

Qur'anic Reflections

*Insights into the
objectives of the
Qur'anic verses*

Part 1/3

***In the name of Allah
the All-Merciful
the Ever-Merciful***

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objectives of the
Qur'anic verses*

AMR KHALED

Translated by:



The English Convoy

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dar_altarjama@amrkhaled.net

Dedication

To our beloved Prophet Muhammad, *Sala-llahu Alayhi Wa-Sallam*, who taught us that our pride and strength lie in our adherence to the Holy book, by saying: “Verily, through this book (The Noble Qur’an), Allah exalts some people and humiliates others.”¹

To the honorable companion Zayd Ibn-Thabet, who collected the Qur’an, and was trusted with the most important task in history while still in his prime.

To the youth of Islam, children of the honorable companions who were called upon in the heat of battle: “People of the Qur’an, honor the Qur’an with your deeds!”

To the people of the Qur’an, who are Allah’s people and servants, I dedicate this book to you: Qur’anic Reflections - An insight into the objectives of the verses of the Qur’an.

Amr Khaled

¹ Narrated by Omar Ibnul-Khattab, Sahih Muslim, Riyad us-Saliheen

Acknowledgements

To the honorable scholars, righteous professors and unknown soldiers who took part in preparing this Qur'anic material, and who did not spare knowledge, nor effort, nor time.
May Allah reward them on my behalf and on behalf of the people of the Qur'an.

Amr Khaled

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Preface

“Praise be to Allah Who has sent down upon His bondman the Book and has not made to it any crookedness.” (TMQ 18:1)²

““Praise be to Allah, Who guided us to this; and in no way could we have been guided, unless Allah has guided us!” (TMQ 7:43)

This book is not an interpretation of the meanings of the Qur'an, and its aim is not to give a detailed explanation of the ayahs (verses) of the Qur'an. If this is what you are after then you should refer to the main *tafseer* (interpretation) books, like *tafseer* At-Tabari or Ibn-Kathir or any of the other interpretation books that fill our Islamic libraries. This book's idea is different and so is its aim.

The idea behind this book haunted me for ten years, especially in Ramadan of each year, when Muslims all over the Islamic world dedicate their time to reading the entire Qur'an during this blessed month. However, I found it truly regrettable that this genuine desire to read the Qur'an was not associated with a clear understanding of each Surah's objectives, reasons of revelation, and the core message addressed to us. As a result, I found people reading the Qur'an and feeling that its meanings were somewhat alien to them. Some might even find them enigmatic or meant to be read without proper understanding of their essence or purposes. Others might grasp the meaning of the wording of the ayahs, but find no connection between one ayah and the next, and instead consider them a series of unrelated ayahs in one Surah. They might even think that there is no main objective that links all the ayahs of the Surah. This is the cornerstone of this book. It is a humble piece of work that breaks the barriers between the youths of our *Ummah* and the Holy Book of Allah (SWT³).

This book emphasizes that the ayahs of each Surah are well-knit and closely related. It demonstrates that every Surah has one topic and specific objectives, and that although at first glance the ayahs might seem scattered and unrelated, when you look closely you will discover the topic of the Surah and the amazing correlations between the ayahs. This will lead you to a clearer understanding of the objective of the Surah, increase your love of the book of Allah, and strengthen your belief in its divine nature, a revelation from the Wise, the All-aware: **“And if it had been from (any where) other than the Providence of Allah, indeed they would have found in it many difference (s).” (TMQ 4:82).**

Therefore, one sees that each Surah of the Qur'an is a fundamental entity, achieving a clear goal; and each ayah serves this goal. The title of the Surah itself is related to its objective (this sheds light on the choice of title for the Surahs of the Qur'an such as: Al-Baqara (The Cow), Al-'Imran (The family of 'Imran), Yunus (Jonah) and An-Naml (The Ants)).

² TMQ=Translation of the meaning of the Qur'an. This translation is for the realized meaning, so far, of the stated (Surah: ayah) of the Qur'an. Reading the translated meaning of the Qur'an can never replace reading it in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed.

Details about the translation of the meaning of the Qur'an used in this book: “Towards Understanding the Ever-Glorious Qur'an” By Dr. *Muhammad Mahmoud Ghali*, Al-Azhar University – Third edition: 2003 – Dar An-Nashr for Universities – All rights reserved to publisher.

³ *Suhanahu wa Ta'ala* = Glorified and Exalted Be He.

Moreover, every Surah is closely related to the previous and the following Surahs, because the order of the Qur'anic Surahs was also revealed by Allah (SWT). We, therefore, come to the conclusion that the Surahs of the Qur'an are one continuous series, so that if you understand their objective (or objectives), you will grasp Allah's aim and what He wants to teach you from this book.

Even if you do not understand every single ayah or word, comprehending the general objectives of the Surahs leads you to understanding the Qur'an in its entirety.

Thus, this book is equally useful to the public and the inexperienced, providing them with the essential principles to understand the Qur'an, as well as to those who memorize the Qur'an and those interested in the science of *tafseer*. This is a humble attempt on my behalf to present the core ideas and topics of the Surahs of the Qur'an.

The method adopted in exposing the Qur'anic reflections is as follows:

- Pinpointing the objective of the Surah.
- Clarifying the relation between the title of the Surah and its objective.
- Exposing the relation of each Surah with the previous and next Surah.
- Choosing a few ayahs to comment on.

Once again, I would like to stress that this is not an interpretation of the meanings of the Qur'an but a mere effort and attempt to help the youths better comprehend the ayahs of the Qur'an and the correlation between the Surahs. No one can ever have the last word on the subject of the Qur'an. Any attempt made to fully comprehend and grasp the topics and core ideas of the Surahs is a far-reaching task, because of the eloquence of Allah's words, the unfathomable depths and accuracy, in addition to my limited and meager abilities.

This is a joint effort exerted by me and the commendable research-team who prepared this material. Any success is due to Allah's grace, and any errors or mistakes are of our own doing. I cannot help but think of what Al-Asfahani said, "I have noticed that when a man finishes writing a book, he cannot help but say later on, "if only I had not written it that way; if only I had added to it, it would have been better; had I brought this forward it would have improved the work; had I omitted this it would have embellished it." And this is a great lesson that highlights human imperfection.

After this brief introduction, I invite you, dear reader, to open your version of the Qur'an and join us in these meaningful Qur'anic reflections with my book.

Surat Al-Fatiha - (The Opener)

Surat Al-Fatiha is a Makkan Surah. It is the fifth Surah in the order of revelation and comprises of seven ayahs.

To start with, there are many questions to be raised. What is the secret of Surat Al-Fatiha? Why does it inaugurate the Holy Qur'an? Why is it called 'the mother of the Holy Qur'an'? Why do we recite it at least 17 times daily? Why is our prayer invalidated if we do not recite Surat Al-Fatiha in it?

Significance of Al-Fatiha

Narrated by Abu Said Ibn Al-Mu'alla: 'While I was praying in the mosque, the Prophet (SAWS⁴) called me but I did not answer him. Later I said, "O Allah's Messenger! I was just praying (when you called me)." He said, "Did not Allah say, **"Give your response to Allah (by obeying Him) and to His apostle when he calls you."** (TMQ 8:24)?" He then said to me, "I will teach you a Surah which is the greatest Surah in the Qur'an, before you leave the mosque." Then the Prophet (SAWS) took hold of my hand, and when he intended to leave (the mosque), I said to him, "Didn't you say to me, 'I will teach you a Surah which is the greatest Surah in the Qur'an?'" He said, "(Yes,) *Al-hamdu-lillah Rabb il-amin* (praise be to Allah, the Lord of the *amin*) which is *al-Sab'a al-mathani* (the seven repeatedly-recited verses) and the Grand Qur'an which has been given to me."⁵

Allah (SWT) demonstrates to us in Surat Al-Hijr (The Rocky Tract) the sublimity of the Qur'an by saying what can be translated as, **"And indeed We have already brought you seven of the oft-repeated (i.e., the Opening Sûrah "Al-Fatiha", as it includes praise and laudation in seven verses) and the magnificent Qur'an."**(TMQ 15:87) 'The seven of the oft-repeated verses' refer to Al-Fatiha for being repeatedly recited.

The Prophet (SAWS) says, "By Him in whose hands my soul lies, Allah did not reveal in the Torah, in the New Testament, in the Book of Psalms nor in the Qur'an anything like it; it is the seven oft-repeated verses."⁶

Hence, this Surah has been given many attributes like: 'the mother of the Holy Book', 'the seven oft-repeated verses', and 'the comprehensive' and 'self-consistent (Surah)', owing to its all-inclusive meaning, and blessings other Surahs draw from it. This Surah inundates the believer's life with its sublime lights. It is a divine grace that blocks the ways of temptations and leads the believer to the gates of mercy.

What secret lies within it? What is the sublimity hidden in the heart of this marvelous Surah; the Surah that many Muslims recite without understanding its meanings and messages?

⁴ *Sala-llahu Alaihi Wa-Sallam* = All Prayers and Peace of Allah be upon him.

⁵ Narrated by Abu Said Ibn-Al-Mualla, Sahih Bukhari, Book 60

⁶ Last part of the previous Hadith

Comprising the objectives of the Qur'an

Surat Al-Fatiha comprises all the meanings of the Qur'an. This is the inherent secret. Every meaning included in the Qur'an has been found in Al-Fatiha, and all the meanings and denotations of the Qur'an have been summed up in these seven ayahs. Let us savor together, and explore, the sublimity of the first Surah of the Qur'an.

The core ideas of the Qur'an

The content of the Holy Qur'an revolves around three pivots presented to those who believe in or recite it:

- 1- Beliefs (to believe in Allah)
- 2- Acts of Worship (to know how we manage to worship our Lord in Whom we believe)
- 3- Way of life (The way chosen for us by Allah (SWT))

First and foremost, the Qur'an teaches us righteous beliefs, i.e. believing in Allah (SWT) in the most appropriate way and on the basis of proper principles.

Secondly, it promotes proper acts of worship (rituals). However, acts of worship are not adequate on its own, because Islam is an all-inclusive way of life.

Surat Al-Fatiha includes these three objectives. Concerning faith, one recites Allah's words, which can be translated as, **"2- In The Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of al-amin (mankind, jinn and all that exists) 3-The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful."**(TMQ1:2-3). Monotheism and the belief in the Day of Judgment are the essences of the Islamic belief. Concerning the acts of worship, we recite what can be translated as **"5-You (solely) do we worship, and You (solely) do we beseech for help (for each and every thing)."**

Concerning the Muslim's way of life Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Guide us to the straight path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring. (It is customary to say "amîn" "amen" at the end of this Surah). (TMQ 1:5-7).**

All the Qur'anic Surahs that follow Al-Fatiha either clarify the beliefs or explain the meaning of **"Praise be to Allah, the Lord of al-amin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)"** and the meaning of **"3-The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful"** and that of **"4-The only Owner (and the only ruling judge) of the Day of Doom"**. Moreover, they show us how to worship Allah (SWT) **"5-You (solely) do we worship, and You (solely) do we beseech for help (for each and every thing)"** Moreover, they relate the principles to be followed in this life, as well as the deeds of the tyrants, the fate of the desperate people, and the ways of the saved souls; hence we find many ayahs explaining the meaning of **"6-Guide us to the straight path."**

Basics of Islam

Surat Al-Fatiha reminds us of the basics of our faith, its great meanings and denotations:

- 1- Remembering the boons and endowments of Allah (*SWT*): **“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of al-amin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”**.
- 2- Showing sincerity when reciting, **“You (solely) do we worship”**. This means we worship You and no one else, our Lord. You alone we worship and You alone we ask for assistance, **“and You (solely) do we beseech for help (for each and every thing).”**
- 3- Seeking good and righteous company, **“Guide us to the straight path. Guide us to the straight path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored,”**
- 4- Warning us of bad company, **(other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.)”** (TMQ 1:5-7).
- 5- Remembering and reiterating the most beautiful names of Allah, with the emphasis on **‘The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful’**, because the relationship between Allah (*SWT*) and mankind is dependant upon mercy. This is the reason why ‘The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful’ is repeated twice.
- 6- Following the right path, **“Guide us to the straight path”**
- 7- The Day of Judgment and the believer’s preparation for it, “
- 8- The importance and the code of supplication (the Surah ends with a supplication).
- 9- The unity of our *ummah*, as you will find that all the subject pronouns addressing the reader and the supplications in Al-Fatiha are in plural. If a man is praying alone in his room, his prayers will not be accepted if he says, “You alone I worship, and You alone I ask for help” or “guide me to the right path”. We have to say, **“guide us”, “You (solely) do we worship” and “You (solely) do we beseech for help”** all in the plural. It makes you feel that you belong to one *ummah* and that you are not alone in this universe.

The worshipper’s delicacy with Allah

In addition to what we have underscored so far, this Surah teaches the worshippers of Allah how to show Him respect, because it is divided into two parts. The first part is a tribute to Allah and the second is a supplication addressed to Him. We can see the praising in the following *ayaat*, **“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of al-amin (mankind, jinn and all that exists). The All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful. The only Owner (and the only ruling judge) of the Day of Doom”. You (solely) do we worship, and You (solely) do we beseech for help. Guide us to the straight Path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring”** (TMQ, 1:1-7).

The following half is a supplication, **“Guide us to the straight Path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring”**. The number of the letters of praise in the first half of Al-Fatiha is exactly equal to the number of the letters of supplications in the second half!

Hence, the Surah teaches the individual how to address Allah. If he wishes to supplicate, it is preferable to start with words of praise first (so he starts by praising and glorifying Allah, then greeting the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS). Afterwards, he can supplicate and ask for anything, and Allah will grant him his *du'aa* (supplication) if Allah wills.

Holding a dialogue with Allah

Reciting Al-Fatiha bestows upon you the greatest honor: to enter into a dialogue with Allah (SWT), as explained in the following Hadith Qudsi: "Abu-Huraira reported: The Prophet of Allah (SAWS) said, "If anyone observes prayer in which he does not recite umm al-Qur'an, it is deficient [he said this three times] and not complete." It was said to Abu-Huraira, "At times we are behind the imam." He said, "Recite it to yourself", for he had heard the Messenger of Allah (SAWS) declare that Allah said, "I have divided the prayer into two shares between Me and My worshipper, and My worshipper will be endowed with whatever he asks. When the worshipper says, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the *alamin*", Allah says, "My worshipper has praised Me". When he says, "the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful", Allah says, "My worshipper has lauded Me". When he (the worshipper) says, "The Possessor of the Day of Doom", He says, "My worshipper has glorified Me". And sometimes He would say, "My worshipper entrusted (his affairs) to Me." And when he (the worshipper) says, "You (solely) do we worship and you (solely) do we beseech for help", He (Allah) says, "This (faith) is between Me and My worshipper, and My worshipper will be endowed with whatever he asks". Then, when he (the worshipper) says, "Guide us to the straight path, the path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring", He (Allah) says, "This is for My worshipper, and My worshipper will be endowed with whatever he asks."

Thus you feel every time you recite Al-Fatiha, Allah (SWT) answers you. What a great honor it is for you to be mentioned by Allah although we just utter Allah's words. He, glorified be He, is worthy of all praises the way eligible to Him.

Omar's sensitivity

Omar Ibn-Abdul-Aziz (RA) used to recite Al-Fatiha, one ayah after the other, with a pause between each ayah. When he was asked for the reason of these silent pauses he answered, "To enjoy Allah's reply (to my supplication)."

If every heart were to feel Allah's reply when reciting this Surah, it would have flown from happiness.

The compiler of graces of all times

Do you now feel the significance of this Surah? Ibn-Al-Qayyim says on this subject, "Allah (SWT) revealed 104 books; he summed up their meanings in three books: the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an. And He summed up these three books in the Qur'an; and He summed up the Qur'an in Al-Fatiha; and He summed up all the meaning of Al-Fatiha in "**You (solely) do we worship, and You (solely) do we beseech for help**".

This ayah is divided into two halves, and both are essential in Islam, worshiping Allah (*SWT*) i.e. practicing His rituals, **“You (solely) do we worship”**, relying on what Allah has created on this earth and using it to achieve success in life in order to rule earth according to His methodology (as we are going to see in Surat Al-Baqara). The companions of the Prophet (*SAWS*) comprehended this ayah very well and applied its two parts in their lives, thus achieving success in this life and in the hereafter.

Today, we see some Muslims applying one half only, **“You (solely) do we worship”**, restricting their understanding of Islam to mere religious practice. Meanwhile, the West applies the second half **“You (solely) do we beseech for help”**, and goes about using the earth’s resources to rule it and replenish it. Islam however preaches a balance between the two, and this is what Surat Al-Fatiha shows clearly.

The key to the Qur’an

So why was it called Al-Fatiha (the Opener)?

There are two interpretations. First, it is the opening Surah of the Qur’an that is why it is called Al-Fatiha (as this word is derived from the Arabic word ‘fataha’ which means ‘to open’). However, a less conspicuous reason is that it holds the key to the Qur’an (i.e. its meanings). Its first ayah opens every Surah of the Qur’an. This Surah holds all the treasures of the Qur’an. If you understand Al-Fatiha, you will understand all the Surahs of the Qur’an that come after it.

One of the great things about the Qur’an is that all its Surahs are sequential in their meanings and objectives. Each Surah is related to the one preceding it according to the order of the Holy Qur’an, and it can only be related to the Surah that precedes it; except Al-Fatiha. If you recite Al-Fatiha before any Surah, you will find a related or complementing meaning within them both. Therefore, we start our prayer with Al-Fatiha followed by any Surah, without losing the coherence in meaning.

Two Surahs to explain two words

I would like to draw your attention to the interconnection between Al-Fatiha and the two Surahs that come after it according to their order in the Holy Qur’an: they are Al-Baqara and Al-‘Imran. One recites ayah six in Al-Fatiha, which can be translated as, **“Guide us to the right path”**.

While Surat Al-Baqara begins with what can be translated as, **“This is the Book (the Qur’an), there is no suspicion about it, a guidance to the pious”** refers to Allah’s words in Surat Al-Fatiha, which can be translated as, **“Guide us to the right path”**, to say that these words will be explained in Surat Al-Baqara.

How? Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“Guide us to the straight Path, the Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.”** Those who have earned Allah’s anger and those who went astray are attributes of people who deservedly incurred Allah’s wrath upon themselves, or who have strayed from His path. Surat

Al-Baqara explains **“other than that of the ones against whom You are angered,”** while Al-‘Imran explains, **“and not (that of) the erring.”**

A whole Surah (i.e. Surat Al-Baqara), composed of 286 ayahs, explains one expression in Al-Fatiha, **“other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.”** and a whole Surah, Al-‘Imran, sheds light on **“not (that of) the erring.”**

There is great consistency in terms of objectives and topics, which will become clearer and more tangible as we look into the two Surahs in detail.

Mercy upon all creatures

We notice that **“the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful”** was repeated twice in the Surah: **“In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful”** and **“the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful”**. We can feel from this accentuated meaning that Allah’s mercy encompasses this life and the hereafter.

The first time it came after **“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”**. Therefore, the *alamin* and everything in this life functions by virtue of Allah’s grace or mercy. After **“the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful”** came **“The Possessor of the Day of Doom”** to point out that the Day of Judgment shall take place only by virtue of Allah’s Omnipotence and graces. This Surah appeases our fears and reminds us that the origin of this universe is Allah’s grace, and that the basis of the relationship between Allah and His worshippers is mercy.

Al-alamin and people

Mentioning the word *al-alamin* (man and jinn) in this context has a graceful meaning. Al-Fatiha – which is the first Surah of the Qur’an – starts with **“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)”**, whereas the last Surah of the Qur’an ends with **“of jinn and men”**. Hence the Holy Qur’an starts with the word *“al-alamin”* and ends with the word *“men”* (meaning mankind), suggesting that this Qur’an was not just revealed for Muslims but to guide the entire humanity.

Gratuitous graces

Surat Al-Fatiha has an unmatched feature, as it does not require any of the difficult rules of *tajwid*⁷. It is easy for anyone to recite this Surah, even those who do not speak the Arabic language.

⁷ *Tajwid* is the system of rules regulating the correct oral rendering of the Qur'an. It is believed to be the codification of the sound of the revelation as it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and as he subsequently rehearsed it with the Angel Jibril (Gabriel). Thus the sound itself has a divine source and significance, and is significant to the meaning.

Verily, Al-Fatiha is your gateway to understanding the Qur'an and holding an intimate conversation with Allah. How can we achieve this total submissiveness in our prayers and feel all the invoked meanings?

The balance of submissiveness

The Prophet (SAWS) says, "The worshipper only earns for his prayer as much as he has been concentrating on it."

How would you feel then, if you were only rewarded for half, or a quarter, or an eighth of your prayer? Let us recite Surat Al-Fatiha together and contemplate its ayahs and their meanings.

If you feel one day that you were not quite submissive in your prayer, then you should know that there is a divine endowment that you have forgotten. If you had said, **"Praise be to Allah"** thoughtfully, you would have felt more and more subdued in your prayer and would have felt wholeheartedly every endowment and grace that Allah has bestowed upon you. Designate for each *raka'a* an endowment or a grace to reflect upon and to praise Allah for. Can you enumerate Allah's endowments? Try. Starting from Islam and faith, to the grace of the revelation of the Holy Qur'an and sending of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), all the wealth and health you are enjoying, your senses; sight and hearing etc... **"...in case you number the favor (s) of Allah, you (cannot) enumerate them. Surely man is indeed constantly unjust, most disbelieving."**(TMQ 14:34).

When you recite, **"the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful"** you remember Allah's mercy on his creations, which extends from this life to the hereafter - then eventually you will be submissive in your prayer. Likewise, when you read what can be translated as, **"The Possessor of the Day of Doom"**, it will remind you of the Day of Judgment and its terrors. You will ask Allah to have mercy on you on that day. Eventually, you will feel total submissiveness in your prayer.

As for the fifth ayah of Al-Fatiha, which can be translated as, **"You (solely) do we worship, and You (solely) do we beseech for help"**, the mere utterance of the words **"You alone"** renews in you your devotion to Allah every single day, and you become more aware that He alone is to be worshiped and that He alone is the one who can help you. This will make you submissive in your prayer.

This ayah, as I said before, encompasses all the meanings in the revealed holy books. Therefore do not skim through it – make it your motto in life and renew its meaning in your heart every time you read it.

Furthermore, when reciting the sixth ayah, which can be translated as, **"Guide us to the right path"**, you must feel that no one else, save Allah, can guide you to the right path in life and keep you firmly on it. There is absolutely no one, but Him, who can guide you through the *sirat* so that you can cross it to reach Him. This belief augments your hope in Allah's mercy, grace, and your fear of His punishment. Bearing all that in mind, you will then be submissive in your prayer.

Share with them felicity

When reciting the seventh ayah, which can be translated as, **“The path of the ones whom You have favored”** it should invoke in your mind all those on whom Allah has bestowed his grace before you. For example, in the first *raka’a*, remember Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) (AS), Adam (AS), Nuh (Noah) (AS) and the Seal (last) of the Prophets Muhammad (SAWS) and ask Allah to guide you to their path. Then try in the second *raka’a* to reflect on great men like Abu-Bakr, Omar Ibnul-Khattab and the rest of the companions, may Allah be pleased with them. In the third *raka’a* remember Salahu-deen (Saladin) and the other heroes of Islam. Finally, in the fourth *raka’a* contemplate the Muslims living around you and your virtuous companions, and pray that Allah maintain these righteous ties. This is how to keep this ayah before your eyes at all times.

When you recite the second half of this ayah, which can be translated as, **“other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring”**, it should remind you of the enemies of Islam, and the non-believers throughout ages; those who strayed from the right way or lost their way and earned Allah’s wrath.

All these meanings, repeated at the end of the Surah, leave thousands of good and bad role models from the past and present, to give the reader of the Qur’an an overall feeling of submissiveness and closeness to Allah, and a firmer pledge to follow His decrees, prayer after prayer, thus reviving our prayer.

The key to understanding the Qur’an

This is Surat Al-Fatiha, the personal identity of every Muslim, and his or her gateway to understanding the Qur’an.

After contemplating some of the great aspects of this Surah, and understanding the key to entering the realm of the Qur’anic meanings, let us embark on a journey of enlightenment, delve into and analyze His ayahs and decrees, exerting strenuous efforts to learn from the correlations between the Surahs.

Surat Al-Baqara - (The Cow)

This is a Madinan Surah, and the first Surah to be revealed in Al-Madinah after the Prophet's emigration. The complete revelation thereof covered the Madinan period; hence, the revelation has synchronized with the establishment of the Islamic society since its very beginning. Surat Al-Baqara is the longest Surah in the Qur'an comprising of 286 ayahs.

How dare we be afraid while cherishing this Surah in our hearts?

There are two Ahadith about Surat Al-Baqara. The first Hadith is narrated by Imam Muslim: 'Narrated by An-Nawwas Ibn Sam'an (RA), "I heard Allah's Messenger (SAWS) saying, "On the Day of Resurrection the Noble Qur'an and those who recited it and acted upon it will be brought forth. The (two) Surahs Al-Baqara and Al-'Imran will plead on the behalf of those who recite them."'⁸

The two Surahs will defend those who have learnt them by heart and recited them regularly.

In another narration, Abu-Umama said he heard Allah's Messenger (SAWS) saying, "Recite the Qur'an, for on the Day of Resurrection it will come as an intercessor for those who recited it. Recite the two bright ones, Al-Baqara and Al-'Imran, for on the Day of Resurrection they will come as two clouds, or two shades, or two flocks of birds in ranks, pleading for those who recited them. Recite Surat Al-Baqara, for taking recourse to it is a blessing and giving it up is a cause of grief, and the magicians cannot confront it."⁹

The heat of the Day of Resurrection is scorching; the sun draws closer to the heads of the creatures, and then Surat Al-Baqara comes to shade those who have learnt it, applied its teachings, and recited it regularly.

The second Hadith about Surat Al-Baqara is narrated by Muslim. Abu-Huraira, may Allah have mercy on his soul, said, "Allah's messenger (SAWS) said, "...Satan runs away from the houses in which Surat Al-Baqara is recited"¹⁰ and in another narration "Satan does not enter it (i.e. the house in which Surat Al-Baqara is recited) for three days." Therefore, many people persist on reciting Surat Al-Baqara to prevent Satan from entering their houses.

Where are the holders of Surat Al-Baqara?

The Prophet (SAWS) used to call on Muslims in the heat of battle saying, "Where are the holders of Al-Baqara?" It seems that the holders of Al-Baqara were a special breed who used to jump promptly to answer the Prophet's call (SAWS).

In this respect, I call everyone to cherish in his heart Surat Al-Baqara (i.e. to recite and memorize this Surah and most importantly to follow all the commandments

⁸ Riyad-us-Saliheen

⁹ Sahih Muslim, Book 4

¹⁰ Sahih At-tirmithi

mentioned therein) in order to be one of the finest people in this life and part and parcel of those endowed with Allah's shade (on the Day of Judgment) in the Hereafter.

The objective of the Surah

Probing and exploring the objective of the Surah assists us in understanding the progression of the ayahs and discovering the correlations between its different topics. Some scholars have even said that the different chapters of the Qur'an were called "Surahs" because each one dealt with one topic. The ayahs of the Surahs are like a fence that encircles the objective of the Surah and revolves around it to serve its meaning. (Remember that the word "Surah" is derived from the Arabic word "sur" which means "a fence" in Arabic.) Thus, every Surah has one core idea and one objective. Now, let's raise a question, what is the objective of this Surah? What is the core idea that ties together the 286 ayahs over two and half *ajzaa'* (parts)¹¹ of the Qur'an?

This Surah's main objective is the succession of man on earth. To put it simply, it calls upon us, "You Muslims are responsible for earth". Those who recite Surat Al-Baqara must know that they are responsible for earth, and that their guiding lodestar in life is Surat Al-Baqara.

Lucky are those who take an example (and a warning) from others

Allah (*SWT*) entrusted many nations throughout history with the responsibility of ruling earth. Some succeeded and some failed. It is time for this nation to take the responsibility and achieve this divine goal. Allah (*SWT*) does not favor anyone, not even the nation of Muhammad (*SAWS*) over any other nations. If it fails in its mission, it will be replaced by another, just as the nations before it. Hence, it is clear why Surat Al-Baqara is the first Surah in the Qur'an after Al-Fatiha. It is the Surah that outlines the methodology of Islam. This also clarifies why it is the first Surah to be revealed in Al-Madinah over the nine years which the Prophet (*SAWS*) had spent there. The reason is quite conspicuous. The Prophet immigrated to Al-Madinah when the Muslims were the victims of incessant persecution in Makkah and settled there to found the *Ummah*.

That's why this Surah was revealed during the foundation stage of Islamic society. It guides the *Ummah* to recognize the mode of taking responsibility for earth. Anyone reciting this Surah should know that every ayah asks him to fulfill the mission for which he was created. O Muslims, you are responsible for reform, replenishment and guidance on earth. It is incumbent upon every person not to be a failure in life, to be able to guide people and to achieve success. All this is explained in Surat Al-Baqara.

The sections of Surat Al-Baqara

Surat Al-Baqara is composed of an introduction then two sections, followed by the concluding section.

¹¹ The singular is *Juzu* meaning one part.

The first section, covering the first part (*juzu*)' of the Qur'an, describes three types of people entrusted by Allah to rule earth. The second section is composed of the ayahs from number 142 to number 283, describing a number of commandments and prohibitions that should be followed by the *Ummah*.

The first *juzu* of the Qur'an:

This *juzu* is composed of eight quarters:

- The first quarter (*hizb*) deals with different kinds of people in order to display the three groups existing on earth as they will be given responsibility for earth.
- The second quarter talks about the experience of the first successor of earth: Adam (AS).
- From the third to the seventh quarter, the ayahs deal with a nation that had been granted the responsibility for earth for a long time, but they failed: the Israelites.
- The eighth (and last) quarter talks about the successful succession of Prophet Ibrahim (AS).

The trial Adam had passed through was a preparatory instructional experience. The confrontation between Adam (AS) and Satan was the starting-point of Adam and his descendants' responsibility for earth. The Israelites were an example of failure when they were given the same responsibility. The Surah, then, details their mistakes - not to insult them, but to tell this Ummah, "Be careful not to follow the example of the previous ruling *Ummah*!"

The last quarter is an example of the successful experience of succession, as represented by Prophet Ibrahim (AS), to whom Allah entrusted earth.

This is a logical order. It started out with Adam, the first trial, and ended with the successful experience to raise our morals.

The introductory ayahs: Three types of people

The introductory ayahs present three types of people. The traits of the first type, the pious, are traced in the first five ayahs. The second types, the disbelievers, are described in the next two ayahs. The characteristics of the third type, the hypocrites, are revealed in the last 13 ayahs (8 - 20) due to the great perils they represent.

It is as if the introduction addresses you by saying, "These are the types of people, so choose for yourself. Which of these types you want to be? Only one of these types will bear the responsibility for earth."

Notice that the first trait of the pious people, as mentioned in the following ayah, in which Allah (SWAT) says that they "**believe in the Unseen (*Ghaib*¹²...)**" (TMQ 2:3).

¹² *Al-Ghaib*: literally means an unseen thing. But this word includes profound meanings: belief in Allah, Angels, Holy Books, Allah's Messengers, Day of Resurrection and *Al-Qadar* (Divine Pre-ordainments). It also includes what Allah and His Messenger (SAWS) mentioned about the knowledge of the matters of past, present, and future e.g., news about the creation of heavens and earth, botanical and zoological life, facts about the nations of the past, Paradise and Hell.

The most important attribute of the *Ummah*, which leads mankind, is their belief in the unseen. By contrast, the worst trait of the previous nation (i.e. the Israelites) was their absolute materialism, which will be further illustrated.

Adam: the first successor on earth

After the introductory ayahs comes the story of Adam (AS). The story starts with the following pivotal ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, **“And (remember) as your Lord said to the Angels, “Surely I am making in the earth a successor.” ...” (TMQ 2:30).**

As a human being, you are responsible for earth as was your father Adam (AS). Earth is not the responsibility of those who disobey Allah and renounce His laws. Adam (AS), the progenitor of the entire human race, was the first person who was given this responsibility. Notice that the angels’ question, concerning Adam’s (AS) creation, did not imply objection to Allah’s will. In fact, they were afraid of having Adam succeed them. They were devoted to worshipping and glorifying Allah. Allah answers them in the same ayah, **““Surely I know whatever you do not know.” (TMQ 2:30).**

Allah teaches Adam (AS) the “technology” of life

The following ayah is also pivotal, **“And He taught Adam all the names” (TMQ 2:31).**

What does this mean?

It means that Allah (SWT) taught Adam (AS), what we refer to as, “the technology of life”. He taught him the names and functions of all creations, such as the sun, the moon, the sea, the trees, and the crops. The ayah resembles a warning to the believers. They should know how to manage everything on earth in order to be responsible for it. Here we find a fine reference in ayah 22, which can be translated as, **“Who has made the earth for you (as) a bedding, and the heaven an edifice (TMQ 2:22).** Allah (SWT) details here the means of Adam’s succession on earth and how mankind (i.e. the children of Adam) can make optimum use of land, sky, plants and so on.

This is a warning not to restrict the teachings of Islam to mere acts of worship. A Muslim has to seek knowledge by the aid of which he (or she) can manage life and earth. Allah (SWT) taught Adam (AS) how to manage earth to make us understand that devoutness alone is not enough. Both, science and technology are crucial elements of this succession as well.

Disobeying Allah is the reason of replacement

The following ayah describes Adam's experience with *Iblis* (Satan). Allah says what can be translated as, **“Then Ash-Shaytan (The all-vicious, i.e., the devil) caused them to slide back therefrom, so he drove them out of what they (both) were in ...” (TMQ 2:36).**

This proves that Allah replaces those who disobey him with those who obey His commandments. It seems as though this ayah is addressed to us today by saying, “Oh, nation of Muhammad, you have been taking the responsibility for earth for 1300 years; and whatever has befallen you in the last century is the result of your disobedience. Take an example from what had happened to your progenitor Adam (AS).” However, Adam’s fault cannot be compared to the grave sins committed nowadays, day and night. Therefore, learn from your previous mistakes and avoid sins to reclaim succession on earth.

The next ayahs, up to ayah 38, go on relating the story of Adam. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“We said, “Get down out of it altogether, then, if ever there should definitely (The verb has an emphatic ending, thereby saying that guidance will come) come up to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, then no fear will be on them, neither will they grieve.” (TMQ 2:38).**

Guidance sent from Allah (SWT), as mentioned in this ayah, was the Holy Qur’an – as indicated in the beginning of the Surah, **“That is the Book, there is no suspicion about it, a guidance to *Al-Muttaqun* [the pious believers of Islamic Monotheism who fear Allah much (abstain from all kinds of sins and evil deeds which He has forbidden) and love Allah much (perform all kinds of good deeds which He has ordained)].” (TMQ 2:2).**

It is the same guidance that we pray for when reciting Surat Al-Fatiha (the Opening chapter of the Holy Qur’an), **“Guide us to the straight Path.” (TMQ 1:6).** Do you savour now the sweetness of the Qur’an and the correlation between its ayahs?

The Israelites' experience

Surat Al-Baqara then relates the Israelites’ experience (starting from ayah 40). It is indicative of their failure in the divine trial of being in charge of earth.

