

Al-Baqarah [The Cow]

Madinan Period

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

[1] *Alif, Lam, Mim.*¹

[2] This is the Book of Allah, there is no doubt in it; it is a guidance for the pious,

[3] for those who believe in the existence of that which is beyond the reach of perception,² who establish Prayer³ and spend out of what We have provided them,

[4] who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you, and have firm faith in the Hereafter.

1. *The names of letters of the Arabic alphabet, called **huruf muqatta'at**, occur at the beginning of several surahs of the Qur'an. There is no consensus among the commentators of the Qur'an as to their precise meanings. It is obvious, however, that deriving the right guidance from the Qur'an does not depend on grasping the meaning of these vocables.*

2. ***Ghayb** signifies the facts which are hidden from man's senses and are beyond the scope of man's ordinary observation and experience such as God's essence and attributes, the Angels, the process of revelation, Paradise, Hell, and so on.*

3. *The expression "establishment of Prayer" has a wider meaning than mere performance of Prayer. It means that the system of Prayer should be organized on a collective basis. If there is a person in a locality who prays individually but no arrangements are made for congregational Prayer, it cannot be claimed that Prayer is established in that locality.*

[5] Such are on true guidance from their Lord; such are the truly successful.

[6] As for those who have rejected (these truths), it is all the same whether or not you warn them, for they will not believe.

[7] Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing,⁴ and a covering has fallen over their eyes. They deserve severe chastisement.

[8] There are some who say: "We believe in Allah and in the Last Day," while in fact they do not believe.

[9] They are trying to deceive Allah and those who believe, but they do not realize that in truth they are only deceiving themselves.

[10] There is a disease in their hearts and Allah has intensified this disease.⁵ A painful chastisement awaits them for their lying.

[11] Whenever they are told: "Do not spread mischief on earth," they say: "Why! We indeed are the ones who set things right."

[12] They are the mischief-makers, but they do not realize it.

[13] Whenever they are told: "Believe as others believe," they answer: "Shall we believe as the fools have believed?" Indeed it is they who are the fools, but they are not aware of it.

4. This does not mean that their rejection of the Truth is a consequence of God's sealing of their hearts. What is meant is that God sealed their hearts and ears as a consequence of their decision to reject the fundamentals of faith, of their deliberate choice of a path divergent from that charted out by the Qur'an.

5. "Disease" here refers to the disease of hypocrisy. The statement that "Allah has intensified this disease" means that He does not punish the hypocrites immediately but allows them to indulge in their hypocrisy and exult in the success of their tricks. This feeling of success intensifies their hypocrisy.

[14] When they meet the believers, they say: "We believe," but when they meet their evil companions (in privacy), they say: "Surely we are with you; we were merely jesting."

[15] Allah jests with them, leaving them to wander blindly on in their rebellion.

[16] These are the ones who have purchased error in exchange for guidance. This bargain has brought them no profit and certainly they are not on the Right Way.

[17] They are like him who kindled a fire, and when it lit up all around him, Allah took away the light (of their perception) and left them in utter darkness where they can see nothing.⁶

[18] They are deaf, they are dumb, they are blind; they will never return (to the Right Way).

[19] Or they are like those who encounter a violent rainstorm from the sky, accompanied by pitch-dark clouds, thunder-claps and flashes of lightning: on hearing thunder-claps they thrust their fingers into their ears in fear of death. Allah encompasses these deniers of the Truth.

[20] It is as if the lightning would snatch their sight; whenever it gleams a while for them they walk a little, and when darkness covers them they halt.⁷ If Allah so willed, He could indeed take away their hearing and their sight. Surely Allah is All-Powerful.

6. This means that two opposite effects emerged when a true servant of God radiated the light which made it possible to distinguish true from false and right from wrong and the Straight Way distinct from the ways of error. To those endowed with true perception, all truths became evident. But those who were almost blinded by the worship of their animal desires perceived nothing.

7. *The first story refers to those hypocrites who disbelieved completely but had become Muslims merely to further their worldly interests. The second story refers to those who were prone to doubt and hesitation or whose faith was weak; those who believed in the Truth but not to the extent of exposing themselves to hardships for its sake.*

[21] O mankind, serve your Lord Who has created you as well as those before you; do so that you are saved.⁸

[22] It is He Who has made the earth a resting-place for you, and the sky a canopy, and sent down Water from above wherewith He brought forth fruits for your sustenance. Do not, then, set up rivals to Allah when you know (the Truth).⁹

[23] If you are in any doubt whether it is We Who have revealed this Book to Our servant, then produce just a *surah* like it, and call all your supporters and seek in it the support of all others save Allah. Accomplish this if you are truthful.

[24] But if you fail to do this-and you will most certainly fail-then have fear of the Fire whose fuel is men and stones¹⁰ and which has been prepared for those who deny the Truth.

[25] (O Prophet), announce glad tidings to those who believe in this Book and do righteous deeds (in accordance with its teachings), that for them are gardens beneath which rivers flow. Their fruits will have such resemblance to those of the earth that whenever they will be provided with those fruits they will say: "it was this which was granted to us on earth before." For them there shall be pure spouses, and there they shall abide forever.

8. *So that you are saved from false beliefs and unrighteous conduct in this life, and from God's punishment in the Next.*

9. *Not to set up others as rivals to Allah means not to make anyone other than God the object of Worship, service and obedience that one owes to God alone.*

10. *In the Next Life not only will the unbelievers become the fuel of Hell-fire, but that the same fate will befall the idol-stones they worshipped and before which they prostrated themselves.*

[26] Behold! Allah is not ashamed to propound the parable of a gnat, or even of something more lowly.¹¹ On hearing these parables the believers know that it is the truth from their Lord, while those bent on denying the Truth say; "What does Allah mean by these parables?" Thus He causes many to go astray just as He directs many to the Right Way. And He thereby causes to go astray only the transgressors,¹²

[27] who break the covenant of Allah after its firm binding,¹³ and cut asunder what Allah has commanded to be joined,¹⁴ and spread mischief on earth. They are the utter losers.

11. *Here an objection is indirectly refuted. At several places in the Qur'an, spiders, flies, gnats and so on are mentioned in order to elucidate certain points. Opponents objected to this on the grounds that such objects were too lowly to find a place in the Book of God. They*

insinuated that had the Qur'an indeed been a revelation from God it would not have mentioned such trivial objects.

12. *Fasiq means transgressor, disobedient.*

13. *The injunctions or ordinances issued by a sovereign to his servants and subjects are termed 'Ahd in Arabic since compliance with them becomes obligatory for the latter. 'Ahd has been used here in this sense. The 'ahd referred to here signifies God's eternal command that all human beings are obliged to render their service, obedience and worship to Him alone. "After its binding" refers to the promise made by mankind to remain faithful to the injunctions of God at the time of Adam's creation. (For details see al-A'raf, 7: 172.)*

14. *That is, the transgressors strike their blows at those very relationships upon which the individual and collective well-being of mankind depends, relationships which God wants maintained on a sound basis.*

[28] How can you be ungrateful to Allah Who bestowed life upon you when you were lifeless, then He will cause you to die and will again bring you back to life so that you will be returned to Him.

[29] It is He Who created for you all that is on earth and then turned above and fashioned it into seven heavens.¹⁵ He knows all things.

[30] Just think when your Lord said to the angels: "Lo! I am about to place a vicegerent¹⁶ on earth," they said: "Will You place on it one who will spread mischief and shed blood while we celebrate Your glory and extol Your holiness?" He said: "Surely I know what you do not know."

[31] Then Allah taught Adam the names of all things and presented them to the angels and said: "If you are right (that the appointment of a vicegerent will cause mischief) then tell Me the names of these things."

[32] They said, "Glory to You! We have no knowledge except what You taught us. You, only You, are All-Knowing, All-Wise."

[33] Then Allah said to Adam: "Tell them the names of these things." And when he had told them the names of all things, Allah said: "Did I not say to you that I know everything about the heavens and the earth which are beyond your range of knowledge and I know all that you disclose and also all that you hide?"

15. *It is difficult to explain precisely what is meant by the "seven heavens". In all ages man has tried, with the help of observation and speculation, to conceptualize the "heavens," i.e. that which lies beyond and above the earth. As we know, the concepts that have thus developed have constantly changed. What might be broadly inferred from this statement is that either God has divided the Universe beyond the earth into seven distinct spheres, or that this earth is located in that part of the Universe which consists of seven different spheres.*

16. "**Khalifah**" or vicegerent is one, who exercises the authority delegated to him by his principal.

[34] And when We ordered the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam," all of them fell prostrate, except *Iblis*. He refused, and gloried in his arrogance and became one of the defiers.

[35] And We said: "O Adam live, in the Garden, you and your wife, and eat abundantly of whatever you wish but do not approach this tree or else you will be counted among the wrong-doers."

[36] But Satan caused both of them to deflect from obeying Our command by tempting them to the tree and brought them out of the state they were in, and We said: "Get down all of you; henceforth, each of you is an enemy of the other, and on earth you shall have your abode and your livelihood for an appointed time."

[37] Thereupon Adam learned from his Lord some words and repented and his Lord accepted his repentance for He is Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.

[38] We said: "Get you down from here, all of you, and guidance shall come to you from Me: then, whoever will follow My guidance need have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

[39] But those Who refuse to accept this (guidance) and reject Our Signs as false are destined for the Fire where they shall abide forever."

[40] Children of Israel!¹⁷ Recall My favour which I had bestowed on you, and fulfil your covenant with Me and I shall fulfil My covenant with you, and fear Me alone.

17. *It would be pertinent to point out that the entire discourse embodied in vv. 40-121, is addressed to the Children of Israel because Jews lived in Madinah and its vicinity in large numbers.*

[41] And believe in the Book which I have revealed and which confirms the Scripture you already have, and be not foremost among its deniers. Do not sell My signs for a trifling gain,¹⁸ and beware of My wrath.

[42] Do not confound Truth by overlaying it with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the Truth.

[43] Establish Prayer and dispense *Zakah* (the Purifying Alms) and bow in worship with those who bow.

[44] Do you enjoin righteousness on people and forget your own selves even though you recite the Scripture? Have you no sense?

[45] And resort to patience and Prayer for help. Truly Prayer is burdensome for all except the devout,

[46] who realize that ultimately they will have to meet their Lord and that to Him they are destined to return.

[47] Children of Israel! Recall My favour which I bestowed upon you, exalting you above all nations.¹⁹

[48] Fear the Day when no one shall avail another, when no intercession will be accepted, when no one will be ransomed, and no criminal will receive any help.

18. *"Trifling gain" refers to the worldly benefits for the sake of which they were rejecting Gods directives. Whatever one may gain in exchange for the Truth, be it all the treasure in the world, is trifling; the Truth is of supreme value.*

19. *This does not mean that their pre-eminence among nations was to last forever; rather, it refers to that period of human history when, of all nations, only the Children of Israel possessed that knowledge of Truth which comes from God alone. At that time they were entrusted with the task of directing the nations of the world to righteousness; they were expected to serve God and to invite the rest of the world to do the same.*

[49] And recall when We rescued you from the slavery of Pharaoh's people²⁰ who had afflicted you with dreadful suffering, slaying your males and sparing your females. That was a tremendous trial for you from your Lord.

