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ
 مَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَكُنْتُمْ
 مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (2:64) وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ الَّذِينَ اعْتَدَوْا مِنْكُمْ فِي السَّبْتِ فَقُلْنَا لَهُمْ كُفُّوا
 قُرْدَةً خَاسِئِينَ (2:65)

“And (remember that time when) We took your promise and raised Tur (mountain) above you. (We said:) You hold fast which We have given you and always bear in mind the commands therein so that you may guard (against evil)” (2:63). “After that you turned back again; in that situation, had it not been for the grace of Allah and His mercy on you, you would certainly have been among the losers” (2:64). “And indeed you have known those among you who exceeded the limits of the (law of) Sabbath. Then We said to them: You remain despised and rejected apes” (2:65).

Lifting Tur (Mount Sinai)

Narrators of the exegesis of the Qur'an are of the view that Allah sent the Torah to Musa at the mount of Sinai (Tur-e-Sinai). But the Jews refused to abide by the commandments prescribed for them in the Torah. Then in order to subdue and discipline this unruly community, Jibreel by Allah's order uprooted the entire mountain, raised it high above their heads and said: *ولتأخذن أمري أو لأرمينكم* “If you obey my order then no worries, otherwise I will drop the mountain upon you.” Even after thousands of years of this incident, the narrators have provided us with the measurement of the mountain – its length and breadth, height, etc – and the gap between the mountain and the heads of the Jews.

Such irrelevant stories have no relation with the Qur'an or with its exegesis. The narrators of the later age may have seen the mythological literature of the Jews or heard the legends prevalent among them, and then they created relevant stories for relevant places. Unfortunately, the exegetes of our time have uncritically placed those stories in their tafsirs.

In this verse, two words *raf'un* (to raise, to lift) and *fauqun* (high) have been used. *Raf'un* means: to lift, to hoist, to raise, to elevate, etc. If we say we have raised a house or a wall, no body will

take that we have hoisted our house or the wall high in the sky or kept it hanging in the air.

In verse 127 of this surah, it is stated : *وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ* “And when Ibrahim (Abraham) and Ismael (Ishmael) were laying the foundation of (Ka'ba) [].” Here the word *yarfa'u* has been used. Can anybody say that Ibrahim and Ismael uprooted the foundation of Ka'ba and hoisted it in the air? It is stated in the Qur'an that, in paradise there will be *فراش* and *فراش* *for*

the blessed people. Can anyone say in the interpretation of this these phrases that the beds and the magnificent seats of the people in heaven will be kept hanging in the air? Hazrat Abu Bakr (R) narrates about the situation during migration, “We went out in search of shade to have shelter from the scorching heat (*فراش*). However, according to the narration of the hadith narrators, its meaning would be “then a rock was hoisted for us over our heads.” In the dictionaries of hadith literature we find its meaning as ‘it appeared in our sight’. The meaning of ‘*fauq*’ is the air or high land. About the battle of trench, it is said in Surah Ahzab *فألقى عليهم من سماء أخرى* “When the enemies appeared from your *fauq*.” Everybody agrees that here ‘*fauq*’ means high land. If the stories narrated by the narrators are conceded, we have to say that the enemy army flying from the air came down on earth and fell on their heads.

Therefore, ‘We raised the Mountain Sinai’ means we made the mountains appear before you (please see verse 171 of Surah A'araf and the corresponding note).

Be you apes, despised and rejected

Except Mujahid, almost all other narrators have held the view that according to the commandment of Allah, all the people of Bani Israel described in this verse physically turned into apes. According to them, the event of catching fish on the Sabbath Day occurred during the time of the Prophet Daud (David) and these apes died within three days. But the Qur'an or hadith literature does not support such theories. Neither the narrators of these fictitious stories were present on the shore of Ela, nor did Jibreel come to them with any message. Therefore, the story that 70 thousand people of Bani Israel became literally apes has virtually no logic or credible basis. On the contrary,

it is proved from this and some other verses that, as they showed disrespect to Sabbath and committed many other sins, their nature and character became like that of the apes: *They did not turn into apes physically.*

Another question arises in this connection. qiradatun is a feminine word, but a masculine word – khashein (not khashiaat) – has been used here. Why? In reply to this question, some

commentators say that قيل فيه تقديم و تاخير ، معناه كونوا خاسئين قرده – فتوح البيان - “Considering what is before and after, there is a deviation in the narration of this verse. So, the meaning of this verse has to be taken accordingly.” It is a matter of regret that they have raised such irrelevant arguments in order to foreground their theory that 70 thousand people turned into real apes, though this cannot be established by the Qur'an or hadith. The Qur'anic narration establishes beyond doubt that the people of Bani Israel remained humans even after the divine command “Be you apes, despised and rejected.” Arabic grammar has also been overlooked in this regard. It is unequivocally established that after this commandment the people of Bani Israel were living as human beings in the physical sense of the term. A general rule of the Arabic language is that, for

(rational beings), a word may take ‘wao nun’ or ين ‘ya nun’ at the end to make its plural form. Here in this verse also ‘nun’ and ‘ya’ have been used to form plural. So, this type of usage in the Qur'an also indicates that the Jews, after this commandment, remained human physically and that they did not turn into apes.

To strengthen this argument, I am citing clear evidence from the Qur'an. In Surah Nisa: 47, addressing the Jews of Prophet's time, Allah says, “O you people of the Book! Believe in what We have (now) revealed, confirming what was (already) with you, before we change the face and fame of some (of you) beyond all recognition and turned them backward, or cursed them as we cursed the Sabbath breakers, for the decision of Allah must be carried out.”

In this verse the contemporary Jews of Prophet's time have been warned about two alternative punishments if they do not believe in the Qur'an. Either their faces would be cursed and turned backward or they would be cursed as were the violators of Sabbath. None can deny that the Jews of the time of the Prophet (SAWS) did not have faith in him. Nor did they refrain themselves from opposing him.

They even tried to kill the Prophet (SAWS). Despite all these, nobody can say that their faces were literally turned around on the back. Nor did any one of them become ape physically. Therefore, it must be admitted that the Sabbath breakers remained physically human.

Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi tried to justify the general view by providing a hairsplitting discussion. But he also concludes his argument on this issue thus:

ولما ثبت بما قررنا جواز المسخ أمكن إجراء الآية على ظاهرها ، ولم يكن بنا حاجة إلى التأويل الذي ذكره مجاهد رحمه الله وإن كان ما ذكره غير مستبعد جداً ، لأن الإنسان إذا أصر على جهالته بعد ظهور الآيات وجلاء البيّنات فقد يقال في العرف الظاهر نه حمار و كان هذا المجاز من المجازات الظاهرة المشهورة لم يكن في المصير إليه محذور ألبتة .

We have justified that physical change is possible. So, abandoning the literal meaning of the verse, we need not accept the allegorical meaning or the meaning given by Mujahid — though his interpretation is not irrelevant, because when a man is guided by ego and holds the ropes of ignorance even after lights of reason and truth are manifested, then in the general idiom he is called a donkey or monkey. So, this well-known and self-evident allegorical term can be accepted without any qualms. (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 1—555)

Lesson from this Verse

Allah has created humans in the best of moulds. But they debase themselves in the lowest of the low by misusing and denying the bounties of Allah (Surah Tin: 4 & 5). About this kind of degenerated people, Allah says in Surah A'araf:

لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا

بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ أَوْلَيْكَ هُمُ الْعَاقِلُونَ (7:179)

“They have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and they have eyes with which they cannot see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle — nay, they are even more misguided and less conscious of the right way; it is they who are the (truly) heedless ones.” (7:179)

In the verse under discussion, the mental and spiritual degeneration or perversion of the Jews has been implied. The Arabs cite the reference of monkey as an example of gargantuan sensuality. A quotation from the religious text of the Jews will clearly speak about the degree of their degeneration. In Chapter 22 of Jeheskel, the Jews have been addressed thus:

[...] You have ignored all of my good things and made my leisure days unholy [...]. People among you have taken bed with their mothers.³⁸ Your people have raped the women having their period [...], have committed hateful acts with the wives of their neighbors, some have molested their daughters-in-law [...] and raped their own sisters. [...] I will ruin your community by dissensions and will scatter them in various regions.

What other filthier examples of animalism and beastliness can there be than these?

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يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ
(2:183) أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ
أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ طَعَامُ مَسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ
وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (2:184) شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ
الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ فَمَنْ شَهِدَ مِنْكُمُ الشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ
، كَانَ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ
نُرًا وَلِتَكْمَلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ عَلَى مَا هَدَاكُمْ

(2:185) وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ
فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ (2:186) أَجَلٌ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيَامِ
، لِبَاسٌ لَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لِبَاسٌ لَهُنَّ عَلِمَ اللَّهُ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَخْتَلَوْنَ
نُسُكُمْ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَعَفَا عَنْكُمْ فَالآنَ بَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَابْتَغُوا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَكُلُوا

³⁸ See footnotes by Henry and Scot of the relevant sections of the Bible.

وَأَشْرَبُوا حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ ثُمَّ أَتُمُوا
صِيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ وَلَا تُبَاشِرُوهُنَّ وَأَنْتُمْ عَاكِفُونَ فِي الْمَسَاجِدِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ فَلَا
تَقْرُبُوهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ (2:187)

“O believers! Siam (fasting) is made obligatory on you, as it was made obligatory on the communities before you, so that you may remain self-restrained” (2:183). “A certain number of days; but if someone among you is sick or on a journey, then s/he should complete the due fasting of the same number of days from other days; and those who can fast with difficulty have to give food to one miskeen (indigent [for each day of fasting]). But if someone wants to spend more than this, that is better for them. Actually, if you fast, that is better for you if only you know” (2:184). “That is the month of Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed, as a guidance for humans and clear proofs of the guidance and the distinguisher (between truth and falsehood). Therefore, whoever of you stays in their house in the month [of Ramadan] must fast. On the contrary, one who is sick or on a journey, then s/he shall make up the same number of days (which s/he did not fast); Allah wants to make your (worship) easy for you, and He is never desirous of making things difficult for you — so that you may complete the days of fasting and exalt the greatness of Allah according to His guidance and so that you may remain grateful to Him” (2:185). “And (O Prophet!) when My servants ask you concerning Me, (tell them) I am indeed very near; when a supplicant calls Me, I respond to their call. So let them respond to My call and believe in Me so that they may earn the knowledge of truth” (2:186). “It had been made lawful to you to have sexual relations with your wives on the night of the fast; they are libas (garment) for you and you are libas for them; Allah knows that you are committing a mistake with regard to your lawful right, so He has turned to you with mercy and removed from you (this burden); so now be in contact with them and seek what Allah has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till night. And do not have sexual relations with your wives while you are in i'tikaf in masjids; in fact, these are the limits (set) by Allah, so do not go near them. Thus Allah makes clear His ayat for humans so that they may remain self-restrained” (2:187).

Rules of exemption from fasting

In the first verse of the ruku (verse 2:183), a strong command for fasting is revealed to the Muslims in general; and the purpose of fasting is also described. In the subsequent verse (verse 2:184) two classes of people have been exempted from this command. It is said that those who are ill or on a journey shall defer and fast the same number of days later.

Again toward the end of the verse it is said that (due to old age or for some other compelling reasons) those who (men and women) become incapable of fasting will not have to fast. But they have to provide food for one miskeen (indigent) for each fast. To feed one miskeen means to give them the maintenance for a day. If someone is capable and gives food to more than one miskeen, that is better for them. It will substitute for the performance of fasting, as it will also be a token of gratefulness to Allah for His grace and kindness. There are many distressed men and women in every locality who do not get enough food even during Ramadan, but they are determined to fast. So, this type of devout paupers should be given priority while giving food as fidya.

In this verse the word yutiqoona has been used. I have translated it as "those who are capable of fasting with difficulties." To me this is the most appropriate rendering, because in the general usage of Arabic literature this word is used only for those who face hardship in performing a job. Imam Razi supports this view and states:

(i) أما الطاقة فهو اسم لمن كان قادرا علي الشيء مع الشدة و المشقة – فقولته و علي الذين يطيقونه أي و علي الذين يقدرون علي الصوم مع الشدة و

(ii) الحجة الثانية في تقرير هذا القول إنه لا يقال في العرف للادر القوي انه يطيق هذا الفعل لأن هذا اللفظ لا يستعمل إلا في حق من يقدر عليه مع

– كبير ج 2 -178 -177

1) taqat – this word is associated with somebody who can accomplish a task with difficulty. So علي الذين يطيقونه means those who are able to fast with difficulty.

2) The word yutiqu is not generally used for a person who can accomplish a task at ease, as this term is used only for such a person who can do something with difficulty.

Imam Raghīb has also provided this meaning in his dictionary. But, unfortunately, many interpreters of the Qur'an have interpreted it thus: "Those who do not fast despite their capability of doing so will give fidya (food for a miskeen)." Using this inconsistent translation, some of the progressive scholars have come up with an interpretation that fast can be broken by giving fidya even without a genuine reason. On the other hand, in order to get rid of this intricacy, the commentators of the Qur'an as said above have come up with an argument that verse 2:184 has been abrogated by verse 2:185. But we must remember that it is the word of Allah and He cannot do anything out of whim which needs to be repelled in no time after its revelation. In fact, in my opinion there is not a single verse in the Qur'an that can be called mansukh (abrogated); [and this issue will be discussed later].

Relationship (sexual contact) between husband and wife

After the revelation of the command/decreed of fasting, some of the companions of the Prophet (SAWS) thought that physical relation with one's spouse was permitted from the time of breaking the fast up to the time of going to bed, and that after that time period it was forbidden. Some of them even considered that, during Ramadan physical contact with one's spouse was prohibited at night as it was during daytime. Most probably this idea was influenced by the established culture and practices of the idolaters and of the Jews.

In this verse, disproving this baseless notion, Allah (SWT) says that He has created men and women and implanted an inherent love and affection in them for each other for a noble purpose. So, without clear prohibition from Allah, it is not wise to refrain from having sex at night during Ramadan.

Libas means what is worn, attire and garment by which one hides their private parts and by which people protect themselves from the severity of cold and heat. In addition, dress increases our beauty and elegance. In this sense, husband and wife have been termed as the dress of each other.³⁹

³⁹ As they meet the biological need of each other, and thus protect each other from unlawful sex and indecency. [Editor]

On the whole, in this verse physical relation between husband and wife at night during Ramadan has been made permissible. In this context, it is also said that fulfillment of sensual satisfaction is not the only target of physical contact between husband and wife. Ensuring the continuation of human procreation according to Allah's law is one of the main reasons of sexual contact between husband and wife. In the context of Ramadan, husbands have been advised to control themselves, because lack of restraint of the husbands sometimes causes suffering and embarrassment for the wives, which at times creates misunderstanding between the couple and destroys conjugal happiness.

يُواخِذْكُمْ اللَّهُ بِاللَّعْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذْكُمْ بِمَا كَسَبْتُمْ قُلُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ
 حَلِيمٌ (2:225) بَن يُؤَلُّونَ مِنْ نِسَائِهِمْ تَرَبُّصُ أَرْبَعَةِ أَشْهُرٍ فَإِنْ فَاءُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
 غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (2:226) عَزَمُوا الطَّلَاقَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (2:227)
 لَلَّذَاتِ يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَاثَةَ قُرُوءٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْتُمْنَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ
 أَرْحَامَهُنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
 إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ
 ؕ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (2:228) وَ تَسْرِيحٍ
 بِإِحْسَانٍ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَكُمْ أَنْ تَأْخُذُوا مِمَّا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَنْ يَخَافَا أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ
 إِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا فِيمَا افْتَدَتْ بِهِ تِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ
 ! تَعْتَدُوهَا وَمَنْ يَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَ اللَّهِ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (2:229) فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا
 تَحِلُّ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ حَتَّى تَتَكَحَّ زَوْجًا غَيْرَهُ فَإِنْ طَلَّقَهَا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يَتَرَاجَعَا
 يُقِيمَا حُدُودَ اللَّهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ يُبَيِّنُهَا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (2:230)
 طَلَّقْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَبِغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأُمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَلَا
 تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارًا لِنَعْتَدُوا ، يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ
 وَا وَادْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ يَعِظْكُمْ بِهِ

فَقُوا اللَّهَ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ (2:231)
 أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا تَعْضُلُوهُنَّ أَنْ يَنْكِحَنَّ أَرْوَاجَهُنَّ إِذَا تَرَاضُوا بَيْنَهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ذَلِكَ
 عَظْمٌ بِهِ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَكُمْ وَأَطْهَرُ وَاللَّهُ
 يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (2:232) وَالْوَالِدَاتُ يُرْضِعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ حَوْلَيْنِ كَامِلَيْنِ
 لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنِيْمَ الرِّضَاعَةَ وَعَلَى الْمَوْلُودِ لَهُ رِزْقُهُنَّ وَكِسْوَتُهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
 تُكَلِّفُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَا تُضَارَّ وَالِدَةٌ بَوْلِهَا وَلَا مَوْلُودٌ لَهُ بِوَلَدِهِ وَعَلَى الْوَارِثِ
 مِثْلُ ذَلِكَ فَإِنْ أَرَادَا فِصَالًا عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مِنْهُمَا وَتَشَاوُرٍ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا وَإِنْ
 صَغُوعُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذَا سَلَّمْتُمْ مَا آتَيْتُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
 اللَّهُ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ (2:233) وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ
 وَيَذُرُونَ أَرْوَاجًا يَتَرَبَّصْنَ بِأَنْفُسِهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةَ أَشْهُرٍ وَعَشْرًا فَإِذَا بَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَلَا
 حَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ (2:234)

“Allah will not call you to account for what is vain in your oaths, but He will call you to account for your oaths that you have made according to your heart's resolve, and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing” (2:225). “Those who swear that they will not go in to their wives have been given a reprieve of four months; so during this period if they change their mind, then (they should know that) Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (2:226). “And if they have resolved on a divorce, then (they should know that) Allah is all-Hearing, all-Knowing” (2:227). “And the divorced women should keep themselves in waiting for three menstrual periods; and if Allah has created something in their wombs, it is not lawful for them to conceal that — if they really believe in Allah and the Last Day; and their husbands have the complete right to take them back within this time if they wish to repair their relationship; and wives have rights on their husbands as the latter have on the former — and both of them should perform them in the right manner; but men have a degree (of responsibility). And Allah is Mighty, Wise” (2:228). “Divorce is two times; then keep (your wife) in good fellowship or let (them) go with kindness;

and it is not lawful for you to take any part of what you have given them — unless both fear that they cannot keep within the limits of Allah; accordingly, (O Muslim community!) if you also fear that they [husband and wife] cannot really maintain the limits of Allah, there is no blame on them if the wife gives (her husband some from her property) to become free thereby. These are the (fixed) limits of Allah, so do not exceed them; in fact, those who exceed the limits of Allah are *zalem* [unjust]" (2:229). "But if the husband (does not accept that divorcee wife [within the prescribed time]) and gives her (final) divorce, then that wife will not be lawful to him until she marries another husband; then if that husband also happens to divorce her, there is no blame on them both if they are re-united (by marriage), and that if they believe that they can abide by the rules and regulations of Allah; in fact, these are the (fixed) limits (rules and regulations) of Allah which He makes clear for a people who know" (2:230). "And when you divorce women and they reach their prescribed time, then either retain them (as wives) in good fellowship or set them free on a reasonable basis; but do not hold them with the intention of oppressing them so that you exceed the limits, and in fact whoever does this, he has indeed done injustice on himself; and beware! do not consider Allah's ayat plaything and jest, and remember the favor of Allah upon you, and that which He has revealed to you of the Book and the Wisdom, advising you thereby (remember these as well); and be careful (of your duty to) Allah, and know that Allah is the Knower of all things" (2:231). "And when you divorce women and the last moment of their term of waiting becomes imminent, then do not prevent if they want to marry their husbands — if both agree among themselves in a lawful manner; through this system good instruction is given to the one among you who believes in Allah and in the Last Day, this is more virtuous and purer for you; and Allah knows (your wellbeing) while you do not know" (2:232). "And the mothers should suckle their children for two whole years — this system is for him who desires to make complete the time of suckling; and the father of the child shall bear the cost of the mother's food and clothing on a reasonable basis; no person shall have a burden laid on them greater than s/he can bear; no mother shall be made to suffer harm on account of her child, nor a father on account

of his child, and a similar duty (devolves) on the (father's) heir (if he dies), but if both desire weaning by mutual consent and counsel, there is no blame on them; and if you wish to engage a wet-nurse (other than the mother) for your children, there is no blame on you, provided you pay (the mother) what you agreed (to give her) on a reasonable basis; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah and know that Allah sees what you do" (2:233). "And (as for) those of you who die and leave wives behind, those widows should keep themselves in waiting for four months and ten days; then when their term of waiting has completely passed, there is no blame on you for what they do for themselves in a lawful manner; and Allah is aware of what you do" (2:234).

It is prohibited to take mahr back

'What' the husbands have given to their wives points to mahr (dower). Some of our jurists opine that ornaments, dresses, etc. that a husband gives to his wife are also included in this (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, Ibn Kathir, etc.). There may be a situation where a wife intends to get relief from the bondage of marriage but the husband does not want to divorce her. In such a situation, if the wife returns her mahr given by her husband and seeks divorce and the husband also agrees to it, then there is no harm in doing so. In the terminology of Islamic Shariah, it is called *khula*.

To pay the mahr in full during marriage ceremony was the practice in the golden age of Islam. But unfortunately, in our modern age, it has become part of our culture and is not taken very seriously; and thus practically wives are deceived and deprived of their right. Sometimes a negligible amount of 5/10 takas is paid as token mahr. Then taking advantage of the wife's loyalty and of other social factors, the husband tries to be exempted from this responsibility. In short, people tend to make a target to deprive the wives of their legal rights by using various unethical tricks.

I would like to draw the attention of the reader to the last part of the verse. Referring to some important rules about matrimonial life, Allah says that these are the limits defined by Him. Anybody who disobeys Allah and violates it shall be a 'Jalim' (oppressor). (See Surah Nisa: 34 & 35)

Subsequent state of divorce

After the completion of final (bayen) divorce, the husband cannot take the wife back, not even by remarriage. This is the ultimate ruling given by Allah. The only way for the couple to be united again is that the wife gets married to someone else and incidentally the new husband divorces her. Only then the former husband can go for marrying her again. But there is again a condition in this process. There must be clear evidence that the second husband came into physical contact with her before divorcing her. This is the actual meaning of the word nikah used in this verse. This indication is available in many a hadith of the Prophet.

This is the general prescription and measure for divorce in normal circumstances. Hardly a man will remarry a wife who has already visited another husband's house and had sexual intercourse with him. Unfortunately, in our society some people have introduced a system called hila. A man impulsively gives his wife triple talaq and regrets the next moment. But he is helpless because of the traditional notion of the triple talaq [and thinks that the pronouncement of three talaqs in one go nullifies the marital bond completely]. Then the divorcee is married to another man on condition that he will again divorce her before long. In this process a mock bridal chamber is also arranged to show that the couple have physically met. The second husband as per the agreement divorces the woman and the former husband then remarries her. But the verse in question has no relation with this type of ugly practice. Sometimes a man out of excitement or rage utters the words of divorce three times and divorces his wife. Subsequently, when he realizes his mistake, he repents. But due to the prevailing fatwa he is helpless. Actually, in such circumstances the husband goes for this unethical practice of hila.

As regards this filthy practice, Allah has said in the previous verse, "Do not make the ayat of Allah an item of games and sports." We regret that by violating the essence of iddat (waiting period) as given in the Qur'an, people have introduced the practice of uttering the words of divorce three times in one go and consider it to be the fulfillment of the conditions of divorce. This has led to all such repugnant practices in society. But the Prophet (SAWS) and his companions have called the people involved in this sort of un-Islamic

activities mal'oon (the cursed). And such practice is punishable for adultery.

Many of our past scholars made lengthy discussion on this issue with evidence and authority. *Zad-ul-Ma'ad* of Hafez Ibn Qayyim is one of such major books.

Iddat of the widow

After the death of husband, his widow is to observe a waiting period of four months and ten days if she is not pregnant. "They shall restrain themselves" means they will not remarry. If they do, that will stand void. It is narrated in many hadiths that until the waiting period is over, the widows should not wear any adornment to look graceful and shall not use perfume, etc. (Bukhari & Muslim). After that time that restriction is removed and she is completely free, and she can marry freely if she wishes.

A dark phase broke out from the time of Emperor Akbar. For political purposes, some sultans of Gaurh tried heart and soul to worsen this situation. For all undesired activities, the Hindu system of four castes became rooted in Muslim society. Consequently, the sharif (elites and aristocrats) in Muslim society started to hate the practice of marrying a widow. In this period, a number of noble men like Mujaddid-e-Azam Syed Ahmad Shahid and his followers were inspired by the ideas of all-respected Mujaddid Alf-e-Sani and started a movement against such prejudices throughout the country. By dint of their efforts and movement, the Muslims in this region were able to rescue themselves from becoming the fifth hated caste of the Indian caste hierarchy. It is a matter of deep regret that one group of the Muslims seem to be misguided by the propaganda of the British and brand these noble-hearted reformers as Wahhabi.

وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ (3:48) وَرَسُولًا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ
أَيُّ قَدْ جِئْتُمْ بآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطَّيْرِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ
بُحُونًا طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَبْذِي الْأَكْمَامَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْبِئُكُمْ
بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدْجُرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةً لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

(3:49) وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَأَجَلَ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ
 جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ
 هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (3:51) فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمُ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ
 قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَاشْهَدْ بِأَنَا مُسْلِمُونَ (3:52)
 اللَّهُ آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُتِبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ (3:53)
 اللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ (3:54) لَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنِي مَتْوَفِيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ
 وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ
 الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ (3:55)

“And Allah will teach (your [Maryam’s] promised son) Book, word of wisdom and Torah and Injeel” (3:48). “And (We made him [Isa]) a messenger to the children of Israel; and accordingly he said: I have come to you with evidence from your Lord — I will design for you out of clay a figure like that of a bird, then I will breathe into it and it will become a bird with Allah's permission and I will heal the blind and the leprous, and bring the dead to life with Allah's permission — and I will inform you of what you should eat and what you should store in your houses; indeed, there is a sign in this for you, if you are (truly) believers” (3:49). “And I am the musaddek [verifier and confirmer] of that which is before me of the Torah; moreover, I will make lawful those things which were made unlawful previously (because of your disobedience); in fact, I have come to you with evidence from your Lord, therefore be careful of (your duty to) Allah and obey me” (3:50). “Know for sure, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship only Him; this is the right and firm path” (3:51). “But when Isa perceived unbelief on their part, he (called his kinspeople and) said: Who will be my helpers in Allah's way? The hawariyyun (disciples of Isa) started saying (responding to his call): We are ansar (helpers) in Allah’s work! We believe in Allah and bear witness that we are Muslims [the ones who submit to Allah]” (3:52). “O our Lord, o our Sustainer, we believe in what You have revealed and we follow the messenger (You have sent), so write us down with those who support truth” (3:53). “Indeed, they hatched a plot, but

Allah frustrated that: in fact, Allah is the best of planners” (3:54). “And when Allah said: O Isa, I will definitely cause your death and will raise you to Me and will purify you completely of those who disbelieve; moreover, I will make those who follow you above those who disobey till the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed” (3:55).

Miraculous deeds of Isa

In verses 3:46-48 Allah informs Maryam that He will send a Messenger to the Bani Israel, and then follows the narration of Isa as to what he will tell the people of his community and do with them, and other issues. Indication of his future actions has been expressed in his own language in a special pattern. I summarize below my understanding of verse 49 for the benefit of the reader:

- (i) The name of this surah is Ale Imran. Imran is the name of Maryam’s father. Some important events about his family have been described in this surah.
- (ii) The significance of the second verse of this surah is that Allah has revealed the Qur’an to Muhammad (SAWS), and before that Torah and Injeel were there as guidance for the contemporary people of the respective time. (In addition to these heavenly books) He has given conscience or the power of judgment to human beings.
- (iii) From the beginning up to verse 80 (more or less) discussion is about the wrong notions and prejudices of the Christians and the subsequent condemnation to them. It has been focused here that Isa was not a god or a superman, and he had no additional, special status or importance over other prophets. So, it is very much clear that the Qur’an does not endorse any superstitions or wrong notions prevailing among the Christians in this regard.
- (iv) In verse 5, Allah has said that He gives shape to a human in their mother’s womb as He wishes. In verse 6, the context and relevance of this statement is changed. Here characteristics of the muhkam and mutashabiha verses have been described. Characteristically, words or verses with one, clear meaning are called muhkam; and such verses are the heart of the Qur’anic teachings. On the contrary, words and

verses with the scope of multiple meanings are treated as mutashabiha. So, while explaining the mutashabiha verses in all places, the relevant muhkam verses should also be taken into account. We should also follow this principle with regard to the story of Isa and Maryam. This indication has been given at the beginning of this surah.

(v) At the outset of the surah (verses 2 & 3) reference of Torah and Injeel has been brought along with that of the Qur'an and Furqan. In a dispute with the Jews (regarding the issue of winning over the Kabula decree) they have been asked and challenged in verse 92 to bring the Torah and read it out. Therefore, it is understood from such verses that it will not be unjust to challenge the Jews or the Christians, and that evidence from the existing Torah and Injeel can be cited against them.

Death and the rise of Isa

This verse begins with (when) which links it with the previous one (verse 53). When the Jews were hatching a plot to kill Isa, Allah assured him by saying: "O Isa! I will save you from their conspiracy and they will not be able to kill you by crucifixion or in any other means."

Huge difference of opinion is seen in the interpretation of this verse – at least ten opinions are there. The main reason for this disagreement is that most of the Qur'anic commentators have depended on, and tried to maintain, the various narrations of the Jews and Christians in explaining the essence of the verse. As a result, they have presented a simple thing in a distorted way as if they were duty-bound to preserve the wrong information and false notions of the Jews and the Christians. However, they have not succeeded in their efforts, as many other opinions on this simple issue suggest.

If the pattern of language used in this verse is carefully and objectively examined, its meaning and significance becomes different from the traditional notions. The actual significance of the verse is — When the Jews were trying to kill Isa, Allah said to him: "Isa! I will bring their scheming to naught. They will not be able to kill you by

crucifixion and, therefore, cannot call you cursed; nor can they kill you in any other way. Rather, after the completion of your mission of prophethood, Allah will cause you to die and exalt you to Him."

The first disagreement here is over the phrase متوفيك . The root verbal noun of the word is whose seminal meaning is to complete or to be completed. However, depending on the variations of the verbal form, it takes various other meanings in other contexts. The death of a person can also be called the completion of their life on earth. In this sense, the word ofat means death.

In different places of the Qur'an, different derivatives of this root verb have been used. If we carefully analyze those usages, we will find that in some places it has only one object and in some others two. In places where it has two objects, its meaning is to give (or to be given) in full and not death in any way. For Example, little later in verse 56 it is said, يوفيهم "Whereas to those who attain to faith and do good work He will grant their rewards in full." Here the subject of the verb is Allah, and it has two objects: the believers and their rewards. Conversely, in places where the verb ofat has only one object, its meaning is death only. For example, in verse 11 of Surah Sajdah, Allah says: يتوفكم ملك الموت "Say, [one day] the Angel of death who has been given charge of you will gather you, and then to your sustainer you will be brought back." Here the meaning of the word ofat is death, and no other meaning is applicable.

In such cases, the derivatives of waf'un cannot have any other meaning except death, which is substantiated by its usages in the Qur'an. Here are some more examples:

- a. فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ Then how will it be when the angels take their souls at death, smiting their faces and their backs? (47:27)
- b. "O Allah! Cause our death with those who are virtuous." (3:193)
- c. "Cause me to die as a Muslim and join me with the righteous." (12: 101)

Lexicographical evidences

I mention below some quotations from some prominent lexicographers.

- i) جوهرى - "Allah caused his ofat means Allah seized his life. Here ofat means death." (Jawhari)
- ii) "Allah caused his ofat means He seized his soul." (*Lisanul Arab*)
- iii) "Ofat means death. Allah caused his death means Allah seized his spirit." (*Qamus*)
- iv) "Allah caused his ofat means Allah caused his death. Ofat means death." (*Misbah al-Munir*)

It is clear from the usage of the term in the Qur'an and in Arabic literature that the only meaning of the phrase متوفيك is "I shall cause your death." The proponent of the other meaning also cannot deny this fact. But, in order to maintain their wrong notion, they say that the words in the verse have to be rearranged for the sake of the correct meaning. Because according to the order of the words as in the Qur'an, the meaning is: "Then Allah said: O Isa! I will cause your death and will lift you to me." Sequentially, the death of Isa precedes the lifting of him to Allah. But the general belief among the Sunnat al-Jamaat collectively is that Allah pulled Isa to Him about two thousand years ago, and that he will be sent back to earth at a later time when he will kill Dajjal and thereby save Islam and the Muslim Ummah. Accordingly, the traditional commentators have rearranged the words of this verse to preserve this wrong theory.

I consider their argument unfounded. I do not have the audacity to say that without rearranging the order of the Qur'anic words its proper meaning cannot be deciphered, given that Allah sent the Qur'an as the main miracle of Islam and the pronouncement of that miracle has

been made in every corner of the world successfully for about 1,400 years. Nor do I deem it necessary to show such audacity.

I do not want to waste any time by raising questions about the meaning of the term Sunnat al-Jamaat or when and how these two words made inroads into Islamic literature. For the kind information of the reader, I simply want to say that my view has been supported by various prominent Islamic scholars and jurists. I will conclude this discussion by quoting from four such scholars.

i) Imam Ibn Hazm says:

ن عيسى عليه السلام لم يقتل و لم يصلب ، ولكن توفاه الله تعالى عز و جل ثم رفعه ليه ، وقال (وما قتلوه وما صلبوه ولكن شبه لهم) -

(ني متوفيك -)

(وَكُنْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مَا دُمْتُ فِيهِمْ فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِي كُنْتُ أَنْتَ الرَّقِيبَ

عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ) - (هُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ

مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا) -

يرد عيسى عليه السلام بقوله (فلما توفيتني وفاة النوم ، فصح نه

- 23 1 -

Hazrat Isa (Isa) was not killed, nor was he crucified. On the contrary, Allah caused his death and took him to Himself. Allah says in the Qur'an: "And they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so to them" (4:157). Addressing Isa, Allah says: "O Isa! I will cause your death and will cause you to ascend to Me" (3:55). Quoting Isa's statement Allah says, "Isa said: I was a witness over them so long as I was among them. But when You caused me to die, You were the watcher over them, and You are witness of all things" (5:117). Allah also says: "It is Allah that takes the souls (of humans) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep" (39:42). By "when You caused me to die," Isa definitely did not mean his sleep. So it is proven without doubt that Hazrat Isa had a natural death. (*Muhalla*, 1—23)

ii) There is no need to introduce Imam Malek to the ulama community. In this regard, Mullah Muhammad Taher, the renowned hadith lexicographer, says:

والأكثر أن عيسى عليه السلام لم يموت – و قال مالك مات وهو ابن ثلاث و
ثلاثين سنة مجمع البحار –

“Majority think that Prophet Isa did not die. But Imam Malek is saying that he died at the age of 33. (*Majma- ul-Bihar*, 1—286)

iii) Ulama and exegetes in general regard Hazrat Ibn Abbas as Jabr-ul-Ummah (the power of the ummah) and Imamul Mufasssireen (the leader of the exegetes of the Qur'an). In this regard, I quote one of his deliberations below:

عن ابن عباس رض في قوله إني متوفيك أي مميتك – أخرج البخاري ف
ترجمته تيسير الوصول ج 1 103

Ibn Abbas said: The clause “I will cause your ofat” mentioned in this verse means I will cause your death. (Bukhari)

iv) About this word, respectable Shah Waliullah is saying: متوفيك (I will cause your ofat) means مميتك (I will cause your death.). (*Fath al-Kabir*, p. 4)

Accordingly, the significance of the verse is: At the time when the Jews started conspiring against the Prophet Isa socially and politically, started making humiliating and demeaning remarks about him publicly, were trying to kill him and if possible crucify him, Allah assured that no harm would touch him and said: O Isa! Rest assured that these wicked people will never be able to kill you; and like other prophets, you will also have a natural death and will ascend the pinnacle of glory.

Raf'un

The meaning of the verse is that Allah will cause Isa to ascend to Him. But failing to dispel the illusion of the contemporary Arab society of that time, people interpret it as: Allah will take Isa to Him (to the fourth heaven) alive. They argue that, as promised, Allah took him to heaven 2,000 years ago. Now he is mixing and flying around

Allah's Arsh (throne) with the angels. To resolve the confusion how the Prophet Isa is flying with his corporeal body, they even go to the extent of saying that, after ascending to heaven, he grew wings in his body. They also propose similar other strange theories.

They have taken it for granted that Allah has a physical residence which is heaven, and that when Allah wants to take somebody to Him, that person has no other way to meet Him but to ascend to the heaven. Mentioning this argument, Imam Razi states:

People who believe in the physical shape of Allah argue that Allah resides in heaven. And they quote this verse to substantiate their claim. But, in different places of this book, we have established with incontrovertible evidence that, Allah is Eternal, Infinite and cannot be limited to any spatio-temporal location. There is no reason to be misguided by the mention of the phrase (to Me). Once the Prophet Ibrahim said: “ني ذاهب إلى ربي – الآية” “I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me!” (37:99). The Prophet Ibrahim was, in fact, going from Iraq to Syria at that time [and there was no question of him going to heaven]. On the whole, the meaning of the verse in question will be: I will lift you

() to a definite place of my honor” (*Fath al-Kabir*, 2—690). In this regard, I am quoting examples of few more usages of the term in the Qur'an and hadith:

a. It is said in the verse under discussion that Allah will do of Isa. One of the 99 attributive names of Allah is (the One who does raf'a of something). According to *Lisanul Arab* Rafi means: - الرافع الذي يرفع المؤمن بالإسعاد وأوليائه بالتقريب

“One Who lets good sense dawn on the believers and blesses His near ones with (or the privilege of proximity), an honor Allah gave to Isa.”

b. It is said in verse 36 of Surah Noor about masjids or places of prayer:

، بُيُوتٍ أَدْنَى اللَّهِ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ “In those houses where Allah has ordained to do

() and dhikr (remembrance).” Here it has not been commanded to hoist the masjids and to keep them hanging in the air. Here it means “to exalt” (Raghib).

- c. In verse 10 of Surah Fatir, it is said: **إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ وَالْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ يَرْفَعُهُ**

“To Him good words ascend and it is He Who exalts the righteous.” This means that Allah accepts the good words and bestows high status on the ones who do good deeds. It should be noted that, the phrase **إِلَيْهِ** ‘toward Him (Allah)’ has been used here too.

Arguments of the other party

I have provided my views with evidences in the sections above in as brief as possible. I will conclude this issue by discussing the usual arguments and evidences presented by the opponents in this subject.

The first evidence they put forward is the hadith of Mi'raj. The gist of this hadith is that the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) met the Prophet Isa in the second sky on the night of Mi'raj. There they exchanged greetings and other niceties. On the basis of this hadith, they want to prove that the Prophet Isa ascended heaven alive (before death) and that he still resides there alive.

I gave my detailed opinion about Mi'raj in the appropriate place. Here I would like to add that the Prophet (SAWS) on the night of Mi'raj met not only with Isa, but with many other prophets and exchanged similar greetings with them as well. Those hadiths contain details of his visits to Prophets Adam, Ibrahim, Musa, Yusuf and Yahya. If we accept their argument, the logical conclusion will suggest that, none of these prophets received natural death and they were taken to heaven alive where they have been staying till today.

The second evidence of the other party is that the Prophet Isa, near the time of the doomsday, will come down to this earth and “will establish complete justice ...;” so it is learnt that he went to heaven before his death, where he is staying alive even today.

I find it difficult to see any relevance of their use of the word ‘so’ in this context, because if Allah wants He can send him back to earth even after his death. Isa, in his life time on earth, could give life to many dead persons who had died ages ago by the order of Allah. If he could do that, there should not be any reservation in the fact that Allah will give him life again and send him back to earth [if He wishes].

There is another important point to note in this context. All the different hadiths – that tell us about Isa's return to earth – inform us that the main purpose of his comeback to earth will be the extermination of Dajjal (Muslim, Tirmidhi, *Mishkat*, Ibn Jabir, etc.). The issue of Dajjal is one of those stories about future happenings that are markedly problematic.

Applying the best of my knowledge about Dajjal, what I have clearly understood is that, even if we have to accept the narrations in the hadith about Dajjal as incontestable, we must unequivocally admit that Dajjal had appeared during the time of the Prophet (SAWS) and he died a normal death after the demise of the Prophet (SAWS). Below I give some evidences of that in brief:

- i) Narrated by Jabir, Abu Dhar, Ibn Omar. Swearing in Allah's name, they said: “Definitely Ibn-Sayyad is the Dajjal.” (Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, etc).
- ii) The Prophet's companion Jabir says, “I have heard by my own ear that Omar, in front of the Prophet (SAWS), swore by Allah and said that, without doubt Ibn-Sayyad was the Dajjal. The Prophet (SAWS) did not contest Omar's statement.” (Bukhari & Muslim)
- iii) It is known from another narration of the Prophet's companion Jabir that, Prophet himself used to fear Ibn-Sayyad to be the Dajjal. (*Mishkat*)

Readers must have noticed that all these narrations are described in a very simple, lucid and unequivocal terms and all mentioned in Bukhari and Muslim. Therefore, the other party has no room for hair-splitting in this regard, as the very reason for Isa to come back to this world again is absent.

Two other pledges

Four pledges that were given to the Prophet Isa are mentioned in this verse. The first two [that Allah will cause his death and that He will exalt him] have been discussed before. The third pledge from Allah to Isa was that Allah would make him completely pure and clean. The Jews used to spread slanders and call him an illegitimate son and his mother a woman of loose character. They also said that Isa was the product of his mother's adultery with a soldier named Panther. On the other hand, the Christians believe that Maryam, Isa's mother, conceived after her union with the Holy Ghost. The Jews had the wrong notion that a man who dies in crucifixion is cursed. This belief led them to call Isa, a great prophet of Allah, mal'oon (cursed). The Christians also believe in this concept, that is, Isa was crucified and he is a cursed person (Galatio, 3-13). Other sections of the current Bible also substantiate such blind faiths (See Coronthio 2, 5-21). However, according to Allah's teachings in the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) removed all these blind faiths and wrong notions and lit the light of truth, as he cleared both Isa and his mother from the calumnies spread by both the Jews and from the wrong notions spread by the Christians. I leave it to the judgment of the reader to decide how much logical or illogical the idea that Isa will be sent at the end of the time to regenerate Islam is. But I must say that the last Prophet (SAWS) established the truth regarding the life of Isa, which is a historical fact.