Duty: Remembering Allah’s graces & boons

In the first ayah, on this subject, Allah says what can be translated as, **“O Seeds (Or: sons) of Israel) remember My favor wherewith I favored you, and fulfill My covenant (and) I will fulfill your covenant, and do have awe of Me (only).” (TMQ 2:40).**

Allah addresses, for the first time, the Israelites by saying what can be translated as, **“...remember My favor...”** Likewise, the first ayah with which Allah addresses us in the Qur’an is, **“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the ‘*Alamin* (mankind, jinn and all that exists).” (TMQ 1:2).** It is as if the first duty of the *Ummah* to be in charge of earth is to remember Allah’s blessings.

Examples of the graces Allah bestowed upon the Israelites

Allah (SWT) mentions some of the blessings He bestowed upon the Israelites. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And (remember) as We separated the sea for you. So We delivered you and drowned the house of Firaawn (pharaoh) (while)**

you were looking (at them). (TMQ 2:50) Allah also says what can be translated as, **“Then after that We forgave you so that you might be grateful.” (TMQ 2:52).**

He also says what can be translated as, **“And We overshadowed you with mists and We sent down manna and quails upon you. “Eat of whatever good things We have provided you.” And in no way did they do injustice to Us, but they were doing injustice to themselves. (TMQ 2:57).**

These successive ayahs deal with the blessings and faults of the Israelites to warn us and dissuade us from committing the same sins.

Sins of the previous nations

Allah (SWT) displays the Israelites’ sins in what can be translated as, **“And (remember) as you said, “O Mûsa (Moses) we will never believe you until we see Allah openly.” (TMQ 2:55).** This shows us that they represent a very materialistic nation. Absolute materialism is a fatal sin that can lead to the nations’ replacement by other nations. This brings to mind the first trait of the pious, mentioned at the beginning of the Surah, **“Who believe in the Unseen...” (TMQ 2:3).**

The ayahs go on enumerating the grave sins of the Israelites such as disbelieving the revelations of Allah, killing the Prophets wrongfully, disobeying Allah, transgressing and cheating in the matter of the Sabbath. Then we reach the story of the Cow, the main story of the Surah.

Why this title?

Some people might wonder why this Surah is called Surat Al-Baqara. They would say that it relates the story of the Cow. Nevertheless, the Surah comprises many other stories as well. So, why was this story in particular chosen as a title?

In fact, the story of the Cow exemplifies the major sins committed by the Israelites. It is used as the title of the Surah to remind the Muslims, the *Ummah* in charge of earth, of these sins in order to avoid them.

Controversy is the origin of evils

The Israelites’ sins are highlighted in the Surah, starting from ayah 67, **“And as Mûsa (Moses) said to his people, “Surely Allah commands you to slay a cow,” they said, “Do you take us to yourself in mockery?” He said, “I take refuge in Allah from being one of the ignorant.” They said, “Invoke your Lord for us that He make evident to us what (cow) she is.” He said, “Surely He says that surely she is a cow neither too old, nor new, middling between the two. So, perform what you are commanded.” They said, “Invoke your Lord for us that He make evident to us what colour she is.” He said, “Surely He says that surely she is a yellow cow, bright (is) her colour, pleasing to the onlookers”. They said, “Invoke your Lord for us that He make evident to us what she is; surely the cows to us are similar to each other; and surely in case Allah so decides, we will indeed be rightly-guided.” He said, “Surely He says that surely she is a cow not tractable (Literally made subservient) to stir the earth or to water the tillage, with no blemish in it.**

They said, “Now you have come with the truth.” So, they slew her, and they had scarcely performed that. (TMQ 2:67 - 71).

The wisdom of choice

The story is about an Israelite who was murdered, and his murderer remained unknown, triggering speculations and accusations. Allah, thus, inspired the Israelites to slaughter a Cow, take a piece of its meat and hit the victim therewith. Allah (SWT) would then bring the man back to life to say who had murdered him. Allah wanted to test the Israelites' obedience. They were very materialistic and Allah intended to show them His Omnipotence and Might to bring a dead person back to life by means of another dead creature; something that would prove to them that life is not wholly materialistic.

However, the Israelites did not understand the wisdom of Allah's command. Since they believed in absolute materialism, they refused to carry out the command. Hence, the story of the Cow represents the Israelites' sins, materialism, and controversy. Moreover, they were disobedient to the Prophets and Allah (SWT).

Even when the Israelites carried out Allah's command, they only did it reluctantly and out of force. This is indicated in the following ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, **“...So, they slew her, and they had scarcely performed that.” (TMQ 2:71).**

The story of the Cow seems to warn us against materialism, controversy about Allah's religion, prevarication of His commandments, and reluctance in carrying out His commands; that is why this Surah was named that way.

The ayahs then go on until the first time Allah addresses the believers. Allah says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not say, “Raaina” (This from of the verb was used by the Jews and had a derisive connotation in Hebrew. Here in means “heed us”) and say, “Look upon us and listen,” (Literally: hear) and to the disbelievers is a painful torment. (TMQ 2:104).**

The Jews used to reiterate the term “*ra'ina*” when addressing the Prophet (SAWS), meaning in Arabic “look after us”. However, their intention was to indirectly insult him with this word because of its meaning in Hebrew “listen, hope you become deaf”. Thus, anyone who was not familiar with the Hebrew language mistakenly thought that Jews were saying “Look after us”. Therefore, Allah commanded the Prophet's companions not to use the word “*ra'ina*” and use the synonymous word “*unsurna*” instead.

Although both words (*ra'ina* and *unsurna*) are synonymous, Allah (SWT) wants us to be a great and unique *Ummah*, a nation distinguished than all others, even in the terms they use. Therefore, Allah warns Muslims against following or even imitating the previous nations, namely, the Israelites, who committed major sins. Rather, all Muslims should be a distinguishable *Ummah*, even in the terms they use in their daily life.

There is a correlation between this ayah in Surat Al-Baqara and another ayah in Surat Al-Fatiha, where the believer is asked to be different from the Israelites. Allah says what can be translated as, **“other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.”** (TMQ 1:7).

What about the Arab youth who nowadays blindly imitate the other nations and the West in the most trivial matters, while Allah (SWT) has taught Muslims to be distinguishable even in the terms they use?

Then, throughout the Surah come a number of ayahs warning us against imitation, which begin with secondary and trivial matters and end with disbelief. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Many of the Population of the Book (Or: Family of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians) would like to turn you back steadfast disbelievers, even after your belief,”** (TMQ 2:109).

A successful experience: Ibrahim (AS)

The last *hizb* of the first *Juzu* (of the Holy Qur'an) deals with the trial of Ibrahim (AS). It is indeed a successful experience with which the first *juzu* ends, to serve as an appealing incentive for us to strive towards success in the tests of succession. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And as his Lord tried Ibrâhîm (Abraham) with (certain) Words; so, he fully carried them out. (Literally: perfected them) He said, “Surely I am going to make you a leader for mankind.” Said he, Ibrâhîm”** (TMQ 2:124).

Prophet Ibrahim (AS) did not only succeed in passing through the tests, but he did so outstandingly, as indicated in **“so, he fully carried them out. (Literally: perfected them)”**. Prophet Ibrahim tolerated all the trials he went through, such as when he was thrown into the fire and when he was commanded to migrate from his homeland to the desert where he left his wife and newborn son. He was also commanded to slaughter his son later on. Accordingly, Allah (SWT) told him that He would make him a leader of mankind because he obeyed Him.

The ayah, then, continues as follows, **“Said he, (Ibrâhîm) “And of my offspring?” He said, “My Covenant will not pertain (i.e. is not attainable) to the unjust.””**(TMQ 2:124).

This proves that Allah (SWT) does not favor anyone, even from among the Islamic *Ummah*. It also shows that succession is associated with obedience, not kinship.

Prophet Ibrahim (AS) called Allah to send a Messenger from among his offspring, as indicated in the following ayah, **“Our Lord, and send forth among them a Messenger, (one) of them, (and indeed Allah answered their invocation by sending Muhammad)...”** (TMQ 2:129). It is important to highlight here that the beginnings of these three stories started with ayahs of succession and all included trials of obedience to Allah.

The story of Adam (AS) starts with a test of obedience when Allah commanded him not to eat from the Forbidden Tree. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And**

(remember) as your Lord said to the Angels, “Surely I am making in the earth a successor ...” (TMQ 2:30).

The story of the Israelites starts with a trial of obedience and gratefulness to Allah, which is, whether they would carry out Allah’s commands and thank Him for His blessings or not. Allah says what can be translated as, **“O Seeds (Or: sons) of Israel remember My favor wherewith I favored you, and that I graced you over the ‘Alamin [mankind and jinn (of your time period, in the past)].”** (TMQ 2:47).

The story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) starts by testing his obedience by giving him certain commands. When Ibrahim worshipped Allah and abstained from worshipping idols, he had to face his father and his own people. Consequently, he was thrown into the fire. Furthermore, Allah commanded him to migrate from his homeland, leave his newborn baby and wife in the desert, and then slaughter his son.

Allah says what can be translated as, **“And as his Lord tried Ibrāhīm (Abraham) with (certain) Words; so, he fully carried them out. (Literally: perfected them) He said, “Surely I am going to make you a leader for mankind.”** (TMQ 2:124).

Blessings and graces

By the end of the first *Juzu*, a wonderful ayah summarizes the life story of Prophet Yaqub “Jacob” and the Israelites. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Or (even) were you witnesses as death was present to Yaaqûb? (Jacob) As he said to his seeds’ (Or. sons) “What will you worship even after me?” They said, “We will worship your God and the God of your fathers Ibrāhīm, Shuaayb and Ishaq, (Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, respectively) One God; and to Him we are Muslims.”** (i.e., to Him we surrender).” (TMQ 2:133).

As indicated in the ayah, Prophet Yaqub was devoted to conveying the message and trust of succession from his fathers, Ibrahim and Ishaq “Isaac”, to his offspring of the Israelites.

The following ayah also comes at the close of the first *juzu*, after listing the three stories of Adam, the Israelites, and Prophet Ibrahim: **“Say (O Muslims), “We have believed in Allah, and whatever has been sent down to us, and whatever was sent down to Ibrāhīm, and Shuaayb, and Ishaq and Yaaqûb (Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, respectively) and the Grandsons, (i.e., the Tribes) and whatever was brought down to Mûsa and Isa, (Moses and Jesus, respectively) and whatever was brought to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we are Muslims.”** (TMQ 2:136).

This ayah details those on whom Allah has bestowed His grace and who are being referred to in Surat Al-Fatiha in the following two ayahs: **“Guide us to the straight Path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring.”** (TMQ 1:6 – 7).

I urge you to recite this *juzu* with the frame of mind of someone who intends to lead humanity to righteousness and deserves the honor of being a successor on earth;

someone learning from the wrongdoings of other nations. This *Juzu* also warns us against materialism, controversy, and prevaricating Allah's Law; it advocates us to obey Allah in all our deeds.

The second *juzu* of Surat Al-Baqarah specifies Allah's commands and prohibitions, which the Islamic *Ummah* should abide by in order to lead mankind. All of these commands and prohibitions can be summarized into three concepts:

1. Obeying Allah
2. Becoming a unique nation
3. Fearing Allah

The Muslim who leads mankind has to have a methodology to organize his actions. This methodology is clearly outlined in the second *juzu* of Surat Al-Baqara.

Changing the Qiblah's direction: A test of obedience and a command of distinction

The second *juzu* starts with a comment on a certain event: Allah's command to Muslims to change the direction of the *qiblah*¹³ from Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to the Ka'ba in Makkah, and the ensuing scepticism the Jews (in Madinah) tried to disseminate about Islam.

Allah says what can be translated as, **"The foolish ones among mankind will say, 'What has turned them away from their Qiblah (The Qiblah is the Kaabah at Makkah, towards which the Muslims face in prayer), (TMQ 2:142).**

What is the relation between this quarter (*hizb*) of the Surah and the preceding *hizb*? The first *juzu* deals with three stories, namely, the stories of Adam, the Israelites and Prophet Ibrahim (AS). The common factor between the three stories is their being all trials of obedience. Adam (AS) was tested when he was commanded not to eat from the Forbidden Tree; the Israelites were tested when they were commanded to slaughter the Cow and Prophet Ibrahim successfully passed all the tests of obedience he had gone through.

Allah says what can be translated as, **"And as his Lord tried Ibrahîm (Abraham) with (certain) Words; so, he fully carried them out. (Literally: perfected them) (TMQ 2:124).**

After Allah (SWT) had told the Muslims about the previous nations, He intended to frame a methodology for them; the first rule of which is obedience. The three stories were narrated in order to let the concept of obedience take root in the hearts of the people who are to lead mankind. Hence, changing the *Qiblah* to which the Muslims used to face in prayer would be a practical test of the Muslims' obedience. The ayah explains this meaning conspicuously.

".... And in no way did We make the Qiblah which you had been (facing), except that We should know who closely followed the Messenger from him who turned over on his heels(i.e. disobey the Messenger)..." (TMQ 2:143).

¹³ The direction now facing the Ka'ba, toward which Muslims look when praying

Some people might think this was easy to do. In fact, it was not all that easy for the Arabs to carry out such a command. Although they had been sanctifying the Ka'ba since the days of Prophet Ibrahim, Allah commanded the Muslims to face Al-Aqsa Mosque in prayer. Then, Allah commanded them to change the direction of the *qiblah* again towards the Ka'ba just to test their obedience to Him.

Notice the relationship between the previous *hizbs* of the first *juzu* and this *hizb*: The seventh *hizb* paves the way for the application of abrogation, which is, changing an Islamic regulation.

Allah says what can be translated as, **“In no way do We abrogate any ayah (i.e. verse, sign) whatsoever or cause it to be forgotten (except that) We come up with (i.e., bring) a more charitable one or the like of it ...”** (TMQ 2:106).

The eighth *hizb* deals with the construction of the Holy Ka'ba. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And as Ibrahîm raised up the foundations of the Home (the Ka'bah at Makkah)...”** (TMQ 2:127).

Finally, the end of the first *juzu* shows that the abrogation of the rule, in this respect, will be the changing of the *qiblah* direction. What a beautiful correlation between the ayahs!

A unique *Ummah* with distinguishable diction

This *hizb* draws our attention to another objective. As previously mentioned in the first *juzu*, it is important for Muslims to be distinguished and unique even in their vernacular and use of words, as indicated in this ayah: **“O you who have believed, do not say, “Raaina” (This from of the verb was used by the Jews and had a derisive connotation in Hebrew. Here in means “heed us”) and say, “Look upon us and listen,”** (TMQ 2:104). The same applies to the command concerning changing the *qiblah* direction.

The Jews used to face Jerusalem in their prayers. Thus, Muslims were commanded to be different from them by facing the Ka'ba when praying. How could Allah entrust a certain *Ummah* of being in charge of leading mankind while it was imitating others? How could both, the leader and those who followed him, equally lead mankind? This necessitated a command that would clearly distinguish Muslims from the other nations; the change of the *qiblah* direction. Hence, after Allah framed a methodology for Muslims, His first command to them was to be a distinguished and unique *Ummah* and to never imitate and follow other nations.

Moderate distinction

The second *hizb* of the second *juzu* starts with the following ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, **“Surely, As-safa and Al-Marwah (i.e. two hills near the Ka'bah) are among the way marks of Allah. So whoever makes the Pilgrimage (i.e. Hajj) to the Home, or makes the Visitation, (Umrah, sometimes called the minor pilgrimage) then there is no fault in him to circumambulate them (As-Safa and Al-Marwah)...”** (TMQ 2:158)

Some people might think that the ayah means that *tawaf* between As-Safa and Al-Marwah (circumambulation of the Ka'ba) is an optional ritual in *hajj* (pilgrimage). However, knowing the reason behind the revelation of this ayah is very important. The polytheists used to circumambulate the two mounts of As-Safa and Al-Marwah. They used to place two idols, Asaf and Na'ilah, atop the two mounts and circumambulate them. Hence, when the Prophet's companions were commanded to be distinguishable, by changing the terms they were using and the direction of the *qiblah*, they felt that their *tawaf* between As-Safa and Al-Marwah was contradicting with this command. Thus, the ayah was revealed to denote that not all the actions of the disbelievers were wrong. In fact, the origin of circumambulating the two mounts was a Divine decree and an act of following Prophet Ibrahim's footsteps. Accordingly, Muslims who are the true believers in Allah's Oneness and true followers of the Prophet (SAWS) have to be moderate in making this distinction.

This *hizb* includes an important ayah that brings forth before Muslims another rule of their methodology. Allah says what can be translated as, **"Thus We have made you [true Muslims - real believers of Islamic Monotheism, true followers of Prophet Muhammad and his *Sunnah* (legal ways)], a just (and the best) nation, that you be witnesses over mankind..."** (TMQ 2:143).

You belong to a remarkable *Ummah*. Imagine, you will bear witness over mankind. Have you realized the magnitude of the responsibility you will have to bear on the Day of Judgment?

Islam and the all-inclusive reform

The third *hizb* of the second *juzu* starts with a series of commands aiming at reforming all the aspects of life in the Islamic community. It starts with this ayah, in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"It is not *Al Birr* (benignancy) that you turn your faces around in the direction of East and West; but benignancy is (in him) who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Prophets, and brings wealth in spite of his love for it (Or: offers out of love for Him) to near kinsmen, and the orphans, and the indigent, and the wayfarer, and the beggars, and (to ransom) necks, (i.e. captives "slaves") and keeps up the prayer, and bring the Zakat, (i.e. pay the poor-dues) and they who fulfill their covenant when they have covenanted, and the patient (ones) in misery and tribulation, and while in violence; (i.e. during fighting) those are (they) who act sincerely, and those are they who are the pious.** (TMQ 2:177).

Muslim scholars say that this ayah includes all the aspects of Islam. It includes the tenets of faith (believing in Allah, His Angels and the Holy Qur'an), acts of worship (*salat* (performing the obligatory prayers) and *zakat* (giving in money for charity)), dealings (keeping one's promise) and manners.

Let us look together at the wonderful gradation of Surat Al-Baqara:

1. The change of the *qiblah* direction (in order to achieve uniqueness):
"...So turn your face towards the Inviolable Mosque (*Al-Masjid-al-Haram* (at Makkah))..." (TMQ 2:144).

2. Moderation in this distinction: **“...Surely, As-safa and Al-Marwah (i.e. two hills near the Ka’ba) are among the way marks of Allah. So whoever makes the Pilgrimage (i.e. Hajj) to the Home, or makes the Visitation, (Umrah, sometimes called the minor pilgrimage) then there is no fault in him to circumambulate them (As-Safa and Al-Marwah)...” (TMQ 2:158).**
3. Righteousness (i.e. piety and each and every act of obedience to Allah) does not solely mean obeying the command of changing the *qiblah* - as indicated in **“It is not *Al-Birr* (piety, righteousness, and each and every act of obedience to Allah, etc.) that you turn your faces towards east and (or) west (in prayers)...” (TMQ 2:177).**

Hence, after making obedience and the Muslims’ uniqueness deep-rooted concepts in the companions’ hearts in the first *hizb* of the second *juzu*, Allah showed them that it was not a matter of *qiblah* but an all-inclusive reform. When Allah (SWT) commanded the Muslims to change the *qiblah* towards the Ka’ba, it was just a test of obedience and a command of distinction. The real objective was to perform all the acts of righteousness mentioned in the above ayah.

The language of comprehensive reform

Starting from the third *hizb* of the second *juzu*, a series of commands and prohibitions are listed to frame a comprehensive way of life for the Islamic *Ummah*:

Penal codes as indicated in the following two ayahs:

- **“O you who have believed, prescribed for you is retaliation concerning (the ones) killed:...” (TMQ 2:178).**
- **“And in retaliation there is life for you, O (men) endowed with intellects” (TMQ 2:179).**

Inheritance law in Islam as indicated in the following ayah:

- **“Prescribed for you, when death is present to any of you, in case he leaves behind some charitable (benefit), is to make testament to parents and nearest kin, with beneficence-truly (binding) on the pious.”(TMQ 2:180).**

Religious legislation as indicated in the following ayah:

- **“O you who have believed, prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for (the ones) who were before you, that possibly you would be pious.”(TMQ 2:183).**

Piety is the guiding light

Obviously all the rules mentioned mainly focus on the believers’ fear of Allah. This is conspicuous in the following ayah of *Al-Qisas*, **“And in Law of Equality (*qisas*)**

there is life for you, O (men) endowed with intellects, that possibly you would be pious.”(TMQ 2:179).

It is also explicit in the ayahs describing the rules of inheritance in Islam, **“Prescribed for you, when death is present to any of you, in case he leaves behind some charitable (benefit), is to make testament to parents and nearest kin, with beneficence-truly (binding) on the pious.” (TMQ 2:180).**

Piety is also emphasized in the ayahs prescribing fasting, **“O you who have believed, prescribed for you is the Fast, as it was prescribed for (the ones) who were before you, that possibly you would be pious.” (TMQ 2:183).**

It is emphasized again by the end of fasting rules, **“Thus Allah makes His signs evident to mankind, that possibly they would be pious.” (TMQ 2:187).**

Allah's methodology will be adopted only by the pious believers, marked for their uniqueness and piety; people who want to earn Allah's satisfaction. These three pivots are shields preserving this methodology. They are coherently presented in a unique way, completely different from man's way of presenting and explaining things.

As you examine the Surah more and more, you discover the thorough aspects of Allah's methodology. The Holy Qur'an first deals with the penal code, then moves to the religious legislation. Some people might wonder about the relationship between the two legislations. Actually, presenting unrelated topics subsequently in the Holy Qur'an indicates that Islam holds them all. Acts of worship are inseparable from the other rules legislated in Islam. This fact emphasizes the thoroughness of Allah's methodology and its inclusion of all aspects of life.

The impregnable shields of Islam

The fourth section deals with the legislation of fighting in the way of Allah and rules of *Jihad*.

Allah says what can be translated as, **“And fight in the way of Allah the ones who fight you, but do not transgress; surely Allah does not love the transgressors. And kill them wherever you catch them, and drive them out from where they drove you out...” (TMQ 2:190 - 191).**

The ayahs emphasize the inevitability of *Jihad* to preserve Allah's methodology and stress on the necessity of spending money on *Jihad* (i.e. in the cause of Allah) **“ And expend in the way of Allah; and do not cast (yourselves) by your (own) hands into perdition (i.e., by neglecting to expend in the way of Allah,), (TMQ 2:195).**

This methodology requires fighting (in the way of Allah) in order to protect Islam from its enemies and foes who hinder its progress; it is not a form of terrorism and bloodshed. There is a general rule in the Holy Qur'an; whenever *jihad* is mentioned, its regulations are explained as well. For example, the command of *jihad* in ayah 190

is directed against the transgressors only. The ayah also clarifies the ethics of *jihad* through prohibiting transgression.

Al-Hajj (a spiritual gas station)

The ayahs then move on to the rules of *hajj*.

Why is *hajj* mentioned immediately after talking about *jihad*?

In fact, *hajj* is the first practical symbol of *jihad*. Thus, by performing *hajj*, Allah (SWT) gives the Muslims a chance to practice *jihad* and change their bad habits (through psychological, physical and spiritual preparation). Notice how coherent and closely-linked the ayahs are, although they deal with various topics!

This brings to mind the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim at the end of the first *juzu*. This supplication is mentioned in the following ayah in which Allah says what can be translated as, “**...Our Lord! And make us submissive unto You and of our offspring a nation submissive unto You, and show us our *Manasik*¹⁴ (all the ceremonies of pilgrimage – *Hajj* and ‘*Umrah*), and accept our repentance...**” (TMQ 2:128).

Hence, Allah revealed the ayahs (196 – 200), which elaborate on the rules of *hajj*, as an answer to the supplication of Prophet Ibrahim in ayah 128. Allah says what can be translated as, “**And perfect the Pilgrimage and the Visitation (i.e., by neglecting to expend in the way of Allah,) (to Makkah) to Allah; yet in case you are detained, then (make) whatever offering is the easiest, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its lawful destination. So whoever of you is sick or is hurt in his head, then (make) a ransom by fast or donation, or ritual (sacrifice). Yet, when you are secure, so whoever enjoys the Visitation until the Pilgrimage, then (make) whatever is easiest of offering. Yet, whoever does not find (any offering), then (make) a fast of three days in the Pilgrimage, and seven when you return, that is ten completely; that is for him whose family are not present (i.e. those who do not live in the vicinity of Makkah) at the Inviolable Mosque; and be pious to Allah, and know that Allah is strict in punishment. The Pilgrimage is (in) months well-known; so, whoever ordains (upon himself) the Pilgrimage in them, then there shall be no lying with (womenfolk), nor evident immorality, nor disputing in the Pilgrimage. And whatever charity you perform, Allah knows it. And sustain yourselves; so, the most charitable sustenance is piety; and be pious to Me, O (you) endowed with intellects! It is no fault in you that you constantly seek Grace from your Lord; so when you press on from Arafat, then remember Allah at the Inviolable Emblem, and remember Him as He has guided you, and decidedly you were even before it (i.e. before ...Islam) indeed of the erring. Thereafter, press on from where the multitude (Literally: mankind) press on, and ask for forgiveness from Allah; surely Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful. So, when you have accomplished your (holy) rituals, then remember Allah like the remembrance of your fathers (The pagan Arabs used to praise their forefathers at the conclusion of the pilgrimage) or (even) with stronger**

¹⁴ *Manasik*: i.e. *Ihram*; *Tawaf* of the *Ka'bah*; *Say* of *As-Safa* and *Al-Marwah*; stay at '*Arafat*, *Muzdalifah* and *Mina*; *Ramy* of *Jamarat*; slaughtering of *Hady* (animal), etc.

fervour in remembrance. So, of mankind (there are) some who say, “Our Lord, bring us (provision) in the present (life),” and in no way does he have any share in the Hereafter. (TMQ 2:196-200).

The pillars of Islam

Unlike the other Surahs in the Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqara details and includes the five pillars of Islam. The rules of fasting are only mentioned in Surat Al-Baqara. The rules of *hajj* and those of spending money in the cause of Allah are only detailed in this Surah. This same Surah also mentions that Islam is not based on usury but on *zakat*. The first ayahs of the Surah refer to the first pillar of Islam - the *Shahadah* (declaration of faith). Allah says what can be translated as, “...**Who believe in the Unseen**” (TMQ 2:3).

The next pillar - *Salat* - is considered the supporting shield of Islam. The subject of *salat* is repeated quite often in several ayahs. Allah says what can be translated as, “**And keep up the prayer and bring the Zakat (i.e., pay the obligatory poor-dues) ...**” (TMQ 2:43).

Allah also says what can be translated as, “**Preserve (constantly) (i.e., observe strictly) the prayers, and the middle prayer, and rise up devoutly to Allah.**” (TMQ 2:238) . The *asr* prayer has been designated in this ayah because of its great significance. It is worth mentioning that it is the only ayah in the Holy Qur’an that refers to this prayer.

Enter perfectly in Islam

Having shown different rules, a pivotal ayah is revealed. Allah says what can be translated as, “**O you who have believed, enter into peacefulness, the whole (of you), and do not ever follow the steps of As-shaytan; (The all-vicious, i.e., the Devil) surely he is an evident enemy to you.**” (TMQ 2:208).

In this ayah, Allah ordains the believers to act according to the comprehensive meaning of Islam. Islam represents all the aspects of the methodology, which Allah has framed for Muslims. The previous ayahs have shown the aspects of this methodology. These aspects include acts of worship, penal codes, laws of inheritance, *Jihad*, rules of *hajj*, and spending money in the cause of Allah. This ayah comes in this particular context to command the people to embrace Islam as a whole and adhere to all its rules. It also warns them against acting in accordance to some of these rules and ignoring others, as the Jews did. Allah says what can be translated as, “**Do you then believe in some (parts) of the Book and disbelieve in other parts?**” (TMQ 2:85).

Hence, the ayah aims to put the Islamic *Ummah* on alert, for Muslims should embrace Islam in the most perfect and appropriate way. Muslims are not allowed to accept some Islamic regulations and refuse others. This reminds us of the Muslim woman who observes her prayers but refuses to put on the veil, or the Muslims (whether men or women) who perform *qiyam* (night prayers) and yet harm their neighbours.

Completing the methodology: The family rules

Over two *hizbs* of the second *juzu*, the rules tackling family life, marriage, divorce, suckling, and engagement are detailed. Some may ask why such rules are delayed until the end of the Surah. Why not in the beginning? The Surah appropriately starts with orders issued to the believers to obey Allah, be pious, observe fasting, and perform *hajj*. All these means are necessary prerequisites for preparing a good Muslim for the difficult task of building a family. Millions of religious regulations and provisions might fail to reform and ameliorate the behavior of a person who goes astray from the straight path. Hence, many ayahs of these two quarters (*hizbs*) end as reminders of your fear of Allah and that He is All-Aware and All-Watchful over everything.

This is indicated in the following ayahs, in which Allah says what can be translated as:

- “...**And be pious to Allah, and know that Allah is Ever-Knowing of everything.**” (TMQ 2:231).
- “...**and be pious to Allah and know that Allah is Ever-Beholding of whatever you do.**” (TMQ 2:233).
- “...**And Allah is Ever-Cognizant of whatever you do.**” (TMQ 2:234).
- “...**And in case you divorce them even before you have touched them, and you have already ordained for them a marriage-portion, (Literally: an ordinance) then (give her) one half of what you have ordained except (in case) the (women) remit, or he in whose hand is the knot of marriage remits; (and) that you remit is nearer to piety. ...**” (TMQ 2:237).
- “**And for the divorced women (there shall be) (the necessary) enjoyment with beneficence, truly (binding) on the pious.**” (TMQ 2:241).

As piety envelops the family rules, both the ethical and practical disciplines in Islam are closely related.

Who will remain firm until the end?

The story of the war that took place between Jalut (Goliath) and Talut (Saul) is mentioned in the ayahs from 246 to 252. This story is about two groups of people from among the Israelites. The first group succeeded in leading mankind, while the other failed to fulfill the same mission for several reasons. The failed group turned away from Allah’s commands, abstained from fighting, disobeyed their Prophet, failed in the trial of drinking from the river, and took materialistic measures as their criteria to estimate victory and defeat. In short, this story illustrates a fight in which one party had two groups of people; one was afraid of engaging in the battle against the enemy, while the other dared to confront the enemy. The story aims at asserting the point that fighting is necessary for protecting Allah’s methodology. It also proves that the cowards will never be able to take charge of earth and lead mankind.

The following ayahs describe this story, Allah says what can be translated as, “**Have you not regarded the chiefs of the Seeds (Or: sons) of Israel even after Mûsa,**

(Moses) as they said to a Prophet of theirs, "Send forth for us a king, (so that) we would fight in the way of Allah." He said, "Might it be that in case fighting is prescribed for you, you would not fight?" They said, "How is it that we would not fight in the way of Allah, and we have already been driven out of our residences and sons?" Yet, when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, except a few of them; and Allah is Ever-Knowing of the unjust. And their Prophet said to them, "Surely Allah has already sent forth Talût (Saul) for you as a king." They said, "However could he have kingship over us, and we have truer (right) than he of kingship, and he has not been brought affluence of wealth?" He said, "Surely Allah has elected him above you and has increased him sizably in knowledge (Literally: an outspreading of knowledge) and figure." And Allah brings (forth) His kingship to whomever He decides, and Allah is Ever- Embracing, Ever-Knowing. And their Prophet said to them, "Surely the sign of his kingship is that the coffer (In earlier Scriptures it is said to be the "Ark", and Serenity is said to be "Shechina") will come up to you; in it (are) a Serenity from your Lord, and a remnant of what the house of Mûsa (Moses) and the house of Harûn (Aaron) left (behind), the Angels carrying it. Surely in that is indeed a sign for you, in case you are believers". Then as soon as Talût (Saul) departed with the hosts, he said, "Surely Allah will be trying you with a river; so whoever drinks of it, then he is not of me, and whoever does not taste (Literally: does not feed on it) it, then surely he is of me, excepting him who scoops up (a scoop) with his hand." Then they drank of it except a few of them. Then, as soon as he passed over it, he and the ones who believed with him, they said, "We have no capability today against Jalût (Goliath) and his hosts." (But) the ones who expect that they will be meeting Allah said, "How often a little community has overcome a much (larger) community by the permission of Allah; and Allah is with the patient." And as soon as they went forth against Jalût (Goliath) and his hosts, they said, "Our Lord, pour out upon us patience, and make firm our feet, and give us victory over the disbelieving people!" So they routed them, by the permission of Allah, and Dawûd (David) killed Jalût; (Goliath) and Allah brought him the kingship, and (the) Wisdom, and He taught him (part of) whatever (knowledge) He decides. And had it not been for the repelling by Allah of mankind, some by means of others, (Literally: by means of some) the earth would indeed have corrupted; but Allah is The Owner of Grace over the worlds. Those are the signs of Allah. We recite them to you with the Truth, and surely you are indeed (one) of the Emissaries. (TMQ 2:246 - 252).

Ayat Al-Kursi: Allah's Omnipotence and Greatness

Now, we come to the greatest ayah in the Holy Qur'an, *ayat* Al-Kursi. This ayah describes Allah (SWT) in the most appropriate and wondrous way ever known to humanity since the dawn of history.

Allah says what can be translated as, "Allah. There is no god except He, The Ever-Living, The Superb Upright Sustainer. Slumber does not overtake Him, nor sleep; to Him (belongs) whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. Who is there that intercedes for His Providence except by His Permission? He knows whatever is in front of them (Literally: between their hands) and whatever is behind them, and they do not encompass anything of His Knowledge except whatever He has decided. His Chair embraces the heavens and the earth;

the preserving of them (Literally: them both) does not tire Him; and He is The Ever-Exalted, The Ever-Magnificent..” (TMQ 2:255).

The ayah that follows *ayat Al-Kursi* has certain significance. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“There is no compulsion in the religion; right-mindedness has already been evidently (distinct) from misguidance” (TMQ 2:256)** *Ayat Al-Kursi* acts as evidence to mankind, that Allah exists (and He is the Self-Existent) and that we all have to believe in Him. Thus, whoever prefers disbelief must not be compelled to embrace Islam.

As Muslims are acting in accordance to that methodology, they need an assurance that this methodology is indeed framed by Allah, Who protects those who apply His rules. This is why *ayat Al-Kursi* comes in the middle of the discussion about this methodology. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Allah is The Ever-Patronizing Patron of (the ones) who have believed. He brings them out of the (depths of) darkness into the light.” (TMQ 2:257).**

Evidences and proofs

Ayat Al-Kursi is followed by three stories demonstrating daily examples in life. The first story is about Prophet Ibrahim (AS) with An-Namrud (Nimrod). Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“As’ Ibrahîm said, “My Lord is He Who gives life and makes to die,” he said, “I give life and make to die.” Ibrahîm said, “Yet surely Allah comes up with (i.e., brings) the sun from the East, so come up with (i.e., bring) it from the West.” Then the one who disbelieved was confounded; and Allah does not guide the unjust people. (TMQ 2:258).**

The second story is about Uzair (Ezra). Allah says what can be translated as, **“Or (such as) he who passed by a town, and it was completely devastated upon its trellises. He said, “However will Allah give life to this (town) after its death?” So Allah made him die a hundred seasons; (i.e., years) thereafter He made him rise again. (TMQ 2:259).**

The third story describes how the dead are brought back to life. Allah commanded Ibrahim to take four birds, slaughter them then cut them into pieces and put a portion of them on every hill. Ibrahim would then call them and they would come to him in haste restored to their original state. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And as Ibrahîm (Abraham) said, “Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.” He (Allah) said, “And have you not believed?” He (Ibrahîm) said, “Yes indeed, but that my heart be composed.” Said He, “So take four of the birds, then wring them to you (and divide them); thereafter set a portion of them on every mountain; thereafter call them; they will come up to you with hasty diligence (and) know that Allah is Ever-Mighty, Ever-Wise.” (TMQ 2:260).**

These stories assert Allah’s Omnipotent power to give life and cause death. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Allah. There is no god except He, The Ever-Living, The Superb Upright Sustainer.” (TMQ 2:255)** Hence, *Ayat Al-Kursi* follows the ayahs tackling the methodology to strengthen Muslims’ faith and increase their trust in Allah. Consequently, it will help them bear the heavy-laden tasks of this

methodology.