[50] And recall when We split the sea, providing passage for you, and thus saved you and caused Pharaoh's people to drown before your very eyes.

[51] And recall when We summoned Moses for a term of forty nights,²¹ and then you set up the calf as your god in his absence. You indeed committed a grave wrong.

[52] Yet We pardoned you that you might be grateful.

[53] And recall (that while you were committing this wrong) We gave Moses the Scripture and the Criterion²² that you are guided to the Right Way.

[54] And recall when (on returning with this favour) Moses said to his people: "My people! You have wronged yourselves by taking the calf for an object of worship, so turn in repentance to your Creator and kill yourselves.²³ This will be best for you in your Creator's sight." Thereupon He accepted your repentance. Indeed He is Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.

20. *We have rendered Al-Fir 'awn as "Pharaoh's people". This includes the members of the Pharaonic family as well as the aristocracy of Egypt of the time.*

21. *When the Israelites reached the Sinai Peninsula after their exodus from Egypt, God summoned Moses to Mount Sinai for forty days and nights so that the nation which had now achieved independence could be given law and morality.*

22. *"Criterion" (furqan) here means that understanding of religion which differentiates truth from falsehood, making each stand out distinctly.*

23. *That is, they should put to death those of their own number who had made the calf an object of worship and actually worshipped it.*

[55] And recall when you said: "O Moses, we will not believe in you until we clearly see Allah (speaking to you)." Thereupon a tremendous thunderbolt struck you before your very eyes.

[56] Then We revived you after your extinction, that you might be grateful.

[57] And We caused a cloud to comfort you with shade, and We sent down upon you manna and the quails, (saying): "Eat of the good wherewithal that We have provided you as sustenance." And by their sinning (your forefathers) did not wrong Us: it is they themselves whom they wronged.

[58] And recall when We said: "Go into this town and eat abundantly of its food; but enter the gate prostrate, saying, "Repentance".²⁴ We will forgive you your sins and shall bestow more favour on the doers of good."

[59] Then the wrong-doers substituted another saying for that which had been given them; and so We sent down a scourge upon the wrong-doers from the heavens for their transgression.

[60] And recall when Moses prayed for water for his people and We replied: "Strike the rock with your staff," And there gushed out from it twelve springs and each tribe knew its drinking-place.²⁵ (Then you were directed): "Eat and drink of the sustenance provided by Allah, and do not go about acting wickedly on earth, spreading mischief."

24. *Hittah could either mean that when they entered the town they should seek God's pardon for their sins or that instead of plundering and massacring people in the wake of their conquest, they should proclaim an amnesty.*

25. *The number of springs was twelve because the Israelite tribes were also twelve in number. God provided one spring for each tribe so that they would not fight each other for water.*

[61] And recall when you said: "O Moses, surely we cannot put up with one sort of food, so pray to your Lord to bring out for us what the earth produces -its herbs and its cucumbers and its corn and its lentils and its garlic and its onions." Then Moses said: "Will you take a meaner thing in exchange for what is better? Go down to some city and there you shall get what you ask for. "And ignominy and wretchedness were pitched upon them and they were laden with the burden of Allah's wrath. This was because they denied the Signs of Allah and slew the Prophets unrightfully. All this, because they disobeyed and persistently exceeded the limits (of the Law).

[62] Whether they are the ones who believe (in the Arabian Prophet), or whether they are Jews, Christians or Sabians -all who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and do righteous deeds- their reward is surely secure with their Lord; they need have no fear, nor shall they grieve.²⁶

26. The context of the verse makes it clear that it does not seek to enumerate in detail all the articles of faith in which one should believe, or all the principles of conduct which one should follow in order to merit reward from God. The aim of the verse is merely to repudiate the illusion cherished by the Jews that, by virtue of their being Jews, they had a monopoly of salvation. They had long entertained the notion that a special and exclusive relationship existed between them and God. They thought, therefore, that all who belonged to their group were predestined to salvation regardless of their beliefs and actions, whereas all non-Jews were predestined to serve as fuel for Hell-fire.

To clarify this misgiving the Jews are told that what really matters in God's sight is true faith and good deeds rather than formal affiliation with a certain religious community. Whoever has true faith and good deeds to his credit is bound to receive his reward, since God will judge people on the basis of merit rather than on the grounds that a person's name happens to be listed in the world as a member of one religious community or the other.

[63] And recall when We made a covenant with you and caused the Mount Sinai to tower above you, (saying): "Hold fast to the Book that We have given you, and remember the directives and commandments in it, that you be pious."

[64] Then you turned away from your covenant, and had it not been for Allah's grace and mercy upon you, you would have long been utter losers.

[65] And you know the case of those of you who broke the Sabbath,²⁷ how We said to them: "Become apes, despised and hated."

[66] And thus We made their end a warning for the people of their own time and for the succeeding generations, and an admonition to the God-fearing.

[67] And then recall when Moses said to his people: "Behold, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow." They said: "Are you jesting with us?" Moses answered: "I seek refuge in Allah that I should behave in the manner of the ignorant."

27. *Sabbath, i.e. Saturday. It was laid down that the Israelites should consecrate that day for rest and worship. They were required to abstain from all worldly acts, including cooking (which they might neither do themselves, nor have their servants do for them).*

[68] They said: "Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us what she is like." Moses answered: "He says, she is a cow, neither old nor immature, but of an age in between the two. Do, then, what you have been commanded."

[69] They said: "Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us of what colour she is." Moses answered: "He says, she is a yellow cow, with a bright colour which is pleasing to those who see!"

[70] They said: "Pray to your Lord that He make clear to us what cow she is. Cows seem much alike to us, and if Allah wills, we shall be guided."

[71] Moses answered: "Lo! He says, she is a cow unyoked to plough the earth or to water the tillage, one that has been kept secure, with no blemish on her!" Thereupon they cried out: "Now you have come forth with the information that will direct us a right." And they slaughtered her although they scarcely seemed to do so.²⁸

[72] And recall when you killed a man and then began to remonstrate and cast the blame (of killing) upon one another even though Allah was determined to bring to light what you were hiding.

28. Through contact with the neighbouring people, the Israelites had become infected with the attitude of sanctifying the cow; in fact they had even become accustomed to cow-worship. In order to disabuse the Jews of this, they were ordered to slaughter the cow. Their professed belief that God alone was worthy of worship could be tested only by asking them to slaughter with their own hands what they had formerly worshipped. This test was indeed a hard one since they were not fully imbued with faith. Hence, they tried to shelve the issue by resorting to enquiries about the kind of animal they were required to slaughter. But the more they enquired, the narrower the strait became for them, until the indications were as obvious as if someone had put his finger precisely on the particular animal they were required to slaughter-the animal which had for so long been an object of their worship.

[73] Then We ordered: "Smite the corpse with a part of it." Thus does Allah bring the dead to life and thus does He show His Signs that you might understand.

[74] Then (even after observing this) your hearts hardened and became like stones, or even harder. For surely there are some stones from which streams burst forth and some that split asunder and water issues out, and some that crash down for fear of Allah. Allah is not heedless of the things you do.

[75] Do you hope that these people will believe in the Message you are preaching,²⁹ even though a party of them has been wont to listen to the Word of Allah and after they had fully grasped it, knowingly distorted it?

[76] And when they meet those who believe (in Muhammad) they say: "We too believe in him." But in their intimate meetings they say to one another: "How foolish! Why should you intimate to them what Allah has revealed to you, for they will use it as argument against you before your Lord?"

[77] Are they unaware that Allah knows all that they hide and all that they disclose?

[78] Among them are also the unlettered folk who do not know about the Scriptures but cherish baseless wishes and merely follow their conjectures.

29. *This is addressed to the converts of Madinah, who had then lately affirmed their faith in the Prophet (peace be on him). These people had some vague notions about Prophethood, Heavenly Scriptures, Angels, the After Life, and Divine Law and so on, and for this they were indebted to their Jewish neighbours. They naturally expected that those who already followed Prophets and Divine Scriptures, and who, by introducing them to these ideas had contributed to their embracing the true faith, would not only join the ranks of the true believers, but would even be amongst their vanguard.*

[79] Woe, then, to those who write out the Scriptures with their own hands and then, in order to make a trifling gain, claim: "This is from Allah." Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they thus earn.

[80] They say: "The Fire will certainly not touch us except for a limited number of days." Say (to them): "Have you received a promise from Allah - for Allah never breaks His promise - or do you attribute to Allah something about which you have no knowledge?"

[81] Those who earn evil and are encompassed by their sinfulness are the people of the Fire, and there will they abide;

[82] those who believe and do righteous deeds are the people of the Garden, and there will they abide.

[83] And recall when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: "You shall serve none but Allah and do good to parents, kinsmen, orphans and the needy; you shall speak kindly to people, and establish Prayer and give *Zakah* (Purifying Alms). And yet, except for a few of you, you turned back on this covenant, and you are still backsliders.

[84] And recall when We made a covenant with you, that you shall not shed one another's blood, and shall not turn out one another from your homelands; you confirmed it, and you yourselves are witnesses to it.

[85] And here you are, killing one another, turning out a party of your own from their homelands, aiding one another against them in sin and enmity, and if they come to you as captives you ransom them although the very act of expelling them was unlawful to you. Do you believe in a part of the Scripture and reject the rest? What else, then, could be the retribution of those among you who do this than that they should live in degradation in the present life, and that on the Day of Resurrection they should be sent to the severest chastisement? Allah is not heedless of what you do.

[86] These are the ones who have bought the present life in exchange for the World to Come. Their chastisement shall not be lightened, nor shall they be helped.

[87] Surely We gave Moses the Scripture and caused a train of Messengers to follow him and then sent Jesus, the son of Mary, with Clear Proofs and supported him with the spirit of holiness.³⁰ But is it not true that every time a Messenger brought to you something that was not to your liking, you acted arrogantly: you called some Messengers liars and killed others?

[88] They say: 'Our hearts are well-protected.'" No! The fact is that Allah has cursed them because of their denying the Truth. So, scarcely do they believe.

[89] And now that there has come to them a Book from Allah, how are they treating it? Even though it confirms the Truth already in their possession, and even though they had prayed for victory against the unbelievers,³¹ and yet when that Book came to them – and they recognized it - they refused to acknowledge its Truth. Allah's curse be upon the unbelievers.

30. The "spirit of holiness" signifies the knowledge derived through revelation. It also signifies the angel Gabriel who brought this revelation. It also denotes the holy spirit of Jesus, the spirit which God had endowed with angelic character.

31. Before the advent of the Prophet (peace be on him), the Jews were eagerly awaiting a Prophet whose coming had been prophesied by their own Prophets. In fact, the Jews used to pray for his advent so that the dominance of the unbelievers could come to an end and the age of their own dominance be ushered in.