Those who do not follow the teachings of Isa cannot be his true followers even if they vent their vanity and claim to be Christians. The fundamental teaching of Isa was the absolute tauheed (Oneness of Allah) and protest against the worshipping of any humans. In that sense, the Muslims are the real followers of Isa. In my opinion, except for the communities like the Nasturio and the Unitarian, no other communities known as Christians deserve the appellation of Christian according to the teachings of the Bible.

The fourth promise of Allah to Isa described in this verse (verse 54) is that "I shall place those who follow you (far) above those who are bent on denying the truth, until the day of resurrection." If we read

this verse in conjunction with verses 55 and 56, its real significance becomes clearer.

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ذَلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ (3:58) مَثَلٌ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ
كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (3:59)

(O Prophet!) What We are reciting to you successively is part of My signs and wise counsel (3:58). "To Allah, the state of Isa is like that of Adam, He created him and said to him: 'Be!' so it is." (3:59)

Isa and Adam

Discussion on the word Adam has been provided in a note of Surah Baqarah. However, this subject has been dealt with in other places in the Qur'an as well, such as Surah A'araf: 189-91; Surah Taha: 121, etc. In these places relevant discussions have been attempted which show that the word Adam in those contexts too means the human race.

It is said in various tafsir books that the 'deputation' of the Christian clergies from Najran who came to visit the Prophet Muhammad mentioned that Isa was born without a father, and then said to him: "O Muhammad! You give us an instance of any other human being on earth who has been born without the intervention of a father? So this is the main evidence of Jesus' godhead."

In reply to that, it is said in the Qur'an that the instance of Isa is like other human beings who have been created by Allah out of clay. The Prophet (SAWS) told the clerics of Najran that Isa's mother Maryam conceived in the same manner as all other women of the world do.

Another piece of very minute information has been provided in this verse. It is said that Allah created Adam and said to him 'Be' and it is *يَكُونُ* is a mudarey form which carries the meaning of both present and future (See Raghbi). This mudarey form of verb cannot be appropriate with regard to the creation of the Prophet Adam because he came into being when Allah created him long ago. So, what justification is there to use this 'Be' with regard to the Prophet

Adam's creation? Actually, the human race has been there since the beginning of creation and will continue until the doomsday [and that is why Allah has used a mudarey form].

Some people in protest to this idea tend to say that "Allah created the Prophet Adam out of clay whereas all other human beings are born of their fathers' semen." But according to a clear declaration of the Qur'an, not only the Prophet Adam but all humans have been created out of clay (Surah Hajj: 5). Similarly, everything in this world comes into being because of an order: 'Kun' (Be!) (Surah Nahl: 40, Baqarah: 117, and other verses). The creation of human being has been discussed in more detail in the interpretation of the first ruku of Surah Nisa.

۞ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ فَاتَّبِعُوا مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (3:95)

بَيَّنَّتْ وَضَعَ لِلنَّاسِ لِلَّذِي بَبْكَةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدَىٰ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (3:96)

"Say (O Prophet!) that Allah has revealed the truth; therefore (O people of the Book,) follow the religion of Ibrahim, the upright one; and he was not one of the polytheists" (3:95). "Indeed, (know that) the first place of worship that was appointed for the entire human race is situated in Bakkah — full of blessing, and a guidance for the entire world" (3:96).

Protest of the Jews

Verse 1 of ruku 9 of this surah mentions the issue of the oath-taking of the prophets. The gist of this pledge is that all the prophets from Ibrahim to Isa gave the good news to their followers of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) and told them to follow him when he came. In verse 82, it is stated that the Muslims believe in the prophethood of Ibrahim and all other prophets of his family.

Being bemused by such statements, the Jewish clerics started trying to find loopholes in the truth and making propaganda against the abovementioned statement. They kept on saying: Muhammad is saying that he believes in the prophethood of Ibrahim, but in practice

his statement is not true; he has declared the meat of camel halal (lawful) whereas it is haram (prohibited) in the religion of Ibrahim.

In reply to this, it is said in the verse that the foods that the Jews consider haram were halal during Ibrahim's time and for a long time afterwards. But it is Israel, that is, Yaqub who for certain reasons treated those things as haram for himself. In the traditional Torah (verses 7—22-23 of the *Book of Lebio*), only the fat of the goat, cow and camel is declared haram. In the subsequent verse 11, the entire camel is made haram. So, it is learnt from here that before the revelation of Torah, camel was not haram in the religion of Ibrahim.

There is an anecdote behind the prohibition of camel. Yaqub was on a tour. While passing at night time alone, a man became involved in wrestling with him. As he was not being able to win the fight, at one point the man hit on the hip of Yaqub. While wrestling, the thigh shield of Yaqub became displaced. The man then said: "Leave me, it is dawn now." Yaqub said: "I will not leave you unless you bless me." He then asked, "What is your name?" Yaqub replied: "Yaqub." The man said, "You will not be called Yacob, rather, you will be called Israel (the one who fights with God)." — For this reason, the sons of Israel do not eat the meat of the upper portion of the hip and loin. (Old Testament, Chapter 32)

In the Qur'an the name Yaqub has been mentioned ten to twelve times.⁴⁰ And to the best of my knowledge 'Israel' (instead of Yaqub) has been used in two places, of which this is the first. Probably, to give an indication to the root of the protest of the Jews the word Israel has been used here. The gist of the story is that a prophet (at least a man) had a wrestling combat with God during the whole night! What is stranger is that such stories are being propagated as words of God.

۞ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنْتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (3:123) إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَنْ يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَنْ يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِثَلَاثَةِ آفَافٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُنَزَّلِينَ (3:124)

⁴⁰ Actually it has been mentioned in the Qur'an 16 times. [Editor]

“The situation is that, (previously) Allah assisted you at Badr though (at that time) you were negligible in number; be careful of (your duty to) Allah, and only then you may become grateful” (3:123). “At that time when you said to the believers: Will it not suffice if Allah helps you by bringing down three thousand angels?” (3:124).

Help by the angels

From verse 122 to verse 125 attention of the Muslim community has been drawn to a series of attacks on the Muslims made by the Quraish. The Quraish people and their allies made joint and organized attacks on the Muslims three times which resulted in three fierce battles — the Battle of Badr, the Battle of Ohud and the Battle of Ahzab. In the Battle of Badr, the number of Muslim warriors was only 313 whereas that of the enemy was one thousand. In the Battle of Ohud, the Muslims were 700 and the enemy fighters were 3,000. At that time the number of Muslim males including those aged 15 was not more than three thousand.

One thing to be noted here is that Allah pledged to help the Muslim force with a number of angels that was in commensurate with the number of the enemy force in a particular battle. As in the Battle of Badr Muslims were 313 and the Quraish 1000, Allah assured the Muslims that He would send one thousand angels for their help. Similarly, three thousand angels were sent in aid of the Muslim force in the Battle of Ohud. Again this number is equal to the number of the enemy force. In the Battle of Ahzab, the number of the enemy force was ten thousand. The Jewish communities were maintaining a safe distance and watching the situation. Excluding the Jews, the number of Quraish soldiers was five thousand. Accordingly, in verse 124 of this surah, it is pledged that Muslims would be assisted with five thousand angels. And this forecast cannot be applicable for the Battle of Badr or of Ohud, because those two battles had already taken place. With regard to (من فورهم هذا), if we analyze the syllables of the verbs used in verse 124, it becomes obvious that they refer to future attacks, which cannot be any other attacks except for the Battle of Ahzab or Khandak (Trench). In other places of the Qur'an, especially in verse 12 of Surah Anfal, more discussion is made on this subject.

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وَأْتُوا الْيَتَامَىٰ أَمْوَالَهُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْخَبِيثَ بِالطَّيِّبِ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَمْوَالِكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حُوبًا كَبِيرًا (4:2) مُمْ أَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكحُوا

مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانَكُمْ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَا تَعُولُوا (4:3)

“And give to the orphans their property, and do not exchange worthless (things) of your property for (their) good (ones), and do not devour their property by mixing that with your own property; this is indeed a great sin” (4:2). “And if you fear that you cannot act equitably toward orphans, then marry other women of your choice, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between more than one wife), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; in this there is a greater possibility that you may not deviate from the right course” (4:3).

The right of the right hand

Basically, the word ayman has been used in this verse. Its singular form is yamin whose actual meaning is (i) right hand, (ii) the pledge or promise that two parties make while they make a contract. Some modern writers take the meaning of yamin as contract and in that sense it is the contract of marriage and the covenant made in that regard. It appears that their main intention behind interpreting the verse in this way is to avoid the issue of slaves. In my opinion their argument is not consistent. Nor are their imaginary interpretations necessary at all in this regard.

Islam has never supported slavery. Rather, it has taken positive and practical steps to gradually eliminate and uproot this abominable practice from society for good. The instruction of marrying the slaves is one such measure to eradicate slavery. In pre-Islamic Arab, a female slave did not have the status of a human being in society. Nor did she have any right anywhere [in private and public life] as a woman. Islam through this commandment confers the honor of wifehood on these downtrodden women.

Some ulama think that this verse does not carry the order of marrying the slave women. According to their view, since the slave women can be enjoyed freely by dint of ownership, marriage is not required. I strongly maintain that this view is absolutely contradictory to the general principle of Islam and against the ethical standard promulgated by the Qur'an. In this verse it is clearly stated that: You will marry free women in twos, in threes, in fours or only one, and slave women.

All these categories are described under the imperative verb 'you marry.' And there is not an iota of hint in the verse to exclude the female slaves from the effect of this command. So, there is no logical reason to make a rule of exception in this regard.

Some people argue that the meaning of nikah may be both marriage and sexual intercourse, and that its primary meaning is sexual intercourse and marriage is its secondary or figurative meaning. In other words, its primary meaning is sexual union and marital bond is its secondary meaning. Therefore, according to them, that 'you can take the slaves through nikah' means 'you can enjoy them without marriage.' In my opinion, this argument should be dismissed straightaway. If this meaning of nikah is accepted and if marriage with the female slaves is not required for having sex with them, then the necessity of marriage becomes null and void with regard to other women as well, because women of both categories are the object of the imperative verb (you marry). Moreover, the claim that the actual meaning of nikah is sexual intercourse is also not reasonable. Imam Raghbi says,

– ثم استعير للجماع و محال أن يكون في الأصل للجماع –

لأن أسماء الجماع كلها كنايات لا يكون ستقبايحهم ذكره الخ

The actual meaning of nikah is marital contract, and then it is interpreted as sexual intercourse as a secondary meaning. It is impossible to take sexual intercourse as the primary meaning of the word nikah. All the words used in the Arabic language for jema or sexual contact have been used as kinayah or metonymically, as for the

sake of decency the Arabs used to consider using any explicit expression to imply sexual contact improper.

Marriage is equally necessary in order to have sex with slave women, as is the case with free women. In this regard I quote below the decision of Abu Bakr Razi, a renowned imam and mujtahid of the Hanafi school of thought. Discussing this verse, the Imam says:

(أو ما ملكت أيمانكم) ضميره أو فانكحوا ما ملكت أيمانكم و ذلك النكاح هو فالضمير الراجع إليه أيضا هو العقد دون الوطء – فإن قيل لما صلح أن يكون النكاح للوطء ثم عطف عليه قوله (أو ما ملكت أيمانكم)

كقوله فانكحوا ما ملكت أيمانكم فيكون معناه الوطء في هذا الموضوع – قيل لا يجوز هذا لأنه إذا كان ضميره ما

تقدم ذكره بديا في أول الخطاب فوجب أن يكون بعينه و معناه المراد به ضميرا فيه فإذا كان النكاح المذكور هو العقد فكأنه قيل فاعقد

فيما طاب لكم فإذا أضره في ملك اليمين كان الضمير هو العقد إذ لم يجز للوطء ذكره من جهة المعنى و ال من طريق اللفظ – إضمار الوطء فيه و إن كان اسم النكاح قد يتناوله

و من جهة آخر أنه لما لم يكن في الآية ذكر النكاح إلا ما تقدم في أولها وثبت أن المراد به العقد لم يجز

أن يكون ضمير ذلك اللفظ بعينه وطأ لامتناع أن يكون لفظ واحد مجازا و حقيقة لأن أحد المعنيين يتناوله

اللفظ مجازا والآخر حقيقة ولا يجوز أن ينتظما لفظ واحد فيجب أن يكون ضميره عقد النكاح المذكور بديا

ي الآية – – 2 56

Au ma malakat aimanukum means fankihu ma malakat aimanukum you marry those who your right hands possess. The term nikah primarily means akd (marital contract). So the subsequent use of the word will also refer to the original meaning of the word nikah. In other words, since the word nikah means marriage in the first instance (with regard to free women), its pronoun will also refer to aqd (marriage) and not wait (sexual contact). Some people may argue that in this verse the term nikah has two meanings – marriage and sexual

intercourse – so it will signify marriage with regard to free women, and sexual intercourse with regard to slave women. In response, we say that such interpretation is not possible because the phrase fankihu has been used for both free women and slaves; and it is not legitimate to attribute two different meanings – haqiqi (literal) and majazi (metaphorical) – of the same word in the same verse and in the same context.

Revered imam simply substantiated the argument I put forward above through reasoning and evidence. Verse 25 of this surah also touches on this topic. Other related issues will be discussed there.

يَعِصِ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَتَعَدَّ حُدُودَهُ يُدْخِلْهُ نَارًا خَالِدًا فِيهَا وَلَهُ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ
(4:14) وَاللَّاتِي يَأْتِيَنَّ الْفَاحِشَةَ مِنْ نِسَائِكُمْ فَاسْتَشْهَدُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ أَرْبَعَةً مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ شَهِدُوا فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ فِي بَيْتٍ حَتَّىٰ يَتَوَقَّاهُنَّ الْمَوْتُ أَوْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ لَهُنَّ سَبِيلًا
(4:15) وَاللَّذَّانِ يَأْتِيَانِيهَا مِنْكُمْ فَأَدْوُهُمَا فَإِنْ تَابَا وَأَصْلَحَا فَأَعْرَضْنَا عَنْهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ تَوَّابًا رَحِيمًا (4:16)

“And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger and goes beyond His limits, Allah will cause him to enter the fire (of Jahannam) to abide in it permanently, and for him therein more disgraceful punishment” (4:14). “And as for those who are guilty of illegal sexual intercourse from among your women, call regarding them four witnesses from among you; then if they bear witness confine them to the houses until death takes them away or Allah opens some (other) way for their wellbeing” (4:15). “And as for the two who are guilty of indecency from among you, give them both a punishment; then if they repent and amend, turn aside from them; surely Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful” (4:16).

Adultery and women

Improving the condition of women in all aspects of their life by establishing all their rights and by freeing them from all kinds of oppression has been described in the first verse of this surah. In this verse, it is said that their rights also involve some responsibilities. Of

them, the first is to maintain their chastity and purity, the negligence of which may incur them punishment.

In the pre-Islamic era, a woman – if accused of adultery – had to suffer life confinement. This surah gives us a detailed picture about the then Arab society in which people used to hold some extremely obnoxious notions about women. It is easily understandable that the life imprisonment of an accused woman was nothing but a cruel death penalty. Conversely, perhaps, there was virtually no system of punishment for the male offenders of the same wrongdoing.

Toward the end of the verse under discussion, it is clearly stated that this provision is an interim and temporary measure. Final command will come in time later. In this verse, old practices of the Arabs have been retained with some urgent reforms. First modification is about the place of confinement. Earlier they were put to jail. In the present temporary system of the Qur'an it is advised to confine those women at home. Earlier the ultimate target of confinement in the jail was to kill them. But the new order is meant for their correction and new life. In the early days, women were punished without any trial or investigation of the allegations. Here this ruling requires the verification and investigation of the allegations and producing four free Muslim males as witness.⁴¹ Clear instruction of this verse is that, until the allegations are proved beyond doubt, the alleged woman cannot be given the punishment of domestic confinement. In the past, only the women were accused and punished for such offenses while male offenders were treated in such a way as if they did not commit any misdeed. However, verse 16 of this surah has the provision of punishment for both the male and female offenders. This will also reduce the possibility of false accusation to a great extent.

At the end of the verse it is assured that for the wellbeing of the confined women, Allah will prescribe other means, which has been defined in the second verse of Surah Noor that states: “As for the

⁴¹ As women were not fully empowered yet in that budding Islamic society, the stipulation ‘male’ has been attached since acting as a witness involves empowerment so that a person does not feel scared to deliver the right testimony. [Editor]

adulteress and the adulterer flog each of them with a hundred stripes.” This is the final commandment of the Qur'an regarding the punishment of adultery. Here no discrimination has been made on the basis of [gender or] marital status of the offenders. Nor are there any hints in this verse about 'rajm' (stoning to death).

According to the majority of the exegetes of the Qur'an, this verse (4:16) has been abrogated by the verse of Surah Noor and by some hadiths. In this regard, I want to simply mention that I consider such views as inconsistent. Indeed, there is no contradiction among the verses of the Qur'an; and, therefore, any question of abrogation of one verse by another does not arise at all. At that time the number of abrogated verses of the Qur'an was 500, which was reduced to 20 during the period of Imam Suyuti. Of those 20, Shah Waliullah has retained only 5 and proved that the remaining 15 are gaer mansukh (not abrogated). After that, Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan expressed his doubt even about the remaining five. Maulana Abdul Haq Haqqani has opined that out of those 5, 2 are not mansukh.⁴² We do not consider even the remaining 3 as mansukh. [In other words, not a single abrogated verse is there in the Qur'an.]

This is also my well-thought and firm belief that no verses of the Qur'an can be abrogated by hadith, because the latter is nothing but a historical document of the speech or action of the Prophet (SAWS). The Prophet (SAWS) came to this earth as Allah's vicegerent to preach and establish the rules and orders of Allah in society. So, the speech or act of the Prophet (SAWS) cannot be contradictory to the rulings of Allah (SWT). It is supposed to be complementary to, and interpretation of, the rulings and commandments of Allah which are encapsulated in the Qur'an. As in the words of the Qur'an, the Prophet (SAWS) is repeatedly stating that: "I only follow whatever is being revealed to me by my Sustainer" (Surah A'araf: 203; An'am: 50 & 106 and other verses of the Qur'an). Allah is giving His verdict of flogging the adulterers (man or woman) and His Prophet is abrogating that ruling and giving another verdict of killing them by stoning — this simply cannot happen.

⁴² See note 79 of Surah Baqarah.

Another point to be remembered here is that the rulings and commandments given by Allah for the reconstruction of the social order and for building up the national character came gradually in phases on the basis of practical situations and requirements. Prohibitions of gambling and intoxicants may be cited as examples here. Drinking of intoxicating liquors, gambling and unrestrained sexual relation were the three main curses of Arab society. But none of these was stopped overnight. Before passing the final order, the mindset of the people was prepared through various instructions. In the case of gambling and drinking intoxicants, we see that by the positive and constructive influence of the noble character of the Prophet (SAWS), the hidden conscience of social life gradually became aware of this evil culture and habits of society; and questions were arising in their minds about it. In verse 219 of Surah Baqarah we see that the companions of the Prophet (SAWS) were making queries about it and in reply to these queries Allah addresses His Prophet (SAWS) and says: "They ask you about intoxicants and gambling. Say: In both there is great evil as well as some benefit for people; but the evil which they cause is greater than the benefit which they bring." This is the first verse about intoxicants. And this verse was followed by verse 43 of Surah Nisa where it has been simply prohibited to offer prayer in a state of inebriation, because the attention that is required for prayer is not possible to attain in an inebriated state of mind. In this way when the psyche of society was ready to receive the course of reform, it is stated in verse 90 of Surah Mayeda as the final order: "O you who have attained to faith! Intoxicants, game of chance, and idolatrous practices, and the divining of the future are but loathsome evil of Shaitan's doing: shun it, then, so that you might attain a happy state." Here it is clear that the first verse is simply a complement to the second and the second, to the third. There is no 'contradiction' or dispute among the meaning of these verses.

Therefore, the question of one verse being abrogated by the other does not arise. In fact, if we analyze Qur'anic verses keeping this perspective in mind, we will find that the verse in question is not opposite or contrasting the verse of Surah Noor at all. There is a clear indication of a better law for the betterment of adulterer women in Surah Nisa; and the new ruling is revealed in Surah Noor where it is said that despite their adultery is proven with clear evidence,

detention for the whole life will not be given, rather they will be released after one hundred floggings. In Surah Nisa the accusers are told to produce four witnesses. On the contrary, in Surah Noor (verse 24:4) it is said, if the accusers cannot produce four eye witnesses to prove their accusation, each of the accusers will receive eighty floggings [for slander]. More so, their testimony will never be accepted in any future trial until they repent and turn back to truth (verse 4).⁴³ It is to be noted here that it has become extremely difficult to bring allegation against a woman because of the penal procedure mentioned last of all. There are some men and women in society who have developed a vicious habit of spreading a bad name for women. Qur'an wants to eradicate this sort of ugly mentality.

It has been clear from this discussion that the verses of Surah Nisa and of Surah Noor [with regard to the punishment of adultery] are the gradual development of different phases of the same system. Moreover, the verses are complementary, and not contradictory, to each other. In the human management system, it is sometimes required to repeal an order by another, because human knowledge has its limitations. A human can see only the immediate, temporary and changeable aspects of life and society. The universal and perpetual aspect of a matter does not appear within their view. So, humans make a law on the basis of an immediate or temporary requirement and according to their limited capability, knowledge and intelligence. But Allah SWT is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-beneficent; hence His ruling has no room for any shortsightedness or shortcomings. Therefore, in the laws of Allah that He passes for the betterment of humanity, the question of the necessity of abrogation does not arise at all.

Penalty for adulterous couple

The main objective of verse 4:15 is to remedy the general pre-Islamic Arab practice of torturing women inhumanely and unjustly after making allegation or slander of adultery against them. For this reason,

⁴³ The terrible and inhuman scene of whipping that flashes upon our inward eyes should not be compared to the word *jald* used in the Qur'an and hadith. The Qur'an has prescribed the punishment for adultery, maintaining the decency and dignity of human being.

this verse only discusses the issue of the women who are accused of adultery, and does not discuss the issue of men. Here an order has been passed to confine the accused woman in her own house so that she can keep away from depraved, bad-charactered men and women and thus can gradually recover from sexual immorality. In fact, the purpose of verse 15 is to give those women an opportunity of self-rectification.

The verse in question discusses the punishment for both the adulterous men and women. It is true that *alladhane* is a dual masculine pronoun, and generally it signifies two males. However, where one pronoun is used to mean a man and a woman, it is not possible to use a neutral pronoun in the Arabic language, or one for the man and another for the woman. In such a case, one has to use either *alladhane* (dual masculine) or *allatane* (dual feminine). *Alladhane* signifies two men; equally *allatane* signifies two women. Therefore, in such cases, it is not possible to use any dual or plural *ism-mausool* (relative pronoun). So, according to the idiomatic use of the Arabic language, in such cases only masculine words are used. Moreover, in Islamic literature and in our general usage, when 'he' is used it includes 'she' also. Otherwise, women would be excluded from 90% Islamic rulings. Therefore, there is no need to engage in arguments and counter-arguments in this regard. It may suffice to mention simply that, in grammar and in the art of rhetoric, this grammatical rule is called the use of *taghleeb* (تغليب) (talking according to the majority).

In this verse the punishment of 'idha' has been prescribed for both the male and female adulterers for an interim period. The meaning of 'idha' is to inflict mental or physical suffering, to torment by verbal censure and imprecation, to give good advice by reminding of the consequences of immoral acts, etc. In short, the main purpose of this torture is to draw away the adulterer's mind from evil actions. It is stated clearly at the end of this verse that if they both repent and mend their ways, "leave them alone and stop torturing them." Then Allah reminds us of His mercy and graciousness and says: I am more acceptor of repentance than anyone else, and I am Allah, the

dispenser of grace to all of you.” That suggests that, after their repentance and correction, the Muslim community should welcome them amongst the mainstream community to live a normal life and society should not make their lives hell forever for a mistake done once out of sudden excitement.

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مَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْكُمْ طَوْلًا أَنْ يَنْكِحَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ فَمِنْ مَّا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ مِنْ
تِيَابِكُمُ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَانِكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ فَانكِحُوهُنَّ بِإِذْنِ أَهْلِيهِنَّ وَأَتُوهُنَّ
أُجُورَهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ مُحْصَنَاتٍ غَيْرَ مُسَافِحَاتٍ وَلَا مُتَّخِذَاتِ أَخْدَانٍ فَإِذَا أُحْصِنَ فَإِنَّ
أَتَيْنَ بِفَاحِشَةٍ فَعَلَيْهِنَّ نِصْفُ مَا عَلَى الْمُحْصَنَاتِ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ الْعَنَتَ
نَبَّرَ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (4:25)

“And whoever among you has not within his power amplex of means to marry free believing women, then (he may marry) of those whom your right hands possess from among your believing maidens; and Allah knows best your faith: you are (sprung) one from the other; so marry them with the permission of their masters, and give them their dowries justly, they being chaste, not fornicating, nor receiving paramours; and when they are taken in marriage, then if they are guilty of indecency, they shall suffer half the punishment which is (inflicted) upon free women. This is for him among you who fears falling into evil; and that you abstain is better for you, and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (4:25).

Reduction of punishment for adultery

“As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes” – this is the clear command of the Qur'an (Surah Noor: 2). However, many of our ulama, referring to some instances of the early age, state that there was a system of rajm in the early days for adultery, though in this verse the law of flogging has been provided. Therefore, they argue, the adulterer will be flogged first and then the punishment of rajm will be applied. It is said in this verse that the punishment of the slaves for adultery will be half of that of the free women. It is easily understood that half of one hundred

floggings is fifty; but there can be nothing which is half of rajm or stoning to death.

Some ulama are of the view that the instances of rajm occurred in the early days of Islam, which was ‘abrogated’ after the revelation of this verse. And they use this verse to controvert the arguments of their opposite party. Imam Razi has termed this as a ‘serious problem’ (3—297). To resolve this problem, Maulana Abdul Huq says:

ونكه تنصيف ك قابل نهيد ے ڈی ر رجم نهيد اور يه

غلام کا ه -

“As rajm cannot be divided in two halves, it will not be applied for female slaves, and so is the case with the free women” (*Tafsir Haqqani*, 3—214).

This argument and counter-argument is fruitless and without any merit. They claim that the system of rajm had been there in early days and still exists after the revelation of this verse. They also openly agree that in this verse an order has been passed to award the female slaves half of the punishment of the free women; however, simultaneously they also say publicly that it is not practically feasible to materialize this order, because death penalty is indivisible. So, this order of Allah is obsolete! May Allah save me from that! Could not Allah (SWT) comprehend while passing this order that death sentence cannot be divided? Was not Allah aware of the fact that both the laws – flogging and stoning to death – for the adulterous women would remain there in Muslim society until the day of resurrection? If He was – and definitely He was – then how did He prescribe a law which will never be possible for human beings to execute or abide by, and will remain a ‘dead letter’ for ever? I have not found any satisfactory answer from the other party to these questions till today. In this regard, it should be mentioned here that a hadith of the Prophet (SAWS) cannot be mukhalef (contradictory) to the word of Allah. In fact, there is no instance of such contradiction in the religious literature of Islam. I will try to provide more details about this issue in the commentaries of Surah Noor.

Marrying a female slave is undesirable

At that time the condition of the moral and social life of the female slaves was very deplorable. So, there was a fear of serious social disorder if making them members of the family through marriage was unconditionally permitted. That is why it is said that the system of marrying the female slaves is only for those who fear getting involved in the sin [of adultery] if they do not marry. However, it is said in general that the fear of indulging in sins sometimes occurs due to lack of mental restraint. So, everyone should try to overcome this weakness and develop the culture of patience and restraint.

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أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ أَوْثُوا نَصِيْبًا مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْجِبْتِ وَالطَّاغُوتِ وَيَقُولُونَ لِلَّذِينَ
كَفَرُوا هَؤُلَاءِ أَهْدَىٰ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَبِيلًا (4:51)

“Are you not noticing those people to whom a portion of the Kitab (Book) has been given? — they believe in Jibt and in all forms of Taghut and say of the polytheists [disbelievers]: The way of their religion is much better than that of the Muslims” (4:51).

Jibt and taghut

The word jibt, as found in different Prophetic narratives and in Arabic dictionaries, denotes those things, matters or persons that are regarded out of superstitions or ignorance as sources of a person's good or evil and as foretellers of future and fortunes. In this regard, I quote a hadith below:

عن قطن بن قبيصة عن أبيه أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال – العيادة والطرق والطيرة من الجبت.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) said: “To count future by making rough sketches, to count the unseen by throwing a pawn and to consider a particular bird as a bad omen are included in jibt” (Abu Daud). The word ‘included’ in this hadith suggests that there are many other forms of jibt, as the following sayings of the Prophet indicate:

“It is unfounded to take the owl as a bad omen.” (Bukhari)

“Will-of-the-wisp and ghost have no existence.”

“There is no good reason to consider the month of Safar as inauspicious.” (Muslim)

“The soothsayers/palmists are worthless.” (Bukhari & Muslim)

“Prayers of 40 nights are not accepted from a person who visits soothsayers [to know the future].” (Muslim)

“No tie is left between a person, who visits a fortune-teller and believes his words, and what has been revealed to Muhammad.” (Ahmad & Abu Daud)

Omar (RA) says, “Jibt is sorcery.” (Bukhari)

In many hadiths it is also reported that imagining good and evil in the lunar star, in the moon and the sun, in a particular day or month is nothing but ignorance and superstition.

The Jews who lived in the Arab world forgot about the teachings of their divine books and, having been in contact with the idol worshippers for a long time and been influenced by them, were engaged in many superstitions and blind faiths. Mention has been made here about their moral downfall only to warn the Muslims against such practices. But, unfortunately, Muslims in the subsequent ages could not become alert about this matter. Having been forgetful about the teachings of tauheed (the Oneness of Allah) and been under the influence of an extremely idolatrous community, they have accepted superstitions and blind faiths of the Hindus [in the context of the Indian subcontinent]. What is most unfortunate is that, in some cases they have adopted the manners and customs and the superstitions including the nomenclature and rules of the polytheists, and in some other cases they garb those practices in Arabic and Persian adjectives and create a new pattern of “Islamic idolatry.” *Sahih Muhammadi Panjika, Islami Falnama, Nakhsey Solaimani* and similar other books are some of the deplorable manifestations of such a degenerated mentality.

Readers must have noticed here that, the Qur'an condemns the Jews for their belief in jibt and taghut. So, whoever believes in these kinds

of superstitions will have a share in the curse that is mentioned in the Qur'an. And it matters little whether such a person is specified as a Hindu, Jew, Christian or Muslim in the census.

تَنفُوتُكَ فِي النِّسَاءِ قُلِ اللَّهُ يُغْتَبِكُمْ فِيهِنَّ وَمَا يُؤْتِي عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ فِي يَتَامَى
النِّسَاءِ اللَّاتِي لَا تُؤْتُونَهُنَّ مَا كُتِبَ لَهُنَّ وَتَرْغَبُونَ أَنْ تَنْكِحُوهُنَّ وَالْمُسْتَضْعَفِينَ
مُوا لِّلْيَتَامَى بِالْقِسْطِ وَمَا تَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِهِ
عَلِيمًا (4:127) وَإِنْ امْرَأَةٌ خَافَتْ مِنْ بَعْلِهَا نُشُورًا أَوْ إِعْرَاضًا فَلَا جُنَاحَ
عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يُصْلِحَا بَيْنَهُمَا صُلْحًا وَالصُّلْحُ خَيْرٌ
أُوُوا وَتَنَقَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا (4:128) وَلَنْ نَسْنَطِعُوهَا أَنْ
تَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ النِّسَاءِ وَلَوْ حَرَصْتُمْ فَلَا تَمِيلُوا كُلَّ الْمَيْلِ فَتَذَرُوهَا كَالْمُعَلَّقَةِ
لِحُلُوهَا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا (4:129) أَيُّ يَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَلَّا
سَعَتِهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ وَاسِعًا حَكِيمًا (4:130) مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ وَلَقَدْ وَصَّيْنَا الَّذِينَ
الْكِتَابِ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ أَنْ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَإِنْ
فَإِنَّ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَنِيًّا حَمِيدًا
(4:131) رَبِّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا (4:132)
يُذْهِبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ وَيَأْتِ بِآخَرِينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَى ذَلِكَ قَدِيرًا (4:133)
تُؤَابِ الدُّنْيَا فَعِنْدَ اللَّهِ ثَوَابُ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا
(4:134)

“And they want to know from you a decision about women; say: Allah is making known to you His decision concerning them, and that which is recited to you in the Book concerning female orphans whom you do not give what is appointed for them while you desire to marry them, and concerning the weak among children, and (at the same time reminding you) of the decision regarding the orphan girls whom you do not give the prescribed portions [as regards mahr and inheritance]

— whereas you do not have ‘reluctance or desire’ to marry them; and (the advice concerning) the children who are weak and oppressed, and that you stand firm for justice to orphans (these orders are still in force). And indeed, whatever good you do, Allah is ever all-Aware of it” (4:127). “And if a woman fears hostility or adverseness [indifference] on the part of her husband, there is no blame on them if they reach an amicable settlement between them; and reconciliation is better even though miserliness is deeply related with human inner-selves. Actually, if you do good (to others) and remain self-restrained (that will not go in vain) because Allah is definitely aware of what you do” (4:128). “The fact is that, it is beyond your capability to do justice between wives – whatever great intention you have to do that – so do not incline too much to one of them, leaving the other hanging and in suspense; indeed, if you are reconciling and self-restrained (that will not go in vain); because Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (4:129). “But if they separate, Allah will render both of them free from want out of His bounty; definitely, Allah is All-Sufficient, Wise” (4:130). “Indeed, Allah is the sole Owner of whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; We advised those who were given the Book before you and (We recommend) you too that you should remain self-restrained with regard to [your duties to] Allah; and if you are ungrateful, then (be informed) that whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to Allah; definitely, Allah is Self-sufficient, and the Only Worthy of all praise” (4:131). “(Yes, Listen again!) Allah is the sole Owner of whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and Allah is enough as a Protector” (132). “O people! If He wills, He can take you away and (in your place) bring others; indeed, Allah is adequately potent to do this” (4:133). “Whoever desires the reward (only) of this world, (s/he should know that) with Allah is the reward of this world and of life hereafter; and Allah is All-Hearer, All-Seer” (4:134).

Rules regarding women

Various rules regarding women are elaborately discussed in the opening rukus of Surah Nisa. Those verses, especially verse 3, have been referred to here through the statement “and what has been

recited to you in the Book.” After the revelation of the initial verses, the Muslim community became especially conscious about the rights of women and became naturally interested to make amends for the age-old injustice on, and oppressions of, women. As a result, they approached the Prophet in order to know the remaining rules regarding women. And those laws are described in verse 128 onwards. But, before that, society has been reminded of the early rulings. In principle, all the Qur’anic rulings – alpha and omega – are closely related, and according to the gradual evolution of social consciousness those were revealed one after another.

Detailed interpretation of the issues mentioned in this verse was provided earlier in their appropriate places. Here I will conclude by drawing the attention of the reader to a critical point. It is stated in this verse that, “you do not give the orphaned women their proper rights” but , which has been translated in two contrary ways:

- (1) You desire to marry them.
- (2) You are unwilling to marry them.

Exegetes of the Qur’an in general hold that, “since the word has not taken any preposition like or , any one of these two meanings can be taken.” But it will be illogical to argue that any of the two opposite meanings of the same verb mentioned in the same verse and in the same context can be accepted. However, to me, both the meanings, not any one of them, are simultaneously acceptable here.

The fact is that, the Arabs used to deprive the widows and the unmarried orphan girls in two ways. Sometimes they used to marry them by force; and sometimes they did not allow them to get married to others, nor did they marry them. Their only intention was to detain them. Since the Qur’an wanted to protest against both these two abominable practices, no preposition has been used in the sentence, and I have translated it accordingly – you do not show reluctance or desire.

Hostility of husband toward wife

In verse 34 of this surah, aggressive and inimical attitude of wife toward husband has been highlighted and remedies to this unwanted relation have also been suggested. Similarly, in the current verse (4:128) under discussion, remedies of the displeasure of a husband on his wife are prescribed. It is in the interest of both husband and wife that instead of severing their conjugal relation beyond repair they may come to an amicable settlement for their future life – and this is the decree of the Qur’an. For example, the husband may take a second wife and at the same time ensure adequate maintenance for the first wife who also agrees to live in a separate place. The wife has rights on her husband, and vice-versa. If the parties (husband and wife) sacrifice part of their rights, or one party agrees to give up the whole of their rights with a view to setting things aright amicably, such a settlement is deemed to be appropriate according to this verse. At the same time, both the parties have been advised to give up the tendency to miserliness. The word used in this verse means a state of miserliness blended with greed. This type of mutual agreement sometimes may become difficult or impossible due to excessive bargaining. Hence, in this context, this kind of tendency (miserliness and greed) is condemned.

Polygamy

If there is no genuine reason for the husband to marry another woman and if it is driven merely to satisfy one’s thirst for beauty and lust and sex hunger, polygamy is not permitted in Islam. But if there is a genuine need, its permission is definitely there in Islam, which is again under certain conditions. It is stated in this verse that it is not humanly possible for men to treat all the wives with equal fairness in all respects. Therefore, a man should have some self-control and mental strength so that his inclination or weakness toward one wife does not throw the other into a state of a poor, neglected woman or of the proverbial queen neglected by her royal husband who is infatuated by his other wives. If a man who goes for polygamy and sincerely tries to do justice and offer fair treatment to all his wives, Allah – most Gracious and most Merciful – may forgive his mistakes and

failings. The main reason for ill feelings between husband and wife is the former's unbridled practice of polygamy. Hence, this bad practice has been mentioned as an example of injustice on women.

Divorce

When the aforesaid measures fail, there remains no other alternative but divorce. In such a condition, if they separate and prepare to start a new life forgetting about their past mental discomfort, they will get help from Allah's infinite bounties and hopefully they will be able to do that. And in Allah's abundance, there is peace and happiness, and blessing and sanctity.

Allah's universal decree

Allah advises the Muslims, as He did in regards to the people of the Book who came in the past, to remain conscious of Him, that is, to practice taqwa. At the beginning of Surah Al Baqarah, taqwa or consciousness of Allah is stated as the first quality of the Muslims (see note 4 of Surah Baqarah). "In Shariah terminology Taqwa is to try heart and soul to save oneself from feelings, instincts and actions which are harmful for spiritual life or for life hereafter, or from deeds which apparently may not seem detrimental, but may play the role of a catalyst and lead a person to moral and spiritual downfall" (Raghib). "Remaining conscious of Allah" means always remembering the untoward consequences of unrestrained life, which Allah has made inevitable in His law."

Crisis in conjugal life occurs mainly due to lack of restraint and patience of both the parties (or of one party). So, after prescribing necessary rulings in this regard, it is immediately stated that taqwa or self-restraint is a common teaching of the divine Scriptures sent to all communities, because the entire wellbeing of humankind in both spiritual and mundane life depends on taqwa or self-restraint. Hence, at the end of this verse it is asserted that this ruling is for the betterment of human beings. However, if people disobey this decree of Allah, they should know very well that Allah is indeed self-sufficient and He is not in need of their worship and services.

Ultimate message of Allah

People have been warned in a similar way in Surah An'am (verses 133-134 & 166) and in some other places in the Qur'an. The gist of these verses is that, if any nation or community that is in power starts misusing or abusing that power, their downfall is inevitable. This is true in social life, as in political life. If the women of a society are suppressed and victimized, the same law of Allah applies, which has been implied in verses 132 and 133. Allah is self-sufficient and He is not dependent on any nation or community. If there is misuse of justice, He will definitely punish those responsible.

فَبِمَا نَفْسِهِمْ أَقْفَهُمْ وَكَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَقَتْلِهِمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَقَوْلِهِمْ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ
 ، طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (4:155) وَبِكُفْرِهِمْ وَقَوْلِهِمْ عَلَى مَرْيَمَ
 بُهْتَانًا عَظِيمًا (4:156) إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ
 وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا
 نَّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا (4:157) عَا اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا
 (4:158) وَإِنْ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا لِيُؤْمِنَنَّ بِهِ قَبْلَ مَوْتِهِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يَكُونُ عَلَيْهِمْ
 شَهِيدًا (4:159)

"But, for their breaking (this) covenant and their rejection of the ayat of Allah and their killing the prophets wrongfully and for their saying: Our hearts are covered; nay! Allah set a seal upon them (their hearts) as a result of their rebellious attitude, so they shall not believe except a few" (4:155). "And for their disobedience — and for circulating against Maryam a grievous slander" (4:156). "And for their saying: we have killed the Isa-al-Masih, Isa son of Maryam and messenger of Allah; but actually they did not kill him; nor did they crucify him, but they simply had an optical illusion; definitely those who have differed about Isa are full of doubts; they have no knowledge about it — there exists only the pursuance of a conjecture, actually they could not kill him for sure" (4:157). "Nay! Allah took

him up to Himself; and Allah is Mighty, Wise" (4:158). "And there is not one of the people of the Book but most certainly believes in this before his death, and on the day of resurrection he (Isa) shall be a witness against them" (4:159).

Slander of Maryam

What is found in the religious or mythological literature of the Jews and Christians about the biography of Jesus Christ has little corroboration with history. Because of the lack of historical materials on the one hand, and the bad influence of the mutually contradictory legends concocted by the Jews and the Christians on the other, there has been a curiosity among the truth-seeking people of the West about this matter for a long time. Eventually, being helpless, many of them started to say: Whatever is said about the biography of Jesus Christ is baseless and is nothing but a collection of some unbelievable stories. And actually Jesus did not exist, they conclude. Eminent writers like Professor Arthur Drews of Germany, William Benjamin Smith of America and J. M. Robertson of England have published different books and articles on this issue.⁴⁴ At last, the Danish Professor Dr. Georg Brandes has apparently closed this chapter in 1926 by writing his famous book *Jesus: A Myth*.⁴⁵

In fact, Christianity was put to rest by the Christian leaders themselves on the day when they abandoned the Injeel and became forgetful about the glorious character of Jesus and, with a view to overwhelming the Jews and bewitching the idolaters, resorted to certain blind faiths, mythologies and imaginary stories in order to prove Jesus مسيح موعود (the Promised Christ). Since that time, they have kept saying that Jesus was born without a father, Jesus' mother Maryam was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Jesus was crucified and physically went up to heaven and took his seat at the right hand side

⁴⁴ Their works are respectively: (A) *The Christ Myth* (2 Vols, Jena, 1910); English translation of *The Christ Myth* (London 1910), and *The Witness to the Historicity of Jesus* (London, 1912); (B) *Pre-Christian Christ* (1905); (C) *Christianity and Mythology* (London). Source: *Islamic Review* July 1927.

⁴⁵ Original title is *Sagnet Om Jesus* 1926, English *Jesus: A Myth*, London, 1927.

of his Father (God), etc. Talmud literatures reveal that the unjust defamation spread by the Jews on the character of mother Maryam was nothing but a manifestation of their reaction against these legends of the Christians, especially the theory that Jesus' birth took place without the intervention of a father. Before that, both the Jews and the Christians had accepted the view that Jesus was the son of Joseph the Carpenter. Clear proof of this fact is found in the mythological texts of both the groups – Jews and Christians.