The financial economic system

The ayahs show the last aspects of the divine methodology: the economic system in Islam. The Islamic economy is based on money investment, not on usury. The following ayahs warn against usury:

- **“Allah expunges riba (Interest or other unlawful) and He augments donations, and Allah does not love every most disbelieving most-vicious person. (TMQ 2:276)**
- **“O you who have believed, be pious to Allah and leave behind what remains of rib'a, in case you are believers. So, in case you do not perform (that), then take notice of a war from Allah and His Messenger (against you). And in case you repent, then you will have the capitals of your riches; you will not do injustice, and you will not be done injustice.” (TMQ 2:278 - 279).**

Now, we come to the longest ayah in the Holy Qur'an, the ayah tackling debts. To assert authentication in dealings, this ayah deals with issues of debts and how contracting a debt should be written down. Allah says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, when you contract (i.e. when you have or contract a debt) a debt one upon another for a stated term, then write it down ...” (TMQ 2:282).** This ayah comes after the story of Ibrahim when he asked Allah (SWT) to bring before him evidence that would consolidate his belief. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Lord! Show me how You give life to the dead.” (TMQ 2:260).** Hence, the two ayahs suggest that certitude is necessary for Muslims in all aspects of their lives. Noticeably, the ayahs dealing with usury are mentioned among the ayahs dealing with spending money and investing to show that Islam offers a better alternative for any forbidden act.

Surat Al-Baqara: The sign of Imamate

Having tackled Surat Al-Baqara and displayed its inclusiveness of all rules of Islam, we realize why Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) used to make anyone who learnt this Surah by heart in charge of other people. Such a person would be cognizant of all aspects of the methodology Allah has framed for Muslims. This comprehensive methodology is represented by the Straight Path in Surat Al-Fatiha and *Al-Aqidah* (creed) in *ayat* Al-Kursi. Moreover, it involves worship and dealings. Worship is indicated by the rules of fasting and *hajj*. Dealings are indicated by the rules dealing with spending money, writing down debts, and prohibiting usury. There are also the rules concerning *jihad*. These aspects are comprised in three pivots: obedience, moderate distinction (i.e. uniqueness), and piety.

Conclusion: We hear and we obey

The Surah is concluded by two ayahs. They are regarded as a treasure endowed to the *alamin* from under the Divine Throne. Allah praises the believers in these ayahs. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“....And they have said, “We have**

heard, and we have obeyed. Grant (us) Your All-Supreme forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the Destiny.” (TMQ 2:285) The Israelites said that they heard Allah’s commandments and disobeyed as indicated in, “...**They said, “We have heard, and we disobey.” (TMQ 2:93)** The Islamic *Ummah*, in contrast, raises the motto of “**We hear, and we obey**” to remain in charge of mankind.

It is followed by a supplication. Allah says what can be translated as, “**Allah does not charge a self (anything) except its capacity; it has whatever it has earned, and against it is whatever it has acquired. Our Lord, do not take us to task in case we forget or we make mistakes. Our Lord, and do not burden us with an obligation as You burdened (the ones) who were before us. Our Lord, and do not over-burden us with whatever is beyond our capability. And be clement towards us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us. You are our Supreme Patronizer, so give us victory over the disbelieving people.**”(TMQ 2:286).

As man goes on in life trying to act in accordance with this methodology, he might commit sins and be unable to remain firm. Going back to the Straight Path is guidance from Allah. Therefore, the Muslims need Allah’s help to pardon them and grant them forgiveness and mercy. If a Muslim fights those opposed to Allah’s *Shariah* and their supporters, he has to ask Allah to grant him victory over the disbelievers. Allah indeed has answered such supplication by saying “**I did**”.

Surat Al-Imran (The Family of Imran)

Surat Al-Imran was revealed in Madinah after Surat Al-Anfal. It has 200 ayahs (verses) and falls in order after Surat Al-Baqara in the Qur'an.

Its relation to Surat Al-Baqara

Surat Al-Imran is the sister of Surat Al-Baqara, attributed to the Ahadith (sayings) of the Prophet (SAWS). They are called “the two bright ones” in his Hadith, “Recite the two bright ones, Al-Baqara and Surat Al-Imran.”¹⁵.

There is great similarity between them as they both start with **Alif-Lâm-Mîm** [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings). Moreover, they both end with a *dua'a* (supplication). It is indeed from the graces of the Qur'an that the first three Surahs end with a *dua'a*:

- Al-Fatiha → “**Guide us in the straight Path**”, (TMQ, 1:5).
- Al-Baqara → “**...Our Lord, do not take us to task in case we forget or we make mistakes ...**”, (TMQ, 2:286).
- Al-Imran → “**... Our Lord, so forgive us our guilty (deeds), and expiate for us our odious deeds ...**”, (TMQ, 3:193).

This is a reference to the importance of *dua'a* for a Muslim, in which he would always seek refuge.

Inspirations from the letters (Alif-Lâm-Mîm)

Perhaps one of the most important similarities between Surat Al-Imran and Surat Al-Baqara is that both commence with the separate letters **Alif-Lâm-Mîm**; a reference to the fact that each ayah in both Surahs contains those three letters. There are many ayahs in the Qur'an that begin with separate letters (such as **Alif-Lâm-Mîm** or **Hâ-Mîm**), as if they are a key to accessing the meanings of the Surahs. Another noteworthy remark is that all Surahs that start with the same letters are connected in their objectives and meanings.

Some may wonder about the intent behind starting some Surahs with these letters. In fact many scholars have several different interpretations regarding this matter. To simplify the subject matter and bring it closer to the mind, we can say that these letters come at the beginning of the Surahs to challenge the disbelievers. It is as if Allah (SWT) says to the disbelievers: Are those letters not of your language? Are they not your primary substance to form a speech? Are you capable of using them to come up with something similar to the Qur'an?

Human beings may be able to build computers and cars from matter and atoms, however they cannot breathe life into them. Similarly, these letters could be used in prose and poems, but could people ever come up with a lively Qur'an? Allah says what can be translated as, “**And thus We have revealed to you a Spirit of Our Command ...**” (TMQ, 42:52).

¹⁵ Authentic, Muslim.

Therefore, most of the Surahs that start with the separate letters are followed by a glorification of the Qur'an, the revelation, or the *dhikr* (the mentioning of Allah).

Perseverance of principle

The objective that this Surah revolves around is tightly related to that of Surat Al-Baqara. The latter informs the Muslims that they are responsible for earth and demonstrates the methodology of succession. Surat Al-Imran emphasizes on the importance of perseverance on the methodology. Many people, after reading and starting to assume their responsibility, go off track and fall off the wagon; they go astray from the straight path, like he who devotes himself to worship in Ramadan then closes the doors of obedience and worship once it is over.

The Surah speaks to those who have been pious for over 20 years and reinforces them in their faith, as well as the youth who just started to become devout. It urges both to be steadfast in their commitment to their religion in order to realize the methodology of succession of Muslims on earth.

How to preserve on the truth?

To answer this question we have to know how people get off track in the first place. People get misled either by concepts that muddle their beliefs or distractions amid their busy life, which weakens their determination. Consequently, deterioration is caused by concepts (internal) or actions (external). Therefore, the Surah incites the believers to persevere in both fields and warns them against what might lead them astray.

Therefore, the Surah is divided into two parts:

- 1) **The first part: The ayahs (1-120)**
Staying steadfast with the concept of the straight path in facing external influences, through the talk about the People of the Scripture and the dialogue with them, which is the first dialogue between the creeds in the Qur'an.
- 2) **The second part: the ayahs (120-200)**
Talks about staying steadfast in actions facing internal influences with reference to the battle of *Uhud*, which is an example of the mistakes that happen and the way to prevent them.

The Surah starts with the exterior; it prepares the surrounding environment for the Muslim, and then starts dealing with the interior. The Surah discusses these two core ideas through the commentary on two incidents that happened during the time of the Prophet (SAWS):

- The first incident: The meeting that took place between the Prophet (SAWS) and the delegation of the Christians of *Najran* (name of tribe). They were guests in the *Nabawi* mosque where the Prophet (SAWS) conversed with them for three days.

- The second incident: The battle of *Uhud* and the Muslims' defeat by the polytheists. Eighty ayahs commented on that incident since most of the believers were not steadfast in that battle and did not follow the orders of their Prophet (SAWS), especially the shooters.

In spite of the fact that these verses comment on incidents that took place over 1400 years ago, the Surah still addresses Muslims throughout the ages teaching them how to remain steadfast, both externally and internally, in their thoughts and actions.

From the beginning until the end

The Surah starts with what helps the Muslims remain steadfast, and ends with what reinforces them on the right track.

Read at the beginning of the Surah, Allah says what can be translated as, **“Alif, Lam, Mîm. (These are three letters of the Arabic alphabet and only Allah Knows their meaning here), Allah, there is no god except He, The Ever-Living, The Superb Upright Sustainer, He has been sending down upon you the Book with the Truth, sincerely (verifying) what was before it (Literally: between its two hands)...”**, (TMQ, 3:1-3).

For your divinity is one god, Allah (SWT), and only He will help you remain steadfast. The Qur'an is the truth and your pathway for perseverance on this religion.

In the last ayah, Allah says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, be patient, and vie in patience, and be garrisoned (i.e., Keep a standing army ready to defend you) and be pious to Allah, that possibly you would prosper”**, (TMQ, 3:200).

We are asked to be patient and to help others be patient. We are asked to remain on guard and be prepared to face and fend off any danger coming from the outside, be it an army, a misleading thought, or mere suspicion.

The mention of the Qur'an as a factor for perseverance is repeated numerous times in the Surah.

For example, ayah (7) comes to clarify the following: Allah says what can be translated as, **“He is The (One) Who has sent down upon you the Book, whereof are clear signs (i.e. ayah = verse) that are the Essence (Literally: the Mother) of the Book, and others co similar (Or: ambiguous). So, as for (the ones) in whose hearts is swerving, they ever follow whatever (parts) of it are co similar, (inequitably) seeking temptation (to sedition), and (inequitably) seeking its interpretation; and in no way does anyone know its interpretation except Allah. And the ones firmly established in knowledge say, “We have believed in it; all is from the Providence of our Lord.” And in no way does anyone constantly remember except the ones endowed with intellects”**, (TMQ, 3:7).

Thus, an accurate understanding of the Qur'an is one of the most important fundamentals for mental perseverance. Many people may stray off the right track and fall into delusory. They follow what is seemingly similar in the Qur'an without

having any awareness of the true context. The message delivered in the Surah is to warn us against such delusions.

Thus, people have to be firmly equipped with knowledge. They also have to make the *dua* 'a of perseverance, Allah says what can be translated as, **“Our Lord, make not our hearts to swerve after that You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from very close to You. You, Ever You, are The One Who is The Superb Bestower”**, (TMQ, 3:8).

Ayahs that call for perseverance

There are numerous ayahs that call for perseverance in this Surah. At one point, this is done by reminding us of those believers who persevered when confronting the enemy.

In the discourse about the battle of *Badr*, Allah says what can be translated as, **“There has already been a sign for you in the two communities that encountered, (The reference is to the Battle of Badr) one community fighting in the way of Allah and another disbelieving. They saw them twice the like of them, as the eye sees, (Literally: as the sight of the eye) and Allah aids with His victory whomever He decides. Surely in that is indeed a lesson for the ones endowed with beholding. (Literally: eyesight)”**, (TMQ, 3:13).

At another point, the Surah reminds us of when *Al-Hawâriyyûn* (the disciples) were determined to support the religion of Allah (SWT) and believed in it. Allah says what can be translated as, **“So, as soon as Isa (Jesus) perceived disbelief among them, he said, “Who are my ready vindicators to Allah?” (i.e., in the cause of Allah) The Disciples said,” We are the ready vindicators to Allah; we have believed in Allah, and bear (you) witness that we are Muslims”**, (TMQ, 3:52).

Speaking of the past nations, Allah (SWT) reminds us of the era of the Prophets and their perseverance to serve Islam, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And as Allah took compact with the Prophets (that), “Indeed, whatever I bring you of Book and Wisdom, thereafter a Messenger comes to you sincerely verifying what is with you, indeed you shall definitely believe in him, and indeed you shall definitely vindicate him ...”**, (TMQ, 3:81).

Moreover, in Surat Al-Imran you find ayahs that prompt piety and steadfastness on the right path until death. Allah says what can be translated as, **“O you have believed, be pious to Allah with His true piety, and definitely do not die except as Muslims”**, (TMQ, 3:102).

The message is: Beware of dying without being a Muslim.

The probable question here is how can one guarantee that when one does not know when he will die? The answer is to be pious to Allah (SWT), observe your duty, and be obedient to His commands. Subsequently, you will be guaranteed a fine ending Insha' Allah (God willing).

In the ayah that directly follows, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And adhere firmly to the Rope (i.e. the Covenant of Allah=the Qur’an) of Allah, altogether, and do not be disunited ...” (TMQ, 3:103).** Consequently, if you want to persevere on the right path, adhere to the Qur’an, surround yourself with the pious and righteous people, and beware of conflicts, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And do not be as the ones who were disunited and differed (among themselves), even after the supreme evidences came to them ...” (TMQ, 3:105).**

The ayahs continue to motivate perseverance in different situations; speculate with me what Allah (SWT) says about perseverance when meeting the enemy, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And similarly many a Prophet there has been along with whom myriads manifold have fought; so in no way did they feel feeble for whatever afflicted them in the way of Allah, and in no way did they weaken, and in no way did they yield themselves; and Allah loves the patient” (TMQ, 3:146).**

Furthermore, ponder what Allah says that can be translated as, **“Surely the multitude have already gathered against you, so be apprehensive of them.” Yet, it increased them in belief, and they said, “Allah is The Reckoner enough for us, and how excellent is The Ever-Trusted Trustee! So they turned over (Or: turned around) with favor from Allah and (His) Grace; no odious (disadvantage) did touch them; and they followed closely the all-blessed Satisfaction of Allah; and Allah is The Owner of magnificent Grace”, (TMQ, 3:173-174).**

Numerous ayahs inspire Muslims to be persistent, unwavering, and not to wane under any circumstance. Since perseverance is a momentous and fateful issue, the Surah warns us against elements that shake the faith of the believer and weaken his persistence.

Obstacles of perseverance: (Lusts and Sins)

In the beginning of the Surah, Allah says what can be translated as, **“Adorned for mankind is the love of lusts, for women and seeds, (Or: sons) and heaped-up, heaps (Literally: “arched” hoarded cantars) of gold and silver, and horses of mark, and cattle and tillage. That is the enjoyment (Literally: the belongings) of the present life; (Literally: the lowly life, i.e., the life of this world) and Allah has in His Providence the fairest resorting”, (TMQ, 3:14).**

Therefore, getting attached to life’s transient wares and its fleeting pleasures are dangerous factors that run against the nation’s perseverance. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Surely the ones of you who turned away the day the two gatherings encountered, surely it was only that Ash-shaytan (The ever-vicious, i.e., the Devil) made them slide back for some of that which they had earned ...” (TMQ, 3:155).**

This ayah explains that some of the companions, who turned back in the battle of *Uhud*, had sins in the past by which *Iblis* (Satan) tripped them and shook their perseverance.

Another ayah holds the same concept, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And is it that as soon as an affliction befell (Literally: afflicted) you, (and) you had already**

afflicted (i.e. afflicted) twice over the like of it, did you say, “However is this?” Say, “It is from your own selves ...” (TMQ, 3:165).

The solution: (Repentance)

Thus the ayahs that encourage hastening to repentance are repeated in the Surah. Allah says what can be translated as, **“Who say, “Our Lord, surely we (ourselves) have believed, so forgive us our guilty (deeds), and protect us from the torment of the Fire”, (TMQ, 3:16) and “Except for the ones who repent even after that and act righteously; (only) then, surely Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful”, (TMQ, 3:89).**

Then comes this ayah, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And vie swiftly with one another for forgiveness from your Lord and for a Garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the pious” (TMQ, 3:133).**

Let this ayah be a motto for the youth that commit sins, to hasten for repentance and ask for forgiveness, so that we could maintain our steadfastness and guarantee Paradise that is as wide as the heavens and earth.

It has become very clear, so far, that perseverance on the right track is an essential and crucial issue, and that the obstacles to maintaining it are numerous. This leads to the following important question: What are the factors that help us sustain perseverance on the right track?

The Surah focused on five elements that serve that purpose:

1- Turning to Allah (SWT)

Perseverance is a blessing from Allah (SWT) and He is the Omnipotent Who enables us to persist on his method. That is why the Surah encourages making *dua’a* to Allah (SWT) from the start.

Allah says what can be translated as, **“Our Lord, make not our hearts to swerve after that You have guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from very close to You. You, Ever You, are The One Who is The Superb Bestower” (TMQ, 3:8);**

“Our Lord, surely You will be gathering mankind for a Day, (and) there is no suspicion about it; surely Allah will not fail the promised (Appointment)”, (TMQ, 3:9);

“Say, “O Allah, (The Arabic word has the supplication suffix umma) Possessor of the Kingship, You bring the kingship to whomever You decide, and You draw (Literally: pluck out) the kingship from whomever You decide, and You render mighty whomever You decide, and You humiliate whomever You decide. In Your Hand is (the) Charity; (i.e., the choicest) surely You are Ever-Determiner over everything”, (TMQ, 3:26).

The Qur'an continues by giving glowing examples to depict how people took refuge in Allah (SWT).

We see the wife of *'Imran* making *dua'a* to Allah (SWT); Allah says what can be translated as, **"...Lord! Surely I have vowed to you what is in my belly in dedication ..."** (TMQ, 3:35).

Likewise, *Zakariya* (AS) "Zachariah" made the *dua'a*, Allah says what can be translated as, **"Thereover Zakariyya (Zechariah) invoked his Lord (and) said, "Lord! Bestow upon me from very close to You a goodly offspring ..."** (TMQ, 3:38).

The ayahs go on in the Surah to encourage and entice making *dua'a*.

Of the *dua'a* of the past nations in steadfastness when meeting the enemies, Allah says what can be translated as, **"And in no way was their saying anything except that they said, "Our Lord, forgive us our guilty (deeds), and our extravagance in our Command, (Your Command to us) and make firm our feet, and vindicate us over the disbelieving people",** (TMQ, 3:147).

Also, this is the prayer of *'uli al-albab* (Men of Understanding), Allah says what can be translated as, **"Our Lord, surely we (ourselves) have heard a caller calling out to (us) to belief, "Believe in your Lord." So we have believed. Our Lord, so forgive us our guilty (deeds), and expiate for us our odious deeds, and take us to You with the ever benign (ones), Our Lord, and bring us what You have promised us by Your Messengers, and do not disgrace us on the Day of the Resurrection; surely You do not fail the Promised Appointment, Then their Lord responded to them, "I do not waste the deed of any doer among you, any male or female. The one of you is as the other (Literally: some of you from some others). So, the ones who emigrated, and were driven out of their residences, and were hurt in My way, and fought, and were killed, indeed I will definitely expiate them of their odious deeds, and indeed I will definitely cause them to enter Gardens from beneath which Rivers run." A requital from (the Providence of) Allah; and Allah has in His Providence the fairest requital",** (TMQ, 3:193-195).

2- Worshipping Allah (SWT)

About *Maryam* (AS) "Mary", Allah says what can be translated as, **"Whenever Zakariyya entered the Chamber to her... ",** (TMQ, 3:37).

Maryam (AS) lived in a sanctuary and devoted herself to prayers, and that was what *Zakariya* (AS) learned from her.

Therefore, when the angels called upon him to presage about *Yahya* (AS) (John) he was praying himself. Allah says what can be translated as, **"So, the Angels called out to him (as) he was upright praying in the Chamber ..."** (TMQ, 3:39).

The atmosphere of worship is evident throughout the Surah until the end, where Allah (SWT) describes the characteristics of the Men of Understanding in what can be translated as, **“The ones who remember Allah, upright and seated and on their sides...”**, (TMQ, 3:191).

3- **Da’wa (missionary activity) to Allah (SWT)**

There is an area in the human brain called the contentment area, and there is a deeper and stronger area, that is of the identity and the sense of belonging.

In order to transfer a thought from the first to the latter we have to converse about it. A person could be certain about the concept of Islam; however, Islam has not become his identity. Therefore, in order to confirm the concept and actually belong to it, one has to talk about it excessively. That way, one could strengthen the idea and persist on it.

Exercising *da’wa* (missionary activity) is fundamental to perseverance, since the missionary usually is the first to hold on to the cause that he talks to people about.

Consequently, the Surah contains many ayahs that encourage the believer to exercise *da’wa*, Allah says what can be translated as, **“And let (i.e. there shall indeed be. The Arabic is emphatic) there be a nation of you (who) call to charity, and command beneficence, and forbid malfeasance; and those are they (who are) the prosperous”**, (TMQ, 3:104);

“You have been the most charitable nation brought out to mankind: you command beneficence, and forbid malfeasance, and believe in Allah. And if the population of the Book (Or: Family of the Book; i.e., the Jews and Christians) believed, it would indeed have been charitable for them; (some) of them are the believers, and the majority of them are the immoral”, (TMQ, 3:110).

4- **Having a clear goal:**

Another critical factor of perseverance is having clear goals in one’s life. Allah says what can be translated as, **“The ones who remember Allah, upright ... “Our Lord, in no way have You created this untruthfully. All Extolment be to You! So protect us from the torment of the Fire”**, (TMQ, 3:191).

Therefore, we have to understand that the universe has not immersed arbitrarily, but rather for a specific goal. The goal is to worship Allah (SWT), to know Him, and to be responsible for the earth (as explained in Surat Al-Baqara).

5- **Brotherhood:**

Allah says what can be translated as, **“And adhere firmly to the Rope (i.e. the Covenant of Allah=the Qur’an) of Allah, altogether, and do not be disunited ...” (TMQ, 3:103).**

Brotherhood for the sake of Allah (SWT) ensures righteous companionship for the believer, which is one of the most important blessings of Allah (SWT) on human beings. Allah says what can be translated as, **“...then He brought your hearts together, (Literally: joined “between”) so you have become brethren by His favor ...” (TMQ, 3:103).**

Therefore, the ayah warns Muslims against losing the gift of brotherhood and becoming divided; Allah says what can be translated as, **“And do not be as the ones who were disunited and differed (among themselves), even after the supreme evidences came to them ...” (TMQ, 3:105).**

Intellectual Steadfastness

We have previously mentioned that the Surah is divided into two parts. The first part of the Surah (from ayah 1-120) deals with the *‘aqeeda* (Faith) of the People of the Scriptures¹⁶ (i.e. Jews and Christians); a polite, refined, and scientific way of discussing their beliefs. It does not aim at denouncing their ideas, but rather aims at strengthening the faith and concepts of Muslim believers and at purifying any misconceptions.

Coming back to this discussion, we find that the events took place in the Prophet’s (SAWS) mosque with a group of *Nagran* Christians (a tribe by that name that lived then), who stayed in *Madinah* for three days to engage in a discourse, the first of its kind between Muslims and Christians, with Allah’s Prophet (SAWS).

It is important to point out here that the debate, or discussion, with a second party of a different belief does not require any way of compromising any part of the faith, values, or beliefs. This could be clearly observed through the discourse present in the Surah and in the Qur’an’s sensible and elegant division of the stages of this discourse.

Fortifying Muslims’ faith before the discussion

The Surah starts by giving a boost of faith to Muslims. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **“Allah bears witness that there is no god except He, and the Angels and the ones endowed with knowledge, upright with equity (bear witness). There is no god except He, The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Wise” (TMQ, 3:18),**
- **“Surely the religion in the Providence of Allah is Islam ...” (TMQ, 3:19),**
- **“Do they then (inequitably) seek other than the religion of Allah, and to Him has surrendered whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly and unwillingly, ...” (TMQ, 3:83),**
- **“And whoever inequitably seeks for himself as a religion other than Islam, then it will never be accepted from him, ...” (TMQ, 3:85), and**

¹⁶ Those who believe in the “Torah” or the “Gospel”

- “So, in case they argue with you, then say, “I have surrendered my face to Allah and whoever closely follows me (has surrendered his face to Allah) ...” (TMQ, 3:20).

Identifying common points

It is important to find a common ground before starting any debate; this is clearly demonstrated in the Qur’an. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, “Say, “**O population of the Book, (Or: Family of the Book, i.e., the Jews and Christians) come to a level word between us and you, that we worship none except Allah, and that we do not associate anything with Him, and that some of us do not take to themselves others (Literally: some “others”) as lords, apart from Allah.**” So, in case they turn away, then say, “Bear witness that we are Muslims.” (Literally: we have surrendered “to Allah”)” (TMQ, 3:64).

The Surah denotes the belief in all of Allah's Messengers (including Prophets of the Scriptures) as another common belief that is shared with them. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, “Say, “**We have believed in Allah, and in whatever has been sent down on us, and whatever was sent down on Ibrahîm and Shuaayb and Ishaq and Yaaqûb, (Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob, respectively) and the Grandsons, (i.e. the Tribes) and in whatever was brought to Mûsa and Isa (Moses and Jesus, respectively) and the Prophets from their Lord; we make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we are Muslims” (i.e. we surrender)**” (TMQ, 3:84).

Testimonial evidence and proofs are the Qur’an’s method of confirmation

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- “**Surely the likeness of Isa (Jesus) in the Providence of Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He (Allah) created him of dust, thereafter He said to him, “Be!” so he is (i.e., he was)”** (TMQ, 3:59),
- “**O population of the Book, why do you argue about Ibrahîm? And in no way were the Tawrah (The Book revealed to Mûsa “Moses”) and the Injil (The Book revealed to Isa “Jesus”) sent down except even after him. Do you not then consider?”** (TMQ, 3:65),
- “**Now you are the ones who have argued about what you have (some) knowledge (of); so, why do you argue about what you have no knowledge (of); ...**” (TMQ, 3:66), and
- “**In no way was Ibrahîm a Jew, neither a Christian; (i.e. a follower of Isa “Jesus”, Nasraniyyan) but he was an unswervingly (upright) (i.e. veering away from idolatry) Muslim; and in no way was he one of the associators (Those who associate others with Allah)”** (TMQ, 3:67).

Numerous ayahs that are rationally and logically convincing

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- “**In no way should a mortal (to whom) Allah brings the Book and the Judgment and the Prophethood thereafter say to mankind, “Be bondmen to me, apart from Allah.” But, (i.e. But he should say) “Be lordly (i.e. teachers of Divine Law and worshipers of Allah) in that you used to teach**

- the Book and in that you used to study (it)” (TMQ, 3:79),
- “And he (i.e. any religious Messenger) should not command you to take the Angels and Prophets to yourselves as lords. Would he command you to (adopt) disbelief after you have (become) Muslims? (i.e. have surrendered “to”)” (TMQ, 3:80).

Warning the People of the Scriptures about denial or contradictions

After the ayahs have provided the logical and rational evidence, they turn to another style of discourse, one of warning and fear-provoking. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- “O population of the Book, (Or: Family of the Book, i.e., the Jews and Christians) why do you disbelieve in the signs of Allah, and you witness (them)?” (TMQ, 3:70),
- “O population of the Book, (Or: Family of the Book, i.e., the Jews and Christians) why do you confound the Truth with the untruth and keep back the Truth, and you know (that)?” (TMQ, 3:71), and
- “So, how (will it be) when We have gathered them for a Day. There is no suspicion about it, and every self will be paid in full whatever it has earned, and they will not be done an injustice” (TMQ, 3:25).

The challenge intensifies

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, “So, whoever argues with you concerning him, (Or: it, i.e., the truth) even after (such) knowledge as has come to you, then say, “Come! We should call our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; thereafter we should imprecate, (and) so lay (Literally: make) the curse of Allah on the liars” (TMQ, 3:61).

This ayah is called the verse of *Al- Mobahala* (invocation); i.e. the two disputing groups would get together and pray or plead to Allah (SWT) that He may render the truthful group victory and curse the pseudo group; surely the *Nagran* Christians did not accept this severe challenge.

Justice and Equilibrium in the Discussion

Since Islam is such a noble religion, this discussion would only conclude in mentioning the good in some of the People of the Scripture. Not only so, but it further persuades Muslims to employ fairness in their view of them.

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- “They are not (all) equal. Of the population of the Book (Or: Family of the Book; i.e., the Jews and Christians) is an upright nation (who) recite the signs (i.e., verses) of Allah at various times of the night as they prostrate themselves (to Him)” (TMQ, 3:113), and
- “And of the population of the Book is he who, in case you put in his custody a hundred- weight, (Literally: a Kantar) will pay it back to you; and of them is he who, if you put in his custody one dinar, will not pay it back to you, except as long as you are upright over him. (Or: over it) ...”

(TMQ, 3:75).

The Qur'an teaches us that being a non-Muslim does not mean that all of their actions are wrong and all of their dealings are forged.

All Muslims should learn equilibrium from Surat *Al-Imran* in dealing with non-Muslims. Moreover, the Qur'an praises the Prophets and Messengers of the People of the Scripture as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Surely Allah has elected Adam and Nûh (Adam and Noah, respectively) and the house of Ibrahîm (Abraham) and the house of Imran over the worlds"** (TMQ, 3:33).

Allah (SWT) also praises Virgin Mary by choosing her out of all women of the world; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And as the Angels said, 'O Maryam, (Mary) surely Allah has elected you ... over the women of the worlds'"** (TMQ, 3:42). What an exquisite principle of justice and equity, for this ayah has not come praising Prophet *Muhammad's* (SAWS) wife or daughter, instead it praised *Maryam* (AS) (Mary).

"No" to thoughtless imitation

Equally, the Qur'an warns us against thoughtlessly following the People of the Scriptures after showing us their creed. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **"O you who have believed, in case you obey a group of the ones who were brought the Book, they will turn you back after your belief into disbelievers"** (TMQ, 3:100),
- **"And how can you disbelieve, and the *ayat* (i.e., signs or verses) of Allah are recited to you, and His Messenger is among you? And whoever firmly adheres to Allah, then he is already guided to a straight Path"** (TMQ, 3:101),
- **"Now, you are those ones who love them, and they do not love you, and you believe in the Book, all of it. And when they meet you, they say, 'We have believed.' And when they go away in private, they bite at you their finger-tips in rage ..."** (TMQ, 3:119), and
- **"And do not be as the ones who were disunited and differed (among themselves), even after the supreme evidences came to them. And those will have a tremendous torment"** (TMQ, 3:105).

It is worth noting that the different core concepts on which the discourse is based were mentioned in consecutive, intertwined ayahs; first praising them, then providing proof against what they falsely believed in, and finally establishing a point of mutual agreement that is followed by a boost of faith (demonstrated clearly in some segments such as the ayahs 79- 83).

Let us not forget that in the midst of this discussion *Al-Imran* (the family of Imran), this noble family that Allah (SWT) named this Surah after. Beginning with *Imran's* wife, her celibacy and prayers for *Maryam* (AS), then *Zakariya* (AS) (Zachariah) and his prayers, to *Isa* (AS) (Jesus) and his mother, and then finally to *Isa's* elevation to heaven. All are profound ayahs that address their distinguished designation and graciousness over mankind.

Concluding the Surah's sections with a message of remaining steadfast

Concluding the first section with steadfastness is one of the clear signals; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...And in case you are patient and pious, their plotting will harm you nothing ..."** (TMQ, 3:120).

Similarly, the second section of the Surah was concluded in the same manner. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, be patient, and vie in patience, and be garrisoned (i.e., Keep a standing army ready to defend you) and be pious to Allah, that possibly you would prosper"** (TMQ, 3:200).

Commitment follows intellectual steadfastness

After establishing the external infrastructure against misconceptions and malicious ideas, the Qur'an moves to the reinforcement of the internal infrastructure. The Ever-Glorious Qur'an handles this subject through the commentary on the Battle of *Uhud*.

Muslims emerged from this battle feeling ashamed, broken, and disgraced because of their defiance to the orders of Prophet *Muhammad* (SAWS). They retreated and disobeyed orders, thus letting down the Prophet (SAWS). However, the Qur'an dealt with this matter in the most noble and gentle way by:

1. Reminding them of Allah's Mercy that He bestowed upon them:

The ayahs also reminded them that victory is from Allah (SWT). Then they were reminded of the Battle of *Badr*. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"(Remember) as two sections of you were about to be disheartened ..."** (i.e. they do not persist on righteousness); **"... and Allah is their Ever-Patronizing Patron; ..."** (i.e. He is who strengthened them) (TMQ, 3:122). Allah (SWT) also says what can be translated as, **"And indeed Allah readily granted you victory at Badr, and you were humble; ..."** (TMQ, 3:123).

In the same context we can see that the emphasis is on victory being always from Allah (SWT) as He (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Yes indeed, in case you are patient and pious, and (the enemy) comes up (against) you instantly, ... markedly swooping"** (TMQ, 3:125). Notice that patience and piety were repeatedly mentioned at the end of the sections of the Surah. Moreover, they were linked here to emphasize the fact that both of them are essential for the descent of the Angels from the heavens and ultimately victory.

2. The order for repentance and the return to Allah's (SWT) path:

This is another magnificent illustration of the Holy Qur'an's techniques in the area of personal development and steadfastness. Before enumerating their mistakes or reprimanding them, the Qur'an calls onto them to repent and head back to Allah's (SWT) path. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **"And vie swiftly with one another for forgiveness from your Lord and for a Garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth ..."** (TMQ, 3:133), and

- **“And who, when they (perform) an obscenity or do an injustice to themselves, remember Allah, and so they ask forgiveness for their guilty deeds- and who forgives guilty deeds except Allah (only)? - and who do not persist in the actions they performed, and they know (that)” (TMQ, 3:135).**

3. Consolation:

The ayahs lift the spirits up amongst the companions of the Prophet (SAWS). These are wonderful ayahs targeting Muslims of all times and places to strengthen them, despite all the hardships and pain they may be going through. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **“And do not feel feeble nor grieve; and you are the most exalted in case you are believers” (TMQ, 3:139), and**
- **“In case a blow touches you, (This refers to the Battle of 'Uhud) then a like blow has already touched the (disbelieving) people. And such days We interchange (i.e. the change of fortune) among mankind ...” (TMQ, 3:140).**

The ayahs tenderly caress the companions' aches by reminding them that the disbelievers had also lost their lives in the battle and equally endured pain and hardship. Then follows a splendid ayah for perseverance in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Or (even) did you reckon that you would enter the Garden and Allah does not as yet know (i.e., has not yet proved, tested) who of you have striven, and that He may know the patient?” (TMQ, 3:142).** *Jannah* (Paradise) comes at a high cost and it is therefore imperative that whoever seeks it must struggle and have patience so that he/she may merit it.