[90] Evil indeed is what they console themselves with.³² They deny the guidance revealed by Allah, grudging that He chose to bestow His gracious bounty (of revelation and prophethood) on some of His servants whom He willed.³³ Thus they have brought on themselves wrath after wrath, and a humiliating chastisement is in store for such unbelievers.

[91] When they are told: "Believe in what Allah has revealed," they say: "We believe only in what was revealed to us (Israel)." They deny everything else even though it be the Truth which confirms what they possess. Say (to them): "If indeed you are believers, why is it that in the past you killed the Prophets of Allah (who were from Israel)?"

[92] Moses came to you with clear proofs and yet you were so wont to wrong-doing that as soon as he was gone you took to worshipping the calf.

[93] Recall the covenant We made with you and caused the Mount to tower above you, stressing: "Hold to what We have given you with full strength and give heed to it." But their forefathers said: "We hear, but we disobey" - for their hearts were overflowing with love for the calf because of their unbelief. Say: "if you are people of faith, then evil are the things that your faith enjoins upon you."

32. Another possible rendering of the same verse is: "And how evil is that for the sake of which they had sold themselves," i.e. for the sake of which they had sacrificed their ultimate happiness and salvation.

33. They had longed for the promised Prophet to arise from among their own ranks. But when he arose among a different people, a people they despised, they decided to reject him. Their attitude bordered on saying that when God wants to raise a Prophet He should consult them and should abide by their opinion.

[94] Say to them: "If indeed the Last Abode with Allah is yours, in exclusion of other people, then long for death if you are truthful."

[95] But they shall never long for it because of the (evil) deeds they have committed; Allah is well aware of the wrong-doers.

[96] You will certainly find them most eager to cling on to life, indeed even more eager than those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity. Each one of them wishes to live a thousand years although the bestowal of long life cannot remove him from chastisement. Allah sees whatever they do.

[97] Say: "Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel³⁴ (should know that) he revealed this (Qur'an) to your heart by Allah's leave: it confirms the Scriptures revealed before it, and is a guidance and good tidings to the people of faith.

[98] (And if this is the cause of their hostility to Gabriel, let them know) whoever is an enemy to Allah, His Angels and His Messengers and to Gabriel and Michael will surely find Allah an enemy to such unbelievers."

[99] We surely sent down to you clear verses that elucidate the Truth, (verses) which only the transgressors reject as false.

[100] Is it not that every time they made a covenant with Allah a party of them set it aside? The truth is that most of them do not truly believe.

[101] And whenever a Messenger from Allah came to them, confirming what they already possessed, a party of those who had been given the Scripture flung the Book of Allah behind their backs as if they knew nothing,

34. The Jews not only reviled the Prophet (peace be on him) and his followers but also God's chosen angel, Gabriel, denouncing him as their enemy, and branding him as the angel of curse rather than of blessing.

[102] and then followed what the evil ones falsely attributed to the Kingdom of Solomon even though Solomon had never disbelieved; it is the evil ones who disbelieved, teaching people magic. And they followed what had been revealed to the two angels in Babylon - *Harut and Marut*- although these two (angels) never taught it to anyone without first declaring: "We are merely a means of testing people; so, do not engage in unbelief."³⁵ And yet they learned from them what might cause division between a man and his wife. They could not cause harm to anyone except by the leave of Allah, and still they learned what harmed rather than profited them, knowing well that he who bought it will have no share in the World to Come. Evil indeed is what they sold themselves for. Had they but known!

[103] Had they believed and been God-fearing Allah's reward would have been better! Had they but known!

35. There are various opinions on the interpretation of this verse; my own conclusion is that at the time when the whole Israelite nation was chained in slavery and captivity in Babylonia, God sent two angels in human form in order to test the Jews. In the same way as angels were sent to the people of Lot in the form of handsome youth (see surah Hud 11: 69 ff. Ed.), they were presumably sent to Israel in the form of divines who could work magic and sorcery. These angels at once began working their magical wonders but they warned the people that

their presence among them was designed to test their faith, and that they ought not to jeopardize their prospects in the After-Life by practising magic. Despite the warning it seems that the Israelites had become so fond of their magical artifices that they continued to pounce upon the talismans and sorcery they taught.

[104] O you who believe! Do not say (to the Prophet): *Ra'ina* (Lend ear to us), but say *Unzurna* (Favour us with your attention) and pay heed (to him).³⁶ A painful chastisement awaits the unbelievers.

[105] The unbelievers, be they the People of the Book or those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity, do not wish that any good should be sent down upon you from your Lord. But Allah chooses for His mercy whomsoever He wills. Allah is Lord of Abounding Bounty.

[106] For whatever verse We might abrogate or consign to oblivion, We bring a better one or the like of it.³⁷ Are you not aware that Allah is All-Powerful?

[107] Are you not aware that the dominion of the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah, and that none apart from Allah is your protector or helper?

36. When the Jews visited the Prophet (peace be on him) they tried to vent their spite by using ambiguous expressions in their greetings and conversation. They used words which had double meanings, one innocent and the other offensive. The particular expression referred to here - which the Muslims were asked to avoid using since it lent itself to abuse - was employed by the Jews when they conversed with the Prophet (peace be on him). Whenever they wanted to request a short pause in which to finish whatever they wanted to say, they used the expression ra 'ina, which meant "kindly indulge us" or "kindly lend (your) ear to us." It is, however, because of the possibility of the word also being used in other meanings, some of which were evil and irreverential, that Muslims were asked to avoid it and to use instead the straightforward expression unzurna, meaning "kindly favour us with your attention "or "kindly grant us a moment to follow (what you are saying)."

37. This is in response to a doubt which the Jews tried to implant in the minds of Muslims. If both the earlier Scriptures and the Qur'an were revelations from God, why was it - they asked -that the injunctions found in the earlier scriptures had been replaced by new ones in the Qur'an?

[108] Or would you ask your Messenger in the manner Moses was asked before? ³⁸ And whoever exchanges faith for unbelief has surely strayed from the Right Way.

[109] Out of sheer envy many People of the Book would be glad to turn you back into unbelievers after you have become believers even though the Truth has become clear to them. Nevertheless, forgive and be indulgent towards them until Allah brings forth His decision. Surely Allah is All-powerful.

[110] Establish Prayer and dispense *Zakah*. Whatever good deeds you send forth for your own good, you will find them with Allah. Surely Allah sees all that you do.

[111] They say: "None shall enter the Garden unless he be a Jew or (according to the Christians), a Christian." These are their vain desires. Say: "Bring your proof if you are speaking the truth."

[112] (None has any special claim upon reward from Allah.) Whoever submits himself completely to the obedience of Allah and does good will find his reward with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.

[113] The Jews say: "The Christians have no basis for their beliefs," and the Christians say: "The Jews have no basis for their beliefs." They say so even though they read the Scripture. The claim of those who have no knowledge (of the Scripture) is similar. Allah will judge between them concerning their differences on the Day of Resurrection.

38. The Jews, who were addicted to hair-splitting arguments, instigated the Muslims to ask the Prophet (peace be on him) a great many questions. God, therefore, cautioned the Muslims against following the example of the Jews in this matter, and admonished them against unnecessary inquisitiveness.

[114] Who is more iniquitous than he who bars Allah's places of worship, that His name be mentioned there, and seeks their destruction? It does not behove such people to enter them, and should they enter, they should enter in fear. There is degradation for them in this world and a mighty chastisement in the Next.

[115] The East and the West belong to Allah. To whichever direction you turn, you will be turning to Allah. Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing.

[116] They say: "Allah has taken to Himself a son." Glory to Him! Nay, Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him; to Him are all in obeisance.

[117] He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth; whenever He decrees a matter He (merely) says: "Be" and it is.

[118] The ignorant say: "Why does Allah not speak to us? Why does no sign come to us?" The same was said by people before them. Their hearts are all alike. We have made the Signs clear for people of firm faith.

[119] (What greater Sign can there be than that) We sent you with the Truth as a bearer of good tidings and a warner! ³⁹ And you will not be answerable about the people of the Blazing Flame!

39. Why speak of other signs when the most conspicuous sign of Truth is the very person of Muhammad (peace be on him)? Let us recall his life before the commencement of his prophet hood, the conditions existing in the area where, and the people among whom, he was born, the manner in which he was brought up and spent the first forty years of his life, and then his glorious achievements as a Prophet. What further signs could we want in support of his message?

[120] Never will the Jews be pleased with you, (O Prophet), nor the Christians until you follow their way. Say: "Surely Allah's guidance, is the true guidance." Should you follow their desires disregarding the knowledge which has come to you, you shall have no protector or helper against Allah.

[121] Those to whom We have given the Scripture, and who recite it as it ought to be recited, they truly believe in it;⁴⁰ and those who disbelieve in it, they are the real losers.

[122] Children of Israel! Recall My favour which I bestowed upon you and I exalted you above the nations of the world,

[123] and beware of the Day when no one shall avail another, when ransom shall be accepted from no one, when no one's intercession will profit anyone, when there shall be no help from any quarter.

[124] Recall when Abraham's Lord tested him in certain matters and when he successfully stood the test, He said: "Indeed I am going to appoint you a leader of all people." When Abraham asked: "And is this covenant also for my descendants?" the Lord responded: "My covenant does not embrace the wrong-doers."⁴¹

40. This refers to the pious element among the People of the Book. Since these people read the Book with sincerity and honesty of purpose, they are inclined to accept whatever they find to be true according to it.

41. This specifies that God's promise of the conferment of leadership applied only to those of Abraham's offspring who were righteous, and that the wrong-doers were naturally excluded. The word "wrong-doer" does not merely apply to those who are unjust and cruel to human beings but also to those who are unjust with regard to the Truth.

[125] And We made this House (Ka'bah) a resort for mankind and a place of security, commanding people: "Take the station of Abraham as a permanent place for Prayer," and enjoined Abraham and Ishmael: "Purify My House for those who walk around it, and those who abide in devotion, and those who bow, and who prostrate themselves (in Prayer)."

[126] And when Abraham prayed: "O my Lord! Make this a place of security and provide those of its people that believe in Allah and the Last Day with fruits for sustenance," Allah answered, "And I shall still provide him who disbelieves with the wherewithal for this short life, and then I shall drive him to the chastisement of the Fire; that is an evil end."

[127] Recall when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House, praying: "Our Lord! Accept this from us; You are All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[128] Our Lord! Make us submissive to You and make out of our descendants a community that submits itself to You, and show us the ways of Your worship, and turn to us in mercy. You are Much-Relenting, Most Compassionate.

[129] Our Lord! Raise up in the midst of our offspring a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your verses, and instruct them in the Book and in Wisdom, and purify their lives. Verily, You are the Most Mighty, the Most Wise."

[130] And who but a fool would be averse to the way of Abraham? For it is We Who chose Abraham for Our mission in this world, and surely in the World to Come he shall be reckoned among the righteous.

[131] Such was Abraham that when his Lord said to him: "Submit,"⁴² he said: "I have submitted to the Lord of the Universe."