The Jews accused mother Maryam of being a woman of immoral character (harlot) and defamed Jesus as an illegitimate son, which is described in Talmud and Midrash. The Jews used to call Jesus "ben-Pandera." The word Pandera is derived from panthera which in English is written as panther.⁴⁶ In my opinion, this verse indicates the spreading of this slander by the Jews. The Qur'anic exegetes generally refer to verses 27 and 28 of Surah Maryam when discussing this slander. However, I believe that this happened after Hazrat Isa became a prophet of Allah. I will discuss those verses in the right place if Allah grants me the opportunity. Here I want to say simply this: Even if we take the views of the majority exegetes, the theory of Jesus' birth without a father is not established in anyway. That is merely an unjust calumny spread by the Jews. The Qur'an in this verse and in other places has contested this slander. Allah's curse engulfed them for such wicked utterances. So we have to state firmly that, according to the Qur'an, each and every word of their slander was untrue. Jesus was not an illegitimate son, and no sensible person can make an absurd statement that he was born without a father.

Visual illusion

Both the Jews and the Christians claim that Jesus was killed by crucifixion. But Qur'an emphatically refutes their claim and declares that the fictitious stories that the Jews and Christians spread according to their different motives are totally false. The Jews did not crucify Jesus; nor did they kill him in any other means – this is a strong, convincing and successful protest of the Qur'an against this fundamental belief of the Jews and Christians. At the level of belief, all Muslims firmly deem the statements of the Qur'an as true.

⁴⁶ See KAUSNER, "Jesus of Nazareth," 23.

However, unfortunately, such an untrue matter (the supposed crucifixion of Jesus) has spread far and wide and people started believing it. The Qur'an points to this popular belief and states:

شبه لهم Its inner significance, as I have translated, is: "But they had simply a visual illusion."

The meaning of the verbal root شبه is: to make something difficult and ambiguous; to cover or hide something; to present something in the shape of something else. Because of the variation of its verbal form and according to different verbal nouns derived from this verbal root, its meaning undergoes some change. For example, the meaning of the verbal nouns تشابهة و مشابهة is to resemble something else; and the meaning of تشبيه is to make something resemble something else. The word شبه used in this verb has come from the verbal noun تشبيه and the purport is that the condition of Jesus at that time was presented in an unreal shape and the real fact was covered and made ambiguous. In other words, although the Jews knew that Hazrat Isa was not killed they circulated this misinformation that he was killed on crucifixion, and that to characterize him as mal'oon or cursed. Conversely, with the hope to establish their new belief system among the Jews and the idolaters with relative ease and in order for Jesus to atone for the sins of all sinners, the Christians created the legends of Jesus' sacrifice in the cross, his rebirth and ascension to heaven after three days, and many other stories. However, the well-established historical fact is that, due to the help and sympathy of the Roman Emperor and of his local governor Pilate, according to the preconceived plan of a secret group who are Jesus' true disciples and known as Essenes, especially one of their leaders Joseph of Armathea, his body was removed from the crucifixion in the right time. He had been placed in a specially-made grave, from where he was transferred to a safe place immediately. And all necessary arrangements were there for his treatment and nursing. For the sake of their security, this group of disciples could not make the true fact known to the public. Accordingly, it is said in the verse that they could not kill Jesus by crucifixion or by any other means, but their leaders circulated their untrue narratives in a way

that made them credible to people. To make the lexical and literary aspect of the verse clear, I quote a hadith as an example below:

و منه ح الفتنة تشبه مقبلة و تبين مدبرة - ي أنها إذا أقبلت شبهت على

أرتهم أنهم على ي يدخلوا فيها و يركبوا منها ما لا يجوز

انقضت بأن أمرها فعلم من دخل فيها أنه كان على - - "

شبه" -

The gist of the legends a group of narrators mentioned with reference to this verse is that:

To save Jesus from the enemies (Jews), a man was given his exact appearance. As the Jews did not know Jesus (!) they crucified the ill-fated man who was camouflaged as Isa. By Allah's infinite power, there opened a window in the roof of the house of Jesus through which he fled to heaven. And Jesus has been staying there physically for a long period of 1959 years and will come down to the earth again to fight against Dajjal and Khinzir in the later era. Then, all the people of the book will have faith in him and then he will die a natural death.

It will not be sufficient to say simply that Islam does not have any relation with these narrations. In fact, the Qur'an introduces different aspects of Isa's life in different places to refute the wrong notions and ideas of the Christians. However, unfortunately, the Muslim exegetes and hadith narrators accepted these false stories indiscreetly and indiscriminately, which has had a deep imprint on, and became ingrained in, the minds of the Muslim community. This virtually paves the way for the Christian clerics to spread their beliefs among the Muslims.

The stories that the narrators have introduced while interpreting the meaning of the relevant verses do not fit in the language of the Qur'an. The implied pronoun of the verb شبه can only be Isa, because no one else has been mentioned explicitly or implicitly before that. After mentioning all the excuses that are put forward to resolve this problem, Imam Razi says:

وهذه الوجوه متعارضة متدافعة والله أعلم بحقائق الأمور – كبير 3- 502

“In fact, these arguments are self-contradictory and refute each other. Only Allah knows the real truth.” (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 3—502). Allah is definitely well-aware of the real fact, which He has revealed in its entirety. If we can recover from the legends compiled by the ignorant Jews and Christians, we will also come to understand the true story thoroughly, as many scholars did and advised their disciples to bring those to light.

Debate on Jesus

Except for some very unclear and mutually contradictory narratives about Jesus Christ's birth, some fabricated and groundless stories of only three years about his prophetic life and the events of one week about his trial, punishment and his supposed ascension to heaven, very little consistent and reliable information about Jesus Christ was available in world history. Accordingly, there were differences of opinion among different sects of the Christian community. Some people used to say: Jesus was not born and he did not die, because he himself is the almighty God. They think that conventional historical facts are metaphorical and nothing but the sport of Lord. According to the people of the Basilian sect, it is said in the Bible of Barnabas that Jesus Christ did not die by crucifixion and that another man replaced him on crucifixion and was killed. However, in order to establish their religious philosophy, the Christians in general say that certainly Jesus died by crucifixion; but on the third day he went up to heaven to atone for the sins of all humanity. Hints about the research work of the Christian philosophers are available in the in *Tafsir al-Kabir* of Imam Razi.

The death and rise of Jesus

Detailed discussion is made on this subject in the interpretation of various verses of Surah Ale Imran, especially in note 278.

Faith in Jesus by the people of Book

A general view of the past exegetes of the Qur'an is that Jesus will come down to this world before the doomsday, and that all the Jews and the Christians will believe in him at that time. But of late, the

eminent scholars of the Muslim world do not accept this view and argue that the past exegetes interpreted the verses on the basis of the theory of Jesus' supposed ascension to heaven physically. But this theory, according to the teachings of the Qur'an, hadith and history, has been found completely inconsistent. Let alone knowledge and science, the Prophet (SAWS) himself, while arguing with the Christian clerics of Najran, refuted the theory that Jesus was god and placed his natural death as the main proof to substantiate his argument (Ibn Jabir: 3-109). Accordingly, I support the later view.

If it is accepted that Jesus will come back once again before the doomsday and the Jews and Christians will also believe in him at that time, then it should also be accepted that there will be two prophets in that later era – Hazrat Muhammad (SAWS) and Hazrat Isa Ibn Maryam. After having firm belief in the Islamic concept of the sealing of prophethood, is there any reason to accept this supposed prophethood of the forthcoming Isa?

The Christians have become tired after waiting for the return of Jesus for the last two thousand years. And the Jews have been waiting for their promised Christ for even a longer period. In imitation of the Jews and the Christians, the Muslims have also constructed for themselves an imagination about *مسيح موعود* and have been waiting for the arrival of that savior Jesus Christ or Isa Masih for more than one thousand years. Each of these groups believes that Masih will come and defeat their enemies and establish a kingdom of heaven for them. But in reality this day-dream has turned into an unnecessary embarrassment. The benefit (?) of the Muslims is that they have inherited all these un-Islamic, unhistorical and unprincipled beliefs from the Jews and Christians; and another benefit (?) is their mental curse of idleness and inaction. And on top of these, Mirza Golam Ahmad is a constant blot on our conscience.

The interpretation of this verse is very easy and simple. Readers may have noticed that the next verse (verse 160) is closely related to this verse. Hence, after verse 159, a full stop has not been used. A careful analysis of these two verses will show that, they have separately discussed the wrongdoings of the two communities — the Jews and

the Christians. Actually, the phrase **من أهل الكتاب** points to one segment of the people of the Book. As verse 159 was revealed to discuss the issue of the Christians and as verse 160 makes mention of the Jews, it is obvious that the target of the discussion in verse 159 is the Christian community.

The conventional, age-old custom of the Christians is that, when death of a person becomes imminent, people call their priest who extracts a confession from the dying person about some religious faiths such as: 'Virginbirth,' the divinity of Jesus, his ascension to and comeback from heaven, trinity, etc. Sometimes the dying person is also issued a passport to heaven in return to his belief in these. The verse in question refers to this practice of the Christians and states that, though the stories of Jesus' ascension to heaven and return to earth are totally baseless, the Christians are forced to believe in these on their deathbeds.

Appendix

General View

All the legends about the creation of human beings prevailing among the Jews and the Christians for a long time are mainly based on the Bible. I quote below some relevant sections from the Bible:

“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (Genesis, Ch. 2—7)

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.

“And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

“And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him.

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

“And Adam said: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” (Genesis, Ch. 2—18-23)

“And Adam called his wife's name Eve [alive], because she was the mother of all living.” (Genesis, Ch. 3-20)

Many things can be said about the excerpts from the Bible quoted above and about their translation; there is no need to mention that here. Our main concern here is to explore the sources of the proverbs prevailing among the Muslims about the creation of Adam and Eve. We have used the word 'proverbs' deliberately, because these legends are not mentioned in the Qur'an. Even the name Eve is mentioned nowhere in the Qur'an. The few hadiths that mention the notion of the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam will be discussed later. It should be mentioned here that many exegetes of the Qur'an did not hesitate to include the folktales and fables of the Jews about cosmology in their tafsirs. As a result, these narrations have become the main ingredients of tafsir literature in general. This is not a new theory invented by us. The experts and the judicious ulama of Muslim society have been raising protests against such unscriptural intellectual practices for a long time. Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal considers these kinds of traditional books of exegesis as unfounded **تب لا أصل لها – المغازي و الملاحم والتفسير** (*Mauzu'at-e-Kabeer* by Mulla Ali al-Qari). About these proverbs and hearsays, the well-reputed historian Ibn Khaldun in his book *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* says:

“Our writers have copied these hearsays and folktales and filled their tafsir books. We mentioned previously that these narrations were taken from the people of desert who were the custodians of Torah; hence, it was not possible for them to assess the authenticity of their sources.”

After making a detailed discussion on this topic, Shah Waliullah states:

نکتہ دوم آنکہ نقل از بنی اسرائیل بسیار است کہ در دین ما داخل شدہ بعد از آنکہ " لا تصدقوا اهل الكتاب و لا تکذبوہم " –
(الکبیر)

Another unrevealed theory is that the compiled narrations and mythologies of the Jews have widely entered in religion (Islam). But our clear scriptural principle is that: 'As regards the narrations of the People of the Book, do not pass any judgment on their being true or false.' Despite this clear ruling of our Prophet's hadith in unambiguous terms, our narrators and writers have taken these narrations and wrong notions as true.

Most of the exegetes of the Qur'an have exactly reproduced the abovementioned Biblical notions, such as: Allah has created Adam with a handful of clay, He created Eve from a piece of bone taken from the left ribcage of Adam, etc. These types of Biblical stories are abundantly cited in their tafsir books. Some of them even did not hesitate to say that all men have a shorter bone at their left rib as part of it was taken out while creating Eve from the rib of the forefather Adam.

Word meanings and their significance

The Qur'an in different verses has clearly mentioned the system through which the evolution of human creation reached its completion. The reader will come to know a short introduction to that later. Some hints of it have been given in the verse (4:1) in question. At the beginning of this verse, it is said:

“يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا
O people! You remain always careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from one single nafs and from that nafs created its zauj.”

In order to understand the real significance of the verse, we need to ascertain the accurate meaning of the three terms discussed below:

The significance of the word *rabb* was discussed in detail in the interpretation of Surah Al Fatiha. The meaning of its root verb is:

The root of the word *rabb* is التربيّة “tarbiyat” which means to create newer things, bring them to completion and perfection under certain process of transformation from one stage to another. (Raghib)

In many places in the Qur'an, instead of the name Allah, or other attributive titles of Allah have been used. Needless to say, the usage of each of these attributive names bears special significance. Here, instead of saying “Be careful about Allah,” it is said: “Be careful about your Rabb.” The clear hint about this usage is that, the present shape of human existence has developed through a system by the good will of the Creator through different stages.

While explaining this verse, the real significance of the word “zauj” is generally ignored. According to the collective decision of Arabic dictionaries, the word *zauj* means one of the pair; and I have translated it as ‘half’ of the ‘couple.’ It is not appropriate to translate it as wife in every place. Actually, the husband is the *zauj* of the wife and, equally, the wife is the *zauj* of the husband. The English word mate or spouse is perhaps the correct rendering of this word.

In this verse, Allah has stated in brief how the human soul came into existence and became active, how the male and female were created and how they learned to protect and gradually bring themselves up. This has no relation with the Biblical description of the creation of Adam and Eve.⁴⁷

The meaning of the word *nafs* was discussed before. Exegetes in general opine that *nafs* means “person.” And on the basis of this meaning, this verse is generally translated as “Allah has created the

⁴⁷ Some people may argue that, since wife can be the *zauj* of husband, why should there be any reservation to accept Hawa (Eve) as the *zauj* of Adam? In reply, others may throw this question: Since the forefather Adam can be the *zauj* of Hawa, why would you protest if it is said that Adam was created from Hawa?

Our submission about both the answers is that, the verse in question does not mention Adam or Hawa. So both the questions are unnecessary.

human race from one person" (Adam) and then created his wife (Eve) from him. I cannot agree with this view. In our opinion, here the translation of the word nafs is *حقيقت* or the origin of existence. Some prominent exegetes have translated it as _____ or 'of similar kind.' I think actually there is no difference between these two meanings.

Evidence of the Qur'an

Many verses in the Qur'an deal with the original component of human and its evolution. To get the real significance of the verse in question, it is important to interpret some other relevant verses. It is true that one section of the Qur'an interprets the other. The ulama are also in agreement with this point. I compile some relevant verses below.

For the benefit of discussion, we have divided the verses in two categories. Verses in the first category suggest that, contrary to the interpretation by the exegetes, it is not possible to accept that in verse 1 of Surah Nisa the word nafs stands for Adam and zauj for Eve. However, these verses are in complete agreement with our interpretation.

First category

(1) Verse 21 of Surah Rum reads:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً
وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ (21)

"And among His signs is that He created mates for you from your anfus [plural of nafs] that you may find rest and security in them, and for that reason He put between you love and compassion; indeed, there are signs in this for a people who reflect."

In order to maintain the Biblical version of the story of Adam and Eve, the word nafs in Surah Nisa has been translated as 'person' or 'body.' Like the first verse of Surah Nisa, the quoted verse above also deals with the creation of human beings and contains similar words and phrases. But here (30:21) the same translators and exegetes have translated the word nafs as _____ (kind or genus) not as "a particular

individual, that is, Adam." The translations of Shah Waliullah and Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi may be cited as examples in this context. A group of exegetes also followed this trend.

Addressing the entire human race, it is said in verse 1 of Surah Nisa that Allah created them from one nafs or living entity and He created their mates also from the same entity. However, in this verse, since the word nafs is a common noun, its singular number has been used. Taking the wrong advantage of this singular noun, some people have misconstrued and translated it as a particular person, that is, Adam.

In the abovementioned verse of Surah Rum, there is no room for taking this meaning. Here both _____ and _____ are plural; hence, the translation of this verse is: Allah has created your pairs from your anfus (plural of nafs). Therefore, the meaning taken by exegetes in Surah Nisa can by no means be applicable in this verse. Otherwise, it will have to be accepted that Eve was created from the body of Adam, so are all the wives from the bodies of their husbands. But this cannot be substantiated, because marital relationship between husband and wife is established after the marriage is solemnized whereas the arrival of the baby boys and girls in this world occurs long before the marriage takes place. Again, many boys and girls die unmarried. So all must accept the meaning given by us and none can prove that nafs here means an individual or the human body.

(2) It is said in verse 11 of Surah Shuara:

يَذَرُوكُمْ فِيهِ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ (11)

"The Originator of the Heaven and the Earth is He (Allah). He created your pairs from your anfus [_____]."

(3) It is said in verse 72 of Surah Nahl:

لَهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا "And Allah created your pairs from your anfus."

For the reasons mentioned above, the meaning of nafs cannot be anything but the origin of entity. That is why, prominent translators of

the Qur'an like Shah Waliullah, Shah Rafi Uddin and Shah Abdul Kader have translated the word nafs in verse 4:1 as (genus).

(4) In Surah At-Taubah it is said,

(9:128) "Indeed, there has come among you [O humankind] an Apostle from your anfas." (9:128)

The significance of this verse is that, Muhammad (SAWS) is not a deity. Nor is he an unnatural thing unknown and incomprehensible to you. He is one of you. Actually, here the meaning of nafs is society, community or genus. "Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) was created from the body of every member of his Ummah (community)"— there is no possibility of such a weird notion in this context. For this reason, Shah Waliullah has taken the meaning of nafs in this regard as 'kabila' or community. While translating Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi states: جو تمھار هي

In other words, there has come such a prophet who is included in your which means 'genus.'

(5) In this regard I want to draw the attention of the truth-seeking reader to verses 189-192 of Surah A'araf. The first verse of this group of four verses is completely similar to the one in question in Surah Nisa. It reads,

"It is He who has created you (all) from the same nafs, and out of it brought into being its mate []." (7:189)

In the first verse of Surah Nisa we read,

وَحَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا - ية

"Your Sustainer Who created you from one nafs, and out of it created its mate []." (4:1)

[As discussed before,] the word nafs mentioned in this verse of Surah Nisa is generally translated as "one person, that is, Prophet Adam,"

and similarly the word zauj as "his wife, that is, Hawa." In all places in the Qur'an [where the words nafs and zauj occur], we notice the same diction, the same context and the same mode of expression. Therefore, in the said verse of Surah A'araf [7:189], the word nafs should have been translated as Adam, and zauj as Eve! A group of general exegetes have done this. As a result, according to the verses from Surah A'araf in question, they did not hesitate to recognize Adam and Eve as polytheists! The tafsir scholars who are not ready to blindly follow the unfounded and imaginary stories and who reject the Adam-Eve legend narrated by conventional exegetes hold the view that:

(1) Male or female of the human race have been created from the same original entity.

(2) Humankind, irrespective of male and female, is born of the same original constituent; and hence, they are thought to belong to the same species. In these verses (7:189-192), there is no mention of Adam and Eve. The verse points to a common weakness of human beings: In order to protect their children from dangers and difficulties, parents seek protection from gairullah (beings other than Allah).

For the benefit of discussion, I quote below the significance of those four verses of Surah A'araf below:

7:189: It is He who has created you from one nafs, and out of it brought into being its mate (pair). And the purpose of creation is to establish a sense of relief, confidence (trust) and love between them. In course of time, when the time for the wife to become a mother approaches, both the man and woman (husband and wife) pray to Allah and say: O our Lord! If You indeed grant us an honest and capable child, we will keep grateful by Your grace.

7:190: But, when according to their prayers they have a child by Allah's grace, then they begin to ascribe other powers beside Him as partners with regard to what He has granted them even though Allah's honour is sublimely exalted and much higher than the partnership people ascribe to Him.

7:191: What! They want to associate with Allah partners who cannot create anything rather they themselves are created.

7:192: These imaginary deities will not be able to help them (their worshippers), and not even themselves.

From the above verses, it is incontrovertibly established that the meaning of nafs in verse (4:1) that we have attributed to the word is not inconsistent. In the verses we have discussed, the meaning of the word nafs can in no way be translated as person. The general usage of the term in the Qur'an is the main evidence of the legitimacy of our translation. The dictionaries of the Arabic language unanimously support this rendering. Learned, judicious and free-minded exegetes like Imam Razi, Imam Abu Haiyan and Imam Ibn Bahr have also accepted this significance.

Abu Haiyan in his interpretation of Surah A'araf says conclusively:

وأما من جعل الخطاب للناس عاما و ليس المراد في الآية بالنفس زوجها آدم
..... ي قوله : فيتسق الكلام اتساقا حسنا من غير تكلف تأويل و لا

تفكيك – البحر المحيط 4 (440)

However, [if we subscribe to the view of] those who say that the entire human race has been addressed in the verse and that the words nafs and zauj do not signify Adam and Eve respectively, then a coherence is established in the verses from beginning to end and we do not have to resort to any far-fetched or inconsistent stories.

To conclude, I quote the following text from Maulana Abdul Huq Haqqani below:

"مشہور یوں کہ حضرت حوا کو آدم کی بائیں پسلی سے پیدا کیا –
احادیث اور توریت سے بھی ثابت ہوتی ہے – مگر بعض محققین جیسا
امام رازی اور علامہ ابو السعود و دیگر مفسرین کہتے ہیں کہ "
منہا " میں " " جزئیت کیلئے نہیں بلکہ جنسیت کیلئے یعنی یہ بات نہیں
کہ حوا کو دراصل آدم کی بائیں پسلی سے بنا یا کہ ایک پسلی کی
حوا بن گئی ہوں - بلکہ یہ مراد کہ جنس آدم سے حوا کو پیدا کیا کس
لئے کہ انس جنسیت سے ہوتا ہے نہ جزئیت سے اور نیز جو ایک ہڈی
بنا سکتا ہے وہ ابتداء کیا نہیں بنا سکتا؟ یہی روایت کے سوا

میں ایک کنایہ ہے یعنی عورت مرد کے پہلو میں رہتی ہے اسی کو
پہلو سے پیدا ہونے سے تعبیر کیا " -

Second category

A particular piece of information has been very clear in some Qur'anic verses that deal with the basic elements of the creation of human being, its location and the trend of the evolution of those elements. Those verses are mentioned below:

(1) It is narrated in verse 20 of Surah Rum: وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ تُرَابٍ

“And among His signs is this: He created you from dust. And then in course of time, you have evolved into human beings and have been dispersed.” (30:20)

The following truths have been inferred from this verse:

- Dust is a component of the creation of human being;
- Human is created out of this element and Allah is the Creator;
- There remains a temporal gap between the beginning of life in the substance of dust and its development into a full-fledged human being. This 'gap' is indicated by the use of the phrase Late Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi also admitted this linguistic characteristic. His translation of this section reads:

تھر تھو ہ مپ ہیل ہوئے ہرتہ ہو -

“Then after few days, you turn into human being and become dispersed.” It has been clearly admitted in his translation that there is a temporal gap between the start of the process of creation of humans and their present full-grown condition. However, he wanted to limit it to 'few days.' Needless to say, I completely agree with his translation. My only reservation is about the adjective 'few.' The word shows that there is a gap of period between the two happenings points to the future.

یعبّر بہ عن کل زمان مستقبل – -

“This may point to every segment of the future” (Raghib). It will not be proper to think that it means only a short gap and not a long one. Whether the temporal gap is short or long is completely determined by the nature of the subject matter of the text and the sequence of the beginning and the end of the statement.

(2) We have noticed in the first verse that humans have been created from dust. I am quoting another verse about the nature of this dust. It is stated in verse 11 of Surah Saffat:

إِنَّا خَلَقْتَهُمْ مِنْ طِينٍ لَازِبٍ -

“Indeed, We created them out of sticky clay.” Here, instead of ‘Turaab’, the word ‘Teen’ has been used. Teen means clay which has been qualified by lazeb that means sticky-gluey clay, and there is no difference of opinion about this translation.

ذَلِكَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ (6) الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ (3)
وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ (7)

“This is the Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Mighty the Merciful. He created all things in the best way and He began the creation of human from clay.” (Surah Sajdah: 6-7).

We have seen in the foregoing discussion that human has been created out of clay. In this verse it is stated that the process of the creation of human being simply started from these elements; this was not the completion of the whole process. For it to become complete human, it needed to undergo various stages.

(4) Living cells of humans have been developed by commingling water with dull and dry dust. For example, Allah says in Surah Furqan: (54) “It is He Who has created human from water” (25:54).

(5) “Allah created humans from alaq.” Alaq means blood, love or attachment, and one kind of aqua insect like leech (Raghib & Qamus).

والعلق شيء أسود يشبه الدود يكون بالماء – مصباح المنير -

“Alaq is a kind of red material which is similar to aquatic leech.” (Misbah al-Munir)

(6) After describing the elements of human creation in clear terms in the abovementioned four verses, Allah is telling us in the following verses about the different stages and evolution of human creation.

(14)

“Indeed He created you in diverse stages.” (Surah Nuh: 14)

This is to say that, before attaining the current developed stage, humans had to go through various phases. And this is the eternal system of Allah's omnipotence, and He is the originator of this system. It has been stated clearly in the Qur'an that there cannot be any change in this rule. Animate and inanimate objects and plants and every material are under this rule, which is also a philosophical truth of the Qur'an.

(7) The following verses from Surah Mu'menoon carry clear hints about the gradual development of human creation discussed above:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ طِينٍ (12) ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ (13)

نَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَنَبَّأَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ (14)

“Indeed, We created human (firstly) out of a life element extracted from clay (sulala), and then We caused him to remain as a drop of sperm in a well-protected place of rest (womb) firmly fixed, then We turned the sperm into a clot of congealed blood and then we made the congealed blood into (organized and disorganized) mudgah and then made that mudgah into bones and then We clothed the bones with flesh and then We caused it to grow into another creation. So exalted and glorified be Allah, the best of the creators!” (23:12-14)⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In the source text, the verse numbers are 11-14. [Editor]

I have not found any Bangla synonym for the word mudgah. In my opinion, clot of blood is not its correct translation. The meaning of its verbal root is 'to chew.' The chewed piece of meat in the mouth is called mudgah. As regards its customary meaning, Imam Raghīb says:

جعل أسماء للحالة التي ينتهي إليها الجنين بعد العلقَة -

"It is a state of the embryo after it overcomes the stage of blood and attains the complete maturity of its embryonic status. The bone, flesh and other components are made in due order in this stage. In this regard in verse 5 of Surah Hajj, the word mudgah has been qualified as مخلقة و غير مخلقة which unanimously means complete or incomplete, or organized or disorganized. That is why, according to the narrative of the verse, in my translation I have used the adjectives 'organized and disorganized' in brackets. So, the notion that the lump of flesh is created first and then it turns into bones is a concept completely contradictory to the Qur'an.⁴⁹

What is Sulala?

Sulala is extracted material from something or the essence of a matter. The Arabic lexicographers are unanimous in this definition. A renowned lexicographer of the Qur'an, Imam Raghīb says: و قوله تعالى من سلالة من طين أي من الصفو الذي يسيل من الأرض -

"The Qur'anic expression 'from the sulala of clay' means from the substance extracted from clay." Allama Rashid Rida in his *Tafsir al-Manar* says:

رجة من الطين هي المكون الأول الذي يعبرون عنه بلسان
" و منها تكون أصلنا - 32 - 3 -

"This sulala extracted from clay is the original material of creation. Nowadays, modern science calls it protoplasm; and the basic component of our creation is made out of it."

⁴⁹ The primary meaning of the word مَكِين is the nest of the birds, snakes and other egg-laying creatures where they incubate the eggs and brood nestlings. Here it refers to the egg-cells of male and female.

About the meaning of sulala, one Arabic-English lexicographer says: "Sulala-t: — Anything drawn out of another; sperm; purest vital part." (Sleingass)

Protoplasm

Readers have been introduced to the elements and different stages of human creation. According to modern science, 'protoplasm' is the primordial organic substance, from which humans and other animate creatures are created. In order to ascertain the similarity between what the quoted verses say and the theories of modern science, we need to have a good idea of the nature of protoplasm. I try to define it below:

(1) Until recently, in the literatures of Bangla, Hindi and other local languages, there was no synonym for the word protoplasm. Hence, the lexicographers of these languages translated it as: original clay, life clay, living seed, etc. In Bangla medical books, in place of protoplasm, "primordial living substance" has been used. (*Modern Anglo-Bengali Dictionary*)

I quote below some useful general information about the definition and nature of protoplasm:

Lexicographers say:

Protoplasm, n. "A semi-transparent semi-fluid substance constituting the physical basis of life."

"Protoplasm defined by Huxley as 'the physical basis of life' is the essential material of which living creatures are composed." (*Ency. Britannica*, 14th Edition)

"Protoplasm ... the living matter from which all kind of living things are formed and developed, and to the properties of which all their functions are ultimately referred. ... Its composition is a problem with which science is still to deal." (*Times Ency. and Gazetter*)

"Protoplasm, ... The viscid, contractile, semi-liquid, more or less granular substance that forms the principal portion of an animal or vegetable cell.... Chemically it is mixed of 80 to 85 percent water and 15 to 20 percent solids, chiefly proteids Protoplasm is contractile and irritable, and reproduces by self-division." (*New Standard Dictionary*, 1945)

Discussion of hadiths

The proponents who believe that the word nafs stands for a person, that is, Adam and the word zauj for Hawa resort to some hadiths, which I quote below:

عن أبي هريرة أن رسول الله صلعم قال – المرأة كالضلع إن أقمته كسرتها و إن استمتعت بها استمتعت بها وفيها عوج – () ، ، (779 2)

“Narrated by Abu Hurairah: Allah’s Apostle said, “The woman is like a rib; if you try to straighten her, she will break. So if you want to get benefit from her, do so while she still has some crookedness.” (Bukhari, Chapter Nikah)

عن أبي هريرة عن النبي ﷺ قال استوصوا بالنساء خيرا فإن هن خلقن من و إن عوج شيء في الضلع أعلاه فإن ذهبت تقيمه كسرته و إن تركته لم يزل أعوج فاستوصوا بالنساء خيرا- ()

“Abu Hurairah reported from the Messenger of Allah who said: Take my advice with regard to women: Act kindly toward women, for they were created from a rib, and the most crooked part of a rib is its uppermost. If you attempt to straighten it you will break it, and if you leave it alone it will remain crooked; so act kindly toward women.” (Bukhari)

Sahih Muslim also recorded these two hadiths of Abu Hurairah with some changes. For the benefit of the discussion, below I quote those two hadiths as well:

عن أبي هريرة قال قال رسول الله صلعم إن المرأة خلقت من ضلع لم تستقم لك على طريقة – فإن استمتعت بها استمتعت بها - وبها عوج – و إن ذهبت تقيمها كسرتها و كسرتها طلاقها – 1 باب وصية بالنساء ص 574

“Abu Hurairah (Allah be pleased with him) reported: Woman has been created from a rib and will in no way be straightened for you; so if you wish to benefit by her, benefit by her while crookedness

remains in her. And if you attempt to straighten her, you will break her, and breaking her is divorcing her.” (Muslim, Chapter: Advice in Regard to Women)

عن أبي هريرة قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم إن المرأة كالضلع إذا ذهبت تقيمها كسرتها و إن تركتها استمتعت بها وفيها عوج –

“Abu Hurairah (Allah be pleased with him) reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Woman is like a rib. When you attempt to straighten it, you break it. And if you leave her alone you benefit by her, and crookedness will remain in her.” (Muslim)

Analysis of these hadiths

According to the exegetes in general, these hadiths give incontrovertible proof that Hawa was created from the rib of Adam. I cannot accept this concept as correct. Fortunately, wise, judicious and reasonable exegetes of the Qur’an and hadith commentators have always contested this kind of baseless hearsays. In my opinion, the arguments of the other party are completely unfounded and, as evidence, they simply reproduce some wrong notions of the Jews blindly. In this regard, I provide my arguments below:

(1) It is stated in hadith that woman was created from a substance or thing named

and I also admit that the word may mean a rib bone. And for the time being, I also accept that rib bone is the only meaning of the word

But, even then, a question remains that ‘woman was created from rib bone’ does not necessarily suggest that she was born from the rib bone of Adam. Hence, ‘rib bone of Adam’ is nothing but an interpolation of the commentators. So, it cannot be established from the text of the hadith at all that Eve was created from Adam’s rib bone.

(2) Then comes the question of Eve. The word has been used in hadith, and it means woman, not a particular woman. Its plural is nisa and niswan. In the compilations of hadith like Bukhari and Muslim, there is a chapter on nikah or marriage, in which there is one section

about the importance of being kind to women. The hadiths under discussion are mentioned in that section. Therefore, nobody can deny that the word 'woman' mentioned in those hadiths refers to the entire womenfolk and not to a particular woman. More so, even if we do not take into account the significance of the chapter and section, the diction of the hadith also testifies this truth.

It is said in clear terms in a hadith narrated by Bukhari:

بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ هُنَّ خُلِقْنَ مِنْ ضَلْعٍ

"You always be kind to women, because they are made from 'rib bone'." So, [for the sake of argument] we have to accept that all the women of the world are created from rib bones. According to this hadith, the claim that only Hawa was made of rib bone is completely invalid.

(3) As discussed before, *nisa* is a singular noun and it means woman, as its masculine counterpart is *mar'ah* which means man. As by the innate nature of man we mean the innate nature of all men, by the innate nature woman we mean that of all women. This is because 'man' and 'woman' in this regard are 'Common Noun' which in Arabic is called *Isme Jins*. In the hadith also the word woman has been used as a common noun. In other words, here *nisa* (plural) and *mar'ah* (singular) carry the same significance and there is no contradiction in the usage of these two terms. In this regard, Imam Abu Hayyan states in his tafsir: *و يؤيد هذا التأويل قوله إن المرأة بالجنس و لم يقل حواء -*

The word 'mar'ah' supports this significance, because the common noun 'woman' (not the word Hawa) has been used in the hadith. (*Bahr al-Muhit*, 3—155)

One thing to be specifically remembered here is that, these hadiths have been narrated to address the entire Ummah as eternal directives. One of the principles of Islam is to contest the ever-existent injustices and unscriptural practices meted out on women in the name of the concept of 'original sin' mentioned in mythological books of the Jews and Christians, and to establish their God-given rights in society. This hadith also, after mentioning one innate nature of women, advises the

Muslim community to be good to women. The two words *nisa* and *mar'ah* refer to that innate nature of women. According to traditional exegetes, here 'woman' stands for Hawa; hence, it should be admitted that that particular innate nature belonged only to the first woman Hawa, and then the hadiths cannot be applicable for women of the subsequent ages. In that case, these hadiths that contain advice for the Muslim men about being kind to women become irrelevant, because after Hawa no woman has been created from rib bone but by the normal way of sexual intercourse between parents.

A group of traditional exegetes and compilers of those mythologies, after noticing this argument, gave this excuse in favour of their case: It is true that only Hawa was created from the rib bone of Adam; however, as all women are daughters of Hawa, indirectly they all inherit the essence of the rib bone and Hawa's innate nature. But the question remains: If women can have a share in that tradition and inheritance because of their being born of the womb of Hawa, then why shall men be deprived of this good luck! Like women, men are also born of the womb of Hawa. So why shall only women be despised with the plea that they were born of a crooked rib?

(4) In the first and fourth hadiths it is said that

"Indeed, woman is like rib." Conversely, in second and third hadiths respectively, it is said: *نهن خلقن من ضلع -*

"Definitely *women* were created from *rib*" "Definitely *woman* was created from *rib*"

According to the significance of these hadiths accepted by the general exegetes, the first two hadiths are contrary to the second two, because the two statements – something is like something else and something is created from something else – are extremely at odds with each other. Therefore, it has to be admitted that, according to the rule of

al-majaz, these hadiths should be completely rejected; or it has to be admitted that, as *majaz* or *kinayah* (metaphor or secondary meaning), it has an indirect meaning which we should accept here. In the third hadith, after saying that if you want to straighten this crooked rib it will break, it is said: *و كسرهما طلاقها* "she will be broken' means divorce will occur."

Needless to say, it is not possible for the rib bone to be divorced, as divorce happens to married women only. So we see clearly that the word has been used metaphorically about women. We will discuss its actual significance later. The only significance of these hadiths is that, some words in them are not used literally.

(5) It will be a disservice to the usage of the Qur'an and the idiom of Arabic literature if we take the literal meaning that woman was created from or rib bone. I quote below two verses from the Qur'an: It is said in verse 37 of Surah Anbiya: خُلِقَ الْإِنْسَانُ مِنْ عَجَلٍ سَأُرِيكُمْ آيَاتِي فَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلْ

“Human is created of haste; soon I will show you my signs. Then you will not ask Me to hasten them!” (21:37)

It is said here that human has been created from ajl which can be translated as hastiness in English. What can be the significance of the clause ‘human is created of hastiness?’ Will it mean that there is a material called hastiness from which human was created?

Another similar verse is: اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ “He is Allah Who created you from weakness” (Surah Rum: 54). The same argument applies here.

Readers may have noticed that, there is a similarity between the language of these two verses and that of the hadiths we discussed and our ulama and imams did not take a literal meaning here with regard to these two verses.

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رِقُّ وَالسَّارِقَةَ فَاقْطَعُوا أَيْدِيَهُمَا جَزَاءً بِمَا كَسَبَا نَكَالًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (5:38) تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِ ظُلْمِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَتُوبُ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (5:39) اللَّهُ لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ يُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (5:40)

“And (as for) the male thief and the female thief, cut off their hands; this is a recompense for their action and an exemplary punishment from Allah; and Allah is Mighty, Wise” (5:38). “But whoever repents

after transgression, then definitely Allah will accept their taubah (repentance); Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (5:39). “Do you not know that to Allah alone belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? He punishes whom He pleases and forgives whom He pleases and Allah has power over all things” (5:40).

Punishment for theft

Simple translation of the first two key words of the verse can be: “man and woman who will steal”. As needed, the verse has been translated literally.

There is serious disagreement among the imams and scholars of various schools of jurisprudence about the significance of the verse. As a result, there have been created five or six rulings – some are independent and some mutually contradictory. However, the scholars should not be blamed for this. Rather, every knowledgeable person will agree that, it is because of their independent intellectual exercise and arguments and counter-arguments that all ramifications of this question and relevant evidences have become clear to us. But, it is a matter of great regret that we have lost the courage and instinct to follow these great people. Otherwise, we could reach an appropriate rendering of these verses, as did our predecessor imams and scholars after analyzing available evidences. As a sign of respect to them, we have closed all the doors of ijtiḥad and prohibited the treasure of that useful knowledge by hammering a big peg! The hadith experts under whose guidance thousands of students are gaining expertise in the six canonical hadith books years after years, the scholars who are writing exegeses of the Qur'an with their extraordinary competence and explaining Bukhari and Muslim, and those who are showing their amazing skillfulness in hairsplitting arguments of different jurisprudential schools of thought are also deemed to be incompetent to exercise ijtiḥad. As regards different religious rulings, new issues are emerging in the Muslim community and their solutions have become practically impossible mainly because of the absence of ijtiḥad. By the way, it should be mentioned here that, doing ijtiḥad involves some particular intellectual ability. It will be arrogance for somebody to do independent research on Islam without knowledge about the evidences of the subject in question.

Problems about the Verse

While interpreting this verse, scholars of the past encountered some problems, and those of the present time are facing some additional ones. Below I am providing a description of those problems in very brief:

1. The ruling of the verse is that if somebody steals their hand should be cut off. But nothing is said about the amount of the stolen goods and articles. So, the prescribed punishment has to be imposed on a person even if s/he pilfers small items like an earthen pot, a torn napkin, a mango, etc.
2. As the verse decrees to cut off the hand of the thief irrespective of their age, the ruling encompasses the minors as well because nothing is said about the thief's age.
3. It is instructed in the verse: "Cut off their hands." So both the hands of the thief should be cut off, as the meaning of 'hands' cannot be taken as only one hand.
4. In the general sense, hand means from the tips of the finger up to the armpit. So, it is evident from this verse that the hand of the thief should be cut off from the armpit, as is the opinion of Daud Zaheri.
5. According to the usage of the Arabic language, hand signifies each of the following definitions: an organ from the tips of the fingers up to the wrist, from the tips of the fingers up to the elbow, and from the tips of the fingers up to armpit. Even only a finger can be termed as يَد or hand (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 3—591); hence, cutting off only one finger of the thief may also suffice.
6. Adultery is more hateful than theft and is more harmful to social life. But, according to the Qur'an, its punishment is only one hundred floggings, which is lighter than the punishment of the cutting off of the hand. Heavy punishment for a light offence and relatively light punishment for a heavy offence cannot be appropriate.

Our venerable imams and scholars of the past endeavored arduously to resolve these questions. But unfortunately, their endeavor could not bring any real success because by that time different schools of

thought had already evolved in Muslim society and each imam and scholar started to analyze available evidences in the light of their own madhhab (school of legal thought). Therefore, it appeared that, their main responsibility became to refute the evidences and arguments of the proponents of other madhhabs. Not only that, the first and foremost duty of one group was thought to refute the arguments of the other/s. Even though Imam Razi was a follower of the Shafi school of thought, he defines this travesty of judgment thus : *وكل واحد من هؤلاء : المجتهدين يطعن في الخبر الذي يرويهِ الآخر – كبير ج 3*

"Each of these mujtahids (Islamic jurists) is busy finding faults with the hadiths narrated by other scholars." (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 3—593)

In these circumstances, I deem it necessary to detail the principles of the penal code in Islam before discussing the verse in question.

Principles of the Penal Code

I mention some hadiths below about the principles of the penal code in Islam:

(A) *عن عائشة رضي الله عنها قالت قال رسول الله صلعم : ادروا الحدود عن المسلمين ما استطعتم فإن كان له مخرج فخلوا سبيله فإن الإمام أن يخطئ في العفو خير من أن يخطئ في العقوبة – ()*

Narrated by Ayesha, Allah's Apostle (SAWS) said: "Try to protect Muslims as far as possible from penal punishment. It is better for a judge to commit a mistake by not awarding punishment than to commit a mistake by giving a verdict of punishment. (Tirmidi; Kitab al-Hudud)

(B) *عن أبي هريرة قال قال رسول الله صلعم : ود ما وجدتم له -*

Narrated by Abu Hurairah (R), Allah's Apostle (SAWS) said: "Whenever you have an opportunity, try to repeal a penal punishment." (Ibn Majah)

(C) *عن ابن عباس رض قال قال رسول الله صلعم : ادروا الحدود بالشبهات - (تيسير صناوي) -*

Narrated by Ibn Abbas, Allah's Apostle (SAWS) said: "Repeal a punishment that has been given out of suspicion." In other words, if there is a reason for suspicion, you should not award punishment to the accused.

It is, therefore, undoubtedly established from these three hadiths that:

(a) If there is a reasonable scope to set the accused free, the judge should make use of this opportunity. Punishment should be awarded as an unavoidable measure [where there is no scope to exonerate the accused].