4. Gentle reproaching:

After lifting up spirits, gentle reproach begins. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **“And indeed you readily coveted death even before you met it; then you have already seen it, and you were looking (at it)” (TMQ, 3:143),**
- **“And in no way is Muhammad (anything) except a Messenger; the Messengers have already passed away before him. Then, will it be that, in case he dies or is killed, will you turn (Literally: turn (s) over on) on your heels? And whoever turns (Literally: turn (s) over on) on his heels, then he will never harm Allah in anything; and Allah will recompense the thankful” (TMQ, 3:144), and another reprimand is,**
- **“As you were mounting and did not twist about for anyone, and the Messenger was calling you in your rear ...” (TMQ, 3:153).**

Imagine this scene: Muslims fleeing the battlefield in terror, running in every direction, heedless of any instructions, while the Prophet (SAWS) is standing firmly on the battle ground calling out for them, reminding them of the hereafter and what awaits them in it, and reminding them of the determination and circumstance of those who are long gone. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And similarly many a Prophet there has been along with**

whom myriads manifold have fought; so in no way did they feel feeble for whatever afflicted them in the way of Allah, and in no way did they weaken, and in no way did they yield themselves; and Allah loves the patient” (TMQ, 3:146).

5. Back to consolation:

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Thereafter He sent down upon you, even after suffering, secure (reassurance), a drowsiness enveloping a section of you; ...”** (TMQ, 3:154).

Moreover, calling upon the Prophet (SAWS) to have his heart laden with sympathy for them; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So it was by (some) mercy from Allah that you have been lenient with them; and if you had been stern (and) harsh of heart, they would indeed have broken away from round about you. So be clement towards them, and ask forgiveness for them, and take counsel of them in the command ...”** (TMQ, 3:159).

Even after the defeat, the ayahs command the Prophet (SAWS) not to abandon consultation with the Muslims. Feel the majesty of this religion that blends reproaching, kindness, and consolation within the darkest and most difficult circumstance.

6. Reasons for the defeat and lack of determination:

After all that has been said we should try to understand the reasons that led to this defeat, so that Muslims everywhere would benefit from the mistakes that occurred:

- a. **Dispute and Disobedience:** Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And indeed Allah has already sincerely (made good) His promise (Literally: was truly sincere in His promise) to you as you overwhelmed them by His permission ...”** (TMQ, 3:152). Allah (SWT) had fulfilled his promise to you on victory **“... until you were disheartened ...”**, i.e. you lost your determination; **“... and contended together about the Command (i.e. the Command of Allah) ...”**, and quarreled amongst yourselves; **“... and disobeyed (i.e. disobeyed the Messenger) ...”**, and this is an indication of the dangers of sin and disobedience and its consequences; **“... after He had shown you what you love (The reference is to the Battle of 'Uhud when the archers deserted their posts to share in the spoils) ...”** after you have realized the signs of victory; **“...Some of you (there were) who would have the present (life) (Literally: the lowly (life), i.e., life of this world) and some of you (there were) who would have the Hereafter ...”** i.e. some of you sought worldly gains out of this battle, hence was the defeat.
- b. **Sins:** Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely the ones of you who turned away the day the two gatherings encountered, surely it was only that Ash-shaytan (The ever-vicious, i.e., the Devil) made them slide back for some of that which they had earned; ...”** (TMQ, 3:155).

- c. **Reliance and attachment to people:** When people rely on an individual who holds a certain idea more than their belief in that idea, their commitment to the idea weakens and so does their strength. In the battle of Uhud, some of the companions put down their weapons as soon as they heard the rumor that Allah's Messenger (SAWS) had been killed; thus the ayahs came to reprimand them. Allah says what can be translated as, **“And in no way is Muhammad (anything) except a Messenger; the Messengers have already passed away before him. Then, will it be that, in case he dies or is killed, will you turn (Literally: turn (s) over on) on your heels? ...”** (TMQ, 3:144).

Warning about dispute in the Surah

It is noticeable that the Surah specifically concentrated on the warning against dispute, as it is one of the major factors that lead to the lack of commitment and to the tremor of the internal infrastructure, whether the discrepancy is in ideology or practice. Therefore, the Surah warned against:

- a. **Following similar ayahs in the Qur'an for the sake of *Al-Fitnah* (incitement to rebellion), and seeking for its hidden meanings or alternative explanations:** Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“... So, as for (the ones) in whose hearts is swerving, they ever follow whatever (parts) of it are so similar, (inequitably) seeking temptation (to sedition), and (inequitably) seeking its interpretation; ...”** (TMQ, 3:7).
- b. **Disagreements and division over side issues:** Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And adhere firmly to the Rope (i.e. the Covenant of Allah=the Qur'an) of Allah, altogether, and do not be disunited; ...”** (TMQ, 3:103). The Surah *also* warns us against bickering and disagreement in Allah's ayahs. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And do not be as the ones who were disunited and differed (among themselves), even after the supreme evidences came to them ...”** (TMQ, 3:105).
- c. **Usury:** being one of the reasons for quarrels among Muslims, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not eat riba, (i.e., usury; interest and other unlawful gains) doubled (and) redoubled, ...”** (TMQ, 3:130).
- d. **Becoming opinionated:** The ayahs instructed the Prophet (SAWS) to continue consulting his followers, despite all that had happened in Uhud. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“... So be clement towards them, and ask forgiveness for them, and take counsel of them in the command. Yet when you are resolved, then put your trust in Allah; ...”** (TMQ, 3:159).

The relationship between the first and second sections:

- 1. **Not to rely or become attached to an individual instead of a belief:** The rumor that the Prophet (SAWS) had been killed confused the Muslims. Similarly, the story of the elevation of *Isa* (Jesus Christ) to heaven disturbed

the Christians and was the reason behind their current deviance from the truth. Surat Al-‘Imran guides us to cherish the idea not the person proposing it, for people would die and perish but the concept and the religion remain. Therefore, this is a clear indication for Muslims not to get attached or believe in a well known figure or missionary of Islam and to not forget the principle and the message behind it all.

2. **The importance of obedience:** Although the Surah stressed on not being committed to a single person but rather to the idea being promoted, it also stresses on the importance of obedience and compliance.
 - In the first section, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, as soon as Isa (Jesus) perceived disbelief among them, he said, “Who are my ready vindicators to Allah?” (i.e., in the cause of Allah) The Disciples said” We are the ready vindicators to Allah; ...” (TMQ, 3:52).** This ayah illustrates the aim **“... in the cause of Allah ...”** and showed the means and the path, **“...Who are my ready vindicators ...”**, thus they have to be the vindicators of Allah (SWT) and his Messenger (AS).
 - In the second section, there is an encompassing ayah that mentions examples of people showing obedience to the Prophets throughout the centuries. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And similarly many a Prophet there has been along with whom myriads manifold have fought; so in no way did they feel feeble for whatever afflicted them in the way of Allah, and in no way did they weaken, and in no way did they yield themselves; and Allah loves the patient” (TMQ, 3:146).**

In addition, this ayah where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“(As you were mounting and did not twist about for anyone, and the Messenger was calling you in your rear ...” (TMQ, 3:153).** That ayah reprimands Muslims for their shortcomings in terms of lack of compliance and obedience towards the Prophet (SAWS) in *Uhud*.

What is the reason behind the title Al-Imran?

What is the relationship between all that has been said about steadfastness and the family of ‘Imran or Al-Imran? Allah (SWT) has chosen from this Surah two symbols of steadfastness; the wife of *Imran* and *Maryam* (AS) the daughter of *Imran*, as their story was told in two full quarters of the Surah

Maryam (AS) was adherent and dedicated to Allah's obedience and submission; she safeguarded her chastity until she earned the title in the Qur'an where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And she who attended to her private parts, (i.e., Safeguarded her chastity) ...” (TMQ, 21:91).**

Among the most dangerous issues affecting individuals and societies nowadays, is the failure to commit to obedience and chastity. Thus *Maryam* (AS) was a symbol of commitment to both.

As for *Imran*'s wife, her main concern was that the child she was bearing would be

Allah's (SWT) vindicator for His religion. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...As the wife of Imran said, "Lord! Surely I have vowed to you what is in my belly in dedication; so (graciously) accept (it) from me (free from all worldly work; to serve Your Place of worship) ..."** (TMQ, 3:35).

"In dedication" means totally submitted to Allah (SWT); as she wanted him to set free the *Aqsa* Mosque from the Roman aggressors. Thus, she was a symbol of commitment and absolute dedication to her cause even after learning that her newborn child was a female. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"So, as soon as she brought her forth, (i.e. gave birth to her) she said "Lord! Surely I have brought her forth, a female." And Allah knows best what she brought forth, and the male is not as the female. "And surely I have named her Maryam (Mary) ..."** (TMQ, 3:36).

Allah (SWT) accepted from *Imran's* wife her sincere intentions saying what can be translated as, **"Then, her Lord graciously accepted her with fair acceptance, and caused her to grow a fair growth ..."** (TMQ, 3:37).

It is worth noting that Allah (SWT) mentioned these two symbols in the Surah, which addresses the People of the Scripture in a distinct manner with which the Qur'an brings people closer, as we have seen. Despite the fact that the Qur'an refutes what the People of the Scripture believe in, it praises the great figures that they believe in, such as *Imran's* wife and *Maryam* (AS).

The great value of women in the Surah

Another point worthy of mention is that in the Surah that deals with steadfastness, Allah (SWT) demonstrates the role models being two women. Even though the Surah was named after the family of 'Imran, it did not mention *Imran* himself but rather focused on his wife's devotion and pure intentions to promote Allah's (SWT) religion, which resulted in the birth of *Maryam* (AS) and after that *Isa* (AS).

Note also that Prophet *Zakariya* (AS), with all his importance and merits among the Prophets of *Bani Israel* (Israelites), has learned from *Maryam* (AS). Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...Whenever Zakariyya entered the Chamber to her, he found (a) provision in her presence. He said, "O Maryam, however does this (come) to you?" She said, "It is from the Providence of Allah; ..."** (TMQ, 3:37), and **"Thereover Zakariyya (Zechariah) invoked his Lord ..."** (TMQ, 3:38).

Hence, the symbol of commitment in this Surah is women; and the Surah that follows Al-Imran is Surat An-Nisaa (Women). This is the clearest indication of the honor Islam has given to women and how high it has placed their rank.

The message, then, to all youth, men and women, is to please stay steadfast on righteousness, both in your ideology as well as in practice, and learn valuable lessons from the two greatest ladies that were mentioned in this Surah: *Imran's* wife and *Maryam* (AS) daughter of Imran.

Surat An-Nisa (The Women)

Surat An-Nisa is a Madinan Surah. It was revealed after Surat Al-Mumtahina and consists of 176 ayahs to be the fourth Surah in the sequence of the Qur'an, exactly after Surat Al-Imran (the family of 'Imran). Surat An-Nisa is the Surah that calls for justice and mercy, especially with vulnerable and weak people. After Surat Al-Baqara defines the responsibility of Muslims on earth and explains the methodology that believers should follow in their lives as Allah's successors on earth comes Surat Al-Imran urging Muslims not to drift from the right path and to fulfill the obligations they are held responsible for. After these two Surahs comes Surat An-Nisa to teach us that the one who is entrusted with earth should be endowed with justice and mercy in his relationship with the weak and those he is responsible for. It is as if the first attribute that should characterize those who carry this responsibility is justice. Accordingly, Surat An-Nisa deals with the rights of the weak groups in society such as: orphans, slaves, servants, heirs, and more importantly, women. The Surah also deals with non-Muslim minorities who live under the protection of Islam and speaks of their rights. In addition, Surat An-Nisa addresses the weak themselves showing them how to behave in different situations. The Surah also refers to wayfarers and parents and how they should be treated. Therefore, Surat An-Nisa the Surah of mercy and justice. The reference to "the weak, justice and mercy" in each ayah comes as a Qur'anic marvel in that it induces no boredom on the part of the reader

The reason behind the title: always begin at home

The reason behind entitling the Surah as "An-Nisa" (The Women) can be summarized in the following: if one manages to be just with his wife in his home, he will eventually know how to be just with other weak groups in the society. That is why it is the Surah of the weak. Naturally, Allah (SWT) entitles the Surah with the name of one of the disenfranchised or weak groups in society, as if to say: before I entrust you with earth, show me how just you are at home. Hence, if we are just and merciful at home, we will unquestionably exercise justice in society. Domestic justice, therefore, is a sample to which Muslims' commitment to justice in their mission on earth is measured. No one can hear this and still claim that Islam oppresses women. These allegations will no longer deceive readers of the Qur'an, mainly readers of Surat An-Nisa, since the whole Surah deals with the issue of justice and mercy with woman. Interestingly, Surat An-Nisa is preceded by Surat Al-Imran which introduces Maryam (AS) "Mary" and Imran's wife as two models of steadfastness and faith, as if Surat Al-Imran prepares us for the honor bestowed upon women in Surat An-Nisa.

Now, let us delve into the ayahs, and read them with the intention of becoming just and merciful with everybody, especially the weak.

Justice: the Pillar of Succession

Straight from the beginning, the Surah sheds light on its objective, as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, "**O you mankind, be pious to your Lord, Who created you of one self, and created from it its spouse, and from the two disseminated many men and women ...**" (TMQ, 4:1). Allah (SWT), in this ayah, tells us that all human beings originate from the same roots, "**of one self**". Why, then, would injustice reign?

In the ayah, Allah (SWT) explains that women are created from men, which calls for the kindness towards women, as in the Prophet Muhammad's (SAWS) Hadith "Women are the full sisters (i.e. in faith) of men"¹⁷. It is worth noting that the Surah begins with a universal appeal, **"O you mankind..."**, while Surat Al-Ma'idah started with a speech directed to the believers only, as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who believe..."** (TMQ 5:1). The reason is that justice is a universal law for all nations. No nation can dominate earth if it is unjust. Justice is the basis of sovereignty, stability, and succession. In this respect, Ibn-Taimia- may he rest in peace- says, "People's affairs become more settled with justice in spite of sins more than they do when society refrains from committing sins but is dominated by injustice. For this reason, people say that Allah (SWT) uplifts just countries even if they were of non-believers and that He does not support unjust countries even if they were of Muslims. It is also said that existence is sustained with justice and disbelief rather than with injustice and belief."¹⁸

Please note that Surat An-Nisa starts with the same idea with which the preceding Surah is concluded; piety. Surat Al-Imran is concluded with this ayah, **"O you who have believed, be patient, and vie in patience, and be garrisoned (i.e., Keep a standing army ready to defend you) and be pious to Allah, that possibly you would prosper."** (TMQ, 3:200). Likewise, the first ayah of Surat An-Nisa is **"O mankind! be pious to your Lord"** (TMQ 4:1).

Do not devour embers

The second ayah is a warning against another type of injustice, **"And bring the orphans their riches, and do not exchange the wicked (you have) for the good (they own); and do not eat up their riches with your riches; surely that is a great outrage"** (TMQ, 4:2). After that, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And, in case you fear that you will not act equitably towards the orphans..."** (TMQ, 4:3). The ayah refers to an Arabic custom according to which the man used to provide the means of living for a female orphan from her own private money. When the orphan reached the age of marriage, the guardian would marry her and give her an inferior amount of money as a dowry. This ayah, therefore, defends this vulnerable group of women. It also encloses the renowned principle that permits polygamy; first justice, justice, and justice; otherwise, marry just one; **"...but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one..."** (TMQ, 4:3).

Women's right to dowry offered wholeheartedly

In the fourth ayah, Allah (SWT) asserts the right of women to dowry and the importance of the fact that men should give it to them as an endowment, willingly as a gift, **"And bring the women their dowries as an endowment, so in case they are good to you concerning any portion of it, (Literally: in case they feel good in themselves to you about anything of it) then eat it up rejoicing with wholesome appetite (i.e., take it and make use of it to your profit and advantage)"** (TMQ, 4:4).

¹⁷ Authentic Hadith, Al-Albany.

¹⁸ *Magmoo' Al-Fatawi* 28:146.

This mutual compassion between a husband and his wife is what Islam seeks to root in their relationship through dowry. Men are asked to give wholeheartedly and women are given the choice of whether to take what men have to offer them or to give some of it back to her husband as a sign of love. It is a wonderful ayah that combines a demand for rights and a call for mutual compassion embodied in giving wholeheartedly.

Justice even with the unwise

The ayahs proceed to deal with justice with different societal groups, including the irrational people. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And do not bring the foolish ones your riches that Allah has made for keeping you up, (i.e., as a means of support) and provide for them out of it, and give them raiment, and speak to them beneficent words” (TMQ, 4:5).** The foolish are those who are not capable of managing their wealth. If the money is left to them, they would squander it. Nevertheless, this category of people should not be exploited or abused as some people might abuse their money using their mental inferiority as a pretext.

The sixth ayah asserts the right of orphans to their money when they become adults; **“And try the orphans until they reach (the) marriageable age. So, in case you perceive in them right-mindedness then pay over to them their riches, and do not eat them up extravagantly and in anticipation of their (attaining) majority” (TMQ, 4:6).**

In the seventh ayah, Allah (SWT) states all women's right to inheritance, the right which used to be extorted from them during the age of *al-jahiliyya* (the pre-Islamic period), in what can be translated as, **“To the men is an assignment of whatever the parents and the nearest kin have left, and to the women is an assignment of whatever the parents and the nearest kin have left, of whatever it be, little or much, an ordained assignment” (TMQ, 4:7).**

The eighth ayah comes to link justice with benevolence. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And when the near of kin (Literally: endowed with kinship, “nearness) and the orphans and the indigent are present at the division, then provide for them out of it, and say to them beneficent saying ” (TMQ, 4:8).**

Protect your children after your death through justice

In the ninth ayah, Allah (SWT) rectifies a false prevailing belief in what can be translated as, **“And let the ones be apprehensive (of Allah), who, if ever they left behind them weak offspring, would fear (poverty) for them. So let them be pious to Allah, and let them say a befitting saying” (TMQ, 4:9).** Many people indulge in acquiring money through illegal means, offending others, on the pretext that they want to secure their children's future. In Surat An-Nisa, Allah (SWT) overthrows this belief as He tells people that they should be just and always speak the truth if they want Allah (SWT) to protect their children.

In the tenth ayah, Allah (SWT) warns against injustice using strong words in what can be translated as, **“Surely the ones who eat the riches of the orphans unjustly, they surely only eat (up) Fire in their bellies and will roast in a Blaze ”(TMQ, 4:10).**

A just division of inheritance

Rules governing division of inheritance among sons and daughters are well demonstrated in the eleventh ayah as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Allah enjoins you concerning your children: to the male the like of the portion of two females...” (TMQ, 4:11).** This is justice because the division of inheritance is not based on sex preference or equal share between man and woman, but rather on the responsibilities and duties assigned to each of them. Men are responsible for covering the expenditures of both their houses and their wives, while women have no such responsibilities. Even when a woman gets married, it is her husband’s duty to provide for her. Consequently, her share of inheritance and money remains intact.

In the twelfth ayah, Allah (SWT) explains in detail the principles of inheritance applied when somebody’s spouse dies, **“And for you is a half of whatever your spouses have left, in case they have no children...” (TMQ, 4:12).** In brief, whenever you feel that your life is running short of justice, in your relationship with your wife or with the fragile people around you, try to read Surat An-Nisa, the Surah of justice, and evaluate your deeds in the light of its ayahs.

“Those are the bounds of Allah”

The ideas expressed in ayahs 13 and 14 are crucial in the sense that they encourage people to be righteous and just. Moreover, the ayahs warn the believers against the consequences of injustice and not abiding by the limits of Allah (SWT), as He says what can be translated as, **“Those are the bounds of Allah; and whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, He will cause him to enter Gardens from beneath which Rivers run, eternally (abiding) therein; and that is the magnificent triumph. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger and transgresses His bounds, He will cause him to enter a Fire, eternally (abiding) therein, and for him is a degrading torment” (TMQ, 4:13-14).**

What could possibly happen if humans indulge in acts of injustice? The answer is right there in ayah 17 in which Allah (SWT) accepts repentance, **“Surely relenting from (Literally: upon, i.e.’ Allah relents) Allah is only towards the ones who do any odious deed in ignorance (and) thereafter they repent shortly; so Allah relents towards those and Allah has been Ever-Knowing, Ever-Wise” (TMQ, 4:17).**

The Surah’s emblem: “consort with them with beneficence”

The ayahs go back to justice with women as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will ...” (TMQ, 4:19).** In this ayah, Allah (SWT) warns against inheriting women against their will, **“... (Literally: through compulsion) neither pose problems for them that you may go away with some (part) of what you have brought them except when they come up with a (demonstrably) evident**

obscenity. And consort with them with beneficence....” (TMQ, 4:19). Scholars have agreed that **“consort with them with beneficence”** means not only dealing with the wife justly, but also patiently so that he may lighten up her heart to drain off her anger, as the Prophet (SAWS), himself used to do. Allah (SWT) proceeds to say what can be translated as, **“... so in case you hate them, then it is possible you may hate something, and Allah sets in it much charity (i.e. benefit)” (TMQ, 4:19).**

“They have taken from you a solemn compact”

Then comes ayah 20 in which both justice and realism in dealing with women are combined in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And in case you are willing to exchange a spouse in place of (another) spouse, and you have brought one of them a hundredweight, (Literally: a Kantar) then do not take anything of it. Will you take it by way of all-malicious (calumny) and evident vice?” (TMQ, 4:20).** Rule number one in treating wives justly is to live and associate with your wife amicably, and if you dislike her, you should try to be patient with her. If you grow impatient with her and decide to marry another, do not ever think of taking any amount of money from your first wife’s dowry. No matter how huge it originally was, never touch it. Allah (SWT) is very strict in this point, **“Will you take it by way of all-malicious (calumny) and evident vice?”** Why does Allah (SWT) consider it an ‘evident vice’? The reason is that, during pre-Islamic times, when Arabs wanted to remarry, they would wrongfully accuse their wives of adultery in order to oblige them to return the dowries they were given! Hence, Allah (SWT) scolds them strongly for this act in this ayah.

Then, we encounter one of the most magical ayahs in tendering the hearts on the one hand and in strengthening and glorifying the marriage contract on the other when Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And how should you take it, and each of you has already gone privily with the other, (Literally: some of you have been privily with (some) and they have taken from you a solemn compact?” (TMQ, 4:21).** The word **“gone privily with the other”** reflects on the deep relationship between the husband and wife. The ayah’s strength lies in the fact that it takes the husband and wife back to the wonderful days and nights they spent together in their bedroom and other places before their relationship deteriorated.

The **‘solemn compact’** is the marriage contract whereby you put your hand in the hand of your wife’s guardian and say: “Following the teachings of the book of Allah (i.e. Qur’an) and the *Sunnah* of his Prophet (SAWS)”. This is a severe warning for every husband should he think of dissolving the covenant, upon which he made Allah (SWT) a witness. It is striking that the expression **‘solemn compact’** is mentioned only three times in the whole Qur’an. First, the expression was used in reference to Allah’s Prophets; **“We took from them a solemn compact” (TMQ, 7:33).** Then it is used referring to *Ahl-ul-kitab* (people of the Scripture) as Allah (SWT) took from them a **“a solemn compact” (TMQ, 4:154).** The third time reminds all husbands of the word or **‘solemn compact’** they gave in their marriage contracts.

Of the ways Islam honored women

Women have been subject to injustice and abuse throughout history. However with Islam and the revelation of Surat An-Nisa, women were given back their rights. In

pre-Islamic times, for instance, men inherited all their fathers' riches, including all their wives! Of course, this law, which was intended to humiliate women, was carried out with the exception of the heir's own mother. This act was so humiliating that Allah (SWT) banned it, saying what can be translated as, **"And do not marry women that your fathers married, except what has already gone by; surely that is an obscenity and detestation, and an odious way"** (TMQ, 4:22).

The ayahs raise another issue; the rights of slave girls in marriage. Please note that Islam tackles this issue and enforces laws to protect the rights of such disenfranchised groups in a time where there were no laws to protect them. In the past, if man was unable to marry a free woman, he would then marry a slave girl. However, Allah (SWT) says what could be translated as, **"So marry them by the permission of their families..."** (TMQ, 4:25). In this ayah, Allah (SWT) uses the word "families" instead of "master" to encourage people to treat them mercifully and compassionately. **"So marry them by the permission of their families, (i.e. their folk) and bring them their rewards with beneficence"** (TMQ, 4:25). The ayah also emphasizes the importance of giving their dowries wholeheartedly, without violating any of their rights because of their bondage.

"...Or taking mates for themselves"

The ayah warns women against getting involved in illegitimate relationships under the cover of friendship. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...or taking mates for themselves"** (TMQ, 4:25). The Surah is about the mercy of Islam with woman in forbidding them from having paramours in order to protect them from the frustration and heartache that follows at the end of the affair. This is definitely the end of any relationship that begins with sin. Not only do such affairs depress women, but they also wreck their futures and stigmatize them. Women, in this respect, represent a special kind of weakness caused by their delicate hearts and strong emotions. Therefore, my advice to young ladies is that you are dear to Allah (SWT) and Islam protects your feelings from being exploited by oblivious irresponsible young men.

Penalty mitigation for the weak

Ayah 25 refers to an interesting aspect of Islam's mercy and justice with the weak, which in this case is regarding the slave girls. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"when they are in wedlock, (then) in case they come up with an obscenity, (5) they shall have then half the torment of free women in wedlock"** (TMQ, 4:25). This goes contrary to what is known about ancient Roman and Indian laws that insisted on exacting severe punishments on lower classes. Islam, on the other hand, is merciful towards low classes and calls for mitigating their penalties.

Ayahs 26, 27 and 28 then come to remind us of the mercy and tenderness with which Allah (SWT) treats, not only the nation of the Prophet (SAWS), but also humanity in general. This is also a form of mercy with the weak. In this regard, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Allah wills to lighten (things) for you, and man was created a weakling"** (TMQ, 4:28). Let us read the ayahs and contemplate how Allah (SWT) shows us His justice and mercy and reminds us of our weaknesses; **"Allah wills to make this evident to you and guide you into the enactments of the ones before you and to relent towards you; and Allah is Ever-Knowing, Ever-Wise."**

And Allah wills to relent towards you, and (the ones) who closely follow (their) lusts would have you incline (Literally: tilt away a tremendous tilting) away a tremendous inclining. Allah wills to lighten (things) for you, and man was created a weakling”(TMQ, 4:26-28).

Justice concerning money and souls

After demonstrating different aspects of social justice with regards to women, family, and society, justice in trade and financial transactions is tackled; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not eat (up) your riches among you untruthfully, except there be commerce by your mutual consent” (TMQ, 4:29).** He (SWT) also calls for justice with human life and avoidance of bloodshed in what can be translated as, **“And do not kill yourselves (i.e. kill one another). Surely Allah has been Ever-Merciful to you” (TMQ, 4:29).**

No excess or negligence

In ayah 34, Allah (SWT) lays down rules that are to govern Muslim families. Men, in an attempt to be just with their wives, may become too indulgent with them, which might eventually lead some wives to sin. This ayah illustrates Islamic balance between firmness and justice. In this respect, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Men are the ever upright (managers) (of the affairs) of women for what Allah has graced some of them over (some) others and for what they have expended of their riches. So righteous women are devout, preservers of the Unseen for. And the ones whom you fear their non-compliance, then admonish them and forsake them in their beds, (Literally: a *madaji*’= reclining) and strike them, (i.e. hit them lightly) yet in case they obey you, then do not seek inequitably any way against them; surely Allah has been Ever-Exalted, Ever-Great” (TMQ, 4:34).** In Islam, women are expected to obey their husbands in order to maintain their domestic life. If women act wrongly after they’ve been given all their rights, then husbands should not allow them to do whatever they please for fear of being unjust to them. Strictness is needed in this case. The means by which husbands are advised to resort to in order to help their wives return to the right path are enumerated in these ayahs in the order in which they should be used; admonishment, refraining from bed-sharing, and finally beating. It should be noted here that beating must be used only in case of ill-conduct or severe disobedience and stubbornness, which has its adverse effects on the family’s welfare and might lead to destroying it. Beating, therefore, is a rare case and men should not resort to it whenever they wish on the pretext that it is mentioned in the Qur’an, neglecting the strict laws controlling this matter. The aim of beating is not causing pain but rather, it is to make a wife realize her wrongdoing. The best example to follow here is Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) who had never beaten a woman or a servant.

Do not be unjust to yourself

Justice becomes the subject of the ayahs again when Allah (SWT) warns against polytheism; **“worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him” (TMQ, 4:36).** That is because polytheism is the greatest injustice one can do to himself as the ayahs in Surat Luqman indicate what can be translated as, **“Surely associating (others with Allah) is indeed a monstrous injustice” (TMQ, 31:13).** In the ayah,

Allah (SWT) expands the notion of justice and beneficence to cover the different groups that comprise society, especially the weak. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“and do good to parents”,** which means parents, especially when they become seniors, and **“near kinsman, and the neighbour who is a stranger, (i.e. not of the family or creed or “nationality”)** and the companion at your side, and the wayfarer, and what your right hands possess. Surely Allah does not love whoever has been conceited (and) constantly boastful” (TMQ, 4:36). Do you see how coherent the Surah is? Even if the ayahs differ in content, they all revolve around one major idea, which is justice in all possible forms.

Obstacles in the way of justice and mercy

Allah (SWT) enumerates the unfavorable characteristics that negatively affect one's ability to be just and merciful, namely miserliness and hypocrisy. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“The ones who are miserly and bid (other) men (Literally: command mankind) to be miserly, and (who) keep back whatever Allah has brought them of His Grace” (TMQ, 4:37), “And also (for) (the ones) who expend their riches showing off to (other) men, (Literally: mankind) and do not believe in Allah nor in the Last Day. And whoever has Ash-Shaytan (The all-vicious, i.e., the Devil) for a comrade, then how odious is such a comrade!” (TMQ, 4:38).**

“Allah does not do injustice so much as an atom's weight”

After teaching us about justice, Allah (SWT) reminds us of His bounty and grace. He treats us with His generosity prior to His justice, so why does man disdain from treating others with justice? Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely Allah does not do injustice so much as an atom's weight, and in case it is a fair deed, He will double it and bring from very close to Him a magnificent reward” (TMQ, 4:40).**

In the following ayah, Allah (SWT) reminds us that the Prophet (SAWS) will be a witness on our justice on the Day of Judgment. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“How then will it be when We cause to come from every nation a witness and cause you to come as a witness against these?” (TMQ, 4:41).** It is as though Allah (SWT) is warning the unjust to be careful and think over their attitudes as the Prophet (SAWS) will be the witness on their injustice. Moreover, the ayah brings the glad tidings to the just, since it is the Prophet (SAWS) himself who will be a witness of their justice.

Then, comes a crucial ayah, which represents the essence of the Surah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely Allah commands you to pay deposits back to their qualified family (i.e. the owners) and, when you judge among mankind, that you judge with justice. How favorable is that to which Allah surely admonishes you; surely Allah has been Ever-Hearing, Ever-Beholding” (TMQ, 4:58).**

The essence of justice: obedience to Allah (SWT) and to the Prophet (SAWS)

The following ayah makes it crystal clear that obedience of Allah (SWT) and his Prophet (SAWS) constitutes the essence of justice as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, obey Allah and obey the Messenger, and the ones endowed with the command (i.e. those in authority) among you. So in case you contend together about anything, then refer it to Allah and the Messenger, in case you believe in Allah and the Last Day; that is most charitable (i.e. most beneficial) and fairest in interpretation” (TMQ, 4:59).**

Resorting to Allah's legislations and settling disputes by referring to Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (life style and Ahadith, or sayings) of the Prophet (SAWS) are the mainstays of mercy and justice in society even though they might seem to be unjust. This is clear in ayah 64; if believers disobey the orders of Allah (SWT) and his Prophet (SAWS), they will be unjust to themselves; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And in no way have We sent any Messenger except that he should be obeyed, by the permission of Allah; and if, as they have done an injustice to themselves, they had come to you, so (had) asked forgiveness from Allah, and the Messenger (had) asked forgiveness for them, indeed they would have found Allah Superbly Relenting, Ever-Merciful.” (TMQ, 4:64).** How can justice be attained? The answer lies in Ayah 65 in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“(Yet) no, by your Lord, they will not believe till they make you judge regarding what they controvert among themselves. Thereafter they should not find in themselves any restriction about whatever you have decreed, and should submit in full submission” (TMQ, 4:65).** My word to the believers is to always resort to the teachings of the Qur'an and to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAWS). Accept what Allah (SWT) and his Prophet (SAWS) ordained and never hesitate in following the Prophet's (SAWS) orders, since he is the witness of your justice on the Day of Judgment.

Fighting to protect the rights of the weak

The ayahs proceed in their discourse on warfare in exactly a whole quarter of a *hizb* (the Qur'an is divided into 30 *juz'* (parts) each *juz'* is then divided in two *hizb* and the *hizb* is divided into four quarters). This quarter begins with the ayah 74 in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, let the ones fight in the way of Allah, (the ones) who barter the present life (Literally: the lowly life, i.e., the life of this world) (seeking) the Hereafter...” (TMQ, 4:74).** What is the relationship between this quarter and justice? For justice to persevere in society, it must be supported by a force that protects the rights of the weak. Fighting in Islam is not an ultimate objective. On the contrary, it is a means of implementing an objective. The evidence is in ayah 75 in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And what is it with you, that you do not fight in the way of Allah, (the way) and of the ones deemed weak among the men, women and newborns, who say, “Our Lord, bring us out of this town (i.e. Makkah, where Muslims were persecuted after Hijrah) whose population is unjust, and set for us a constant patron from very close to You, and set for us from very close to You a ready vindicator...” (TMQ, 4:75).** Interestingly, most of warfare legislations and principles are in Surat An-Nisa. That is because women are primarily the makers of *mujahedeen* (fighters for the just Islamic cause), and are also fighters inside their houses. The woman who patiently bears her husband's injustice is a *mujahedah* who fights and gets martyred a hundred times a day. We can deduce from this that the inclusion of war legislations and principles in this particular Surah is a sort of a message directed to woman, a message

that says (and Allah is the best Who knows) you, as well, are considered a fighter in the cause of Allah (SWT) when you are patient with your husband and when you protect your house.

The influence of Media on justice

There is also an important ayah in this quarter addressing the media people in every era and every place. Depicting the way media influences justice, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And when there comes to them a command (i.e., the matter, the affair) of security or fear, they divulge it; and if they had referred it to the Messenger and to the ones endowed with the command (i.e., those in authority) among them, the ones among them who investigate would indeed know it”** (TMQ, 4:83). The media may have a negative influence on judges and public opinion to the extent that conceptions may change radically, influencing the judgment of the most just. For this reason, rumours should be referred to their authorities. In addition, one should refrain from distorting information and jumping to conclusions. The ayah is a clear message to the Muslims of this age, who should question everything that reaches them through media.

The Danger of Hypocrisy

In addition, there comes a full quarter of a *hizb* devoted to the dangers of hypocrites in society. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, what is it with you that you are two communities regarding the hypocrites, and Allah has cast them back for what they earned? ...”** (TMQ, 4:88).

Mentioning the hypocrites comes as a warning against their presence in society, which is the major reason behind the loss of justice and the deprivation of the rights of the weak. Hypocrites simply corrupt society and its values, especially the value of justice.

The ayahs continue until they reach the most elevated sense of justice; justice even during battle. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, when you strike (i.e. journey in the earth) in the way of Allah, then be discerning”** (TMQ, 4:94). These are the warfare ethics that Islam pioneered in promoting.