[132] And Abraham enjoined the same upon his children, and so did Jacob: "My children! Behold, Allah has chosen this religion for you. Remain till death in submission (to Allah)."

[133] Why, were you witnesses when death came to Jacob? He asked his children: "Whom will you serve after me?" They said: "We shall serve your God, the God of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, the One God, and unto Him do we submit."

[134] Now, they were a people who passed away. Theirs is what they have earned, and yours is what you have earned. You shall not be asked concerning what they did.

[135] They say: "Be Jews," or "Be Christians." "Then you will be rightly guided." Say to them: "No, follow exclusively the way of Abraham who was not one of those who associate others with Allah in His Divinity."

[136] Say: "We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the descendants (of Jacob) and in what was given to Moses and Jesus and in what the other Prophets received from their Lord, We make no distinction between any of them, and we are those who submit to Allah."

42. The word "Muslim" signifies he who bows in obedience to God, who acknowledges God alone as his Sovereign, Lord and Master, and the only object of worship, devotion and service, who unreservedly surrenders himself to God and undertakes to live his life in accordance with the guidance that has come down from Him. Islam is the appellation which characterizes the above-mentioned belief and conduct. That belief and outlook constitute the core and kernel of the religion of all the Prophets who have appeared from time to time among different peoples and in different countries since the beginning of human life.

[137] And then if they come to believe as you believe, they are on right guidance; and if they turn away, then quite obviously they have merely fallen into opposition to the Truth. Allah will suffice you for protection against them. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[138] Say: "Take on Allah's colour." And whose colour is better than Allah's? It is Him that we serve.

[139] Say (O Prophet): "Will you then dispute with us concerning Allah when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds are for us and your deeds are for you. And it is Him that we serve exclusively."

[140] Or do you claim that Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the descendants (of Jacob) were "Jews" or "Christians?" Say: "Who has greater knowledge, you or Allah?" Who

does greater wrong than he who conceals a testimony he has received from Allah? Allah is not heedless of the things you do.

[141] Now, they were a people who passed away. Theirs is what they earned, and yours is what you earn; you shall not be questioned concerning what they did.

[142] The block-headed will say: "What has turned them away from the direction they formerly observed in Prayer?"⁴³ Say: "To Allah belong the East and the West; He guides whomsoever He wills onto a Straight Way."

43. After his migration to Madinah the Prophet (peace be on him) continued to pray in the direction of Jerusalem approximately for a period between sixteen and seventeen months. Subsequently, he received the injunction to pray in the direction of the Ka 'bah.

[143] And it is thus that We appointed you to be the community of the middle way⁴⁴ so that you might be witnesses to all mankind and the Messenger might be a witness to you.⁴⁵ We appointed the direction which you formerly observed so that We might distinguish those who follow the Messenger from those who turn on their heels. For it was indeed burdensome except for those whom Allah guided. And Allah will never leave your faith to waste. Allah is full of gentleness and mercy to mankind.

[144] We see you oft turning your face towards the sky; now We are turning you to the direction that will satisfy you. Turn your face towards the Holy Mosque, and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it in Prayer.⁴⁶ Those who have been granted the Scripture certainly know that this (injunction to change the direction of Prayer) is right and is from their Lord. Allah is not heedless of what they do.

44. The Arabic expression which we have translated as "the community of the middle way" is too rich in meaning to find an adequate equivalent in any other language. It signifies that distinguished group of people which follows the path of justice and equity, of balance and moderation, a group which occupies a central position among the nations of the world so that its relationship with all is based on righteousness and justice and none receives its support in wrong and injustice.

45. What this means is that when the whole of mankind is called to account, the Prophet (peace be on him), as God's representative, will stand witness to the fact that he had communicated to the Muslims and had put into practice the teachings which expound sound beliefs, righteous conduct and a balanced system of life which he had received from on high. The Muslims, acting on behalf of the Prophet (peace be on him) after the latter's return to God's mercy, will be asked to bear the same witness before the rest of mankind, confirming that they had spared no effort in either communicating to mankind what the Prophet (peace be on him) had communicated to them, or in exemplifying in their own lives what the Prophet (peace be on him) by his own conduct, had translated into actual practice.

46. This is the injunction concerning the change in the direction of Prayer which was revealed in Rajab or Sha 'ban 2 A.H. According to a tradition in the Tabaqat of Ibn Sa'd, the

Prophet (peace be on him) was at the house of a Companion where he had been invited to a meal. When the time of Zuhr' Prayer came, the Prophet (peace be on him) rose to lead it. He had completed two rak'at and was in the third when this verse was suddenly revealed. Soon after the revelation of this verse everybody, following the Prophet's action, turned the direction of Prayer away from Jerusalem to the Ka 'bah. A public proclamation of the new injunction was then made throughout Madinah and its suburbs. The words, "We see you oft turning your face towards the sky," and "We are turning you to the direction that will satisfy you," clearly show that even before the revelation of this injunction the Prophet (peace be on him) was looking forward to receiving an injunction of this kind.

[145] And yet no matter what proofs you bring before the People of the Book they will not follow your direction of Prayer; nor will you follow their direction of Prayer. None is prepared to follow the other's direction of Prayer. Were you to follow their desires in disregard of the knowledge which has come to you, you will surely be reckoned among the wrong-doers.

[146] Those to whom We have given the Scripture recognize the place (towards which one must turn in Prayer) as fully as they recognize their own sons,⁴⁷ this even though a group of them knowingly conceals the Truth.

*47. "To recognize something as fully as one recognizes one's sons" is an Arabic idiom. It is used with regard to things which one knows without the least shadow of a doubt. The Jewish and Christian scholars were well aware that the Ka 'bah had been constructed by Abraham and that Jerusalem had been built by Solomon some thirteen hundred years after that, and that in the latter's time it was made the **qiblah**. This is an unquestionable historical fact and they knew it to be so.*

[147] This is a definite Truth from your Lord; be not, then, among the doubters.

[148] Everyone has a direction towards which he turns; so excel one another in good works. Allah will bring you all together wherever you might be, for nothing is beyond His power.

[149] From wheresoever you might come forth turn your face towards the Holy Mosque; for that indeed is the Truth from your Lord, and Allah is not heedless of what you do.

[150] From Wheresoever you come forth turn your faces towards the Holy Mosque, and wheresoever you may be, turn your faces towards it in Prayer so that none may have an argument against you,⁴⁸ unless they be those immersed in wrong-doing. Do not fear them, but fear only Me so that I may complete My favour⁴⁹ upon you; perhaps you will be guided to the Right Way.

[151] Just as when We sent among you a Messenger of yourselves, who recites to you Our Signs, purifies your lives, instructs you in the Book and in Wisdom, and instructs you what you did not know.

48. *Any lapse in this matter on the part of Muslims would give their opponents a weapon to use against them in their polemics. They would be able to hold Muslims up to ridicule on the grounds that they had violated what they themselves claimed to be from their Lord.*

49. *The "favour" here refers to the position of world leadership and guidance from which God later removed the Children of Israel and which was then conferred upon this ummah. The Muslims should follow the directives of God if for no other reason than that ingratitude and disobedience might divest them of the honour that has been bestowed upon them.*

[152] So remember Me and I shall remember you; give thanks to Me and do not be ungrateful to Me for My favours.

[153] Believers! Seek help in patience and in Prayer; Allah is with those that are patient.

[154] And do not say of those who are killed in the way of Allah that they are dead; they are alive even though you have no knowledge of their life.

[155] We shall certainly test you by afflicting you with fear, hunger, loss of properties and lives and fruits. Give glad tidings, then, to those who remain patient;

[156] those who when any affliction smites them, they say: "Verily, we belong to Allah, and it is to Him that we are destined to return,"

[157] Upon them will be the blessings and mercy of their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided.

[158] Surely, *al-Safa* and *al-Marwah* are the symbols of Allah. Hence, whoever performs Hajj (Full Pilgrimage) to the House (of Allah) or makes 'Umrah (Minor Pilgrimage),⁵⁰ will find that it is no sin for him to ambulate between the two. And whoever does a good work voluntarily should know that Allah is Appreciative, All-Knowing.

[159] Those who conceal anything of the clear teachings and true guidance which We have sent down even though We have made them clear in Our Book, Allah curses such people and so do all the cursers,

[160] except those who repent and make amends and openly declare (what they had concealed). Such shall I pardon for I am Much- Relenting, Most Compassionate.

50. *The pilgrimage to the Ka 'bah along with a set of other rites on certain fixed dates of Dhu al-Hijjah is known as Hajj. Pilgrimage at other times is known as 'Umrah.*

[161] As for those who disbelieved⁵¹ and died disbelieving, surely the curse of Allah and of the angels and of all men is on them.

[162] Thus shall they abide and their chastisement shall not be lightened, nor shall they be given respite.

[163] Your God is One God, there is no god but He; the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

[164] (To guide) those who use their reason (to this Truth) there are many Signs in the structure of the heavens and the earth, in the constant alternation of night and day, in the vessels which speed across the sea carrying goods that are of profit to people, in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and thereby quickens the earth after it was dead, and disperse over it all manner of animals, and in the changing courses of the winds and the clouds pressed into service between heaven and earth.

[165] Yet there are some who take others as equals to Allah and love them as Allah alone should be loved; but those who (truly) believe, they love Allah more than all else. If only the wrong-doers were to perceive now - as they will perceive when they will see the chastisement - that all power belongs to Allah alone and that Allah is severe in chastisement!

51. The original meaning of kufr is to conceal. This lent the word a nuance of denial and it began to be used as an antonym of Iman. Kufr means to believe, to accept, and to recognize. Kufr, on the contrary, denotes refusal to believe, to deny, to reject. According to the Qur'an, there are several possible forms of disbelief. One is to refuse either to believe in the existence of God, not to acknowledge His sovereignty, not to recognize Him as the only Lord of the Universe and of mankind and the only object of worship and adoration. The second form of disbelief is that a man might recognize the existence of God but still refuse to accept His ordinances and directives as the only source of true guidance, and as the true law for his life. The third form of disbelief is that although a man might recognize, in principle that he ought to follow God's guidance, he refuses to believe in the Prophets who were the means of communicating God's guidance to mankind. The fourth form of disbelief is to differentiate between one Prophet and another, to accept some Prophets and reject others because of parochialism and bigotry. The fifth form of disbelief is the refusal to recognize, either totally or partially, the teachings communicated on God's behalf by the Prophets concerning beliefs, principles of morality, and laws to fashion human life. The sixth form of disbelief is that a person might theoretically accept all that he should accept but then wilfully disobeys God's ordinances and persists in this disobedience, and considers disobedience rather than obedience to God to be the true principle of life.

[166] At that moment those who have been followed will disown their followers, and they will see the chastisement, and their resources will be cut asunder.

[167] And the followers will then say: "Oh if only we might return again, we would disown them as they have disowned us?" Thus Allah will show them their works in a manner causing them bitter regrets. Never will they come out of the Fire.

[168] O people! Eat of the lawful and pure things in the earth and follow not in the footsteps of Satan. For surely he is your open enemy;

[169] he only commands you to do evil and commit acts of indecency and to ascribe to Allah the things concerning which you have no knowledge (that He really is their source).