(b) In the legal proceedings, if it is seen that the charges are not proved beyond doubt in the eye of law, the accused will have to be acquitted.

(c) According to the teaching of the Islamic penal code, it is better for the judge to commit a mistake by setting the accused free than awarding punishment by mistake. In other words, the accused can be acquitted by mistake but cannot be punished inadvertently. This is the fundamental principle of the Islamic penal code.

Precedents of the application of these principles

(1) In Abu Daud and other canonical hadith compilations, there is a chapter titled *باب في التلقين في الحد* which is translated as "to teach the accused a word that will make the awarding of punishment impossible."

(2) Narrated by Abu Umayyah al-Makhzumi:

عن أبي أمية المخزومي أن النبي صلعم أتى بلص قد اعترف اعترافاً ولم يوجد معه متاع فقال رسول الله صلعم :-
فأعاد عليه مرتين و ثلاثاً فأمر به فقطع - أبو داود - ابن ماجه -

A thief, who confessed his guilt in an appropriate manner, was brought to the Prophet. But no goods were found with him. The Apostle of Allah said to him: I do not think you have stolen. He said: Yes, I have. The Prophet repeated it two to three times; but despite that the man confessed his guilt. Only then the Prophet passed a verdict to cut off his hand." (Abu Daud, Ibn Majah, Nasai, etc.)

(3) Anas Ibn Malik narrated: While I was with the Prophet a man came and said, "O Allah's Apostle! I have committed a legally punishable sin; please inflict the legal punishment on me." The Prophet kept quiet and did not ask him what he had done. Then the time for the prayer arrived and the man offered prayer along with the Prophet. The man again got up and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Legal punishment has been due on me; please inflict the punishment on me according to the law of Allah's Book." The Prophet said, "Haven't you prayed with us?" He said, "Yes." The Prophet said, "Allah has forgiven your sin or your legal punishment." (Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud & Nasai). The name of this man is Abul Yusr Ka'b ibn Amr Ansari.

(4) During the Prophet's time, there was a Muslim called Ma'az Ibn Malik. Various accounts of his surrender have been narrated in different books of hadith. The narrators of these hadiths are Prophet's companions like Jabir, Ibn Abbas, Abu Hurairah and Buraidah. They report:

Ma'az Ibn Malik once appeared in a meeting of the Prophet (SAWS) and told the latter in an excited voice, "O Prophet! I have committed adultery, please purify me and pass a verdict to inflict the legal punishment on me." The Prophet did not give any heed to what he said and turned his face away. But Ma'az did not stop and repeated the same statement. The Prophet tried to avoid him four times but Ma'az did not stop.

In order to give a clear picture, I quote below the relevant section of another hadith narrated in Muslim:

Narrated by Buraidah.... Then he said: O Messenger of Allah, purify me. Whereupon he said: Woe be upon you, go back, ask forgiveness of Allah and turn to Him in repentance. He (the narrator) said that he went back not far, then came and said: O Allah's Messenger, purify me. Whereupon Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Woe be upon you, go back and ask for Allah's forgiveness and turn to Him in repentance. He (the narrator) said that he went back not far, when he came and said: O Allah's Messenger, purify me. Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said the same thing as he had done

before. When it was the fourth time, Allah's Messenger (may, peace be upon him) said: From what am I to purify you? He said: From adultery, Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) asked if he had been mad. He was informed that he was not mad. He said: Has he drunk wine? A person stood up and smelt his breath but found no smell of wine. Thereupon Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: Have you committed adultery? He said: Yes.⁵⁰

I want to draw the attention of the reader to verse 6 of this surah (Maeda). After giving the ruling of ablution, bath and tayammum, Allah says:

اللَّهُ لِيَجْعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ حَرَجٍ وَلَكِنْ يُرِيدُ لِيُطَهِّرَكُمْ وَلِيُنِيمَ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكُمْ

(5:6)

“Allah does not want to put you in any hardship, but He wants to make you pure and bestow upon you the full measure of his blessings, so that all you become grateful.”

Conversely, after the discussion of theft, it is said about the non-believers in verse 5:41:

لِنَّكَ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُطَهِّرَ قُلُوبَهُمْ ط

“These are those people for whom Allah does not desire that He should purify their hearts.”

After advising the wives of the Prophet to perform the ritual of purity, the Qur'an addresses the entire Ahl al-Bait (Prophet's family members) and says:

مَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا (33:33)

“Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, O people of the House! and to keep you spotless and to purify you thoroughly” (33:33). Here the purity of mind and character is evidently emphasized.

After the crucial test of the Battle of Tabuk, Allah refers to three companions and, after accepting their repentance, says:

⁵⁰ After this few pages are missing in the source text.

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلَّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ

وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (9:103)

“O Prophet! Take alms out of their property, you will cleanse them and purify them thereby, and pray for them; surely your prayer is a relief to them and Allah is all-hearing all-knowing” (9:103).

In the above discussion, the readers have noticed that different companions addressed the Prophet saying: يا رسول الله إني أصبت كذا و كذا فطهرني !

“O Prophet of Allah! I became involved in such and such sins, so please purify me.” So the main objective of all the penal punishments in Islam is purification.

Meqdar or amount

Nothing is mentioned in this verse about the amount or value of the stolen property. But from the verbal instruction of the Prophet (SAWS) and the examples set by him, it is clear that if the amount and value of the stolen article is below a particular measure, the decree in this verse will not be applicable on the thief; in other words, their hand will not be cut off.

On this point, except for two or three, all the imams and scholars hold the same view. Differences of opinion emerged on the value of the stolen article. And there are at least twenty different opinions on this; however, in terms of the strength of the evidence, only two views merit a discussion. The first view is that, the value of a stolen thing will have to be a quarter of a dinar or a gold coin if it is assessed in gold. And if it is assessed in silver, its valuation will be three dirhams or silver coins. The jurists of Hejaz, Imam Shafi and some other scholars support this view and quote some hadiths from Bukhari and Muslim as evidence. The gist of these hadiths is what the Prophet (SAWS) said: “The hand of the thief is to be cut off if the value of the stolen item is one fourth of a dinar or above. But if s/he steals an article of the value of less than that, the hand of the thief will not be cut off.” On the contrary, almost all the Islamic jurists of Iraq are of the opinion that the value of the stolen thing will have to be ten

dirhams or silver coins. Imam Abu Hanifa and his followers support this view. Tahabi, Baihaki, Imam Ahmad and some other narrators narrated from Ibn Abbas: "The Prophet (SAWS) says that no punishment of cutting off the hand will be given for stealing a thing of the value of less than ten dirhams." Hafiz ibn Kathir also cited a hadith of similar view. Abu Daud narrated two hadiths of the same substance.

I deem it necessary to quote few more hadiths in this regard. Tibrani narrates:

(1) عن عبد الله بن مسعود قال كان تقطع اليد على عهد رسول الله صلعم في عشرة دراهم -

(2) عن عبد الله بن مسعود أن النبي صلعم قال : لا تقطع اليد إلا في دينار أو عشرة دراهم -

(1) Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud narrates that during the time of the Prophet the hand of the thief used to be cut off for stealing a thing worth ten dirhams.

(2) Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud narrates that Prophet of Allah said: "The hand of the thief cannot be cut off for stealing less than one dinar or ten dirhams." Abu Daud also narrates a hadith of similar significance.

In different communities of Arab society in the pre-Islamic era, various kinds of punishment were in vogue for crimes like adultery, theft and robbery. The customs and practices of the local Jews are worth mentioning in this respect. Islam gradually reformed or removed those bad customs and practices. This theory is nothing new; all our scholars have admitted this fact. While discussing the hadith presented by the Zaheri community, Hafiz Ibn Kathir says:

و يحتمل أن يكون هذا خرج مخرج الأخبار عما كان الأمر عليه في الجاهلية حيث كانوا يقطعون في القليل والكثير - تفسير ج 3 340

"This can also be said that, this hadith simply informs us about the condition of pre-Islamic Arab society. People of pre-Islamic Arab used to cut off the hand of the thief for stealing any amount of theft – small or big amount. (*Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*, 3—340)

Evidence is found in the religious texts of the Jews that they had a general system of punishing a thief by crucifixion. It is also reported that when Jesus was crucified, "then were there two thieves [*sic*] crucified with him" (Matthew, 27—38). However, from reading the Bible it seems that Jesus did not like this punishment of crucifixion. Hence, he said 'allegorically' according to his usual principle.⁵¹

"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire." (Matthew 18—8)

Different religious texts of the Indian idolaters provide description of various crimes and mention punishments for stealing according to the value of the stolen article. Punishments for stealing range from cutting off the hand to cutting off one hand and one leg, cutting off both the hands, impaling, throwing into water after severing nose and tying hands and legs, and death by burning in hay fire. (Encyclopedia, vol. 6, Theft)

Definition of theft

Stealing others' property is totally wrong, and Islamic law has provision for punishment for such a crime. The theft under discussion in this verse is the one for which there is the prescribed punishment of cutting off the hand. In what follows, I will discuss the literal and technical meanings of the word *saraka*:

In dictionaries, the word *saraka* means:

(1) أخذ ما ليس له أخذه في خفاء -

(2) السرقة في اللغة أخذ الشيء من الغير على سبيل الخفية والاستسرار - هداية

(1) To take away a thing secretly over which one does not have a right. (Raghib)

(2) To take away a thing from others secretly and with the intention of keeping that secret is called *saraka*. (*Hedaya*)

⁵¹ All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables, and without a parable spake he not unto them. (Mark, 4—34)

Our imams and scholars took the relevant hadiths we mentioned earlier into consideration and arrived at a technical meaning of the theft. Exceptions of the main law have also been included in this definition. In some cases, exceptions and explanations have been described together. In order to understand the main clause of law, I quote below the unanimously approved clause. I will mention the exceptions later. According to the Indian Penal Code, clause 378:

“Whoever takes away the property of another, which is not of less value than the prescribed standard or *Miqdar*, from a protected position, in a secret manner, has committed a theft.”

First explanation: If somebody steals a thing of less value than the prescribed standard even if from a protected position in a secret manner will not be regarded as a thief.

Second explanation: If somebody steals something from a place which is not generally considered to be protected, then the punishment of this clause will not be applicable to them even if the price of the stolen article reaches the standard value and the thief takes it away secretly.

Third explanation: If somebody takes away the property of somebody else openly, the punishment of this clause will not be applicable even if the property is protected and even if the price of the stolen article reaches the standard. The punishment of the cutting off of the hand will not be applicable to such a person.

Exceptions :

Apart from these, this clause has some other exceptions. I mention below some of them as examples:

1) Needy person: A needy person entered into the protected garden of somebody else, ate up fruits of the garden to his heart's content but did not take any in his bag or pocket. His action will not be considered as theft at all. But if he takes away some fruits with him while going out of the garden, in that case, two things have to be taken into consideration: when and wherefrom he collected the fruits. If s/he took away the fruits ripe and stored in the barn and if the value of the fruits reaches the standard of *meqdar*, then s/he will be awarded

the prescribed punishment. Otherwise, he will have to pay damages and will be subject to lesser punishment. In other words, his hands will not be cut off. (Abu Daud, Nasai, Hakim and *Subulus Salam*).

2) Fruits of an unprotected place: If somebody steals fruits from trees of an unprotected place, regardless of its price and quantity, the punishment of the cutting off the hand will not be executed. (Ahmad, Abu Daud, Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Majah & Ibn Hibban)

3) If a person steals something from the house of their relatives or from a joint property, or if a servant steals from their master's house, the penalty of cutting off the hand will not be awarded. Stealing something from the *Baitul-Mal* (public treasury) will not incur the punishment of cutting off the hand, because *Baitul-Mal* is the property of all the Muslims in which the thief in question has also a share and right.

4) Punishment by cutting off the hand will not be applicable for the theft of field crops, fish of a lake, river or sea, fruits of garden if these are stolen from an unprotected place.

5) Theft of perishable items like cooked rice and curry, meat, milk, etc. will not incur the prescribed punishment for the thief.

These and other exceptions have been elaborately discussed in books of *Fiqh* of the Hanafi school. In this regard, *Hedya*, *Fath al-Qadir*, *Sharh al-Wiqaya* and the marginal notes (*hashiya*) of Maulana Abdul Hai may be consulted. From the examples of the prescribed law and the exceptions, it is clear that there is no good reason to feel scared and horrified after hearing the Islamic punishment of the cutting off of the hand for theft.

Amicable settlement

Another legal aspect should be mentioned here. According to the Indian penal code, no case pertaining to theft is compoundable. But in Islamic law all the cases regarding theft may be amicably settled before they go to the court. What is more, Islam encourages this kind of amicable settlement, and many prophetic narratives contain advice about compromise.

(1) عن عبد الله بن عمرو بن العاص أن رسول الله صلعم قال :
الحدود فيما بينكم فما بلغني من حد فقد وجب -

Narrated by Amar Ibn al-A's, the Prophet (SAWS) said: "You will settle the cases of hudud (prescribed penalties) amicably, because once a case of hadd is brought to me the punishment will become unavoidable." (Abu Daud, Nasai)

In this hadith the Muslims are advised to try to settle the cases, especially those of theft, amicably on the basis of the character of the guilty person and intercessions. If the allegation is proved, compensation may be collected from the accused. Again, the owner of the stolen items may even forgive the thief, which is implied in the hadith. Regardless of the enormity of the case of theft, all such amicable settlements can be done according to the advice of the hadith. However, once the case is brought to a judge in court, there is no room for amicable settlement. Please see the hadith below.

2) Safwan Ibn Umayyah (R) bought a woolen shawl and was sleeping in the masjid covered with the same. In such a situation, a man was dragging the shawl and was fleeing away but was caught red-handed. The man was brought to the Prophet (SAWS) who, considering the circumstances, gave the verdict of cutting off the hand. Safwan then said to the Prophet (SAWS): "I have no intention to punish him. I am selling out the wrapper to him and he will pay me later." He also said: "I forgive him." The Prophet (SAWS) then said, "Why did you not do so before producing him to me?" (Abu Daud, Ibn Majah & Darmi)

Here it is seen that the value of the stolen article was much higher than the Miqdar and it was stolen from a protected condition; and that was the reason why the punishment of cutting off the hand was given. But, even in the case of such a theft, there is room for amicable settlement and forgiveness before it is brought to the court, which is evident from the saying of the Prophet.

Undoubtedly, Islam gives tough punishment to the thief. But it also has a system to prevent such punishment from happening [if there are extenuating circumstances or if there is a way to amicable settlement]. If the case of the theft is not extreme and if the character

of the thief is not incurable, there is no possibility of the application of this punishment. In extreme cases [where the thief is an unredeemed and incorrigible criminal], it is very much appropriate to give the punishment to the thief from a moral point of view as well as on the question of principle. We have seen the good effect of this penal system in the kingdom of King Ibn-Saud, where we may not find even one single example of a person whose hand has been cut off for theft. Upon queries to the government officials there, I have come to know that this punishment is hardly applied. When I was in Makkah in 1929, I heard about only one such case. But, so far I can remember, that case was not brought to the law court as there was an amicable settlement. After all, as there are no thieves or thefts in Saudi Arabia [which can cause the application of the prescribed penal punishment], the punishment of cutting off the hand is actually non-existent there. Conversely, in our country, thousands of people are being sentenced to punishment [imprisonment] for theft every year and the number of thieves and of the cases of thefts is on the rise – and all this is a result of our blind imitation of the Western [legal] system, which is largely devoid of any acceptable moral principle. Because of this Western legal system, once a thief spends time in jail, s/he turns to be a practiced thief, and the recurrent imprisonment fails to create any fear in their mind about the evil of theft. Introducing corrective measures is irrelevant in this regard, as the main objective of our current system seems to earn money through the labour of the imprisoned thieves.

We should always remember that the Qur'an is the word of Allah; and the Qur'an describes Him as الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ the Compassionate and Merciful. Accordingly, all the systems prescribed in this Book are full of good and are designed for the benefit of the humanity. In other words, He prescribes punishments for the alcoholics, the adulterers and the thieves for the greater welfare of human society. If there is a septic, gangrenous wound in somebody's hand or leg and if it is not possible to cure it with normal medication, the doctors generally cut off the hand or the leg of the patient. We never contest such a decision of the doctor; instead, we offer complete support. What is more, we pay the doctor money and feel relieved once s/he cuts off

the limb through a surgical operation. By cutting off the hand of the thief, it is intended simply to remove a harmful, poisonous element from society. In reality, this system has been successful in all respects – both in terms of the objective and principle. Conversely, all other human-made systems failed in all ages and have become counter-productive and vitiated social life even more.

Provision for taubah (repentance)

If a theft case is amicably settled before it is taken to the court and the thief returns the stolen item/s or equal price and purifies themselves, then their taubah (repentance) will be accepted. It should be borne in mind here that a thief commits two offences simultaneously: one against Allah by violating His commandment and the other against His servants by depriving them of their legal possessions and rights of property. Allah does not forgive the offence related to Haqqul-ebad (the rights of His servants). In other words, if somebody does injustice to a human, Allah will not forgive them until the wronged person concerned does so. This is a general principle of Islam. In various hadiths we see that, after receiving the full punishment for theft, the punished Muslims used to go to the Prophet (SAWS) and became purified through taubah.

This [concept of the rights of humans] is a very much appropriate system. Otherwise, the crime of theft will become viciously widespread in society, and social life will be destroyed by the danger of various types of unrest. [For example,] a thief who steals the stored food grains of their neighbor causes starvation to the entire family of that neighbor. In such a condition, if Mr Thief does taubah and can become purified from all his sins, this will be a gross injustice.

هَلْ أَنْتَبِكُمْ بِشَرِّ مِمَّنْ دَلِكْ مَثُوبَةٌ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ لَعْنَةِ اللَّهِ وَعَصَبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمْ الْفِرْدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ الطَّاغُوتِ أُولَئِكَ شَرٌّ مَكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَنْ سَوَاءِ السَّبِيلِ (5:60)

“Say: Shall I inform you about a worse retribution from Allah than than this? (Ok, let me ask you:) On whom did curse of Allah fall?

And on whom did wrath of Allah fall? Of which community did Allah make apes and swine? And who worshipped taghut (wood, stones, ghosts and spirits, etc)? Actually their place was much worse and their deviation extreme.” (5:60)

Becoming monkey and swine

Toward the end of the previous verse, most of the Jews are called fasiqoon or wrongdoers. But saying this only does not tell us even one hundredth of the misdeeds of the Jews. So in this verse some important issues have been discussed in brief, from which even the readers of the Bible will find much information. And the Jews will definitely find information here, as these issues are very much part of their history and religious books.

It is stated in this verse that Allah made some people from amongst the Jews monkey and swine. In the note of verse 76 of Surah Baqarah, I showed in details that in the Qur'an, ‘to become monkey’ signifies to acquire the character and nature of monkey. [In other words, the word ‘monkey’ has been used metaphorically here.] The Qur'an, hadith, history, and Arabic literature do not force us to accept the theory that some people of the Jewish community really became monkey physically.

In the same way, ‘to become swine’ means to develop the nature and instinct of this animal [in their way of life]. Imam Raghīb, with reference to this verse, explained the meaning of the word khinzir:

قوله تعالى و جعل منهم القردة والخنازير – قيل عني الحيوان المخصوص
و قيل عني من أخلاقه و أفعاله مشابهة لأخلاقها لا من خلقته خلقتها –
الأمران مرادان بالآية – و كذا أيضا في
إذا اعتبرت أخلاقهم خنازير و إن كانت
صورهم صور الناس –

It is said that a particular animal has been referred to in this verse. It is also said that, this verse indicates the nature, not the physical feature, of the people whose character and activities are like those of that particular animal. Both are the significance of the verse,

because it is narrated that a human community were turned into the shape of swine. Conversely, it is also seen that, in human society there are a group of people who, though physically human, are thought to be monkeys and swine in terms of their nature and character.

I do not understand how two significances of the same verse can be accepted. However, in the comment of Imam Raghīb, we find complete support to our view. However, he is in difficulty with the narrations by various narrators and that is the reason why he had to accept both the significances. But there is no endorsement for those narrations in hadith or history. So there is no compelling reason for us to accept the unfounded remarks of some narrators. We, therefore, have to rid ourselves from the troublesome thought of those unfounded narratives and have to take the simple, easy and normal meaning of the verse.

In various places of the Bible also, the word 'swine' has been used in the sense of abomination. For example, "golden ring in the nose of swine" (Isaiah, 65-4) has been used in the same sense. In the advice Jesus gave to his disciples in mountain, he said: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces." (Matthew: 7-6) According to the author of the Biblica, "'The swine' as well as 'the dogs,' in Jesus' warning, are Gentiles...." (Art. Swine). In other words, dogs and swine were Jewish terms of contempt used for the Gentiles. For what meaning this kind of words were used in Jewish religious literatures is clearly understood from the above evidences. Jesus in the five books/gospels and later on his disciples in their books stated clearly the curse and destruction that befell upon the Jews. Ezekiel recounts the words of his Lord: "Thou art become guilty in thy blood that thou hast shed, and hast defiled thyself in thine idols which thou hast made" (Ezekiel, 22:4).

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وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ (7:11) قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ

رَ وَخَلَقْتُهُ مِنْ طِينٍ (7:12) قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَكَبَّرَ فِيهَا فَاخْرُجْ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الصَّاغِرِينَ (7:13) قَالَ أَنْظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمٍ يُبْعَثُونَ (7:14) قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنظَرِينَ (7:15) يَنْتَبِي لِأَفْعَدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (7:16) ثُمَّ لَا يَتَّبِعُهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ (7:17) قَالَ اخْرُجْ مِنْهَا مَذْمُومًا مِمَّنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لِأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (7:18) وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (7:19) فَوَسَّوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَائِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَتَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ (7:20) وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِيَّيَّي لَكُمَْا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ (7:21) لَاهُمَا بَعْرُورٌ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوَائِهِمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْتُ لَكُمَْا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَْا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (7:22) قَالَ رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (7:23) قَالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَى حِينٍ (7:24) قَالَ فِيهَا تَحْيَوْنَ وَفِيهَا تَمُوتُونَ وَمِنْهَا تُخْرَجُونَ (7:25) يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُورِي سَوَاتِكُمْ وَرِيشًا وَلِبَاسُ النُّفُوسِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ ذَلِكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ (7:26) يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنْزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوَاتِهِمَا إِنَّهُ يَرَاكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِمَّ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (7:27)

"We created you (first), then We fashioned you (in the shape of human), then We said to the angels: You all prostrate to Adam. All of them did prostrate except Iblis; he was not the one to submit" (7:11). "Allah said: Why did you not prostrate when I commanded you to do so? He said: I am superior to Adam, You created me from fire, and him from clay" (7:12). "Allah said: Go away from this, because you will keep bragging there — which cannot happen, so you go away,

because you are of the meanest ones" (7:13). "Iblis said: Allow me respite until the day when they are raised up" (7:14). "Allah said: You are already of those who have been allowed respite" (7:15). "Iblis said: For those You have punished me, I will certainly lie in wait for them in Your straight path" (7:16). "Then I will certainly come to them from before them and from behind them, and from their right-hand side and from their left-hand side; and You shall not find most of them thankful" (7:17). "Allah said: Go away from this despised and expelled; whoever of the children of Adam will follow you, I will certainly fill hell with you all" (7:18). "And (conversely We said): O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden and eat from where as you wish, but do not go even near this tree — otherwise, you will be of the unjust" (7:19). "But the Shaitan whispered suggestions to both of them in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts, and said: Your Lord has forbidden you about this tree for the sole reason that otherwise you will become angels or will become immortals" (7:20). "And he swore to them both: Indeed, I am a well-wisher (adviser) to both of you" (7:21). "Accordingly he caused them to fall by deceit; so when they tasted of the tree, their hidden parts became manifest to them, and they both began to cover themselves with the leaves of the garden — and their Lord called out to them and said: Did I not forbid you about this tree? And did I not tell you that Shaitan is your open enemy?" (7:22). "They said: Our Lord, Our Sustainer! We have wronged ourselves, but if You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will suffer utter ruin" (7:23). "Allah said: Go away you are enemy of each other! And there will be for you in the earth itself a dwelling-place and means for maintenance for a time" (7:24). "He (also) said: Therein shall you live, and therein shall you die, and from it shall you be raised" (7:25). "O children of Adam! We have indeed sent down to you such a libas (clothing) which is for you both raiment to cover your shame and adornment; and the libas of self-restraint is the best; this is of the ayat (signs) of Allah so that people may take advice" (7:26). "O children of Adam! let not the Shaitan cause you to fall into affliction as he expelled your parents from the garden, pulling off from them both their clothing to show them their private parts; he surely sees you, he as well as his

host (from such a place), from whence you cannot see them; Indeed, We have made Shaitans to be the guardians of those who do not believe" (7:27).

Adam and his creation

In the preceding verse (verse 7:10), Allah addressed the humankind in general and said: Allah has made you well-established on earth and created all necessary materials for your sustenance there. Soon after that in this verse it is said that: It is We (Allah) Who have created you and given you human shape, etc. So contextually it is clear that, by using 'you' Allah has addressed the whole humankind mentioned in verse 10. This issue was discussed in detail in various notes of Surah Baqarah.

I discussed in the tafsir (interpretation) of verse 1 of Surah Nisa in the light of the teachings of the Qur'an about the original component of the creation of Adam or the humankind and about their full-fledged development.

Pride of high birth

Being blinded by the false pride of high birth, Iblis refused to submit to Adam. Similarly, opposition to Islam by the Quraishites and all their insolence were driven by the same pride of high birth and devilish arrogance. Surahs revealed toward the end of the Makki period of prophethood especially warned them about this. There is an eternal lesson in this for the entire humanity.

Another important lesson for the believers in this verse is: A Muslim is one who completely submits to Allah out of love. So a Muslim should surrender to the will of Allah without any doubt or question. And this is called ibadat (worship). On the contrary, the one who presents excuses and disobeys Allah's order is the follower of the way of life of the Iblis.

Respite of Iblis

Lust, anger, greed and similar other cardinal passions are constant companions of humans. But Allah has given humankind an inbuilt power to overcome and check these vices, and by virtue of this

quality human being is treated as best of the creation (ashraful makhluqat).

Iblis sought a respite from Allah until the or resurrection of humans. The 'time of this resurrection' may mean the Day of Judgment, which is the opinion of the exegetes in general. But a question may arise here: Why has until the Day of Judgment – and not until the death of humans – been used here? Will humans be subject to Iblis' influence and victims of nafs ammara even during the long period between the end of human life on earth and the Day of Judgment?

The word is used for various meanings. There will not be any confusion if it means that the influence of Satan or of nafs ammara on humans will be there until their conscience and moral and ethical sense do not become dominant and active. Needless to say, the word is also used in this sense.

Deception of Satan

Satan's deception or delusion has engulfed humans on all sides. He tries to bring evil thoughts in our minds even at the time of worships and prayers. People who offer their prayer to show off may be cited as examples of such inducement of Satan. So, we have to be always very mindful of Satan's insinuations and temptations. In the Qur'an, the word term taqwa refers to this constant mindfulness. Here also human beings have been warned about the incitement of Satan.

Jannat of Adam

About the significance of the word jannat, Imam Razi says:

و هنا سوالات – السؤال الأول – كيف وسوس إليه و آدم كان في الجنة و إبليس أخرج منها؟

“Several questions arise here. The first question is: Iblis was expelled from heaven and lived in earth; and Adam was supposedly in heaven. So, in such a condition, how was it possible on the part of Iblis to instigate and tempt Adam?” The Imam quotes three answers to this question.

According to Hasan, “Iblis used to send insinuations and temptations to heaven and paradise through his قوت فوقيت or power of ascension.” However, nobody said anything about the nature of this power or about its origin.

“Others say that Adam and Hawa used to stand near the gate of paradise, and Iblis outside the gate. And then Adam-Hawa and Iblis became close to each other; and thus Iblis used to sneak away after passing his temptations. Our narrators have not told us from where and from what source they collected this queer story. Nor is there any evidence in history to suggest that some of the narrators of this theory were present at the supposed secret meetings between Adam-Hawa and Iblis. The Prophet of Allah also did not inform the human race about any such theory. So this is nothing but some speculation and groundless conjecture. Through this, both Adam and paradise have been demeaned and ridiculed.

Imam Abu Muslim Ispahani said:

بل كان آدم و إبليس في الجنة لأن هذه الجنة كانت بعض جنات الأرض – والذي يقوله بعض الناس من أن إبليس دخل في جوف الحية و دخلت الحبة في الجنة فتلك القصة الركيكة مشهورة -

“Rather, both Adam and Iblis were present in jannat; because this jannat (garden) is one of the innumerable gardens of this world. And, in order to resolve this problem, some people said that Iblis entered into the womb of a serpent which then entered into paradise carrying it. This is one of the widely-known dangerous folk tales.” (*Kabir*, 4—283)

We support this opinion of Abu Muslim, as we did before. The meaning of the verbal root of the word 'jannatun' is to cover or to be covered. The land of gardens and orchards remain covered with the shade of trees; and that is why such a piece of land is called jannat or garden. In the Qur'an, the word jannat has been used to refer to both the paradise in life hereafter and to gardens of this world. (Please see Surah Furqan: 8, Bani Israel: 91, Baqarah: 261-265, Saba: 15-16 and other relevant verses) In order to convince the reader I quote here only one verse:

وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ مِنْ أُعْتَابٍ وَحَفَفْنَاهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ
وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زُرْعًا (32)

“And (O Prophet!) you recount to them a parable of two men; for one of them We made two gardens of grape vines, and We surrounded them both with palms, and in the midst of them We made cornfields” (Kahf: 32).

In this verse we get a clear picture of a jannat (garden) of mundane world. The story of the serpent is an imitation of Israeliyats (Jewish mythology or traditions and stories of the Israelites). The difference is that the Jews think that the serpent itself is the instigator of Adam, while our narrators sent Satan surreptitiously to paradise by putting him inside the serpent. (For the story of the serpent, please see Chapter 3 of Genesis.)

Different stages of the development of human civilization and its socio-religious conditions have been discussed in these verses. After the awakening of their sense of shame, man and woman tried to cover themselves with the leaves of trees. Verse 22 refers to that condition. Then gradually they tried to produce fabric material and developed it further in due course of time, which has been described in verse 26. But at the same time, it has been said separately that the best dress is the dress of taqwa which is most important for living a decent, moral life. Humans have had to spend a long period of time to reach this developed state, which has been mentioned in this verse. It will be a gross mistake if we consider it a matter of few days or few months.

The forbidden tree

It is learnt from the Qur'an simply that Adam and Hawa were forbidden to go near a tree. No more details about the tree are available in the Qur'an or in hadith literature. So it can be reasonably surmised that this prohibition is not about any tree known to humans. However, there is a pre-indication and foreboding about this tree in the Qur'an and in hadith. It is such a tree that if someone tastes its fruits, s/he is sure to ruin and do injustice on themselves, will lose the adornment of morality and their garb of morality will fall off their bodies. It is such a tree whose association presents the evil instincts like lust and greed as alluring to people and thereby makes them

indulge in many immoral and unethical activities. The Qur'an has forbidden us to visit even the boundary of such a tree. (Please see the notes of ruku 4 of Surah Baqarah.)

Disobedience of Adam

If the word Adam refers to a particular prophet (the Prophet Adam), then we will have to admit that his disobedience is no less serious than that of Iblis. According to the general meaning, after infusing ruh (soul) in the body of Adam, Allah taught him knowledge. Adam saw in his own eyes that Iblis disobeyed Allah's command and refused to bow down to him. Adam heard in the same sitting and in his own ears that Iblis took a firm resolve to misguide him and Hawa. Moreover, Allah categorically warned him and said: Beware! Do not follow Iblis – “Indeed, he is a manifest enemy of both of you.” Despite everything, simply for the greed of a fruit, Adam forgot all these and yielded to the delusion and temptations of Iblis! Can such disobedience be possible for a prophet or a messenger of Allah? (Please see note 30 of Surah Baqarah.)

The Muslim mind and the Satanic mind

The mentality of Iblis is one of arrogance and rebelliousness. Conversely, the mental disposition of a believer is one of confession, repentance and forgiveness-seeking. This is the main difference between a steadfast Muslim and Iblis. It is a vital responsibility of each and every Muslim to translate this great lesson of the Qur'an into practice in their life.

Shaitan (satan) and his nature

According to the lexicographers, the word shaitan is derived from the verbal root

shatanun which means to stay at a distance. Every transgressor, lawless, dissolute, arrogant and disobedient among the human beings, jinns and animals is called shaitan (Raghib, *Qamus* and Jawhari). Raghib adds: – سمي كل خلق ذميم للإنسان شيطاناً – ليه السلام الحسد شيطان و الغضب شيطان -

“Every evil instinct of humans is also called shaitan, as the Prophet (SAWS) has said: Jealousy is shaitan and anger is shaitan.”⁵²

⁵² While writing, I could not ascertain from which hadith book this has been taken. The matn (text) of the hadith narrated by Abu Daud Atia is different.

In the Qur'an we find descriptions of human shaitans, as there are descriptions of jinn shaitans. In verse 14 of Surah Baqarah, it is said about the hypocrites: "And when they meet those who believe, they say: We believe; and when they are alone with their shaitans, they say: Surely we are with you, we were only mocking (with the Muslims)." All scholars agree that here the word shayatin (plural of shaitan) refers to the Quraish leaders who used to misguide and give bad counsel to people. In other words, one who misguides people by seducing their minds and by giving bad counsel is a shaitan considering *دلالة النص* (inferred meaning) regardless of their human or any other identity. Verses in Surah Nas and Surah An'am support this argument. In verse 27 of Surah Bani Israel, the wastrels and spendthrifts have been denounced as *إخوان الشيطان* (brethren of Shaitan). About the shoots and

fruit-stalks of the tree of Zaqqum, it is said in verse 65 of Surah Saffaat that *كَأَنَّهُ رُءُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ* "they are like heads of Shaitan."

In this regard, I think it is important to mention another verse. The Qur'an makes mention of Prophet Sulaiman, on the basis of which there are many folk tales and absurd wrong notions prevailing in society. According to the most common stock notion, Sulaiman was the king of the jinns. It should be mentioned here that jinn, shaitan, Iblis, khannas, etc all belong to the same family. In this regard, it is said in the Qur'an that Allah made jinns and shaitans obedient to Sulaiman. For example:

وَالشَّيَاطِينِ كُلِّ بِنَاءٍ وَغَوَاصٍ (37) وَأَخْرَيْنَ مُقَرَّبِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ (38)

According to the common notion, its translation is: "And We brought under his control all shayatin [plural of shaitan], builders and divers; apart from these, We also brought under control all other satans fettered in chains" (38: 37-38). Verse 82 of Surah Anbia states:

وَمِنَ الشَّيَاطِينِ مَنْ يَغُوصُونَ لَهُ وَيَعْمَلُونَ عَمَلًا دُونَ ذَلِكَ وَكُنَّا لَهُمْ حَافِظِينَ (82)

"And of the satans (whom we subdued to him) some who dived (for pearls) for him and did other work, and We were warders unto them."

In order to provide the significance of these two verses, a group of narrators concocted fiction, which we discussed before and is not the

subject matter of our discussion now. For the benefit of analysis I am quoting two theories. It is said in the interpretation of the first verse: Whenever a jinn oppressed a human anywhere in the world, Prophet Sulaiman used to apprehend that jinn and throw it in the sea or buried it in earth without wasting any time. Some jinns have remained imprisoned even till today.

The meaning of the second verse according to the stock notion is that: Allah Himself used to maintain the satans. In other words, the jinns and satans lived an honest and peaceful life according to the command of Allah, always submitted to Sulaiman (who is made of clay) and carried out his orders (*Kabir*). It is obvious that these two significances are grossly contradictory to each other.

I provided my view about the nature and activities of Iblis, jinn and satans before. Iblis refused to submit to Adam because of his pride of high birth. In this verse, it is said that Satan and his entire group can watch humans who cannot see them. 'Scientific exegetes' argue that, as humans are corporeal beings, jinns and satans can see them. Conversely, since jinns are *لطيف* or of fine material, human cannot see them. But we see in these two verses that the invisible, the ever rebellious, fire-made jinns or satans are obeying humans' order and working as carpenters, builders and other professionals without any complaints! The fire-like jinns are diving deep into the sea and collecting pearls for humans! King Sulaiman is apprehending the jinns and binding them all over the body with iron, detaining them in sea and burying them in earth. I want to remind the reader in this regard that these contemporary satans of King Sulaiman's time are presumed to be original and genuine jinns. Our chapbooks like *Nakse Sulaimani* and sorcerers are simply the remnants of these stories.

By the usages in the Qur'an we want to show that the particular, narrow notion that shrouds the minds of the Muslims about jinn and satan is baseless. Now I will conclude this discussion by quoting some relevant hadiths.

عن أنس رض قال قال رسول الله صلعم إن الشيطان يجري من الإنسان - متفق عليه -

1) Narrated by Anas: The Prophet (SAWS) said, "Satan can move inside the human body using the veins through which blood circulates" (Bukhari & Muslim). We regard this satan as nafs-e-ammara.

2) Narrated by Ibn Masud, the Prophet (SAWS) said, "Each person has two companions — one is jinn and the other is angel. The companions asked the Prophet (SAWS), "They are even with you?"

The Prophet replied: *ياي و لكن الله أعانني عليه*

— فلا يأمرني إلا بخير-

"Yes, with me too. But, as Allah guarded me against him (jinn), he has surrendered to me (SAWS). So the satan cannot induce me toward any evil." It can also be translated as "he has become Muslim (obedient)." (Muslim)

From the knowledge that Allah has given me, I understand that these hadiths point to the angelic and devilish instincts inherent in human beings. Here we also know that, if one follows the way of life of the Prophet, even if s/he cannot conquer the devilish instinct completely, s/he can at least subdue it.

3) The abovementioned two hadiths deal especially with the satan that seduces humans' mind. We know from some other hadiths that satan is associated with some ugly, abominable and evil things. For example *الكلب الأسود البهيم* black dog has been called satan (Muslim). One kind of snake has also been called satan.

In the preceding discussion, we have provided an idea about the meaning of the word satan in Arabic literature especially in the Qur'an and hadith. The satan that is imagined in our society can be called the corporeal satan. I do not want to engage in argumentation with people who are used to imagining this. I simply want to submit to them that my definition of satan is incorporeal and shapeless — nafs-e-ammara. As Muslims, we have to continuously fight against this satan. In other words, in this regard, the harmful animal instinct has been termed as satan.

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رَبِّكُمْ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ
يُعْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ ۗ أَلَا لَهُ
بَارِكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (7:54)

"Indeed, your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six periods of time, and He is seated on 'throne.' — He throws the veil of night over the day, (so that) they (day and night) pursue each other rapidly; and (He also created) the sun and the moon and the stars subjected to His commands. Beware! His is the creation and the command; Let the glories of Allah, the Lord of the worlds, be celebrated!" (7:54).

Six periods

At the end of this verse, it has been said clearly that the universe came into being by the good will and command of Allah. This has been described at the end of this verse. Among so many creatures in the universe, only the creation of sky and earth has been discussed in this verse.

a. Khalqun

The word *التقدير المستقيم* is at base. Actually it means or to determine or ascertain something in the right manner or to originate something which does not have any previous example or model is called *khalqun*. To create one thing from another is also called *Raghib*, citing different examples from the Qur'an, has supported this definition. As in other places, Imam Razi took *as*

and provided arguments and evidences (4—319). Other tafsirs also support this view (for example, *Fath al-Bayan*, 3—306). Arabic-English lexicographers have given the following meanings of *qadr* and *taqdeer*:

"Render possible, facilitate; fix in measure and quantity and distribute, etc." (F. Steingass, *A.E. Dictionary*)

b. Ayyam

It is said in this verse that Allah created the sky and the earth in six *ayyam*. *Ayyam* is plural of *yaom*. Generally the term *yaom* signifies

the time from sunrise to sunset. But it is also used to mean any small or large period of time (Raghib, *Misbah al-Munir*, *Mawrid*, *Kulliyat*, Abul-Baka-Al-Hussaini-Al-Hanafi, etc.). Allama Abdus-Saud and Kazi Baizari translated (in six ayyam) as in

six periods. According to this meaning, I have translated the related section of the verse as "Allah created the heavens and earth in six periods." The word aeon (yug) could be used; but we abandoned that, as the significance of yug that is given in Hindu mythological literature or in Sanskrit dictionary is not fully consistent with the word yaom or period.

Here we should remember one thing. The Qur'an does not say that the creation of the entire universe and creatures was completed in six days or periods. Rather, it says that:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ

"And it is He (Allah) Who created the heavens and the earth in six ayyam while His Arsh (dominion) was on the water" (Surah Hud: verse 7). This suggests that the creation of water and Arsh had happened long time before the heavens and earth were created. So it is important that we acknowledge another period aside from these six periods, or, as according to the general view, another day aside from these six days. In verses 9 and 10 of Surah Ha Meem As-Sajdah (Fussilat), it is said:

فَلْأَنْتُمْ لَتَكْفُرُونَ بِالَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَرْضَ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ - 9

وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا وَبَارَكَ فِيهَا وَقَدَّرَ فِيهَا أَقْوَاتَهَا فِي أَرْبَعَةِ أَيَّامٍ -

10

"Say: What! Do you indeed disobey Him Who created the earth in two days [periods]? And He made mountains from above its surface, and He blessed therein and made therein its foods, in four days [periods]."

Soon after that, in verses 11 and 12 of the same surah, it is said:

ثُمَّ اسْتَوَى إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ (11) فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَى فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا وَزَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحٍ وَحِفْظًا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ (12)

"Then He turned to the heaven when it was smoke. ... And then He completed them as seven heavens in two days [periods]." We undoubtedly know from these verses that the task of creation was completed in (2+4+2) 8 days, and not in six days.

The yaom or time as mentioned in the Qur'an has no minimum or maximum limit. It is said in Surah Rahman, *كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ* Maulana Thanawi translated it as *هر وقت* or every time. And needless to say, this is the only reasonable translation of yaom. The real significance of this verse is that "in every moment there is Allah's glory" [so here yaom signifies a very short period of time]. For the manifestation of Allah's one glory after another, we have to wait one whole day – such a meaning can be accepted by no means. In regards of creation, Allah Himself says:

(50)

(49)

"Definitely, We have created everything according to its proper measure. And Our Command is a matter of a single (act) like the twinkling of an eye" (Qamar: 49-50). After these clear statements in the Qur'an about creation there should not be any doubt about the significance of the word yaom. The phrase Day of Judgment or *يوم القيامة* has been used in many places in the Qur'an. And about the Day of Judgment, it has been said :

هُوَ أَقْرَبُ -

"The matter of the day of the Hour [Judgment] (to Allah) is but as a twinkling of the eye or even quicker" (Surah Nahl: 77). So it is undoubtedly proven from these two verses that there is no minimum limit of the word yaom as used in the Qur'an. Similarly, according to the usage of the word yaom in some other verses in the Qur'an, it is

not possible to ascertain any maximum time limit within the scope of the word. As in the abovementioned verses, in verses 4 and 5 of Surah Sajdah, after mentioning the creation of heavens and earth, it has been said only about one procedure of creation:

ثُمَّ يَرْجُحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ (5)

“... then the affairs of the earth shall ascend to Him in a day the measure of which is a thousand years of what you count” (32:5). As a general rule, it is said in Surah Hajj:

وَإِنَّ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ (47)

“Definitely, a day with your Lord is as a thousand years of what you reckon” (22:47). A detailed discussion on these verses is not possible here. Our argument at this point is simply that, in these two verses the word yaom signifies a period of one thousand years. In the same manner, in verse 4 of Surah Ma'arej, the phrase مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ or “a day the measure of which is fifty thousand years” has been used to point to the definition of the word yaom.