Be Positive to Achieve Justice

In the previous ayahs, the Qur'an addresses the strong and the liable, ordering them to be just and merciful to the weak. However, ayah 97 urges the weak to be positive and active, and not to be submissive or defeated. The ayah makes it clear that the weak should not await justice idly, nor should they beg for mercy from others. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely the ones whom the Angels take up, (while) they are unjust to themselves- (to them) (the Angels) say, “In what (condition) were you?” (i.e., In what circumstances were you? Of what religion were you?) They say, “We were deemed weak in the earth.” They (the Angels) say, “Was not the earth of Allah wide so that you (could) have emigrated in it?” So, the abode for those (men) is Hell, and what an odious Destiny!”** (TMQ, 4:97).

***Qasr* in Prayers (allowed shortening of the obligatory prayers) as a Mercy from Allah**

Allah (SWT) then calls attention to the boundless mercy with which He surrounds his creatures and slaves, specifying *Qasr* of prayers and the prayer of fear (special prayers prayed during time of great fear or danger) in ayah 101 in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And when you strike in the earth, (i.e., journey in the earth) then there is no fault in you that you shorten the prayer...”** (TMQ, 4:101). By this ayah, Allah (SWT) draws our attention to His over-flowing mercy so as to make us merciful towards people in return.

Justice with Non-Muslim Minorities

Finally, we see the Islamic justice towards the non-Muslim minorities in Muslim societies. In an incident that took place during the days of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), a Muslim committed the crime of theft and accused a Jew of it. Another Muslim knew the truth, but under the false impression that he is standing by his Muslim brother who would be sentenced to the prescribed Islamic punishment if truth was revealed, he decided to keep this information to himself and gave a false testimony.

As a result, strongly-worded ayahs are revealed, **“Surely, We have sent down to you (i.e. the Prophet) the Book with the Truth that you judge among mankind by whatever Allah has shown you; and do not be a constant adversary of the treacherous.”** (TMQ, 4:105). Then the tone becomes even harsher as Allah (SWT) addresses the wrongful sinners, **“And whoever earns an offence or a vice (and) thereafter throws (the blame thereof) upon an innocent one, then he has readily burdened himself with all-malicious calumny and evident vice.”** (TMQ, 4:112). Allah (SWT) proved the Jew’s innocence setting forth these civilized principles of dealing with other religions.

A Return to Women

By the end of the Surah, there is a return to the divine principles associated with women in which there is great emphasis on justice and mercy. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And they ask you for your pronouncement concerning women. Say, “Allah pronounces concerning them, and what is recited to you in the Book concerning the orphan women (Or (possibly): women who have orphans...”** (TMQ, 4:127). There is also a call for justice in polygamy, **“And you will never be able to do justice between (your) wives, (Literally: women) even if you are (so) eager; yet do not incline away completely (Literally: incline away all inclining) (from one), so that you leave her (behind) as if she were suspended...”** (TMQ, 4:129). This is considered an unjust action on the part of the man who misuses his authorities.

Stand up firmly for justice

Ayah 135, which comes towards the end of the Surah, is strongly reminiscent of the objective of the Surah, **“O you who have believed, be constantly upright with equity (with others), witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or (your)**

parents and nearest kin. In case (the person) is rich or poor, then Allah is the Best Patron for both. So do not ever follow prejudice, so as to do justice; and in case you twist or veer away, then surely Allah has been Ever-Cognizant of whatever you do.” (TMQ, 4:135).

The word *qawwameen* (standing firm) is an exaggerative form of the word *qa'em* (keeper of justice) used to reinforce the meaning of ‘to stand firmly for justice’. The ayah also warns us against following our own inclinations, which is a major factor in inflicting injustice upon people.

Tyranny against the People of the Scripture

The Surah then points out some of the mistakes of the People of the Scripture that are related to its subject matter so as to warn Muslims from their deeds, **“So, for the injustice (on the part) of (the ones) who have Judaized, We have prohibited them good things that were lawful to them...” (TMQ, 4:160).** Due to their injustice, Allah (SWT) prohibited some of the *halal* (lawful) things that were allowed for them.

The following ayah manifests their injustice as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“... and for their barring from the way of Allah many (people). And for their taking riba, (Usury and other types of unlawful) and they were already forbidden it, and eating (up) the riches of mankind untruthfully; (Literally: with untruth)...” (TMQ, 4:160-161).**

Allah (SWT) also says what can be translated as, **“O population of the Book, (Or: Family of the Book, i.e., Jews and Christians) do not go beyond the bounds in your religion and do not say concerning Allah (anything) except the Truth. Surely the Masih, Isa son of Maryam, (The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary) was only the Messenger of Allah, and His Word that He cast forth to Maryam, and a Spirit from Him. So, believe in Allah and His Messengers, and do not say, “Three.” Refrain; most charitable is it for you; surely Allah is only One God. All Extolment be to Him-that He should have a child. To Him (belongs) whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth; and Allah suffices for an Ever-Trusted Trustee. The Masih (The Messiah) will never disdain to be a bondman of Allah, neither the Angels who are near-stationed (to Him). And whoever disdains to do Him worship (Literally: worshiping Him) and waxes proud, then He will soon muster them altogether to Him.” (TMQ, 4:171-172).** These two ayahs deal with the deviation in the Christian doctrine. Mentioning this here serves the objective of the Surah in yet another way. The deviation that took place in their religion and holy book is due to the oppression that the first generation of Christians suffered on the hands of the Romans. This, in a way, sounds like a message urging the believers to defend and support Islam to prevent it from the divergence that befell Christianity.

These two ayahs are followed by two more that carry an emphatic warning against injustice. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely (the ones) who have disbelieved and have done injustice, indeed Allah would not forgive them, nor indeed guide them on any road. Except the road to Hell, eternally (abiding) therein forever...” (TMQ, 4:168-169).**

That was Surat An-Nisa, a call for the observance of justice and mercy in all social classes. Moreover, this Surah has the advantage of containing the largest number of references to the Most Beautiful Names of Allah (SWT) in its last few ayahs (42 references). These names include those of knowledge and wisdom (The Wise and The All-Knowing), and those of ability, compassion, and forgiveness that all indicate Allah's justice, compassion, and wisdom in all the laws that He decreed for the realization of justice.

Brothers and sisters in Islam, please read Surat An-Nisa with the intention of applying justice primarily to your lives, at home with your family (especially wives and parents), then with your neighbours and with people in your society regardless of their religion or social class.

Surat Al-Ma'idah (The Table)

Surat Al-Ma'idah is Madinan, although some of its ayahs were revealed in Makkah after *hajjat alwada'* (the farewell hajj that the Prophet (SAWS) performed). It was revealed after Surat Al-Fath and comes in the Qur'an after Surat An-Nisa. It contains 120 ayahs and it is the only Surah in the Qur'an that begins with **"O you who have believed..." (TMQ, 5:1)**. This phrase recurs in the Qur'an 88 times, 16 of them are found in Surat Al-Ma'idah.

Abdullah Ibn-Mas'oud says, "If you hear **"O you who have believed..."**, listen carefully, for it is either a good thing you should do or an evil sin you are forbidden to do".

The meaning of **"O you who have believed..."** is "O you who truly believed in Allah, accept Allah as your Lord and worship Him, listen and obey."

The Objective is in the call

The objective of the Surah is made clear in the first call as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, fulfill your contracts..." (TMQ, 5:1)**; thus urging Muslims to fulfill their commitments. The Surah indicates all kinds of commitments, which range from mankind's responsibility on earth, and moves on to obedience matters, such as praying and wearing *hijab* (Islamic veil). It also points out abstaining from forbidden deeds, such as drinking alcohol and possessing illegally-obtained money.

The call **"O you who have believed..."**, as mentioned above, does not recur in any other Surah as much as it recurs in Surat Al-Ma'idah. Even Surat Al-Baqara, which consists of more ayahs, contains only ten similar calls. These calls constitute the core ideas of the Surah; wherever a call occurs, a new idea of the Surah is dealt with; a new set of prohibitions and commands is given. The Surah moves smoothly from one to another of these sixteen orders urging us to fulfill our commitments.

The Prophet's wife Aisha RA (May Allah be pleased with her) says, "Surat Al-Ma'idah is the last of the revelations of the Qur'an. Therefore, make *halal* (lawful deeds) what you find in it of *halal*, and make *haram* (sinful deeds) what you find in it of *haram*."¹⁹

This Surah contains the last ayah of the Islamic legislation, which was revealed during *hajjat alwada'* in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favor on you, and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you..." (TMQ, 5:3)**. The objective of the Surah is starting to become clearer; now that religion, its teachings, and its principles are complete, fulfill your obligations to Allah (SWT), maintain them, and acknowledge what religion considers *halal* and shun what it considers *haram*. It is actually the Surah of *halal* and *haram* in Islam.

¹⁹ Good Hadith, Ibn-Hazm.

Core ideas of the Surah

As mentioned before, the call “**O you who have believed...**” moves us to a new core idea and a new detailed order. It is striking that all the ayahs of the Surah revolve around the following main ideas that demonstrate a great deal of both, *halal* and *haram* principles:

1. Food, drink, quarry and slaughter.
2. Family and marriage.
3. Faith and *kaffarat* (prescribed acts of charity or fasting performed in repentance of doing an unlawful act).
4. Principles of worship.
5. Verdicts, judiciary rules, testimonies, and the realization of justice.
6. Organizing Muslim relations with other religions, namely with Jews and Christians.

There is great emphasis in the Surah on the *halal* and *haram* of food, drink, quarry, and slaughter, which is interrelated with the title of the Surah “Al-Ma’idah” (literally: the dining table). Food is a biological necessity, however, the *halal* and *haram* in it must be attentively observed. Hence, less material aspects of life should be handled with the same vigilance.

In addition, legislation is reserved for Allah (SWT) alone and this is stressed throughout this momentum of *halal* and *haram* principles from “**...Surely Allah judges (according to) whatever He wills.**” (TMQ, 5:1) to the three ayahs that warn from straying from Allah’s legislation and applying other than what Allah has revealed. In one of those ayahs Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, “**...And whoever does not judge according to what Allah has sent down, then those are they (who are) the disbelievers.**” (TMQ, 5:44).

Progression and Coherence in the Qur’an

Observe the correlation between the previous Qur’an Surahs and Surat Al-Ma’idah. Surat Al-Baqara informs us of man’s responsibility on earth. After that, Surat Al-‘Imran urges us to persevere and to be steadfast. Next, Surat An-Nisa tells us that in order to persevere, we need to observe justice and compassion with the weak. Recapping that, Surat Al-Ma’idah orders us to fulfill all of the above.

Thus, Surat Al-Ma’idah urges us to be just to our wives, to the weak, and to the whole of mankind. It also urges us to maintain the way of life that Allah (SWT) mapped out for us in Surat Al-Baqara. This is why Allah (SWT) included in it ayah 3, which declares the completion of His devised way of life.

Furthermore, note the gradual arrangement of the Surahs in the Qur’an as they address the People of the Scripture:

Surat Al Baqara: An account of the mistakes of the People of the Scripture and a call for Muslims to be distinguished from them.

Surat **Al-Imran**: A peaceful discussion of their doctrines; one that highlights the features they have in common with Muslims.

Surat Al Nisa: A criticism of the excessiveness of the People of the Scripture and their differences about *Isa* (AS) (Jesus).

Surat Al Mai'da: A strongly-worded confrontation as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Indeed they have already disbelieved, the ones who have said, “Surely Allah is the third of three.””** (TMQ, 5:73).

We can conclude from the above that Islam approaches other religions in a very progressive and gradual way.

The First Call: fulfill your contracts

“O you who have believed, fulfill your contracts. The brute of cattle (Ana'am = cattle, camels, sheep and goats) has been made lawful to you...” (TMQ, 5:1).

What could be the relationship between the fulfillment of obligations and the legitimization of slaughtering and eating cattle? Allah (SWT) did not begin by declaring the *haram*, or illegitimate, so as to avoid rendering the Surah repellent. Instead, the *halal*, or the legitimate, was mentioned immediately after the obligation fulfillment order. Thus, **“fulfill your contracts”** is followed by **“lawful to you”** to testify the boundless compassion and mercy with which Allah (SWT) blesses this nation.

Indeed, that is a method that *da'wa* (missionary activity) workers should use in order to win over more hearts. *Da'wa* people should not begin with what Allah (SWT) has forbidden if they are planning to guide people to the right path. Since everything is originally allowed, a *da'wa* worker should begin by informing people what is allowed for them and later on indicate to them what is not allowed.

In addition to the compassion and kindness that characterize the discourse here, there is another meaning to the first call. We are told in this ayah to fulfill our obligations so that the amount of *halal* we are granted does not become limited as it did with the Jews.

It is striking that this same idea is in fact referred to in the two Surahs that precede and follow Surat Al-Ma'idah (Surat An-Nisa and Surat Al-An'am). In Surat An-Nisa, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, for the injustice (on the part) of (the ones) who have Judaized, We have prohibited them good things that were lawful to them...”** (TMQ, 4:160). Furthermore, in Surat Al-An'am Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And to the ones who Judaized We have prohibited everything with (Literally: possessing, equipped with, owning) claws...”** (TMQ, 6:146). But what was the prohibition for? **“...(by) that We recompensed them for their inequity; and surely We indeed are sincere.”** (TMQ, 6:146). They did not fulfill their obligations to Allah (SWT) that He deprived them of some of the *halal* that was already allowed to them. Thus, Muslims, be wary of doing what they have done lest you get the same punishment.

The Second Call: “...do not violate the way marks of Allah...” (TMQ, 5:2)

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not violate the way marks of Allah...” (TMQ, 5:2).** Do not change the features of Allah’s religion, in terms of orders and prohibitions, **“...nor the Inviolable Month, nor the offering, nor the garlands, nor the ones repairing to the Inviolable Home seeking from their Lord Grace and all-blessed Satisfaction; and when you are not on pilgrimage, (Literally: when you have become legally permissible, i.e., no longer in the sanctified state of a pilgrim) then (go game) hunting. And do not let antagonism of a people who barred you from the Inviolable Mosque provoke you to transgress. And help one another to benignancy and piety, and do not help one another to vice and hostility...” (TMQ, 5:2).**

The first ayah is thus a statement of the necessities of life and the second one is a declaration of a set of great human principles:

- Justice; emphasizing the objective of Surat An-Nisa of establishing justice as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...And do not let antagonism of a people who barred you from the Inviolable Mosque provoke you to transgress...” (TMQ, 5:2).**
- Cooperation; emphasizing one of the messages of Surat Al-‘Imran, i.e. unity and avoiding dissention, as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...And help one another to benignancy and piety and do not help one another to vice and hostility ...” (TMQ, 5:2).** This ayah comprises thousands of examples of social relations that fall under piety, righteousness, and cooperation.
- *Taqwa* (piety and fear of Allah). Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...and be pious to Allah; surely Allah is strict in punishment.” (TMQ, 5:2).** This reminds us that this Holy book is **“...a guidance to the pious.” (TMQ, 2:2),** as mentioned at the beginning of Surat Al-Baqara.

Then comes the third ayah where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Prohibited to you are carrion, (i.e. dead meat) and blood...” (TMQ, 5:3),** indicating that the first obligation to be fulfilled is that of *halal* food since a Muslim should never eat foul food.

After this indication comes the fifth ayah, which can be translated as, **“Today the good things are made lawful for you, and the food of the ones to whom the Book was brought is lawful to you, and your food is made lawful to them. And (so) are believing women in wedlock, and in wedlock women of (the ones) to whom the Book was brought ...” (TMQ, 5:5).** The ayah, as we can see here, points out two kinds of *halal*: *halal* food and good women, whether they were Muslims or *ketabiyyat* (from the People of the Scripture), as long as they are chaste and well-mannered. This allowance is a wonderful gesture that bespeaks the tolerance²⁰ with which Islam deals with the People of the Scripture. Even in a Surah that addresses them harshly, chaste women are declared *halal* for Muslims, whether the women are Muslims or from the People of the Scripture.

²⁰ Acknowledging and supporting that individuals have the right and freedom to their own beliefs and related legitimate practices, without necessarily validating those beliefs or practices.

In the very same ayah, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favor on you, and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you...” (TMQ, 5:3)**. The importance of this ayah lies in the fact that it is the closing of all the principles of Islam. The relationship between this particular ayah and the subject matter of the Surah is that obligations do not exist unless there is some sort of completion. Since religion is now complete, you believers must fulfill your obligation to it and comply with its laws. I wonder if any of us ever felt this blessing of the completion of religion and thanked Allah (SWT) for it.

Once a Jew said to Omar Ibn Al-Khattab (RA) (May Allah be pleased with him), “O the chief of believers! There is a verse in your Holy Book Which is read by all of you (Muslims), and had it been revealed to us, we would have taken that day (on which it was revealed as a day of celebration.” Omar Ibn Al-Khattab (RA) asked, “Which is that verse?” The Jew replied with the ayah that can be translated as, **“...Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favor on you, and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you...” (TMQ, 5:3)**. Omar replied, “No doubt, we know when and where this verse was revealed to the Prophet. It was Friday and the Prophet was standing at 'Arafat (i.e. the Day of Hajj)”²¹

There is a subtle touch that can be noticed here. Most of the ayahs of this Surah are concluded with rather strong words, especially the introductory ayahs. For example Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...surely Allah is strict in punishment” (TMQ, 5:2)** and **“...surely Allah is swift at the reckoning” (TMQ, 5:4)**. The only exception is the third ayah which mentions the legislation in case of an urgent situation where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...And whoever is constrained in scantiness, (i.e., compelled by need)...”** and concludes it in what shows His mercy saying what can be translated as, **“Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.” (TMQ, 5:3)**.

The Third Call: the spiritual good

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, when you rise up for prayer, then wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads, (Or: “part of” the head) and (wash) your legs to the ankles...” (TMQ, 5:6)**.

Some may wonder why this ayah was revealed in a Surah that is about the fulfillment of obligations. Actually, the Surah starts with a statement of biological necessities (e.g. food and marriage) and mundane pleasures, so it was logical for the Surah to move to spiritual pleasures and spiritual purity that naturally start with *wudu*’ (ablution). This way, the Surah touches upon all kinds of pleasure: worship pleasure, as well as mundane pleasure. We can conclude from this that the legislations of Islam are inclusive, as legislations of dealings come hand in hand with those of worship.

Another subtle touch in Surat al-Ma'idah is that nearly after every ten ayahs, there is an ayah to remind us of our obligation to Allah (SWT). This obligation is mentioned in the Surah eleven times in clear, plain ayahs, which poses a question to Muslims.

²¹ Authentic Hadith, Al-Bukhari

Now that the life discipline which has been set out for you is complete, will you fulfill your obligation to it?

Allah (SWT) says in the seventh ayah what can be translated as, **“And remember the favor of Allah upon you and His compact by which He has solemnly bound (Literally: compacted) you as you said, “We have heard and we obey.”...”** (TMQ, 5:7). It is noticed here that there is a connection between this ayah and the ayah in Surat Al-Baqara that can be translated as, **“...And they have said, “We have heard, and we have obeyed. Grant (us) Your All-Supreme forgiveness, our Lord, and to You is the Destiny.”** (TMQ, 2:285). Believers say this while the Israelites say, **“...we have heard, and we disobey...”** (TMQ, 2:93). This makes the connections between the objectives and ideas of the Surahs of the Qur’an even clearer.

The fourth call (Justice)

The sequence of the ayahs proceeds until it reaches the fourth call, presented in the ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, be constantly upright for Allah, witnesses with equity, and let not antagonism of a people provoke you to not do justice. Do justice; that (literally: it) is closer to piety. And be pious to Allah, surely Allah is Ever-Cognizant of whatever you do”** (TMQ, 5:8).

After handling the fulfillment of obligations concerning food, drink, marriage and ablution, the ayahs move on to another very important covenant, which is justice. Justice is an obligation that must be fulfilled, even with those whom we hate or whom we fight. This ayah represents a very important pillar of Islam’s tolerance and its justice towards other parties.

The fifth call (remember Allah’s favors upon you)

The eleventh ayah reminds us that Allah (SWT) protects the believers from their enemies’ betrayal; thus, believers ought to fear Allah (SWT) and fulfill His obligations. **“O you who have believed, remember the favor of Allah upon you as a (certain) people designed to stretch against you their hands, so He restrained their hands from you. And be pious to Allah, and in Allah let the believers then put their trust”** (TMQ, 5:11).

Allah (SWT) fulfills His promises to us. One of these divine promises is mentioned in the ninth ayah, in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Allah has promised the ones who have believed and done deeds of righteousness (that) they will have forgiveness and a magnificent reward”** (TMQ, 5:9). In light of this ayah, will we be able to keep our obligations towards Allah (SWT)?

The Israelites and their covenants

Allah (SWT) then draws on examples of people who breached their covenants with Him, and did not act on the principle of this ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“we have heard, and we have obeyed”** (TMQ, 2: 285), as He ordained. These were the Israelites. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

“And indeed Allah already took compact with the Israelites and We sent forth among them twelve chieftains. And Allah said, “Surely I am with you, indeed if you keep up the prayer, and perform the *zakat*, (i.e., pay the poor-dues) and believe in My Messengers, and rally to them in assistance, and lend to Allah a fair loan, indeed I will definitely expiate for you your odious deeds, and indeed I will definitely cause you to enter gardens from beneath which rivers run. So whoever of you disbelieves after that, then he has already erred away from the level way” (TMQ, 5:12).

Hence, what was the result? Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, for their breaking their compact, We cursed them and We made their hearts grow hard” (TMQ, 5:13).** Allah (SWT) firmly warns us in this ayah against being like those who breached their covenants, or else His wrath and damnation would befall.

The story of Musa (Moses) (AS) and his people

The ayahs move on to depict what took place between Musa (AS) and the Israelites when they were asked to enter the holy land (Palestine), that (SWT) Allah promised for them. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O my people, enter the Holy Land (literally: the hallowed land) which Allah has prescribed for you and do not turn back in your traces, (literally: on your hind parts) (and) so you turn over as losers”.** They said, **“O Musa, surely there are people in it (who are) giants, and surely we will never enter it until they leave it. So, if they leave it, then surely we will be entering”**” (TMQ, 5:21-22). They disobeyed and breached their covenant with Allah (SWT), and they were consequently punished by Him. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Said He, “Then surely it will be prohibited for them for 40 years (while) they go astray in the earth”**” (TMQ, 5:26). Hence, Allah (SWT) denied them the entrance of the holy land for a period of 40 years.

We have previously mentioned that Allah (SWT) starts off the Surah by saying what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, fulfill your contracts. The brute of cattle (cattle, camels, sheep and goats) has been made lawful to you” (TMQ, 5:1).** This is to encourage the fulfillment of covenants so that He (SWT) would not deprive Muslims of lawful things permitted for the nation. In this story, Allah (SWT) tells us that He had set many restrictions on the Israelites because of their violation of their covenants. Thus, the main message of this Surah is that if a person honors the covenants, Allah (SWT) facilitates things for him. On the other hand, if a person breaches the covenants, Allah (SWT) makes things harder for him.

The story of Adam’s two sons:

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And recite to them the tiding of Adam’s two sons with the truth as they offered a sacrifice, (literally: sacrificed an all-sanctified sacrifice) (and) it was (graciously) accepted of one of them and not (graciously) accepted of the other” (TMQ, 5:27).** Adam’s son killed his brother rashly because of wrath, envy, and hatred. As for the link between the story of Adam’s two sons and that of the Israelites and their entrance to the holy land is that both of the stories represent instances of violation of covenants. Whereas the Israelites breached Allah’s (SWT) covenant because of their cowardice, Adam’s son

breached it because of his rashness. Representing the two extremes, both examples lead to the violation of Allah's (SWT) covenants. Islam, on the other hand, always advises us to adopt the middle course in all affairs.

Immediately after this story comes the 32nd ayah to comment on it. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“On that account We prescribed for the Israelites that whoever kills a self -other than for (killing another) self or (literally: nor) for corruption in the earth- then it will be as if he had killed mankind altogether; and whoever gives life to it, (i.e., a self) then it will be as if he had given life to mankind altogether” (TMQ, 5:32).**

Thus, after depicting the brutality of murder in Adam's story, Allah (SWT) sets out firm regulations in the following ayahs to fight corruption. The ayahs explained the restrictions on man's freedom, on theft, and on the spread of corruption on earth.

It is worth mentioning that the issue of public right has been addressed only recently while the holy Qur'an pioneered in issuing these laws more than 1400 years ago. Allah (SWT) explains this clearly in what can be translated as, **“that whoever kills a self -other than for (killing another) self or (literally: nor) for corruption in the earth- then it will be as if he had killed mankind altogether” (TMQ, 5:32).** Therefore, crime is not only a single assault, but also a threat facing the whole society. There is consequently a public right to be preserved.

The sixth call: (strive in the cause of Allah)

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, be pious to Allah and seek (close) proximity to Him, and strive in His way, that possibly you would prosper” (TMQ, 5:35).** Thus, after listing the threat of corruption, Allah (SWT) orders believers in the 35th ayah to strive in His cause and to fight corruption.

It is worth noting that, in the Qur'an, the decree to carry out *jihad* (striving in the cause of Allah) is always justified. For instance, in Surat An-Nisa, *jihad* is declared to support those deemed weak among men, women and newborns. In this respect, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And what is it with you, that you do not fight in the way of Allah, and (the way) of the ones deemed weak among the men, women and newborns” (TMQ, 4:75).**

The seventh, eighth and ninth call: (Never imitate blindly)

The ayahs reach a new subdivision of the Qur'an to describe three calls for preserving the distinctive Muslim identity. The seventh call is pointed out in the following ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not take to yourselves the Jews and the Nasara (Christians) as patrons; some of them are patrons to some (others). And whoever of you patronizes them, then surely he is one of them. Surely Allah does not guide the unjust people” (TMQ, 5:51).**

The eighth call is illustrated in the following ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, whoever of you turns back from His (Allah's) religion, then Allah will eventually come up with a people He loves**

and who love Him, humble towards the believers, mightily proud towards the disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah” (TMQ, 5:54).

The ninth call, in its turn, is referred to in the following ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not take to yourselves the ones who take your religion in mockery and as a plaything -from among the ones who were brought the Book even before you and (from among) the steadfast disbelievers- as constant patrons” (TMQ, 5:57).**

The previous ayahs do not aim at degrading the other religions, but rather at preserving the Muslim identity. The ayahs are a call to achieve complete allegiance to Islam. Surat Al-Ma'idah does not forbid dealing with the People of The Scripture. This fact is evident in previous ayahs such as the fifth in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Today the good things are made lawful for you, and the food of the ones to whom the Book was brought is lawful to you, and your food is made lawful to them. And (so) are believing women in wedlock, and in wedlock women of (the ones) to whom the Book was brought even before you” (TMQ, 5:5).** This ayah permits marriage to women of the People of The Scripture.

Thus, showing tolerance and mercy are recommended in our relationship with the People of The Scripture. Nevertheless, this should not be taken so far as to lead to the loss of the Muslim's identity and his allegiance to Islam. There is a difference between showing respect, tolerance, and compassion for others and fostering productive co-operation on the one hand, and dissolving into the other's identity and, consequently, losing one's own to the other. Hence, if the seventh and the ninth calls concentrate on forbidding taking disbelievers as patrons and loving them, the eighth call warns against the abandonment of Islam. This, in fact, is one of the most hazardous consequences of the loss of identity.

Notice also that the previous subdivision of the Qur'an warns against judging or ruling by what Allah (SWT) has not revealed. This was observed in the following ayahs in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

“... And whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then those are they (who are) the disbelievers” (TMQ, 5:44).

“... And whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then those are they (who are) the unjust” (TMQ, 5:45).

“... And whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then those are they (who are) the immoral” (TMQ, 5:47).

“Is it then the judgment of (pagan) ignorance that they inequitably seek? And who is fairer in judgment than Allah, for a people having certitude?” (TMQ, 5:50).

The relationship between the above-mentioned ayahs and the three calls in question is that blind imitation of others is the main reason for judging or ruling by what Allah (SWT) has not revealed. O youth! Fulfill your obligation of abandoning blind imitation; fulfill your obligations by alleging to your religion and abiding by its decrees and prohibitions.

The gentleness of love

One of the graces of the holy Qur'an lies in the eighth call where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, whoever of you turns back from His (Allah's) religion, then Allah will eventually come up with a people He loves and who love Him” (TMQ, 5:54).** The holy Qur'an uses gentleness and love to warn against one of the most dangerous situations one could ever get into: turning back from Islam.

The ayah does not state that those who turn back from Islam will be tormented and placed in hell. Instead, Allah (SWT) threatens using the tone of love and not that of hellfire. After the stern statements and commands that are used in the Surah comes a gentle call to leave a special effect on the soul.

The tenth call (“Do not prohibit whatever good things Allah has made lawful for you” (TMQ, 5:87)).

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, do not prohibit whatever good things Allah has made lawful for you, and do not transgress. Surely Allah does not love the transgressors” (TMQ, 5:87).**

This ayah asks believers not to prohibit what Allah (SWT) has made lawful to them. Only Allah (SWT) has the right to determine what is lawful and what is not. Allah (SWT) prohibits harmful things and allows good and useful things. This notion is confirmed by the ayah that follows in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And eat of whatever Allah has provided you, lawful and good, and be pious to Allah, in Whom you are believers” (TMQ, 5:88).**

The link between the tenth call and the second one is that it is sinful to prohibit what's lawful just as it is sinful to permit what's unlawful; it is an act of disobedience to Allah (SWT) and an act of changing His decree. Therefore, the characteristics of what's lawful and what's not are gradually being clarified. Thus, every ayah adds a new concept to complete the rules decreed to Muslims.

The eleventh call: (unlawful drinks)

After dealing with good things that Allah (SWT) made lawful, the ayahs move on to deal with what's forbidden (in the same order presented the first and second ayahs). Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, surely wine and games of chance, and altars (for idols) and divining (i.e., divination by arrows or in any other way) are only an abomination of Satan's doing, so avoid it, that possibly you would prosper” (TMQ, 5:90).**

Since the Surah starts with listing unlawful food, it also has to address what drinks are unlawful since its name is Al-Ma'idah (the table). The main goal here is to warn Muslims against indulging in the prohibited pleasures of life. The ayah invites Muslims to fulfill their pledges in their relationship with Allah (SWT) and not to even taste a single drop of wine as alcohol can lead to enmity and hatred among the members of a nation.

Notice that the ayah deals with the issue of wine sternly and associates it to altars and divining that are remnants of polytheism. The objective of this warning is to protect

the nation from this destructive habit. Another remark is that the holy Qur'an uses 'avoid it' to indicate to what extent Islam prohibits and forbids wine drinking.

The twelfth and the thirteenth calls: (Be aware of affliction in what is lawful and what is not)

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, indeed Allah will definitely try you with something of the game that your hands and lances attain, that Allah may know who fears Him in the unseen..."** (TMQ, 5:94). This ayah warns Muslims against afflictions they might face and that are meant to test their faith and their application of the constraints of what's lawful and what's not.

This ayah was revealed when the companions were in a state of *ihram* (pilgrim sanctity, i.e. in the sacred precincts or in the sanctified). Allah (SWT) was testing them by ordering them not to hunt regardless of the availability of games around them. The ayah that follows confirms the same meaning. In this respect, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, do not kill the game (while) you are in pilgrim sanctity (i.e., in the sacred precincts or in the sanctified)"** (TMQ, 5:95). There is an obvious coherence between the beginning and end of the Surah in the sense that both focus on hunting regulations.

The fourteenth call: (Do not make things harder for yourselves)

The calls carry on until we reach the point where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, do not ask about things which, if were displayed to you, would vex you, and in case you ask about them while the Qur'an is being sent down, they will be displayed to you. Allah has been clement towards them, (i.e., those things) and Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Forbearing"** (TMQ, 5:101). Allah (SWT) reveals in this ayah one of the regulations concerning the issue of the lawful and the unlawful that many people misunderstand. Their narrow knowledge in this field pushes them to take extreme positions. They, as a result, fail to comply with the regulations they made for themselves and thus end up falling in disobedience to Allah (SWT). This ayah calls for balance: although Allah (SWT) orders us to fulfill covenants, we should not make things harder for ourselves.

There is an amazing connection between these ayahs and the story of the Israelites' cow in Surat Al-Baqara. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"A people even before you already asked about them; thereafter they became disbelievers in them"** (TMQ, 2:102). This ayah refers to the excessive questions that previous nations used to pose to their messengers. Their excessive inquiries led to tightening rules, which they eventually disobeyed.

There's an ayah in Surat al-Baqara in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"So, they slew it, and they had scarcely performed that"** (TMQ, 2:71). The Israelites inquired excessively about the nature and the color of the cow. They asked about things they were not obliged to know about and thus turned an absolute and unrestricted rule into a restricted one.

Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) and his companions is a good example to follow as he once said what can be translated as, "O people, Allah has made hajj obligatory for

you; so perform hajj”. Thereupon a person said “Messenger of Allah, (is it to be performed) every year?” He (SAWS) kept quiet, and repeated (these words) thrice, whereupon Allah's Messenger (SAWS) said “If I were to say "Yes", it would become obligatory (for you to perform it every year) and you would not be able to do it”²².

In Surat Al-Ma'idah, there is clear balance between the adherence to orders and prohibitions, and the fulfillment of obligations to Allah (SWT) on one hand and the avoidance of unnecessary restriction of rules on the other.

The fifteenth call: (Do not be an imitator)

As the ayahs carry on, we reach another rule concerning what's lawful and what's not. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, (look) after your (own) selves (literally: upon you are yourselves). He who errs (does not) harm you when you are (rightly) guided” (TMQ, 5:105).**

Abu-Bakr (RA) once said in a speech, “you misinterpret this ayah”. People misinterpreted the ayah and thought it meant that we are not to help in the guidance of others; those who want to stray from the right path are free to do so. This misconception led to the abandonment of the *da'wa* (missionary activity). However, the ayah really means that even if everyone alters the laws of what's lawful and what's not, and neglects the fulfillment of covenants, believers have to stand firmly and fulfill their covenant. This coincides with Prophet Muhammad's (SAWS) saying, which can be translated as, “Let no one of you be an imitator; acting benevolently if people act benevolently and acting badly if people act badly. Rather, if people act benevolently (you should) act benevolently, and if they act badly may you never wrong (people)”.²³

Therefore, in the last two calls, the Surah concentrates on two aspects of commands and prohibitions:

- Do not make things harder for yourself.
- Do not be negatively influenced by the surrounding people.

The sixteenth call: (the lawful and the unlawful in testimony and bequest)

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, the testimony between you, when death is present to any of you while bequeathing, shall be two (men) with (i.e. owning) a sense of justice” (TMQ, 5:106).** This ayah comes to complete the series of decrees revealed in the Surah. It proves the thoroughness of Islam regarding all daily affairs, starting from food and drink; marriage and family relationships to punishment laws, international relationships, testimony, and bequest.

Let us contemplate again on this ayah that depicts the comprehensiveness of Islam with regards to all daily affairs. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favor on you,**

²²Authentic Hadith, narrated by Muslim.

²³Weak Hadith, narrated by Al-Albani.

and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you” (TMQ, 5:3). Thus, be thankful to Allah (*SWT*) for the blessing granted by this religion and its honorable laws.

The legal intents in the Surah

Since Surat Al-Ma'idah handles the issue of what's lawful and what's not in Islam. It is the only Surah that includes the five Islamic legal intents:

- Protection of religion
- Protection of soul
- Protection of mind
- Protection of honor
- Protection of money

This Surah, which contains the ayah in which Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“Is it then the judgment of (pagan) ignorance that they inequitably seek? And who is fairer in judgment than Allah, for a people having certitude?” (TMQ, 5:50),** clarifies that Allah's (*SWT*) set of decrees is the best guarantee for humanity's well being both in this life and the hereafter.