[170] And when they are told: "Follow what Allah has revealed," they say: "No, we shall follow what we found our forefathers adhering to." What! Even if their forefathers were devoid of understanding and right guidance?

[171] Those who have refused to follow the Way of Allah resemble cattle; when the shepherd calls them they hear nothing except shouting and crying; they are deaf, dumb and blind, and so they understand nothing.

[172] Believers! Eat of the pure things wherewith We have provided you for sustenance and give thanks to Allah if it is Him that you serve.

[173] He has made unlawful to you only carrion and blood and the flesh of swine and that over which there has been pronounced the name of anyone other than Allah's. But he who is constrained (to eat of them) - and he neither covets them nor exceeds the indispensable limit incurs no sin: Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.⁵²

[174] Those who conceal anything of the Book revealed by Allah and sell it away for a trifling gain are merely filling their bellies with Fire. Allah will neither address them on the Day of Resurrection, nor shall He pronounce them "pure". A painful chastisement lies in store for them.

[175] They are the ones who bought error in exchange for true guidance, and chastisement in exchange for forgiveness. How patient they are in enduring the Fire!

52. This verse grants permission to use prohibited things on three conditions. First, that one must be in a state of extreme compulsion, for example, one is gravely ill or so hungry and thirsty that one's very life is in danger, and a prohibited thing is all that is available to save one's life. Second, the person who consumes a prohibited thing in such a dire state of compulsion should have no inclination to violate the Law of God. Third, in consuming the prohibited thing one should not exceed the limit of bare necessity. If a few bites or a few drops are enough to save one's life, one ought not to go beyond this absolute minimum.

[176] This is so because Allah revealed the Book with the Truth, but those who disagreed concerning the Book veered far away from the Truth.

[177] Righteousness does not consist in turning your faces towards the east or towards the west; true righteousness consists in believing in Allah and the Last Day, the angels, the Book and the Prophets, and in giving away one's property in love of Him to one's kinsmen, the orphans, the poor and the Wayfarer, and to those who ask for help, and in freeing the necks of slaves, and in establishing Prayer and dispensing the *Zakah*. True righteousness is attained by those who are faithful to their promise once they have made it and by those who remain steadfast in adversity and affliction and at the time of battle (between Truth and falsehood). Such are the truthful ones; such are the God-fearing.

[178] Believers! Retribution is prescribed for you in cases of killing: if a freeman is guilty then the freeman; if a slave is guilty then the slave; if a female is guilty then the female. But if something of a murderer's guilt is remitted by his brother this should be adhered to in fairness, and payment be made in a godly manner.⁵³ This is an alleviation and a mercy from your Lord; and for him who commits excess⁵⁴ after that there is a painful chastisement.

53. *This verse also makes it clear that according to the Islamic penal law the question of homicide can be settled by the mutual consent of the two parties. It is the prerogative of the heirs of the victim to forgive the murderer, and if they want to exercise this prerogative not even a judge has the authority to insist on carrying out the death sentence. In such a case, however as the verse mentions, the murderer will be required to pay blood money.*

54. *"Excess" might consist of the attempt, on the part of the heirs of the murdered person after they have settled the matter and received blood money to take revenge for the blood of the victim. It will also be excess, and in this case it will be on the part of the murderer, if he tries to delay the payment of blood money to the heirs of the victim. They would thus be repaying the heirs of the victim with ingratitude for their kindness and goodwill.*

[179] People of understanding, there is life for you in retribution that you may guard yourselves against violating the Law.

[180] It is decreed that when death approaches, those of you who leave behind property shall bequeath equitably to parents and kinsmen.⁵⁵ This is an obligation on the God-fearing.

[181] Then if anyone alters the will after hearing it, this sin shall be upon them who alter. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[182] He who suspects that the testator has committed an error or injustice and then brings about a settlement among the parties concerned incurs no sin. Surely Allah is Much-Forgiving, Most Compassionate.

55. *This injunction relates to a period when no rules had yet been laid down for the distribution of inheritance. Thus everyone was required to make testamentary disposal of their property so as to ensure that no disputes arose in the family and no legitimate claimant to inheritance was deprived of his due share. Later on when God revealed a set of laws regarding the distribution of inheritance (see surah al-Nisa' 4:11 ff.), the Prophet (peace be on him) further elucidated the laws relating to inheritance and testamentary disposition by expounding three rules. First, that no person can make any will regarding his estate in favour of any of his legal heirs. The portions of the legal heirs were laid down in the Quran and it was not permitted either to increase or decrease them. Second, that testamentary disposition might be made only to the extent of one-third of the estate, but no more. Third, neither a Muslim nor a non-Muslim could be each other's legal heirs.*

[183] Believers! Fasting is enjoined upon you, as it was enjoined upon those before you, that you become God-fearing.

[184] Fasting is for a fixed number of days, and if one of you be sick, or if one of you be on a journey, you will fast the same number of other days later on. For those who are capable of fasting (but still do not fast) there is redemption: feeding a needy man for each day missed. Whoever voluntarily does more good than is required, will find it better for him; and that you should fast is better for you, if you only know.⁵⁶

[185] During the month of Ramadan the Qur'an was sent down as guidance to the people with Clear Signs of the true guidance and as the Criterion (between right and wrong). So

those of you who live to see that month should fast it, and whoever is sick or on a journey should fast the same number of other days instead. Allah wants ease and not hardship for you so that you may complete the number of days required, magnify Allah for what He has guided you to, and give thanks to Him.

56. Like most other injunctions of Islam those relating to fasting were revealed gradually. In the beginning the Prophet (peace be on him) had instructed the Muslims to fast three days in every month, though this was not obligatory. When the injunction in the present verse was later revealed in 2 A.H., a degree of relaxation was introduced: it was stipulated that those who did not fast despite their capacity to endure fasting were obliged to feed one poor person as expiation for each day of obligatory fasting missed (see verse 184). Another injunction was revealed later (see verse 185).

[186] (O Muhammad), when My servants ask you about Me, tell them I am quite near; I hear and answer the call of the caller whenever he calls Me. Let them listen to My call and believe in Me; perhaps they will be guided aright.

[187] It has been made lawful for you to go in to your wives during the night of the fast. They are your garment, and you are theirs. Allah knows that you used to betray yourselves and He mercifully relented and pardoned you. So you may now associate intimately with your wives and benefit from the enjoyment Allah has made lawful for you, and eat and drink at night until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of the night; then (give up all that and) complete your fasting until night sets in. But do not associate intimately with your wives during the period when you are on retreat in the mosques. These are the bounds set by Allah; do not, then, even draw near them. Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to mankind that they may stay away from evil.

[188] Do not usurp one another's possessions by false means, nor proffer your possessions to the authorities so that you may sinfully and knowingly usurp a portion of another's possessions.⁵⁷

57. One meaning of this verse is that people should not try to seek illegitimate benefits by bribing magistrates. Another meaning is that when a person is aware that the property to which he lays a claim rightfully belongs to someone else, he should not file a judicial petition simply because the other party lacks the evidence to support their case or because, by trickery and cunning, the petitioner can usurp that property. It is possible that the judicial authority would decide the case in favour of the false claimant on the basis of the formal strength of the claim, but as this judicial verdict would merely be the result of the chicanery to which the claimant had resorted he would not be its rightful owner.

[189] People question you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: "They are signs to determine time for the sake of people and for the Pilgrimage." Also tell them: "True righteousness is not that you enter your houses from the back; righteousness lies in fearing Allah. So, enter your houses by their doors, and fear Allah that you might attain true success."⁵⁸

[190] Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but do not transgress, for Allah does not love transgressors.

[191] Kill them whenever you confront them and drive them out from where they drove you out. (For though killing is sinful) wrongful persecution is even worse than killing.⁵⁹ Do not fight against them near the Holy Mosque unless they fight against you; but if they fight against you kill them, for that is the reward of such unbelievers.

[192] Then if they desist, know well that Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Compassionate.

58. One superstitious custom of the Arabs was that once they entered the state of consecration for Pilgrimage they did not enter their houses by the door. Instead, they either leapt over the walls from the rear or climbed through windows which they had especially erected for that purpose, on returning from journeys; too, they entered their houses from the rear. In this verse this superstitious custom is denounced, as are other superstitious customs. It is emphatically pointed out that the essence of moral excellence consists of fearing God and abstaining from disobeying His commands.

*59. Here the word, **fitnah** is used in the sense of "persecution". It refers to a situation whereby either a person or a group is subjected to harassment and intimidation for having accepted what is right and rejected what is wrong.*

[193] Keep on fighting against them until mischief ends and the way prescribed by Allah prevails, But if they desist, then know that hostility is directed only against the wrong-doers.

[194] The sacred month for the sacred month; sanctities should be respected alike (by all concerned)⁶⁰ Thus, if someone has attacked you, attack him just as he attacked you, and fear Allah and remain conscious that Allah is with those who guard against violating the bounds set by Him.

[195] Spend in the Way of Allah and do not cast yourselves into destruction with your own hands; do good, for Allah loves those who do good.

[196] Complete *Hajj* and '*Umrah* for Allah. And if you are prevented from doing so, then make the offering which is available to you,⁶¹ and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches its appointed place. If any of you should have to shave your head before that because of illness, or injury to the head, then you should make redemption by fasting, or almsgiving, or ritual sacrifice.⁶² And when you are secure,⁶³ then he who avails of '*Umrah* before the time of *Hajj* shall give the offering he can afford; and if he cannot afford the offering, he shall fast for three days during *Hajj* and for seven days after he returns home; that is, ten days in all. This privilege is for those whose families do not live near the Holy Mosque. Guard against violating these ordinances of Allah and be mindful that Allah is severe in chastisement.

60. From the time of Abraham three months - Dhu al-Qa 'dah, Dhu al-Hijjah and Muharram - were consecrated for Hajj, and the month of Rajab was consecrated for 'Umrah. For the duration of these four months warfare, killing and pillage were prohibited so that people could perform Pilgrimage and return home safely. For this reason these months were called the "sacred months".

61. If any obstruction prevents a person from proceeding with the Pilgrimage and he is forced to stay behind, he should make a sacrificial offering to God of whatever is available - for example, either a camel, a cow, a goat or a sheep.

62. According to the Hadith, in such a situation the Prophet (peace be on him) ordered three days of fasting, or the feeding of six poor people, or the slaughter of one sheep or goat.

63. This refers to the change in the situation when the obstacle to proceed with the Pilgrimage has been removed.

[197] The months of *Hajj* are well known. Whoever intends to perform Pilgrimage in these months shall abstain from sensual indulgence, wicked conduct and quarrelling; and whatever good you do, Allah knows it. Take your provisions for the Pilgrimage; but, in truth, the best provision is piety, Men of understanding, beware of disobeying Me.

[198] it is no offence for you to seek the bounty of your Lord during pilgrimage.⁶⁴ When you hasten back from 'Arafat then remember Allah at *al-Mash'ar al-Haram* (i.e. *al-Muzdalifah*), and remember Him in the manner He has directed you, for before this you were surely in error.