Arsh of Allah

In this section of the verse, it has been said -

“then He mounted the Arsh.” There are fierce differences of opinion among the exegetes about the significance of these four words. The first difference is on the usage of the word thumma . According to Jawhari, this word is used to indicate sequence and the gap or distance between the previous and subsequent discussion. Imam Raghīb also supported this view depending on a condition or explanation (*Mufradat*). However, other lexicographers opine that thumma means sequence or gap when used between two words; but when it is used between two sentences, it does not necessarily signify sequence or gap, rather it stands for wao (and). This is also the opinion of Afkhas. One lexicographer mentions verse 46 of Surah Yunus and verse 17 of Surah Balad to substantiate such usage of the word. (*Misbah al-Munir*)

Allama Firozabadi says:

ثم حرف يقتضي ثلاثة أمور – التشريك في الحكم أو قد يختلف أن تقع زائدة كما في أن لا ملجأ من الله إلا إليه ثم تاب عليهم – الثاني الترتيب أو لا تقتضيه كقوله عز و جل: و يبدأ خلق الإنسان من طين ثم جعل نسله الآية – المهلة أو قد تختلف كقولك أعجبتني ما صنعت اليوم – لأن ثم فيه لترتيب الأخبار و لا تراخي بين الأخبارين –

The gist of the discussion of *Qamus* is that: 1) Thumma can be used as atefa (connective) or zad (additional); 2) thumma can signify sequence and in places it may not signify that; 3) in places it may point to a gap of time and in some others it may not do so. Every lexicographer mentioned verses of the Qur'an to support their argument.

Generally, the verse is translated as: He after that (that is to say, after creating the heavens and the earth in six days) ascended the throne.” Such translation creates various types of complications. One question is: Before Allah created the heavens and earth, had the Arsh of Allah existed? Nobody can say ‘no’ to this question, because if somebody says ‘no’ to this question, that will create hundreds of complications and problems. This is especially because there is a statement in the Qur'an (11:7) that says that before the creation of heavens and earth, the Arsh of Allah had been on the water. Conversely, if it admitted that the Arsh of Allah existed before the creation of heavens and earth, then the question will be: Was that Arsh unoccupied or vacant at that time? This subject has been mentioned in many other places in the Qur'an, where the readers will find other confusions. Here we can simply say that, the meaning of thumma that we have taken does not have any room for such confusions. And our meaning is completely supported by the usage of the word in Arabic dictionaries and in the Qur'an.

أَوْعَيْبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ
لِقَاءَ مَنْ بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَرَزَاكُم فِي الْخَلْقِ بَسْطَةً فَادْكُرُوا آيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ
(7:69)

“Do you wonder that a set of admonition has come to you from your Lord through a man from among you, so that he might warn you? And remember that time when He made you successors after Nuh's people and increased you amply in stature, therefore remember the mercies of Allah, that you may be successful” (7:69).

Physical structure of the 'Aad community'

In Allah's supreme law, people of one region or community by birth become robust and healthy because of Allah-given weather and other natural reasons. From this perspective, the people of 'Aad had the characteristic of robust physique. This good health and physical capability have been mentioned as a mercy of Allah. A group of traditional narrators provided various types of baseless and fantastic stories about the physical structure of primitive people. Regrettably, a group of the exegetes of Qur'an did not hesitate to include those stories in their tafsirs. But, all the perceptive exegetes admit that there is not even the slightest hint about these incredible stories in the Qur'an, hadith or reliable history.

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصِ مِنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ (7:130)
فَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى وَمَنْ مَعَهُ
لَا إِنَّمَا طَائِرُ هُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (7:131)

“And certainly We overtook Phiraon's kinspeople with famine and the shortage of fruits and crops that they would take a lesson” (7:130). “But when good came to them they said: This is (has become possible) for our wellbeing; conversely, if there were an evil, they ascertained Musa and those with him as 'bad omen;' look! their evil omen is with Allah, but most of them do not know” (7:131).

Evil Omen

To regard a particular person, matter, lunar day, an event, a day or date as a reason for something good or evil has been there throughout history among all the peoples of the world, and it still exists. Taking advantage of this notion, the people of Phiraon (Pharaoh) started circulating that Musa and his people were the reason of all their dangers and difficulties. They did not let anyone understand that dangers and difficulties come from Allah, and His order for such problems comes only for the immoral and abominable practices of a community. In this regard, it can be said that such a notion of good and evil is one kind of polytheism, which is against the teachings of Islam. Although in the context of the Indian subcontinent these are written, for example, in a book titled *Muhammadi*, these are nothing but blind imitations of Hindu and Persian superstitions.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرْنِي إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ نَرَا
لَ فَإِنْ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانُهُ فَسَوِّفَ تَرَانِي فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ
فَإِذَا وَخَرَ مُوسَى صَعِقًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ
الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (7:143)

“And when Musa came at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, (then) he said: Come into my view! so that I may see You; Allah said: No, you can never see Me, but keep looking at that mountain, if it remains firm in its place, then you will see Me; but when his Lord gave tajalli (glory) to the mountain, (that tajalli) made it broken to pieces and Musa fell down unconscious. Then when he recovered, he said: Glory be to You! I turn to You in repentance, and I am the first of the believers” (7:143).

Having the sight of Allah

The literal meaning of the clause *نظر إليك* is “show me so that I may gaze upon You.” About its significance, judicious exegetes of the Qur'an write:

المعنى مكني من رؤيتك و هيئني لها - " انظر إليك -

"It means: You give me the capability about Your own sight, and prepare me accordingly. If You do so to me, I will look at You." This significance is found in the tafsirs of Baizawi, *Fath al-Bayan* and Abus-Saud. In my opinion, this is an unreasonable and unnecessary rendering.

About the interpretation of this verse, scholars of communities like Ash'ara engaged in argument and counter-argument with the tenacity to establish their own views. As there was no dearth of competent scholars among them, there were endless debates and arguments. And this constitutes the main danger about tafsir among the less competent and neutral people like us.

The apparent meaning of the verse is that, the Prophet Musa sought to see Allah. The debate here is on the question whether it is possible for a human being to see Allah. One group say that it is definitely possible or, how was it possible for a prophet like Musa to be present before Allah with such a request? How was it possible for Musa to be ignorant about such a basic belief that it is not possible for a human to see Allah?

However, soon after the prayer of Musa, a strong answer is coming:

"you will never be able to see me!" And a verse in Surah

An'am explains why: لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ

"No vision can comprehend Him, and He comprehends (all) visions" (6:103). So there is no denying that it is not possible for human eyes to see Allah. Here all the writers unanimously say that: The significance of such verses is that it is not possible for humans to see Allah in this mundane life; but it will be possible in life hereafter and there is evidence in authentic hadith on that.

The evidence of hadith is true. But the problem is that, the discussion in this verse is about mundane life. The Prophet Musa made this prayer in this world and as a human of this very mundane world. So their main argument becomes invalid by this fact, because according to their argument it is not possible for humans to see Allah in this

world. Could it be possible that the Prophet Musa was unaware of such basic information? Although, according to them, it was impossible for Musa to make such a prayer to see Allah, there is no denying that he made this prayer.

To resolve this problem, scholars like Zamakhshari of the Mu'tazila community provided various explanations, of which one is worth mentioning here. They argue that the Prophet Musa made this prayer to Allah as the spokesperson of Bani Israel and as a response to their importunity. He knew very well that it was impossible to see Allah. However, in order to make the ignorant and arrogant community understand practically, he was forced to take this measure of making this prayer to Allah. (*Tafsir al-Kabir, Bahr al-Muhit*, etc.)

The rigid importunity of Bani Israel was that they would never believe in Musa's words until they saw Allah directly. Verse 55 of Surah Baqarah and verse 153 of Sura Nisa narrate this demand in clear terms. It is true that, after the event of Samiri, the Prophet Musa took seventy heads of Bani Israel for meeqat (appointed place and time of meeting) and they were attacked by earth-quake and other calamities (see verse 155 of Surah A'raf). Like other explanations, this is a conjecture of Zamakhshari. However, in the absence of any concrete evidence, this can be accepted as comparatively more reasonable.

I do not think that there is any particular reason to believe that the Prophet Musa knew that the sight of Allah was impossible during the time of the event. Firstly, he received prophethood and book (revelation) at this time. And after that, revelation came to him for a long time. So it is not impossible or inconceivable that he was unaware of this particular information (about the impossibility of seeing Allah) before this time. It is seen in the Jewish scripture (Old Testament) that:

" الآن إن كانت لي عندك مرحمة فأرني وجهك لأعرفك وأظفر منك "

“Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, You show me Your ‘countenance’ so that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight” (Exodus, 33:13). So Musa had made this particular prayer about seeing Allah before he received guidance from Him. And for that no fault can be associated with his prophetic life.

هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ فَأَنَّى تُؤْفَكُونَ (10:34) هَلْ مِنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ قُلِ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي لِلْحَقِّ أَفَمَنْ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْحَقِّ أَحَقُّ أَنْ يُتَّبَعَ أَمْ مَنْ لَا يَهْدِي إِلَّا أَنْ يُهْدَىٰ فَمَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ (10:35)

“Say: Is there anyone among your (imagined) partners [with Allah] who originates the creation and then reproduces it? Say: Allah brings the creation into existence, then He reproduces it; so, where are you turning misguided?” (10:34). “Say: Is there any of your associates who can guide to the truth? Say: Allah guides to the truth. Well, is He then Who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed, or s/he who themselves does not find guidance unless they is guided? So what has happened to you? How do you judge?” (10:35)

Creation and regeneration

First creation means the origin of creation, and regeneration means re-production or the re-creation of something in its original shape. The existence of all living beings such as, plants, animals and birds and human beings is governed by this system of regeneration. On deeper reflection it has to be admitted that the existence of a creator, who controls this system, is inevitable. Therefore, the greatest philosophers, scientists and pundits of the world have unhesitatingly accepted this truth. What is more, Darwin also at last admitted this by saying: “Therefore I should infer from analogy that probably all the organic beings which have ever lived upon this earth have descended from one primordial form into which life was first breathed by the Creator” (*The Origin of Species* [1859], last page, last para).

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ (11:25) لَا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمِ أَلِيمٍ (11:26) فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا نَرَاكَ إِلَّا بَشَرًا مِثْلَنَا وَمَا نَرَاكَ إِلَّا اتَّبَعَكَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ هُمْ أَرَادْنَا بِأَدْيِ الرَّأْيِ وَمَا نَرَىٰ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ بَلْ نَظُنُّكُمْ كَاذِبِينَ (11:27) قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّي وَآتَانِي رَحْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِهِ فَعُمِّيَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنُلْزِمُكُمْوهَا وَأَنْتُمْ لَهَا كَارِهُونَ (11:28) وَيَا قَوْمِ لَا أَسْأَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ مَالًا إِنْ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَا بِطَارِدِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُلَافُوا رَبِّهِمْ وَلَكِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ قَوْمًا تَجْهَلُونَ (11:29) وَيَا ، يَنْصُرُنِي مِنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ طَرَدْتُهُمْ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (11:30)

زَرَأْتُمْ اللَّهَ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ وَلَا أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِي أَعْيُنُهُمْ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ إِنِّي إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (11:31) قَالُوا يَا دُ

الصَّادِقِينَ (11:32) ، إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ إِنْ شَاءَ وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ (11:33) وَلَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ نُصْحِي إِنْ أَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَنْصَحَ لَ ، كَانَ اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُغْوِيَكُمْ هُوَ رَبُّكُمْ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (11:34) أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ قُلْ إِنْ افْتَرَيْتُهُ فَعَلَيْ إِجْرَامِي (11:35) وَأَوْجِي إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُؤْمِنَ بِ

مَنْ قَدْ آمَنَ فَلَا تَبْتَسِسْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ (11:36) وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا وَلَا تُخَاطِبُنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُعْرِفُونَ (11:37) وَيَصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ وَكَلَّمَا مَرَّ عَلَيْهِ مَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ سَخِرُوا مِنْهُ قَالَ إِنْ تَسَخَرْتُمْ مِنِّي فَأَلَا تَسَخَرُ مِنْكُمْ كَمَا (11:38) فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَيَحِلُّ عَلَيْهِ عَذَابٌ

مُقِيمٌ (11:39) وَرُفُلْنَا أَحْمِلَ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ وَمَا آمَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ (11:40)

“And indeed We sent Nuh to his people as a messenger. (He said to them:) I am an obvious cautioner for you” (11:25). “(My message) is that you shall not serve any but Allah, surely I fear the punishment of a painful day on you” (11:26). “The chiefs who disbelieved among his people said: We see you but a human like ourselves, and we also notice that only the very rozil (meanest) of our people have followed you according to direct (first) thought; moreover, we do not see in you any excellence over us, and, in fact, we think you are liars” (11:27). “Nuh said: O my community! tell me if I am established on proof from my Lord, if He has blessed me with a share in His mercy and if that is concealed from your sight, shall I force you to understand that while you are reluctant to it?” (11:28). “(He further said) O my people! I do not ask you for wealth in return for it. None can give my reward except Allah. I am not ready to drive away those who have believed; definitely, (one day) they will be present before their Lord (and then what shall I answer?). Moreover, I notice that as a community you have resorted to ignorance” (11:29). “O my people! If I drive them away, who will protect me from the displeasure of Allah? Do you not try to understand?” (11:30) “I do not say to you that I have the treasures of Allah at my disposal. Nor do I say that I know ghaib (the unseen), or that I am an (superhuman) angel, nor do I say about those whom your eyes hold in mean estimation (that) Allah will never grant them (any) good; Allah knows best what is in their souls – for then definitely I will be one of the unjust” (11:31). “They said: O Nuh! Indeed you have disputed with us and lengthened that dispute (we do not want to hear that any more), therefore, if you are truthful, bring to us the punishment that you have been telling us” (11:32). “Nuh said: (who am I to bring punishment?) Only Allah can bring that to you if He pleases, and then you will not be able to repel Him” (11:33). “And even if I wish you well, my advice will not benefit you at all if Allah intends to give you punishment; He is your Lord, and to Him you shall return” (11:34). “And are they (the disbelievers of Makkah) saying that (Muhammad) himself has made up these words? Say (O Muhammad): If I have constructed lies, my guilt will be on myself, but I am innocent of all crimes that you have been committing” (11:35). “And it was revealed to Nuh: none of your

people will believe except those who have already believed, therefore do not grieve at what they do” (11:36). “And start making that ship in Our supervision and according to Our command; and look! do not speak to Me in respect of those who are unjust — surely they shall be drowned” (11:37). “(Then) Nuh began to make the ship — (at this time) the situation was that whenever the chiefs from among his people passed by the ship they jeered (about that); (then) Nuh said: If you want to laugh at us, (then carry on), but as you are laughing at us now, we will answer that (by our future action)” (11:38). “So you will come to know soon who it is on whom will come a disgraceful chastisement, and on whom will fall a lasting torment” (11:39). “At last when Our command came and a terrible flood started on earth, then I said: O Nuh! Carry in it two of all things, a pair, and your own family – except those against whom the word has already gone forth – and those who believe. And the fact is that, those who believed and were with Nuh were small in number” (11:40).

Complaints of the elders

Opposition to the prophethood of Hazrat Nuh (Noah) came mainly from the elders of his community. This is natural because, if they could not hold the body and mind of the people under their subjugation, their right to dominate and oppress the people would come to an end. [And obviously Nuh's prophethood posed a big threat to their authority.]

The elders brought three accusations against Nuh:

- 1) Nuh is a human being like them, and no human can become a prophet for other human beings. The advent of an angel or avatar is needed to convey God's message to human beings.
- 2) Only the *araazel* (lower class) of society are following Nuh. These lower-class people do not have social status or influence. Nor do they have any deeper sense of judgment. Moreover, Allah himself keeps them down-trodden. So it is unbecoming of a true prophet of Allah to let these people come near him or let them have any sense of audacity [of coming near the Prophet or receiving equal treatment as the elders].

3) Like them, Nuh also has two hands, two legs, two eyes and one head. In their opinion, a prophet should have a strange physical feature like the ten-handed Durga, the four-handed Narayana, the four-faced Brahma, the three-eyed Shiva, or the Man-lion (the fourth incarnation of Vishnu).

These are the fundamental, perpetual superstitious beliefs of the polytheists. In this section of this surah, these stock notions have been refuted.

The main objective of prophethood is to rescue the downtrodden and the underdog of society.

Verses 29-31 deal with the mental status and reaction of the Prophet Nuh after he heard the unjust demand of the elders to drive the lower-class people away. His reaction can be summarised thus:

1) One day these oppressed servants of Allah will be present before Him and will petition against me with regard to this new injustice (by myself) of neglecting them. If I dismiss these downtrodden people today according to your whimsical demands, I will be considered an oppressor and on that day [the Day of Judgement] I will have nothing to say to defend myself before Allah.

2) It cannot be the ideal stance of Islam that the people who are being regarded as downtrodden by the upper-class will remain in perpetual doom and will never have the blessing of emancipation and welfare. On the contrary, the main objectives of the advent of the true religion of Allah are to liberate the oppressed from the clutch of the oppressors, to lift the status of the downtrodden and to restore their legitimate human dignity and rights in society.

Muslims are now ignoring these beautiful teachings of the Qur'an and are spreading the borrowed ideas of communism. Moreover, they are recognising the division between Ashraf (upper-class) and Ajlaf (lower-class) using the tag of kufu and gair-kufu (social compatibility and incompatibility).

Noah's Flood

Verses in this surah (Hud) detail the great flood that occurred during the time of the Prophet Nuh. Verse 40 states: "When Our

commandment came to pass, there occurred a great flood on earth." The general meaning of the word tannoor used in this verse is tandoor or a cylindrical clay oven. However, in Arabic literature, 'faarat tannoor' means 'water gushes forth forcefully on earth.' Many of the exegetes of the Qur'an have admitted that:

The Arabs call the earth tannoor. (*Fath al-Kabir*, 5—85; *Fath al-Bayan*, 4—320; *Fath al-Qadir*, 2—474). Among the exegetes, Ibn Abbas, Ekrama, Jawhari, Ibn Waina and others think that tannoor means wajhul ard (the surface of the earth). (*Ruhul-al-Ma'ani & Fath al-Qadir*)

According to the other view, the significance of the use of the word tannoor in this verse is that: water gushed forth from the oven, and that caused the flood. However, different narrators hold different opinions in identifying the oven. Some of the views are: it was the rock oven of Eve; the oven of the Prophet Nuh's wife; it was an oven situated in a masjid in Kufa, or in India or in any other place on earth. However, they did not provide any evidence to the effect that flood water was coming from a particular oven. But in verses 11-12 of Surah Qamar, with regard to this flood, it is clearly stated that:

"Then We opened the gates of heaven, with water pouring forth. And We caused the earth to gush forth water reservoirs, so the water gathered together according to a measure already ordained." And then Allah describes the story of the Prophet Nuh boarding an Ark and the subsequent events. So the natural causes of the flood were heavy rainfall from heaven, the upstream of rivers and water reservoirs being swollen because of that and both rivers and reservoirs coming together and washing and inundating the surface of the earth. Given such clear narratives in the Qur'an, our exegetes did not have to give any heed to the unfounded, weird narrations of the rabees (narrators).

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فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَكًا وَأَنْتَ كُلَّ وَاجِدَةٍ مِنْهُنَّ
بِنَا وَقَالَتْ أَخْرِجْ عَلَيْنَ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا

هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ (12:31)

“So when Aziz’s ‘wife’ heard of their evil intention she sent for them and prepared for them a repast, and gave each of them a knife, and at last said (to Yusuf): Come out before them! But when the women saw him, they deemed him overwhelming, and cut (injured) their hands and said: This is not a human, this is a great angel” (12:31).

Women’s plot

In verse 12:28, through the statement of Aziz, we get clear evidence that few women in the city were conspiring to misguide Yusuf (Joseph). The opening of verse 31 also touches on the same subject matter.

It is stated clearly in the Qur’an that Aziz’s wife gave each of her guests a knife. It is a common practice to keep knives on table for the guests to cut and eat fruits or meat. Why is this ordinary practice mentioned so specially in this surah?

In my opinion, the idea of giving knives is part of a preconceived plan. According to a group of exegetes, a knife was given to each to scare and win over Yusuf. But I believe that this was done to orchestrate a false and groundless lawsuit against Yusuf. That these women succeeded in their preconceived conspiracy and that their hand injuries were used to imprison Yusuf are clearly suggested in verse 50 of this surah where it is noticed that, even after the good news of his release and the open invitation of the King of Egypt, Yusuf is not coming out of the prison. Rather he says to the messenger, “Go back to your lord and ask him what is the case of the women who cut their hands; surely my Lord is fully aware of their plot” (12:50).

Then the messenger went back to the King and told him about Yusuf and his query. Accordingly, the King asked the women to come in order to know their condition, as verse 51 reads: “He (the King) then said: What happened when you were trying to get Yusuf out of his mind (bereave him of his good sense and good judgement)? They answered: Glory be to Allah! We know no evil of him. The Chief’s wife said: Now the truth has become established: I sought him to yield himself (to me), and he is most surely among the truthful ones”

(12:51). And thus even the wife of the King also acknowledged the innocence of Yusuf. From the above discussion, it is evident without doubt that the arrangement of the royal feast, the supply of knives and the act of cutting their hands were used as ploys to incarcerate Yusuf by putting the blame on him.

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وَقَالَ الْمَلِكُ اثْنُونِي بِهِ أَسْتَخْلِصُهُ لِنَفْسِي فَلَمَّا كَلَّمَهُ قَالَ إِنَّكَ الْيَوْمَ لَدَيْنَا مَكِينٌ
أَمِينٌ (12:54)

“Then the King said: Bring Yusuf to me, I will choose him especially for my own assistance, (when Yusuf was released according to this order) the King conversed with him and said: Today you have been established in our eyes as an extraordinarily respectable and trustworthy person” (12:54).

Encounter with the king

Prophet Yusuf came out of the prison and met the King at the right place and in the right time. During this encounter, the King discussed few issues with him, which is clearly implied by Qur’anic narratives. The details of this discussion are not provided in the Qur’an, as people can easily infer from the beginning and end of the narrative.

In this regard, the first thing that should be mentioned is that, in verse 35 onwards there is no mention of the aforementioned Aziz. Nor does the Qur’an tell us about how Aziz’s wife, whom our exegetes – for reasons unknown to me – name Julekha, led her life. However, it is evident from the Qur’an that she was alive till Yusuf’s release from prison. On the other hand, it is true that after she had made the accusation against Yusuf, she asserted Yusuf’s moral certitude and innocence and openly confessed her guilt at the very first opportunity. Moreover, if we analyze her statements from first to last, it appears that the disquiet and anxiety of her early life [and the pang of her conscience], through the influence of Yusuf’s noble character, gradually turned into love of him.

It is known from the Bible that, the King gave him the right to rule the country even though he was not crowned with the throne. As the second man in the kingdom, Yusuf was honoured with many privileges. What is more, he was married to the daughter named

(Asnat [Aseneth]) of a certain priest called Futifer (Genesis 42). However, scholars believe that there is a good amount of doubt in his account. Actually this story of Asnat and Yusuf was cited from false mythological books (Biblica, Apocryphal, "Life of Aseneth; Britanica, Apocryphal, "Joseph and Aseneth"). Our exegetes in their imagination accomplished Yusuf's marriage with their fictitious Julekha. But, I do not know any evidence to substantiate that.

اذهبوا بقميصي هذا فألقوه على وجه أبي يأت بصيرا وأتوني بأهلكم أجمعين
(12:93)

"Now you go (to your country) with this kamis [shirt] of mine and keep it before my father — he will be able to understand all. Over and above, you come to me with all your families" (12:93).

Good news

The most endeared son is sending a message to the father afflicted with separation: By the grace of Allah, everything on my side is well. Now all of you in the family please do come to Egypt.

The clause *fa-alquhu ala wajhe abee* فَأَلْقُوهُ عَلَى وَجْهِ أَبِي in verse 12:93 can be translated both literally and figuratively. The literal rendering would be: "and cast it (my shirt) over the face of my father;" and the figurative meaning would be: "and lay it (my shirt) before my father." *Mufradat* of Imam Raghīb and other dictionaries may be consulted to understand the usage and inner meaning of the words *ilka* and *wajho* used in the verse. In terms of the verbal root, the word *baseer* used in the verse may mean both 'to see through eyes' and 'to comprehend through the mind.' Lexicographers tend to prefer the second meaning.

I have also accepted the second meaning of the clause *fa-alquhu ala wajhe abee*, that is, "and lay it (my shirt) before my father." Since the Prophet Yaquḅ was the headman of his community

and was highly respected, it would be indecent and against the social norms for a stranger to come and throw the shirt on his head or face. On the contrary, the meaning I have attributed is endorsed by many dictionaries and by usages in the Qur'an.

I have not found any evidence to substantiate the claim that the Prophet Yaquḅ became blind. It is said in the Qur'an that his eyes became 'white' because of grief and extreme worries. And the whitening of eyes is a sign of physical weakness. And this is a visible symptom of anaemia and happens quite often because of bloodlessness. If one suffers from anaemia, their eyes look white. But, on the basis of this, a person suffering from anaemia cannot be regarded as blind.

There is no doubt that Yaquḅ became physically frail for a number of reasons, and his eyes became white or bloodless because of that. The reasons that made him frail and fragile are: his old age, disobedience of his sons, the spectre of famine, after all the disappearance and (supposed) death of Yusuf and lastly the pang of the separation of Bin Yamin. We also understand that the good news regarding Yusuf, Bin Yamin and the amity of Yusuf with his brothers removed the main cause of Yaquḅ's mental anguish. As a result, it can be said beyond doubt that, his mind was enlivened because of enthusiasm and encouragement; and like other organs of his body his eyes and eyesight also became reinvigorated.

I believe that was not the only or main reason of sending his shirt. The Prophet Yusuf was sending his shirt and, at the same time, was advising to bring all men and women and children of Ibrahim's family (posterity) to Egypt. It is presumed that their number was more or less seventy, and livestock farming was their main means of livelihood. Therefore, it would not be possible for them to leave their livestock. Under the circumstances, Yaquḅ could naturally fear that, despite all his sincerity, Yusuf could be in danger while delivering that massive responsibility. It was to remove that anxiety from his

father's mind that Yusuf was advising to bring all to Egypt and, at the same time, was sending the shirt to his father. Readers may have noticed that Yusuf is not saying: "Take my shirt" or "Take one of my shirts." Rather he is pointing to a particular shirt, saying: Take this particular shirt of mine and lay it in front of my father, and that will make him understand the message.*

If we analyze the verse, keeping this customary, practical situation in mind, it will be easily understood that Yusuf sent his very expensive shirt in order to let his father know about his financial solvency. Once the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) said to Uthman inb Affan who became the third Khalifa after the former's demise:

"Allah will cause you to wear a shirt (gown)," etc. It is unanimously understood that, by *kamis* (shirt or gown) our Prophet Muhammad meant the honour of *khilafat* (caliphate) or the honour of holding the office of the caliph. Accordingly, some scholars opine that Yusuf sent the shirt as a symbol of his rulership. In other words, he wanted to say to his father: Please you come! And here both prophethood and a just Islamic way of governance will be established.

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* What is the speciality of this shirt? The gist of what the exegetes in general have said in this regard is that, that shirt was a miraculous dress. When King Nimrod passed an order to throw Yusuf's great-grandfather Ibrahim into fire, the angels brought this shirt from heaven and dressed him therewith. It was because of this miraculous dress that Ibrahim came out of the fire totally unharmed. To make the story short, later on Ibrahim burnt the dress into an amulet and wore it round his neck. Upon his death, Ibrahim passed it on to his son Ishaq (Isaac) who later bequeathed it to Yaqub. Afterwards, Yaqub hung it by the neck of Yusuf who sent the same *kamis* (dress) to Yaqub so that the latter could be certain about the identity of Yusuf. However, the narrator of this theory did not mention the source from which he collected the details of this story of thousands of years ago.

إِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ (16:58) يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ (16:59)

"And when one of them is given the news of the birth of a female child, his face becomes darkened with stigma and he becomes mortified" (16:58). "— In order to protect himself from the disgrace of the news received he hides himself from the people; (and starts thinking) despite the disgrace will he keep her, or bury her in the earth? Look! How evil is their judgment!" (16:59).

Daughter, "unworthy daughter"

This subject has been discussed in rukus 12, 16 and 17 of Surah An'am as in other places in the Qur'an. The people of Quraish in Makkah and the polytheists of other regions used to kill their daughters for various reasons and motives, and that in different ways and methods. The Quraishites used to practice female infanticide for two main reasons. Firstly, daughters could not take part in tribal hostilities and warfare, nor in the waves of extensive plundering and pillage. Therefore, daughters did not have any share in property accumulated through these ways; moreover, they were thought to be burdens on their fathers who had to provide them with food, clothing and shelter. In order to save themselves this 'wastage,' many fathers used to kill their infant daughters mercilessly. Secondly, and in my opinion most importantly, they used to treat their wives very badly and the wives did not have anywhere to go to lodge their complaints. So, the fathers knew very well that their daughters would end up with the same miserable life once they were married off to other men. Therefore, in order to protect their daughters from future oppression in the hands of their husbands, they used to kill their daughters at their early age by throwing them headlong from a height, such as hills and mountains, or by burying them alive. This has been described in verse 59 of this surah (Nahl). In other parts of the world also, daughters used to be killed mainly for earning the pleasure of gods

and goddesses. The sacrificing of daughters in the Ganges in our country (British India) is an historic example of this.⁵³

اَعْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (96:16)

“The provision that is with you will be exhausted, but the wealth that is with Allah is everlasting; and (in this test) those who remain patient, their reward will be many times more than their action” (16:96).

Eternal property

What remains with Allah and the reward He will give to those people who remain unwaveringly faithful to Him in times of trials and tribulations are eternal. A person and their wealth may, and will, be

⁵³ In this regard, readers may read Edward S. Stern's essay “The Medea Complex: the Mother's Homicidal Wishes to her Child,” *Journal of Mental Science*, 1948, 94: 321-331). Some excerpts from the article are mentioned below:

“In Ancient Greece it is said that children were sacrificed to Melikertes at Tenedos (Grote, 1903), and girls were habitually exposed to death as soon as they were born. In his life of Lyncurgas, Plutarch states that the Spartans threw all weakly and deformed children into the cavern Apothetae. The Boeotians would sacrifice a boy to stop a pestilence.

“In India (Cait, 19r3) at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the British Government stopped the practice by which Hindu women in Bengal consigned their firstborn to the Ganges in fulfilment of a vow to do so if blessed with a son. At the shrine of Kali at the great Saiva Temple at Tanjore, a male child was sacrificed every Friday evening until British rule forced the substitution of a sheep.

“Among the aboriginal tribes of North-East India, the Chutiyas used to sacrifice the children of one particular clan, which received certain privileges in return. When a woman of this clan became pregnant astrologers were called in, and if they predicted a boy she was carefully tended and the baby anointed with a paste made of turmeric and a kind of pulse. Later, he was kept at the temple and fed sumptuously until plump enough to suit the goddess's taste. He was then shaved, anointed with the paste again, adorned with gold and silver ornaments, and conducted before the goddess's image, where he prostrated himself and was then decapitated by the high priest.” (p.325) [Editor]

destroyed for various reasons; but the existence of a nation and its treasured wealth are [relatively] permanent. People have to earn this [lasting] wealth after sustaining different kinds of sacrifices and losses, and through various types of arduous endeavours and struggles.

The previous five verses mention few elements through which a nation can build it up. In this verse, it is said that those who remain patient in their continuous struggle of attaining their goal and worshipping Allah will get their reward multiplied many times more than their action and not simply in commensurate with the actual amount of their work. Verse 97 is complementary to this. Here it is said that women also do have their part of responsibility in nation building, and they also have rights. According to the verse, a national life that is built through the cooperation of both Muslim men and women is, in a real sense, a pure or beautiful life.

يٰٓعِبَادِىَ لِيَا مَنِ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى الَّذِى

بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ (17:1)

“Glorified is He, Who made his servant (Mohammad) travel on a night from the Masjid al-Haram [Ka'ba] to the remote masjid (Baitul Muqaddas) — the environment of which we blessed! Accordingly, We show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer” (17:1).

The Mi'raj (Ascension) of Prophet Muhammad

This verse describes the event of the Prophet Muhammad's mi'raj (ascension). According to this narrative, Allah brought the Prophet Muhammad from Ka'ba to Baitul Muqaddas in order to show him some of His signs. Some of the extant signs are: how the people of Bani Israel were utterly ruined because of their disobedience to Allah and how the site of worship for the prophets and devotees – the masjid of Baitul Muqaddas – was completely destroyed. And all these also carry a clear indication of the future victory of his ummah (Muhammad's community).

I discussed the incident of mi'raj briefly in my book *Mustapha Charit* (Life of Muhammad). There is no disagreement with regard to the veracity of the event of mi'raj [as it is well-established by the Qur'an]. However, there are differences of opinion about whether Muhammad's ascension was physical or spiritual, and this since the time of the blessed companions of the Prophet Muhammad. Most of the companions and their followers (tabi'un) apparently accepted it as a physical happening. In other words, according to them, the incident of mi'raj happened while Muhammad (SAWS) was awake and the Prophet went up to heaven near Allah physically. But, another group of companions and of their followers (tabi'un) believed that it was a matter of dream and the body of Prophet was not transferred even for a moment. Scholars like Shah Waliullah said: "The entire episode of mi'raj happened physically while Prophet was awake. However, it was metaphorical and related to a world that existed at the juncture of the real world." (see verse 17:60 and its corresponding note)

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وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ حَسْبِيَ إِمْلَاقُ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا
(17:31)

"And do not kill your children for fear of poverty; it is We Who give them sustenance and (We give sustenance) to you too; certainly, killing them is a great sin" (17:31).

Infanticide (murder of one's children)

There is scarcity of food grains in the country. Population in Asia and Africa is growing alarmingly. Hence, in order to ensure a good proportion of population growth and the production of food grains, birth control has been made mandatory. Because of recurrent pregnancy and childbirth, the health condition of the womenfolk has been worsening. — Propagandas of this type have been in vogue in the world for a long time. At present, there has begun a new version of this propaganda.

In my opinion, the complaint of the scarcity of food grains is completely baseless. In our country, there is no dearth of land,

farmers or agricultural workers to produce adequate food grains. However, there is a lack of eagerness and impetus to work among the people and of enough knowledge and understanding of the ruling class. We all know that after the imposition of martial law tens of thousands of acres of fallow, uncultivated land have been rescued even though much of the work of the project has not been materialised yet. One big reason of the scarcity of food grains is smuggling and food export by the government. This crisis has occurred, as over-all import of other goods has been bigger than the export. Under the circumstances, instead of rendering the nation having no descendants to succeed, controlling excessive import of goods from other countries may end the crisis. A big cause of the discount problem is the widespread, relentless wastage of our currency in foreign markets and the import of many illegal and unnecessary goods into our country. This crisis that has been created by ourselves will be solved on its own if we fully implement all the good endeavours currently undertaken.

It is a sheer laughable, disgraceful argument that contraception is necessary for the protection of female health. Experts can identify the causes of the health problem of women in our country and ascertain the correlation between infant mortality and the impairment of mothers' health. As a member of society, and as a father of 11 children and a grandfather and great-grandfather of more or less 2 dozens of children, and on the basis of limited practical experience that I have, I can confidently say that the negligence and intemperance of the husbands is the main reason of the female health problem. If we can address and remove the irresponsibility of the husbands, the problem of recurrent pregnancy will be naturally solved. And we will not have to intervene in the natural law of Allah.

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وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أُرِيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ
وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُحُوفُهُمْ فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا (17:60)

“(O Prophet!) Remember when We said to you: Your Lord encompasses those people; and We showed you the dream (vision) only as a trial for people and the cursed tree described in the Quran as well; and We cause them to fear, but it only adds to their great insurgency.” (17:60)

Allah's encompassment

‘Allah encompasses them’ means He stores punishment for them, and the nonbelievers of Quraish and the disbelievers of Arab will not be able to shield themselves from that retribution.

Ru'a or dream

In our opinion and in the opinion of a comparatively small number of companions and tabi'in, the mi'raj of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) was a matter of dream, because the term ru'a mentioned in the Qur'an has no other meaning except dream (I am providing evidence later). To get rid of this semantic problem, a group of narrators argue that there is no relation of this verse with the incident of mi'raj. However, if this verse has no relation with mi'raj, to what is it related then? — To address this question, different people are mentioning different stories to relate to this verse. Some people are saying: Allah showed the Prophet through a dream which disbelievers will die in what location during the Battle of Badr. Some others say that the Prophet saw this dream one year before the Treaty of Hudaibiah and it was about the good news of entering Makkah. According to Said ibn al-Musayyib, the Prophet saw in his dream that people of the Umyyah dynasty were dancing like monkeys on his pulpit in the masjid. As he was sad about what he saw, this verse was revealed. (*Tafsir al-Kabir, Bahr al-Muhit, etc.*)

Readers may have noticed that, this verse makes mention of a past incident. My tentative calculation suggests that Surah Bani Israel was revealed at least five years before the Prophet's migration from Makkah to Madinah. However, it can be said with certainty that this surah was revealed at least few years before migration. So it should be understood that if it were revealed about a past incident, that incident must have happened few years before migration, whereas the

Battle of Badr occurred in the second Hijrah year and the Treaty of Hudaibiah in the sixth Hijrah year. And perhaps it goes without saying that the story of monkey dance is simply a political propaganda. Moreover, according to Imam Razi, the Prophet did not have any pulpit when he was in Makkah before migration.

For the above reasons, most of the exegetes of the Qur'an have rejected these narrations and admitted that this verse was revealed about the Prophet Muhammad's mi'raj. Now the debate is on the meaning of the word ru'a. Here our argument is that, according to the usage of the term in the Qur'an, the rule of the Arabic language and the statement of the Prophet Muhammad, the only meaning of ru'a is dream and it cannot have any other significance. The word ru'a has been used in seven other places in the Qur'an, and all have translated it as dream.

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فَصَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا (18:11)

“So We protected their ears from the din and bustle (of people) for a number of years” (18:11).

Veil on their ears

The usual translation is “according to their prayers, we have drawn a curtain on their ears.” It has been translated thus, keeping the word ‘veil’ in the context. However, the literal translation would be, “accordingly, we stroke their ears,” which does not make any sense. Therefore, the exegetes have accepted the metaphorical meaning of this verse. And in this regard, there is no difference of opinion between them and us, as we also take its metaphorical meaning for the fact that idiomatic expressions cannot be translated literally. However, the exegetes did not stop there. They think that ‘striking their ears’ means ‘drawing veils on their ears,’ which actually means ‘we kept them lying asleep [within the cave].’ Our objection is about the second meaning.

The verse does not tell us definitely how long As-hab Kahf (people of the cave) stayed in the cave. It uses two words سنين عددا which means that in normal calculation they stayed in the cave for few years.

I have also rendered this meaning. In terms of language use, these 'some years' can mean both 'a number of years' or 'few years', and both the meanings are possible in this context. Many of the major exegetes of the Qur'an have given similar views:

Allama Abus-Saud states:

وصف السنين بذلك () إما للتكثير و هو الأنسب بإظهار كمال القدرة
أو للتقليل و هو الأليق بمقام إنكار كون القصة عجا -

“The significance of qualifying the ‘years’ in this way (that is, by usual calculation) is that it may mean both ‘many years’ and ‘few years.’ If we consider it keeping the view of the infinite power of Allah, the first meaning will be appropriate. Conversely, it has been denied in the verse that the story of As-hab Kahf was anything unusual or queer; and hence, the second meaning will be contextually more appropriate.”

Allama Alusi⁵⁴ and Imam al-Naisapuri⁵⁵ supported this view (see marginal notes of *Tafsir al-Kabir* and *Ruh al-Ma'ani*). According to the opinion of these scholars, we support the second meaning. Moreover, our argument is that this meaning is more consistent with historical truth.

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وَتَحْسِبُهُمْ أَيْقَاطًا وَهُمْ رُفُودٌ وَنُقُوبُهُمْ ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ
ذِرَاعِيهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِرَارًا وَلَمَلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعْبًا
(18:18) وَكَذَلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَتَسَاءَلُوا بَيْنَهُمْ قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ كَمْ لَبِئْتُمْ قَالَوا لَبِئْنَا يَوْمًا
أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِئْتُمْ فَابْعَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ
فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ وَلَا يُشْعِرَنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا
(18:19)

⁵⁴ Author of *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim*.

⁵⁵ Author of *Tafsir Ghara'ib al-Qur'an*.

“And you might think them ‘awake’ but in fact they are ‘asleep’; and We always turn them, sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, while their dog (lay) outstretching its two arms at the rock-made treasure-room; if you came to know about their story, you would certainly turn back from them in flight, and you would certainly be filled with awe because of them” (18:18). “And thus did We awaken them that they might question each other; one of them asked: How long have you stayed? They said: a day or part of a day. (Others) said: Your Lord knows best how long you have stayed. Now send one of you with this silver ‘coin’ of yours to the city, then let him buy some pure food for you after checking, he should be very careful — Beware! He should not give even a hint to others about yourselves” (18:19).

Awake and asleep

The verse states, “You may deem them awake, but actually they are asleep.” In other words, it means that if bystanders saw them, they would consider them awake, and so on and so forth. The word ‘you’ in the verse does not stand for any particular person. In Arabic literature [as in English], this is an idiomatic expression or a general mode of using words in speech. Very often the Arab poets are found to compose poetry, addressing imaginary listeners or companions as ‘You!’, ‘O Companion!’, ‘O Hamama!’, ‘O two companions!’, etc.

First problem

Some problems have evolved with regard to the explanation of this verse. The first question is: who are meant by ‘them’ or ‘they’ mentioned in the verse? As-hab Kahf or their opposition? The exegetes of the Qur'an have accepted the former as the noun of this pronoun.

In my opinion, this is a fundamental error. And my judgment is based on two grounds:

1) If we read the verse attentively, we will see that the condition of the people described in the verse was very displeasing, extremely abominable and horrible (full of frightful sights). Conversely, As-hab Kahf were extremely virtuous and fully devoted to the meditation of

Allah, which the Qur'an acknowledges in eulogistic terms. So it is not proper to relate the implication of this verse to them.