This is fulfilled through:

- 1- The protection of religion: Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, whoever of you turns back from His (Allah's) religion...” (TMQ, 5:54).** Thus, the first issue addressed by the Islamic law is the protection of religion and abandonment of disbelief in Allah (*SWT*).
- 2- The protection of the soul: Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“On that account We prescribed for the Israelites that whoever kills a self -other than for (killing another) self or (literally: nor) for corruption in the earth- then it will be as if he had killed mankind altogether” (TMQ, 5:32).** Thus, homicide is forbidden.
- 3- The protection of mind: Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, surely wine and games of chance, and altars (for idols) and divining (i.e., divination by arrows or in any other way) are only an abomination of Satan's doing, so avoid it, that possibly you would prosper” (TMQ, 5:90).** The main purpose of the prohibition of wine is the protection of the mind.
- 4- The protection of honor: Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“Today the good things are made lawful for you, and the food of the ones to whom the Book was brought is lawful to you, and your food is made lawful to them. And (so) are believing women in wedlock, and in wedlock women of (the ones) to whom the Book was brought even before you when you have brought them their rewards in wedlock, other than in fornication, neither taking them to yourselves as mates (i.e., girl-friends)” (TMQ, 5:5).** This ayah forbids pre-marital relationships between the two sexes.
- 5- The protection of money: Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“And the male thief and the female thief: then cut (off) the hands of both” (TMQ, 5:38).**

Hence, the five legal intents are mentioned in Surat Al-Ma'idah in order to prove that the aim behind adhering to these orders and prohibitions is the welfare of humankind in those five areas.

The revision of covenants on the Day of Judgment

When will the covenants be revised? They will be revised on the Day of Judgment. For this reason, Allah (SWT) ends this Surah marvelously by saying what can be translated as, **“The day when Allah will gather the Messengers, so He will say, “What answer were you given?” They will say, “We have no knowledge; surely You, Ever You, are the Superb Knower of the (things) unseen””** (TMQ, 5:109).

What is worth noting here is the coherence that characterizes the ayahs of this Surah. At the beginning, Allah (SWT) asks us to fulfill obligations. In the middle, he raises the issue of what's lawful and what's not, saying what can be translated as, **“O you Messenger, proclaim whatever has been sent down to you from your Lord”** (TMQ, 5:67). By the end, He (SWT) concludes with what can be translated as, **“The day when Allah will gather the Messengers, so He will say, “What answer were you given?””** (TMQ, 5:109).

The end of the Surah takes us to the story of Isa (Jesus) (AS). This ayah comes to acquit Isa (AS) of all things done by the Christians who strayed away from his path. This is meant to raise again the problem of blind imitation of others. How can you Muslims follow them while Isa (AS) himself will renounce them on the Day of Judgment?

In order to encourage people to fulfill their covenants, Allah (SWT) refers to the Day of Judgment, saying what can be translated as, **“Allah said, “This is the day the sincere ones will profit from their sincerity (literally: their sincerity will benefit the sincere “ones”)”** (TMQ, 5:119). The sincere ones are those who fulfill their covenants with Allah (SWT) and people.

Reason behind the title of Surat Al-Ma'idah

Finally, we are going to address the reason behind naming the Surah as Al-Ma'idah. Is it because the story of the table is told in the Surah? The Surah mainly discusses the fulfillment of covenants, so what is the link between this issue and the table? Allah (SWT) says, what can be translated as, **“As the disciples (the followers of Isa), (also called the apostles) said, “O Isa son of Maryam (Mary), is your Lord able to send down (The Arabic verb implies sending down more than once or in large quantities) upon us a Table from the heaven?” he said, “Be pious to Allah, if you are believers”. They said, “We would (like) to eat of it and our hearts be composed; and that we may know that you have already (spoken) to us sincerely and that thereof we may be among the witnesses”. Isa son of Maryam said, “O Allah, our Lord, send down upon us a Table from the heaven that will be (for) us a festival, for the first of us and the last (of us), and a sign from You. And provide for us; and You are the Most Charitable of providers”. Allah said, “Surely I am sending it down upon you; so, whoever of you hereafter disbelieves, then surely I will torment him with a torment wherewith I do not torment anyone of the worlds”** (TMQ, 5:112-115).

The last ayah is pivotal. Allah (*SWT*) says what can be translated as, **“Allah said, “Surely I am sending it down upon you; so, whoever of you hereafter disbelieves, then surely I will torment him with a torment wherewith I do not torment anyone of the worlds” (TMQ, 5:115).** It refers to those who revoked their obligations even after Allah (*SWT*) sent down the table. Thus, the story of the table is related to that of a people who asked Allah (*SWT*) to give them a sign, and so He did. In return, Allah (*SWT*) took an abiding oath from them; an oath, if revoked, would result in severe torment.

As for our nation, Allah (*SWT*) provides it with this central ayah, which can be translated as, **“Today I have completed your religion for you, and I have perfected My favor on you, and I am satisfied with Islam as a religion for you” (TMQ, 5:3).** This ayah represents a divine gift similar to that given to the disciples, the table. The question that arises now is are the Muslims going to fulfill their covenants as the disciples did?

While reading this Surah, please try to feel the nobleness of the blessings bestowed upon us by Allah (*SWT*) by completing the religion. Try, also, to tame your desires in order to fulfill the obligations of Allah (*SWT*) in all daily matters.

Surat Al-An'am (The Cattle)

About the Surah

Surat Al-An'am is a Makkan Surah. It is the first Makkan Surah in the Qur'anic order (since all the Surahs from Surat Al-Baqara until Surat Al-Ma'idah are Madinan Surahs). It was revealed after Surat Al-Hijr and it consists of 165 ayahs.

Cloudless Night

The revelation of this Surah was accompanied by many signs of its distinctiveness. Firstly, the entire Surah was revealed upon the Prophet (SAWS) in one night en bloc, whereas all the long Surahs in the Qur'an were revealed sporadically. One of the marvellous signs of the Surah's exceptionality is the descent of 70 thousand angels glorifying Allah (SWT) with a sweet, loud voice on the night it was revealed. How magnificent is this majestic caravan surrounding the descent of this noble Surah in the dark of the night. Hence, these signs shed light on the objectives of the Surah as well as its contents.

The Objectives of the Surah

Surat Al-An'am begins with what can be translated as, **"Praise be to Allah Who created the heavens and the earth" (TMQ, 6:1)**. This ayah is enough to make any Muslim feel the main objective as well as the core idea of the Surah from the very beginning. It is to profess belief in the unity of Allah (SWT), to reject polytheism, and to fill your heart with His love and nothing but His love, that this Surah was revealed for. This idea of monotheism is repeated 49 times in 49 different ayahs, which is about 30% of the Surah. Hence, the reason behind its magnificent revelation and why it is accompanied by 70 thousand angels becomes quite clear. Moreover, the significance of the time of its revelation (night), which is the most appropriate time for such a spiritual atmosphere, becomes manifest.

People Addressed in the Surah

Surat Al-An'am comes amidst the different ideologies, methodologies, and ethnicities in the world as a refutation of such fallacies. Whether they were the worship of idols or the forces of nature, as was the case in the age of the Prophet (SAWS), or atheism and denial of Allah's existence in our modern age. Through displaying the universal proofs of Allah's omnipotence and greatness, the Surah proves the falseness of such ideas. Thus, it addresses you, believers, in the first place to strengthen your faith, your love for Allah and your sincerity in worshiping Him. Moreover, it gives you the evidence with which you can prove false the claims raised by materialists and atheists, however consistent they may seem to be. This is successfully achieved through a discourse on Allah's omnipotence and the refutation of atheistic claims, such as pantheism or the accidental principle; the belief that the world was created accidentally. It is the incomparable creativity and perfection of the creation of the universe that proves, beyond all doubt, the greatness and oneness of the Creator.

The Surah also addresses another group, which corresponds to those who believe in Allah (SWT), yet purposely deviate from practicing the teachings of His religion.

Surat Al-An'am explains to this group that faith is indivisible and that it has to be felt in the heart and expressed through actions at the same time. One part without the other will not do. This becomes clear by the end of the Surah as well as in the reason behind its name. Consequently, we feel the significance of its revelation all at once, which emphasizes on the integral nature of practice and belief in monotheism.

The Correlation of the Surahs of the Ever-Glorious Qur'an

Before tackling the ayahs of the Surah, the sequence of the discourse with *Ahl-ul-kitab* (People of The Scripture) throughout the Surahs of the Qur'an must be looked upon once more. Each of Surat Al-Baqara, Al-'Imran, An-Nisa', and Al-Ma'idah discuss different features of *Ahl-ul-kitab*, leaving the discourse with the atheists (especially Makkan atheists, since the Surah itself is Makkan) all to Surat Al-An'am.

Another subtle observation about the relation between Surat Al-An'am and the Surah preceding it (Surat Al-Ma'idah) is that Surat Al-Ma'idah ends with what can be translated as, **"To Allah (belongs) the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth and whatever is in them" (TMQ, 5:120)**, as if to foreshadow Surat Al-An'am which starts with what can be translated as, **"Praise be to Allah Who created the heavens and the earth" (TMQ, 6:1)**.

A Couple of Words Flooding the Heart With Love ("Say" and "He is")

Surat Al-An'am follows a specific order strictly; four or five ayahs about Allah's omnipotence occur followed by a set of ayahs challenging materialists, atheists, and pantheists. The Surah is revealed in this sequence invariably. It is quite visible that most of its ayahs begin with one of the two words that can be translated as, **"Say"**, or **"He is"**. Let us discover the reason behind this repetition as well as the relation between these two phrases and the core of the Surah.

Whenever you come across an ayah that begins with what can be translated as, **"He is"**, you will find that it is about Allah's omnipotence. For instance, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And He is Allah in the heavens and in the earth" (TMQ, 6:3)**, **"And He is (The One) Who takes you up by night" (TMQ, 6:60)**, **"And He is The Vanquisher above His bondmen" (TMQ, 6:61)**, and **"And He is (The One) Who created the heavens and the earth..." (TMQ, 6:73)**. As for confrontational ayahs, which address the Prophet (SAWS) as well as every believer, they all illustrate ways of refuting atheistic claims. They positively begin with **"Say"**, **"Which thing is greatest in testimony?" Say, "Allah is Ever- Witnessing between me and you" (TMQ, 6:19)**, **"Say, "Who safely delivers you from the darkness(es) of the land and the sea?" (TMQ, 6:63)**, **"Say, Allah safely delivers you from them and from every agony" (TMQ, 6:64)**, **"Say, "He is The Determiner over sending forth upon you a torment, from above you or from beneath your legs, (i.e., under your feet)" (TMQ, 6:65)**, and **"Say, "Shall we invoke, apart from Allah, that which neither profits nor harms us" (TMQ, 6:71)**. It is almost as if the ayahs are addressing readers telling them to first feel who the Omnipotent is until their hearts are filled with His love, then confront those who raise doubts about their belief in the Oneness and Greatness of Allah (SWT).

Having been interested by and more than sufficiently introduced to the Surah, it is time to take a close look at the confrontational as well as divine omnipotence ayahs of the Surah.

A Flow of Ayahs of Omnipotence Commence the Surah

Surat Al-An'am begins with three ayahs that equally indicate the omnipotence of Allah (SWT). Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Praise be to Allah Who created the heavens and the earth, and made darkness(es) and light, thereafter the ones who have disbelieved unjustly set up equals (Or: rivals) to their Lord. He is (The One) Who created you of clay, thereafter He decreed a term, and a term is stated in His Sight..."** (TMQ, 6:1-2), then **"And He is Allah in the heavens and in the earth. He knows your secret and your speaking aloud and He knows whatever you are earning"** (TMQ, 6:3), and **"So they already cried lies to the Truth as soon as it came to them. Then the tidings of whatever they used to mock will eventually come up to them"** (TMQ, 6:5).

All these ayahs inspire readers to feel the omnipotence of Allah (SWT). Hence, if atheists turn their backs in denial, readers will feel the hideousness of their sins and the extent of their aberration and will, therefore, have a good reason to confront them with the ayahs of the Surah.

Time and Place

One can observe the gentle indication included in the following two ayahs. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Say, 'To whom (belongs) whatever is in the heavens and the earth?'"** Say, **"To Allah."** (TMQ, 6:12), then comes **"And to Him belongs whatever rests in the night and the daytime"** (TMQ, 6:13). The first ayah indicates that Allah (SWT) is the Owner of the place **"the heavens and the earth"** and the second ayah indicates that He is the Owner of **"the night and the daytime"**, the owner of the time. Glorified be Allah (SWT) Who has created the time and the place and has subjugated them to His Sovereignty.

What is the Sign?

Read this magnificent confrontational ayah bearing in mind Allah's ownership of time and place; **"Say, 'Shall I take to myself as constant patron other than Allah, The Originator (Literally: The Renderer) of the heavens and the earth, and He is (The One) Who feeds, and is not fed?'"** Say, **"Surely I have been commanded to be the first of the ones who have surrendered"** (i.e. who have become Muslims) **and definitely do not be of the associators (i.e., those who associate others with Allah).** Say, **"Surely I fear, in case I disobey my Lord, the torment of a tremendous Day."** **From whomever it is turned about (i.e., it "torment" is turned away) upon that Day, then He will have mercy on him; and that is the evident triumph"** (TMQ, 6:14-16). These ayahs guide us to knowledge and true belief by liberating us Muslims from all forms of polytheism or fear of any creatures.

Please note that the verb phrase **"Say"** invariably occurs after **"He is"**, as if to tell us to first identify Allah (SWT) and fill our hearts with His love, then react to the claims of atheists and say who He is.

A confrontational Incident

A group of disbelievers came to the Prophet (SAWS) asking him to provide them with a proof of his Prophethood, and of Allah's oneness, claiming that they have already asked the Jews who claimed that they had no proof to offer. In response to that comes ayah 19 of Surat Al-An'am; **"Say, 'Which thing is greatest in testimony?' Say, 'Allah is Ever-Witnessing between me and you; and this Qur'an has been revealed to me to warn you thereby and whomever it reaches.' Do you surely bear witness indeed that there are other gods with Allah?' Say, 'I do not bear witness.' Say, 'Surely He is only One God, and surely I (myself) am quit of whatever you associate (with Him)'" (TMQ, 6:19).** After Allah's testimony, what else can be trusted?!

Though Surat Al-An'am mainly addresses polytheists, as has already been mentioned, ayah 20 encloses a hint at the Jews who denied having a witness for the Prophethood of Muhammad (SAWS); **"The ones to whom We have brought the Book recognize it (just) as they recognize their sons" (TMQ, 6:20).**

The Day of Judgment: Live Scenes

The ayahs would sometimes make you visualize the scenes being described and almost hear the sounds of the people in it. Here they are, standing in front of the gates of hell; **"And if you could see (them) as they are made to stand against the Fire, so they say, 'Oh, would that we might be turned back, and (then) we would not cry lies to the signs of our Lord, and we would be among the believers!'" (TMQ, 6:27).** The ayahs then take you to a most sublime situation which was always denied by disbelievers; facing the Compeller of heavens and earth. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And if you could see (them) as they are made to stand against their Lord! He will say, 'Is not this (ever) the Truth?' They will say, 'Yes indeed by our Lord!' He will say, 'Then taste the torment because you used to disbelieve.'" (TMQ, 6:30).** Look at those sinful and immoral people who are burdened by their wrongdoings and how they are extremely tired of bearing their burdens on their backs. Just visualize them as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...And they will be carrying their encumbrances (Literally: whatever "they are encumbered with") on their backs. Verily odious are the encumbrances they bear!" (TMQ, 6:31).**

Patience and Steadiness in Confrontation

The ayahs do not only provide the Prophet (SAWS) and all *Da'wa* (missionary activities) activists with sufficient evidence and proofs to challenge disbelievers with, but they also sustain them with the power to be steadfast in spite of the disappointment and frustration they might face. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And indeed Messengers were already mocked at even before you; then what they were scoffing at redounded upon the ones who mocked at them" (TMQ, 6:10).** He (SWT) also says what can be translated as, **"And Messengers even before you were indeed already cried lies to, (yet) they were patient against what they were cried lies to (i.e., patient with what they were accused of lying about) and were hurt, until Our victory came up to them..." (TMQ, 6:34).**

Yet, the epitome of this exceedingly supportive string of ayahs is found in the following ayah; **“We already know that surely it indeed grieves you (the things) they say. Yet surely they do not cry lies to you, but the unjust (people) repudiate the signs of Allah” (TMQ, 6:33).** O Muhammad (SAWS), these people do not accuse your person of lying as much as they deny the ayahs of Allah (SWT) and He will support you against them.

Moving Words

The Surah follows the same pattern throughout its ayahs; an ayah of Allah’s omnipotence followed by a confrontational ayah. In this sequence comes a magnificent ayah of omnipotence in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And in no way is there a beast (moving) in the earth nor a bird flying with its two wings except that they are nations like you. In no way have We neglected anything whatever in the Book...” (TMQ, 6:38).**

When disbelievers deny the words of Allah (SWT), a stream of thunderous ayahs comes to confront them. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Say, “Have you seen (for) yourselves, in case the torment of Allah comes up to you or the Hour comes up to you, will you invoke any other than Allah, in case you are (truly) sincere?” (TMQ, 6:40).** Allah warns them against the consequences of transgression and excessive sinfulness in order to avoid the retribution that Allah (SWT) exacted on disbelievers in times gone by; **“So, as soon as they forgot what they were reminded of, We opened upon them the gates of everything, until when they exulted with what was brought to them, We took them (away) suddenly; then lo, they were dumbfounded” (TMQ, 6:44).**

Another stream of confrontational ayahs starting with the word “Say” takes the lead, **“Say, “Have you seen (that) in case Allah takes away your hearing and your belongings, (Literally: eye-sights) and seals your hearts, who is a god other than Allah to come up with them (back) to you?” (i.e., bring them “back” to you) Look how We propound the signs; thereafter they turn aside. Say, “Have you seen for yourselves? In case the torment of Allah comes up to you suddenly or openly, will any be perished except the unjust people?” (TMQ, 6:46-47).** The context of the ayahs softens hearts and fills them with a desire to be close to Allah (SWT).

A New Way of Confrontation

As the ayahs came to assist the Prophet (SAWS) in his *Da’wa* and confrontation with his people, they start to change their methods in order to meet the Prophet’s needs (SAWS). For instance, ayah 57 encloses a new approach; **“Say, “Surely I am on a supreme evidence from my Lord and you have cried lies to it...” (TMQ, 6:57).** The ayah accentuates basic dogmatic beliefs and great self-confidence that unsettle opponents, a useful *Da’wa* method that can be learnt from the Surah.

Allah’s Inclusive Knowledge and Omnipotence

Now a new stream of ayahs about Allah's omnipotence is related in an affecting tone; **"And in His Providence are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them except He. And He knows whatever is in the land and the sea. And in no way does a leaf fall down, except that He knows it, and not a grain in the darkness (es) of the earth, not a thing wet or dry, except that it is in an evident Book"** (TMQ, 6:59). It's almost as if you can actually see the leaf falling in a desert, or atop a mountain, and the grain in the bottom of the sea.

Who can demand human souls but Allah (SWT) who says what can be translated as, **"And He is (The One) Who takes you up by night, and He knows whatever you indulge in by daytime..."** (TMQ, 6:60). How come his oneness is denied? How can anybody deny it? Who possesses the comprehensive knowledge of his creatures and their quantities but Allah (SWT) who says what can be translated as, **"And He is The Vanquisher above His bondmen, and He sends preservers over you..."** (TMQ, 6:61), which are the angels guarding and inscribing all of one's good and bad deeds.

Who rescues people from the horrors of land and sea but Allah (SWT) who says what can be translated as, **"Say, "Who safely delivers you from the darkness (es) of the land and the sea?..."** (TMQ, 6:63). How come his oneness is denied? How can anybody deny it?

Hence, anyone who shows or feels any signs of denial will be sufficiently answered and thus reassured and his doubts will be effectively refuted. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"Say, "He is The Determiner over sending forth upon you a torment, from above you or from beneath your legs, (i.e., under your feet)..."** (TMQ, 6:65). Who can escape His omnipotence or hide from His inclusive knowledge?

A believer reading Surat Al-An'am would be completely moved by the setting of the scene in which the Surah was revealed; a nocturnal scene in which a troop of angels descend with the Surah. A believer would almost hear the soft voices of the angels glorifying Allah (SWT) in this Surah. The Surah's context causes a paradigm shift in the human view point, elevating man to the realm of the heavens and earth, day and night, land and sea, sun, moon and stars. It introduces human beings to paradise, showing them the kingdom of Allah (SWT) from one ayah of omnipotence to another, until it reaches the following ayah; **"And He is (The One) Who created the heavens and the earth with the Truth; and the day He says, "Be!" and it is. His Saying is the Truth, and His is the Kingdom the Day the Trumpet will be blown; He is The Knower of the Unseen and the Witnessed; and He is The Ever-Wise, The Ever-Cognizant"** (TMQ, 6:73).

A Pious Trip: Prophet Ibrahim (AS) "Abraham" and His People

The Surah then starts to relate the story of Prophet Ibrahim (AS) and his meditation upon the universal indications of Allah's omnipotence in the same omnipotence-confrontation pattern the Surah has been following throughout. The story of Ibrahim (AS) cannot be considered separate from the order of the Surah. On the contrary, it is employed to realize its main objective. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And thus We show Ibrahim (Abraham) the dominion of the heavens and the earth that he may be of the ones of constant certitude. So as soon as the night**

outspreed over him, he saw a planet. He said, **“This is my Lord.”** Then, as soon as it set, (Literally: waned, faded) he said, **“I do not love the setting (things)”** (TMQ, 6:75-76). It is the same chain of order in the Surah in the sense that Ibrahim contemplates upon the signs of Allah’s omnipotence. Furthermore, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Then, as soon as he saw the sun emerging, he said, “This is my Lord, this is greater.” Yet as soon as it set, he said, “O my people, surely I am quit of whatever you associate (with Allah)”** (TMQ, 6:78). Indeed, there is no room for doubt about the great magnitude of the Lord of the universe that exceeds all limits. Thus, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely I have directed my face to Him Who originated (i.e., created) the heavens and the earth, unswervingly upright, (i.e., by nature upright) and in no way am I one of the associators.”** (i.e., those who associate others with Allah)” (TMQ, 6:79).

After this presentation of the signs of omnipotence, the ayahs shift to the confrontation; **“Do you argue with me concerning Allah, and He has already guided me?...”** (TMQ, 6:80). Still, Ibrahim emphasizes the Oneness of Allah. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...And I do not fear what you associate with Him, except my Lord will decide anything”** (TMQ, 6:80). Hence, Allah (SWT) praises this method in *Da’wa* in what can be translated as, **“And that is Our Argument, (which) We brought Ibrahim (Abraham) against his people...”** (TMQ, 6:83).

The incomparable beauty of the Qur’an is complemented by the repetition of the stories of Prophets throughout it. The repetition, however, does not render the Qur’an redundant. On the contrary, each repetition has an indispensable function in that each repetition functions to fulfill the objectives of the Surah it occur in, in a unique way.

For instance, Surat Al-An’am presents a specific part of Prophet Ibrahim’s (AS) story that happens to be his contemplation upon the miracles of Allah (SWT) in the universe. Prophet Ibrahim (AS) applies the method of omnipotence and confrontation in his *Da’wa* to Allah (SWT). Please notice that the part where Prophet Ibrahim (AS) is thrown in the fire is not mentioned here, but yet the Prophet’s story still supports the objective of the Surah.

A strong-Worded Warning of Polytheism

As a comment on the story of Ibrahim (AS), comes a crucial ayah that warns against polytheism. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“The ones who have believed and have not confounded their belief with injustice, to those belong the (true) security, and they are right-guided”** (TMQ, 6:82).

When that ayah was revealed, the Prophet’s companions said, "O Allah's Apostle! Who is there amongst us who has not done wrong to himself?" He (SAWS) replied, "It is not as you say, for 'wrong' in the ayah and 'do not confuse their belief, with wrong means 'SHIRK' (i.e. joining others in worship with Allah (SWT)). Haven't you heard Luqman's saying to his son, **“O my son, do not associate (others) with Allah. Surely associating (others with Allah) is indeed a monstrous injustice”** (TMQ, 31:13)" ²⁴.

²⁴ Authentic Hadith, Al-Bukhari.

Even in the ayahs about Prophets, who are the closest of all to Allah (SWT), the punishment of polytheism is clearly stated. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...and if they associated anything (with Him), indeed whatever they were doing would be frustrated for them”** (TMQ, 6:88).

Omnipotence and Confrontation in the Same Ayah

Ayah 91 contains one of the most magnificent proofs of Allah’s omnipotence; **“And in no way have they estimated Allah His true estimate as they said, “In no way has Allah sent down anything on any mortal...”**” (TMQ, 6:91)

One day, the Prophet (SAWS) recited this ayah to his companions and then said, “The Mighty Lord, the Exalted and Glorious would take hold of the Heavens and earth in His hand. Allah (SWT) in this ayah is glorifying himself saying ‘I am the sovereign. I am the Holy one’”. The Prophet (SAWS) kept reiterating the most beautiful names of Allah so his companions looked at the pulpit, which was shaking with the Prophet (SAWS) above it, affected by the glory and greatness of Allah (SWT)²⁵. The very inanimate wood actually sensed the glory of Allah (SWT) when there are still human beings among us whose hearts are never moved by the glory of Allah (SWT), not even out of fear. These people are confronted in the second part of the same ayah 91. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...Say, “Who sent down the Book that Mûsa (Moses) came with (as) a light and a guidance to mankind? ... Say, “Allah.” Thereafter leave them out, playing in their wading (i.e., plunge in vain discourse)”** (TMQ, 6:91).

A Return to the Ayahs of Omnipotence: Cannot You Feel His Love?

The ayahs here (95-103) flow with manifestations of Allah’s omnipotence and extraordinary creativity; **“Surely Allah is The Splitter of the grains and nuclei Also: date-pits, fruit stones and other kernels). He brings out the living from the dead, and He is The Bringer out of the dead from the living. That (Literally: those) is Allah; then, however are you diverged (into falsehood)? The Splitter of the daybreak, and He has made the night for rest, and the sun and moon to all-reckoned (courses). That is the determining of The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Knowing”** (TMQ, 6:95-96). Through these ayahs, Allah (SWT) demonstrates His omnipotence in two different examples; once as the One who causes the seed-grain and fruit-stone to split and sprout though it is of tiny size, and once as the Splitter of the daybreak through the darkness of the endless night.

Indeed, the Surah touches the genuine human nature which knows well its Creator and believes in His Oneness even though it is buried under our mundane lives. Yet this heap of polytheism sometimes obscures this human nature, obstructing it from prevailing. Surat Al-An’am comes to activate this nature and wipe the dust of polytheism off this nature to enable it to return to Allah (SWT) and to believe in His Oneness. For this reason, Allah (SWT) addresses polytheists in what can be translated as, **“The Ever-Innovating of the heavens and the earth-however does He have a child, and He has no female companion, and He created everything, and He is**

²⁵ Authentic Hadith, Muslim.

Ever-Knowing of everything?” (TMQ, 6:101). Is there anyone who can argue against that?! Allah (SWT) alone creates and excels. He is the Omnipotent, the One Who has no match or partner. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“The Ever-Innovating of the heavens and the earth-however does He have a child, and He has no female companion, and He created everything, and He is Ever-Knowing of everything? That is Allah, your Lord, there is no god except He, the Creator of everything. So worship Him; and He is an Ever-Trusted Trustee over everything. Beholdings (i.e., eyesights) cannot perceive Him, and He perceives be holdings and He is The Ever-Kind, The Ever-Cognizant” (TMQ, 6:101-103).** These ayahs prepare for the following crucial ayah which can be translated as, **“Demonstrations have already come to you from your Lord...” (TMQ, 6:104).**

Hence, throughout the ayahs the evidence of Allah’s Greatness, Power, and Omnipotence become crystal clear. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...so whoever beholds, it is for his own good, (Literally: for his “own” self) and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm, (Literally: upon his “own” self)” (TMQ, 6:104).** Whoever believes will be the winner and whoever disbelieves shows the real blindness; the blindness of the heart which is far worse than that of the eyes.

In order to show the difference between faith and disbelief, the Surah uses different examples and similes. In the previous ayah (104), for instance, atheism is likened to blindness, while in ayah (122) the comparison far exceeds this; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And is he who was deceased, then We gave him life and made for him a light to walk by among mankind, as one whose likeness is in the darkness (es), (and) he is not coming out of them? Thus whatever the disbelievers were doing was adorned (i.e., made attractive) for them” (TMQ, 6:122).**

Now after going through all these marvelous ayahs that evince Allah’s Oneness, how can the state of a disbeliever be described? Definitely, he is like the dead. Yet, the mercy of Allah (SWT) is still there to give him another chance to return to the right path and revive himself once again. Moreover, Allah (SWT) will grant him a light of belief by which he can walk amongst men sunk in darkness to guide them to the right path. What a touching example compared to those who were destined to live in the darkness of disbelief, who do not even think of getting out of it. Instead, their disbelief is always gorgeously decorated and fancied to them.

Reason behind the title: Professing to the belief in the Oneness of Allah in both intention and action

A final question remains: Why is this Surah named Al-An’am?

Al-an’am refers to the cattle people pasture and eat; yet what is the connection between *al-an’am* and a Surah that talks about the belief in the Oneness of Allah (SWT)? The correlation between them is profound. The Surah deals with the belief in the unity of Allah (SWT) and warns people of restricting this belief to the reiteration of “I profess to the belief in the unity of Allah” to oneself while their lives do not attest to that. Rather, one should profess to the belief in the unity of Allah in terms of both intention and practice.

Many profess to the belief in the unity of Allah (SWT) and would affirm to that, and there is no room for doubt about their belief. Nevertheless, if we were to examine their life and whether they follow Allah's decrees in all aspects, we would find things quite different.

Professing to the belief in the unity of Allah (SWT) must not be in terms of intention only. Instead, we must profess to that belief in terms of all our behaviors as well as our daily life.

The Surah was named as such because the people of Arabia used to consider cattle as their primary resource and as a necessity for their life. Hence, they dealt with it as their own, and claimed that Allah (SWT) had nothing to do with it. Allah (SWT) says, what can be translated as, **“And they made for Allah of whatever tillage and cattle that He propagated, an assignment; so they said, “This is for Allah”, according to their assertion, and, “This is for our associates” (i.e., what they associate with Allah). So, whatever is for their associates does not get to Allah, and whatever is for Allah, then (this is what) gets to their associates. Odious is whatever (way) they judge!”**(TMQ, 6:136).

Allah (SWT) then says, what can be translated as, **“And they have said, “These are cattle (Arabic an'aam includes cattle, camels, sheep and goats) and tillage sacrosanct; none shall feed on them except whom we decide”, according to their assertion, and cattle whose backs have been prohibited, and cattle over which they do not mention the name of Allah, fabricating (lies) against (Him). He will soon recompense them for whatever they were fabricating. And they have said, “What is within the bellies of these cattle is exclusively for our males and prohibited to our spouses; and in case it is dead, then they shall be partners in it”. He will soon recompense them for their describing; surely He is Ever-Wise, Ever-Knowing”** (TMQ, 6:138-139).

Therefore, this can be regarded as a warning against professing to the belief in the Oneness of Allah (SWT) in terms of intention only, without it affecting application aspects. Thus, beware of professing to the belief in the Oneness of Allah (SWT) in terms of intention only, while contradicting it with your actions. That is why Allah (SWT) chose this example of incorrect application to name the Surah. He has done it so that one would become fearful and question his application every time he reads the ayahs dealing with the belief in the unity of Allah and prohibiting polytheism.

The path of safety

Since professing to the belief in the Oneness of Allah (SWT) encompasses both intention and application, the Surah concludes with what can be translated as, **“Say, “Surely my prayer, and my rites, and my living, and my dying are for Allah, The Lord of the worlds. No associate has He; and this I am commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims” (Literally: of the ones who have surrendered to Allah). Say, “Shall I inequitably seek other than Allah for Lord and He is the Lord of everything?” And every self earns nothing except what is to its own account”** (TMQ, 6:162-164).

He Who has this ability is most worthy of pure professing to the belief in His unity in terms of all intellectual, spiritual, and practical aspects of our lives. All of these notions are summarized in three core ayahs of the encounter present throughout the entire Surah. They can be translated as,

- **“Say, “Shall I take to myself as constant patron other than Allah, The Originator (Literally: The Renderer) of the heavens and the earth”” (TMQ, 6:14);**
- **“(say,) “Then, shall I inequitably seek other than Allah for arbiter, and He is (The One) Who has sent down to you the Book (clearly) expounded?”” (TMQ, 6:114);**
- **“Say, “Shall I inequitably seek other than Allah for Lord and He is the Lord of everything?” (TMQ, 6:164).**

The above-mentioned ayahs focus on the three core ideas of the belief in the Oneness of Allah: the belief in the Oneness of Allah in terms of the Oneness of His Lordship, in terms of love, and in terms of appealing to His *shari'a* (Islamic law).

The ending of the Surah: The succession

Allah (SWT) stresses, through the ayahs of this Surah, on His ownership of the earth, His creativity of its creation, and His absolute authority. He then gave us the earth and made us successors on it. Allah says in what can be translated as, **“And He is (The One) Who made you succeeding each other (in) the earth” (TMQ, 6:165).**

Notice here the nice gesture linking the objective of Surat Al-An'am and that of Surat Al-Baqara (our responsibility for the earth). Moreover, the ending of this Surah prepares us for Surat Al-A'raf, which deals with the struggle between right and wrong on the earth. This can be observed in the ayah that can be translated as, **“...and has raised some of you above others (Literally: above “some” others) in degrees, that He may try you in what He has brought you” (TMQ, 6:165).**

One can notice the relationship between these wonderful three Surahs, as if they all send one unified message: O Muslims, now that you understand the importance of professing to the belief in the unity of Allah in terms of both intention and application (Surat Al-An'am), Allah (SWT) is giving you this earth to apply His *shari'a* in practice. Consequently, you, Muhammad's nation, are responsible for the earth (Surat Al-Baqara), so where do you stand in the struggle between right and wrong over succession (Surat Al-A'raf)?

Surat Al-A'raf (The Battlements)

Surat Al-A'raf is Makkan, and was revealed after Surat Saad. It follows Surat Al-An'am in the Qur'an and consists of 206 ayahs.

The strikes of right against wrong

This Surah was revealed at a time when the combat between the Muslims and the disbelievers was fierce, specifically when the Prophet (SAWS)²⁶ ordered the Muslims to publicize the *da'wa* (missionary activity). This was a new phase; a phase of publicity and confrontation, when perhaps some people would have feared harm or embarrassment. The Surah was revealed in these conditions and in such an atmosphere to talk about the conflict between right and wrong, and to point out that this struggle is a permanent and everlasting universal rule, which existed since the beginning of creation and will continue until the Day of Judgment.

The Surah begins with the struggle between Adam (AS) and Satan with the beginning of creation, and follows that by the conversation between the dwellers of *jannah* (paradise) and those of hell. Hence, this struggle results in having a group in *jannah* and another in hell. Afterwards, the Surah draws a timeline depicting, throughout the history of mankind, the struggle between each Prophet and his people. At the end of the struggle, the unjust people were always annihilated due to their corruption. In each section of the Surah you are being asked: Where do you stand in this conflict? Determine your position.