[199] Then press on even as others press on and implore Allah's forgiveness;⁶⁵ Allah is Most Forgiving, Most Merciful.

64. "Seeking the bounty of your Lord" means earning one's livelihood during the Pilgrimage.

65. Since the time of Abraham and Ishmael the recognized practice of the Arabs with regard to Hajj was that on the 9th of **Dhu al- Hijjah** they went from Mina to 'Arafat, returning on the morning of the 10th to stay at Muzdalifah. Later, as the priestly monopoly of the Quraysh became well established, they claimed that it was below their dignity to go to 'Arafat with the ordinary people of Arabia. As a mark of what they called their distinction, they only went to Muzdalifah, without going to 'Arafat and returned from there, leaving it to the commoners to go to 'Arafat it is this idol of pride and vainglory which has been shattered to pieces by the present verse.

[200] And when you have performed your rites remember Allah as you remember your fathers; or remember Him even more. There are some (among those that remember Allah) who say: "Our Lord, grant us what is good in this world;" such shall have no share in the Hereafter.

[201] There are others who say: "Our Lord, grant us what is good in this world and what is good in the World to Come, and protect us from the chastisement of the Fire."

[202] They shall have a portion from what they earned; Allah is quick in reckoning.

[203] And remember Allah through the appointed days. It is no sin for him who hastens off and a return in two days, and it is no sin for him who delays the return⁶⁶ provided he has spent the days in piety. Beware of disobeying Allah and know well that to Him you all shall be mustered.

[204] Among people there is a kind whose sayings on the affairs of the world fascinate you: he calls Allah again and again to bear testimony to his sincerity; yet he is most fierce in enmity.

66. *It was perfectly alright whether a person returned on the 12th or on the 13th of Dhu al-Hijjah from Mina to Makkah as long as it is during the days of **tashriq**.*

[205] whenever he attains authority, ⁶⁷ he goes about the earth spreading mischief and laying to waste crops and human life, even though Allah (whose testimony he invokes) does not love mischief.

[206] whenever he is told: "Fear Allah," his vainglory seizes him in his sin. So Hell shall suffice for him; what a wretched resting place!

[207] On the other hand, among men there is a kind who dedicates his life seeking to please Allah; Allah is Immensely Kind to such devoted servants.

[208] Believers! Enter wholly into Islam⁶⁸ and do not follow in the footsteps of Satan for he is your open enemy.

[209] And if you stumble in spite of the clear instructions which have come to you, then know Well that Allah is Most Mighty, Most Wise.

[210] Are those people (who are not following the Right Path in spite of admonition and instruction) waiting for Allah to come to them in canopies of clouds with a retinue of angels and settle the matter finally? To Allah shall all matters ultimately be referred.

[211] Ask the Children of Israel how many Clear Signs We gave them! And when a people tamper with Allah's bounty after it has been bestowed on them - then indeed Allah is severe in punishment.

67. *The words **idha tawalla** can also be so translated as to make the verse mean that once the sweet and apparently genuine protestations of such people are over, they engage in arrogant and destructive action.*

68. *God demands that man should submit, without reservation, his whole being to His will. For God does not accept the splitting up of human life into separate compartments, some governed by the teachings of Islam and others exempt from them.*

[212] Worldly life has been made attractive to those who have denied the Truth. Such men deride the men of faith, but the pious shall rank higher than them on the Day of Resurrection. As for worldly livelihood, Allah grants it to whomsoever He wills without measure.

[213] In the beginning mankind followed one single way. (Later on this state ended and differences arose.) Then Allah sent forth Prophets as heralds of good tidings for the righteous and as warners against the consequences of evil-doing. He sent down with them the Book embodying the Truth so that it might judge among people in their disputes. And those who innovated divergent ways rather than follow the Truth were none other than those who had received the knowledge of the Truth and clear guidance, and they did so to commit excesses

against each other. So by His leave Allah directed the believers to the Right Way in matters on which they disagreed. Allah guides whomsoever He wills onto a Straight Way.

[214] Do you suppose that you will enter Paradise untouched by the suffering endured by the people of faith who passed away before you? ⁶⁹ They were afflicted by misery and hardship and were so convulsed that the Messenger and the believers with him cried out: "When Will Allah's help arrive?" They were assured: "Behold, Allah's help is close by."

69. The point emphasized here is that whenever the Prophets came into the world they, and their followers, were confronted with severe resistance from those in rebellion against God. At grave risk to themselves they strove to establish the hegemony of the true faith over the false ways of life. The profession of faith has always demanded that one should strive to establish the true religion, which one had adopted as one's faith, as a living reality and that one should spare no effort in undermining the power of the Devil who seeks to resist it.

[215] People ask you what they should spend. Say: "Whatever wealth you spend let it be for your parents and kinsmen, the orphans, the needy and the Wayfarer; Allah is aware of whatever good you do,"

[216] Fighting is ordained upon you and it is disliked by you; it may well be that you dislike a thing even though it is good for you, and it may well be that you like a thing even though it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.

[217] People ask you about fighting in the holy month. Say: "Fighting in it is an awesome sin, but barring people from the Way of Allah, disbelieving in Him, and denying entry into the Holy Mosque and expelling its inmates from it are more awesome acts in the sight of Allah; and persecution is even more heinous than killing."⁷⁰ They will not cease fighting against you till they turn you from your religion if they can. (So remember well) that whoever from amongst you turns away from his religion and dies in the state of unbelief their work will go to waste in this world and in the Next. They are destined for the Fire and it is there that they will abide.

70. This relates to a certain incident. In Rajab 2 A.H. the Prophet (peace be on him) sent an expedition of eight persons to Nakhlah (which lies between Makkah and Ta'if). He directed them to follow the movements of the Quraysh and gather information about their plans, but not to engage in fighting. In the course of this journey they came across a trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh and ambushed it. They killed one person and captured the rest along with their belongings and took them to Madinah. They did this at a time when the month of Rajab was approaching its end and Sha 'ban was about to begin. It was, therefore, doubtful whether the attack was actually carried out in one of the sacred months, that is, Rajab, or not. But the Quraysh and the Jews who were secretly in league with them, as well as the hypocrites played up this affair and used it as a weapon in their propaganda campaign against the Muslims. They pointed out the contradiction between the claims of the Muslims to follow true faith on the one hand, and their not hesitating to shed blood in a sacred month on the other. This verse is addressed to these objections.

[218] (On the contrary) those who believed, and forsook their hearth and home and strove in the Way of Allah,⁷¹ such may rightly hope for the mercy of Allah: for Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

[219] They ask you about wine and games of chance. Say: "In both these there is great evil, even though there is some benefit for people, but their evil is greater than their benefit."⁷² They ask: "What should we spend in the Way of Allah?" Say: "Whatever you can spare"⁷³ In this way Allah clearly expounds His injunctions to you that you may reflect upon them,

*71. Jihad denotes exerting one's utmost to achieve something. It is not an equivalent of war, for which the Arabic word is **qital**. Jihad has a wider connotation and embraces every kind of striving in God's cause.*

72. This is the first injunction concerning intoxicating drinks and gambling, and here the matter has been left merely at the expression of disapproval. The injunction commanding not to perform Prayer when one is in a state of intoxication came later, and ultimately alcohol, gambling and the like were categorically prohibited (see al-Nisa' 4:43 and al-Ma' idha 5:90).

73. What is being asked is how much of one's resources should be spent in charity so that Allah be pleased. The answer provided is that one should fulfil one's needs and whatever is beyond one's needs should be spent in the Way of Allah. Such spending to earn God's grace is voluntary rather than mandatory.

[220] both in regard to this world and the Next. They question you concerning orphans. Say: "To deal with them in the way which is to their good, that is best. And if you intermix (your expenses and living) with them, (there is no harm for) they are your brothers." Allah knows the mischievous from the righteous, and had Allah willed, He would indeed have imposed on you exacting conditions; but He is All-Powerful, Most Wise.

[221] Marry not the women who associate others with Allah in His Divinity until they believe; for a believing slave girl is better than a (free, respectable) woman who associates others with Allah in His Divinity, even though she might please you. Likewise, do not give your women in marriage to men who associate others with Allah in His Divinity until they believe; for a believing slave is better than a (free, respectable) man who associates others with Allah in His Divinity, even though he might please you. Such people call you towards the Fire, and Allah calls you, by His leave, towards Paradise and forgiveness; and He makes His injunctions clear to people so that they may take heed.

[222] They ask you about menstruation. Say: "It is a State of impurity; so keep away from Women in the state of menstruation, and do not approach them"⁷⁴ until they are cleansed. And when they are cleansed, then come to them as Allah has commanded you." Truly, Allah loves those who abstain from evil and keep themselves pure.

74. During this period people are only required to abstain from sexual intercourse; no change is postulated in other relationships.

[223] Your wives are your tilth; go, then, into your tilth as you wish but take heed of your ultimate future and avoid incurring the wrath of Allah.⁷⁵ Know well that one Day you shall face Him. Announce good tidings to the believers.

[224] Do not swear by Allah in your oaths if they are intended to hinder you from virtue, piety and promoting the good of mankind. Surely Allah is All-Hearing, All- Knowing.

[225] Allah will not take you to task for the oaths you utter in vain, but will certainly take you to task for the oaths you utter in earnest. Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

[226] For those who vow abstinence from their wives there is a respite of four months.⁷⁶ Then, if they go back on their vow they will find that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate.

75. These words admit of two meanings. First, that one should try to maintain the continuity of the human race so that when one departs from this world there should be others to replace in performing one's tasks. Second, that one should be concerned with the quality of the coming generation, i.e., how far it is endowed with religious devotion, moral excellence and humanity.

*76. In the legal terminology of Islam this is known as **ila'**. It is obvious that harmony and cordiality do not always prevail in matrimonial life. There are occasions when strains and tensions develop, leading to discord and estrangement. But the Law of God does not approve of that discord which causes a husband and wife, who are legally tied to one another in matrimony, to remain for long alienated from one another for all practical purposes as if they had ceased to be spouses. For this kind of abnormal discord and estrangement God has fixed a limit of four months during which the spouses are required either to settle their differences, or to break the tie of wedlock so that each becomes free to contract marriage with someone with whom a harmonious matrimonial relationship appears more likely.*

[227] And if they resolve on divorce, surely Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.⁷⁷

[228] Divorced women shall keep themselves in waiting for three menstrual courses and it is unlawful for them, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day, to hide whatever Allah might have created in their wombs. Should their husbands desire reconciliation during this time they are entitled to take them back into wedlock.⁷⁸ Women have the same rights against their men as men have against them; but men have a degree above them. Allah is All- Powerful, All-Wise.

[229] Divorce can be pronounced twice: then, either honourable retention or kindly release should follow.⁷⁹ (While dissolving the marriage tie) it is unlawful for you to take back anything of what you have given to your wives unless both fear that they may not be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah. Then, if they fear that they might not be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah, there is no blame upon them for what the wife might give away of her property to become released from the marriage tie?" These are the bounds set by Allah; do not transgress them. Those of you who transgress the bounds set by Allah are indeed the wrong-doers.