2) After discussing and talking about the As-hab Kahf in the first half of verse 17, mention of a misguided group of people is made in its concluding section; and verse 18 opens with the expression 'if you see them....' Therefore, common sense and the rules of grammar suggest that the pronoun 'they' stands for the second group of people, that is, the sinful opponents of As-hab Kahf.

Second problem

The second problem in the verse concerns its purpose or intention. Some people are lying asleep in a cave, and it is natural that the onlookers will consider them asleep. The Qur'an does not give any hint whatsoever as to what made the bystanders deem them awake. The exegetes have tried to provide an explanation of this problem by giving different, contradictory ideas, which are mentioned below:

- 1) As-hab Kahf slept, keeping their eyes open; and hence the onlookers deemed them awake.
- 2) As they kept turning upon one side and then on the other, they were thought to be awake. Their evidence (argument) is that the later section of the verse mentions turning upon one side and then on the other (a discussion on this 'evidence' will be attempted later).
- 3) The exegetes expressed different, whimsical opinions regarding the nature of this turning upon one side and then on the other. According to the companion Abu Hurairah, As-hab Kahf lying under the spell of sleep used to turn upon one side twice in a year. Some opine that they used to turn upon one side only once in a year and that is on 10 Moharram of the lunar calendar. The exegete Mujahid believes that As-hab Kahf used to sleep on their right side continuously for nine years and on their left side for another nine years and, accordingly, they used to turn upon one side and then on the other in eighteen years. About the reason of turning upon one side and then on the other, Ibn Abbas says that their bodies used to turn into earth for sleeping in one posture for a long time, hence Allah made this provision to them of turning upon one side and then on the other.

However, Imam Razi considers these as strange arguments and adds: "Allah out of His infinite power kept them alive for more than three hundred years (550 years!) without any food or drink. So, how come He had to make a special arrangement to keep them safe from the effects of earth (or stones)? (Could not Allah keep them safe without that anyway?)"

It is regrettable that we find no acceptable solutions to our questions from these baseless, imaginary theories. It is a general condition of human beings that their eyes remain closed when they sleep. So it is an absurd argument that they slept keeping their eyes open. What is more, they failed to provide any religious or historical evidence to buttress this assumption.

The main question was: By which sign could the onlookers assume that As-hab Kahf – who had been lying asleep for centuries – were awake? In response, it is said that it was assumed by the sign of their turning upon one side and then on the other. Then the question arises: Did the As-hab Kahf turn upon one side and then on the other every minute during those 350 or 550 years? If not, it would not have been possible for the viewers who gathered to take any notice of that particular physical movement at all.

The second question is: How could it be assumed that the asleep were awake by simply looking at their turning upon one side and then on the other? It is well known to all that people turn upon one side and then on the other even when they are fast asleep. So it is clear that the exegetes do not have any answer to this question. After the above discussion of turning upon one side and then on the other, there is no value for such arguments.

In this regard, Imam Razi states:

وأقول هذه التقديرات لا سبيل للعقل إليها و لفظ القرآن لا يدل عليه
جاء فيه خبر صحيح فكيف يعرف؟

"These views are not supported by knowledge or wisdom. Nor are they substantiated by the Qur'an or authentic hadith. So, how can we know what is true and what is false?" (*Tafsir al-Kabir*). My problem also lies in here.

Third Problem

This verse makes mention of a dog. What does the word dog suggest here? Another school of thought may say that it is clear from the verse that the people who are described in the verse had a dog. It is clearly stated in verse 22 that the dog belongs to As-hab Kahf. So it is proved from the narration of the Qur'an that this verse deals with the condition of As-hab Kahf.

We will discuss the issue of this dog later. It may suffice to mention here that, whatever has been said [by many of the exegetes of the Qur'an] about the number or condition of As-hab Kahf is not the statement of the Qur'an at all. Rather, these are nothing but some fictitious stories prevalent among the ignorant masses.

Fourth Problem

It is said here about the condition of these people that if someone came to know about their real situation, s/he would abandon their association and would flee to a distant place, and their heart would be filled with dread and bewilderment. In other words, that person would be bewildered and seized by utter fright.

Now the question arises, what was there to make the onlooker so dreaded and bewildered? As-hab Kahf were extremely noble and devotees of monotheism; and the philosophy of their life was directed to ensure the victory of truth. Now the question is: When did a radical change occur in their life that their life became so disgraceful and shocking that its description would create dread and bewilderment if and when people came to know about them? What is more, what new and abominable principle or code of conduct did they develop in themselves that if the details of that were known, people would run far away from them?

Narrators of tafsir provided answers, however unfounded, to these questions. Some argue that such dreadfulness was created among the onlookers because they used to keep their eyes open during sleep and because they grew long hair and fingernails. Some said: "Allah created them in such a physical feature that people became extremely bewildered whenever they cast eyes on them." After quoting these

two views, Imam Razi states : — أما تفصيل سبب الرعب فالله أعلم به — وهذا هو الأصح -

"Only Allah knows the full details of this dread and terror — and this is the correct opinion." ([quoted in] *Tafsir al-Kabir*)

It is undoubtedly established from these narratives that the exegetes actually do not have any sound arguments in support of their tales and stories. Their theories are not proven by the Qur'an or hadith; and these are beyond the reach of reason and rationality. Therefore, it remains completely unproven that the verse in question is about the As-hab Kahf.

In order to decipher the correct significance of the verse, in what follows, I explain the meaning of few key words:

Aiqaz and Rukud

Aiqaz is plural. However, it has two singular nouns: يَقْظُ and يَقْظَانُ. The difference in its singular noun causes a difference in the meaning of its plural. In this regard, I quote below the views of some lexicographers:

يقظ الرجل ضد نام و تنبه للأمر و حذر و فطن فهو يَقْظُ و يَقْظَانُ — و يُقْظَانُ ج أيقاظ و رجل يقظ و يقظان إذا كان فيه معرفة و فتنة — و فيه (حديث) أيقظوا صواحب الحجر أي تنبهوا — نهايه —

رجل يقظ بكسر القاف حذر و فطن أيضا والجمع أيقاظ — و يقظ يقظا و يقظة بفتح القاف و يقظة خلاف نام و كذلك إذا تنبه للأمر — (المصباح المنير)

يَقْظُ الرجل و يَقْظُ : - و تنبه للأمر و حذر و فطن فهو يَقْظُ و

يَقْظُ — و يقظ الغبار اثاره و قال الحمامي " تحرك يقظان الغبار و نائمته "

لتراب المثار و الذي ليس بمثار — -

According to the collective opinion of the lexicographers, though the word aiqaz means awake, in a metaphorical sense it means aware, experienced, clever, well-informed of the situation, flourishing,

prospering, etc. Needless to say, if the word 'awake' is used with reference to a community or society, it is more appropriate to take its metaphorical meaning, especially if taking the primary meaning is not possible.

As regards the word Rukud, Imam Raghīb says:

() – النوم القليل

"A pleasant, short nap is call ruqud." The Arabic dictionary *Qamus* supports this definition though the general lexicographers translate it merely as 'sleep.'

However, it is worth remembering here that although its primary meaning is 'to sleep,' sleeping in the state of wakefulness is also called 'naum' in the Arabic language (I will provide its evidence later). Apart from this, the or also signifies the following: someone who is negligent of their duties, an obscure or undignified person, a complacent person, dust that is settled on the surface, when a market is down, ragged or worn-out dress, etc. These usages are mentioned in the dictionaries like *Mukhtar al-Sehah*, *Misbah al-Munir*, *Qamus*, etc.

In terms of literary value, hadith comes after the Qur'an. So we mention below few hadiths of the Prophet as evidence:

1) In a hadith-qudsi, the Prophet has been told: **و أنزل عليك كتابا لا يغسله الماء تقرؤه نائما ويقظان-**

"Allah has sent to you such a book which no water can destroy by washing away, and you read this book in the state of sleep and wakefulness."

2) Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) said:

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"You perform ritual prayer standing, if that is not possible sitting, and if that is not possible in sleeping.

3) Once Hazrat Belal was late in announcing azan, and Prophet said:

يقال

– "

"

نام فلان عن حاجتي إذا غفل عنها -

"See! The man is asleep! See! The man is asleep!" In this context, the Prophet meant 'unmindful' by using the word 'asleep,' as it is usually said that a certain person has been asleep about work, that is, has become negligent or heedless. (*Nihayah & Majma- ul-Bihar*)

The significance of the word sleep in the first hadith is not to be forgetful about the Qur'an even when lying down. 'Praying in the state of sleep' in the second hadith means praying while lying on their side. And in the third hadith sleep means negligence or inattentiveness.

So, by the usage of the word in hadith and in Arabic literature, it is undoubtedly established that rukud in the verse may mean people who are asleep, and equally it may mean people who are undutiful, indiscreet or injudicious, lying on the ground, undignified, insignificant and negligent.

Taqleeb or turning upon one side

For the benefit of discussion, we have divided verse 18 into four parts. And now we are discussing the second part. In this part it is said: **و نقلبهم ذات اليمين و ذات الشمال -**

The infinitive qalbun means to change, to transform from one position to another, to turn to the other side. Its verbal noun in the verbal form tafyeel stands: taqleebun. Qalbun and taqleebun convey the same meaning. However, according to the characteristic of the verbal form tafyeel, it carries a sense of excessiveness and exaggeration. There the word would mean to turn completely upside down or to turn topsy-turvy. (Raghīb, *Misbah al-Munir*, *Nihayah*, *Al-Mawarid*, & *Qamus*).

It is noticeable here that the text of the Qur'an talks about 'change,' not about turning upon one side. The sense of 'side' has been added in order that the meaning complies with some invented, unproven notions. I have tried my best to provide the correct translation of the words in the verse.

Kalb and Oseed

There is no doubt that the actual meaning of kalb is dog. However, metaphorically it carries other significances as well. The reader may remember that, according to the general exegetes, this verse talks about As-hab Kahf. However, we believe that this verse discusses the condition of the innovators, polytheists and Christian communities who were the opponents of As-hab Kahf. Evidence to this claim was provided before. The sum and substance is that, there is no relation between this dog and the so-called dog of As-hab Kahf.

In order to define the true nature of this dog, I am drawing the attention of the reader to the word oseed. It is said in the verse that their dog spreads two arms to oseed.

There are four meanings of the word oseed:

فناء البيت وعتبه A courtyard or door-sill (a timber at the base or top of the threshold). (*Qamus, Misbah al-Munir, etc.*)

الوصيدة حجرة تجعل للمال في الجبل – يقال أوصدت الباب و أصدته أي
اطبقته و أحكمته و الوصيد النبات المتقارب الأصول –

الوصيد الفناء والعتبة و بيت كالحظيرة من الجحارة في الجبال للمال الخ-

A room that is made of hilly rock to protect property is called oseed. Furthermore, a thicket of plants and trees is also called oseed. (*Raghib, Aqrabul Mawarid, Lisanul Arab, Jawhari, Qamus, etc.*)

In my opinion, it is more appropriate to accept the meaning of a well-protected room or house built to keep treasures safe, and that will remove any inconsistency with the meaning of courtyard.

Here we find a completely natural identity of the dog: It is always keen on spreading its arms on a treasury (assets). In other words, it is an abominable, avaricious animal.

A person with this special characteristic of a dog is also called a dog. And this is supported by different anecdotes mentioned by companions in hadith literature. According to Imam Hasan:

' إن الدنيا لما فتحت على أهلها كلبوا فيها أسواء الكلب –
(تشجبي)

ء يصيبه – نهايه

و غلب على هذا الحيوان النابح ...

التودد و الوفاء والدنائية و الحرص و البخل – و ربما وصف به فيقال :

- - "

This proves that people having the characteristics of dogs are also termed as dog in the Arabic language.

History testifies that after the demise of the Prophet Isa, the religion he spread kept falling down. After the emperor of Rome converted to Christianity, the shape and nature of Christianity was determined according to the notions and political interests of the rulers and emperors. That is why Imam Ibn Hazm branded the Christian community of that time as a royal community (*al-Milal wal-Nihal*). The clergy of this time generally followed the religious doctrine of the state. Those who did not follow that tenet had to go through various types of inhuman oppression. I believe that in this verse, the mean-mindedness and lowly mentality of the rapacious priests who were complicit with state repression is compared to the nature of dog.

End of sufferings

After enduring lots of sufferings, the As-hab Kahf spent one whole year in the cave. Then the appointed time arrived, and all preparations were made in Allah's infinite power to cause them to embrace a soldier-like life.

As-hab Kahf used to send one of them to the market for foodstuffs at a favourable time. And that opened the possibility for them to have some idea about the political situation of the country. Then, when the right moment came to cause them appear in public life, Allah made that happen not to their knowledge.

The significance of the word ba'as has been described in note 6. However, it may suffice to mention here that, up until now I have not found any place in the Qur'an where the term ba'as has been used to signify rising from sleep. Verse 60 of Surah An'am cannot be used to substantiate such a meaning, as the word ba'as is related to ma'ut (death), not sleep.

In the clause 'they will ask themselves,' the pronoun 'they' refers to other people of the regions of As-hab Kahf and Rameem. As the As-hab Kahf used to hang together all the time, they were not unaware of the condition of any of them.

A day or part of it

When As-hab Kahf appeared in public after the period of living incognito, a certain individual said to them: "How long did you stay in the cave?" In reply, one of As-hab Kahf said, "A day or part of it." That is to say, a short time. Days of difficulty have gone. And now the time for worshipping God and for the struggle to establish truth and justice has come. And that will be followed by an eternal life of happiness. Comparatively, the few years of difficulty are negligible. In Surah Mu'menoon it is said that after awarding the disbelievers punishment and the believers reward, Allah will ask the latter:

قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ؟ (23:112)

"What number of years did you stay on earth?" (verse 23:112)

In reply, they will say (23:113) لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ فَاسْأَلِ الْعَادِيْنَ

"We stayed a day or part of a day." (verse 23:113)

And then Allah will say: (23:114) إِنَّ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا لَوْ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

"You tarried but a little if you only knew." (verse 23:114)

What is meant by 'a day or part of it' in Surah Mu'menoon should apply to the verse of Surah Kahf in question. Despite this clear example in the Qur'an, the exegetes brought in many types of fictitious stories. Some of them say, after sleeping soundly for a long period of 300 years, when they woke up the turbidity of their sleep was not over. Since the question was asked to them at such a time, they could not give a right answer. But all the imaginary stories regarding their sound sleep of 300 years and regarding the turbidity of their sleep are unfounded. (See the explanation of verse 25)

Some of the As-hab Kahf said to their companions: Allah knows how long you stayed, so send someone with this coin to the city. And similar other stories are in vogue.

This suggests that they could not get any definite information about the political condition of the country yet. Hence, they sent someone with a coin to the city. It is certainly understood from this verse that they had been preparing themselves to stay in the cave for a long time, and they also brought some money for that purpose. The last part of this verse and verse 20 clearly indicate that they were not certain up until then.

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وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِئَةِ سِنِينَ وَأَزْدًا نِسْعًا (18:25)

"And (they say): As-hab Kahf [people of the cave] stayed in the cave three hundred years and added another nine (years)" (18:25).

300-year stay

In verse 19, it has been stated clearly that the duration of the stay of As-hab Kahf is known only to Allah. However, while explaining this verse, a group of exegetes think that Allah Himself says that they

stayed for 300 years. According to them, as *يقولون* is not used before the verse, it is established without any doubt that this is a statement by Allah, not by a human being. In reply to the claim of the other group, they further say that it is true that previously in verses 19 and 22, 'they said,' 'they will say,' or 'they say' have been used, but because of the gap between these two verses, that correlation is severed. So the grammatical rule of *atf* (conjunction) between this verse and the preceding one may not be established. (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, etc.)

Fortunately, a group of exegetes of the Qur'an have contested this view right from the beginning. Imam Razi says:

و في قوله و لبثوا في كهفهم قولان - () إن هذا حكاية كلام القوم -
و الدليل عليه أنه تعالى : سيقولون ثلاثة رابعهم كلبهم و كذا إلى أن قال
و لبثوا في كهفهم - و يؤكد أنه تعالى قال بعده
: قل الله أعلم بما لبثوا و هذا يشبه الرد على الكلام المذكورة قبله و يؤكد
أيضا ما روي في مصحف عبد الله : و قالوا و لبثوا في كهفهم -

“There are two opinions on this verse. The first view is that, the verse simply mentions a hearsay or rumour. Its proof is that, Allah says: “They will say, As-hab Kahf are three, the dog is the fourth one.” After making similar statements, finally they say: “They stayed in the cave for 300 years,”— that is to say that this is a statement made by those people. No sooner than that, Allah is saying, “Only Allah knows well about the duration of their stayal,” etc. This is how this opinion has been well-founded. Moreover, in the qir'at (recital) of Ibn Mas'ud, it is clearly stated : قالوا و لبثوا في كهفهم

“And they said that As-hab Kahf stayed in their cave for 300 years....” This made this view even stronger. (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, the gist of the first opinion was mentioned before.)

After mentioning different opinions, Imam Abu Hayyan says:

قيل هو من قول المتنازعين في أمرهم و هو الصحيح على مقتضى سياق الآية و يؤيد " قل الله أعلم بما لبثوا " - جعل ذلك من الغيوب التي هو تعالى مختص بها (البحر المحيط) -

“It is said that this statement of staying for 300 years was issued by the disputatious people, and the style of narration also suggests this. It is substantiated by the clause ‘Allah is fully aware of the duration of their stay.’ The duration of their stayal is part of Allah’s undisclosed knowledge that is known only to Him. (*Bahr al-Muhit*, 6—117)

Sineen or few years

The word sineen in verse 11 is another contentious issue. The sum and substance of the argument is that, the opening of the story gives evidence of the sleep of As-hab Kahf for many years. And this completely testifies their 309-year stayal in the cave.

So far we know, the word sineen is plural. So its meaning would be ‘years.’ It may mean ‘few years,’ ‘a number of years’ or ‘many years.’ Words used in human literature are rendered according to the knowledge and experience of human. The Qur'an has been sent for the guidance of humans; hence, words in the Qur'an are also used mainly according to human intellect, conscience and experience. I mention below few examples of this usage together with the translation of Maulana Thanawi:

1) After returning to Egypt, Pharaoh says to Musa: أَلَمْ نُرَبِّكَ فِينَا وَلِيدًا
وَلَبِثْتَ فِينَا مِنْ عُمُرِكَ سِنِينَ

“Have we not reared you in your childhood, and did you not stay with us for a number years?” (Shu'ara: 18)

2) Allah says to the Prophet Musa: فَلَبِثْتَ سِنِينَ فِي أَهْلِ مَدْيَنَ

“Then you stayed for a number of years among the people of Madyan.” (Taha: 40)

3) It is said about the disbelievers of Makkah: أَقْرَأَيْتَ إِنْ مَتَعْنَاهُمْ سِنِينَ
(205)

“Have you then considered if We let them enjoy themselves for years!” (Shu'ara: 205)

4) In the same way, the word sineen has been used with regard to the 7-year famine during the time of the Prophet Yusuf, and also about his imprisonment of more than ten years. Accordingly, the significance of verse 11 in this surah should also be the same. The Prophet Musa stayed in Egypt, and then in Madayen after running away from Egypt, for a number of years. Definitely, he did not stay for centuries. So it is not appropriate to raise misgivings concerning the word 'sineen.'

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ ذِي الْقُرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا (18:83)

“And (O Prophet!) they ask you about Zulqarnain. Say: I will recite some of his memoirs to you” (18:83).

Zul-Qarnain

Qarnain is a dual noun; singular is qarn which means: 1) horn and 2) a generation or the human race in one epoch. So dhul-qarnain would signify something relating to two horns, or a person of (or having relation to) two generations. The examples in the Qur'an, hadith and Arabic literature suggests the usage of the word in both the senses. Apart from that, qarn also signifies the peak of a mountain and the morning phosphorescence ray of the sun.

It is not understood whether the term dhul-qarnain has been used in the Qur'an to indicate a particular person or his characteristics or a general title. However, it is clear from the narration of the verses that this particular name or title is not given by the Qur'an. First, we notice that contemporary people are asking the Prophet Muhammad about dhul-Qarnain. It is shown in verse 94 that the local people are lodging a complaint to him against the oppression by Ya'juj and Ma'juj by addressing him as 'O dhul-Qarnain.' So it implies that the name or title dhul-Qarnain was known to a group of people long before the time of the Prophet Muhammad and that even his contemporary people concerned also used this name or title. Moreover, it is also clear that this name or title is not given by the

Qur'an and that the Qur'an mentions it as a statement made by other people.

Regarding the identity of this dhul-Qarnain, traditional compilers and narrators brought in different kinds of stories and rumours. A group of exegetes of the Qur'an tried hard to extract a kind of historical truth out of those fictitious narratives and theories. In our country few contemporary translators and exegetes of the modern age also conducted special research to ascertain the historical identity of dhul-Qarnain on the basis of books written in English on the topic and of recently discovered documents.

The second appendix of this surah will shed some light on this subject. Here I want to say in brief that, whoever this dhul-Qarnain was, he cannot be Alexander the Great. According to the narrative of the Qur'an, dhul-Qarnain had the noble qualities of patience and magnanimity, and had deep and impeccable religious belief and maintained a clear liberal policy in politics. Alexander or Iskandar Rumi is conspicuous by a total lack of these characteristics. Moreover, historical evidences give us an opposite picture of him, whereas the Qur'an confirms the greatness and magnanimity of dhul-Qarnain. As we find a clear and fundamental contradiction between the character traits of dhul-Qarnain and Alexander, we can easily reject the fictitious narrative of Sikandar Badshah.

تَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا (19:17)

لَتَأْتِيَ إِتِي أَعُودُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ مِنْكَ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَقِيًّا (19:18)

لَأَهَبَ لَكَ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا (19:19) قَالَتْ أَتَى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ

رَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا (19:20) قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلِيٌّ هَيِّنٌ وَلَنَجْعَلُهُ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ

إِن أَمْرًا مَفْضِيًّا (19:21) مَلَّتُهُ فَانْتَبَذَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا

(19:22) فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ

نَسِيًّا مَسِيًّا (19:23) فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَا تَدْرِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا

(19:24)

“And in presence of them she made an arrangement of a hiding — then We sent to her Our ‘ruh,’ and then it was transformed into a well-made human” (19:17). “Maryam said: if you are not an honest man, I will seek refuge from you with the Beneficent (Allah)” (19:18). “The visitor said: I will give you a pure-hearted boy — and for that reason I have been sent from your Lord” (19:19). “Maryam said: How can I have a son since no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?” (19:20). “Allah said: So it will be, your Lord says — that is very easy for Me — and also for the reason that, We will make this son a sign for humans and Our mercy, and this is a determined matter” (19:21). “Then (in due course to time) Maryam conceived him, then went to a remote place with him” (19:22). “Then (in due course of time) the pangs of pregnancy compelled her to take shelter under the (shade) of a date-palm tree and being restless for pain started to say: O I am so pitiable! Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!” (19:23). “Then (someone) from beneath the tree called out to her and said: Grieve not; look! By Allah's command, there has been a stream to flow beneath you” (19:24).

The glad tiding of pregnancy and childbirth

The period of Maryam's preparation and asceticism has ended, and now she has started her practical life based on that training. The main concern of the guardian of such a marriageable girl is to marry her off to an honest [and caring] bridegroom. The Qur'an does not tell us when this solemn ceremony was held. We have come across the life stories of Ibrahim, Ismail, Ishaq, Musa and other prophets in different places in the Qur'an. However, the Qur'an does not go into the minor details of the dates on which daughters of such and such persons were married to such and such men. But, later on, we are informed about their spouses and offspring. Whatever the case may be, it goes without saying that those prophets were married to their wives in the right procedure and in the right time. For example, in few places in the Qur'an, we come across terms like ‘Musa's mother,’ but there is no mention of Musa's father. On the other hand, we find Haroon address Musa as ‘son of my mother’ (Taha:

94, A'raf:150). While describing the life-story of the early phase of Musa's life in Egypt, the Qur'an mentions again and again ‘mother of Musa’ and there is no mention of his father. Interestingly, because of this fact, no one presumes that Musa was born without the intervention of a father. The fact of the matter is that, all believe that Musa's mother was married to his father, and he was born accordingly by the decree of Allah.

In the light of this Qur'anic usage and of the universal law of Allah, we may reasonably surmise that Maryam was married to a compatible man; and after that marriage Allah sent His angel to her with the good news of the birth of the Prophet Isa. The verse in question contains that good news. In this regard, verse 45 of Surah Ale-Imran states:

قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ (3:45)

“When the angels said: "O Maryam (Mary)! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Maryam, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah.” It is worth mentioning here that the nature of this glad tiding in Surah Ale-Imran was revealed long after the revelation of Surah Maryam.

As regards the significance of the term ruh mentioned at the end of verse 17, Imam Razi said: “There are differences of opinion among the exegetes regarding this issue. Most of the exegetes believe that ruh here means Angel Jibreel. However, according to Abu Muslim:

— إنه الروح الذي تصور في بطنها بشرا —

“The word ruh signifies the spirit that took a human shape in the womb of Maryam. However, the first explanation is nearer the actual import.” Accordingly, this imam considers that it is inevitable to accept the meaning of ruh as Jibreel. In other words, Jibreel has been termed as ruh in the Qur'an. Here the visitor is saying: “I have been sent as a messenger from your Lord.”

I will detail the argument of the Imam later. Here we quote a relevant verse of Surah Tahreem:

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَّقَتْ
بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُتِبَ عَلَيْهَا إِتْقَانٌ مِمَّنْ لَقِيَ رَبَّهُ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّابِرُونَ (66:12)

“And Maryam, daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into him of Our inspiration and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord and His books, and she was of the obedient ones.” (66:12).

Explaining this verse, Imam Razi said:

و قوله فيه أي في عيسى.... و أما التشبيه بالنفخ فذلك أن الروح إذا خلق فيه
الجسد كالريح إذا انفخت في شيء و قيل بالنفخ لسرعة دخوله
فيه نحو الريح - 8 238

“In the verse the phrase ‘into him’ stands for ‘into Isa.’ The metaphor ‘breathing into’ stands for ‘giving life,’ because if something is breathed into wind goes round it. Equally when life is breathed into the foetus or embryo, then it spreads throughout the whole body.” (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 8—238)

It is known to the well-read reader that according to the grammar of the Arabic language, there are two pronouns for third person singular number: ها for the feminine gender and هـ for the masculine gender. In the verse in question, fihe is used, not fiha. So it cannot be translated as “Allah breathed into Maryam His own spirit;” and accordingly it must be acknowledged that life spirit was infused into Isa by Allah’s decree when he was a foetus in the womb of Maryam. Abu Muslim maintains this view while interpreting verse 17 of this surah. While Imam Razi rejected this view in a traditional sense, he espouses a similar view with regard to the interpretation of Surah Tahreem.

However, now we intend to say a few words regarding the significance of the term ruh. All agree that the word ruh may point to Jibreel. But it cannot be accepted that the word ruh stands only for

Jibreel, which even Imam Razi did not uphold, because such a rigid view goes against the tradition of the usage of the word in the Qur'an.

It is stated in verse 85 of Surah Bani Israel that ruh is simply an order from Allah, which is manifested in different contexts in different shapes. Verse 29 of Surah Hijr, after describing the first few phases of the creation of the human being, states: نفخت فيه من روحي

“Then I breathed into him of one of My spirits” (see verse 9 of Surah Sajdah). Here ruh signifies life, as in this context a translation like “We breathed the angel Jibreel into the human being” is inconceivable.

Verse 2 of Surah Nahl reads: “He sends down the angels with the inspiration or spirit (ruh) by His commandment on whom He pleases of His servants, saying: Give the warning that there is no god but Me, therefore be mindful (of your duty) to Me. Undoubtedly, here the word ruh signifies wahi (inspiration) (see note 2 of Surah Nahl). Most of the exegetes, especially Imam Razi, put forward different arguments to support this opinion.

In few other places such as in verse 52 of Surah Shura, the word ruh has been used to mean wahi or inspiration. In verse 22 of Surah Mujadilah, after describing the special characteristics of hijbullah as opposed to those of hijbusshaitan, it is said: أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ
الإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ

“These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and whom He has strengthened with an inspiration (ruh) from Him.” As regards the significance of this verse, Imam Razi quotes the opinions of Ibn Abbas and As-Suddi. According to Ibn Abbas, Allah blesses the believers with victory in their struggle against those who oppose Allah and His messenger. And that victory reinvigorates and infuses new life into their hearts, and that is why it has been termed as ruh. According to As-Suddi, ruh is the urge and inspiration of iman ([quited in] *Tafsir al-Kabir*, 8—171). It is well-established from this verse that the ruh of Allah sometimes descends on the righteous believers.

Allah's message to Maryam

'Sending ruh' may mean sending inspiration/revelation from Allah or sending Jibreel. If the first meaning is taken, it does not have any relevance to inspiration being transformed into a complete human being. If the second meaning taken, there are problems.

First question is: Was it necessary for Jibreel to take a human shape in order to convey to Maryam the good news of the birth of a baby boy? Whereas we have noticed that:

- 1) Maryam was born in an environment of prophethood, and the Prophet Zakaria himself was her guide and preceptor. It was also known that Allah addressed Zakaria as 'O Zakaria.'
- 2) Angels address Maryam directly to tell her that Allah has selected her, so on and so forth (see Qur'an, 3: 41-42). She was also given the good news that she would be the proud mother of the Prophet Isa.
- 3) It was also known to her that her mother prayed for her and that she would have the privilege of serving and worshipping in Baitul Muqaddas.

Given the above facts, what new thing did Jibreel want to convey to Maryam that behoved him to take a human shape? No appropriate answer has been given to this question, however.

In my opinion, it is a psychological matter. Maryam had been receiving the good news of bearing the Prophet Isa in her womb for a long time. She was being repeatedly informed about the name of her son and about the enormous responsibility that he would perform. It is natural that Maryam would remain absorbed wholly in imagining the beauty and merits of her would-be son who would be the emancipator of the people of Bani Israel. At such a moment a new inspiration from Allah affected her mind with anxiety, and during the time of that anxiety an imaginary shape of her future son appeared before her. The condition of Maryam at that time has been hinted in the last section of verse 7 and in verse 38. The connotative meaning of the word also supports this view.

Translation of verse 18: Generally, this verse is translated as "I seek refuge in the Beneficent One from you if you are Allah-fearing." However, it is required to seek refuge in Allah from somebody who is not honest [and Allah-fearing]. I do not understand why it was necessary to seek refuge in Allah if that person were honest and [Allah-fearing]. Hence, I take as *nafia* and translated it accordingly: "if you are not honest," etc.

Imaginations and suppositions of the narrators

The general decision of the narrators is that after the meeting between Maryam and ruh (who in their opinion is Jibreel) the former became pregnant. To substantiate this argument, they say that Jibreel took some kind of shape: *حسب الوجه* *ظهيرها على صورة شاب*

"The shape of one beardless, good-looking and perverted young man" (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 5—779). Not only that, they interpolated a word *نفخ* (whiff) and indicated the place of whiff in such a way that we find improper to mention. Unfortunately, some of them even do not hesitate to say that, those procedures were adopted *ليتيهيج شهوتها* to arouse Maryam's sexual desire so that his semen reaches her womb. (*Ruhul-al-Ma'ani*)

The main problem occurred actually because of the distorted significance of the clause. By *أهب* "I will give you a baby boy," the exegetes mean "I will give you a baby boy now." But if we look at the usages of the Qur'an, taking such a meaning is not possible. And this becomes clear if we look at the verses containing *يهب*, *وهب*, *أهب*. It may suffice to refer to verse 5 of this surah.

In the light of the above discussion, it is ascertained that the word ruh in the verse in question signifies nothing but inspiration. And if we take this meaning, it does not contradict the idea of a fully-grown human being.

Maryam's question

The gist of Maryam's narration is that, a woman can become pregnant in two ways: through the intervention of her husband or through an

illicit relationship with a man. So her question was: I have not had any intimate relation with a man (husband). Nor am I vitiated in character. So in the present circumstances, I do not see any possibility of me being mother of a son. The reason why she says 'of a man' (of husband) is that to maintain sexual relation with any other man would be adultery, as the only licit way to have sex is through the intimate relationship with one's spouse.

Our exegetes right from the beginning have been ignoring the historical fact that Maryam later on got married in keeping with the custom of her society and time and that she had other children apart from Isa. Equally, they have also disregarded the universal law of Allah that emphasizes the necessity of sexual union between male and female for childbirth and the relevant Qur'anic statements. (see Surah Ale-Imran verses 266 & 277.)

This verse in question contests the folk tales concocted by the exegetes regarding Maryam becoming pregnant right away. Because right after verses 18-19, verse 20 clearly states that no prospect of Maryam's pregnancy occurred up until then. Otherwise, she would not have said "how come I would give birth to a child." Conversely, according to the exegetes, she had become pregnant before she made this statement.

Birth of Yahya and Isa

Whatever is said in this verse regarding the birth of Yahya, in verse 9 the Prophet Zakaria is assured in the same terms. And in both the assurances, there is no room for any bizarre imagination.

Ayat or sign

All the prophets of Allah are signs from Him for human beings. Perhaps no readers of the Qur'an have any doubt about it. What is more, the use of the term ayat (signs) is not exclusive for the prophets. In the Qur'an this term is used to mean day and night, rivers and streams, the sky and atmosphere, heaven and earth, sun and moon, rains, hills and mountains, and even Pharaoh and the brothers of Yusuf. What is more, the Qur'an terms two warring factions, sleep and wakefulness and ships and boats as ayat or signs. In a nutshell, all that testify Allah's existence and teach us about the unity of His

godhead are signs of Allah. In that sense, all prophets including Isa are signs from Allah.

The second half of this verse is noticeable. This section of the verse begins with 'and so that,' which suggests that it has a clear linkage with a previous verse. Its significance is that Allah will bless Maryam with the gift of a faultless son.

Maryam's conception

After the initial statements are finished, it is being said that then Maryam bore Isa in her womb. The use of the letter fa points to this sequence and gap. And this nullifies all the folk tales that suggest Maryam became pregnant before this.

Maryam's lamentation

Maryam got married and then became pregnant in the normal process. When the period of pregnancy was complete she experienced labour pain. It is known from the Qur'anic narrative that after becoming pregnant she moved to a distant place. At that time, for whatever reason, she faced such an adverse situation that she (or they) could not manage to have any shelter.

The ordeals and tribulations during first pregnancy are known to all. On top of that, Maryam had this material and circumstantial difficulty. So her lamentation is a natural expression of her distress at that time.

Consoling Maryam

Verses 24-26 carry a consoling message. But who uttered these consolatory words from beneath the trees? Simple, naive answers have been provided: 1) Angel Jibreel 2) the Prophet Isa himself. However, the proponents of these two theories have not provided any evidence to substantiate their claim. In my opinion, the consolation came from Allah swt Himself. Different verses of the Qur'an carry the precedent that Allah calls upon his prophets. After childbirth, Maryam badly needed water for bathing and drinking. Generally rivers flow through low land. Many verses in the Qur'an talk about rivers flowing in the region underneath paradise. Accordingly, a message comes from lowlands to apprise Maryam of the source of

river. Besides, in verse 13 of Surah Mu'menoon, the word (we have made) with regard to قرار مكين or permanent resting place, which indicates that Allah made that arrangement.

Yusuf Najjar

There is another possibility. In contemporary history, a man named Yusuf Najjar (Joseph the Carpenter) has been ascertained as the father of Isa and as the husband of Maryam. But, as the authors of the Bible used the birth of Isa without the intervention of a father as the main proof of his godhead, they tried hard to suppress the truth. Despite that, truth crept into the crevices of their narration. Different narrations suggest that our exegetes were also not unaware of this fact. I cite one narration as an example:

لما حملت بعبسى عليه السلام كان معها ابن عم لها يقال له يوسف النجار -

“When Maryam bore Isa in her womb, her cousin Yusuf Najjar was next to her” (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 5—783). People who do not consider it inappropriate to interpret the Qur'an on the basis of such narration may argue that it was Yusuf Najjar who called Maryam from distance to tell her those words. Given the tough prohibitions regarding the confinement of a woman at childbirth and uncleanness of a woman recently delivered of a child, Yusuf had no other alternative.

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يَا أُخْتِ هَارُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكِ امْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكَ بَغِيًّا (19:28)

أَشَارَتْ إِلَيْهِ قَالُوا كَيْفَ نُكَلِّمُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي الْمَهْدِ صَبِيًّا (19:29)

“O sister of Haroon! Your father was not a bad man. Nor was your mother an unchaste woman” (19:28). “Maryam then pointed to Isa; people of her community said: How shall we speak to one who is a child in the cradle (until that day)?” (19:29)

After that

‘After that’ means after a long time, after the conferment of prophethood on Isa. The description concerning Maryam ends at this point, which is followed by the narrative of the prophethood of the

Prophet Isa. The temporal gap between these two periods is more or less from 30 to 40 years. As verse 45 of Surah Ale-Imran mentions the word كهلا (middle age or mature age) adulthood with regard to Isa, it can be surmised that the lifespan of Isa was between 40 to 60 years. During this time, Maryam and Isa travelled different countries and then at the end settled down in their native land. The Qur'an does not discuss the time in between. The first ruku mentions Zakaria's prayer and the answer to his prayer. It does not say anything about Yahya's birth and boyhood; and verse 12 straightway states: when he attained youth and when he earned the capability to accept Book with certitude.

Maryam left Jerusalem soon after she became grown-up and went into hiding for a long time. Then she suddenly came back to them with her grown-up son. As they knew nothing about her marriage and motherhood, they considered it very strange. And that was the main reason why they made indecent comments on the character of Maryam.

Disclosure of truth by Isa

In order to answer the questions of her native people, Maryam points to her son. The important thing to know about Isa is his prophethood. Having received his mother's gesture, Isa clearly made his statement.

Verses 30-33 contain his statements. The gist of his proclamation is that he was sent by Allah as a messenger (see notes of ruku 5 of Surah Ale-Imran). Then he says: Allah has ordered me to establish prayer and give zakah – the two most important duties after the declaration of faith – throughout my whole life. Through these commands, it is undeniably proven that, during this encounter and conversation Isa was of the age of prophethood and was obligated to observe the precepts of Shariah. Obviously such statements cannot be made by a child in the lap of mother. Our rabees who are skilled in bringing about what is impossible became unrestrained in this regard. One group is saying that there is no limit to Allah's power and that Allah offered Isa prophethood and sent him all sorts of commands soon after his foetus was transmitted into the womb of his mother. They also argue that his physical structure took a perfect shape

immediately and that roughly in three hours he was born a perfect human shape. Despite their many attempts, even the Christians could not go that far. Verse 32 advises to be kind-hearted only to mother, but does not say anything about father. The reason is that Isa's father had died before Isa started his public ministry. Conversely, the Jews kept publicising that Isa used to mistreat his mother and hence he was told to be kind to his mother. Confirmation of this slander exists even in the Bible of the Christians (see Matthew: 12). However, this particular verse of the Qur'an contests this slander, which requires a long, elaborate discussion.

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إِذْ رَأَىٰ نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّي آتِيكُمْ مِنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجْدُ
عَلَى النَّارِ هُدًى (20:10)

“[Remember] that time, when he [Musa] saw a fire and said to his family: You stay (here)! I have seen a fire, most possibly I will be able to bring something for you or will be able to find a guidance in its light” (20:10).

Musa's viewing of a flash of light

The Prophet Musa saw a fire. Did he see a big fire bursting into a blaze at distance? Or, he saw a flash of light at some place and thought that the flash was like a fire or that the light was caused by a fire. It is generally presumed that fire was definitely there. Which one is well-founded, and which is a mere conjecture or hypothesis?

According to the learned exegetes there are four kinds of fire: 1) fire that has light and also burns, such as normal fire of everyday mundane life; 2) latent fire that does not burn, such as fire lying hidden in trees; 3) fire that does not have light but has burning quality such as the fire of hell; 4) fire that has light but not burning pain, such as the fire of the Prophet Musa.

A discussion of fire is at the centre of this verse. First, Musa saw a fire. Definitely, that first sight was through his physical eye. However, when he was approaching the mountain of Tur, leaving his family members behind, he says “I perceive a fire.”

Similarly, verse 6 of Surah Nisa contains *فَإِنْ آنَسْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ رِشْدًا* “If you perceive in them sound judgement or maturity of intellect.” This *anastu* means or perception by the heart. Certain literary scholars and exegetes supported this view and quoted precedents of old literature in favour of this view (*Ruhul-al-Ma'ani, Bahr al-Muhit*, etc). Then comes the significance of the word *qabs*. Some scholars think that its significance is: I will bring few pieces of burning wood for you in faggots. Rejecting this rendering, some others translate it as: I will bring burning fire for you in faggots.

Imam Raghīb states: What is obtained from a sudden hot wave of fire is called *qabs*. The effort to obtain that is called *qabs* and *ektabas*. Then its inner significance is: *لطلب العلم والهداية* in the sense of seeking knowledge and guidance from Allah. Imam Raghīb cites the examples of the usage of this word in the Qur'an in both the senses.

Before analysing the issue, it should be borne in mind in what circumstances the Prophet Musa was during this time. It is learnt from the Qur'an that, that event occurred immediately before the conferment of prophethood on him. The experience of seeing, hearing and perception of prophets and messengers of such unique moments cannot be judged by normal standards. It is an otherworldly matter. So we must try to understand the true significance of this verse figuratively. What is more, that metaphorical meaning should be derived clearly from the language of the Qur'an. In the above discussion, I have tried to mention those figurative meanings.

As a result, the simple summary of the verse would be: Allah states that when Musa arrived at the peak of Mount Sinai, and he saw a flash of light on the other side of the mountain, most probably near mount Tur. He became curious to know the source of that light and started to proceed to it. On the eve of his journey to that place, he was advising his family members to stay where they were. He was saying to them, “Perhaps I will bring some fire for you, or I will find the right path through that fire or light.” (see verses 11-12.)

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وَلَقَدْ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي فَاصْرَبْ لَهُمْ طَرِيقًا فِي الْبَحْرِ يَبَسًا لَا
(20:77) فَأَتْبَعَهُمْ فِرْعَوْنُ بِجُنُودِهِ فَغَشِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْيَمِّ مَا

عَشِيَهُمْ (20:78) وَأَضَلَّ فِرْعَوْنُ قَوْمَهُ وَمَا هَدَى (20:79) يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ قَدْ أَنْجَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ عَدُوِّكُمْ وَوَاعَدْنَاكُمْ جَانِبَ الطُّورِ الْأَيْمَنِ وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّاءَ (20:80)

“And (in the right time) We revealed to Musa, saying: Travel by this night with My servants, and accordingly follow a dry path in the water-reservoir so that there will be no fear of you being caught (by the army of Phiraon) and there will be no reason for worry” (20:77). “Then Phiraon pursued them with his army, but the thing that was produced in the reservoir came upon them and covered them up” (20:78). “The situation was that, Phiraon led his people to a wrong way, and indeed, he could not guide them aright” (20:79). “O children of Israel! We delivered you from the grip of your enemy, and it was decided between you and Me that you would be present on the right side of ‘Mount Tur’ and We sent to you the manna and the salwa” (20:80).