This core idea perfectly suited the Prophet's companions' conditions in Makka. Furthermore, it suits people in every time and place. A struggle between right and wrong will exist in every era, at the level of countries and nations, as well as on the personal level, between man and oneself.

Perhaps, You are the reason!

The objective that the Surah's events and notions revolve around is the necessity of determining a position in the struggle. O Muslims, you must determine your standing: Which group do you choose to be among? Do not remain passive.

This notion clearly appears in the stories of the Prophets that are encountered in this Surah. The Surah focuses on the separation between the believers, who were saved by Allah (SWT), and the disbelievers. However, it does not mention any passive category because man basically must have a determined position in life.

For example, Nuh's (Noah) story is concluded by what can be translated as, **“So they cried him lies; then We delivered him, and the ones with him, in the ship(s), and We drowned (the ones) who cried lies to Our signs; surely they were a wilfully blind people” (TMQ, 7:64).**

As for Hud's (AS) story, Allah says, what can be translated as, **“So We delivered him, and the ones with him, by a mercy from Us; and We cut off the last trace of**

²⁶ All Prayers and Blessings of Allah be upon him

(the ones) who cried lies to Our signs and in no way were they believers” (TMQ, 7:72).

With regard to Lut’s (Lot) story, Allah says, what can be translated as, **“And in no way was the answer of his people (anything) except that they said, “Drive them out of your town; surely they are a folk who constantly purify themselves”. So We delivered him and his family, except his wife” (TMQ, 7:82- 83).**

With regard to Shu’ayb’s (AS) story, Allah says, what can be translated as, **“The chiefs who waxed proud among his people said, “Indeed we will definitely drive you out, O Shu’ayb, and the ones who have believed with you, from our town, or (else) you indeed will definitely go back to our creed”” (TMQ, 7:88).**

With regard to Saleh’s (AS) story, Allah says, what can be translated as, **“The chiefs who waxed proud from among his people said to whomever were deemed weak, to whomever of them believed, “Do you know that Saleh is an Emissary from his Lord?” They said, “Surely in whatever he has been sent with, we are believers”” (TMQ, 7:75).**

All the previous ayahs share the same perspective; you either become among the believers or among the disbelievers. There is no room for passive groups in the above-mentioned stories.

“...so let there be no restriction in your breast ” (TMQ, 7:2).

The beginning of the Surah clearly proclaims that above-mentioned notion. Allah says, what can be translated as, **“A Book sent down to you, (i.e., the Prophet) so let there be no restriction in your breast on account of it” (TMQ, 7:2).** You are required to publicize the teachings of Islam, and should not allow anyone’s gaze or criticisms make you feel ashamed of it. Sometimes, some are embarrassed to reveal righteousness owing to the power of wrongness or its spread.

Likewise, a Muslim woman should never feel ashamed of her *hijab* (veil), and a Muslim should never fear people’s harm. Therefore, the true Muslim has to determine his cause and settle his issues, because Allah (SWT) says at the beginning of the Surah, what can be translated as, **“...so let there be no restriction in your breast on account of it, that you may warn thereby” (TMQ, 7:2).** Those ayahs, as we pointed out earlier, are a symbol of the beginning of the public *da’wa* phase.

The third ayah of this Surah emphasizes the same notion. Allah says, what can be translated as, **“Closely follow what has been sent down to you (i.e. the believers) from your Lord, and do not ever follow patrons apart from Him” (TMQ, 7:3).** This is an assertive request to follow righteousness immediately and without hesitation, passiveness, or consideration of the other paths.

Adam (AS) and Iblis (Satan): “So he misled them both by delusion” (TMQ, 7:22)

The ayahs 7:20-7:22 describe the struggle between Adam (AS) and *Iblis* since the beginning of mankind. Thus, how did *Iblis* mislead Adam and Hawa’ (Eve)? That is portrayed in what can be translated as, **“So he misled them both by delusion”**

(TMQ, 7:22). *Iblis'* method of seduction was to leave them in a state of perplexity and indecision; hence the usage of the word *fa'adallahuma* (he misled them), which relates to the one who hangs his bucket into a well then leaves it in the middle without deciding its position. Therefore, positive action and determination of one's position are some of the strongest soldiery of righteousness, whereas passivity and hesitation are the paths of disobedience, even if followed by a believer.

Nakedness: *Iblis'* weapon

Notice *Iblis'* focus on one type of corruption, which is nakedness. This is expressed in what can be translated as, **“Then *ash-shaytan* (the all-vicious, i.e., the devil) whispered to them (both) to display to them that which was overlaid (i.e., hidden) from them of their shameful parts” (TMQ, 7:20).** As a result, **“...as soon as they (both) tasted the tree, their shameful parts appeared to them” (TMQ, 7:22).**

Hence came the divine decree to cover up, and the warning against all facets of exposing private parts, in what can be translated as, **“O Seed (or: sons) of Adam! We have readily sent down on you a garment to overlay your shameful parts, and a vesture (fine clothes; or feathers)” (TMQ, 7:26).** Allah also says, what can be translated as, **“O Seeds (or: sons) of Adam! Definitely do not let *ash-shaytan* tempt you just as he brought your parents (literally: your two fathers) out of the Garden, plucking out from them (both) their garments to show them their shameful parts” (TMQ, 7:27).** Furthermore, Allah says, what can be translated as, **“O Seeds (or: sons) of Adam! Take your adornment at every mosque” (TMQ, 7:31).**

You should, therefore, learn from this Surah. Haven't you noticed the number of warning in these ayahs? Learn from this Surah that you have to cover up your private parts and to lower your gaze. Young women must learn chastity and decency, and determine their position on *hijab* without hesitation.

Nakedness is *Iblis'* weapon ever since the beginning of mankind. Its proliferation aids the propagation of vices and facilitates disobedience. As a result, Allah (*SWT*) comments on Adam's (*AS*) story by what can be translated as, **“Say, “My Lord has only prohibited obscenities (i.e. abominations, unlawful sexual intercourse), whatever of (these) are outward and whatever are inward”” (TMQ, 7:33).**

No third party

The Surah divides people into two categories: dwellers of *jannah* and dwellers of hell.

It takes us afar to the Day of Judgment, as if we could hear the conversation taking place between the two parties. Allah says, what can be translated as, **“And the companions (i.e., inhabitants) of the *jannah* will call out to the companions of hellfire, (saying) “We have already found whatever our Lord promised us true; then have you found whatever your Lord promised true?” They will say, “Yes.” Then an announcer will announce between them, “The curse of Allah be on the unjust” (TMQ, 7:44).**

There are, therefore, only two dwellings, and there's no place for a third. Hence the presence of a decisive word, in the following ayah, which separates both parties conclusively. The ayah says, what can be translated as, **“And between them is a curtain” (TMQ. 7:46).**

Are you still hesitant? Haven't you determined your position yet? Listen then to this appeal, which can be translated as, **“And the companions of hellfire will call out to the companions of the *jannah* (saying), “Downpour on us some water, or some of whatever Allah has provided you”. They will say, “Surely Allah has prohibited both to the disbelievers”” (TMQ, 7:50).** Choose for yourself either destiny and either place.

Reason behind the title

Allah (TWT²⁷) says, what can be translated as, **“And between them is a curtain, and on the battlements are men who recognize (them) all by their mark” (TMQ, 7:46).** This indicates that there are people on *al-A'raf* (the battlements) between the *jannah* and hellfire, whom know the dwellers of both. Those on *al-A'raf* call the dwellers of the *jannah* as indicated in what can be translated as, **“...and they will call out to the companions of the *jannah*, “Peace be upon you!” They have not (yet) entered it, and they long (Or: are eager) for that” (TMQ, 7:46).**

They fear hellfire, which is expressed in what can be translated as, **“And when their beholdings (i.e., their eyes) are turned about towards the companions of hellfire, they will say, “Our Lord, do not make us among the unjust people”. And the companions of the battlements will call out to men they recognize by their mark. They will say, “In no way has your gathering (i.e., your amassing, and your multitude) availed you, neither whatever you used to wax proud of”” (TMQ, 7:47-48).**

Who are then the people of *al-A'raf*? They are those whose good deeds and sins have scaled equal because they have not determined their positions and actions in life. Since retribution and reward correspond to the nature of the deed, they will be stranded on elevated walls called *al-A'raf*, somewhere between the *jannah* and hellfire to overlook both places.

Hesitant people include many types of people and so, there will be a number of battlements and not just one. Make sure you will not be among them. O my Muslim brother/sister, take the initiative to follow the right path and do not become one of those on *al-A'raf*. Determine your position for you might even be deprived of being among those on *al-A'raf*, in case of a terrible ending, may Allah (SWT) forbid.

Stories of the Prophets; a schema of the struggle throughout history

To emphasize on the messages it conveys, the Surah narrates the stories of five of Allah's Prophets and their confrontations with their people. These messages are:

1. The struggle between right and wrong is enduring and will never cease.
2. Wrongness will certainly be vanquished.

²⁷ TWT=Tabaraka Wa Ta'ala = Most Blessed Most High.

3. Wrongness will be defeated because it is distant from Allah (SWT), and because of corruption in its different forms: moral, economic and social.

It is evident that these stories are mentioned several times in the Qur'an, so why are they more distinguished here? Their presence serves the Surah's objective of determining the position in the struggle through:

- Revealing that the elements of confrontation between all the Prophets and their peoples were almost the same; in some cases even using the same words. This is all to prove that the struggle is ancient and that it repeats itself with different individuals and different nations. All the Prophets had the same *da'wa*, which is pointed out in the ayah that can be translated as, **"... O my people! Worship Allah. In no way do you have any god other than He"**(TMQ, 7:59). It can also be seen in the ayah that can be translated as, **"I constantly proclaim to you the messages of my Lord"** (TMQ, 7:68). Even the proofs were the same. Allah says, what can be translated as, **"And do you wonder (literally: have you wondered) that a remembrance from your Lord has come to you"** (TMQ, 7:69).
- The disbelievers' accusations. This is indicated in the ayah that can be translated as, **"... Surely we indeed see you in evident error"** (TMQ, 7:60), and that which can be translated as, **"... Surely we see you indeed in foolishness, and surely we indeed expect that you are one of the liars"** (TMQ, 7:66).
- The emphasis on the termination of wrongness according to the rule that says that retribution and reward correspond to the nature of the deed. The people of Thamud, for example, used to carve out homes in the mountains for safety. Their sense of security lured them into acting arrogantly towards Allah's (SWT) law. This is why they were punished by a commotion, which was accompanied by fear, since fear is the opposite of the sense of security. The same rule was applied also to the people of Lut (AS), who were overindulged in sexual lust, which led them to divert from human nature and into aberration. This is all the result of immoderation. The ayah says, what can be translated as, **"Surely you indeed come up with lust to men, apart from (i.e. instead of) women; no indeed, you are an extravagant people (i.e., exceeding the limits (of decency))"** (TMQ, 7:81). Hence, they were punished by a rain of stones.
- Driving the attention to the fact that the defeat of wrongness is due to corruption. In the example of Thamud, the people of Saleh (AS), extreme extravagance was the reason behind their annihilation, as indicated in the 74th ayah. Whereas the people of Lut (AS) were annihilated as a result of moral corruption and homosexuality, as indicated by the 80th and 81st ayahs. Madyan, the people of Shu'ayb (AS), were annihilated because of economic corruption, as indicated by the ayah that can be translated as, **"... so fill up the measure and the balance, and do not depreciate mankind their things (i.e., their goods)"** (TMQ, 7:85).
- Warning against arrogance, for it is one of the most dangerous reasons for destruction. It can be seen that the expression, which can be translated as, **"The chiefs who waxed proud from among his people"** (TMQ, 7:75) is repeated in the stories of both Thamud and Madyan. We also find that at the beginning of the Surah, an expression is focused on, which can be translated

as, **“... the ones who cry lies to Our signs and wax proud against them” (TMQ, 7:36)**. This expression is repeated again in the 40th ayah. For an expression to be repeated in the Qur’an, there must be a significant notion to which Allah (SWT) wants to alert us.

- Focusing on saving the Prophet and the believers who followed him, and on the annihilation of the disbelievers, without any reference to any passive or neutral parties. Allah says, what can be translated as, **“... We delivered him, and the ones with him” (TMQ, 7:64 & 7:72)**, as well as, **“So We delivered him and his family” (TMQ, 7:83)**. The Surah also says, what can be translated as, **“...Indeed we will definitely drive you out, O Shu’ayb, and the ones who have believed with you” (TMQ, 7:88)**.

Are you still hesitant after all of that?

Notice the Qur’an’s remarks on these stories. Allah says, what can be translated as, **“And if the population of the towns had believed and been pious, We indeed would have opened upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth” (TMQ, 7:96)**. Allah (SWT) fits all these examples within a cosmic rule; either you have faith, determine your position, and follow the Prophet, or you suffer severe hardship and dire torment from Allah (SWT).

We all fall under this rule. Are you still hesitant? If you are not for the right then you are for the wrong, even if your intentions are otherwise. This is because by not taking a definite position, you have weakened the righteous followers. Furthermore, do not ever say, “I am but one individual and do not have the capacity to change anything in the struggle formula”. If righteousness will need 100 sincere, successful individuals to triumph yet there are only 99, you might be the one to complete the group. However, if you fail to act in such a manner, you would be the reason for the regression of the righteous.

The story of Musa “Moses” (AS)

The ayahs proceed to the story of Musa with Pharaoh, his magicians and the Israelites. It is one of the most wonderful stories in terms of its display of the examples of resoluteness and hesitation.

It is worth saying here that the story of Prophet Musa is the most frequently cited story in the Qur’an. It is mentioned in 29 chapters.

However, Surat Al-A'raf is the most detailed Surah concerning the relationship between Musa and his people, especially after leaving Egypt. Contrary to what is mentioned in Surat Al-Qasas, it does not touch upon the story of his birth or his upbringing in Pharaoh’s palace. On the other hand, the story promptly commences with the struggle from the first ayah. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...So look how was the end of the corruptors!” (TMQ, 7: 103)**, **“And Mûsa (Moses) said, “O Firaawn! (Pharaoh) Surely I am a Messenger from The Lord of the worlds” (TMQ, 7: 104)**. This is revealed by Allah (SWT) in the Surah so that we can learn lessons from the situations of determination and hesitation.

Resoluteness Starting With *Sajdah* (Prostration)

When the magicians came to seek Pharaoh's preference and to confront Musa (AS), they witnessed the sign that proved his message. Within a few minutes, they signaled their determination decisively and staunchly. **"So the Truth came to pass, (Literally: fell "on them") and void (Literally: became untrue) was whatever they were doing. So they were overcome over there, and they turned over belittled. And the sorcerers were cast down prostrating"** (TMQ, 7: 118-120).

Their faith started with this sincere prostration. They adhered to their belief, despite being threatened with torture and death. In this respect, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"They said, "We believe in The Lord of the worlds, The Lord of Mûsa (Moses) and Harûn" (Aaron). Firaawn (Pharaoh) said, "You have believed in Him before I permit you..."** (TMQ, 7: 121-123).

After that, Pharaoh told them, **"Indeed I will definitely cut up your hands and your legs alternately, thereafter indeed I will definitely crucify you all together"** (TMQ, 7:124). What was the impact of his reaction on their stance? Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"They said, "Surely to our Lord we are around (Literally: turning over). And in no way do you take vengeance upon us except that we have believed in the signs of our Lord as soon they came to us..."** (TMQ, 7:125-126). Such was their irrevocable and unhesitant response to the threat of Pharaoh. Moreover, they drew patience from the Truth and prayed to die as Muslims, **"...Our Lord, pour out upon us patience and take us to Yourself as Muslims"** (TMQ, 7:126).

Pharaoh's Corruption

After we have witnessed various kinds of corruption in the previous stories of the Prophets, there comes the story of Musa and Pharaoh to show us the worst form of corruption. Allah (SWT) reveals their corruption in the ayah that can be translated as, **"...He said, "We will soon massacre their sons and (spare) alive their women, and surely above them we are vanquishers"** (TMQ, 7:127). The divine punishment inflicted upon that tyrant and his people was gradual. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"So We sent upon them the deluge, and the locusts, and the lice, and the frogs, and the blood, expounded signs ..."** (TMQ, 7:133). However, Allah (SWT) wanted to commute the punishment as He says what can be translated as, **"Then as soon as We lifted off from them the chastisement to a term that they should reach, only then did they breach (their covenant)"** (TMQ, 7:135). Thus, what was the punishment after that? Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"So We took vengeance on them, then We drowned them in the main for that they cried lies to Our signs, and they were heedless of them."** (TMQ, 7:136).

Israelites: Negativity and Hesitation

Similarly, the ayahs show us another case of hesitation exemplified in the Israelites. What was their reply when their Prophet told them, **"...Beseech Allah for help and be patient; surely the earth (belongs) to Allah. He causes whomever He decides among His bondmen to inherit it, and the (prosperous) end is for the pious"** (TMQ, 7:128)? Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"They said, "We were**

hurt even before you came up to us and even after you came to us” (TMQ, 7:129). In turn, Musa (AS) gave them his reply to teach them trusting Allah (SWT) which is a principal element leading to determination. Musa (AS) said, **“It may be that your Lord will cause your enemy to perish and make you successors in the earth; so He looks into how you do” (TMQ, 7:129).**

Hence, the ayahs (128-129) highlight the importance of determination and the avoidance of hesitancy as two fundamentals in the test of succession on earth; a matter which the Israelites could not understand.

Even in Faith!

Israelites appear on other occasions as a group of people living aimlessly and misguidedly with regards to faith. In ayah 138, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And We made the Seeds (or: sons) of Israel pass over the sea. Then they came upon a people consecrating themselves to idols they had...” (TMQ, 7:138).** A little while after crossing the sea and witnessing every step in the drowning of Pharaoh and his soldiers they said, **“O Mûsa, (Moses) make for us a god as they have gods.” He said, “Surely you are a people who are ignorant” (TMQ, 7:138).** This is a question that shows the peak of their ignorance. It was revealed in the same ayah which narrates the story of their rescue, so that Allah can show us the extent of their hesitation and instability.

“So take them with power, and command your people to take the fairest of them...” (TMQ, 7:145).

The majority of Allah’s commands to Israel urged Israelites to follow Allah’s orders and religion with firmness. In ayah 145, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So take them with power, and command your people to take the fairest of them...” (TMQ, 7:145),** and in ayah 171 Allah (SWT) instructs them in what can be translated as, **“Take powerfully what We have brought you...” (TMQ, 7:171).**

Then let us see how they responded to Allah’s commands. Musa (AS) left them and went to meet his Lord, so what did they do? In this respect, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And the people of Mûsa (Moses) took to themselves even after him, of their (diverse) ornaments, a corporeal Calf that had a lowing (voice)...” (TMQ, 7:148).**

The ayahs strongly denied what they did, **“...Did they not see that it did not speak to them nor did it guide them upon any way? They took it to themselves and were an unjust (people). And as soon as it was made to fall down in their hands, (i.e., they regretted.) and (they) saw that they had already erred, they said, “Indeed in case our Lord has no mercy on us and does not forgive us, indeed, we will definitely be of the losers.” (TMQ, 7:148-149).** They complained of unclearness and unsteadiness in their religion and their relationship with Allah.

In such a way, the difference between the magicians and the Israelites becomes clear. The reader can feel this difference between the magicians’ challenge to Pharaoh when they said, **“so decree whatever you will decree...” (TMQ, 20:72),** and can confirm this feeling when he reads, **“They said, “We were hurt even before you came up to**

us and even after you came to us” (TMQ, 8:129). He can feel this difference between **“They said, “We believe in The Lord of the worlds” (TMQ, 7:121)** which was uttered by the magicians without hesitancy, and **“O Mûsa, (Moses) make for us a god as they have gods” (TMQ, 7:138)** which was said by Israelites despite the great miracles they had witnessed.

The Three Groups

Immediately after the story of Musa (AS) with the Israelites, there comes the story of the Sabbath-breakers (163-167). This story succinctly illustrates how some Israelites cunningly evaded Allah’s order. They committed a heinous sin by fishing on the day on which Allah (SWT) had forbidden them to work (Saturday). Therefore, Allah (SWT) tested them by sending plenty of fish in front of their eyes on Saturdays. They tried to evade Allah’s order by spreading out their nets on Friday nights and collecting what they found in them on Sunday mornings. Some of the positive believers started to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. They did that in order to be free from guilt in front of Allah (SWT) on the basis of their attempted reform, realizing that it is only Allah (SWT) who leads to the right path.

Other believers stood negatively. Moreover, they blamed those who were enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And as a (certain) nation of them said, “Why do you admonish a people whom Allah (is) causing to perish or tormenting with a strict torment?” They said, “(As) a (possible) excuse to your Lord, and that possibly they would be pious” (TMQ, 7:164).**

Thus, there were a group who committed sins, a positive group who tried to guide, and a negative group who neither moved nor preached. Let us move to see what became of each group.

Rescue...Torture.... Negligence

The Sabbath-breakers did not respond to the advice of the believers. Therefore Allah (SWT) inflicted upon them punishment, **“So, as soon as they forgot what they were reminded of, We delivered the ones who were forbidding odious deeds and We took (away) the ones who did injustice with most miserable torment because they were acting immorally” (TMQ, 7:165).**

Allah (SWT) saved the positive group from punishment, and punished the disobeyers severely. The Qur’an did not mention those who stood negatively. Religious scholars differed in opinion in this respect. Some of them believed that they did not deserve to be mentioned because of their negativity, thus, their fate will be determined on the Day of Judgment as Allah (SWT) wishes. The other group held the opinion that that they were included with the disobeyers. They were meant to be among those whom Allah (SWT) says about what can be translated as, **“We took (away) the ones who did injustice” (TMQ, 7:165).** Both, they and the disobeyers would be treated equally because they kept silent in the face of sins, turning to be sinners themselves.

Some of Them Were Righteous and Others Were Far Away From That

One of the magnificent aspects in the Qur'an is that it does not tell a story for the sake of telling stories. It always concludes any story with a moral lesson and advice to plant the intended meaning behind telling the story in the mind of the reader. Thus, the end of the story of Musa (AS) and the Sabbath-breakers clarified an important lesson. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And We cut them up in the earth into nations, (some) of them righteous, and (some) of them lesser than that...”** (TMQ, 7:168).

This was the state of the first generation of the Israelites who got lost and was separated in different parts on the earth. Some of them were righteous and others went astray. However, the second generation had some negative and hesitant people. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Then there succeeded even after them a succession who inherited the Book, taking the advantage of this meaner (life), and saying, “Soon it will be forgiven us.” And in case an advantage, the like of it, comes up to them, they will take it...”** (TMQ, 7:169).

Similarly, the ayahs end with a vivid example for us to emulate; an example enjoining us to adhere to the religion's ordinances tenaciously. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And the ones who hold fast to the Book and keep up the prayer, surely We do not waste the reward of the righteous doer”** (TMQ, 7:170).

Notice the phrase **“hold fast”** and how it indicates strong adherence to Allah's commands, especially praying. These people are honored by Allah (SWT). They are not only people guided to the right path but they also guide others. They are positive people as well as reformers of their society, their country, and their nation.

How Come You Cannot Determine When Your Nature Had Testified?

The ayahs, then, take us to old time, to the world of posterity. It was then when Allah (SWT) had made us testify to ourselves His greatness and divinity. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And (remember) as your Lord took from the Seeds (Or. sons) of Adam, from their backs, their offspring, and made them bear witness concerning themselves, “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes indeed, we bear witness.” (So) that you should not say on the Day of the Resurrection, “Surely we were heedless of this”** (TMQ, 7:172).

Then, how can we not move to support our religion when Allah (SWT) took a vow from us since the beginning of creation, even before we came to this world. A vow that we would be with the righteousness and its supporters? The love of the religion and adhering to it are divine nature endowed from Allah (SWT). Then, why do some people forget this pledge and forget this nature?

The Disease of Heedlessness

Allah (SWT) explains in the previous ayah what can be translated as, **“...(So) that you should not say on the Day of the Resurrection, “Surely we were heedless of this”** (TMQ, 7:172). It is the heedlessness. It is the most dangerous disease which might lead to cooling down the enthusiasm of following the righteousness and to the hesitation in supporting the religion. Then, what are the symptoms of this disease? Listen to ayah 179 where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And indeed**

We have already propagated for Hell many of the jinn and humankind; they have hearts with which they do not comprehend, and they have eyes with which they do not behold, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like the cattle; no indeed, they are further in error. Those are they (who are) heedless” (TMQ, 7:179).

Thus, heedlessness is the main reason behind every hesitation and lack of determination. Therefore, the last advice given to the Prophet (SAWS), although he is the infallible Prophet, comes before the end of the Surah where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And remember your Lord within yourself, in supplication and in fright, other than being (too) loud in words, in the early mornings and the (hours) before sunset, and do not be among the heedless” (TMQ, 7:205).**

If that is directed to our Prophet (SAWS), then it is more proper for us, his followers, to detect this disease and eradicate it by glorifying and making sincere *dua’a* (supplication) to Allah (SWT), and by reading Surat Al-A'raf and understanding its meanings.

He is like a Dog

Before the end of the Surah, it mentions a great number of examples and ayahs that serve the same meaning and warn the believers against heedlessness and lack of determination with regards to Allah’s legislation and religion. Here comes a striking image, **“And recite to them the tiding of him to whom We brought Our signs, yet he stripped himself out of them; (i.e., he abandoned them) then Ash-Shy tan (The all-vicious one, i.e., the Devil) followed up after him, (and) so he became of the misguided. And if We had decided, We would indeed have raised him thereby, but he clung to the earth and closely followed his prejudice. So the likeness of him is like the likeness of a dog: in case you burden it, it lolls (its tongue out), or (in case) you leave it, it lolls (its tongue out)...” (TMQ, 7:175-176).**

What a striking image of that who received Allah’s ayahs and was guided but he sloughed off them like a snake casting off its skin. If he had adhered to his religion, Allah (SWT) would have honored him. Nevertheless, he preferred the lowliness of this world. Thus, he resembles a dog getting tired and lolling his tongue out whether he is aware or not. What a striking image, that should shake every lazy and heedless person!

Prostrate With This Meaning

The best conclusion of this Surah is with an ayah including prostration. This is the first ayah in the Qur’an that contains a prostration. In order to remember the determination, the resolution, and the strong will, we should remember the prostration of the magicians who challenged Pharaoh with his tyranny and unjustness. The ayah also asks us to practically show our submission to Allah (SWT) because this act of prostration draws the attention of the soul to put faith into practice. Thus, it signals its readiness for determining its way in life. We should prostrate to Allah (SWT) when reading this ayah, with this meaning in our minds. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Surely the ones who are in the Providence of your Lord do not wax**

too proud to (do) Him worship, and they extol Him, and to Him they prostrate themselves” (TMQ, 7:206).

Surat Al-Anfal (The Spoils)

Surat Al-Anfal is a Madinan Surah, revealed after Surat Al-Baqara. It comes after Surat Al-A'raf in the Qur'an. It consists of 75 ayahs.

The Day of Separation Between Good and Evil

This Surah was revealed after the Battle of Badr; some religious scholars call it "Surat Badr". The Battle of Badr was the first battle in Islam. Allah (SWT) calls it the day of separation in this Surah because that was the day when Allah separated between the right and the wrong. It is considered the day that separated two eras in human history; an era when Islam was weak and when Islam would grow to be stronger and turn into a powerful nation defending Islam until our very day. It was a great day in human history. Thus, the whole Surah was revealed to comment on that day.

If victory were to be measured in materialistic terms, then Muslims would have never recorded any victory on that day. The number of Muslims was 313. They were not prepared for fighting, neither psychologically nor in terms of fighting gear. On the other hand, the number of the disbelievers was about 1000 and they were perfectly prepared. It is worth mentioning that in this battle, the Muslims only had one horse, while the disbelievers had 300 horses. Thus, by materialistic measures, it was impossible for the Muslims to win this battle.

The Vices of *Al-Abrâr* (the pious believers)

Al-Anfal means the booty and this Surah is named after this booty (The Spoils).

The Prophet's (SAWS) companions had a nice comment on this Surah. They say, "It was because of us, the companions of the Prophet, that Surat Al-Anfal was revealed when we disagreed about the booty and were ill-mannered". This ill-mannerism that they talked about is not the same as we know it today. However, they expressed their disagreement as such because of their exalted manners and their humbleness.

Provisions for Victory-worldly and Divine

The Surah tackles the principles on which victory is based, a matter that is compatible with the general atmosphere of the Surah and the reason behind its revelation. After the Muslims had won the battle of Badr, this Surah was revealed in order to instill the universal factors of victory within the Muslim minds, as victory is not won by chance or at random. On the other hand, it is gained through these worldly and spiritual principles.

Thus, there are two main important factors that lead to victory:

- 1- The belief that victory comes only from Allah (SWT), as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And in no way is victory from (any- where) except from the Providence of Allah" (TMQ, 8:10).**

- 2- Dedication and commitment towards balancing powers with enemies, and even doing better than them if possible, in addition to the use of effective schemes and tactics to gain victory.

This Surah stresses on the concept that one should trust in Allah (SWT), be certain that He (SWT) is the Powerful, and exert all one's efforts in order to gain victory. For this reason, Allah (SWT) revealed what can be translated as, **"... Allah is not changing (His) favor that He conferred (Literally: favored) on a people until they have changed what is within themselves..." (TMQ, 8:53).** This ayah indicates that Allah (SWT) is the sole force and cause behind every victory, provided that one should do everything in one's power. Therefore, we must bear in mind that victory is subject to the efforts of mankind and, thus, we must know that victory lies between both, man's work and his fate.

Some do think that victory is just a divine miracle, so you find them engrossed in *dua'a* (supplication) praying to Allah (SWT) to render them victorious, and then wonder why their incessant prayers are not answered. The problem is that they have not yet understood that there are other aspects that must be considered; dedication, planning, and toil. *Dua'a* alone is not sufficient when it is not accompanied by work. Depending on *dua'a* alone makes us unaware of the nature of our religion and laws of Allah (SWT) on Earth.

On the other hand, there are those who persist on doing all they can in devising plans and tactics. However, when they try to measure their power in comparison with that of the enemies, they find it relatively inadequate, and they consequently find themselves in a weak position. That is obviously because they focus on worldly requirements of victory and are in complete oblivion to the fact that victory is gained only through Allah (SWT).

The Surah directs us to a balance between these two antitheses; trust in Allah's fate must always be the basis upon which we fulfill the worldly requirements of victory.

Victory is from Allah (SWT)

The Surah begins with a question that can be translated as, **"They ask you about the spoils. (The Arabic word *nafl* originally means: supererogatory prayer, or gift)..." (TMQ, 8:1).** This ayah indicates people's questions about the division of spoils. **"Say, 'The spoils (belong) to Allah and the Messenger; so be pious to Allah, and act righteously among yourselves (Or: make a reconciliation after differences) and obey Allah and His Messenger, in case you are believers.'"** (TMQ, 8:1).

The qualities of the believers are enumerated in the ayahs that follow which can be translated as, **"Surely the believers are only the ones who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts tremble ..." (TMQ, 8:2).** It is interesting here that the answer to their queries about the division of the war spoils does not come directly after the question. Rather, the answer comes enclosed in ayah 41, divided by 40 ayahs from the original question, **"And know that whatever thing you take as booty, then for Allah is the fifth of it and for the Messenger, and for a near kinsman, and the orphans, and the indigent, and the wayfarer ..." (TMQ, 8: 41).**

The reason behind this delayed answer is that when the Muslims asked about the spoils of war, all they were thinking of at that moment was their worldly gains, so Allah (SWT) taught them how victory is solely His and that it is only gained through Him. The initial answer is in the following ayah which can be translated as, **“Say: “the spoils (belong) to Allah and the Messenger” (TMQ, 8:1)**, and that is note to remind them that the spoils do not belong to them in the first place. The Qur’an gracefully diverts the Muslim’s attention away from the spoils in order to instill the principles of victory in their minds before anything else. Later on, it explains how booties are divided. Allah (SWT) says towards the end of the surah what can be translated as, **“So, eat of what you have taken as booty, such as is lawful (and) good...” (TMQ, 8:69)**. Thus, Allah (SWT) settles what is of importance and indicates that the worldliness of a matter such as booty division is of secondary importance.

The Surah is divided into two parts: the first part is mainly concerned with the concept that only Allah (SWT) brings victory, while the second is concerned with the worldly requirements that we should fulfill in order to gain victory.

PART ONE: “...and there is no victory except from Allah...” (TMQ, 8:10).

The first part indicates Allah’s blessings upon Muslims as he helped them gain victory:

1- The setting of the battle

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“As also as your Lord brought you (The Prophet) out of your home with the truth, and surely a group of the believers indeed are hating that (TMQ, 8: 5)**. Many of the believers did not wish to fight, but Allah (SWT) has already devised a plan to restore order and reveal the truth; **“And as Allah promised you (The pronouns “you” and “yours” are plural) one of the two sections should be yours, and you would like that the one other than the accoutered (i.e. owning accoutrement, the armed section) should be yours. And Allah willed to uphold truthfully the truth by His words and cut off the last trace (Literally: the rear, hind part) of the disbelievers, That He might (uphold) truthfully the truth and void the untrue, although the criminals would hate (that).” (TMQ, 8:7-8)**. These ayahs are crystal-clear as the setting of the battle was arranged by Allah (SWT).

2- The psychological preparation for the battle

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“As He was making drowsiness to envelop you as secure (reassurance) from Him, and sending down on you water from the heaven to purify you thereby, and to put away from you the chastisement of Ash-Shaytan, (The all-vicious :one”; i.e., the Devil) and to brace your hearts, and to make firm (your) feet thereby” (TMQ, 8:11)**.

Allah (SWT) made the Muslims doze before the battle started and awakened them to find it drizzling, so they would perform ablution and be invigorated. Even the psychological preparation was arranged by Allah (SWT).

One of the *Sahabah* (the Messenger's companions) describes the scene saying that, while he was guarding the Muslim army, he dozed off. When he looked at the rest of the *Sahabah*, he found them all sleeping soundly, in spite of the atmosphere of fear and terror that dominated the scene. All that happened was in accordance with Allah's (SWT) plan.

3- The spiritual preparation of the army

Not only was the setting and the psychological preparation from Allah (SWT), but also, the psychological status of the troops on which huge sums of money were spent. The divine spiritual preparation of the Muslim troops is revealed in the following ayah which can be translated as, **"As Allah showed you them in your sleeping as few; and if He had shown them to you as many, you would indeed have been disheartened, and you would indeed have contended together about the Command; but Allah saved (i.e., handed you victory) (you). Surely He is Ever-Knowing of the inmost (thoughts) in the breasts (Literally: what the breasts own). And as He showed you them in your eyes as few, as you encountered..."** (TMQ, 8:43-44).

The Muslim troops were made to see the disbelievers few so that they would not panic and fear them, while the disbelievers were made to see the Muslims few so that they would underestimate them. The same effect was applied to the same scene but it had two totally different impacts on each side. Glory be to Allah (SWT) who makes victory and helps gain it.