77. *That is, if a man has abandoned his wife on unreasonable grounds, he should not feel secure from the wrath of God for God is not unaware of the excesses that he may have committed.*

78. *This injunction only relates to a situation where the husband has pronounced divorce once or twice. In that case the husband retains the right to revoke the divorce before the expiry of 'iddah (waiting period).*

79. *According to this verse, a man may pronounce revocable divorce upon his wife not more than twice. Should he pronounce divorce for the third time after revoking it twice, the wife will be permanently alienated from him.*

[230] Then, if he divorces her (for the third time, after having pronounced the divorce twice), she shall not be lawful to him unless she first takes another man for a husband, and he divorces her.⁸¹ There is no blame upon them if both of them return to one another thereafter, provided they think that they will be able to keep within the bounds set by Allah. These are the bounds of Allah which He makes clear to a people who have knowledge (of the consequences of violating those bounds).

[231] And so, when you divorce women and they reach the end of their waiting term, then either retain them in a fair manner or let them go in a fair manner. And do not retain them to their hurt or by way of transgression; whosoever will do that will indeed wrong himself. Do not take the Signs of Allah in jest and remember Allah's favour upon you. He exhorts you to revere the Book and the Wisdom that He has sent down upon you. Fear Allah, and know well that Allah has full knowledge of everything.

80. *In the terminology of Islamic Law this is known as khul', i.e. a woman's securing the annulment of her marriage through the payment of some compensation to her husband. In case of khul' it is permissible for the husband to reclaim the whole or part, as agreed upon, of what he had given to his wife, But in case of divorce by the husband he has no right to reclaim any part of what he had gifted to the wife.*

81. *What it means is that the second husband divorces her voluntarily if and when he likes. This provides no room for the sham marriage and divorce that are arranged just to make it permissible for the first husband to remarry his divorced wife.*

[232] When you divorce women and they have completed their waiting term do not hinder them from marrying other men if they have agreed to this in a fair manner. That is an admonition to everyone of you who believes in Allah and the Last Day; that is a cleaner and purer way for you. For Allah knows whereas you do not know.

[233] If they (i.e. the fathers) wish that the period of suckling for their children be completed, mothers may suckle their children for two whole years.⁸² (In such a case) it is incumbent upon him who has begotten the child to provide them (i.e. divorced women) their sustenance and clothing in a fair manner. But none shall be burdened with more than he is able to bear; neither shall a mother suffer because of her child nor shall the father be made to suffer because he has begotten him. The same duty towards the suckling mother rests upon the heir as upon him (i.e. the father). And if both (the parents) decide, by mutual consent and consultation, to wean the child, there is no blame on them; if you decide to have other women

suckle your children there is no blame upon you, provided you hand over its compensation in a fair manner. Fear Allah and know well that Allah sees all that you do.

82. This injunction applies to the condition where the couple have separated either because of divorce or khul 'or faskh (annulment) or tafriq (repudiation as a result of judicial decision) and the woman is nursing a child.

[234] The wives of men who have died must observe a waiting period of four months and ten days;⁸³ when they have reached the end of the waiting term, there is no blame upon you regarding what they may do with themselves in a fair manner. Allah is well aware of what you do.

[235] There is no blame upon you whether you hint at a marriage proposal to such women or keep the proposal hidden in your hearts, Allah knows that you will think of them in that connection. But do not make any secret engagement with them and speak openly in an honourable manner. Do not resolve on the marriage tie until the ordained term has come to its end. Know well that Allah knows even what is in your hearts. So, have fear of Him and know well that Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Forbearing.

[236] There is no blame upon you if you divorce your wives before you have touched them or settled a bridal gift upon them. But even in this case you should make some provision for them: the affluent, according to his means; the straitened, according to his means - a provision in fair manner. That is a duty upon the good-doers.

[237] And if you divorce them before you touch them or settle a bridal gift upon them, then (give them) half of what you have settled unless either the women act leniently and forgo their claim, or he in whose hand is the marriage tie acts leniently (and pays the full amount). If you act leniently, it is closer to God-fearing. And forget not to act gracefully with one another, for indeed Allah sees all that you do.

83. The waiting period owing to the death of the husband is obligatory even for a woman with whom consummation of marriage has not taken place. A pregnant woman, however, is exempt from this. Her waiting period expires with childbirth, even if the time between the husband's death and the childbirth is less than the waiting period prescribed by Law. To observe "a waiting period" does not mean merely that the women concerned should refrain from marrying, but also from self-adornment.

[238] Be watchful over the Prayers, and over praying with the utmost excellence,⁸⁴ and stand before Allah as would utterly obedient servants.

[239] And even if you face the state of fear, still perform the Prayer whether on foot or riding; and when you are secure, remember Allah in the manner that He taught you, the manner that you did not know earlier.

[240] Those of you who die leaving behind your wives should make testament of one year's provision without expulsion in favour of your wives; and if they themselves depart, there

shall be no blame upon you for what they may do with themselves in an honourable manner. Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.

[241] Likewise, let there be a fair provision for the divorced women; this is an obligation on the God-fearing.

[242] Thus Allah makes His injunctions clear to you that you may understand.

84. *The expression used here is **al-salat al-wusta**. The adjective **wusta** in addition to signifying the middle position of the subject that it qualifies, also signifies its excellence. Hence the expression could legitimately be interpreted both in the sense of the middle Prayer as well as in the sense of the Prayer which is performed at the right time and with full devotion and attention to God, a Prayer which contains all the attributes of excellence. The commentators who favour "middle Prayer" to be the meaning of the expression take it to mean the 'Asr Prayer.*

[243] (O Messenger), have you thought of those who went forth from their homes for fear of death even though they were in their thousands? Allah said to them: "Die!" Then He restored them to life.⁸⁵ Indeed Allah is Bounteous to mankind; but most people do not give thanks in return.

[244] So fight in the Way of Allah and know well that Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[245] Who of you will lend Allah a goodly loan which He will return after multiplying it for him manifold?⁸⁶ For Allah has the power both to decrease and increase, and to Him will you be returned.

[246] (O Messenger), have you thought of what happened with the elders of the Children of Israel after Moses? They asked one of their Prophets: "Set up for us a king so that we may fight in the way of Allah," He said: "Would you possibly refrain from fighting if fighting is ordained for you?" They said: "And why would we not fight in the way of Allah when we have been torn from our homes and our children?" But when fighting was ordained for them they turned back, except a few of them. Allah is well aware of the wrong-doers.

[247] And their Prophet said to them: "Indeed Allah has sent forth Saul (*Talut*) as your king," They said: "By what right shall he rule over us when we are more worthy than he to dominion, for he is not very wealthy?" He said: "Allah has chosen him over you and has endowed him abundantly with both intellectual and physical capacities. Allah indeed has the power to bestow dominion upon whomsoever He wills. Allah is All-Resourceful, All-Knowing."

85. *This refers to the exodus of the Israelites. See **surah al-Ma'idha** 5:vv.20ff. which narrates the details of this incident.*

86. *"Goodly loan" signifies whatever one gives to another person selflessly, and from absolutely pure motives. God describes whatever man spends in this manner as a loan made to none other than Him, and He undertakes to repay that loan and to repay it several-fold.*

[248] And their Prophet said to them: The Sign of his dominion is that in his reign the Ark, wherein is inner peace for you, will be brought back to you, and the sacred relics left behind by the house of Moses and the house of Aaron borne by angels. Truly that is a Sign for you, if indeed you are people of faith.”

[249] When Saul (*Talut*) set out with his forces he said: "Allah will try you with a river, and whoever drinks of it does not belong to me; he who refrains from tasting it -unless it be just a palmful - he indeed belongs to me.” Then all, except a few of them, drank their fill at the river. But as soon as Saul (*Talut*) and the believers with him went forth across the river, they said: “Today we have no strength to face Goliath (*Jalut*) and his forces.”⁸⁷ But those who believed that they were bound to meet their Lord said: "How often has a small party prevailed against a large party by the leave of Allah." Allah is with those who remain steadfast.

[250] And when they went forth against Goliath (*Jalut*) and his forces, they prayed: "Our Lord! Shower us with patience, and set our feet firm, and grant us victory over this unbelieving people.

[251] Thereupon by Allah's leave they put the unbelievers to flight, and David killed Goliath, and Allah granted him dominion and wisdom, and imparted to him the knowledge of whatever He willed. And were it not that Allah repelled some people with another, the earth would surely be overlaid with mischief. But Allah is Bounteous to the people of the world (and thus extirpates mischief).

87. These were presumably the people who had shown their impatience on the bank of the river.

[252] These are the Signs of Allah which We recite to you in Truth, for indeed you are one of those entrusted with the Message.

[253] and these Messengers (who have been designated to guide people), We have exalted some of them above the others. Among them are such as were spoken to by Allah Himself, and some He exalted in other respects. And We granted Jesus, son of Mary, Clear Signs and supported him with the spirit of holiness. Had He willed, those who had seen these Clear Signs would not have fought one another thereafter. But (it was not the will of Allah to prevent people from disagreement by compulsion, hence) they differed among themselves whereby some attained faith and others denied the Truth. Yet had Allah so willed they would not have fought one another, Allah does whatever He wills.

[254] O you who believe! Spend out of what We have provided you before there comes a Day when there will be no buying and selling, nor will friendship and intercession be of any avail. Indeed those who disbelieve are the wrong-doers.

[255] Allah, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting by Whom all subsist, there is no god but He. Neither slumber seizes Him, nor sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Who is there who might intercede with Him save with His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is hidden from them, whereas they cannot attain to anything of His knowledge save what He wills them to attain. His Dominion⁸⁸ overspreads the heavens and the earth, and their upholding wearies Him not. He is All-High, All-Glorious.

[256] There is no compulsion in religion.⁸⁹ The Right Way stands clearly distinguished from the wrong. Hence he who rejects the evil ones⁹⁰ and believes in Allah has indeed taken hold of the firm, unbreakable handle. And Allah (Whom he has held for support) is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[257] Allah is the Guardian of those who believe, He brings them out of every darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their guardians are the evil ones;⁹¹ they bring them out of light into all kinds of darkness. These are destined for the Fire, and there shall they abide.

*88. The Arabic term **kursi** signifies sovereignty, dominion and authority. This verse is generally known as the "Verse of the Throne" and it provides in one piece a knowledge of God without any parallel. No wonder it has been characterized in the Hadith as the most excellent verse of the Qur'an.*

89. The verse means that the Islamic system, embracing belief, morals and practical conduct cannot be enforced by compulsion. These are not things to which people can be yoked forcibly.

90. Literally taghut (pl. tawaghit) means anyone who exceeds his legitimate limits. In the Qur'anic terminology, however, it refers to the creature who exceeds the limits of his creatureliness and arrogates to himself Godhead and lordship.

91. Here taghut (see n. 90 above) has a plural connotation. This implies that by turning away from God a man is subjected not to the tyranny of one, but to the tyranny of many tawaghit (evil ones).