The issue of sea/ocean/reservoir

Verse 78 states: *فَعَشِيَهُمْ مِنَ الْيَمِّ مَا غَشِيَهُمْ* which literally means “there covered them that which did cover them of the sea.” The exegetes of the Qur'an have not provided any details of that particular sea. Nor have they mentioned any its characteristics. Some opine:

الأمر الهائل الذي لا يقادر قدره و لا يبلغ كنهه – فتح البيان

“That is such an enormously dangerous matter that it is impossible to fathom its enormity or to understand its true nature” (*Fath al-Bayan*, 6—80). Imam Razi clearly states, *ي غشيهما ما لم يعلم كنهه إلا الله تعالى*, “they were covered by such a thing whose real nature only Allah knows” (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 6—85).

However, in my opinion, there is no reason to be frustrated about the explanation of the verse. It is known from the Qur'an that the people of Bani Israel were leaving Egypt during late night. Moreover, it is undoubtedly established by an authentic prophetic narrative that the people of Bani Israel were completely liberated from the slavery of Pharaoh on the 10th of a lunar month (see vol. 1, pp.88-89). It must have taken some time for them to come out of Egypt, to reach the marsh and then to cross it to reach the safe place on the other side.

During this time, the littoral water naturally recedes, which is called neap tide or ebb tide. Conversely, after the first few days of a lunar month, sea water begins to swell around the edges, and on 11th or 12th of the month, water inundates the coastal areas. And this is called spring tide or flood tide. This cycle of nature continues throughout the year.

When the sea water swells to the brim, then it takes the shape of waterspouts and proceeds to the nearby lands through the adjoining rivers. And this is called tide bore. On such a lunar day, Pharaoh and his retinue were drowned while crossing the river Nile. The verse in question narrates this natural phenomenon. The people of Bani Israel took a dry road of “bahr’ or swamp or marsh land. However, Pharaoh was drowned in a “yamm” or river. It is to indicate this difference, bahr is mentioned in verse 77, and yamm in 78.

Pharaoh's failing to ascertain the right path

Verse 77 suggests that the Prophet Musa and his followers by Allah's command took such a safe path where they did not have the fear of being caught by Pharaoh and his retinue. Nor did they have any apprehension of being drowned or befallen by other calamities. It is said in this verse that in his effort to catch the people of Bani Israel, Pharaoh led his people to a wrong path; hence, they could not take the way Musa and his followers were using. In other words, the Prophet Musa followed one way, and Pharaoh another way. So the fictitious story of the gathering of both the groups on the shore of Red Sea, which is compiled in our exegeses, is totally baseless. Actually, these unsubstantiated stories are mainly copied from the Old Testament and from mythological books. (See Exodus, Ch. 14).

Manna and Salwa

Note 46 of Surah Baqarah touched upon this topic. When the people of Bani Israel came out of Egypt and arrived at the valley of Mount Sinai, they faced a serious scarcity of food grains. At that time, by the grace of Allah, they found out two types of delicious food: manna and salwa. And this great number of Israeli people lived on it for a long time. In verse 80 of this surah, Allah reminds them of that blessing so that they can show gratitude to Him.

Manna

At the expanse of the valley of Mount Sinai, one kind of sweet seed – that looked like grains of sago – used to be gathered on the leaves of a particular tree and on stones. This was called manna. In the Persian language, manna is called toranjbin and gonjbin, and its another name is shir khest or stone milk. Even now at the expanses of the valley of Mount Sinai, especially at the expanse of Wadiussek, the Arabs still cull great amount of manna and sell to the pilgrims of the Convent through the intermediary of the ascetics. And this is not an uncommon happening on earth. In many places of Asia and Europe, this manna has been produced. Even though the European scholars did not discover it even until the fifteenth century, its use was never unknown to the Semitic people. When Sicily in Italy was in the hands of the Muslims (827-1070), they used to collect manna from there and do the business of collecting and selling it in full swing. A mountain in Sicily is still called Gibel el Mann⁵⁶ (mountain of the manna).⁵⁷ Manna is found in the Punjab region also. (See 'Manna' in *Britannica* and Watt's *Dictionary of Economic Products of India*). A hadith of the Prophet Muhammad reads: - الكماة من المن وماءها شفاء للعين - "Kam'at is one kind of manna, and its water alleviates eye ache." (Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad, Nasai, etc)

⁵⁶ Also known as Gibel el Iman or mountain of the faith. [Editor]

⁵⁷ According to *Classic Encyclopedia*, manna is:

A concrete saccharine exudation obtained by making incisions on the trunk of the flowering or manna ash tree, *Fraxinus Ornus*. The manna ash is a small tree found in Italy, and extending to Switzerland, South Tirol, Hungary, Greece, Turkey and Asia Minor. It also grows in the islands of Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia. It blossoms early in summer, producing numerous clusters of whitish flowers. At the present day the manna of commerce is collected exclusively in Sicily from cultivated trees, chiefly in the districts around Capaci, Carini, Cinisi and Favarota, small towns 20 to 25 m. W. of Palermo, and in the townships of Geraci, Castelbuono, and other places in the district of Cefalu, 50 to 70 m. E. of Palermo.

For more information, please visit <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Manna> [Editor].

Salwa

In the Ibrani language, 'Salwim' is a kind of fleshy and plump bird, which the Arabs generally call sumana. It cannot be known from which region these seasonal birds arrive. Hence, a group of people believe that these birds come out of sea. The Egyptians like its meat very much and do not hesitate to buy it in a high price. One special characteristic of these birds is that, they keep sitting on the ground and do not fly if they are not made to fly by force (*Hayat-al-Haiwan*,⁵⁸ 2—23 & *Ajaeb al-Makhlukat*,⁵⁹ 2—237).

In English this bird is called 'quail;' and in the Bangla and Sanskrit languages, it is called bharui, bhorotponkhi (skylark), fanikhel, etc. Their migration starts from the coastal region of the Mediterranean Sea. Many of these birds are caught upon their movement and sold in big numbers in the market (see 'Quail' in *Britannica*). The name of a ship in the naval expedition to the East that was sent during the Elizabethan period was called 'Desire.' It is known to the students of history that the sailors of this ship suffered from scarcity of food. In 1592 on their way back, they anchored their ship to a port in Patagonia⁶⁰ and found an island. There were so many skylarks in that island that it was difficult for them to walk without stampeding these birds. Then 22 sailors were employed to catch those birds and to dry their meat. And this continued from 30 October to 22 December. They lived on skylarks for 1 month 23 days and started their return journey with the dried meat of 14 thousand birds. But soon after they entered a relatively more tropical area, the sailors were attacked by a devastating epidemic of some sort of plague and beriberi. Later it was discovered that one kind of big worms grew in the flesh of these birds, which was the reason of that epidemic. And it is common knowledge that the disease of beriberi is caused by irregularity of food. Apart from this common knowledge, it has been found that

⁵⁸ Written by Kamal Uddin Muhammad Bin Musa Al-Damiri, a great Muslim zoologist.

⁵⁹ Written by Imaduddin Zakriya.

⁶⁰ "A tableland region of South America in southern Argentina and Chile extending from the Río Colorado to the Straits of Magellan and from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean."

meat of skylarks is decomposed and contaminated with bacteria if dried and preserved with fat. (See 'Quail' in *Biblica*.)

It is known from a prophetic narrative in Bukhari (Chapter Prophets) and Muslim (Chapter Marriage) that people of Bani Israel preserved this meat in a large quantity, which was decomposed later

إسرائيل لم يخنز اللحم (For an explanation of the text of this hadith, see *Fath al-Bari*, 6—231). Allah told the people of Bani Israel to eat manna and salwa without contaminating them. However, greed drove them to dry and decompose those, which they ate and were attacked by various primordial diseases.

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الَّذِينَ يُفَاتَلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلَمُوا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ (22:39) الَّذِينَ

مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ إِلَّا أَنْ يَقُولُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا دَفْعُ اللَّهِ النَّاسَ

بِبَعْضٍ لَهَدَمَتْ سَوَامِعٌ وَبِيَعٌ وَصَلَوَاتٌ وَمَسَاجِدٌ يُذَكَّرُ فِيهَا اسْمُ اللَّهِ

وَلْيَنْصُرَنَّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَقَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ (22:40)

“Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war (is being begun), because they have been wronged; indeed, Allah is adequately powerful to help them” (22:39). “Those oppressed Muslims who have been expelled from their homes without a just cause – except that their ‘crime’ is that they accepted Allah as their Lord. Indeed, had it not been that Allah repels one group by another, monasteries, churches, synagogues and majids, wherein the name of Allah is mentioned much would definitely be pulled down; whoever helps (in the causes of) Allah, Allah will definitely help them; indeed, Allah is adequately Strong, Mighty” (22:40).

First permission for combat battle

When persecution by the Quraish became unbearable on the Muslims, a group of Muslims migrated to Habsha (Abyssinia), and the rest to Madinah. This verse was revealed at one point of time during that period. Muslims are advised to take up arms for the first time in this verse after they were subjected to severe persecution in the hands of the Quraish for a long period of 13 years. This verse does not simply

tell us that ‘Allah is capable to help the Muslims.’ Rather, the gist of the verse is that Allah will definitely help the Muslims. (*Tafsir al-Kabir*)

“Permission is given to wage war, because they [Muslims] are oppressed” – such a translation would not be wrong. But, nowadays, a group of writers have become over-zealot and, on the basis of this verse, have started to propagate that, being oppressed is the only reason for taking up arms. However, this is a wrong conception. In different verses of Surah Anfal and Surah Taubah the reasons for, and the purposes of, Jihad have been stated in clear terms. Those verses will be disregarded if we consider being oppressed as the only [or adequate] reason for Jihad. In a nutshell, the actual Jihad is that which is fought to make Islam victorious, and that includes Jihad for self-defence.

There are differences of opinion about where this verse was revealed — in Makkah or in Madinah? However, textual evidences suggest that many verses of this surah, if not the whole surah, were revealed after Prophet's and his companions' migration to Madinah. Particularly, the verse in question was revealed when the Prophet was in Madinah after migration. This has been substantiated by Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Majah, Masnad, etc. Even if we do not take this view into consideration, that this surah was revealed in Madinah is evident from the fact that it contains the declaration of Hajj and permission for Jihad, which were inconceivable during the Makkan period.

Security of Houses of Worship

This verse does not talk about masjid. It makes especial mention of churches, synagogues and temples where the Jews, Christians and other monotheist non-Muslims worship. It states that it is the responsibility of the Muslims to protect the temples of the monotheist non-believers from the onslaught of the polytheists.

The second part of the verse deserves especial attention. Allah is the source of all power and help for the Muslims. Allah will keep helping those Muslims who will help Him, that is, will help spread His true religion and will take part in all noble activities with other Muslims to establish truth and justice on earth.

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بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ

الكَبِيرُ (22:62)

“That is the order, because Allah is the True Lord, also (because) – all that they call upon besides Allah is falsehood, and because Allah is the Mighty, the Great” (22:62).

Forecast for change

Change is coming. The entire Arab world was carrying an obvious evidence of that imminent change. It was palpable that the false gods and goddesses of the Quraish would one day be destroyed, the whole atmosphere of the country would celebrate the glory of the true God and all will pledge allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad. The verse in question is a sequence of that and carries the forecast of that future. The following verse (63) provides an instance of dry, arid land becoming full of greenery, and thus gives hope of that auspicious change on the horizon. This surah was revealed in-between the end of the Makkan period and the inception of the Madinah period. Many scholars have regarded this surah as one revealed in the Madinan period, as the first crucial test for the Muslims, and first and foremost victory, at Badr happened after migration to Madinah. This tough ordeal and the subsequent help from Allah is part of His plan. If we act upon this particular teaching of the Qur'an, we can still turn ours a truly united country.

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يُدُوا فِي اللَّهِ حَقَّ جِهَادِهِ هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ
مِثْلَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا لِيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ شَهِيدًا
لَكُمْ وَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِاللَّهِ
هُوَ مَوْلَاكُمْ فَنِعْمَ الْمَوْلَى وَنِعْمَ النَّصِيرُ (22:78)

“And strive hard in Allah's causes, as you ought to strive; it is He who has chosen you and He has not laid upon you any hardship in religion; (this is) the faith community of your father Ibrahim; He named you Muslims before and in this age — so that the Prophet

remains a witness upon you, and you upon the entire human race. So you should perform prayer regularly and pay zakat and hold fast to Allah as your support; He is your Guardian — how excellent He is as the Guardian and how excellent He is as the Helper!” (22:78).

The name Muslim

Addressing every member of the Ummah of Muhammad, the Qur'an states: Allah Himself has named you 'Muslim,' and the believers before you were also given this name. However, this name has been confined within the covers of the Qur'an for a long time as if it is simply a sanctified matter without any relation with practical life. Every sect and sub-group of the Ummah of Muhammad have ignored this name and have invented new names. Personal experiences of this author testify that if someone wanted to be happy with the appellation of 'Muslim,' all the sects and sub-groups become united against them and behave hostilely. But it is known to all that such vilification and hostility to a Muslim goes against Allah's law and it is tantamount to rebellion against Allah Himself.

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وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعَ طَرَائِقَ وَمَا كُنَّا عَنِ الْخَلْقِ غَافِلِينَ (23:17)

“And look, We have fixed above you seven tracts; and never are We heedless of the creation” (23:17).

Taraeq or ways

Taraeq is plural of tareeq which means way. In that sense, a particular opinion can also be called tareeqah (fem. of tareeq). The verse in question addresses all humans on earth and says: for the generally visible seven planets above you, we have defined seven routes. The existence of the sky in the imagination of Ptolemaeus was extinct long ago. The interpretation of the Qur'an should not be ascertained by a theory of 1800 years ago. About 1400 years ago, the Qur'an delivered its verdicts regarding natural science. In the past, scientists used to contest the Qur'an. However, gradually science is drawing near the Qur'an, and this has been especially true in the fields of creation science, embryology, astronomy, botany, etc.

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أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا تَتْرَىٰ كُلًّا مَّا جَاءَ أُمَّةً رَّسُولَهَا كَذَّبُوهُ فَأَنبَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ بَعْضًا وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ
أَحَادِيثَ فَبُعْدًا لِقَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (23:44)

“Then We kept sending the messengers in succession; whenever there came to a community its messenger, they called him a liar — accordingly We made them follow one another (to destruction) and We made them (subject of past) stories — and thus the disbelieving community were removed!” (23:44)

The succession of the prophets

From the beginning of civilisation until the advent of the Prophet Isa, all the prophets of Allah came in succession. Stories of many of them have not been narrated to us. “Has not the account reached you of those before you, of the people of Nuh and Ad and Samood, and those after them? None knows them but Allah. Their messengers come to them with clear arguments, but they thrust their hands into their mouths and said: Surely we deny that with which you are sent, and most surely we are in serious doubt as to that to which you invite us” (Qur'an 14:9).

Here I draw the reader's attention to an important thing. As the narration of different verses suggests, the succession of prophethood from Nuh to Isa was intact, unbroken. But that succession stopped with the Prophet Isa. It has been established beyond doubt from the Qur'an and Hadith that the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) was sent for the entire humanity and that he is the last prophet; no prophet will come after him. And this is a historical truth that, since the demise of the Prophet Muhammad 1400 years ago, no prophet or messenger of Allah has come.

The question is that the norm which prevailed on earth for thousands of years must have had a good reason behind it. What was that good reason? Why was that tradition altered? Has anything been introduced as an alternative to that convention?

I believe if we think deeply, we may find the answers within the questions. Islam came to establish a permanent, universal brotherhood comprising all members of human society from all regions and from all classes [irrespective of their gender]. That was why temporary and regional prophethood was brought to an end and universal

prophethood was brought about; hence, the convention of the advent of new prophets was stopped, as the rationale of sending the Prophet Muhammad was the target of all previous prophets put together.

But the question remains. In the past the demise of one prophet was followed by the advent of another, and the new prophet used to address the evolving new problems and provide their solutions. However, after the decease of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) no one is seen to be performing that responsibility. Now, what is the remedy to this deadlock or impasse?

In brief, the answer is that this problem was non-existent in the religion of Islam given by Allah and established by Muhammad. With our face hanging down in shame, we have to admit that this problem was a creation by the ulama of the middle age. From the time of our Prophet's decease until the end of the fourth century (hijra), all queries and questions were brought to the judicious and sincere scholars of the Qur'an and Hadith who used to provide answers according to their expert knowledge and discretion. If needed, all the competent ulama of a country were brought together in a legislative assembly by the government. At that time, there was no dearth of competent scholars in terms of their devotion to Islam, sincerity and their ardent search for knowledge. They used to analyze texts of the Qur'an and hadith independently. And their opinions and decisions were further scrutinised and criticised minutely by other ulama of the country or the wellbeing of the community was still then part and parcel of the discussion of the religious rulings. This kind of analysis and study of religious texts is called ijtiḥād. And all agree that the practice of ijtiḥād is directed by the Qur'an and hadith. However, toward the end of the fourth century Hijra, a group of illustrious ulama assumed that ijtiḥād was obsolete and gone out of practice. After some time it was declared that: after the death of Imam Nasafi in 1143 C.E. the practice of ijtiḥād became defunct till the doomsday. It was since that inauspicious moment that the Muslim community has been encountering all sorts of problems, and it was because of the curse of this deadly blunder that today the Muslim community has turned into a blind, lame, deaf and dumb society.

وَإِنَّ هَذِهِ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ (23:52) فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ
رُبُّرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ (23:53)

“And as regards your ummat, these are actually one single ummat and I am your Lord, so all of you should be careful about Me (about My orders and prohibitions)” (23:52). “But people (of their community) cut off their religion among themselves into pieces; (now) each group is happy with the part (they received)” (23:53).

Prophets

The word prophets here means Allah's prophets who have been mentioned in the Qur'an. It is true that Allah sent other messengers and prophets who are not mentioned in the Qur'an, but we do not know the full details of their prophethood. If history provides description of any of them, we will assess such accounts in a neutral way. We will look at their character and at their way of life and will weigh the teachings they left according to the benchmark of Islam, and then we will accept what is true. However, we will not accept the blind faith of the primitive people as history.

Verses 51-52 deal with the basic principle of the true religion of Islam. All the prophets mentioned in the Qur'an were Muslim, and Islam was their religion. The principal objective of Islam is to establish a brotherhood of the humans of the world for the sake of Allah and on the basis of monotheism. The Jews forgot about this noble objective and did not hesitate to kill prophets unjustly; and the Aryans considers everyone outside their community as Mlechchhas.⁶¹ The Christians spread falsehood by fair or foul means against our Prophet though he is a staunch supporter of the Prophet Isa and

⁶¹ Mlechchhas are “people of foreign extraction (i.e., non-Aryans) in ancient India. A Sanskrit term, mlechchha was used by the Aryans much as the ancient Greeks used barbaros, originally to indicate the uncouth and incomprehensible speech of foreigners and then extended to their unfamiliar behaviour. Mlechchhas were found in northwestern India, and there is reason to believe that the people known in Akkadian as Mlakkha were the original mlechchhas. As a mlechchha, any foreigner stood completely outside the caste system and the ritual ambience. Thus, historically, contact with them was viewed by the caste Hindu as polluting.” [Editor]

Maryam. And thus they demonstrated their sense of gratitude [to the Prophet Muhammad]? On the contrary, the Muslims who are the followers of Muhammad (SAWS) have held all the prophets in the highest esteem.

Division of religion

This verse identifies the followers of Hazrat Ibrahim, Hazrat Musa, Hazrat Isa and other prophets as one ummat (community) and provides an account of their condition. They divided their religion many times and each group remained happy with their broken segment. This verse is particularly relevant to the Muslim community of today.

A traveller of the way to success

Having plenty of wealth and power, no one should think that Allah has given them special blessing and that s/he is on the right way to wellbeing and emancipation. As opposed to this concept, verses 57 and 61 define the actual wellbeing to which all human beings should aspire.

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أُولَئِكَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَهُمْ لَهَا سَابِقُونَ (23:61)

“It is they who hasten to good things and it is they who are foremost in attaining them” (23:61).

In the way to wellbeing

Those are on the way to well-being who:

- 1) Are always fearful of the displeasure of Allah. In other words, they keep away from those activities that may earn Allah's anger.
- 2) Allah's signs are of two kinds: first, the verses in the glorious Qur'an; second, the well-established signs of Allah in the wider world. People who believe in these two kinds of signs are on the way to well-being.
- 3) Those who do not associate anyone or anything in the godhead of Allah. They do not place anyone in Allah's rank: not even the guru, deity, pir (saint), fakirs (ascetics), pundits, priests, scholars or dervishes; nothing: no planets, not stars, no shrines, and no dargahs (mausoleums of holy saints). They put complete trust in Allah and believe that life and death are in the hands of Allah.

- 4) Those who spend on good causes. Even after giving charity they fear that they have not been able to perform their duties completely and that one day they will have to be accountable to Allah.

This verse states that people of the abovementioned categories are on the way to well-being in a true sense.

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أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ (23:115)

“Did you then think that We had created you in vain? Did you also think that you would not have to come back to Us?” (23:115)

Creation of human is not without a reason

Human beings are the best creation of Allah who is the treasure-house (receptacle) of all power and wellbeing. Allah did not create the human race without a reason. If the purpose of human life were merely to eat one's fill, to give birth to few children in order to satisfy one's lust and then to die, then there would not be much difference between human beings and foxes, dogs and the worms found in the intestines of a human being.

There are two missions of human life. A human is the bearer of Allah's khilafat and His representative on earth. After performing this duty, one will have to ascend one stage up, which is the time to achieve spiritual fulfilment. Its nature and its ultimate stage is beyond my knowledge.

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وَنُفِخَ بِالنِّفْثِ وَالنَّفْثِ بِأَفْوَاهِكُمْ مَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَتَحْسَبُونَهُ هَيِّنًا وَهُوَ

عِظِيمٌ (24:15) وَلَوْلَا إِذْ سَمِعْتُمُوهُ قُلْتُمْ مَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَتَكَلَّمَ بِهَذَا

سُبْحَانَكَ هَذَا بُهْتَانٌ عَظِيمٌ (24:16) مَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تَعُودُوا لِمِثْلِهِ أَبَدًا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ

مُؤْمِنِينَ (24:17)

“When you were receiving with your tongues and spoke with your mouths such a slander about which you had no knowledge — and you were deeming it as a trifle matter though it was very grave with Allah” (24:15). “And (o believers!) why did you not say when you heard about this slander: It will not be right for us to talk about this

issue; glory be to Allah! This is a serious slur” (24:16) “Allah admonishes you that you should not repeat this kind (of misdeed) if you are true believers.” (24:17).

Social responsibility

After hearing such slanders against the people of one's own community, especially against the women, a Muslim should deem such accusations as false. The reason [and the general principle] is that, a Muslim should generally have a good impression about other Muslims. Not only that, Muslims should seek evidence from those who spread such kind of slanders (see verse 13 of this surah). If a Muslim keeps silent or is engaged in gossiping about it, s/he will be deemed to be complicit with the misdeed (slander) (see verse 15). Verse 17 warns the Muslims against such heedlessness and incaution so that nothing like this can happen in the future.

Nowadays the disease of this moral fallibility has been widespread in society. When people hear such slanders, especially against women, they seem to be exultant and exhilarated, and demonstrate immense interest to talk about that filthy thing. Even many seemingly pious people are heard to say: “Allah knows what is true and what is false, but this news has been spread far and wide.” Yet again some people hasten to interpose a remark and say: “There is some truth in every rumour.” Such people remain totally forgetful about these verses of the Qur'an.

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وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ الْمَصِيرُ (24:42)

“Indeed, to Allah belongs whatever is there in the heavens and the earth, and all have to return to Him” (24:42).

Sovereignty belongs to Allah

Allah is the sole Proprietor of the universe and is the sole Holder of sovereign power. Sovereignty does not belong to humans or to a people. Human beings can be given the right to run the affairs of a country, but that they will do as a vicegerent of Allah and within the limits defined by Him. To deny this sovereignty of Allah or to accept a human as the owner of that power is a kind of newly-invented political polytheism.

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يَحْشُرُهُمْ وَمَا يَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَقُولُ أَأَنْتُمْ أَضَلَلْتُمْ عِبَادِي هَؤُلَاءِ أَمْ هُمْ ضَلُّوا السَّبِيلَ (25:17)

“And on the day when He shall gather them, and whatever they served besides Allah; Allah will say (addressing these objects of worship): Was it you who led astray these My servants, or did they themselves (voluntarily) go astray from the right path?” (25:17)

The future of the polytheists

Polytheists are of two kinds. The first group are those who deny Allah and worship a person or an object that they think has power to do good or harm to them. They approach those to obtain their desired things or to avert mischief. And for that purpose, they make food-offerings to them. They sacrifice animals at their place and bow down and prostrate before their shrines. The second group of polytheists are engaged in all these kinds of sinful acts, but orally they believe that there is One Supreme God.

The verse in question states that the persons and objects that the polytheists worship did not advise or command them to get engaged in this deadly sin. Nowadays our society is being increasingly infected with the leprosy of pir- and grave-worship. On the other hand, society is also sick with the deadly variola (varicella/smallpox) of atheism: disbelief on the one hand, and blind faith on the other. If we analyze the situation deeply, it will be clear that the root cause of both the diseases is the same — lack of understanding of true monotheism (tauheed).

The saints and ascetics who are being worshipped in this world will appeal to Allah: “O Glorious God! We did not misguide them; they became misguided on their own.” They will also divulge the sources of the incitement to polytheism.

وَقَالَ الرَّسُولُ يَا رَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِي اتَّخَذُوا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ مَهْجُورًا (25:30)

“In that situation, the Prophet will say: O my Lord! Certainly, my qaum (people) considered this Qur'an false and rejected” (25:30).

Complaints of the Prophet

It is said in this verse that, on the Day of Judgement, the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) will complain to Allah and say: “O my Lord! My qaum (people) deemed the Qur'an sent by You as a rejected and abandoned thing.”

Here ‘my qaum’ means my ‘ummat’ (community). To consider the Qur'an rejected and abandoned means: to not believe in the authenticity and authority of the Qur'an; to not try to learn and teach the Qur'an; and to not accept it as the guide of life.

We should think about the negligence the people of Muhammad's ummat have collectively shown to the Qur'an. In a true sense, for few centuries the Qur'an has been abandoned by our religious madrassas, let alone others (the laypeople). Today we become perturbed to see the waywardness of our community and are lamenting the lack of religious understanding and of earnestness of belief in society. However, we fail to realise the fact that this slackness is a result of our negligence, imprudence and absence of foresight.

Dear reader! Now you please think about it. The Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) is the intercessor of the mujnebeen (sinners). His intercession is believed to be the main resort of our emancipation. May Allah protect us! If he complains against us on the Day of Judgement, will there be any other ways of emancipation for us?

وَالشُّعْرَاءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغَاوُونَ (26:224) أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّهُمْ فِي كُلِّ وَادٍ يَهِيمُونَ (26:225) وَأَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ مَا لَا يَفْعَلُونَ (26:226) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَانْتَصَرُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا وَسَيَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَيَّ مُنْقَلَبٍ يَنْقَلِبُونَ (26:227)

“And as for the poets — the misguided follow them” (26:224). “Do you not see that they wander about in every valley confused?” (26:225). “And those poets do not do what they say (to others)” (26:226). “Except those who believe and do righteous deeds and remember Allah much, and defend themselves after they are oppressed; and those who do wrong will come to know what final place of turning they shall turn back” (26:227).

The condition of the poets

This class of poets are the second grade disciples of Shaitan who has taught them some prescribed words to recite. Verses 24-26 unequivocally describe three of their characteristics. However, those poets are excluded from this category who: compose poetry in pursuance of an honest and noble ideology, look for the beauty of nature and then celebrate the glory of Allah, are themselves of good character and inspire others to good work, remonstrate and protest through their writings against oppression and injustice, and defend the religion of Islam against misrepresentation. Verse 227 excludes these kinds of poets from the condemnation that we find in the previous verses. In this regard, exegetes of the Qur'an opined clearly that the worth of poetry would be judged by its content. Therefore, composing poetry in general is not only blameless; sometimes it becomes obligatory to compose literature for noble purposes (*Fath al-Qadir, Tafsir al-Kabir, etc.*).

In the concluding section of this verse, it is said that those poets who indulge in immoral and abominable practices will come to know about their future regrettable plight very soon.

مَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ (29:6)

“And whoever does jihad [strives hard], s/he does so only for the wellbeing of their own; indeed, Allah is Self-sufficient, above (needs of) the worlds” (29:6).

Hint to Jihad

Jihad is the greatest ajmayesh (test) of a Muslim's life. Hence, in different places in the Qur'an jihad is mentioned right after tests and tribulations. The real spirit of Islam cannot flourish in a state of servitude. Political freedom is important to foreground and establish the essence of Islam. Protecting our liberty from the onslaught of domestic and foreign forces involves huge responsibility and preparation. The most important of this preparation is appropriate military array for self defence, the main component of which is appropriate manpower. A well-equipped group of people is even more important for an Islamic state. However, to assess the strength

of this manpower on the basis of demographic figures that we find in censuses will be self-deceptive. The strength of iman of the members of the Islamic forces should be examined; that is why test and trial is important.

The actual meaning of the word fitnah or ajmayesh is: دخال الذهب النار لتظهر جودته من روائته -

“To burn gold in the fire in order to separate alloy from it and to make it unadulterated.” Only those will be able to hold the flag of Islam high who are proved to be genuine believers in the crucial test of iman. All historical facts of the golden age of the Muslim world corroborate this truth.

It is said in the verse in question that the exertions and the sacrifices that a Muslim makes in their personal life benefit only the individual and the community; Allah has no need of it, as He is self-sufficient, self-subsistent and independent of the whole world.

إِنَّمَا مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا (33:40)

“Muhammad is not the father of any of your men — but he is the Messenger of Allah and (in the succession of the prophets) he is the last one; indeed, Allah is cognizant of all things” (33:40).

The Last Prophet

It is said in the verse that Muhammad is the last prophet. The first argument concerning this verse involves the spelling of the letter in the word *أَبَا*. In the Qur'an it is written with jabr (or fat'h, the vowel point for *a*) — khatam. However, in a historical analysis it is found that only one qari (canonical, classical reader of the Qur'an) named A'sem supported this diction, but all other readers read it as khatem (with zer/kasrah [the vowel point for *i*] under ta). Khatam means seal, which is used after a letter or document is written. In that sense, Prophet Muhammad has been said a 'seal,' as with him the continuation of prophets ended and there will not be any other prophets after him. This argument is used to corroborate the reading of Asem. Conversely, khatem means somebody who terminates

something — a concluder. So, the first significance is implicit or indirect and the second one is explicit or direct.

Hadith scholars and exegetes of the Qur'an like Hafez Ibn Kathir quoted many hadiths and showed that there are more evidences in favour of khatem. In this regard, it can be mentioned here that, Imam Shawkani's tafsir – *Fath al-Qadir* – that was published by Maktab Azizia Hejazia in Makkah printed the phrase as خاتم النبيين khatemunnabeyyeen. In my opinion, this is the appropriate reading and appropriate writing.

It is clear from this particular verse of the Qur'an that Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad to bring the continuation of prophethood to a close. Refusing to accept him as the last prophet or to accept anyone else after him as prophet will mean disregarding the Qur'an, ignoring the prophetic narratives and attacking the ideological foundation of the millions of Muslims in the world.

In one section of the verse it is said that, unlike the generality, Muhammad is not an ordinary human being. The issue of foster-father and adopted-son was discussed few times before, and there is no good reason to repeat it here. In my opinion, Prophet gave Zaid ibn Osama such a high status in order to challenge the kulin system of the Arab society of that time. In the concluding section of this ruku, that kulin system has been contested. Muhammad was not the father of any man, so nobody has any right to claim kulin status as one of his offspring.

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إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ (37:6) وَحَفِظْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَارِدٍ

(37:7) لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَيُقَدِفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ (37:8)

وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ (37:9) طِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَائِبٌ

(37:10)

“Surely We have beautified the near heaven with the stars” (37:6). “And We have safeguarded it well against every rebellious Shaitan” (37:7). “They cannot listen to the upper world and they are deterred from every side” (37:8). “Expelled [from heaven], and for them is an unflinching chastisement” (37:9). “Except him who snatches away

something by stealing, then there follows him a brightly shining flame” (37:10).

Shihabun Thaqeb

Literally it signifies burning fire, and here it means hellfire (see Note 10 of Surah Hijr). The verse in question says that such a person will be followed by burning fire. Here the use of the word (follow) suggests that fire will get hold of them or will reach them. In this respect, Imam Razi states:

فَأَتْبَعَهُ يَعْنِي لِحْقَهُ وَ أَصَابَهُ – يُقَالُ تَبِعَهُ وَإِتْبَعَهُ إِذَا مَضَى فِي أَثَرِهِ وَ أَتْبَعَهُ إِذَا أَلْحَقَهُ – (كَبِير)

What is known in our country as the fall of a meteor is actually nothing but the fall of a shooting star or spark. None of the star in the constellation falls. Actually, they cannot fall. According to the scientists, “Though the stars in the sky look very small, they are actually extremely gigantic. The sun is believed to be 1200,000 times bigger than the earth; and each and every star in the sky is like the sun, and some of them are even bigger than the sun. These sun-like and bigger-than-sun stars are arrayed and set in order so far away from us that they look small in our eyes. The fall of a massive thing like a star on earth is not possible. Let alone the fall of a star on earth, even if the earth comes near an extremely large, burning material like a star, it will definitely be vaporized. The narrators give an explanation saying, “Since the birth or prophethood of Muhammad (SAWS), the mischief of the ascending devils has stopped; hence, we do not see any incident of the fall of star.” This is an absolutely untrue statement. Actually, the fall of spark has been happening since the beginning as usual according to Allah's law. It goes against historical facts that before the advent of Muhammad jinns or shaitans used to commute with ease between the heaven and earth and that no measure was taken to drive them away from heaven.

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رُدُّوْهَا عَلَيَّ فَطُفِقَ مَسْحًا بِالسُّوقِ وَالْأَعْنَاقِ (38:33)

“Sulaiman said: Bring the horses back to me! Then he began to pass his hand over their legs and necks” (38:33).

The story of cutting horses

Verses 32-33 are actually interlinked. Verse 32 contains the first part of the story and verse 33 the second part. The horses were presented before Sulaiman; he examined them and then let the people who were present know his ideas. And the concluding section of verse 32 says, "by that time they were taken out of sight behind the curtain." We take this pronoun to mean horses. However, it has generally been translated as "by that time (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of night)." There was no reason to make the absent present. Immediately after that in verse 33, Sulaiman says: "Bring those back to me." Here all agree that 'those' stands for the horses. 'Bring back' can only mean 'bring those again that went away.' It is certain that Sulaiman could not order his attendants to get the sun back. Even if he ordered them to do so, it was not the sun, but the horses, that came back.

According to the traditional notion, the translation of the verse would be: "Then Sulaiman started touching the legs and necks of those horses with his sword; in other words, he started slashing them." The gist of their meaning is that, while enjoying the beauty of the horses Sulaiman became so overjoyed that he lost self-control and missed Asr prayer and that he regained consciousness of his fault only after the sun-set. He became penitent after this incident and sacrificed in Allah's name at least 20,000 (twenty thousand) war-horses.

But the question is: Was the prayer time of Zuhr and Asr divided (as it is now) during the time of Daud or Sulaiman? If yes, why did he bring himself to kill those horses without making up for his missed prayer? If anything went wrong, Sulaiman was solely responsible for that. Can it be deemed as appropriate and becoming for a prophet to kill innocent war-horses (intended for jihad) in such a cruel way for his own fault? Who gave Sulaiman the right to destroy this huge resource accumulated by the revenue of the public treasury?

Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi provided incontrovertible evidences to establish the pointlessness of such argument (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 7—198-201). Ibn Jarir also supported the gist of the abovementioned discussion by citing Ibn Abbas's saying, which was narrated by Abu Talha.

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"Say: It is an immensely great message" (38:67). **قُلْ هُوَ نَبَأٌ عَظِيمٌ** (38:67)

The message of monotheism

The previous two verses provide an introduction to true monotheism. It is being said here that the message of monotheism is the first and foremost message of the Qur'an and of its holder, the Prophet Muhammad. Verse 87 states that the teaching of monotheism is universal and is not restricted to any particular country or community. This is a general, universal message for all times, countries, communities and for the entire humanity.

We the Muslims are the bearer of this message and we are entrusted with the responsibility to spread this teaching to the entire humanity. But what have we done in this regard? Let alone the world community, at present tens of thousands of Muslims in our country and in society are ignorant about the teaching of tauheed (monotheism). We have done nothing to raise their Islamic consciousness by way of exposing them to Islamic teachings. In terms of customs and practices, many of them have even turned into Hindus. We have never approached them. We have not yet realised it properly that the widespread social impurity is a result of it. Even today all our religious exhortations and advice in the Islamic gatherings are restricted to the pious people of the rich area. Delivering an hour long speech in a big religious gathering is not enough to teach the people in the village about tauheed, salah and sawm and other subjects. If we want to do this duty in a true sense we will have to spread to the villages and to spend time with the villagers, and during leisure time we will have to teach them surahs with meaning and engender hatred in their hearts against shirk and bid'at. This task will not be carried out by just going out with a notebook of dawah work in the pocket. This was not the way how Islam was spread in Bengal. This author has seen few examples of how it was done. The vision of their arduous work is wandering dolefully here and there, but nobody is there to give any shelter to it.

- فليبيك على الإسلام من كان باكيا -

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قَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسَّوَسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ
(50:16) إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ (50:17)

“Certainly We created human, and We know what (good and evil) his mind suggests to him, and We are nearer to him than his life-vein” (50:16). “When the two observers are (present) there on the right and on the left of that human” (50:17).

Two Observers

يَتَلَقَّى is mudarey, which is used for both the present and future tenses, depending on the context. Its root meaning is: to see, to meet, to perceive, to realize, etc. Qur'anic translators in general have rendered it as 'to receive.' But my understanding is that it is not appropriate to translate it as 'to receive' here. In order for this word to mean 'to accept or to receive,' the preposition *min* is required, as the Qur'an states: فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ “Then Adam received from his Lord words (of revelation).” (2:37)

وَأِنَّكَ لَتَلَقَّى الْفُرْآنَ مِنْ لَدُنِّ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ (6) “As for you (O Muhammad), you definitely receive the Qur'an from the presence of One Who is Wise and all-Knowing.” (27:6)

On the contrary, verse 103 of Surah Anbia contains the clause تَتَلَفَّاهُمْ which means “the angels will present themselves before them” or “when the angels will welcome them.” Generally, with regard

to the interpretation of verse 17, it has been said that for every human being two angels are appointed whose job is to record all their good deeds and bad deeds. And typically it is assumed that those two angels have been referred to in this verse. However, no explicit or implicit corroboration is found in this verse in support of this interpretation. The term Kiramoon-Katibeen (honorable writers) has been mentioned in other verses as well, but that is a separate matter.

After introducing the abovementioned opinion, Imam Razi states:

و يحتمل أن يقال التلقى من الاستقبال.... فيكون معناه ما يتلقاه المتلقين يكون عن يمينه وعن شماله قعيد - على هذا الوجه هما ملكان الذان يأخذان روحه من ملك الموت الخ -

It can also be argued that the verb يتلقى is in the future tense. In that sense its meaning would be: when those two assembled will take their seats (assume their duties). According to this argument, those two assembled are two angels who will receive the souls of the virtuous and the wicked. He concludes the discussion thus: وهذا أعرف الوجهين Among the two interpretations, this one (the latter) is more scholarly and more credible. Soon after the discussion of 'two observers,' verse 19 talks about the horrors of death, the Day of Judgment, reckoning of actions and about rewards and punishments; and thus the surah concludes. This also can be cited as pertinent evidence in support of Imam Razi. Just before the discussion of 'two observers,' verse 16 touches upon the human nafs (mind/soul) and its susceptibility to temptations. Along with this, the conjunction idh (at that time) has been used at the beginning. And it is understood from this sequence that, idh refers to the temptation of the mind.

The Qur'an makes mention of three mental states: nafs ammara (the lower self or the ego that enjoins evil), nafs lawwama (self reproaching soul) and nafs mutmayinna (the tranquil self). Actually, these three refer to the three separate states of the same faculty of the mind (see Surah Yusuf: 53, Surah Qiyamah: 2, and Surah Fajr: 27). I think, most probably verse 17 points to nafs ammara and lawwama, and verse 18 to nafs mutmayinna. Ammara is a state of the incitement to wickedness, which is the lowest grade of the mental faculty. As regards lawwama, it does not incite the mind to wickedness, but it also cannot restrain it from evilness. However, after the commission of sin, it becomes penitent and keeps reprimanding itself. This is the middle state of the mind. Mutmayinna is beyond the incitement to wickedness; it has an instinctive aversion to sin and wickedness and natural pull to virtuousness. This the negahban (more helpful in protecting a person from evil influences and misdeeds) of the first two states of mind.

إِنَّهُ لَفُرْقَانٌ كَرِيمٌ (56:77) لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ (56:78)
(56:79)

“Certainly this is the greatly beneficial Qur’an” (56:77). “Which is (written) in a well-guarded book” (56:78). “None shall touch it except the purified ones” (56:79).

Etiquette with the Qur’an

As usually translated, it is said in the verse, “Those who are in a state of impurity will not touch the Qur’an.” At present, no impure person is touching the Qur’an and will never do so in the future — such a meaning of the verse will not be correct, as this is contrary to the fact of the matter. Actually, the verse in question issues a decree of prohibition. It is known from a hadith narrated by Imam Malek that, in a letter our Prophet gave to Imam Hazm, it was stated that no one could touch the Qur’an except the pure ones (Muatta). Imam Malek and others also read this letter (Ibn Kathir). So, Muslims should act according to the order of Allah and to the decree of the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). In order to appreciate the true message of the Qur’an, the purity of the body and soul is needed; and appreciating the true message of the Qur’an is impossible in a state of impurity. And, we can hope to become benefited from the Qur’an by maintaining the proper etiquette with it.

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لَنَّبِيٍّ إِذَا جَاءَكَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ يُبَايِعْنَكَ عَلَىٰ أَنْ لَا يُشْرِكْنَ بِاللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَسْرِقْنَ وَلَا يَزْنِينَ وَلَا يَقْتُلْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ وَلَا يَأْتِينَ بِبُهْتَانٍ يَفْتَرِينَهُ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِنَّ
نَّ وَلَا يَعْصِينَكَ فِي مَعْرُوفٍ فَبَايِعْنَهُنَّ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُنَّ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ
رَحِيمٌ (60:12)

“O Prophet! when believing women come to you in order to take bayat [pledge] that they will not associate anything with Allah, and will not steal, and will not commit illegal sexual intercourse, and will not kill their children, and will not construct or circulate a calumny,

and will not disobey you in what is good, then accept their pledge, and ask Allah for forgiveness for them; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (60:12).