4- The descent of the angels

The descent of the angels is evident in the ninth ayah, which can be translated as, **"As you call your Lord for succor, so He responded to you that, "I am supplying you with a thousand Angels in successive ranks " (TMQ, 8:9).** It can also be perceived from the following ayah that can be translated as, **"As Your Lord was revealing to the Angels, (saying), "I am with you; so make the ones who believe stand firm. I will soon cast into the hearts of the ones who have disbelieved horror; so strike above the necks, and strike every finger-tip of them" (TMQ, 8:12).**

Only Allah (SWT) is the Eternal Owner of Sovereignty and He alone can do as He desires. We can trust in no one but Him (SWT) for granting us victory. Dependence on other inferior things leads absolutely to nowhere.

5- The time and place of the battle

The ayahs move on to what is beyond psychological factors; the divine arrangement of the time and place of the battle. The battlefield itself was obviously chosen by Allah (SWT) as is shown in what can be translated as, **"As you were on the closer embankment, and they were on the remotest embankment, and the cavalcade (of riders) was below you; and if you had made a mutual appointment, you would indeed have differed about the promised appointment..."** (TMQ, 8:42).

The nearer slope of the valley, where the Muslim camps were situated, had a quality of sand that made rain more solid upon falling. Rain made the soil firm under the feet

of Muslims making movement around the battlefield much easier. However, on the other slope, the rain caused floods which acted as an obstacle for the disbelievers' infantries and horsemen. This is a manifestation of Allah's power, the victory Maker, the believers' Backer.

6- **"You did not kill them, but Allah killed them" (TMQ, 8:17)**

The Surah continues until an ayah clarifies the outcome of the battle and its progress, even when the Prophet (SAWS) throws sand towards the faces of the disbelievers saying, "May these faces be deformed"²⁸, **"So, you did not kill them, but Allah killed them; and in no way did you (i.e., the Prophet) throw when you threw, but Allah threw ..."** (TMQ, 8:17).

That is why the ayahs emphasize on the importance of making *dua'a* to Allah (SWT) for victory, as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"...and there is no victory except from Allah..."** (TMQ, 8:10). No wonder the Prophet (SAWS) kept praying to Allah insistently on the day of Badr until his shirt slid back over his shoulders and all could see his armpits **that Abu-Bakr (RA)** said, "Take it easy, O Messenger of Allah..." Since victory is from Allah (SWT), one should answer His call in what can be translated as, **"O you who have believed, respond to Allah and to the Messenger when He calls you to that which enlivens you ..."** (TMQ, 8:24).

PART TWO: "And prepare for them whatever power and whatever garrisoned horses you can ..." (TMQ, 8:60).

1- **The importance of taking the measures needed and its impact on victory**

Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"And prepare for them whatever power and whatever garrisoned horses you can to (spread) awe thereby into (the hearts) of the enemy of Allah and your enemy..."** (TMQ, 8:60). This ayah lucidly reveals its meaning. The very same Surah that emphasizes that victory is from Allah (SWT) also emphasizes the importance of readiness and measure-taking. In addition to turning to Allah (SWT), planning is an equally significant factor in bringing about victory. Moreover, this Surah tackles the issue of the balance of power, indicating that a single person fighting a whole army can never win his battle simply by saying, **"..and there is no victory except from Allah.."** (TMQ, 8:10). This is, in fact, a common misconception among us about religion and the divine laws upon which the universe functions.

It is important to say that at this point, the word **"spread awe"** is mentioned in the sense that it prevents fighting and bloodshed from ensuing. Hence, Muslims must have a deterring power that terrifies their enemies and consequently makes war a less favorable choice for the enemies. Even during wartime, Islam, in spite of all the misconceptions people have nowadays, calls for peace. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"and others, apart from them (i.e., besides them) that you do not know; Allah knows them ..."** (TMQ, 8:60). The ayah then encourages the display of Muslim power and equipments in order to deter their enemies from fighting them. Correspondingly, Allah (SWT) says in the ayah that follows what can be translated as,

²⁸ Authentic Hadith, Muslim.

“And in case they are bent on submission, then be bent on it and put your trust in Allah ...” (TMQ, 8:61).

2- The balance of worldly power

It is true that Allah (SWT) supports whoever He wishes, but one must bear in mind the balance of power and the fulfillment of the worldly requirements of victory. I am simply saying this so that no one says, “If there is a divine back-up by the angels, then why should we make preparations?” Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you Prophet, exhort the believers to the fight. In case there are twenty of you, patient (men), they will overcome two hundred; and in case there are a hundred of you, they will overcome a thousand of the ones who have disbelieved for that they are a people who do not comprehend. Now Allah has lightened it for you, and He has known that there is weakness in you. So, in case there are a hundred of you patient (men), they will overcome two hundred; and in case there are of you a thousand, they will overcome two thousand by the permission of Allah, and Allah is with the patient” (TMQ, 8: 65-66).**

The phrase **“by the permission of Allah”** is indicative of Allah’s indisputable possession of victory. He (SWT) supports whomever He wants. Moreover, the ayahs indicate that patience is important in attaining victory and **“...and Allah is with the patient”** confirms that. Glory be to Allah who bound the two factors that contribute to victory in one Surah.

3- Understanding the laws of war

The ayahs move on to the factors that played a role in the disbelievers’ loss in the battle. Besides being disbelievers, they were not equipped with the material power which leads to victory, as indicated in what can be translated as, **“...and if there be a hundred steadfast persons they will overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they (the disbelievers) are people who do not understand...” (TMQ, 8:65).** This means that they did not understand the factors that could have helped them gain victory. Moreover, they lacked the experience needed in military scheming. Muslims should learn from Surat Al-Anfal, the laws of Allah (SWT) and the worldly requirements of victory.

4- Obeying Allah (SWT) and the brotherhood in the cause of Allah

Allah (SWT) shows that there is another worldly requirement which should be fulfilled in order to gain victory in what can be translated as, **“And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not contend together, (and) so you would be disheartened and your vigor goes away; and (endure) patiently; surely Allah is with the patient” (TMQ, 8:46).** Unity and abandoning disputes are vital requirements of victory.

Allah (SWT) also says what can be translated as, **“And in case they would (like) to deceive you, then surely Allah is enough (i.e., enough Reckoner) for you; He is The One Who has aided you with His victory and with the believers, And He has brought their hearts together (Literally: joined “between” their hearts). If you had expended whatever is in the earth altogether, in no way could you have**

brought their hearts together; but Allah has brought them together...” (TMQ, 8: 62-63). Brotherhood, therefore, is one of the main factors that contribute to victory.

5- Avoidance of arrogance and vanity

This is clear in ayah 47, which can be translated as, **“do not be as the ones who went out of their residences boastfully (ungrateful) and showing off to the multitude ...”** (TMQ, 8:47). This is another unfulfilled worldly requirement that led to the disbelievers’ defeat; they slaughtered camels, got drunk, and boastfully celebrated even before the battle started, in order to terrify all the Arabs. Their vanity is precisely what made them underestimate their opponents and consequently lose the battle.

6- The qualities of the believers; positive and practical

Many of the ayahs in this Surah harmonize the two concepts together; complete trust in Allah (SWT) and total preparation for action. That is precisely why the Surah enumerates the traits of the believers and then concludes these descriptions with the ayah that can be translated as, **“Those are truly the ones who are believers”** (TMQ, 8:4). Moreover, towards the end of the surah, in ayah 74 specifically, the attributes of true believers reoccur and are followed by what can be translated as, **“... those are they (who truly) are believers”** (TMQ, 8:74). The same words come in both the beginning and end of the Surah; however, there is a semantic difference between them. The attributes mentioned at the beginning are all related to faith, which well suits the second ayah in which Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“the believers are only the ones who, when Allah is mentioned, their hearts tremble and when His ayat (Signs or verses) are recited to them, they increase them in belief, and in their Lord they put their trust”** (TMQ, 8:2). As we can see here, the ayah encloses gentle attributes, because the ayah occurs in the part of the Surah that is concerned with faith.

The main concern of the second part of the Surah, however, is the requirements of victory. That is why the attributes of believers here are, **“And the ones who have believed, and have emigrated, and have striven in the way of Allah, and the ones who have given abode and helped towards victory, those are they (who truly) are believers...”** (TMQ, 8:74). True believers, therefore, possess the qualities that occur in both parts of the Surah. They submit to Allah (SWT), worship Him, strive in His cause, fervently support His religion, live for Islam, and take all measures into consideration. For this reason comes the core ayah that can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, when you meet a community, (i.e., an enemy community) then stand firm and remember Allah much, that possibly you would prosper”** (TMQ, 8:45). This ayah encloses all the factors of victory; **“stand firm”** is doing all in one’s power (measure-taking), **“and remember Allah much”** is turning to Allah (SWT), the victory-maker, for support, and **“that possibly you would prosper”** is precisely the point where victory is gained. Furthermore, the passage of time cannot alter these principles. The repetition of the following ayah emphasizes this in what can be translated as, **“As was the steadfast manner of the house of Firaawn (Pharaoh) and the ones who were even before them ...”** (TMQ, 8:52). The ayah makes it clear that the reason behind their doom was their arrogant disbelief (i.e. their

disregard of the divine aspect), while ayah 54 indicates the worldly reason; their injustice; **“and all were unjust” (TMQ, 8:54).**

The reason behind the title “Al-Anfal (the spoils of war)”

The spoils of war refer to worldliness. The fact is that the Muslims, after the battle of Badr, disputed; they showed hostility towards each other, and the bond of brotherhood between them was about to be shattered and all was for the sake of earthly matters. Allah (SWT) warns the believers from competing over matters in this life, for it may be a cause for their disunity and the loss of their brotherhood, consequently leading to material loss and loss of spiritual keys to victory. For that reason, the ayahs ordered them to take no heed of the spoils of war at all, as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Say: “The spoils (belong) to Allah and the Messenger”” (TMQ, 8:1).** The factors that contribute to victory became instilled in their hearts and minds. When these factors were fixed, He (SWT) divided them in 41 ayahs until ayah 69, in which the inferiority of the matter of spoils is explained and the permission of what has already been taken is granted; **“So, eat of what you have taken as booty, such as is lawful (and) good ...” (TMQ, 8:69).**

The keys to victory are, as mentioned before, turning to Allah (SWT) and dedication at work (in our case, preparation for war). Among these preparations are the strong bond of brotherhood and the unity among Muslims, because if brotherliness is lost and separation and disunity reign instead, loss is bound to occur. The Surah, therefore, is entitled “Al-Anfal” in order to remind us of the main cause of loss.

Inheritance law repeal

The Surah is adjourned with the repeal of the law of inheritance between the *Sahabah*, which implied that a man can inherit his brother in the cause of Allah (i.e. not a blood brother).²⁹ The last ayah of the Surah can be translated as, **“the ones who are related (by blood) (Literally: near by birth “womb”; endowed with near kinship) have more right to patronage with one another (Literally: some of them to some “others”) in the Book of Allah...” (TMQ, 8:75)** Thus, inheritance between those who were in brotherhood (in the cause of Islam) had been a temporary stage that preceded the battle of Badr, and that was permitted in order to deepen their feelings of duty and love towards one another. After the victory in Badr, the Muslim society was bound together in a way stronger than it ever was, as victory mends most of the psychological problems of a society.

That was Surat Al-Anfal. We should make sure we fully understand the principles of victory so that Allah (SWT) supports our nation. We should turn to Allah (SWT) and be confident that He is the Maker of victory, **“and there is no victory except from Allah” (TMQ, 8:10).** Moreover, we should do everything we can in order to gain victory (e.g. pursue knowledge, succeed in our social and practical lives, and avoid

²⁹ Translator’s note: Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), on arriving at Madinah, joined every Muslim from *Al-Muhajiroun* (the emigrants) with one of *Al-Ansar* (the people of Madinah who backed the Muslims and the Prophet), in brotherhood. Each one of the *Muhajiroun* shared his brother from *Al-Ansar* in everything (home, capital, etc.). This type of brotherhood ordained by the Prophet is a special case different from the mere brotherhood between all Muslims.

worldliness and mundane pleasures (i.e. the spoils)) in order to have our *dua'a* answered and our nation's dignity and superiority regained.

Features of the discipline concluded:

After the first ten Surahs of Qur'an, the features of the discipline of being Allah's vicegerents crystallize. Furthermore, the objectives and messages of the Surahs integrate to form a single message to the reader of Qur'an:

- Muslims, you are responsible for Earth, and here is your life discipline. (Surat Al-Baqarah).
- Adherence to this discipline is of great importance. (Surat Al-'Imran).
- Justice is the main pillar of succession. (Surat An-Nisa).
- The importance of applying the discipline and fulfilling the commitments made to put it into practice. (Surat Al-Ma'ida).
- Maintenance of the Oneness of Allah (SWT) both in belief and practice is crucial in this discipline. (Surat Al-An'am).
- Determine your position where discipline is concerned. (Surat Al-A'raf).
- The principles of victory are both divine and worldly; which demonstrates the discipline's comprehensiveness and realism. (Surat Al-Anfal).

It must be apparent by now that the Surahs of the Qur'an accumulate to form a single chain of consistent messages and ideas. Now that the discipline has started to take shape, ten sections follow to provide us with the factors that support that discipline and they include:

- Repentance (Surat At-Tawba)
- Gratification of Allah's blessings (Surat An-Nahl); particularly, the blessing of having faith in Allah (SWT) in one's heart. (Surat Ibrahim)
- Moderation in calling for this discipline (Surat Hud)
- Patience and hope for Allah's victory (Surat Yusuf)

After understanding how to contemplate Allah's ayahs, let us move on to the next ten sections of Qur'an and see more of its wonders and miracles.

Surat At-Tawbah (the Repentance)

Surat At-Tawbah is a Madinan Surah. It was revealed after Surat Al- Ma'idah. In the order of the Surahs in the Qur'an, it follows Surat Al-Anfal. It consists of 129 Ayahs and is the last full Surah revealed to our beloved Prophet (SAWS) before he passed away.

The surah was revealed at a time when the Muslim nation was getting ready to spread the message of Islam outside the borders of the Arabic Peninsula to reach all the peoples of the Earth.

This surah was revealed after the last battle fought by Prophet Muhammad (SAWS), the Battle of Tabouk, where 30 thousand Muslims took part in it. As mentioned before, this surah directly follows Surat Al- Anfal which deals with the Battle of Badr; the first battle fought by the Prophet (SAWS) with only 313 Muslims. The reason behind this is so that the reader of the Holy Qur'an can notice the difference between the circumstances, conditions, and rulings of the two battles, as well as the Qur'anic commentary on both.

The Battle of Tabouk was one of the battles where the negative effect of hypocrisy was prevalent. There were many hypocrites amongst the army. There were also many believers who were left behind because they were not brisk enough to take part. Nevertheless, the Muslims won the battle and this surah was revealed to comment on that.

The Sign of Distinction

Surat At-Tawbah is the only surah that does not start with *Al-Basmallah* (invocation of the name of Allah) in contrast to all of the surahs in the Qur'an. When a Muslim reads the Holy Qur'an and starts by saying, "In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful", he feels from the very beginning that he is crossing a borderline between an old condition and a new one. He feels that he is plunging into a deeper spiritual world, heart and soul, leaving the materialistic world behind as he keeps hearing more of Allah's words and living with Allah's most beautiful names, which include the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

The reason behind the absence of *Al-Basmallah* at the beginning of the surah, according to most religious scholars, is due to the fact that this is a surah that deals with disbelievers and hypocrites more than any other in the Holy Qur'an. Thus, they are deprived of *Al-Basmalah* along with all the meanings of compassion and mercy that are presented there. Its first words can be translated as, **"An acquittal from Allah and His Messenger to the ones of the associators (Those who associate others with Allah) (with) whom you have covenanted."** (TMQ, 9:1.

Surat At-Tawbah has other names as well. It is called the *Exposer*, as it exposed the polytheists by numerating 55 of the hypocritical traits with which they dealt with the Prophet (SAWS). It is also called the *Revealer* as it reveals the flaws of the disbelievers and the languid that forsake giving support to Islam. It is also called the *Sword* as it is the most surah that urged Muslims for *Jihad* (fighting for Allah's cause), encouraging them to fight Allah's enemies, and warning against laziness and

languor. It is indeed a stern surah, but why then is it called At-Tawbah (the Repentance)?

The reason behind the title

Of all the aspects of our relationship with Allah (SWT), repentance is indeed the most tender of all. It means going back to Allah (SWT), resorting to Him, and giving up all sins. What, then, is the relation between repentance and the traits of both polytheists and hypocrites, and the urging for *Jihad*?

This surah is the final call for humanity. It was descended right before the concluding revelation of the Qur'an and the death of the Prophet (SAWS). Although the surah contains severe warnings to the disbelievers and hypocrites, along with a call for Muslims to fight for their religion, it gives everyone a final chance for repentance. In many instances, we notice the recurrence of what can be translated as, **"...so, in case they repent, it will be more charitable (i.e., better) for them."** (TMQ, 9:74).

If we look for the word *Tawbah* (repentance) and its derivatives in this surah, we will find that it is repeated 17 times in Surat At-Tawbah, making it the highest number of repetition of this word in the Holy Qur'an. In Surat Al-Baqarah, the longest surah in the Qur'an, the word *Tawbah* is repeated 13 times only. It is also mentioned 3 times in Surat Al-Imran, 12 times in Surat An-Nisa, 5 times in Surat Al-Ma'idah, 6 times in Surat Hud, and 1 time only in Surat Al-An'am.

A call of repentance for all

Thus, we conclude that the highest number of times where the word *Tawbah* is mentioned is in this surah. What is noteworthy is that the surah does not leave out a sect or a group without including them within the range of *Tawbah*. The call was for all; disbelievers, polytheists, apostates, those who are hesitant, hypocrites, sinners, pious believers, and even the Prophet (SAWS) and his companions (RA). Whenever the surah mentions one of those groups, it reminds them of repentance or gives them the glad tidings that Allah (SWT) forgives them, in what can be translated as, **"Indeed Allah has already relented towards..."** (TMQ, 9:117), and **"... So, in case they repent, it will be more charitable (i.e., better) for them"** (TMQ, 9:74).

As the surah exposes the hypocrites, it conveys to them a clear message that all of their tricks are revealed to the believers and thus leaves them no other chance but to repent. Hence, such exposure leads them to repent. It is just like when Allah (SWT) inflicts a hardship on someone so that it becomes a reason for his awakening and return to His path. Surat Al-Tawbah makes the hypocrites feel that they are besieged as it deprives them of all their lame excuses when Islam is set forth and clarified to everyone. Even Allah's call for the believers to fight is intended to fill the disbelievers' hearts with despair and to convince them that they will not be able to conquer the believers. Therefore, the surah leaves them with only one way out; the way of repentance.

The relation between At-Tawbah and the preceding Surahs

When we divide the Qur'an into three divisions, we find that the first part consists of the seven longest Surahs, ending with Surat At-Tawbah. It is as if it has been revealed after the clarification of the methodology of Islam and the means to accomplish Allah's mission, only to open the gates of repentance and mercy to whoever fails to follow Allah's orders. It is indeed a blessing that it is one of the final Surahs revealed to the Prophet (SAWS) before his death. Hence, the end of revelation as well as the end of the Qur'an marks opening the gates for repentance. Can you feel this meaning?

Some people feel the severity of this surah on the disbelievers and hypocrites, while others feel Allah's overwhelming mercy, as He accepts everyone's repentance. Yet, the latter are the ones that get closer to the actual point of the surah. It threatens the sinners only to urge them to run to repentance. Exposing the hypocrites and calling upon the believers to fight, and thus asserting the fact that they will not be conquered, are both intended to urge the disbelievers to repent.

Final calls for repentance

The surah starts in a severe and eye-catching way. In addition to the fact that it does not start with the *Basmallah*, as all other Surahs do, it starts with the word "*Bara'a*" (acquittal) as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"An acquittal from Allah and His Messenger to the ones of the associators (Those who associate others with Allah) (with) whom you have covenanted. So, wander about in the earth for four months, and know that you are unable to be (i.e. without the power to be defiant) defiant to Allah."** (TMQ, 9:1-2).

It is a strict start and a fixed time limit. Then, an alarming announcement from Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAWS) is given to all those who can hear it, **"And an announcement from Allah and His Messenger to mankind on the day of the Greater Pilgrimage that Allah is quit of the associators and (so is) His Messenger."** (TMQ, 9:3).

Why all this strictness? The answer is in what Allah (SWT) says and can be translated as, **"So in case you repent, then it is more charitable (i.e., better) for you; and in case you turn away, then know that you are unable to be defiant to Allah"** (TMQ, 9:3). The threat here is actually urging for repentance, and not vengeance. Moreover, both the **"acquittal"** and the **"announcement"** are the final calls for this repentance.

Repentance of the polytheists who joined in the battle

The surah takes us to the fifth ayah where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **"So, when the prohibiting months are drawn away, (Literally: stripped away) then kill the associators wherever you find them... every place of observation (i.e., ambush)";** however, **"But, in case they repent, and keep up the prayer, and bring the Zakat, (i.e., pay the obligatory poor-dues) then let them go their way; (Literally: pass on their way)."** (TMQ, 9:5). Despite the clear commands to fight the associators, there is still a reminder that encourages them to repent. It is true that the surah is severe in facing them. Yet, it is also true that it is so keen on urging them to go back to Allah's path.

After that, the surah informs us that we should leave no excuse for the disbelievers by calling upon them and clarifying the religion to them before fighting them. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And in case any of the associators (Those who associate others with Allah) seeks of you neighborly (protection), then grant him neighbourly (protection) till he hears the Words of Allah; thereafter convey him to his secure place.”** (TMQ, 9:6).

The ayahs follow in succession in the same rhythm; threatening but reminding of repentance. For instance, in the tenth ayah, Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“They respect (Literally: watch) neither consanguinity nor treaty towards a believer; and those are the ones (who are) transgressors.”** (TMQ, 9:10). The next ayah continues, **“So, in case they repent, and keep up the prayer, and bring the Zakat, (Pay the obligatory poor-dues.) then they are your brethren in the religion”** (TMQ, 9:11). This ayah proves that once they repent, not only are they forgiven by Allah (SWT), but they are also granted the brotherhood and love of the believers.

Another warning is repeated in ayahs 12 and 14 in case the polytheists insist on fighting. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And in case they breach their oaths after their covenant, and discredit your religion, then fight the leaders of disbelief; surely they have no (binding) oaths, that possibly they would refrain”** (TMQ, 9:12), and **“Fight them! Allah will torment them at your hands and disgrace them and grant you victory over them”** (TMQ, 9:14). This is immediately followed by an ayah that returns to repentance where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...and Allah relents towards whomever He decides”** (TMQ, 9:15). It is an excellent example of Islam’s moderation and balance between compassion and leniency on one hand, and between reality and strictness on the other.

If this is the case with the disbelievers and hypocrites, then how will it be with the disobedient Muslims? Will Allah (SWT) forgive them? When Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“So, in case they repent... then they are your brethren in the religion”** (TMQ, 9:11) about the disbelievers, what would be the case when a believer sins?

Surat At-Tawbah is amongst the most surahs giving hope to Muslims of Allah's mercy. If Allah (SWT), the Lord of Might, repeatedly encourages even the disbelievers and hypocrites to go back to the path in repentance; and repeats the word *Tawbah* (repentance) 17 times in this surah, how can He not forgive the disobeying believers?

Repentance of languid believers that forsake giving support to Islam

We now reach ayah 24 that addresses the believers and urges them to fight for the victory of Allah’s religion. The *Jihad* this ayah refers to is not limited to wars and battles, but extends to include all forms of giving aid to Islam making it a priority in a believer’s life. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Say, “In case your fathers, and your sons, and your brethren, and your spouses, and your kinsmen, and riches that you have scored (Literally: committed) and commerce whose slackening you are apprehensive of, and dwellings you are satisfied with, in case**

these are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving in His way, then await till Allah comes up with His Command; and Allah does not guide the immoral people.” (TMQ, 9:24). This ayah mentions eight allowed forms of love, yet warns against letting any of those to be a reason for drifting away from Allah's path and leaving *Jihad* behind. Thus, one has to carry on Allah's orders with priority, and has to keep them beyond worldly desires lest Allah's punishment and wrath ensue, may Allah (SWT) forbid it!

The surah then shifts to deal with a new type of repentance; a different type other than that of the sins that people might commonly commit, like not lowering the gaze or delaying prayers. The surah invites those who forsake giving support to Islam to repent. It points out that this hideous act requires genuine repentance. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“O you who have believed, how is it with you, (that) when it is said to you, “March out in the way of Allah,” you sink down heavily to the earth? Are you satisfied with the present life, (Literally: the lowly life, i.e., the life of this world) rather than with the Hereafter? Yet in no way is the enjoyment of the present life, in the Hereafter anything except a little thing.” (TMQ, 9:38).**

A gentle reproach, that is followed by a strict tone in the next ayah where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“In case ever you do not march out, He will torment you with a painful torment and will (readily) exchange instead of you another people.” (TMQ, 9:39).** Beware that you all might be exchanged! Allah (SWT) is indeed capable to render His religion victorious, and He does not need anyone of us to do that, as He (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“In case ever you do not vindicate him, (The Prophet) yet Allah readily vindicated him” (TMQ, 9:40).**

This is followed by the ayah with the clear, broad command that excludes no one where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“March out, light and heavy! And strive with your riches and yourselves in the way of Allah” (TMQ, 9:41).** In order for the disbelievers to turn on their heels and repent, we need to fight them. Thus, the Muslims' struggle against them is an aid for them to repent, and head back to Allah's way. Consequently, the Muslims' failure to fight is a reason for the disbelievers to stay astray. Let us then start striving for the victory of our religion, carrying out all sorts of goodness to save ourselves and to help others repent.

Repenting of not depending on Allah (SWT)

Throughout the previous ayahs, the surah was about the Battle of *Honayn* and how the Muslims were overconfident due to the fact that their army had a larger number of soldiers. However, this large number did not help them in any way and they slipped into the misconception that victory depends on quantity, forgetting that it is only from Allah (SWT), as He says what can be translated as, **“Indeed Allah has already (granted) you victory on many battlefields, and on the day of Hunayn, when your multitude made you admire it, yet it availed you nothing; and the earth, spacious as it is, was strait for you; thereafter you turned away, withdrawing.” (TMQ, 9:25).** This grave mistake requires repentance and ayah 27 points that out as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Thereafter Allah even after that relents**

towards whomever He decides ;and Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.” (TMQ, 9:27).

Failure to aid Islam

The ayahs then switch to tackle the hypocrites who failed to aid Allah’s religion. In ayah 46 Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And if they had been willing to go out (among you), they would indeed have made some preparation (Literally: prepared a preparation) for it; but Allah hated that they should be sent forth, so He discouraged them” (TMQ, 9:46).** If they had a sincere intention to march out, they would have prepared for the battle and moved forward. However, their intentions were fake and Allah (SWT) hated that they should join the Muslims’ army and discouraged them. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...so He discouraged them, and it was said to them, “Sit with the ones sitting back.” (TMQ, 9:46).**

These are indeed painful words to a Muslim. If you are denied the chance of participating in charity or missionary work, just remember that you could be subject to Allah’s wrath, and that your good deeds might not be accepted. Who would take that? Who would like to be a burden on this religion?! Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And if they had gone out among you, in no way would they have increased you except in confusion...” (TMQ, 9:47).**

The ayahs then follow in succession with reproach. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as,

- **“And of them is he who says, “Give me permission (i.e., permission to be excused from fighting) and do not tempt me.” Verily they have already fallen down into temptation; and surely Hell is indeed encompassing the disbelievers” (TMQ, 9:49),**
- **“And they swear by Allah that surely they are indeed of you, and in no way are they of you ...” (TMQ, 9:56), and**
- **“If they could find a shelter, or (some) cavernous places, or any place of entry, they would indeed turn about and bolt away (to it).” (TMQ, 9:57)**

Ayahs 81-87 enclose a severe tone. For instance, Allah (SWT) says in ayah 86 what can be translated as, **“And when a surah is sent down (saying), “Believe in Allah and strive with His Messenger, “those endowed with ampleness among them ask you permission (i.e., permission to stay behind and not fight) and say, “Leave us (behind) with the ones sitting back.” (TMQ, 9:86) “...The ones sitting back”,** what a moving expression! Who would accept to be sitting at home watching TV and doing nothing to aid his religion? Such a person could be very religious and keen to pray in the mosque, for example, yet very passive and would never bother to serve Islam. These type of people should be aware of ayah number 87 where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“They are satisfied to be with the ones tarrying behind, (i.e. among the women, who generally remain behind) and their hearts are stamped upon, so they do not comprehend.” (TMQ, 9:87).** How could they be on the right path if they remain in that state?

On the other hand, look at the positive example as Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“But the Messenger and the ones who have believed with him have striven with their riches and their selves; and those will have the most charitable (benefits) and those are they (who) are prosperous.”** (TMQ, 9: 88).

Rejoicing in Hell

In ayah 81, there is stern reproach where Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“The ones who were left behind exulted with their seat (s) behind the back of Messenger of Allah ...”** (TMQ, 9:81). It clarifies how unbalanced their standards of happiness and sadness are. Who would be happy and proud of failing to support Islam? Rejoicing this is like celebrating hellfire! Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“...and hated to strive with their riches and their selves in the way of Allah, and said, “Do not march out in the heat.” Say, “The fire of his strictly hotter,” if they (really) comprehend * So, let them laugh a little and weep much in recompense for what they have been earning.”** (TMQ, 9:81-82).

The call for everyone to repent

As aforementioned, each reproach in this surah is followed by a call for repentance. For instance we can see:

- The repentance of hypocrites and apostates; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“... in case they repent, it will be more charitable (i.e., better) for them; and in case they turn back Allah will torment them with a painful torment in the present (life) (Literally: the lowly (life), the life of this world) and the Hereafter; and in no way do they have in the earth a constant patron or a ready vindicator.”** (TMQ, 9:74).
- The repentance of the hesitant; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And others have confessed their guilty (deeds); they have mixed a righteous deed with another odious (one). It may be that Allah will relent towards them; surely Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.”** (TMQ, 9:102).
- Urging everyone to repent; Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Do they not know that Allah He, Ever He, accepts repentance from His bondmen, and He takes the donations; (i.e., Free will offering) and that Allah, He, Ever He, is The Superbly Relenting, The Ever-Merciful?”** (TMQ, 9:104).

There are three conditions for an accepted repentance:

1. Regretting the sins committed,
2. Quitting them, and
3. Determining not to go back to them again.

Take the initiative right now and repent, since delaying it is in itself a sin.

The attributes of Muslims deserving martyrdom

After having dealt with the attributes of hypocrites, the surah moves on to talk about the attributes of the true believers who made the valuable purchase that Allah (SWT) describes in what can be translated as, **“Surely Allah has purchased from the believers their selves and their riches for (the reward) that the Garden will be theirs; they fight in the way of Allah; so they kill, and are killed. It is a promise, truly (binding) on Him in the Tawrah, and the Injil, and the Qur’an; and who fulfills his covenant (better) than Allah! So feel glad of the tidings of the selling you have made (Literally: allegiance you have sworn) with Him; and that is the (bargain) (that is) the magnificent triumph.”** (TMQ, 9:111).

Thus, the Qur’anic context incites us to learn more about the attributes of the true believers. We turn the page to read what can be translated as, **“(Triumphant are) the repentant (ones), the worshipers, the ones praising (Him), wandering (in His way), bowing down, prostrating themselves, the ones commanding beneficence and forbidding male-ficence, and the ones preserving the bounds of Allah; and give good tidings to the believers.”** (TMQ, 9:112).

Repentance of the elite of the *Ummah* (Islamic nation)

So splendid is repentance that Allah (SWT) reminds the Prophet (SAWS) and his noble companions of it saying what can be translated as, **“Indeed Allah has already relented towards the Prophet and the Muhajirûn (The Supporters, i.e., the inhabitants) and the Ansar (The Supporters, i.e., the inhabitants of Al-Madînah who sheltered and helped those who emigrated from Makkah) who closely followed him in the hour of difficulty, even after the hearts of a group of them had almost swerved aside; thereafter He relented towards them; surely He is Ever-Compassionate, Ever-Merciful to them.”** (TMQ, 9:117).

Repentance, as explained by religious scholars, is the first level of being a bondman of Allah (SWT) as well as the last. True faith begins with sincere repentance. Moreover, it is required at the end of life. Hence, we can understand the Prophet’s (SAWS) Hadith saying, “By Allah! I ask for forgiveness from Allah and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day.”³⁰

A final repentance for the three left behind

Finally, there is the repentance for the three Muslims who were left behind in the Battle of *Tabouk*. Letting Islam down and failing to run for its aid is a serious sin that requires repentance. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“And to the three who were left staying behind, until, when the earth, spacious as it is, became strait for them, and their selves became strait for them, and they expected that there was no shelter from Allah except in Him; thereafter He relented towards them that they might repent; surely Allah, He, Ever He, is The Superbly Relenting, The Ever-Merciful.”** (TMQ, 9:118).

Do you notice the wonderful meaning in, **“thereafter He relented towards them that they might repent”**. Allah (SWT) has to forgive you first and guide you towards repentance. Thus, guidance is from Allah (SWT) and only He can help you find it.

³⁰ Authentic Hadith, Al-Bukhari.

Hence, my dear Muslim brothers and sisters, always repeat this *dua* 'a (supplication):
“Oh, Allah forgives me so that I may repent.”

The best end of the best life

The first impression a reader of Surat At-Tawbah gets is that it is full of threats, warnings and severe scolding. Nevertheless, this is done as the surah receives everybody with open arms for repentance. Moreover, it is indeed a tender sign in the Qur'an that Allah (SWT) did not name this surah “The Exposer” since Allah (SWT) loves to conceal the deeds of his bondmen. One more grace in this surah is that despite the fact that it deprives the hypocrites from Allah's mercy at the beginning, through depriving them of *Al-Basmalah* and the acquittal from them; it still provides everybody with mercy at the end, exemplified in Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) who has been sent as a messenger of mercy to mankind. Allah (SWT) says what can be translated as, **“Indeed there has already come to you a Messenger from (among) yourselves. Mighty (i.e., burdensome) to him is whatever distresses you. Most eager is he for your (welfare), to the believers (he is) constantly compassionate, constantly merciful.”** (TMQ, 9: 128).

This ayah is the best closure to the seven longest Surahs in the Holy Qur'an. Being the last complete surah to be revealed to the Prophet (SAWS), it is also the best end to his life (SAWS). It is the farewell surah, and the greatest farewell in our religion is accepting repentance from everybody. In case this great offer of repentance is turned down, Allah (SWT) says in the last ayah what can be translated as, **“So, in case they turn away, then say, “Allah is enough (Reckoner) for me. There is no god except He. On Him I have put my trust; He is the Lord of the Magnificent Throne.”** (TMQ, 9:129).

Dear brother and sister ask yourself whether you are going to repent or not. If Allah (SWT) has opened the doors of repentance to all mankind, no matter how close or far they are from His path, what would you do, being the believer that you are who loves Allah's teachings and His Book? Let us all then work and live for Islam. We also have to beware not to fail in advocating and supporting it. Furthermore, we have to have absolute faith that Allah (SWT) forgives whomever He pleases.

From the graces of the Qur'an

We conclude by pointing out that both Surat At-Tawbah and Surat Al-Anfal are consecutive, conforming to the time order of the two Battles of *Badr* and *Tabouk*. Surat Al-Anfal deals with the Battle of *Badr*, the first battle of the Prophet (SAWS), while Surat At-Tawbah deals with his last battle. The sequence of the surahs points out the difference in the Islamic community between the time when Muslims started to lead their religion to victory and the last actual and great victory. The two surahs open the field for sociologists and researchers to notice the differences between the two societies and to analyze their development; an analysis, which requires observation and critical thinking.