[258] Did you not consider the case of the person who remonstrated with Abraham⁹² about who was Abraham's Lord just because Allah had granted him dominion? When Abraham said: "My Lord is He Who grants life and causes death," he replied: "I grant life and I cause death." Abraham said: "But surely Allah causes the sun to rise from the east; now you cause it to rise from the west." Thereupon the denier of the Truth was confounded. Allah does not direct the wrong-doers to the Right Way.

[259] Or consider him by way of example who passed by a town that was fallen down upon its turrets. He exclaimed: "How will Allah restore life to this town that is now dead?" Allah then caused him to remain dead for a hundred years and then raised him to life, and asked him: "How long did you remain in this state?" He replied: "I remained so for a day or a part of a day." Allah rejoined: "No, you have rather stayed thus for a hundred years. But look at your food and your drink; there is no deterioration in them. And look at your ass (how its entire skeleton has rotted)! And We did all this so that We might make you a token of instruction for people. And see how We will put the bones (of the ass) together and will clothe them with flesh." Thus when the reality became clear to him, he said: "I know that Allah has power over everything."

[260] And recall when Abraham said: "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead," Allah said: "Why! Do you have no faith?" Abraham replied: "Yes, but in order that my heart be at rest."⁹³ He said: "Then take four birds, and tame them to yourself, then put a part of them on every hill, and summon them; they will come to you flying. Know well that Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise."

92. *Here the reference is to Nimrod, the ruler of the land of Abraham's birth, Iraq.*

[261] The example of those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah is like that of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear there are a hundred grains. Thus Allah multiplies the action of whomsoever He wills. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing.

[262] Those who spend their wealth in the Way of Allah and do not follow up their spending by stressing their benevolence and causing hurt will find their reward secure with their Lord. They have no cause for fear and grief.

[263] To speak a kind word and to forgive people's faults is better than charity followed by hurt. Allah is All-Sufficient, All-Forbearing.

[264] Believers! Do not nullify your acts of charity by stressing your benevolence and causing hurt as does he who spends his wealth only to be seen by people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. The example of his spending is that of a rock with a thin coating of earth upon it: when a heavy rain smites it, the earth is washed away, leaving the rock bare; such people derive no gain from their acts of charity. Allah does not set the deniers of the Truth on the Right Way.⁹⁴

[265] The example of those who spend their wealth single-mindedly to please Allah is that of a garden on a high ground. If a heavy rain smites it, it brings forth its fruits twofold, and if there is no heavy rain, even a light shower suffices it. Allah sees all that you do.

93. *That is, the rest and inner peace that one attains as a result of direct personal observation.*

94. *Here the term **kafir** is used in the sense of the ungrateful person who refuses to acknowledge the benevolence of his benefactor.*

[266] Would any of you desire that he should have a garden of palms and vines with rivers flowing beneath it - a garden in which he has every manner of fruit-and that it should then be struck by a fiery whirlwind and be utterly burnt down at a time when old age has overtaken him, and his offspring are still too small to look after their affairs?⁹⁵ Thus does Allah make His teachings clear to you that you may reflect.

[267] Believers! Spend (in the Way of Allah) out of the good things you have earned and out of what We have produced for you from the earth, and choose not for your spending the bad things such as you yourselves would not accept or accept only by overlooking its defects. Know well that Allah is All-Munificent, Most Praiseworthy.

[268] Satan frightens you with poverty and bids you to commit indecency whereas Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounty. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing.

[269] He grants wisdom to those whom He wills; and whoever is granted wisdom has indeed been granted much good. Yet none except people of understanding take heed.

95. It is obvious that a man does not like to see that the earnings of his lifetime are destroyed when he is stricken with age and needs them badly and is no longer in a position to earn them. How is it, then, that he can contemplate stepping into the realm of the Hereafter and finding suddenly that he is empty-handed; that he has sown nothing whose fruit he can harvest?

[270] Allah knows whatever you spend or whatever you vow (to spend).⁹⁶The wrong-doers have none to succour them.

[271] If you dispense your charity publicly, it is well; but if you conceal it and pay it to the needy in secret, it will be even better for you. This will atone for several of your misdeeds. Allah is well aware of all that you do.

[272] You are not responsible for setting these people on the Right Way; Allah sets on the Right Way whomsoever He wills. Whatever wealth you spend in charity is to your own benefit for you spend merely to please Allah. So, whatever you spend in charity will be repaid to you in full and you shall not be wronged.

[273] Those needy ones who are wholly wrapped up in the cause of Allah, and who are hindered from moving about the earth in search of their livelihood, especially deserve help. He who is unaware of their circumstances supposes them to be wealthy because of their dignified bearing, but you will know them by their countenance, although they do not go about begging of people with importunity. Whatever wealth you spend on helping them, Allah will know of it.

96. "Vow" means either a man's pledge to spend something or to perform some act of goodness which is not obligatory upon him provided that a particular wish of his is fulfilled. It is essential, however, that this vow, should relate to some wish which is in itself permissible and good and that the person concerned makes it to none but God and for the sake of God. It is then that such a vow will be reckoned as an act of obedience to God and its fulfilment will be worthy of reward. Otherwise such a vow will be seen as an act of disobedience and sin and its fulfilment will invite punishment from God.

[274] Those who spend their wealth by night and by day secretly and publicly, will find that their reward is secure with their Lord and that there is no reason for them to entertain any fear or grief.

[275] As for those who devour interest, they behave as the one whom Satan has confounded with his touch.⁹⁷ Seized in this state they Say: "Buying and selling is but a kind of interest,"⁹⁸ even though Allah has made buying and selling lawful, and interest unlawful. Hence, he who receives this admonition from his Lord, and then gives up (dealing in interest), may keep his previous gains, and it will be for Allah to judge him.⁹⁹As for those who revert to it, they are the people of the Fire, and in it shall they abide.

[276] Allah deprives interest of all blessing, whereas He blesses charity with growth. Allah loves none who is ungrateful and persists in sin.

[277] Truly the reward of those who believe and do righteous deeds and establish Prayer and pay Zakah is with their Lord; they have no reason to entertain any fear or grief.

97. The Arabs used the word **majnun** (possessed by the jinn) to characterize the insane. The Qur'an uses the same expression about those who charge interest.

98. The unsoundness of this view lies in not differentiating between the profit one gains on investment in commercial enterprises on the one hand, and interest on the other. As a result of this confusion the proponents of this view argue that if profit on money invested in a business enterprise is permissible, why should the profit accruing on loaned money - that is interest-be deemed unlawful?

99. What is said here is not that man will be pardoned by God for the interest charged in the past, but that it is for God to judge him. The expression: "may keep his previous gain" does not signify absolute pardon from God for the interest one has realized; rather it points to the legal concession that has been made. It only means that no legal claim will be made against a person for the interest he had charged in the past.

[278] Believers! Have fear of Allah and give up all outstanding interest if you do truly believe.

[279] But if you fail to do so, then be warned of war from Allah and His Messenger.¹⁰⁰ If you repent even now, you have the right of the return of your capital; neither will you do wrong nor will you be wronged.

[280] But if the debtor is in straitened circumstance, let him have respite until the time of ease; and whatever you remit by way of charity is better for you, if only you know.¹⁰¹

[281] And have fear of the Day when you shall return to Allah, and every human being shall be fully repaid for whatever (good or evil) he has done, and none shall be wronged.

100. This verse was revealed after the conquest of Makkah and has been placed here because of its contextual relevance. Although interest was considered objectionable even before, it had not been legally prohibited. After the revelation of this verse interest-bearing transactions became a punishable offence within the realm of Islam. On the basis of the last words of the verse, **Ibn `Abbas, Hasan al- Basri, Ibn Sirin and Rabi'ibn Anas** are of the view that pressure should be brought against anyone who charges interest within the boundaries of the Islamic State (Dar al-Islam) to repudiate the transaction and recant; and if he persists, he should be put to death. Others consider it sufficient to imprison such people and keep them in prison until they pledge to give up charging interest.

101. This verse is the basis of the Islamic regulation that if a person is incapable of paying off his debt, the court will force the creditors to grant him respite from payment. In fact, under certain circumstances, the court is entitled to remit a part of his debt and, in some cases, the whole of it. Muslim jurists have made it clear that a debtor's residential house, eating utensils, clothes and the tools which he uses for earning his livelihood may not be confiscated in any circumstance whatsoever for non-pavement of loans.

[282] Believers! Whenever you contract a debt from one another for a known term,¹⁰² commit it to writing. Let a scribe write it down between you justly, and the scribe may not refuse to write it down according to what Allah has taught him; so let him write, and let the debtor dictate; and let him fear Allah, his Lord, and curtail no part of it. If the debtor be feeble-minded, weak, or incapable of dictating, let his guardian dictate equitably, and call upon two of your men as witnesses; but if two men are not there, then let there be one man and two women as witnesses from among those acceptable to you so that if one of the two women should fail to remember, the other might remind her. Let not the witnesses refuse when they are summoned (to give evidence). Do not show slackness in writing down the transaction, whether small or large, along with the term of its payment. That is fairest in the sight of Allah; it is best for testimony and is more likely to exclude all doubts. If it be a matter of buying and selling on the spot, it is not blameworthy if you do not write it down; but do take witnesses when you settle commercial transactions with one another. And the scribe or the witness may be done no harm. It will be sinful if you do so. Beware of the wrath of Allah. He teaches you the Right Way and has full knowledge of everything.

102. This is the basis of the rule that the time for the repayment of a loan should be fixed at the time when the loan is transacted.

[283] And if you are on a journey and do not find a scribe to write the document then resort to taking pledges in hand.¹⁰³ But if any of you trusts another, let him who is trusted, fulfil the trust and fear Allah, his Lord. And do not conceal what you have witnessed, for whoever conceals it, his heart is sinful. Allah has full knowledge of all that you do.

[284] All that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah. Whether you disclose whatever is in your hearts or conceal it, Allah will call you to account for it, and will then forgive whomsoever He wills, and will chastise whomsoever He wills. Allah has power over everything.

[285] The Messenger believes, and so do the believers, in the guidance sent down upon him from his Lord: each of them believes in Allah, and in His angels, and in His Books, and in His Messengers. They say: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers. We hear and obey. Our Lord! Grant us Your forgiveness; to You we are destined to return."

[286] Allah does not lay a responsibility on anyone beyond his capacity. In his favour shall be whatever good each one does, and against him whatever evil he does. (Believers! Pray thus to your Lord): "Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or commit mistakes. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden such as You laid on those gone before us. Our Lord! Lay not on us burdens which we do not have the power to bear. And overlook our faults, and forgive us, and have mercy upon us. You are our Guardian; so grant us victory against the unbelieving folk."

103. It should also be noted that the purpose of taking a pledge is merely to assure the lender the return of his loan. He has no right at all to benefit from the pledged property. If, however, either cattle or beasts of burden have been pledged, they can be milked and used for transport in lieu of the fodder that one provides them during the period of custody.