Women’s allegiance

It is seen in this verse that believing women presented themselves before the Prophet and lent allegiance to him. The contents of this allegiance are equally applicable to both men and women, and obligatory on both.

Women constitute more or less half of the Muslim community, and they are the mother of the next generation, the bedrock of whose Muslim life will take shape in the shelter of these mothers. So, undoubtedly, if the Muslim women are removed and kept far away from the sphere of education of national life, Muslims will turn into a decrepit and crippled community.

Islam does not endorse this unscriptural practice of denying women their right to education. Neither did our Prophet give any decree to maintain gender discrepancy in education. Rather, the teachings of the Qur’an and hadith are totally at odds with this cultural practice (of denying women their right to education). That is why, at that time (the golden age of Islam), there were innumerable brave, learned Muslim women. At that time, women had space in public life beyond the world of kitchen and domestic confinement. They were visible in masjids, Eid congregations, in Ka’bah doing circumambulation, in the field of Arafah, and in battlefields.

Why did that social condition change? History can provide the right answer to this question. Needless to say, this is a very sad chapter in Muslim history. However, it should be remembered in this regard that, like all other Islamic systems, this gender structure also has its boundary. Those who transgress this boundary are equally at fault.

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إِنَّمَا النَّبِيُّ لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ تَبَتَّغِي مَرْضَاةَ أَزْوَاجِكَ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (66:1)
فَرَضَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ تَجَلَّةَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ مَوْلَاكُمْ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ (66:2)

إِلَى بَعْضِ أَرْوَاجِهِ حَدِيثًا فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَتْ بِهِ وَأَظْهَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَرَفَ
بَعْضَهُ وَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ بَعْضٍ فَلَمَّا نَبَّأَهَا بِهِ قَالَتْ مَنْ أَنْبَأَكَ هَذَا قَالَ نَبَّأَنِيَ الْعَلِيمُ
الْخَبِيرُ (66:3) اللَّهُ فَقَدْ صَعَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيْلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ (66:4)

“O Prophet! Why do you forbid for yourself what Allah has made lawful for you? You seek to please your wives; indeed, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (66:1). “(O believers!) Allah has made obligatory on you that you will absolve yourselves from your oaths by paying (kaffarah); indeed, Allah is your Protector, and He is the All-Knower, All-Wise” (66:2). “[Remember] that time when the Prophet secretly communicated a piece of information to one of his wives, but when she informed (others) about it, and Allah made it known to the Prophet — made known part of it and avoided part; so when the Messenger informed her of it, she said: Who informed you of this? The Prophet replied: The All-Knower, the All-Aware has informed me” (66:3). “If you both do taubah to Allah [turn to Him with repentance] (which you should do), because your hearts are already inclined to this; but if you back up each other against him, then you should know that Allah Himself is his Guardian, and Jibreel and the righteous believers, and furthermore the angels are his helpers” (66:4).

Note One: Introductory words

The first verse contains the clause:

Are you proscribing or will you proscribe? As the verse

أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ is in the mudarey form, its past meaning is inconceivable here. Proscription or proscribing means abandoning/negating the use of something. It was not possible for the Prophet to proscribe what Allah made lawful, as such an act is tantamount to kufr (disbelief). We see in Surah Ahzab that the Prophet (SAWS) avoided the company of his wives for few days.

However, the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) never took any vow. Moreover, there is no reliable hadith to establish that he paid any kaffara (expiation) for breaking an oath.

The story of Maria narrated with regard to interpreting this verse is totally baseless in terms of the chain of narration of those stories, and is nothing but a vicious calumny in terms of diraya (knowledge and cognizance). Most probably, those stories were invented by a jindik (hostile enemy or arrogant disbeliever) of Islam.

Another opinion with regard to the shan-e nuzul or asbab an-nuzul (the background or occasion of a revelation) of the opening verses of this surah is that, once the Prophet (SAWS) had a honey drink in the house of his wife Zainab. Ayesha and Hafsa together hatched a plot and tried to mislead the Prophet by saying that he had had dregs of an ill-smelling substance like magafir (a kind of bad smelling resin) and that what he drank was not a honey drink at all; hence, his mouth was emitting bad smell. The story goes that, after hearing the same thing from two of his wives, he said to the second one (Hafsa or Ayesha), “I am taking an oath that I will never take that again. But, be careful! Never tell anybody about this.” However, she divulged it to others, and then these few verses were revealed.

Regrettably, I have not been able to understand the significance of this story or myth at all. The Prophet was having a honey drink in Zainab's room; and a person of good, pure taste like him could not realize that that was not honey at all, and rather an ill-smelling substance like magafir! Moreover, how was it possible that, neither he nor his wives or any other companions could get a trace of the bad smell before? What is more, after that, he did not investigate the veracity or otherwise of the matter even after the decree of the Qur'an فَتَبَيَّنُوا (investigate!) — what is the reason for that? If the Prophet had an alternative to honey drink, what wrongdoing or shameful act did he commit for which he became too embarrassed and had to swear off having that again and requested Hafsa or Ayesha to keep that secret?

These are the implications of those narratives. There is no end of inconsistency in the details of the account. Primarily, I quote few

examples from Bukhari and Muslim. It is said about the chain of Ata's narrative,

عن ابن جريج قال زعم عطاء أنه سمع عبيد ابن عمير يقول سمعت عائشة رض تزعم أن رسول الله صلعم كان يمكث عند زينب بنت جحش – الحديث (– كتاب الإيمان و النذور)

is used where there is a possibility of untruth in a narrative; and it is also used in the Qur'an in the same sense (Raghib). In most cases, carries two implications: when the veracity of the narrative is questioned or when the narration is taken to be untrue. In the Qur'an, is used in places where the speaker is censured (*Al-Mawarid*). In this particular narration, the word has been used two times: first about the narrator Ata toward the beginning and then again about the last narrator Ayesha. Therefore, it cannot have any value as a credible historical narrative. In a chapter relating to divorce in Bukhari, it is narrated from Ayesha that, apart from Hafsa and Ayesha herself, Sauda and Safia were also fully involved in that plot. According to verse 5 of Surah Ahzab, Ibn Akkas included another woman (Kathir) and this makes the total number of women involved five, whereas it is understood from verse 4 of this surah that they were only two. So, in my opinion, this particular narration of Bukhari cannot be accepted as flawless.

I will end this discussion by providing another example. There is another narration in Bukhari from Ayesha, which states that Zainab caused the Prophet to drink, whereas in this narration again in the name of Ayesha it is said that it was Hafsa, not Zainab, who made him drink maghafir (Ibn Kathir). Failing to resolve this inconsistency, Hafez Ibn Kathir says — it is said that these two hadiths mention two separate incidents. This is not unjustifiable. However, the problem is that both the hadiths have been cited as the background of the same verse. At my young age, I think I read most probably in Nurul Anwar: That is to say, when two verses of the Qur'an contradict each other,

then both will be rejected.⁶² When such an over-daring rule about the Qur'an has been kept intact, then why will it be deemed unacceptable to use two contradictory statements of one companion? What is more, this is Ayesha's personal assumption, and not a prophetic narrative.

Summary of the verses

Now we will have to depend on the verses in order to get the details of the main story. It is known from verse 1 that for some reason the Prophet was not happy with his wives; and as a result, he was avoiding, or wanted to avoid, something which Allah made lawful to him. However, this verse does not give us any hint of the cause of his feeling of resentment.

Readers may have noticed that verse 1 addresses the Prophet, and soon after that in verse 2 Allah is addressing the believers in general. In course of discussion, this verse (verse 2) gives provision for expiation/atonement for the general Muslims if they break an oath [or when fulfilling an oath becomes impossible]. Otherwise, the believers in general would not be addressed at the beginning of this verse.

From verse 3 it is understood simply that the Prophet shared a secret with one of his wives and that wife divulged that secret to another wife. The verse does not provide any hints about the content of that secret.

From verse 4 it is understood that, two of his wives have been advised to turn to Allah repentant. In other words, they have been ordered to repent (to do taubah). It is also understood from the verse that they had already been repentant by the time the verse was revealed.

After analyzing all contextual issues to the best of my ability, I have arrived at this assumption that, this verse concludes the ila-related discussion that has been made in surah Ahzab.⁶³ So we find the original story in there (in Surah Ahzab). Evidence of this claim will be discussed later. However, I make simply this comment here that, it is an odious act to spread hypothetical and conjectural anecdotes and

⁶² Contradictory verses exist nowhere in the Qur'an, because it is the word of Allah and not of any human (surah Nisa: 8).

⁶³ Ila is a binding bow in which a man declares that he will abstain from sexual relation with his wife.

stories that have no basis in the Qur'an or hadith. Such an act becomes even more heinous when such stories are potentially on the point of damaging and attacking the very foundation of Islam and of prophethood. In my opinion, 95% elements of the attacks by the Christians on the character of the Prophet have been collected from such kinds of [flimsy] narratives.

We are grateful to Allah that, for the last 4-5 centuries our revered scholars and judicious commentators have proven the falsity and worthlessness of those narratives by providing incontrovertible arguments. As a result of their tireless, continuous devotion and arduous endeavors, the Christian clergymen have been compelled to correct their errors and false notions, which will become clear to us if we read the modern versions of their books (about Islam and the Prophet Muhammad).

The actual occurrence

Surah Ahzab was revealed after the end of the Battle of Trench, and this is undoubtedly known from internal evidence. And this is also true that the Battle of Trench occurred in the month of Zil-Ka'd in the fifth Hijrah. It is also certain that Surah Ahzab started to be revealed from the last month of the fifth Hijrah. And after that, Surah Tahreem was revealed around the time of the seventh Hijrah. On the whole, Surah Ahzab was revealed before Surah Tahreem. Therefore, it cannot be denied that, as a historical sequence, Surah Tahreem draws a conclusion to what was already revealed in Surah Ahzab.

Different accounts have been mentioned in Bukhari and Muslim in this regard. According to one, once Ibn Abbas asked Hazrat Omar: "Which are those two women about whom (in verse 4) Allah is saying that 'if they help each other' against the Prophet?" Omar replied, "Hafsa and Ayesha." After that, Omar also narrated other relevant events in detail and concluded his account by saying: "After that when the period of ila ended, the Prophet descended from his room and met his wives."

It is clear from this description that this issue does not have even a smallest amount of relation with the stories of honey drink or Maria. The truth is that, after suffering from the acute shortage of food and

clothing there was a sense of discontent among the wives of the Prophet.

At that time the financial condition of Muslim families in Madinah comparatively became a little well-off than before. The property of the neighboring Jewish tribe, Banu Quraiza, and that of the Jews of Khaibar was seized because of their persistent misdeeds and treachery. Moreover, after the battles of Badr, Ohud and Ahzab, the difficulties for the Muslims to do businesses were considerably reduced. However, though other Muslim families in Madina became financially a little solvent, the indigent condition of the Prophet's family was not alleviated at all. And this created dissatisfaction among his wives who, under the leadership of Ayesha and Hafsa, kept putting pressures on the Prophet to remedy the miserable state. At last there was a wonderful, amicable settlement from Allah, the value and importance of which the readers will understand if they read attentively the relevant verses in Surah Ahzab. As the wives of the Prophet respectfully passed this test from Allah, He rewarded them with the noble title of 'Ummahat ul Momineen' or the Mothers of the Believers.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ
 اللَّهُ يَغْدِرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عِلْمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَأْتِيكُمْ فَاقْرَأُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ
 الْقُرْآنِ عِلْمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ
 مَلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يَقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَأُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا
 الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرَضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ
 نَدِّ اللَّهُ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

(73:20)

"Indeed, your Lord knows that you – a group of your companions – keep standing in prayer, some until two-thirds of the night, and some until half of it, and some until one third of it; the fact is that, it is Allah Who measures the night and the day. He knows that you are not able to do it, so He has turned to you with mercy — so read what is easy of the Qur'an; He knows that some of you will be sick, and

others who travel in the land (for sustenance) seeking the bounty of Allah, and others will fight in Allah's way, therefore read as much of it as is easy — and keep (obligatory) prayer well-established and give zakat and give qard (loan) to Allah rightly; indeed, whatever of good saving you send (from this world), you will find its reward with Allah (in life hereafter) comparatively more and that is great as a reward; and ask forgiveness of Allah for removing your sins; indeed, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.” (73:20)

Reading the Qur'an in prayer

Placing this verse as evidence, most of the followers of Imam Abu Hanifa have given a decision that this verse does not suggest reading exclusively Surah Fatihah. Rather, it is proven that, it will suffice if somebody reads Surah Fatihah or any other section of the Qur'an even if simply a verse. As evidence, they have taken a hadith narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, in which the Prophet directs somebody saying, *ثم اقرأ ما تيسر معك من القرآن* “After that, recite the easiest part of whatever you know from the Qur'an.” Then Hafez Ibn Kathir, after saying *وقد أجاب الجمهور* “most of the scholars and imams replied to this,” mentions few hadiths that emphasise the reading of Surah Fatihah. Hadith scholars made detailed discussion on this subject. Imam Bukhari wrote a separate treatise entitled *Juz'ul Kira'at* in this regard. As a result, there has not been any dearth of arguments and counter-arguments regarding this issue.

With my limited ability, I have made some discussion on this matter and arrived at the conclusion that, when the imam (prayer leader) recites sections from the Qur'an loudly, then the muktadi (the followers behind him) should remain silent and concentrate on listening to his recitation. On the contrary, when the imam recites mutely the muktadi should recite Surah Fatihah, without which their prayer will not be performed. If we analyze this carefully and objectively, such a view will make an adjustment between this verse and verse 204 of Surah A'araf. This will also solve the apparent contradictions among some relevant hadiths on the subject. Imam Ibn Taimiyah also gives a similar decision.

In this regard, the unnecessary argument with (absolute negation) is not reasonable. They argue that “prayer will not be performed without Surah Fatihah” means: 100% will not be completed, and some deficiency will remain. Everyday knowingly we will perform 70% or 80% prayer – can such a statement have any value?

(114:3) *إِلَهُ النَّاسِ* (114:2) (114:1)

(114:5) *الَّذِي يُوسَّسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ* (114:4)

(114:6)

“Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of human” (114:1). “The King of human” (114:2). “The God of human” (114:3). “From the evil of the whisperings of the Khannas” (114:4). “The Khannas that whispers evil counsels into the hearts of humans” (114:5). “From among the jinn and the human” (114:6).

The only Lord worthy of worship

Allah is the Sustainer of each and everyone of the creation. In this verse only human beings have been mentioned, as they are the best of the creation and the only ones accountable to Allah for their actions. The main duty of the human beings is to accept Allah as the only Lord worthy of worship, to which verse 4 points.

Temptation of Khannas

The actual meaning of the word ‘waswasa’ is: to whisper; to give evil counsel in secret; to arouse the bad instinct. The word khannas is a derivative from the verbal root *كَنَّ*. Its meaning is: something that comes and goes; something that becomes visible and then disappears. (See *al-Khannas* in Surah Takweer.) The last verse of this surah identifies the waswaser or the one who does waswasa. That is of two kinds: open and secret. Bukhari and Muslim narrate a hadith where the Prophet (SAWS) says:

إن الشيطان يجري من بني آدم مجري الدم “Satan moves in the veins of humans like blood circulation.” In hadith and tafsir literature, the last two surahs of the Qur'an – Falaq and Nas –

are known as Muavezatain (two surahs of taking refuge in Allah). Different discussions have been made about these two surahs, which actually created a serious confusion in society. Companion Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud did not consider these two surahs as part of the Qur'an, did not write these two in his musabida and stuck to his own opinion throughout his whole life in contradiction to the opinions of other companions and to many clear hadiths.

Another group says: a certain Jew collected a bunch of hair from Prophet's comb; he then knotted it and put it under a stone in a dark pit. This sorcery had an influence on the Prophet, and there were signs in him of suffering from mental derangement and distraction. And this continued for a long period of six months. During this period, he seemed to have deemed his inaction as action (he did not do something, but thought that he did). The influence of the sorcery was so intense on his mental faculty that, he thought he had sexual intercourse with his wives even though in reality he did not. After the passage of six-month time in such a mental state of the Prophet, these two surahs were revealed. The next day, the Prophet went to that particular pit and passed an order to get that hair out of it. After that, when those knots were puffed with reciting verses of these surahs one after another, the knots started to be disentangled. And then it is concluded that, with the benefit of these two surahs, the Prophet was eventually saved from the harm of that lethal sorcery of the Jews.

If it were 'possible' for an insignificant Jew like Labid (the name of that particular Jew) to cause mental derangement and distraction of a great prophet like Muhammad (SAWS) simply by putting a knot on every hair of a bunch, then the word 'impossible' should be removed from dictionary. This view is supported by a verse of the Qur'an. In ruku one of Surah Furqan, it is said: “And the zalimoon (the disbeliever transgressors) say to the believers: ‘you follow none but a man who is possessed.’ See how they coin similitude for you. And thus they have gone astray and become incapable of finding a right

path” (25:8-9). It is clear from this verse that, it was the disbelievers of Arab who used to make such statements that, “somebody applied sorcery on the Prophet Muhammad.” These verses strongly contest those comments and brand the circulators of those falsehoods as transgressors and misguided. In Surah Ta'ha, after describing the story of Musa and Pharaoh's sorcerers, it is said: وَلَا يُفْلِحُ السَّاحِرُ حَيْثُ (69) “the sorcerers will never succeed.” Interpreting this verse,

Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi said:

ولا يفلح الساحر حيث أتى يدل على ن الساحر لا يحصل له مقصود بالسحر خيرا كان - و ذلك يقتضي نفي السحر بالكلية.

“This verse proves that the sorcerers will never be able to realize their goals, whether their objectives are good or bad. And thus sorcery has been completely denied [in Islam] (*Tafsir al-Kabir*, 6—79). Then he said, “In response to this, it is important to discuss sorcery and its nature, which has been discussed in the exegesis of Surah Baqarah.” I read that discussion with avid interest. Imam Razi responded in a complex logical language after mentioning some complex arguments of the mu'tazilas. Then he multiplies the division of sorcery and considers the following as sorcery: influence of will-power, medicinal property of a thing or plant, magic and jugglery, evil eye, etc. He even categorizes cheating, swindling and chugolkhuri (passing on information about others with the bad intention of creating misunderstand and animosity among people) as sorcery. (1--646)

Imam Abu Bakr Jassas (d. 370 Hijrah) was a famous imam and mujtahid (Islamic legist/jurist) of the Hanafi school of thought. Khateeb in his history, Maulana Abdul Hai in the book entitled *Tarjamaye Hanafia* and the hadith scholar Zorkani in a footnote of *Mawahid* stated that, Abu-Bakr Jassas was the leader of the Hanafi community during his time. Many celebrated learned people and hadith scholars were his disciples. According to Maulana Abdul Hai, Abu-Bakr Jassas was one of the great legists/jurists of the Hanafi school. This Imam Abu-Bakr Jassas in a separate chapter of his book *Ahkamul Qur'an*, after discussing the nature and classification of sorcery in detail, proves that the general belief of the Muslims about

sorcery is unfounded and un-Islamic (1—41-49). The imam attacks in harsh language those Muslims who believe that the normal equipoise of the body and mind of the Prophet was hampered and unhinged by the supposed sorcery of a certain Jew. Using the abovementioned two verses, he refutes their arguments. Detailed discussion on sorcery has been set in order in the interpretation of Surah Baqarah. I mention below the last remark of the Imam in brief :

I cannot admit the consistency of these remarks. "The Prophet was enchanted" — this is the remark of the disbelievers of Quraish. The disbelievers have perpetually attacked the prophets of Allah that they were 'mas'hur' (unhinged by sorcery). Pharaoh cried fie upon Musa, saying

إِنِّي لَأَظُنُّكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ مَسْحُورًا (17:101)

"O Musa! I think you are indeed bewitched" (17:101). According to this old practice, the disbelievers of Makkah also denominated the Prophet by the same appellation. In verses 47-48 of Surah Bani Israel, it has been said: "We are best aware of what they wish to hear when they give ear to you and when they take secret counsel, when the evil-doers say: You follow but a man bewitched. See what similitudes they coin for you, and thus they are all astray, and cannot find a right path." Verse 8 of Surah Furqan also touches on this issue. It has also been stated in the Qur'an that the sorcerers will never be successful (Ta'ha: 69). Interpreting this verse, Imam Razi said : *و ذلك يقتضي* "Through this the existence of sorcery has been denied completely."

In this regard, Imam Abu-Bakr Jassas says :

و قد أجازوا من فعل السحر ما هو أطم من هذا و أقطع – و ذلك أنهم زعموا أن النبي عليه السلام سحر وأن الساحر عمل فيه و قد قال الله تعالى مكذبا للكفار فيما ادعوه من ذلك للنبي صلعم فقال جل من قائل " و مثل هذه الأخبار من وضع الملحدين و العجب ممن يجمع بين تصديق الأنبياء و إثبات معجزاتهم و بين التصديق بمثل هذا من فعل السحرة مع قوله تعالى و لا يفلح الساحر حيث أتى – فصدق هؤلاء من كذبه الله –

"What is more serious and dangerous is: people of this group believe that sorcery was applied upon the Prophet and that affected him [...] whereas establishing the untruthfulness of the disbelievers who made a claim of that sort Allah says: "And the zalimoon (the disbeliever transgressors) say to the believers: 'You follow none but a man who is bewitched.' See how they coin similitudes for you. And thus they have gone astray and cannot find a right path." The renegade heretics forged hadiths of this class only to jeer at Islam [...] whereas Allah states that "the objective of the sorcerers will not be succeeded." Thus people of this group are trying to prove the truthfulness of those whom Allah characterizes as untruthful. (1—49)

Now we conclude this discussion by citing a saying of the Prophet in this regard.⁶⁴ Abu Musa Ash'ari narrates:

— — —
 "Three types of people will never enter paradise: 1) a perpetual drunkard, 2) a breaker of the blood relations and 3) a person who regards sorcery as true. (Ahmad & *Mishqat-ul- Masabih*, Chapter Khamar)

⁶⁴ Discussions about the hocus-pocus of the sorcerers have been made in note 76 of Surah Baqarah and in notes 40-41 of Surah A'araf.

GLOSSARY

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud: A companion of the Prophet Muhammad and a prominent hadith narrator.

Abdul Hai: An Indian Muslim scholar.

Abu Hanifa: The founder of the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence. He is believed to belong to the generation of *tabi'in*, the generation after the *sahaba* (companions of the prophet).

Abu Hurairah: A companion of the Prophet Muhammad and a narrator of many hadiths.

Abu Musa Ash'ari: A companion of the Prophet Muhammad and important figure in early Islamic history. He was at various times governor of Basra and Kufa.

Ad: The people to whom the Prophet Hud was sent by Allah to guide them back to the right path of Islam.

Ahkam ul-Qur'an: A book of Qur'anic law by Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi.

Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: An important Muslim scholar born in Khorasan in east of Iran into a family of Arab origin. He is the founder of the Hanbali school of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence).

Ahzab: A surah in the Qur'an, and also the name of a battle fought during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.

Akbar: A controversial Mughal emperor of India who reigned the country for a long period from 1556 to 1605 and who extended Mughal power over most of the Indian subcontinent.

Ale Imran: Literally the Family of Imran, a surah (chapter) in the Qur'an.

Al-Mawarid: An Arabic dictionary book.

Anaemia: A condition in which the blood is deficient in red cells, in hemoglobin or in total volume.

Arafah: Also known as the Mount of Mercy (*Jabal ar-Rahmah*), it is a granite hill east of Makkah. This is an important site of pilgrimage, and it is here where the Prophet Muhammad delivered the Farewell Sermon to the Muslims who had accompanied him for the Hajj towards the end of his life.

Ashura: A religiously important day for the Muslims, which falls on the tenth of the Islamic month of Muharram. Ashura means tenth.

Asr: The late afternoon obligatory prayer for the Muslims. It is the third in order of the five daily prayers.

Avatar: An incarnation in human form; an embodiment.

Ayat: Singular ayah, an Arabic word which means signs. In tafsir literature it mainly refers to the verses in the Qur'an, but broadly it also signifies the signs of Allah in His creation.

Ayesha: Also transcribed as A'ishah, Ayesha, 'A'isha, or 'Aisha, Turkish *Ayşe*, etc., Wife of the Prophet Muhammad and after his death the storehouse of Islamic knowledge and considered a versatile genius. In Islamic writings, she is often referred to by the noble title "Mother of the Believers."

Azan: The Islamic call to ritual prayers.

Bani Israel: Israelites

Badr: A town in the province of Madinah, western Saudi Arabia. It is located about 80 miles (130 km) from the city of Madinah. It was the site of the first combat battle (known as the Battle of Badr) that occurred in the Prophet's lifetime as the Qurayshites were approaching to attack the burgeoning Islamic city of Madinah in 624, which the Muslims successfully encountered.

Baitul Muqaddas: Also known as Masjid al-Aqsa, an important religious site for the Muslims and situated in occupied Jerusalem, Palestine.

Baizawi: Full name Qazi Nasiruddin Abu Saeed Abdullah Ibn Umar bin Muhammad al-Shirazi al Baizawi, author of an exegesis of the Qur'an titled *Anwar-ul-Tanzil fi Assar-ut-Tahweel* popularly known as *Tafsir-i-Baizawi*.

Bakkah: One of the many other names of the holy city of Makkah. It has many names, approximately fifty. Allah called Makkah by five names: Makkah, Bakkah, Al-Balad, Al-Qaryah and Ummul-Qura (See verses: 48:24, 3:96, 90:1, 16:112, & 6:92). For more information, please read *History of Makkah Mukarramah* by Shaikh Safiur-Rahman Mubarakpuri.

Bani Israel: Children of Israel.

Basilian sect: A sect within Christianity.

Bid'at/bid'ah: Any type of unacceptable innovation in Islam.

Brahma: The creator God in the Hindu sacred triad.

Bukhari: Real name Muhammad ibn Ismail al-Bukhari. A legendary Muslim scholar who compiled the collections of hadith treasured in the book named after him as Bukhari.

Daud: David.

Dajjal: Masih ad-Dajjal (literally the Impostor Messiah), an evil figure in Islamic eschatology. He is popularly believed to appear pretending to be Masih (or the Messiah). It is also a metaphor for an evil person as discussed in this book.

Durga: A Hindu goddess generally depicted as having ten arms, riding animals (lion or tiger) and carrying weapons.

Eid: The two main Muslim religious festivals – Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha – are referred to as Eid.

Exegete: In Islamic terminology *mufassir*, one who practices exegesis (an extensive and critical interpretation of a holy scripture).

Exodus: A journey by a large group to escape from a hostile environment. In Islamic terminology, this is known as Hijrah and signifies the Prophet Muhammad's and his companions' migration from Makkah to Madinah.

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149-1209): A Persian Muslim philosopher, and an expert in Qur'anic exegesis, medicine, physics, astrology, literature, history and law. He is the author of *Tafsir al-Kabir*.

Fath al-Bari: Literally 'Grant of the Creator,' an 18-volume commentary on *Bukhari* and written by Ibn Hajr Asqalani. It took 25 years for the writer to complete this legendary work.

Fath al-Bayan: A tafsir by Siddiq Hasan Khan.

Fath al-Kabir: A glossary – written by Shah Waliullah – of the intricate words of the Qur'an written.

Fath al-Qadir: A book by Imam Shawkani.

Fatwa: A non-binding legal opinion by a competent Islamic scholar or jurist.

Fidya: A ransom, expiation, usually refers to an amount of money or food paid to the poor by those who fail to observe fasting in Ramadan due to health reasons.

Fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence.

Ghat (of a river): An Urdu word denoting a riverside place for bath and water collection. Generally, it is a broad flight of steps that is situated on a riverbank and that provides access to the water especially for bathing.

Habsha: Abyssinia

Hadith: Reported sayings or actions or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or his companions, together with the tradition of their chain of transmission that are not part of the Qur'an.

Hafsa: Wife of the Prophet Muhammad.

Hajj: Pilgrimage, the fifth pillar of Islam. It is a pilgrimage to Makkah during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. A Muslim is required to perform Hajj at least once in their lifetime if s/he is physically and financially capable.

Haqqani, Abu Muhammad Abdul-Haq: Author of *Tafsir-e-Haqqani*.

Haroon: Aaron

Hazrat: An honorable term prefixed to the names of important Islamic personalities including the prophets.

Hedaya: A book of Islamic jurisprudence.

Hejaz: A region in the west of Saudi Arabia.

Hijbullah: Literally defined as 'party of Allah.'

Hijbusshaitan: Party of Shaitan.

Hijra: Exodus. The migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers to the city of Madinah in 622 because of persecutions by the belligerent forces against Islam in their place of birth, Makkah.

Hila: Generally known as hila marriage. When a man impulsively divorces his wife and then regrets and wants to get her back, especially in the Indian subcontinent, people arrange a fake marriage of the woman to another man with the precondition that the man will divorce her before long in order for the first husband to remarry her. Such a system has no basis in Islam and evolved in society mainly because of the misconception of the notion of divorce in Islam.

Iblis: An Islamic term for Devil (Shaitan or Satan).

Ibn Abbas: Cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. He is revered by Muslims for his knowledge and expertise in the exegesis of the Qur'an. He is also highly esteemed as an authority on the Sunnah of Muhammad and for his overall knowledge.

Ibn Haiyan: A Muslim historian from al-Andalus (Spain).

Ibn Hazm: Also known as Imam ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, was an Andalusian-Arab philosopher, litterateur, psychologist, historian, jurist and theologian born in Córdoba in present-day Spain.

Ibn Jarir: One of the earliest, most prominent and famous Persian historians and exegetes of the Qur'an. He wrote exclusively in Arabic, and his most famous works are *Tarikh al-Tabari* (*History of the Prophets and Kings*) and *Tafsir al-Tabari*.

Ibn Khaldun: North African Arab polymath, astronomer, economist, historian, Islamic scholar, jurist, lawyer, mathematician, military strategist, nutritionist, philosopher, social scientist and statesman. Born in North Africa in what is now Tunisia.

Ibn Majah: Full name Abu `Abdallah Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah al-Rab'i al-Qazwini, a scholar of hadith. He compiled the collection of hadiths known as *Sunan Ibn Majah*.

Ibn Taimiyyah: A great Islamic scholar born in Harran in what is now Turkey. He lived during the troubled times of the Mongol invasions. He sought the return of Islam to its sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Ibrahim: Abraham

Ibrani: Hebrew

Ijtihad: Critical thinking and interpretation (and reinterpretation) of the primary texts of Islam according to the evolving circumstances to address evolving problems and issues. It refers to the endeavor of a qualified Muslim scholar to derive or formulate a ruling on the basis of the Qur'an and of prophetic teachings.

Ila: Abandonment for swearing. Before Islam, men used to swear not to touch their wives for unlimited periods of time. Islam discourages such behavior.

Iman: Faith, belief and the trust in Allah and belief in other articles of faith in Islam.

Imam: An Islamic leadership position. Often the leader of ritual prayers and of the Muslim community. Classical scholars and jurists of Islam are called Imam.

Imamul mufasssireen: Literally the leader of mufasssireen (exegetes who interpret the Qur'an).

Injeel: The Genesis

Isa: Jesus

Ishak: Isaac

Ismail: Ishmael

I'tikaf: A commended pious practice of retreat in a masjid for a certain number of days or for any amount of time, which should be spent on righteous activities like praying and remembering Allah.

Jald: Literally whipping or flogging, it is a corrective punishment for adultery.

Jahannam: Hell

Jannah: Heaven

Jerusalem: Al-Quds

Jibreel: Angel Gabriel, the archangel who brought messages from Allah to all the prophets of Islam.

Jihad: Uttermost struggle and striving by a Muslim for noble causes.

Jinn: An invisible spirit mentioned in the Qur'an and believed to inhabit the earth and to influence humankind.

Ka'ba: The cuboidal building in Makkah and the most sacred site in Islam. It was originally built by the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). It has a masjid around it which is called Masjid al-Haram (the Sacred Masjid). All Muslims around the world face toward the Ka'bah during ritual prayers, no matter where they are, and visit it to perform Hajj (pilgrimage).

Khaibar: An oasis some 95 miles north of Madinah in Saudi Arabia and a site of a battle fought between the Muslims and the enemies of Islam in 629 (7 Hijrah year).

Khalifa: A vicegerent of Allah on earth, and in this sense all humans are Allah's khalifa and are supposed to deliver their responsibilities attached to the term. It also means a temporal and spiritual head of Islam and is used as a title (Caliph in the western vernacular).

Khalifat: Vicegerency, also caliphate.

Khinzir: Pig, swine; also metaphor for bad taste and for abominable things.

Khula: An Islamic divorce initiated by wives.

Kulin: A class system that establishes the supremacy of the Brahmins in Hindu society.

Lexicographer: An author of a dictionary, or a person devoted to the study of the meaning, evolution, and function of words.

Libas: Dress

Lisanul Arab: Literally the Arab Tongue, a major Arabic dictionary.

Madayen: Also known as Mada'in, a place mentioned in the Qur'an, which is in present-day Iraq.

Madinah: Medina in Western terminology.

Madrassa: Also spelt as madrasah and madrasa, literally a school for any kind of teaching. Generally it refers to educational institutions where Islamic learning is given an especial emphasis.

Mahr: Obligatory dower that a husband pays to his wife.

Makkah: Known as Mecca in the West, a city in Saudi Arabia in which the Prophet Muhammad was born and received first revelation.

Maria: Wife of the Prophet Muhammad.

Maryam: Mary

Masih: Christ

Masjid: Known in the distorted term 'mosque' in Western terminology. It is the place of worship for Muslims.

Maulana: An Arabic term literally meaning: our master, leader or role model. It is traditionally used as a title, mostly in Central Asia and in the Indian subcontinent, preceding the name of a respected Muslim religious leader, in particular graduates of religious institutions.

Midrash: Compilation of commentaries on the Hebrew Bible.

Mi'raj: Literally ascension.

Mirza Golam Ahmad: The founder of the rejected Ahmadiyya movement that refuses to believe in the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad.

Miskeen: Indigent

Moharram: The first month of the Islamic calendar.

Monotheism: Known as tauheed in Islamic terminology, it is the cardinal belief that there is no god but Allah.

Muatta: A collection of hadith compiled and edited by Imam Malik. It is considered the earliest extant source of hadith that forms the basis of Islamic jurisprudence.

Mujaddid-e-Azam: Literally the great reformer, a title generally attached to Muhammad Syed Ahmad Sahib.

Musa: Moses

Muslim: A person who submits to the will of Allah and adheres to the religion of Islam.

Muslim: Full name Abul Husayn Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj Qushayri al-Nisapuri, is regarded as the second most important scholar of hadith literature. He compiled the hadiths collected in the book named after him as Muslim.

Musnad: Full title *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, the collection of hadith compiled by the famous scholar Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the proponent of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence.

Mu'tazila: A theological school of thought within Islam.

Mujtahid: A Muslim scholar and jurist who is competent to analyse the primary sources of Islam according to the demand of practical situations using the tools of analogy and ijihad.

Narayana: One of the names for the Hindu supreme god Vishnu.

Nasai: Full name Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb ibn Ali ibn Sinan Abu `Abd ar-Ra man al-Nasai, a noted collector of hadith who wrote one of the six canonical hadith collections. His hadith collection is known after him as Nasai. He also wrote 15 other books, 6 dealing with the science of hadith.

Najran: A city in southwestern Saudi Arabia near the frontier with Yemen. It is the capital of Najran Province and one of the fastest-growing cities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Nihaya: Complete title *Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihaya* (The Beginning and the End), an important work by Imam ibn Kathir. It covers history starting with the beginning of creation and ends with the righteous entering into Paradise and the evil entering Hellfire.

Nuh: Noah

Nurul Anwar: A book of Islamic jurisprudence.

Ohud: A 142-meter high mountain near Madinah. It is the site of the second battle between Muslims and the belligerent forces of Makkah during the Prophet's time. The Battle of Uhud was fought on 23 March, 625 CE.

Old Testament: The collection of books comprising the sacred scripture of the Hebrews and recording their history as 'the chosen people;' the first half of the Christian Bible.

Omar: A legendary Muslim figure, the second Caliph (reign 634–644) and one of the great early Islamic figures. During his caliphate, Islam was spread to Persia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt.

Palmer: An author of a later version of the Bible.

Phiraon: Pharaoh

Ptolemaeus: Full name Claudius Ptolemaeus (90-168), known in English as Ptolemy was a Roman mathematician, astronomer, geographer and astrologer.

Quraish: The most powerful and prominent tribe in all of Arabia at the time of Muhammad (peace be upon him). The Prophet Muhammad was born into this tribe.

RA: Radi-Allahu anhu/anha (May Allah be pleased with him/her!). This invocation is generally used after the name of a companion of the Prophet in order to seek Allah's blessings on them and also as a mark of respect to them.

Rabee: Narrator. Generally refers to the narrator of hadith. However, in this book, it refers to those narrators who narrated Prophetic narrations with regard to the exegesis of the Qur'an.

Raghib: Full name Imam Raghib al-Isfahani, a lexicologist of the Qur'an, famous for his book *Al-Mufredaat*.

Ramadan: The ninth month in the Muslim calendar. This month is best known for the noble practice of sawm (fasting) by the Muslims around the globe and hence a very significant month in Islam.

Rashid Rida (1865-1935): An eminent disciple of Mufti Abduh and a great scholar and journalist well-known for his compilation of *Tafsir al-Manar*.

Ruku: A division of a surah (chapter) in the Qur'an. It is a concept mostly used in the Indian subcontinent and usually groups a set of verses which are mostly related and also as a reference point while memorizing.

Salah: Ritual prayer, one of the five pillars of Islam

Samiri: A magician employed by Pharaoh as a rival to Moses. According to Muslims, it was he, not Aaron, who made the golden calf.

Samood: A people of ancient Arabia who were known from the first millennium BC to near the time of the Prophet Muhammad. They are the people to whom the Prophet Salih was sent.

Sauda and Safia: Two of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad.

SAWS: Sallallahu alaihi wa sallam (May peace and blessings of Allah be upon him!), an invocation used when mentioning the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

Sawm: Literally restraint. It is the Muslim fasting especially during the month of Ramadan and is one of the five pillars of Islam

Shah Waliullah: A prominent Islamic reformer who is regarded arguably as the greatest Muslim intellectual India has produced. He worked for the revival of Muslim rule and intellectual learning in South Asia during a time of waning Muslim power.

Shaitan: Satan

Shirk: The Islamic concept of the sin of polytheism specifically; but in a more general way it refers to worshipping anyone other than Allah, associating partners with Him, invoking beings other than Him, giving His characteristics to others beside Him, or not believing in His characteristics.

Shiva: The god of destruction and regeneration in the Hindu sacred triad.

Sulaiman: Solomon.

Surah: Chapter in the Holy Qur'an

Suyuti: Full name Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti (849-911AH /1445-1505CE), also known as Ibn al-Kutb (son of books), was an Egyptian writer, religious

scholar, juristic expert and teacher. He is most well-known for his work *Tafsir al-Jalalain*.

SWT: Subhanahu wa ta'ala (Glorious and exalted is He (Allah!)), an invocation used when mentioning Allah's name.

Syriac: A dialect of Middle Aramaic that was once spoken across much of the Fertile Crescent. Classical Syriac became a major literary language throughout the Arab region. It is now a literary language based on an eastern Aramaic dialect and used as the literary and liturgical language by several Eastern Christian churches. It is preserved in a large body of Syriac literature.

Tabi'in: Believers who saw the companions of the Prophets in their lifetime.

Tafsir: Exegesis or commentary of the Qur'an. An author of tafsir is called a mufassir.

Tafsir Haqqani: A tafsir book written by Abdul Haqq Haqqani.

Tahawi: Imam Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (239-321AH), known as Imam Tahawi after his birthplace in Egypt, a great scholar of hadith and jurisprudence (fiqh).

Taka: The basic unit of money in Bangladesh. 100 paisas (pence) make a taka.

Talaq: The Islamic term for divorce or dissolution of marriage.

Talmud: A collection of Jewish writings related to the practical application of Judaic law and tradition.

Taqwa: Allah-consciousness and mindfulness of one's duties to Him.

Tauheed: Monotheism, belief in the oneness of Allah.

Tayammum: Dry ablution using sand or dust, which is substitute for proper wudu or ghusl (bath) when one cannot find or cannot use clean water.

Teah Plateau: The middle section of the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt and about 800 meters above sea level.

Thanawi, Ashraf'Ali (1863-1943): An eminent South Asian Islamic scholar and a most prolific writer. His most famous book is *Bihisti Zewar* (Heavenly Ornaments).

Tirmidhi: Full name Abu Isa Muhammad ibn Isa ibn Surat ibn Musa ibn ad-Dahhak as-Sulamī at-Tirmidhi (824-892 CE) was a Persian collector of hadith. His collection of hadith is known after his name as Tirmidhi.

Tur: Literally 'the mount'. It is an Arab neighborhood on the Mount of Olives approximately 1 km east of the old city of Jerusalem.

Ulama: Muslim scholars.

Ummat: Community or nation. It is a special name given to the global Muslim community and signifies its unity.

Unitarian: One who believes in Unitarianism, a Christian denomination that rejects the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, asserts the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity, and gives a pre-eminent position to Jesus as a religious teacher, while denying his divinity.

Vishnu: A Hindu deity believed to have descended from heaven to earth in several incarnations and worshipped as "the Preserver" and the second member of the Trimurti (the Hindu sacred triad), along with Brahma the Creator and Shiva the Destroyer. Vishnu is the supreme God in the Vaishnavite tradition of Hinduism.

Wahhabi: Also known as Wahhabism, was a reformist movement within Islam attributed to Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab (1703–1792). The term Wahhabi Islam associated with extremism or radicalism is a misnomer and generally used to malign Islam and to create division among the Muslims.

Yahya: A prophet of Islam also known as John the Baptist in Christian terminology.

Ya'juj and Ma'juj: Gog and Magog.

Yaqub: Jacob

Yusuf: Joseph

Yusuf Najjar: Joseph the Carpenter

Zad-ul Ma'ad fi Hadyi Khairi-l 'Ibad Zadul Ma'ad: Literally, Provisions for the Hereafter from the Guidance of Allah's Best Worshipper, a book on the life of the Prophet Muhammad written by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292-1350CE / 691 AH- 751 AH).

Zakah: Literally purification. It is one of the major religious duties in Islam. Zakah is a portion (2.5%) of one's wealth that must be given every year to the poor or to other specified causes. It is the third pillar of Islam and is mandatory on all eligible Muslims to pay.

Zakaria: Zechariah

Zamakhshari: Widely known as Allama Zamakhshari (467-538 A.H.). He is the author of a much read tafsir called *Tafseer-e-Kashshaf*.

Zaqqum: A tree that grows in Jahannam (hell).

Zil Ka'd: The penultimate month in the Islamic lunar calendar.

Zuhr: The afternoon prayer in Islam. This is the second in order of five prayers said by Muslims in a day